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against & beyond Paul Kingsnorth's völkisch
environmentalism
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Lies Of The Land

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[ed. – We will admit that eyes rolled at first here at Return Fire upon reading this piece when it first appeared in 2017, published by the libertarian communists of the Out of the Woods collective (OTTW). At the time it felt that certain of the authors' accusations in this piece were flimsy and might have been better put as speculations rather than assertions (while others doubtless were always on the mark). The intervening years have however only confirmed the trajectory which they saw being travelled, both by their target in question and in other trends in the worlds of Western environmentalism (see On Staying Woke in Polycrisis Futurism). It is reproduced here, primarily, as a way to speak to the issues at large, beyond overly personalising them. Yet the case in question leaves us a clear pathway to do just that.

The first thing to say is that – especially in a critique (rightly) centered on the omissions in a certain discourse that allow enough margin for fascists to adapt to their own nefarious ends – there is a complete lack of awareness in the following essay of how the Left itself has served in the past and present to funnel people into the fascist ranks, both by omission and commission, not least

by pandering to rise of Right by adjusting the centre of gravity for 'moderate' positions towards an openly more racist ground (see, for example, the recent US election). While this relates to particular prejudices inherent to leftism itself in most contexts (to this end, we have included an appendix from a Maria Mies essay – however liable for some of the same critiques as OOTW level, someone who lived through an actual fascist regime, the coming to power of which she partly attributes to the Left itself), it also relates the nature of fascism itself historically and today.

In 'A Diagnostic of the Future,' Peter Gelderloos spoke to exactly this dynamic a year after OOTW's essay: "[None of the] fascist leaders were coherent thinkers. They were effective populists, which means they mixed and matched any pattern of claims, philosophies, and worldviews that would motivate their base. This is why fascists were simultaneously Christian, pagan, and atheist; bohemian and aesthetic; capitalist and socialist; scientistic and mystical; rationalist and irrationalist. This pseudo-intellectual aspect has been a fundamental characteristic of the extreme right throughout the 20th century and up to the present day. It's one more reason why it makes no sense to engage with them on the level of reasoned debate, because they will say anything that provokes the kind of reaction they want to provoke. […] On a structural and organizational level, fascism borrowed immensely from the left, particularly from syndicalism and the socialist and communist parties. Yet the philosophical genealogists of fascism always attempt to tie it to the more marginalized elements of anti-capitalist movements; nihilists, naturalists, and individualists are common whipping boys. This is not particularly useful for understanding fascism; rather, it is a mechanism by which leftists clean house and further marginalize their more radical critics [ed. – see The Cryptoliberal Creep].

"A useful historical analysis of fascism would be largely economic, posing the question: at what point do capitalists begin to support fascist movements? The moment when Germany's industrial and military establishment decided to support the Nazis was

beyond any doubt a watershed in the evolution of a small group of violent wingnuts into a huge party capable of taking over the country. Military and capitalist support also played a decisive role in changing Nazi ideology and toning down many of the more esoteric, anti-establishment beliefs…"

We would defend a concept of the wild (see 'All That Wildness Names') in our thinking and experience (however unorthodox in comparison with common Western dualism which the likes of OOTW posit as the only way of thinking such a thing – see Unruly Edges), and any holistic critique of how some versions of such a concept have been mobilised by our enemies would have to also bear in mind how the Left facilitated that. In their favour however, the anti-fascism that OOTW utilise in their text is at least strongly anti-colonial; a marked improvement on the main history of Western anti-fascism. So let this be a jumping-off point for the larger conversation which stands behind their piece: the debate (also within anarchism) around nationalism, indigenous struggles, and what separates the two, as well as how our struggles and their blind-spots might affect the terrain decades on.

Paul Kingsnorth, subject of the original essay's ire, was one of the directors of the Dark Mountain Project (see Return Fire vol.4 pg48) – though he was already stepping down in the same year OOTW were writing – whose 2009 'post-environmentalist' manifesto caught the attention of some eco-anarchists at the time. Before that, he was a participant in the 1990s-2000s anti-globalisation movement (see Return Fire vol.4 pg80), by 2003 publishing his One No, Many Yeses in opposition to how he saw cultures everywhere being degraded by the contemporary form of capitalism… although the latter was a word studiously avoided by certain participants in those movements. "A decade and a half later," as other survivors of those years noted in 'Epilogue on the Movement Against Capitalist Globalization', "in the United States, we saw Donald Trump appropriate slogans like "Fair Trade, not Free Trade" directly from the liberal wing of the counter-globalization movement. These slogans were able

to serve him because they didn't reject capitalism itself – they left open the possibility that "better" political leadership could make it work properly. The timid souls who argued that radical rhetoric and aspirations would alienate potential supporters and undercut the movement paved the way for our legacy to be coopted by our enemies on the far right."

Already by 2008, Kingsnorth was focusing more on the inchoate collection of lands and histories which he identifies as England: his resulting book of that year, Real England, was cited in speeches by both Conservative Party leader and the Archbishop of Canterbury. By the time 2016 and the first electoral victory of Donald Trump rolled around (see 'It Depends on All of Us'), this was his reflection on the aspirations he and others like him had held: "Campaigning environmentalists, the 'social justice' movement, the lefties and the greens: we would be the heroes of the coming hour. Our rational solutions to climate change, our well argued deconstructions of neoliberalism, our piles of evidence about the negative impact of trade treaties, our righteous demands for justice – these would shake the world. When they learned the truth about the ongoing corporate stitch-up, the people would rise up in opposition.

"*They did rise up, in the end, but it wasn't us they were listening to. The message had found a different messenger. 'There's a global power structure', said Donald Trump, in his last TV spot before his election victory, 'that is responsible for the economic decisions that have robbed our working class, stripped our country of its wealth and put that money into the pockets of a handful of large corporations and political entities.' They were words that could have been heard at any social forum, anti-globalisation gathering or left-green beanfeast from the last twenty years, as could the rousing final sentence: 'The only thing that can stop this corrupt machine is you.' […] As I drank my tea, I began to realise [that] the anti-globalisation movement had not died."*

While he (unlike OOTW) also cited leftist phenomena of recent years such as the then-rise of Jeremy Corbyn (see 'Every-

Paul Kingsnorth is not a fascist. But his völkisch environmentalism opens wide the door to revanchist, heteronormative, neocolonial, and white nationalist currents which have long existed in parts of Western green politics. But the 'other environmentalism' of the movements and approaches discussed above is also an already existing one. It doesn't prefigure the kind of static world that Kingsnorth seeks, but in its dynamism and struggle (including internal struggles) prefigures the flux and complexity of an ecologically just world. It exists simultaneously locally – in the cracks and interstices wrestled or protected from capitalism, the state and colonialism – and globally, in the internationalist spirit of solidarity that will be essential if we are to reject proto-fascist environmentalism. It creates 'the people' not as a static avatar of racialized nationhood but as dynamic, heterogenous collective seeking to build a new world.[39]

[39] For one example of the different scales of Indigenous activism, see Graham H. Cornwell and Mona Atia (2012). 'Imaginative Geographies of Amazigh Activism in Morocco'. On the decolonial potential of 'the people' as a heterogenous formation inclusive of difference and internal struggle see George Ciccariello-Maher (2017) *Decolonizing Dialectics*.

> the Lhe Lin Liyin of the Wet'suwet'en nation hung a banner affirming, "We welcome refugees." And as part of this same national day of action, Pierre Beaulieu-Blais, an Indigenous Anishnabe member of NOII-Ottawa,[35] declared, "From one community of resistance to another, we welcome you. As people who have also lost our land and been displaced because of colonialism and racism, we say Open All the Borders! Status for All!"[36]

Hence a concern with culture, place and identity does not imply nationalism, and neither can border violence be glossed as simply 'a community asserting its values'. Nor do Indigenous and colonized people necessarily feel threatened by the challenges to gender norms that Kingsnorth so sniffily frames as part of a globalist agenda. Indeed, Western gender (and sexual) norms are – like borders – often seen as colonial impositions[37] that have done much much to damage gender roles, identities and sexualities that do not meet these norms.[38] Again, exploring the resonances (and tensions) between such approaches and calls to 'queer' ecological activism are of considerable importance.

