frontiers | Frontiers in Political Science

TYPE Hypothesis and Theory
PUBLISHED 04 March 2025
DOI 10.3389/fpos.2025.1455768

OPEN ACCESS

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RECEIVED 27 June 2024
ACCEPTED 13 February 2025
PUBLISHED 04 March 2025

CITATION
Cooper L (2025) Authoritarian protectionism and the post-neoliberal transition: learning from Stuart Hall's method of articulation.
Front. Polit. Sci. 7:1455768.
doi: 10.3389/fpos.2025.1455768

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Authoritarian protectionism and the post-neoliberal transition: learning from Stuart Hall's method of articulation

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This article returns to Stuart Hall's account of Thatcherism to consider the interaction between consent-based hegemonic devices and the structural compulsions that emanate from political-economic transitions. It argues that Hall's method of articulation offers a middle position in analysing contemporary authoritarian trends, which recognises the role of structural constraints and logics, as well as the discursive construction of ideology in enabling (and inhibiting) hegemony seeking efforts. Building on existing work that has highlighted the distinction between classical neoliberal arguments regarding economic individualism and the trend towards 'protectionist' discourses today, where the state is cast as a protector of the in-group against threats, real and imagined, the article outlines how the method of articulation can aid us in making sense of the complexity and non-linearity of the post-neoliberal transition. This framework is then applied to the case study of the British Conservative Party's trajectory after the 2016 Brexit referendum.

KEYWORDS

articulation, authoritarianism, neoliberalism, political-economy, Stuart Hall

Introduction

This article considers the role of ideas and consent in transitions between political-economic systems. Ideas-centred explanations (for example Harvey, 2007; Klein, 2008; Stiglitz, 2019) of the rise and development of neoliberalism, while still very prominent, have been critiqued over the last decade by those favouring more structurally grounded accounts (Cahill, 2013, 2014). This argument is particularly associated with the literature on 'authoritarian neoliberalism', which emerged in response to the Eurozone crisis (Bruff, 2014) and highlighted the drift towards anti-democratic politics (Bruff and Tansel, 2019, 2020; Chacko, 2018, 2020; Fabry, 2019a, 2019b; Gallo, 2021; Jessop, 2019; Tansel, 2017a). For these authors, the rise of market rationalities that 'straitjacket' the governing space into policies shaped by capitalist interests have left the space for consent-based politics diminished and driven a proliferation of anti-democratic techniques. The Eurozone crisis encapsulated this framework in part because the European institutions often appeared unconcerned with winning consent for austerity policies.

In the second half of the mid-2010s the global rise of authoritarian and illiberal forces has not however shared this technocratic logic but actually challenged such rules-based institutions in often 'radical' ways (Bozóki, 2015; Cooper, 2021; Davies, 2018; Herman and Muldoon, 2018; Milanese and Kolozova, 2023; Snyder, 2018; Varshney, 2019; Wodak, 2019). The rise to power of Donald Trump, Narendra Modi and Jarosław Kaczyński, Viktor Orbán's second election victory, and the Brexit referendum (as well as the political crises in the latter's aftermath) illustrated this trend towards a rule breaking and subverting authoritarianism. These forces

also made highly successful appeals for political consent for their projects, drawing on ethnonationalist, anti-immigrant and sovereignty-based frames and meanings. This has challenged the architecture and assumptions of neoliberal globalization but in highly regressive and contradictory ways. It builds on a tension that was always present in the relationship of neoliberal globalization to the nation-state. Neoliberalism is both a macroeconomic doctrine that holds to the fallacy that markets are self-correcting (Stiglitz, 2008, 2019) and a political philosophy that 'seeks to extend competitive market forces… and promote individual freedom' (Jessop, 2013, p. 70 emphasis added; see also Kotz and McDonough, 2010, p. 94). As states may come under demands from citizenry to regulate capital and may also prioritise collective goals in some form over individual 'freedom' and market competition, this means the relationship between neoliberalism and the nation-state has never been an uncontradictory one.

These potential tensions and the role of consent-based political vocabularies in the new authoritarianism resonate with the work of Stuart Hall and his Gramscian account of Thatcherism as 'authoritarian populism' (Hall, 1979, 1988). Hall was drawn to Gramsci's critique of the class instrumentalism that analysed political forces narrowly around the question, 'who profits directly from the initiative under consideration?' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 166). Building on this, Hall identified how ideas and meanings were constructed that were able to subvert and disrupt such class alignments by uniting a range of social groups. For Hall, this was also the critical challenge that the Thatcher government posed to the left in the 1980s: its ability to construct a popular appeal that stood 'betwixt and between' the conservative and the radical.

Somewhat surprisingly Hall's work has been relatively neglected (Bruff and Tansel, 2019, p. 237; see also Carrington, 2019) amid the outpouring of analysis on the relationship between authoritarianism and neoliberalism (for important exceptions see Adorno and Brown, 2021; Boffo et al., 2019; Hendrikse, 2021; Knott, 2020). My argument here builds on my earlier use of Hall (Cooper, 2021, pp. 19–28) to make a further contribution to the work that others have undertaken in this direction (on which see Lehtonen, 2016; Rogers, 2020; Shilliam, 2021). In my book, *Authoritarian Contagion* (Cooper, 2021, see also Cooper, 2023), I drew on Hall to analyse how contemporary far right discourses often appear to eschew the classical neoliberal idea that a moral state is one that disavowals its obligations towards citizens (e.g., through public services or social security) on the grounds of incentivising individual work and competition. Instead, what I referred to as authoritarian protectionism constructs a hegemonic appeal around the idea that a particular in-group is threatened and the state can and should mobilise to 'protect' these insiders, even if this means taking illiberal and anti-democratic actions. So, in the former, what Hall called authoritarian populism or we might refer to as authoritarian individualism, the minimal state is celebrated; but in the latter, the state is recast as a vehicle to 'protect the people'.

This distinction between authoritarian individualism and authoritarian protectionism is however an ideal type. In practical political discourse these different strategies may be entangled together, or policies that are substantively neoliberal may also be pursued under the cover of 'protectionist' appeals. Indeed, the crisis of neoliberal globalization is producing contradictory patterns of structural change and ideological contention. To make sense of what are often confusing and illogical juxtapositions between ideologies and their relationship with changes in economic conditions, I make the case here for drawing on and utilising Hall's method of articulation (Grossberg and Hall, 1986, see also Clarke, 2015). I argue that it provides a framework for analysing hegemony that integrates the shifting terrain of ideas and the movement of economic ('material') forces. Offering a sympathetic alternative perspective to the authoritarian neoliberalism scholarship, the article illustrates how this method integrates consent and compulsion dialectically, treating them as mutually constitutive of the conjuncture.