[35] ed. – see the supplement to this chapter of Return Fire; 'Centering Relationships'

[36] Harsha Walia (2013) *Undoing Border Imperialism.*

[37] ed. – see 'The Thin Line Between Radical & Authoritarian'

[38] See, for example, Ifi Amadiume (2015/1987) *Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in an African Society*; Sandeep Bakshi (2016) 'Decoloniality, Queerness, and Giddha'; Phoenix A. Singer, Colonialism, Two-Spirit Identity, and the Logics of White Supremacy; Tamasailau Sua'ali'i (2001) 'Samoans and Gender: Some Reflections on Male, Female and Fa'afafine Gender Identities'; Sujata Moorti (2016) 'A Queer Romance with the Hijra'. An engagement with such accounts should not lead us to the understanding that Indigenous and colonized societies have 'the answers' to misogyny, homophobia and transphobia; nor that they are always-already inherently superior to the West on gender (see Moorti on this in particular), but they certainly dispel the notion that only 'globalist' Westerners are concerned with undoing gender norms. [ed. – see also Return Fire vol.3 pg36]

thing is Sanitised, But We Are Constantly Wringing Our Tired Hands'), US candidate Bernie Sanders, and the Greek party Syriza – the false promises of whom have also predictably fueled the Right (see The Far Right, the Left, & the Trap of Electoral Politics), in the inane cycle of voter disappointment and re-alignment so characteristic of the Left-Right dynamic – as inheritors of anti-globalisation movement sentiment, it is of course the new right-wing populists that sparked his essay, 'The Lie of the Land', which OOTW responded to. However, regardless of whether or not he is in fact as much in favour of them as OOTW claim (some of them he was still distancing himself from several years later), he is wrong to see them as an escape route from the stage of globalisation he laments: rather, they seem to be more a signal of the crisis of governance in general as the neo-liberal consensus collapses (see Capitalism & Electrification) but without intelligent and viable schemes to save either capitalism from its own crises or the world from capitalism.

Perhaps more useful when thinking about fascism than seeing it as a coherent political movement is looking at what fascism achieves – historically when in power, and presently when out of it but as a street movement with limited or covert institutional backing – namely, terrify and discipline populations (hence its eternal mutual affinity with police) and destroy social movements, directing anger and resentment away from privileged classes during crises of capitalism. Hence, when it doesn't celebrate anti-capitalist resistance, liberal hand-wringing over fascist violence only extends their propaganda of terror.

More recently, looking back on the Brexit both he and Trump applauded, Kingsnorth wonders "[h]ow many Brexit voters felt their country was changing in ways they didn't understand and couldn't control?" But it seems far from clear that he himself understands colonial capitalism: either that, or he understands it only too well, without letting on. In 2022, once again looking back on the anti-globalisation movement, he blogged that "it turned out that a borderless, utopian world with no national boundaries

and no national sovereignty also just happened to suit the interests of transnational capital and its enablers. It wasn't long before universalist utopianism morphed into commercial globalism. Suddenly, "no borders" seemed less of a promise than a threat. Suddenly, those utopian elites chattering about the need to demolish the "social construct" of the nation sounded more like they were defending their own class interests than ushering us all towards broad sunlit uplands."

What's going on here is a sleight-of-hand over what is a border for goods (which neo-liberal capitalism wants to circulate more freely), and what is a border for people, which neo-liberal capital only wants to circulate insofar as those people can come to resemble goods, namely exploitable capital; the rest are increasingly stopped at the gate by the very national sovereignty supposedly being dissolved. For a tip-of-the-iceberg of the latter, consider how much like "no borders" it sounds when, within just a few months of entering government, Labour recently oversaw the three largest mass deportations in British history, with at least three flights of 200 heads apiece returning people to Brazil and new charter routes set up for mass removals to East Timor and Vietnam. Algorithms are in use to select specific migrants for detention and deportation based on certain criteria. While Labour came to power pledging against holding prospective migrants in Rwanda (despite it basically being a pet project of another Labour leader in 2004 before being picked up by the Conservatives), they decreed asylum applicants will now be held on the British-occupied Chagos Islands, and have extended 'anti-terror' laws to border defence, with the now-party leader previously comparing refugees crossing the Channel to Britain as "on a par with" climate change, hostile foreign powers and terrorism.

Besides, it's already centuries that State-backed capitalist projects and settlers have poured from one side of the world to the other (see Return Fire vol.3 pg89) and dragged enslaved or indentured labour with them, yet only now – when the influx is coming to the imperial cores that have for so long dispos-

ing the resonances with what we have elsewhere called 'cyborg ecology'[34] is key if we are to prevent the worst excesses of climate change from taking hold.

Many Indigenous and colonized people see the places they inhabit as being destroyed not by the opening of borders but by the very imposition of colonial borders in the first place. Accordingly, they play an active role in the migrant solidarity movements that will be of continued importance in providing solutions to climate-driven migration.

> In 2010, when 492 Tamil refugees aboard the MV Sun Sea arrived on the shores of the West Coast [of Canada] and faced immediate incarceration, Indigenous elders opened the weekly demonstrations outside the jails by welcoming the refugees. As their contributions toward a national day of action to support the detained Tamil refugees,

Land: Indigenous Women's Understanding of Place. 'Place Against Empire: Understanding Indigenous Anti-Colonialism', Affinities: A Journal of Radical Theory, Culture, and Action 4.

[34] ed. – "For [scholar of agrarian studies James C.] Scott, so-called 'traditional agriculture' is dynamic and plastic, the work of bricoleurs who make use of whatever materials and techniques are to hand, including selective use of the products of science and technology. The practical knowledge thus acquired – which he calls *mētis* – often runs ahead of scientific knowledge since it is based in trial-and-error experimentation and tinkering. [C]yborg ecology is not an inherent preference for the 'high' tech. From the cyborg point of view, the assemblage peasant-ox-plough is no more or less a techno-natural mesh than the assemblage AI-drone-GMO. The point is that bricolage practically appropriates whatever materials are to hand. For example as the glaciers that provide billions of beings with freshwater retreat, even maintaining traditional agriculture may well require desalination technology and knowledge of fluid mechanics to maintain irrigation. Or a reprisal of 'archaic' stormwater collection and distribution systems could play that role. Or some combination of the two" (Contemporary Agriculture: Climate, Capital, & Cyborg Ecology). Obviously the OOTW collective here side-steps the question of the dependency on colonial supply-chains which 'high' tech entails… More another time on this.

The struggles of Indigenous peoples across the world are not, in any sense, equivalent to the proto-fascist, völkisch environmentalism he otherwise espouses; and have much to offer those seeking to develop an ecological politics within, against and beyond our current crises.[31] Although they – like many people subject to colonial violence – often organize around 'the nation', to conflate the way the term is utilized here with the nationalism of colonial states is deeply disingenuous. As Frantz Fanon notes, 'national consciousness…is not nationalism'; and does not mean 'the closing of a door to communication'. Rather, it is is 'the only thing that will give us an international dimension.'[32]

Indeed, in contrast to Kingsnorth's static, essential understanding of 'place', Indigenous concepts of place central to much Indigenous 'nationalism' are dynamic and relational: 'place', 'land' and 'territory' (and roughly translatable terms) function as ways of understanding the relationships between people, animals, minerals and plants across different scales. It is their dynamism on social, political, geologic and biological levels that gives them their very 'sense of place'.

These relationships do not separate out human society from the natural world, as Kingsnorth does, but see them as inextricably linked.[33] Learning from such understandings and explor-

[31] ed. – see 'Gállok is the Name of a Place'

[32] Frantz Fanon (2004). *The Wretched of the Earth*. Some may be perturbed by any organization around the nation, and the lines between decolonial nationalism and supremacist nationalism are not always clear cut: as Maia Ramnath notes in *Decolonizing Anarchism*, postcolonial states have 'perpetuated the same kinds of oppression and exploitation carried out by colonial rule, but now in the name of the nation.' (p.5) Yet the postcolonial nation is not the same as the decolonial or decolonized nation, and Ramnath notes that it would be churlish for anarchists to reject the concept of nation out of hand given that it plays such an important role in so many struggles against colonialism and white supremacy (p.22 in particular, but this sentiment animates the entire book).

[33] See, for example, Isabel Altamirano-Jiménez & Nathalie Kermoal (2016), 'Introduction: Indigenous Women and Knowledge' in *Living on the*

sessed them, and now depend on them for much labour even domestically – that certain citizens feel "suddenly" threatened.

This is addressed by another writer to live through the anti-globalisation movement (only to see his efforts recuperated by far-right figures like Jack Donovan), Rhyd Wildermuth: "None of the current political movements accurately address quite what is happening. Unfortunately, the social justice framework is particularly shallow here: it sides with immigrants not on economic grounds, but on the field of identity and oppression (precisely as the far right does, but in inverse). While immigrants absolutely face racist oppression, the social justice political strategy ignores that this oppression is a continuation of their economic exploitation, rather than a mere moral issue. The economic exploitation of immigrants is bound-up in the same capitalist machinations which deteriorate the economic conditions of the working-class whites [making] them a ripe field for harvesting by far-right ideologues like Donovan.

[…] It is as if Leftists built a stage, set up a mic and speakers, and brought in a massive audience, but while they became distracted by Liberal Democratic crises (the war on terror, the 2016 presidential elections) and glittering distractions (gay marriage, identity politics [ed. – see 'The Position of the Excluded']), men like Donovan stumbled upon the script and the live mic and began improvising before an eager crowd."

Combating this scenario requires a reframing of the problem straight back at the capitalists initiating the cycle rather than just at the racism migrants face on the street, as Wildermuth suggests, but also a clear position of solidarity amongst all of us on the bottom in the increasingly dangerous and divisive future that sees the Global North catching up with the ecological crisis already reigning in the South (see 'The Utopia we Dream of Becomes Most Visible in the Dark'): and this is clearly lacking in Kingsnorth's writings, reflecting the nationalised – and, as we shall see, basically racialised – version of his own political quietism.

This brings us to the "völkisch" charge of the article below. The term references a diverse late 19th Century counter-cultural movement in what's now the German and Austrian States, where adherents – reacting to the new conditions of urbanised, industrialised life and its socio-cultural implications – romanticised an older Germanic identity, and anticipated a "national rebirth" rejecting Enlightenment values (see Return Fire vol.4 pg48) in favour of the language and culture of the völk, "the people." While there were those who developed this in a libertarian rather than authoritarian direction – the anarchist Gustav Landauer comes to mind – another part of the movement glorified the history of the "Holy Roman" Empire (Germanic warlords – appointed by the Pope as emperors following the fall of the actual Roman Empire in its western domains – noted for their brutal subjugation of Scandinavians, Magyars, Slavic Wends and Poles) and its supposedly-harmonious hierarchical order, perhaps on the verge of reconstitution, as German-speaking territories unified into nation-states later than other European countries; and, the ideology of humanity as pre-formed by blood and/or inherited characteristics. Using justifiable anxiety and dis-ease of the new conditions of capitalist dispossession as propulsion, ideologues blended this with all-too-modern theories of the time of genetic essentialism and biological competition for survival and applied it to economics, politics and social power, and entered separate 'races' into a zoological ranking with Aryans at the top (though they also mobilised occult imagery around these themes too). Potentially anti-capitalist and anti-colonial discontent was thus channeled to other ends, and some of the resulting circles were crucial to the rise of German fascism in the '20s and '30s. Neo-Völkisch groups of today drink from exclusively this poisonous legacy (and, in doing so, believe they are anti-modern in their thinking rather than deeply informed by the passage of modernity) rather than the original movement as a whole.

Now, as we've made clear on various other occasions (see Return Fire vol.5 pg60) and the authors of the text below affirm, this

account of the bourgeoisie's role in colonialism; nor of the fact that 'bankers' act as they do because that is what capital demands of them.

Such moralising is not in and of itself leftist: fascists, too, are completely at home making such critiques; and Kingsnorth's aformentioned racialization of 'globalists' leaves the door wide open for them. Given capitalism's ability to continue functioning with and in fascist regimes, such an 'anticapitalism' (or anti-neoliberalism) is in fact useful for capitalism. As Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer noted, it 'seeks to make the rebellion of suppressed nature against domination directly useful to domination'.[30] Far from being an exhilarating avatar of the 'ending' of 'the end of history', Trump shows us that such words are as true as ever.

Another Environmentalism is Possible…

Like fascists, Kingsnorth promises the future to those who can successfully harness his carefully curated vision of a national birthright: that they 'will win the day' is, for him, 'as iron a law as any human history can provide.' We reject this. History does not have 'iron laws' but is produced through struggle. In mentioning Standing Rock Sioux resistance to DAPL and the Zapatistas, Kingsnorth seems to know this too, at least on some level.

[30] Quoted in Bonefeld, Antisemitism and Abstraction. To set this antisemitism in historical context it would be important to engage with the influence of Martin Heidegger on strands of the environmentalist movement; and on the overlaps between his work and Kingsnorth's. Heidegger drew heavily on the Greek concept of *autochthony*, which names the way in which people are (supposedly) rooted in the environment of a specific region. In his philosophical writings he opposed this to the 'rootlessness' of 'modernity'. Heidegger was, of course, a member of the Nazi Party, and in his diaries this 'rootless modernity' is figured as *Weltjudentum* ('world Judaism'). Warren Ellis connects Kingsnorth's essay to another notion of Heidegger's here: morning.computer/2017/03/poisonous-little-england For more on Heidegger, *autochtony* and Nazism, see Hood, Stephen l'Argent. "Autochthony, promised land, and exile: Athens and Jerusalem revisited." (2006) PhD diss. The idea of 'rootless' Judaism also fuelled antisemitism in the USSR.

can choose to define itself by 'protecting, not despoiling, its wild places'. Yet the creation of National Parks saw the forced relocation of thousands of Indigenous people and their existence is possible because of long (and ongoing) histories of genocide and dispossession.[28]

By ignoring racism and colonialism in this way, Kingsnorth undermines his own argument: when lauding the Standing Rock Sioux he suggests that Indigenous populations are exemplary close-to-nature 'nations', yet here they are an obstacle to the flourishing of nationalist nature.[29]

Other aspects of Kingsnorth's fusing of environmentalism and nationalism fall apart under even the slightest scrutiny. Whilst geological features are often used in the drawing of national borders such that they acquire an air of natural permanence, regional ecologies do not match up to national borders (think again of the division of Sami lands); and the most important ecological changes in the contemporary world are driven by global forces that nation states can do little to challenge. Climate change does not respect borders.

Those on the left might at least find some solace in Kingsnorth's naming of 'neoliberalism' as a 'global' formation opposing environmentalism; and in his references to the 'carbon-heavy bourgeoisie' and the 'bankers' who threw 'the people of Greece, Spain and Ireland to the wolves'. Yet his criticisms are moralising rather than structural. There is no

[28] Isaac Kantor (2007) 'Ethnic Cleansing and America's Creation of National Parks.'

[29] As we have noted elsewhere, this contradiction is central to settler colonialism. In settler colonialism's expansionist, extractive guise, Indigenous populations are treated as part of 'nature', which acts as a resource for extraction, a limit to growth and a sink for waste. In its romanticist, protectionist guise, Indigenous populations are positioned as a threat to 'beautiful' 'nature': they are held to be too lacking in scientific knowledge to understand how to protect it. Kingsnorth veers between offering (problematic) support for Indigenous populations resisting the first of these modes and adopting the second mode himself.

is far from the only way of conceptualising 'nationhood' or the indigenous concepts that get mashed into that same name (see the supplement to this chapter of Return Fire; 'Centering Relationships'). We will not be portrayed as Kingsnorth's 2022 strawman persecutors: "As for defending actual links between people and place across time: don't even think about it, unless you fancy being labelled a white supremacist." We would say the opposite: that whiteness (as a structure of power and strategy of division, not a phenotype – see the companion piece to Return Fire vol.3; Colonisation) has no inherent connection with the British Isles of which he speaks nor of any other lands; rather, as a product of colonialism, historically it has been the absence of place, or more precisely its interchangeability or destruction (see the supplement to this chapter of Return Fire; 'Here or Anywhere Else'). Ironically, Kingsnorth misses this in his own sources, when he mentions his twenty-year haunting by the final lines of travel writer Norman Lewis's autobiography: "Wandering the hills of India, Lewis is ask by a puzzled local why he spends his life travelling instead of staying at home. What is he looking for? 'I am looking for the people who have always been there', replies Lewis, 'and belong to the places where they live. The others I do not wish to see.'" Why was Lewis on the road seeking what Kingsnorth maintains he would have had at home, in a pre-"globalist" era? Attempted to rekindle ways of inhabiting place that do not address the threat of whiteness to those places (see The Darkness Criticizes the Wolf for Howling at the Moon) seem doomed to failure, or worse, handing terrain over to a different form the enemy takes.

In his Lies of the Land, the piece that the text below responds to, Kingsnorth did in all fairness qualify that "I think now that globalism is the rootless ideology of the fossil fuel age, and it will fade with it. But the angry nationalisms which currently challenge it offer us no better answers about how to live well with a natural world which we have made into an enemy." However, his own vision of nationalism is hard to distinguish from the vision which animates the most militant articulations he (supposedly)

shies away from embracing. He attempts, in 2022, to distance his vision of the nation from the nation-state (a valid distinction, but his example is unconvincing), saying it is the latter that has given the former the bad reputation: "we need to understand that Europe has not yet recovered from the trauma of the Second World War. If the Great War laid bare the failures of the old order, then World War II, for Europeans of a certain generation, delegitimised not simply a ruling class and its worldview, but the very existence of nation-states. European nations had been battling each other for centuries, but fascism, and especially National Socialism, revealed new depths to which a country might sink in pursuit of greatness or purity. Theodor Adorno famously claimed that it was "barbaric to write poetry after Auschwitz". For many Europeans, surveying the ruins of a continent demolished by fascism and then carved up by communism, it must have seemed equally barbaric to continue believing in nations.

"*It was in the bloody aftermath of this carnage that today's dominant vision of a post-national world took root. The European Union, seeded in the Fifties, is rooted in this vision of national sovereignty "pooled" (read: abolished) for the greater good." There was, of course, another factor at play in the new consciousness in the post-WWII world which Kingsnorth does not mention: the unrelenting wave of struggles for de-colonisation from the European powers whose sovereignty he mourns, struggles which – tragically – often ended up monopolised by leaders who aped the same nation-states that colonised them. From this view, what we see is in fact the proliferation of the nation-state in the collapse of empires, not its disappearance. Bearing in mind the incompleteness of the victories the anti-colonial movements gained (not to mention the large settler-States like the US successfully wielding their sovereignty against the population of their internal colonies), and the defeat of völkisch fascism which preceded, it's unclear how he can assert in The Lie of the Land that "those who can harness people's deep, old attachment to place and identity – to a belonging and a meaning that goes beyond money or argument – will win*

heteropatriarchal values of bounty, purity[27] and fragility, and poses instead the possibility of liberated life.