This argument is pursued through the following steps. First, I critically engage the authoritarian neoliberalism literature by foregrounding the role of consent in constructing hegemonic orders. Second, I return to Hall's account of Thatcherism, highlighting how his analysis integrated both ideational and economic dimensions holistically. Third, moving back to the present global conjuncture, I show how Hall in some of his last work identified the presence in society ('from below) of alternatives to neoliberalism. These spoke to the political shifts seen in the second half of the 2010s. In the final step, I develop a close analysis of the ideological transformation that Brexit fostered in British Conservatism, identifying how the rise and fall of this new political formation entailed an ultimately unstable articulation between the economic unevenness arising from Britain's position in the global economy and Brexit ideology. I argue that this illustrates how a politics that was able to connect to the emergence of a class-coded ethic nationalism 'from below' owed its potency to a particular constellation of structural conditions in the global political economy but was in turn constrained by these same conditions.

On consent and coercion: the promise and pitfalls of authoritarian neoliberalism

Over the last decade a number of scholars have contributed to the literature on 'authoritarian neoliberalism' (Bruff and Tansel, 2019, 2020; Chacko, 2018, 2020; Fabry, 2019a, 2019b; Gallo, 2021; Jessop, 2019; Tansel, 2017a). In its initial formulation this work represented a conceptualisation of the turn towards regimes of 'permanent austerity' (Bailey, 2015) and their utilisation of authoritarian practices. The push to impose radical neoliberal restructuring even when it lacked support among elected representatives gave this moment of crisis and transition in global political economy an anti-democratic colouration. Policy choices were cast as an inevitable response to difficult economic conditions. The 'fiscal adjustment' process in the European Union was the paradigmatic case (Bruff and Tansel, 2019, p. 232; see also Bruff and Wöhl, 2016; Wigger, 2019), in part due to the role of supranational institutions (with weaker democratic mandates) in prosecuting the austerity agenda. Ian Bruff's original formulation saw the response of the European institutions to the crisis as marking a retreat from 'seeking consent for hegemonic projects' (Bruff, 2014, p. 116) towards a strategic use of quasi-coercion means to advance neoliberalism. He thus identified three tenets of this emergent form of governance:

1. An 'appeal to material circumstances' to justify state passivity and retrenchment in the face of problems such as inequality. A lack of elite confidence in the classical narratives of neoliberalism led instead to an emphasis on 'tough choices' in 'hard times'.

2. A 'deeper and longer-term recalibration of the kinds of activity that are feasible and appropriate for nonmarket institutions to engage in'; i.e., a doubling-down on the retreat of the state mantra and a hollowing out of social protections.
3. The recrafting of democratic states as authoritarian through seeking their 'subordination to [the] constitutional and legal rules… deemed necessary for prosperity' (Bruff, 2014, pp. 115–116).

From this basis the authoritarian neoliberalism literature developed a critique of 'ideas-centred accounts' (Cahill, 2014, p. 44) and pursued a 'structural' theory (Tansel, 2017b, p. 9). While focused on unequal class relations this also integrated other dimensions of the social and their mediation in the political and cultural field. Priya Chacko argues that neoliberalism mobilises gendered and racialised 'moral' codes that construct notions of the worthy citizen to enforce compliance with capitalist markets (Chacko, 2018, 2023). This explicitly departs from the 'baseline definition' (Jessop, 2013, p. 70) arguing that market individualism was always a false construct of neoliberalism. 'Neoliberal social orders', she writes, 'far from giving life to a spontaneously evolved market, with individuals self-regulating with spontaneously evolved morals, have created particular types of private markets dominated by large capitalist interests and concentrated wealth and power with a small minority' (Chacko, 2023, p. 451). This focuses on work and the patterns of compulsion and exclusion present in labour-capital relations; for example, through the hollowing out of employee protections and collective bargaining with the transition from industrial to post-industrial societies. Neoliberal practices can however be more complex than the narrow focus on disciplinarity and compulsion suggests. Research on the use of technology platforms has shown how these labour relations can entail a 'constrained flexibility' which combines elements of personal autonomy with greater exposure to insecurity and market compulsions (Muldoon et al., 2024). Even at the level of labour market then neoliberalism has involved elements of participation alongside compulsion. At the broader political level the ideology and practices of neoliberalism should not be read narrowly as elite constructs that are imposed forcefully, but have often arisen from a process of democratic contention. This is what Gramsci called 'transformism' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 128), the absorption and pacification of discontent into an elite project. Neoliberalism illustrated thus the 'unstable equilibrium between coercion and consent' that is characteristic of 'all democratic class politics' (Hall, 1985, p. 116).

This methodological dictum and starting point—that we should investigate the mechanisms through which consent is constructed in the political field—should inform how we analyse contemporary patterns of authoritarianisation and their relationship to economic conditions. While the scholars that have taken up the 'authoritarian neoliberalism' paradigm recognise that the welfarist orientation of some authoritarian regimes has 'ostensibly challeng[ed] neoliberalism' (Chacko, 2023, p. 455), they have stressed continuity over change, emphasising 'ongoing neoliberal trends' and elite attempts 'to curb dissent' to these policies (Chacko, 2023, pp. 455–456). Furthermore, in its resolute focus on the vertical social relations of capital and subaltern class groups, the analysis can miss other dimensions of the totality; such as, the different ways that states interact with markets and the nature of their external geopolitical competition/cooperation, i.e., 'the international' as such (Kurki and Rosenberg, 2020; Rosenberg, 2016; Rosenberg et al., 2022; Saull, 2023a, 2023b; Saull et al., 2015).

Analysing the Eurozone crisis somewhat narrowly as a contest marked by resistance to capital and a neoliberal policy of capital illustrated the explanatory problems this can lead to. With neoliberalism seen as a response to crises, driving class conflict and the ineluctable use of capital-favouring policies by states (Tansel, 2017b, p. 8), these scholars argue that it inherently contains an anti-democratic potential, one that may involve outright coercion or 'indirect legal, administrative and political reform' (Tansel, 2017b, p. 12). The level of abstraction at which this explicitly structural theory is cast can inhibit analysis of how consent for these policies was constructed and sustained from below, not merely imposed from above. In short, the 'popular' component can become occluded in the push for an explicitly structural theory. Cultural and political forms, such as the neoliberal populism that has often animated the centre-ground, especially in northern European states, are not simply expressions of structural forces but act as productive elements within the conjuncture, providing the meanings that render events both intelligible and subject to contestation. By analysing the compulsions of structural 'enforcement' alone, the ways that ideas are mobilised to generate hegemonic systems risks being occluded.