The relentless coloniality of Kingnorth's thinking is expressed again in his chosen example of (supposedly 'benevolent') nationalist environmentalism. He cites Roosevelt's creation of the US National Parks as proof that nationalism

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at home in the ecological web of one's location, or in centering displacement? […] Haraway's approach stands in stark contrast to the anthropomorphized naturalization of "the wild" and our place in it performed by so many deep ecologists. Instead, she calls for the introduction of "dissensus" via the character of the "in/appropriated other" – the one who is not placed and given belonging in community by their acknowledgment of difference, but who cannot pretend comfort or naturalness anywhere, ever, much less defend the boundaries of that (eventually inevitable) terrible community. The "productive conflict" of the insider-outsider perspective – double consciousness – can give us more helpful perspective in our decision-making about how to relate to each other and to our world than any kind of assertions of authenticity, naturalness, and belonging. […] Rather, she argues that, far from the simplistic identification [Arne] Naess calls for *[ed. – 'deep ecology' thinker who theorised identification-as-belonging (i.e. being part of a larger 'natural' whole, the interests of which are thus our own rather than thinking of ourselves alone) but also, perhaps unknown to this author, identification-as-kinship]*, we must learn to do empathy – and solidarity – without identification. Once we admit that we are all aliens to each other, quite apart from the distance created by social constructs like raced and gendered difference, we can begin to grow true empathy. […] There is an impossibility of deciding between difference and sameness before each event of contact – and that is good, because it makes us see our degrees of difference as degrees of relation rather than otherness. This is the project between humans and animals, and humans and humans, I wish to see in the world. This is the lesson I want to learn from listening to the land. This is the cyborg I would rather be than any goddess" (The Unquiet Dead: Anarchism, Fascism, & Mythology) – note this last line, though it's important to note that 'cyborg' is not used in the above in any trans-humanist sense or relating necessarily to industrial technology, misconstrues what 'god/dess' is in most cultures outside of the major salvation religions (see A New Luddite Rebellion), where ironically they may more closely resemble the above author's 'cyborg' in some ways… a topic for another day.

[27] ed. – see Earthbound Farmers' Almanac & Food Autonomy in Bulbancha

For Kingsnorth, the reproduction of the nation state is inseparable from the reproduction of its 'nature.' His writing falls back on the imagery of 'mother earth:' pure, bountiful yet fragile, a set of ideal characteristics which can then be imposed on gendered subjects. The idealised reproduction of nature can then be used to discipline human reproduction, which is itself the precondition of the nation state – after all, what is a 'birthright' without births? When Kingsnorth talks of the desire to 'nurture your homeland,' we can see this as the implicit operation of what Edelman calls 'installing pro-procreative prejudice' – the word 'nurture' has a rich subtext of child care and gendered labour.[23]

The quiet assumption is that the nuclear family will continue to function, that kids will keep being born and that women will continue to do the (unwaged) work of caring for them. On this, Kingsnorth's national future depends, and thus we can recognise it as an iteration of what Edelman calls 'reproductive futurism'.[24]

In the face of this all-enfolding reproductive duress we should remember that 'what is at stake [is] not the ability to reproduce, but the capacity to regenerate, the terms of which are found in all sorts of registers beyond heteronormative reproduction.'[25] These words of Jasbir Puar's push us to reject the western imposition of mother earth in favour of an anti-colonial 'cyborg earth'[26] – one that rejects the colonial,

[23] ed. – see 'Care is Partisan'

[24] ed. – see Return Fire vol.2 pg90

[25] Jasbir Puar (2007). *Terrorist Assemblages.*

[26] ed. – "A scientist in the field of primatology as well as a feminist and sci-fi enthusiast, [Donna] Haraway *[ed. – see Unruly Edges]* is best known for her work "The Cyborg Manifesto", which presents the metaphor of the cyborg as a way to understand our constructed, irreverent, perverse selves. But her project is larger than that; Haraway describes "queering nature" as her "categorical imperative." […] How can we view Haraway's cyborg as a figure of possibility and productive non-utopian crises, to use it "to rebuke the disappearance of the body within post modernism"? What is the value of being

the day. This might be as iron a law as any human history can provide."

Despite his distinction, it isn't long before slippage into a clearly pro-State vision of nation emerges in his supposedly-universal nationalism: "Nationalism, in the broadest sense of the term, was the default worldview of most people at most times, especially in more traditional places. It was a community-focused attitude, valuing stability, continuity and social cohesion, in which a nation, tribe or ethnic group was seen as a thing of value to be protected. […] While globalists saw migration as a right, nationalists saw it as a privilege. To a globalist, border walls and immigration laws are tantamount to racism or human rights abuse. To a nationalist, they are evidence of a community asserting its values and choosing to whom to grant citizenship."

The vast majority of human history not only featured but necessitated movement (borders being a much more recent invention: see On a Comet's Tail), and this is only set to intensify in the face of the ecological crisis. Kingsnorth also ignores how those precious-to-him nations he would defend – England being a prime example – themselves so often not only travelled but emigrated, settling entire continents and irreversibly shaping that 'English' character and history 'back home.' And aside from colonial ventures, the millennia-long reality of ethnicities precisely emerging during movement, integration and adaption (see Return Fire vol.5 pg122) led to that same English ethnicity forming from Roman, Angle, Saxon and Viking newcomers on previously-Celtic lands.

By 2022 Kingsnorth is rather more explicit in his concern as the nation's devaluation as "little more than a postcode or a glorified airport lounge. Its population is from everywhere and anywhere…" In fact, in most cases the are direct links due to colonial history (read: extractive relationship) between the countries current immigrants come from and the countries they head to: again, this is ignored. Instead, in The Lie of the Land he turns to Jonathan Haidt (whose prefered form of nationalism is that

of Hungarian queerphobe and racist 'anti-globalist' strong-man Viktor Orbán, arguably the most successful of contemporary far-right rulers): "Psychologically, Haidt suggested, what happened in 2016 was that many nationalist-inclined voters in the West felt that their community was now under existential threat – not only from huge waves of migration, but from ongoing Islamist attacks and the globalist elite's dismissive attitude to their concerns about both. In response, they began to look around for strong leaders to protect them." The claim that as of 2016 the elites were not taking the Islamist terrorism of the time (see Return Fire vol.3 pg5) or popular concern over it seriously flies in the face of the facts; one thinks of the notorious UK Prevent scheme and its heavy reliance on citizen snitches (mostly targeting and mapping Muslims, but also at least once extending to a 14-year-old Derbyshire pacifist anti-fascist from a socialist family who were all harassed by counter-terror officers in a seeming attempt to force the family apart).

At the end of the day, Kingsnorth's investment of hope for some kind of opening for 'greening' connected to the latest reactionary wave seems to promise meager returns: ecologists are, of course, painted by Trump and his ilk as yet another gang of 'globalist' elites, the same as queers and anti-racists. The only redeeming reading of The Lie of the Land (in the words of Anthony Galluzzo, looking back on it some years later) is its questioning of whether we should "cede the attachment to place, the love of nature, and the human propensity for myth to the right? And if the right historically has seized on these propensities and investments, often to catastrophic effect, what does this tragic history tell us about the political efficacy of a left enamored with its own myths of disembodied rationalism and technological self-deification?" The more promising directions for this, however, are in the indigenous movements which – despite Kingsnorth's opportunistic championing of them in The Lie of the Land as somehow compatible with his call for bordering – offer very different visions from the Right.

In fact, 'climate change' is mentioned only twice – each time in relation to forms of environmentalism that Kingsnorth pits himself against; and it is startling to note how peripheral Kingsnorth's concern in this regard appears. There is not a single mention of climate change's devastating impact on food production; nor on how it fuels conflicts, including the civil war in Syria.[20] Rather, his environmental concern is driven by a privileged romanticism that culminates in the nation state: 'wild' 'nature' contributes to the distinctiveness of the nation, providing it with some of that 'colour, beauty and distinctiveness'.

This nature is framed as part of the 'birthright' of a nation, and in a disturbingly völkisch turn-of-phrase Kingsnorth states that if 'you want to protect and nurture your homeland – well, then, you'll want to nurture its forests and its streams too'. This desire to wrap forests in the flag clears the way for what the critical scholar of ecofascism Peter Staudenmaier calls a 'deadly connection between love of land and militant racist nationalism.'[21]

Recalling Kingsnorth's dig at those who challenge gender identities, we would add that this 'love' of the land is also a deeply gendered, thoroughly heteronormative romance. As Lee Edelman writes:

> 'Nature [is] the rhetorical effect of an effort to appropriate the 'natural' for the ends of the state. It is produced, that is, in the service of a statist ideology that operates by installing pro-procreative prejudice as the form through which desiring subjects assume a stake in a future that always pertains, in the end, to the state, not to them'.[22]

[20] John Wendle (2016), 'Syria's climate refugees', *Scientific American.*

[21] Janet Biehl and Peter Staudenmaier, Ecofascism: Lessons from the German Experience.