Contests over identity and belonging shaped the Eurozone crisis, providing a web of cultural frames that intensified the structural crisis. Populism took hold on both sides of the dispute. Weaker Eurozone economies were 'othered' by exclusionary narratives (Ervedosa, 2017; Tzogopoulos, 2020). Rather than recognising the crisis as structured through transnational ties, i.e., the uneven and combined development of European states' political economies that shapes how their differential growth models and capacities interact (on which see Dooley, 2018, 2023), the ideational narrative distorted and obscured these connections in favour of a nationalist, beggar-thy-neighbour perspective. They drew on the North–South trope famously associated with Aesop's fable *The Ant and the Grasshopper*, which depicts the grasshopper as begging for food in winter from the more prepared and industrious ant, whose refusal to help teaches a hard 'moral' lesson (see Alemany and Parra-Membrives, 2023). So, the mythological neoliberal assumption that individual competition forms the basis for the merit distribution of resources is transplanted in this narrative to the geopolitical and geoeconomic terrain. At the same time, a simplifying set of discourses also shaped the resistance (Sierp and Karner, 2017). In the 'Greco-German dispute' both sides constructed narratives that spoke past one another with distinct ordering principles that conjured a mutually unintelligible view of the world (Nicolaidis et al., 2018). Identity and vision—including competing understandings of internationalism—shaped this contest over hegemony that entailed sharply counterposed visions of Europe and differing accounts of the history, causes and nature of the European crisis. These sharply contrasting populisms prioritised sovereignty (Olivas Osuna, 2021) in their *explanans*, trading depictions of a quasi-mercantilist Germany with the imprudence of Greece.

Still, with its push for macroeconomic adjustment through spending cuts and market 'efficiencies' the Eurozone was without question a consummately neoliberal moment. Ironically, however, given that the authoritarian neoliberal analysis emphasised so strongly the structural component in the pursuit of these policies over their political mediation, it might be argued that subsequent developments in Europe and elsewhere have exposed the structural limits that

neoliberalism has run up against as a hegemonic political philosophy. China's successful development of a model of state-managed capitalism has reorientated and heightened geoeconomic competition. The emergence of a low growth world with repeated crises (wars, the pandemic, climate change) generating market failures and demands for state intervention, have also contributed to the narrowing of the space for neoliberal ideas (on this see Alami and Dixon, 2024; Davies and Gane, 2021; Gerstle, 2022; Meadway, 2024). This diminishes the appeal of philosophical individualism among a populace demanding protection, not 'freedom', from the state and limits the scope for applying policies based on the illusion of self-correcting markets (Cooper, 2021). This landscape shaped the authoritarianism that emerged from the mid-part of the last decade. Notably, this tended to advance not 'subordination to constitutional and legal rules' (Bruff, 2014, p. 116) but their subversion. Trump's rule-breaking authoritarianism at home, combined with his rejection of free trade abroad, has encapsulated these global headwinds, as right and left increasingly converge around the idea that some form of state intervention to correct markets is necessary to achieve their overall policy goals (Gerstle, 2022).

If rather than pursuing a narrowly 'structural' theory we give equal focus to the terrain of ideas, then we can ask questions about how these *illiberal* (Herman and Muldoon, 2018; Milanese and Kolozova, 2023; Snyder, 2018; Wodak, 2019) appeals to consent interact with the status and practices of neo*liberalism* (Hendrikse, 2018). Whereas it had once been anticipated that authoritarianisation would see non-market institutions further recalibrated around market rationalities, while citizens downgrade their 'expectations' of public authorities (Bruff, 2014, p. 116), one might argue that a trend to the opposite appears to have emerged: a groundswell of demands for protection—i.e., a vocabulary of *expectations*—from citizens in the face of cascading crises (Cooper, 2023). How elites have engaged and navigated these demands is fundamentally a question of hegemony; i.e., the interaction between changes in economic conditions (incl. market failures) and the mobilisation of ideas to both 'filter' and 'steer' these processes. As neoliberalism's central organising motif—that market-based resource allocation is both efficient and just—loses its lustre, alternative hegemonies that make 'collectivist' and unconditional (i.e., not merit-based) claims on distribution have a new potency.

In the next section, I show how Hall's methodology of articulation can help capture these new transitions.

Thatcherism and the method of articulation: hegemony and productive relations, the 'filtering' of the material

Hall famously analysed Thatcherism as 'authoritarian populism' (Hall, 1988, pp. 84–87), highlighting how it depicted enterprising individualism as organic to the identity of the British people. Although this was an elite project that harnessed the power of the state from 'above' to fundamentally change the relations between government, capital and labour associated with the post-WW2 settlement, the populist element of this idiom denoted how it sought consent through a movement 'rooted in popular fears and anxieties' emanating from 'below' (Hall, 1988, p. 84). Populist reasoning based on the construction of 'them' and 'us' binaries (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012; Olivas Osuna, 2021; Wodak, 2019) was critical to the successful hegemonic construction of this politics, pitting *hardworking Britons* attached to socially conservative values against a range of allegedly threatening forces—including young Black men, the gay rights movement and trade unionists—that were routinely the subject of tabloid-led moral panics. This filled a space that was opened by the 'fragmentation of many of the traditional "us/them" discourses of the working class' (Hall, 1988, p. 141). Hall's analysis drew attention to how this potent set of meanings welded mass sentiments to 'the practices' and vision 'of the dominant classes' (Hall, 1988, p. 140), from the rise of conspicuous consumption to the idealisation of a homeowning democracy. These articulated discourses combined to construct a hegemony that was attuned to the anxieties latent in an 'angry' form of Englishness (the Conservative Party failed to win a majority in Scotland or Wales in any election between 1979 and 1997). Its ability to captivate this audience, to sustain legitimacy by mobilising consent, led Hall to see Thatcherism as a highly ideological phenomenon that arose from, and could be dislodged by, a battle over ideas.

This was a consciously political viewpoint but one that also arose out of an ontological position and accompanying methodology. Hall's ontology framed reality as inherently plural and differentiated but stopped short of the conclusions that Laclau and Mouffe (2001) would arrive at, which subsumed the material and economic into the discursive field, rather than maintaining the idea that they formed distinct but interconnected levels of the social world (On which see Colpani, 2022). While Hall argued that within any 'social formation' (society) there were 'different regimes of truth' constructed by subjects with differing perspectives, he saw these as existing in a dialectical relation to the material structures of social and class hierarchy (Grossberg and Hall, 1986, p. 48). In this sense, Hall did not accept that discourses were merely 'free floating' systems of meaning, unconnected to social forces (ibid, p. 54), but neither did he argue that there was a necessary relationship between class position and ideology or consciousness (ibid, p.53). Through the concept of articulation Hall analysed material socioeconomic relations as a layer of stratification that only became intelligible through culture:

> [A] theory of articulation is both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects… [It] asks how an ideology discovers its subject rather than how the subject thinks the necessary and inevitable thoughts which belong to it… without reducing those forms of intelligibility to their socio-economic or class location or social position (ibid, p. 53).

In Hall's reading 'articulation' is therefore the process through which subjects make sense of the conditions they encounter. They do so by apprehending and reworking the socially produced ideas that render their conditions intelligible. Ideology is thus a productive force in the sense that it 'empowers people… to make sense of… their historical situation' (ibid). Rendering the material 'intelligible' through 'articulating' different discourses does not reveal a hidden essence (e.g., a 'true' consciousness) as such but constitutes the process by which categories such as social class become concretely meaningful.

For Hall, then, 'class unity' where it exists is established on the terrain of ideology as a form of hegemony (ibid, p. 55). As such it is necessarily a fragile and incomplete phenomenon, continually shaped by conflict and mediation. He, therefore, did not reject a 'the connection between an ideology or cultural force and a social force' (ibid) but saw articulation as a means of identifying their complex, reciprocal linkages.

Hall staked out a distinct approach in which the task of theoretical elaboration was to capture the conjuncture holistically by continually overlaying more concrete determinations into the analysis. This was central to his criticism of Laclau and Mouffe's intellectual project:

> [W]hen… [Laclau and Mouffe] come down to particular political conjunctures, they do not reintegrate other levels of determination into the analysis. Instead, they take the abstractions which have been developed and elaborated, in a very rigorous and conceptual way at a high philosophical level, and insert them into the here and now. You do not see them adding, adding, adding, the different levels of determination; you see them producing the concrete philosophically (ibid, p.58).

Importantly, this is further distinguished from Laclau and Mouffe by what might be called a 'whole society' approach to how hegemony is constructed and secured. 'What Hall stresses', writes Samuele Mazzolini, 'is that hegemony goes far beyond the struggle to conquer nominal political power' (Mazzolini, 2020, p. 772). Hegemony is, in this sense, formed through a series of articulations, fusing the economic, civil society and political, that constitute the conjuncture as a complex constellation (ibid). Hall's analysis of Thatcherism can be read in the context of these premises. He adopted the presupposition that the hegemony of one set of ideas could never be constructed purely from the top down by elites but must involve the populace as a 'productive force', so to speak. This was critical to how he understood Thatcher's consent-wielding power (Hall, 1988) that harnessed a wellspring of visceral sentiments for its project. 'Nothing can become popular which does not negotiate the experiences, the codes, etc., of the popular masses' (Grossberg and Hall, 1986, p. 52), as he put it. This power was crystallised in the conjuncture through a process of conflict and negotiation; it did not, he argued, occur epiphenomenally with the movement of structures and impersonal forces but 'entail[ed] a struggle' (ibid). Like many other scholars Hall saw the callsign of neoliberal thought as the idea of a 'free, possessive individual' striving to self-betterment and locked in an eternal contest with a 'tyrannical and oppressive state' (Hall, 2011, p. 706). In its Thatcherite form neoliberalism involved the *articulation* of this ego-centric individualism with a fervently nationalist imagery, Victorian values and a carceral politics of 'law and order' (Hall, 2011, pp. 712–713). These crusading discourses were not tertiary to the ideological formation but its 'leading edge' (Hall, 1988, p. 85). The strong state would thus *enforce* the values of a free people; a contradictory notion but one that activated visceral sentiments among many Britons.

Thatcher's construction of this hegemonic narrative was not 'free floating' but entwined with the global economic transition. This was incentivising elites to move away from state directed economies. The ideologues of the monetarist and neoliberal right offered a suite of policies to 'solve' the crisis of the 1970s (Hall, 1979, p. 16) through austerity and aggressive interest rate rises that produced unemployment and deflated the economy. This recognition of the role of the economic sphere in shaping the policy options of elites was the concrete manifestation in analysis of Hall's departure from the Laclauian method of a purely discursive framework. Instead he argued that the 'twists and turns' in the conjuncture were 'rooted in… deeper trends and tendencies in society' such as the industrial economy and the organisation of the monetary and financial system (Hall, 1988, p. 87). In the 1980s, some even held that Thatcher's lack of progress on the 'economic fundamentals' would render this project ephemeral. Hall however counselled against this position, arguing that while judged against criteria such as productivity and industrial output, her policy had 'failed' this was not its yardstick. 'Thatcherism is pursuing', he wrote, 'an alternative image of "prosperity": Britain as an open playground… for international capital' (ibid). Its hegemonic strategy thus sought to redefine culturally the very terminology of success. The economic transformation occurring at the global level rendered this tangible: 'the multinationalization and internationalization of capital… is the most significant process going on globally', Hall argued, one that had given a 'dynamic thrust' to 'the capitalist world system' (ibid). Thatcherism generated its own impetus by creating interest groups with a perceived stake in pursuing the paradigm shift away from the Keynesian economic model. In this sense, the success or failure of neoliberalism was in the end a positional and relational question; determined by how subjects framed and 'filtered'—both individually and through shared discourses—their own subjective class and status position.

Hegemonic articulation occurs at this contact point between economic forces and the discursive construction of meaning. Through the 'filtering' and contestation of ideas, the melding of different discourses, neoliberalism entered the 'common sense' of the everyday. Yet, it was also—at this level—continually tested and reconfigured. The innately biosocial way in which the subject both apprehends and 'produces' these discourses, interspersing ideas in a complex and not always coherent mix, meant that neoliberal thought was inherently co-existent with—indeed, often embedded in—other ideological frames. The next section explores Hall's analysis of this 'bisociality' and what it may suggest about post-neoliberalism.