[22] Lee Edelman, *No Future.*

cordingly, 'border walls and immigration laws' are held to be 'evidence of a community asserting its values and choosing to whom to grant citizenship.' As with fascism, this 'cultural' politics is in fact a racial – and racist – politics.

Kingsnorth regurgitates the antisemitic trope of globalism as 'rootless'[17] *[ed. – although there are, of course, non-antisemitic ways of talking about rootlessness as a specific consequence of colonialism; see Return Fire vol.3 pg87]* and twice raises the spectre of 'violent' Islam to add weight to his claims. Not once does he mention that Muslim majority countries are disproportionately affected by climate change; nor that Islamophobia[18] drives the EU's policy of leaving migrants to drown.[19]

And although Kingsnorth is right to say that 'Green spokespeople and activists rarely come from the classes of people who have been hit hardest by globalisation', his reference to Standing Rock is as close as he comes to rectifying this. Despite his hostility to those who fly, he makes no reference to Black Lives Matter UK's shutdown of London City Airport, undertaken to highlight the racist dimensions of climate change.

The Environment

'Like Butterflies']. Kingsnorth makes it clear elsewhere that what he means by "Western culture" is really the institutional Christian church. And the lost elements of that culture which he laments include "patriotism, Christianity, cultural conservatism, sexual modesty". This isn't culture. It's empire. And Kingsnorth has nothing – nothing at all – to say about the historical injustices of the "culture" that he so pines for. (Of course, as a White, cisgender, heterosexual man, there were far fewer injustices that would have affected him)" (Jumping the Gap: Where Green Transphobia Leads).]

[17] Werner Bonefeld (2014). 'Antisemitism and the Power of Abstraction: From Political Economy to Critical Theory'. in Marcel Stoetzler (ed.), *Antisemitism and the Constitution of Sociology*.

[18] For a historic overview of European Islamophobia (and, indeed, the necessity of Islamophobia for the construction of Europe), see Gil Adijar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy*. As its title suggest, this also charts the historic imbrication between Islamophobia and antisemitism.

[19] ed. – see "We Notice When Bigots Get a Win"

"*As we experience the paroxysms of late capitalism," Raj Patel writes in Inflamed (co-authored with Rupa Marya), "nationalisms become the last redoubt of those pining for the certainties of childhood that never were. I'm thinking here of the National Fronts in France and England, the Hindu fanatics of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh in India, the white nationalists in Bolivia and the United States. For me the question of nation gets dissolved by queering boundaries, as we mentioned in our look at the Movement for Black Lives and border medicine, by belonging to several nations simultaneously. I'd like to wear nation like language, speaking many and being able to move through them to see how they might combine and learn, expanding and sharing grammars and words that can't be thought of in other ways. I've heard this called "two-eyed seeing," and I think we'll find our way through the fog of national certainties only by seeing with as many subaltern eyes as possible."*

Since The Lie of the Land was published, the latest turn of event is that Kingsnorth has embraced Christianity. Let it not be said that we are falling into a facile and ahistorical anti-Christianism in our objections to this: rather, we welcome those who look at that legacy in the heretical manner of Marco Camenisch (see Return Fire vol.5 pg31), uttering these words before his judges in 1980 during his trial for multiple bombings of pylons of the Sarelli nuclear plant: "Regarding the attack: why hit the Sarelli plant on Christmas night? Not only for security reasons [ed. – i.e., lack of attendant staff]. It was intended to be a demonstration of solidarity with Jesus, the conspirator, the nomad, the revolutionary, the rebel, the partisan fighter, who in the Sermon on the Mount clearly said: "Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be filled! Blessed are you who now weep, for you will laugh… But woe to you who are rich, for you already have your consolation! Woe to you who are now full, for you will be hungry! Woe to you who now laugh, for you will mourn and weep!" Ours was a manifestation of rage for the denial of a Jesus of love, of strength, of the poor in a religion that for 2,000

years has been classist and racist, a pretext for genocides and conquests; that felt obliged to create an image of Jesus as servile, ascetic, transcendent, opium of the masses."

While we're not ruling out that some might take an anti-patriarchal, anti-colonial and anti-authoritarian message from early Christian teachings, such sentiments have in practice been turned into their opposite by the institution – whatever its denomination – which Kingsnorth specifically defends as a hierarchical necessity: the Church (and in the case of the Romanian Orthodox one he ascribes too, he himself notes has bred some of the more violent nationalisms, though he claims to distance himself from this).

His attempts, when decrying "the dethroning of the sovereign – Christ – who sat at the heart of the Western sacred order" and its supposed role in the current social and ecological crisis of industrial civilisation, to pose the Cross against the Machine, are with anarchist precedent – Jacques Ellul, Ivan Illich, etc. – but looking at the obvious mobilisation of Christianity for the ends of colonial capitalism and its moral economy of salvation through work and obedience, the connection is far from automatic. Kingsnorth claims to be more attached to the institution of the Church than to the concept of the West, though by 2021 he was writing that "The West, in short, was Christendom. But Christendom died." As he notes, one medieval historian wrote that "There has never been any unitary organisation of Western culture apart from that of the Christian Church, which provided an effective principle of social unity…" However, as we dwelt on in our upcoming book release, "[Fredy] Perlman has a hypothesis about European civilization having a particular, historical penchant for prevarication," as Peter Gelderloos asserts in his as-yet-unpublished essay 'Reconciling Parzival': "Around 1700 years ago, the very political system that Jesus was trying to liberate people from, the system that executed him, adopted him as the figurehead of their cult of imperial expansion. They turned an anti-capitalist, state-critical spiritual movement into a pro-capitalist, state-worshiping religion

ecologies of particular places (unlike Kingsnorth's nationalists, who appear from static places as if by magic).[13]

There is no France without the subjugation of the Berber *[ed. – i.e. Imazighen]* populations of North Africa. There is no United States of America without the destruction of Turtle Island.[14] The borders separating Norway, Sweden, Finland and Russia have divided up the traditional lands of the Indigenous Sami population,[15] preventing them from continuing their traditions of fishing, herding, hunting and trading.

Where Indigenous populations have been decimated by the brutal violence of colonialism, Kingsnorth's 'nation' is threatened by a nefarious fantasy of 'globalism' that promotes migration and dissolves borders; and supports multiculturalism whilst 'enthusing about breaking down gender identities'.[16] Ac-

[13] Kim TallBear (2013) 'Genomic articulations of indigeneity'.

[14] ed. – see 'Lest We Forget'

[15] ed. – see 'Gállok is the Name of a Place'

[16] The implicit transphobia of this statement is not the only time Kingsnorth mimics the sneering language of alt-right fascists: elsewhere he takes a dig at those who have (supposedly) told him to 'check his privilege'. [ed. – Since the time of writing, this transphobia has become anything but implicit: "It's not a coincidence that Kingsnorth's transphobia appears to have started around the time he converted to Orthodox Christianity. That's when his own conception of the holy "migrated" from the earth ("the swamps of the material realm") to heaven (a "mysterious, untouchable, numinous force outside of creation itself"). And that's when he started writing about a supposedly universal desire for "transcendence", which is behind both religion and the secular drive for progress *[ed. – see Return Fire vol.1 pg11]*. Given his criticism of the "*trans*-cendence" of transhumanism and (supposedly) transgender *[ed. – see Nicolas Casaux, Transphobe, is Lying to You]*, Kingsnorth's own appeal to transcendence is ironic[…] While he still writes about "nature" (and "land" and "place"), more and more, Kingsnorth has been writing about something he calls "culture" – and more and more it seems like he's using all these words to mean the same thing. "Culture", like "nature", can be another one of those code words. It can mean the way people living in a particular place over a period of time "be" together, the way they make that place and time "home". But it also can mean something like "the way I am comfortable with things being" or "the way I imagine things used to be". It can be code for patriarchy, White supremacy, and hetero- and cis-normativity *[ed. – see*

the status quo.[10] Kingsnorth elides this and presents his people as a self-evident matter-of-fact. They are grounded in and emerge from a timeless 'natural' environment: the nation.

This nation is a 'cultural' formation associated with 'traditions, distinctive cultures…religious strictures [and] social mores'. It is the source of 'colour, beauty and distinctiveness' and fosters a 'belonging and a meaning beyond money or argument'. Such 'belonging' is held to be particularly strong in 'traditional' places: Kingsnorth references the Standing Rock Sioux[11] as exemplary and there is a passing reference to the Zapatistas.[12]

Here there is a temptation to read Kingsnorth charitably: perhaps he is proposing a radical understanding of 'nation' (and the concepts associated with it) in line with that offered by many Indigenous peoples, an idea to which we return below. But no: elsewhere 'the nation' coincides with the (colonial) state – he draws heavily on Jonathan Haidt, for whom key nationalists include Marine Le Pen and Victor Orban. Kingsnorth may try to distance himself from 'angry nationalism' and Trump (while expressing 'exhilaration' at their surge to power), but given his arguments this can only ever work as a disavowal.