Seeding the present: Hall and austerity politics at the twilight of the neoliberal era

The hegemony of neoliberalism has always been reconstituted and reproduced within the specifics of the historical conjuncture. From the conservative to the more 'progressive' and social democratic phases of neoliberalism (Fraser, 2019), the empty signifier of 'fairness' (Hall and O'Shea, 2013, pp. 13–15) was continually re-coded but within a framework of 'meritocratic' individualism. This 'bundle of ideas… the primacy of the competitive individual, the superiority of the private over the public', and the 'supposed naturalness of "the market"' became apprehended in common-sense as premises 'beyond question, …so deep that the very fact that they are assumptions is only rarely brought to light' (Hall et al., 2013, p. 13). But by analysing the production of this 'consensus' through its mediation in society, it was possible to illustrate the variety of ideas that stood behind such thinking—and this ideological differentiation also offered, one may argue, further insights into potential post-neoliberal shifts.

Hall, with his co-author Alan O'Shea, identified the presence of such alternative logics in developing an analysis of the austerity policy pursued by the Cameron government (2010–2016). Their analysis of online comments on a *Sun* newspaper article which had reported the benefit cap policy (i.e., an archetypical neoliberal measure) observed their 'strangely composite' character at the individual level. This illustrated, they argued, how individuals are inclined to 'articulate together ideological elements from very disparate sources, such that there is an unresolved struggle over common sense within the individual as well as between individuals and groups' (Hall and O'Shea, 2013, p. 20). This ideological bisociation mediated how the individual comprehended the question of distribution that the policy pertained to. Hall and O'Shea noted that while each discursive statement was unique its own terms and the aggregate data could not be considered 'representative', the material indicated not only the hegemony of neoliberal discourse as the agenda setting logic, but also its co-presence with other ideas. For there were 'other currents in play—empathy for others, a liking for co-operation rather than competition… [and] a sense of injustice' (ibid, p. 21). In some comments there was a sense of 'class anger' that had become conjoined, i.e., articulated in a holistic fashion, 'with the politics of UKIP or the BNP' (ibid, p.22). From these differing premises a 'common sense' was derived.

Isolating two of these remarks for the purposes of analysis can help to suggest the terms of contention through which alternatives to the vernaculars of neoliberalism have emerged. In the first, a set of meanings very similar to Thatcherism may be discerned. 'People moaning about benefit cuts must be benefit claimants', they write, '[t]hat is the problem with this country, the people have been living well beyond their means for years' (cited in ibid., p.21). National decline is thereby associated with the *shirkers* and a sense of future salvation identified with the *strivers*—i.e., a textbook assertion of the hardline egoistic libertarianism of Thatcher. This embraces the logic of individual competition through markets and articulates it together with Thatcher's image of a nation that may either be formed through hard work or 'betrayed' by the 'work shy'. By contrast, the second of the two remarks articulate a form of exclusionary ethnic nationalism alongside a demand for government policies that address the cost-of-living crisis:

> There are going to be riots in the street before long because even though the benefit system needs reforming, wages are far too low and people IN work cannot survive on what they are being paid, so they will be marching for an increase in the minimum wage and so they should, also for a complete halt in immigration (cited in ibid., p. 21).

Here, then, the type of distributional antagonism towards the state changes radically. In the second of the two remarks, the state becomes an *object of claim-making* by citizens demanding it address low living standards and poverty. By contrast, in the first comment, the state is cast as the *subject of claim-making* against hardworking citizens through demands for taxes. This is framed as a rentier act favouring the workshy. The essence of the dichotomy between the 'nanny state' and the 'cradle to grave state' of the neoliberal and social democratic imaginations, respectively, is thus captured, in a colloquial form, by these two different articulations of the relationship between state and citizen. In the former the state is a tyrannical force that threatens the 'free' competition and rationality of market distribution, while in the latter, the state advances a social contract to protect citizens' wellbeing through the provision of public services and welfare. Although the second comment implies a critique of the neoliberal vision, embedded within, and indeed seemingly overriding, the class logic is an ethnically exclusionary pattern of claim-making against immigration in any form. Its nascent class anger is thereby redirected through this ideational movement towards an identity-based antagonism situated against the migrant 'other'. The taken for-granted-nature of the alleged negative impact of migration on living standards gives it this subjective quality of a 'common-sense' proposition. In this way, a rendering of these meanings into some form of inclusive set of economic demands is sublated by 'filtering' such class sentiment through an ethno-racial, overtly nationalist prism.

This gives a particular content to the *demand for protection* expressed in this remark, anchoring it firmly in a nationalist and xenophobic politics. It provides a consummate illustration of the kinds of popular discourses that authoritarian protectionism has mobilised to rally and instrumentalise, responding to this demand for a state that protects kin and creed. It is an imaginary that involves a quite different constellation of meaning to the cornerstone neoliberal idea of philosophical individualism. For it appears to reject a concept of distribution based on the meritocratic 'reward' for individual hard work and in its place asserts an identity-based claim on economic resources. Membership of the in-group, i.e., the British ethno-nation ('native Britons'), becomes decisive to making a claim on the state's capacity to distribute resources (towards the in-group and away from the out-group, i.e., the foreign-born population). It also illustrates how, if one defines neoliberalism through the twin pillars of an ego-centric individualism and the idea of self-correcting markets, the abandonment of the former is likely to posit a refutation of the latter. For it entails a new set of distributional claims on the state to act exogenously on markets to deliver outcomes perceived as favouring the claim-maker. This presupposes that such an approach would not occur independently of state, political action.

While this comment only speaks 'for itself' in the literal sense, it can be taken as a prompt for reflection on the kinds of viscerally held sentiments in society that have shaped the contemporary use of 'protectionist' discourses by the new right. The new authoritarian protectionism (Cooper, 2021, 2023) has mobilised and articulated frames that have instrumentalized such fears about identity and status to legitimise practices that erode democracy and centralise power. Importantly, this does not in itself mean any kind of willingness to deliver distributional policies that favour the in-group, but such discourses are nonetheless entangled with a political economic transition in which forms of market failure—from the inability of markets to deliver green energy investment without state subsidies, to the huge fiscal interventions of the pandemic era and the drive to re-armament in the face of war and intractable conflict—are proliferating and exposing the 'free' market ideal as an illusion.