This conflation of Indigeneity with the nation state is a key rhetorical device for the white supremacist right (think of calls to 'protect' 'indigenous Britons', for example). It is particularly abhorrent given that so many nation states exist because of their genocidal dispossession of *actually* Indigenous populations: those whose identities and ways of life are inseparable from their dynamic relationships with the more-than-human

[10] Jason Frank (2009) *Constituent Moments: Enacting the People in Postrevolutionary America.*

[11] ed. – see Return Fire vol.4 pg16

[12] ed. – see "It Was Wartime"

that countenanced slavery and empire. In a macabre irony, they even adopted the image of the instrument they used to execute him as a symbol of their cult. The Bogomils [ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg48] were not being so unreasonable when they claimed that the Christian Church was the Church of the Antichrist.

"*As the Church built up its power – centered not in the Levant nor anywhere a community gathered to practice the agape love feasts of the original followers of Jesus' Zoroastrian teachings, but in Rome – the old Empire crumbled around it. The Church spent more than a thousand years inhabiting an imaginary Roman Empire, giving its blessings to a long succession of Visigothic, Frankish, and "Holy Roman" warlords, whom it goaded unsuccessfully towards political centralization. And both their eschatological horizon as well as their model for right behavior centered on images – whether Eden, Paradise, or apostolic communes – in which there was abundance, harmony with nature and between people, everything was shared, everyone was tended to, and nobody worked, yet every time the Church encountered such a community on Earth, it broke it up in the most violent ways, making eager recourse to torture, enslavement, dispossession, and execution.*

"*The Church became a spiritual machine for sanctifying war and exploitation in the name of peace and community. It was the capital of an empire that did not exist, an inheritor of philosophical and cultural traditions it had never understood or contributed to, which it had in fact bloodily suppressed, and its holy men monopolized the sale of forgiveness for a growing list of natural behaviors socially and psychologically suppressed as evil, all of which they themselves practiced with impunity. This institution was the only glue for that weak agglomeration so barely deserving of a name or separate identity, Europe. And its modalities saturated all the notions and practices of politics, philosophy, and science of what would become known as the West. The result was a culture pathologically incapable of telling the truth.*"

Kingsnorth, in his claim that "every culture, whether it knows it or not, is built around a sacred order," adds that

"[i]t does not, of course, need to be a Christian order. It could be Islamic, Hindu or Daoist. It could be based around the veneration of ancestors or the worship of Odin. But there is a throne at the heart of every culture, and whoever sits on it will be the force you take your instruction from." This pluralism is getting harder to credit given he's largely featured in conservative Christian and traditionalist (as in "defenders of the Judeo-Christian and Western tradition") media that's rife with bemoaning of the 'woke' and the decline of the 'West', gleefully noting his 'family values' and valorisation of marriage alongside his bedfellows such as Orthodox fellow traveler Rod Dreher and his proposal for Christian communities of "refugees of the sexual revolution." As the Christian Right openly gains ground in some of its most hateful positions – not just in Poland, Bolivia or the US, but in the presence of Bishop Ceirion Dewar (braying about being "at war" with "Muslims", "woke ideology," and "cancel culture") at the large rally last July in London, where Stephen 'Tommy Robinson' Yaxley-Lennon and other far-right figures took an overtly Christian tone – we're going to be dealing with the social force of these ideas more and more, with the Orthodox Church among others receiving a surge of interest from young single men in particular.

While perhaps a similar number of years into the future as have passed since The Lie of the Land will show where Kingsnorth is travelling, we are disentangling the insidious parts of his message precisely because his is a more intelligent presentation of those ideas than the more blatantly far-right ones, and we want to distinguish our own critique of industrial civilisation and both the Left and the Right from his. He characterises the situation like this: "That's the response from the Left: 'There's still too many bigots around. If we just cancel them all, we'll be fine.' On the extreme Right, there's the belief that the leftists are destroying everything and if we just get rid of them, we'll be able to live the true life again. But it's a refusal to accept limits and self-sacrifice

He proclaims his astonishment that friends on the 'leftish, green-tinged world' had not done similarly, wondering why those who come from 'a tradition founded on localisation, degrowth, bioregionalism[8] and a fierce critique of industrial capitalism' would vote to remain part of the EU.

At this point it is worth noting that over 15,000 people *[ed. – plus the rest since 2017; see Statement on the Melilla Massacre]* have died as a result of EU borders since the turn of the millennium; and that the EU routinely and deliberately subjects migrants to appalling conditions at the camps it runs.[9] Yet this is not the source of Kingsnorth's ire: indeed, migrants are notable only by their absence from his essay. Rather, Kingsnorth buys into the UK's dominant (and alarmingly right-wing) framing of the EU: that it erodes borders in favour of free movement; and that this free movement erodes cultural differences.

Accordingly, he positions Brexit as 'the people', 'fuelled…by a sense of place and belonging', seeking to take back power from 'rootless' 'globalists'. For him, this is the key political division of our current moment and regardless of whether or not Brexit achieves these aims (spoiler: it won't), the vote 'exhilarates' Kingsnorth. Astonishingly, so does the election of Donald Trump.

Appeals to 'the people' are common in political discourse and are a central feature of populist politics. But as a political subject (and actor), 'the people' never pre-exists such appeals. Rather, it is constructed through them; and acknowledging this can be an important step in constructing a politics to challenge

[8] ed. – see the companion piece for Return Fire vol.3; Colonisation

[9] Reporting on the condition of child migrants at the now closed reception centre on Lesbos, Tzanetos Antypas, head of the humanitarian organisation Praksis, stated that: 'there were some [children], I'm not kidding, whose hair had turned white. When we moved them to an open camp they chose to remain listless in their tents. After so many months incarcerated in such overcrowded conditions, I was told they had forgotten how to walk.'

Marine Le Pen is centring 'the environment' in her French Presidential campaign. And there are chilling historical precedents too: the Nazis drew on the the work of early geographers and ecologists such as Friedrich Ratzel to promote '*lebensraum*', the 'living space' held to be necessary for the flourishing of a 'pure' nation. It is also worth noting that Kingsnorth situates himself within the legacy of the anti-globalization movement which, although largely left-wing, sometimes repeated or overlapped with fascist ideas and imagery.[6] And whilst we focus on the essay itself in what follows, Kingsnorth himself is no stranger reactionary nationalism.[7]

In this piece we outline our key areas of concern with Kingsnorth's argument and connect them to broader errors in the way that he understands the world. Although he attempts to distinguish between a 'benevolent green nationalism' and the quite-obviously less benevolent policies of the right, we show that no such separation can be made. Indeed, the key oppositions that structure his argument are precisely those that structure fascist environmentalism. Rejecting these, we close this essay by pointing to the possibility of anti-fascist and decolonial ecological struggle.

People, Place & Nationalism

Kingsnorth opens his essay with an admission that he voted for the United Kingdom to leave the European Union.

[6] Raphael Schlembach (2014). *Against Old Europe: Critical Theory and Alter-Globalization Movements.*

[7] We have serious concerns about the 'Dark Mountain Project', which Kingsnorth co-founded and 'editorially directs' with Dougald Hine. Vinay Gupta – who has 'been around the Dark Mountain story since before it had a name', has spoken at its festivals and has been published in two of its books – has openly stated that he would 'seriously consider helping out' a basically human ecological fascism' (so long as it's credible). At one point in the essay, meanwhile, Kingsnorth rhetorically asks if he is 'a fascist?', as if to suggest that any such accusations would be patently absurd. Our concern here is not whether Kingsnorth himself is 'a fascist', but rather to show how close much of his environmentalism is to fascism.

– that you might have to give up things you want to do to create a better world – that is driving us mad and driving our culture to the wall," asserting that true freedom is none other than giving up your own will to follow God's. Yet limits he specifically refers to, again and again, are those he – public intellectual that he is, despite his constant talk of the need for quietism and shutting up to listen to the world (slightly undermined by the fact he runs writing courses to get customers to do same) – would not be subjected to: those of the transgressed gender roles, the unstated part being that these are largely against expectations of domestic femininity (see Return Fire vol.2 pg46).

Sharing a common rhetorical move of the Right, in 2022 he uses the toxic bloated mass of neo-liberal identity politics (see 'The Position of the Excluded') to stand in for any actually radical vision of anti-racism or feminism, complaining how we are all "being levered out of the domestic sphere and sold instead a pseudo-egalitarian fulfilment "in the workplace", at capitalism's behest, upending our family lives and diminishing our self-sufficiency. I suggested that the home can be a place of independence and of resistance to this process – for a real home is an economy, a dwelling, and a web of mutual care." Except, of course, when it isn't: or when the virtue-sign of 'care' (see 'Care is Partisan') is a code-word for the loving reproduction of patriarchy. Obviously we are not among the feminists who abandon the notion of the hearth in favour of a valorization of the masculine 'public sphere' of politics and work (rather, we are for the destruction of the dichotomy, certainly in terms of its gendering), but it is not men like Kingsnorth we relish being indoors with.

A more useful spiritual genesis of our current and total crisis would not lead us to say, with Kingsnorth, that "The Enlightenment may have failed" (although the predictions and hopes of many of its participations and philosophisers undoubtedly have), but that it succeeded in the ways most faithful to its heritage. "The Enlightenment presented itself – and most of its biographers have continued to present it – as a rupture with Christianity," reads

Reconciling Parzival, "the triumph of reason, the end of superstition, in sum, an eschatological fairy tale in a dazzling new idiom. A good number of critical theorists and historians have traced the Christian and neo-Platonic [ed. – see Return Fire vol.5 pg47] heritage of Enlightenment philosophy, revealing the many intellectual structures adopted by the men of science who banished the Church but weren't quite able to kill God." One of the clearest continuities in this, that essay goes on to point out (contra to the liberal feminists still clinging to Enlightenment values to deliver them from the likes of Kingsnorth), was in terms of gender:

"*[In the European Middle Ages,] the Church's attitude towards women was quite clear, though the results they had achieved in dispossessing women were inconsistent. With the exception of monastic communities of nuns, subjected, nonetheless, to male authority, women were all but expunged from the ecclesiastical world. The medieval Church did not have such tight control over the Christian imaginary, however, forced as it was to elevate Mary in a thousand incarnations to Goddess status in all but name. We can safely assume that the impulse for this transformation came from outside the Church.*

"*The world of the commoners, on the other hand, could barely be considered patriarchal in comparison with gender relations under the Roman Empire or after the Renaissance and Enlightenment. In the 12th and 13th centuries, peasant women held land along with their male relatives, exercised nearly every rural trade, were aided in reproductive tasks by men (nor were these tasks set aside from or subordinated to productive tasks), and they could control the product of their labor. The growing number of women migrating to the cities markedly improved their lot in these same cities, gaining entry into nearly every profession, as well as exercising the right to inherit property and refuse marriage. Mainstream ideas of progress have obscured the facts that the end of the Roman Empire constituted, among other things, a revolution against patriarchy, and that the celebrated Renaissance and Enlightenment were in large part wars against women and gender*

wide open to a fascist environmentalism. Terrifying though this is, it is not without precedent: environmentalist and ecological politics in the West too often tend towards reactionary views. For example, some environmentalists continue to advocate closing national borders to 'protect our environment', the sterilization of women in the Global South to reduce the global population, transmisogyny in the name of the 'natural', and utilize violence against Indigenous populations to 'protect' National Parks.[5]

[5] ed. – "Environmentalism remains trapped in the thought of colonial-capitalism. Nature is something which happens in foreign lands, amongst barbarous people, who are now found to be incapable of protecting it. Neo-colonialism finds the indigenous community guilty of the mirror-crime of that for which they were condemned by colonialism; rather than too connected to their environment, they are now too disconnected. This time they shall be thrown off their land so that civilisation may save it from them, rather than them from it. In west Kenya the Sengwer people are being chased from their homes. Thousands of them flee before the military police, who tear apart their huts before setting them on fire. The government calls them squatters, blaming the Sengwer for the degradation of the forest they inhabit. They neglect to mention that the Sengwer have lived as hunter-gatherers in the Embobut forest and the Cherangany Hills for thousands of years. Why are these people being made homeless? Part of the blame at least falls on the UN's Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation (REDD) programme *[ed. – see Return Fire vol.3 pg8]*. The World Bank has been funding the Government of Kenya's new Natural Resource Management Programme (NRMP), which includes "financing REDD+ readiness activities". In practice this means the forest is being readied for market, to be sold to whichever company which needs to offset its pollution and habitat destruction. The idea that corporate ecocide should be rewarded with cheap land stolen from the global south embodies all that is wrong with modern environmentalism" (The Vivisection of Oikeios). This is not a new development, but accompanied the concept of National Parks as they spread across the world since their inception in the so-called United States: which was the Yosemite Valley, recently seized from the Miwok people in a war to reduce their autonomy and stop their attacks on gold mining colonists. Yosemite (actually a Miwok term for the invaders, 'some among them are killers') vistas are result of thousands of years of land-use practices such as underbrush burning that lead to flourishing oaks and deer enough to support one of the highest indigenous population densities on the West Coast at the time.

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On Saturday 17th March 2017 *The Guardian* published a lengthy essay by the writer, poet, and climate campaigner[1] Paul Kingsnorth. Titled 'The lie of the land: does environmentalism have a future in the age of Trump?', it calls for a nationalist environmentalism that its author believes to be a suitable response to our current ecological and political conjuncture. It has been widely shared on social media and attracted praise from – among others – *Guardian* political commentator John Harris and Greenpeace Senior Political Advisor Rosie Rogers. This horrifies us. It is, quite simply, a dangerous piece. Its argument and its logics must be rejected by those seeking to think through an environmental politics appropriate to the era of climate change.[2]

In the essay, Kingsnorth finds inspiration in those he calls 'the new populists' – reactionaries like Stephen Bannon[3] and Marine Le Pen;[4] and outlines a programme that leaves the door

[1] ed. – No longer involving himself with campaigning, he has however expressed interest in the so-called Truckers Protests: see "We Notice When Bigots Get a Win"

[2] ed. – see On Staying Woke in Polycrisis Futurism

[3] ed. – Self-described "Christian Zionist," media executive, political strategist, and former investment banker and Naval officer: key adviser early in Trump's first term (having created Breitbart News, which he described at the time as "the platform for the alt-right") until being dismissed after 'Unite the Right' rally in Charlottesville (see Ghosts) after pressure due to his open white-supremacist ties. Contributor to Trump's attempted 'Muslim Ban' denying access to the US to those from several majority-Muslim countries, which was only defeated by an anarchist-initiated wave of occupations that shut down every major airport in the country. Has toured to form connections with far-right networks across Europe and in Israel, seeing in Japan, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, China, Turkey, Egypt, the Philippines, Poland, and South Korea a global shift to nationalism "against cosmopolitanism". Although currently in prison after enriching himself with money raised to fund Trump's notorious southern border wall project, his media playbook still very much underpins Trump's strategy.

[4] ed. – Leader of French far-right National Front party (now rebranded as Nationally Rally) inherited from her father.

non-conforming people [ed. – see Memory as a Weapon; Mutant Identities in the Middle Ages].

[…] When it comes to gender, it seems that early Enlightenment thinkers drew exclusively from ecclesiastical sources, shunning aristocratic discourses. […] What we find instead is that in the Enlightenment, man is everything and woman is nothing, suggesting the clear and dominant influence of the womenless world of the monastery and the university. […] This concept drew on and strengthened Catholic and Platonic teachings regarding female inferiority and male hegemony."

In other words, it was the Enlightenment which was precisely the reimposition of the patriarchy he longs for, if it is – and it is – the Church rather than Christianity per se which he laments the demise of.

Perhaps unsurprisingly given this penchant for "thrones," the 2022 writing cited thus far by Kingsnorth was in fact a spirited defence of the institution of monarchy. But this isn't the tongue-in-cheek 'anarcho-monarchism' provocation of Peter Lamborn Wilson (see Wounded Healers), or even its less tongue-in-cheek offshoots: this was mourning that year's death of the British Queen. "A monarchy," he lectures, "is irrational, uncommercial and inexplicably mystical." This would surprise, say, the previous Spanish King who abdicated after so many corruption scandals to openly live off his ill-gotten gains in Dubai, or the royalty of Holland, Japan, Sweden, etc., which in no way interfere with their status as core colonial capitalist states. It is especially ironic that the incumbent King of England has been an enthusiastic supporter of the World Economic Forum executive chairman's 'Great Reset' proposal to force through a new social contract and technological advances under the cover of the COVID pandemic (see 'The Difference Between "Just Coping" & "Not Coping At All"'), which Kingsnorth elsewhere spills much ink denouncing; quite rightly, yet throwing himself in with notorious conspiracy theorists that gravitate around the proposal (see About the Reactionary Drift of Some "Comrades"…) rather than absorbing it as yet another pre-

dictable deployment of disaster capitalism (see 'Mobilising Disaster Relief') in a wider and more holistic analysis.

"A monarch has sat on the throne of England for 1,500 years," he writes wistfully. Actually, as he well knows, between 1649–66 was a republic which beheaded the King and set about intensifying early British merchant capitalism via the slave trade, mercilessly pushing on the conquest of Ireland, enclosing the commons (see the supplement to this chapter of Return Fire; 'Centering Relationships') on various continents and then setting a ruler back on the throne to continue the same trajectory. Other European nation-states were quick to show that the same results could be gained by keeping the monarch deposed or enthroned; it wasn't an important distinction in how the modern State evolved.