'We will protect you': the shifting ideas and crisis of British Toryism after 2016

Recall that Hall invites us to consider how the 'theory of articulation' prompts reflection on 'how an ideology discovers its subject' (Grossberg and Hall, 1986, p. 53). This treats ideology not as

a phenomenon of the mind but as a product of the social world. It is neither a structure imposed on the subjecthood of the agent nor a Cartesian creation, but a social form generated through the process of mediation and construction. This produces complexity, as individuals may become caught in a 'series of contradictory subject-positions' (Hall, 1988, p. 140), but also provides the social domain in which struggles over hegemony occur. The theory is therefore 'democratic' in the sense that a hegemonic ideology is understood as arising out of this societal process—not simply coercively - and is thereby forged through 'popular politics and popular conceptions' (Hall, 1988, p. 274; see also Grossberg and Hall, 1986, p. 52). For Hall, then, the inability of the left to stop the march of Thatcherism was primarily an issue of consent, i.e., a failure of persuasion, in the face of the profound economic crises of the 1970s and 1980s.

Thatcherite hegemony specifically—the 'local' and historical form that neoliberalism assumed in Britain—can be distinguished from the global process of neoliberalization insofar as the latter was necessarily elastic. The underlying neoliberal assumptions of philosophical individualism and free ('self-correcting') markets were highly mutable; they were softened for example in its various 'meritocratic' social democratic iterations. Indeed, while Thatcher's authoritarian populism articulated together differing ideological frames—a stoical notion of a conservative, hardworking Victorian-esq Britain fused with a competitive, do-it-yourself libertarianism—once interwoven into an ideology it remained rather static in its worldview. In this sense, while neoliberalism was elastic in its ideological moorings, Thatcherism was less so. As a more socially liberal form of neoliberalism became prominent in the 1990s, conservatives would lament their loss of power in the Anglo-American world. Thatcher argued that the 'very success' of this brand of right wing conservatism as, what we could call, a hegemonic force, had made them 'seem dispensable' (Thatcher, 1999, np). This speech also saw her recapitulate the fundamentals of the neoliberal world view as an attachment to the ideals of individual 'liberty' (ibid). Thatcher saw no reason to adjust her ideas as she had—of course—categorically won the contest with her opponents, and what had started as a local attempt to 'rescue' British capitalism had overtime morphed into a global restructuring of the economic order. The fall of the Soviet Union, the opening of China and the march of neoliberal globalisation were all framed as a defeat of socialism. 'We have entered an age in which the people increasingly yearn', she argued, in the aftermath of the revolutions of 1989, 'for the path of freedom, free enterprise and self reliance' (Thatcher, 1990). This aura of invincibility contrasts sharply with today's Conservatives. The latter's crisis is closely entangled with the global economic conjuncture. It thus provides a case study of how hegemony intersects with structural conditions.

Neoliberalism's loss of ideological potency has reflected in part the inability of its favoured tools (tax cuts, deregulation, privatisation, etc.) to generate dynamism in a productive economy struggling with a series of cascading crises. If, as Hall argued, 'articulation forms the bridge' between the material structures of the economy and 'their representation, through specific ideological forces and campaigns' (Hall, 1988, p. 137), then contemporary British Conservatism illustrates how this bridge is a 'two-way street'; for the web of meanings conjured by ideology can become a productive force in reshaping the economy but will also be constrained and disciplined by the consequences of such political acts. Britain's experience of Brexit occupies a revealing position in this regard. Much of its ideological narrative adapted astutely to a setting in which xenophobic and class frames had become an emergent force of discontent 'from below'. Unorthodox political appeals on the right, which departed from the individualism and economic libertarianism of Thatcher's political repertoire, spoke to these sentiments. The Brexit campaign's infamous pledge of £350m a week for the NHS gave this movement an appearance of progressivity, one that would surely have had little impact were it not for the austerity policy of the Cameron government. Vote Leave's messaging as a seemingly 'anti-establishment' and change orientated vision recalled the populist element of Thatcherism.

Here the callsign of Brexit—'take back control'—is instructive of the hegemonic dynamics at play. A heterogeneous coalition of classes and political forces rallied around this appeal, which was artfully ambiguous regarding *what* exactly was being taken back and controlled. The slogan acted as an empty signifier, allowing each element of the coalition to 'filter' its meanings through a certain prism of articulation that mixed notions of national-democratic sovereignty and greater controls on immigration with the aspiration to a restore the economic security that many had found elusive in the years following the 2008 financial crisis.

Robbie Shilliam argues that the heterogeneity of this coalition was given coherence by its mix of 'Blue Labourism' and 'Red Toryism' that had rediscovered a form of working class subjecthood based on the imaginary of a conservative and racialised vision of 'left behind' England (Shilliam, 2018, chap 7). '[T]he politics of the 2016 EU referendum', he writes, 'were deeply entangled in the historical rise and fall—and rise again—of the "white working class" as a deserving constituency' (Shilliam, 2018, np). In this retelling Shilliam reminds us of the 'moral' sorting, i.e., the divide and rule categorisation between individuals and groups, that often occurs when claims to protection are made by elites. In their rush to claim the mantle of defenders of *the* 'left behind' Brexit advocates defined it according to an image of a forgotten, run-down smalltown England that conveniently excluded the impoverished but multicultural urban centres which had voted to remain; and, so, as Shilliam concludes, 'a line runs through this articulation, sorting the undeserving according to their proximity to whiteness' (ibid). Like other successful acts of hegemony this was able to activate a set of cultural meanings and identities already present in society, instrumentalising these mass sentiments for a political end.

Still, for the marginalised but 'deserving', Brexit did mark a change in how Britain's Conservatives related to them. Those placed on this pedestal were part of the insider group that this brand of authoritarian protectionism claimed to defend. Somewhat ironically, towns and small cities that had been at the sharp end of Thatcherite deindustrialisation now turned to the new Conservatives. For places like Stoke-on-Trent, that had once claimed 70 per cent of the world market in ceramics, Brexit was seen as an answer to its 'deep-seated political disaffection' and 'prolonged economic abandonment' (MacLeod and Jones, 2018, np). Deindustrialisation was both a policy based on the withdrawal of state support and a consequence of technological change and trade globalisation. By the time of the Brexit referendum these processes occurring across the *longue durée* had forged 'geographies of discontent' (Dijkstra et al., 2020), shaping the political conjuncture of 2016. Importantly, as Andrés Rodríguez-Pose has shown, far from a straightforward working class revolt, it was often the relatively well-off voters in areas experiencing decline that Brexit most appealed to (Rodríguez-Pose, 2018; see also Green and Pahontu,

2024). The *idea* of decline arising from the 'general economic situation' (Colantone and Stanig, 2018, p. 214) rather than a personal experience of impoverishment was critical. Frustration at rundown high streets, rusting industrial sites and failed regeneration projects all provided material for the 'left behind' identities that formed in such places elites (Olivas Osuna et al., 2021). Indeed, just as Hall and O'Shea observed an articulation of meanings at the level of personal thinking, an unresolved internal struggle over 'common sense' (Hall and O'Shea, 2013, p. 20) something similar has been observed at this meso, i.e., local community, level. The idea of living in a 'left behind' area was internalised into the social fabric, defining their neglected status vis-à-vis London elites (Olivas Osuna et al., 2021). This 'mediates the interaction between economic and cultural factors' (ibid, p. 1020). It forged a political economy that presented opportunities and risks to the Conservatives as they sought to capitalise on Brexit.