Tellingly, in his mourning of the Queen, he recounts how he heard the news while fishing and hiking: "the sense of loss that swept over me. You have to be British to understand this – and British at this moment in time especially." He does not reflect on the fact that he is among the peat-bogs of Ireland when writing this (having promptly decamped from his beloved England after voting to leave the European Union, only to move to it – there's those limits best applied to others again), nor on what the Crown lands of that same monarchy historically meant for the kind of commoning he was engaging in at the time news reached him: namely their complicity in their enclosure, in the Irish colony as much as in Britain. Even as he proposes a revival of a kind of Christian spiritual commoning in a January 2024 podcast, speaking of how American settlers should feel empowered to go and create holy wells as they please on the landscape as if it were a blank slate, the theme of limits seems self-servingly partial: and note that these days, compared to his opportunistic deployment of them in The Lie of the Land, the only people indigenous to the lands he throws open for his followers to sanctify who he mentions by name are, coincidentally, those who have converted to his own Orthodox Church. Perhaps relatedly, he claims that a "grand sweep of human history" reveals that humans (more pre-

messenger". The sameness or unity of opposites, a common theme in pagan and animist belief systems the world over, has no place amidst the demonization of the Other which is fundamental to Christianity. It took 1500 years of Catholic Inquisitions, witch hunts, heresy police, torture squads, and massacres to destroy such a transformative idea. In the year 1200, it can still make a weak appearance. In the end, Catholicism remained too pagan to complete the task, and it would be the rational men of the Enlightenment who would inherit the legacy of this war – both metaphysical and corporeal – and be able to subject the Other to a total alienation, banishment, and liquidation."

So while we don't begrudge Kingsnorth his appeal to the particularity of culture, there's an important message missing here. That message is written all over Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker's The Many-Headed Hydra with its charting of the truly international cross-pollination of radicalisms over the last half-century which formed (but did not only emanate from) the British radical traditions that looked not to revive the Church in any form but to live out the early Christian 'levelling' egalitarianism they re-encountered on their rulers' colonial frontiers, or James C. Scott's descriptions of ethnicities forming on the base of autonomy, and not the other way around. "If we support true anti-hegemonic particularism, we must also support the other half of the dialectic by developing a force to penetrate all false boundaries, to restore communicativeness and conviviality across a horizontal and random web of connectivities and solidarities," continued Peter Lamborn Wilson. "This would constitute the true force of which multiculturalism is merely the empty simulacrum. It would complement anti-hegemonic particularism with a genuine reciprocity among peoples and cultures. The "economy of the Gift" [ed. – see Return Fire vol.5 pg53] would replace the economy of exchange and commodification. The Social would resume circulation on the level of experienced life" through the exercise of imagination and generosity."

This is to go where Kingsnorth's path does not take us.]

"embody" another country, but African- or South Asian- or Turtle Island-descended peoples or anyone else who actually created the Britain of today and of the previous monarchs do not, unless as with recent Conservative Party leaders they can act as white as the rest of them... And yet, it is this 'Other' – ever-present, yet conspicuous by absence in Kingsnorth's wistfulness – that is precisely what gives anyone their sense of self. Perhaps Kingsnorth, seemingly unable to chart exactly what went wrong with his once-supposedly-glorious culture, would have done well to have attended to the subtexts of Parzival, the medieval romance work first committed to paper by Wolfram von Eschenbach around the quest-for-the-Holy-Grail motif (Kingsnorth's long-time collaborator mythologist Martin Shaw wrote a whole book on it, and – though he also ended up converting to the Orthodox Christianity around the same time as Kingsnorth, and pines for the regeneration of the Church – had at least written of the need for positive mythologies of migration), the subject of Peter Gelderloos' forthcoming work: "Wolfram makes clear that not only is Cundrie not to be considered beautiful, in terms of her appearance she is barely to be considered human. In a single passage he compares her to five different animals, both domestic and wild. Nonetheless, Cundrie commands respect. Kings and knights alike listen to her words. She is a sorceress, a wise woman, and a servant of the divine. And as such, she is an altogether unlikely figure to appear in a Christian romance. In the Christian moral paradigm, an ugly woman should be evil, a learned woman moreso.

"*Nonetheless, Cundrie is a canonical element of the Grail stories, and plays an essential role in the plot. Yet Wolfram could easily have made her beautiful and even-tempered, a sort of the Lady of the Lake as she is portrayed in modern renditions, rather than the warty tart Wolfram gives us. This element, it turns out, is a holdover from Irish paganism, Eriu, a divine gift-giver with "a radiant summer aspect and a hideous winter one, whence came two separate characters in the romances: the beauteous maiden who bore the Grail and the loathly damsel who served the Grail as*

cise would be to say states) follow the same colonial pattern "all the time": "They expand, they seek new lands, and if they find people already on them, conflict ensues." (He seems not to have caught in his "grand sweep" examples – even just from that specific landmass – such as the Haudenosaunee 'Six Nations' stateless confederacy designed precisely to counter-act such tendencies amongst themselves, and which the United States was unable to defeat militarily.)

We won't misrepresent Kingnorth's ambiguity and hesitancy, even as late as that 2022 piece: "It is in this context that so many people see the nation-state as a potential bulwark against unaccountable technocratic globalism. But it is also a reality that the nation-state is what has driven that globalism forward. While some nations are ancient things, nation-states in their modern form are mostly not: their rise coincides with the rise of modernity, and today they rarely represent the actual nations they purport to speak for. [...] To many, nationalism seems like a reasonable response to this, and I think it can be, under some circumstances. But there are also good reasons to be nervous about what it can do to the human mind. Humans remain human, and it is easy enough for national feeling to shade into xenophobic triumphalism. Personally, I've long found myself in the uncomfortable position of valuing nations but mostly being repelled by nationalism. [...] Perhaps the dissolution of the modern nation state into smaller, more anarchic, less centralised units is both inevitable and welcome. Perhaps then new nations will form, around a spiritual core and a love of their place, which will give to their people the kind of meaning which the nation-states of the Machine era have so successfully imitated while at the same time destroying."

While we would dispute his conflation of the nation ("understood separately from the nationalist projects of European states," to follow Lev Zlodey and Jason Radegas, "simply the largest imaginary community a person can envision based on their history and their ability to communicate with the world around them," or A.G. Schwarz's "fictive community united

by a common language, culture, and history; [a] context in which common experiences can take place [and] therefore also an affective universe") and the historically precise – and precisely modern – project of nationalism (cross-class alliances for the establishment of nation-states!), from an anti-colonial and anti-racist perspective there seems little to criticise in the above lines. Yet he is playing with a doubled-edged sword by not connecting any such perspectives to his own project in an era of mass migrations of people fleeing ecological collapse and capitalist depredation, whereas doing so would indeed take us beyond the liberal and false anti-racism – so often pandered to by leftist anti-fascism – the pompous faux-cosmopolitanism of which (where genuine autonomy for any particular group, as Peter Lamborn Wilson's 'Against Multiculturalism' reminds, "is out of the question, and so is any "class consciousness" which might cut across ethnic or "lifestyle" lines to suggest revolutionary coalitions") turns so many disillusioned people into the arms of the reactionaries. (Even some of the national struggles closest to Kingsnorth are doing better than this, from the 'Refugees Welcome' placards abounding at demonstrations of the recently-revitalised Cornish independence movement or the historic internationalism forming part of Irish radicalism – but once again he prefers to ignore the labour and land that has been exploited as the 'Celtic Fringe' to create his beloved England, even as he makes his home there.) Especially unconvincing is his appeal to "more anarchic" societies when he champions the Church; hierarchy, in English, literally being derived from a term for rule by priests.

In another typically reductionist move, by 2023 he characterises the cultural moment as the conflict as "the 'woke' tribe — that curious agglomeration of international capital and elite progressive opinion posing as an uprising from below – works to invert the culture as it crusades against everything that the place has ever been or stood for. In response, the 'based' tribe rises up to 'defend the West', but can never seem to agree on what it is

defending. […] Surveying the ongoing demolition of the pillars of my culture, I am sometimes, in my worst moods, tempted to join the defenders of the West in their work. But when I have calmed down, I remember that those pillars are mostly rotten anyway, and that those attacking them, repulsive as they can sometimes be, are not entirely wrong either. Something has gone wrong with this 'West', and those who highlight its past crimes are getting at something that maybe even they can't quite put their finger on." His account, of course, erased those whose finger is quite directly pointed at colonial capitalism (inextricable – from the Doctrines of Discovery, authorising colonisation, and Papul Bulls, authorising slavery, onwards – from the Church in one form or another) who don't come from but aim their weapons at "international capital and elite progressive opinion"; see Follow the Fires. Once again, another faux-modest intellectual mistaking partisan dominant media discourses for the sum total of social contestation and subversion, convinced that a "kind of post-modern leftist" "dominates the culture" (surprisingly to some!). We need better vision and history than this.

"What, after all," Kingsnorth rhetorically asks in 2022, "is the point of a monarch in the modern world? There is really only one: to represent a country and its history; to be a living embodiment of the spirit of a people." In the case of the Britain he's referring to, this can basically only mean (the aspirations of attaining) whiteness, if Germans, Normans, Greeks, Netherlanders and Danes – to name a few of the nationalities of the 'British' royal family, common across Europe as for a large part of Kingsnorth's "1,500 years" royals were required to marry other royals (almost inevitably of other nationalities: they are essentially the most successful and most parasitic migrants), with the last monarch even half-English by birth and heredity due to an illicit dalliance with a commoner being over 300 years ago and the current dynasty only changing their German name to Windsor in embarrassment amid the so-called Great War, leading many Britons to historically consider them essentially foreigners – can band together to