The Conservative leaders that followed David Cameron experimented with different discourses that sought to seize the new anti-establishment mood that animated Brexit Britain. Consider for example the transition that Theresa May undertook from taking office to the 2017 election. Her first speech as Prime Minister attempted to craft a narrative that expressed 'left behind' sentiments. In contrast to the Conservative Party's subsequent political trajectory, as well as May's own political history, the tone was remarkably inclusive and heavily laden with notions of class injustice and solidarity. Promising to fight against a series of 'burning injustice[s]' that included both class and racial inequalities she pledged that her government would do 'everything we can to give you more control over your lives' (May, 2016). While this appeared to posit a liberal paternalism such messaging did not make it into the 2017 election, which saw May fight an orthodox Conservative campaign with the catchline 'strong and stable' mimicking Cameron's 2015 election messaging of 'stability and strong government' (Cameron, 2015). May's now infamous remark that 'there's no magic money tree' was totemic of how the Conservatives ceded the pro-government spending and social justice agenda to Corbyn's Labour Party (Cooper and Cooper, 2020, pp. 752–756).

The July 2016 speech remains important however as an indicator of the disruptive effects of the Brexit referendum on political elites and alignments. Conservative leaders would reposition themselves in relation to what Maria Sobolewska and Robert Ford called 'Brexitland' (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020; see also Surridge, 2018, 2021). This new landscape was marked by the political salience of values over the traditional predominance of class and economic preferences. While the spectrum from liberal to authoritarian views in the populace was by no means new (Sobolewska and Ford, 2020), the referendum made this split fundamental to the electoral coalitions of the two main parties. Given the barely concealed racism that had marked the Brexit campaign itself (Shaw, 2022), the pressure of their new Brexit-based electoral coalition and—above all—the inclinations of the Conservative Party's own ascendent Brexit faction, it seems unlikely that the more inclusive position May indicated in the summer of 2016 could ever have been sustained even if she had sincerely believed in it. Moving further rightwards on migration, sovereignty and identity, while offering public investment to address the grievances and interests of the favoured 'left behind' was always the most likely course. So, in these discursive conditions, 'the ideology discover[ed] its subject', rather than the other way round, i.e., the evolving context decisively shaped the politics (Grossberg and Hall, 1986, p. 53).

Boris Johnson's 2019 campaign proved effective at capturing this hegemonic opportunity against Corbyn's Labour. In developing a relatively wide electoral coalition Johnson was able to present different faces: Brexit hardliner, moderate Conservative, and opponent of austerity. While he took big risks and rode his luck, Johnson consolidated his position with Brexit hardliners through the prorogation 'no deal' crisis, only to then run a moderate campaign based on implementing his eleventh hour Brexit agreement, investing in public services, particularly the NHS, and tackling regional inequality ('levelling up') (Cooper and Cooper, 2020, pp. 754–755). Across these different faces there was notably little in these narratives of the hard-edged economic individualism associated with Thatcherism. Whereas the 'Iron Lady' had argued that the recovery from the closure of mines and factories would be determined by individual graft and self-betterment, Johnson's Conservative Party now promised that the active state would intervene to address this negative legacy through redistributive policies. In other words, it marked a transition from 'I will not protect you, you are on your own' to 'I will' (Cooper, 2023). The Conservative Party adjusted how they imagined their favoured in group, moving away from a self-image of a party representing 'hardworking Britons' to one that saw itself as the voice of 'left behind' against an out of touch liberal elite.

Articulation and 'the international': the revenge of global finance

This movement, from the *authoritarian individualism* of Thatcher to the *authoritarian protectionism* of today's Conservatives (Cooper, 2021), is not a pristine, categorical or even self-conscious evolution but has been marked at each stage by an eclectic articulation of ideas and policies. Gramsci would likely see this new Brexit Conservatism as an example of 'transformism' (Gramsci, 1971, p. 128): the 'funnelling' of popular discontent into an elite project, which, continues to be shaped in certain ways by the rebellious sentiments that originally produced it, even as they become integrated into the establishment. In the case of the new Toryism, this was an incomplete process of pacification. For the ideological dimension continued to assume a primacy over constructing a stable and workable governing project. The Brexit that May had attempted to pursue, balancing the xenophobic demand to end freedom of movement for EU nationals with maintaining access to the single market and de facto membership of a customs union, could not survive the ideological vexations of her party's Brexiters. The latter's commitment to a hard Brexit narrowed the Conservative Party's room for manoeuvre. Not only were the anticipated negative economic impacts of Brexit largely borne out, but other structural conditions repeatedly disrupted and shaped the process of ideological articulation. The cascading crises that had generated the landscape amenable to the Leave campaign's victory in 2016 exposed the distributional tensions in the new Conservative coalition. They found themselves torn between their own ideological preferences for tax cuts and a smaller state with the demands of their new electorate for delivering the investment they had been promised at a time when new crises—from COVID-19 to the Russia-Ukraine War and dramatic inflation in energy prices—would attenuate further demand on state resources.

In these frequent episodes of breakdown, structural conditions continually intruded on the ideological formation of the new Conservatism, driving its rise and fall. These factors were also fundamentally international in their nature of and scale. The Brexit vote was stronger in those areas that had been most exposed to the 'China shock': the impact of the country's rapid and cost competitive industrialisation on manufacturing industries in the western world (Colantone and Stanig, 2018). As Justin Rosenberg and Christopher Boyle show the global pattern of uneven and combined development over the *longue durée* structured the local unevenness in economic geography that was evident in the distribution of the Brexit vote (Rosenberg and Boyle, 2019). Above all, the neoliberal transformation and restructuring of western economies around the needs of high finance in tandem with the globalisation of trade and production, including, crucially, the Chinese industrial revolution, had a reordering effect on Britain's economic geography (ibid). Notably, whereas in the American political context,[1] the impact of Chinese industrial competition has been frequently argued over since its entry to the WTO, in the UK this has barely featured in public debate. In this form of articulation, the favoured frames mobilised to explain post-industrial decline left aspects of the economic structure—the globalisation of production—'hidden', so to speak, from public consciousness.[2]

If articulation is 'the bridge' between the material structure of the global political economy and the meanings constructed to make sense of these conditions (Hall, 1988, p. 137), the case of the absence of the 'China shock' from the Brexit debate is revealing of the complexity of this relationship; it indicates how the absence of certain images may be as significant as their presence to explaining the course of events. To conceptualise articulation as a 'two-way street' thus means to treat both (a) the material structure of the global economy and (b) the contention that occurs over how we frame and shape these forces in 'the political' as reciprocal, holistically embedded dimensions of analysis. Both are causally significant for the other, and the case of the rise and fall of the Brexit Conservatives is revealing of this mutuality.

The structural circumstances that had generated the opportunity for the Conservatives to sharply expand their electoral coalition would steeply limit their room for manoeuvre in office. An almost religious faith in the possibilities of Brexit combined with a narrowing of the state's fiscal space through COVID-19 and the global inflationary shock led to an irresolvable tension between their ideological preferences and the reality of the UK's position. Brexit had a clear aggravating effect on these negative economic circumstances. According to a Centre for European Reform analysis to June 2022 (so at the end of the Johnson government), which compared UK performance to economies that had a similar growth trajectory prior to the 2016 referendum, Brexit may have reduced annual UK tax revenue by £40 billion—a figure that is only marginally lower than the £46 billion of tax rises of March 2022 (Springford, 2022). This dynamic would prove critical to the political crisis and subsequent defeat of the Conservatives in the 2024 election. Even leaving aside the COVID-19 crisis—that required enormous levels of government spending to support the economy through lockdown—the Johnson government's instincts were interventionist by Conservative standards, moving sharply away from the austerity of the Cameron-Osborne era. Despite pursuing a formally hard Brexit, the government also never delivered the 'bonfire' of regulation that Brexiters aspired to. Divergence was led by the EU as it passed new regulation and not by a major UK push for deregulation (Reland, 2024).

Together these elements set the stage for the extraordinarily short-lived experiment of the Truss government in September 2022. Although in her campaign for the Conservative leadership she had promised a radical programme of deregulation, including 'making sure all EU law is off the statute books by the end of 2023' (cited in Keate, 2022), her premiership would not survive to even broach this topic. The historic 'mini budget' sought to resolve the tensions in Conservatism on fiscal policy through a radical programme of tax cuts. But it did so in a highly heterodox fashion, entailing huge increases in government borrowing. Not only were the March 2022 tax increases to be reversed but a programme of further cuts were outlined, totalling some £161 billion over 5 years (on top of £60 billion in energy bills support for 2022–2023). This attempt to carry through a large fiscal stimulus as the Bank of England was tightening monetary policy in response to inflation produced a classic currency crisis, of the type usually associated with developing countries. The withdrawal of more than 40% of mortgage products and the near collapse of the private pension system would make Liz Truss' tenure as prime minister the shortest in British history. The Truss budget was framed by a novel articulation of different discourses, combining strong elements of Thatcherite 'trickle down economics', the belief that sweeping tax cuts for the wealthy and corporations would drive investment and long-term growth, and a libertarian vision of a deregulated, hollowed out public realm, with the total abandonment of macroeconomic orthodoxy on government borrowing.

Truss discovered that unlike in the 1980s there was little public support for these policies, while the bond markets that were asked to fund them did not share the government's bullish expectations of their impact on growth. The episode illustrates therefore some of the constraints that the global economy places on the ideological domain; the ways in which it enables and constrains political actors, even those that appear ascendent in a conjunctural moment. The Truss government experienced such structural compulsions that dramatically undermined its ability to mobilise consent for its policy agenda. Hegemony in these examples, from the failure of Brexit as a governing project to the desperate attempt to render it successful under the Truss government, exhibited how ideological frames that do not capture the concrete challenges that the global economy poses will likely suffer political costs.

The case of the Truss crisis of September–October 2022 demonstrates the complexity of the current conjuncture in global political economy. It is one shaped by relatively open financial markets

1 For example, many mainstream Democrats have long criticised the accession of China to the WTO. Rep. Marcy Kaptur (Ohio, 9th District) said in 2011, "in many places, including the state that I represent, you can see money, people, and jobs literally flowing out of our country and you can watch the trains pass as they are bringing in containers full of Chinese merchandise" (Congressional Executive Committee on China, 2011).

2 One may speculate why this was the case. Perhaps the intensity of Britain's class conflicts in the 1980s inclined supporters and opponents of neoliberal restructuring to utilise domestic frames to interpret and give meaning to these events in ways that occlude the international dimension, or, when it was included, focused on Britain's integration into the European single market (but even in this regard it was not a central argument of Brexiters).

that maintain a disciplining power on macroeconomic and fiscal policy. Yet, at the same time, markets are adapting to low growth conditions and a situation of greater dependency of capital on the state, especially in the context of the green transition and cascading crises. This backdrop shaped the rapid market convergence around the expectation that the Truss government could not deliver the private sector-led growth that would render its borrowing sustainable. So, hegemony failed in this case at the intersection of governing power and the global political economy. The form of articulation represented a strategic, indeed 'cognitive', inability to construct a politics that comprehended these conditions and was able to shape their development. In this sense, it was a quite organic radicalisation of Brexit, as a process of hegemonic articulation that was effective in appealing to an emergent, class-coded set of ethno-nationalist sentiments 'from below' but was unable to martial a strategy 'from above', i.e., at the level of statecraft, that took account of the UK's material position in the global economy.

Conclusion

This article has identifief the potential of Hall's method of articulation as a means of integrating holistically the structural logics and compulsions arising from economic transition and the ideological terrain in analysing hegemony. Hall helps us carve out a position that identifies the role of ideology as a productive force with a causal efficacy on material economic relations but highlights the reciprocal nature of this relation as a 'two-way street', in which hegemony-seeking actors are also constrained by these conditions. In studying the role of consent and compulsion in contemporary authoritarianisation Hall's method of articulation offers, therefore, an attractive 'middle position' that sits between a structural theory (Tansel, 2017a) and the discourse-centred approach associated with post-Marxism (Laclau and Mouffe, 2001).

The Truss government in some ways marked a strange and ephemeral return to authoritarian individualism, especially when the 'mini budget' is viewed in the context of her leadership election campaign in the summer of 2022 which had seen her rail against the 'handouts' to support working and middle class families through the energy crisis (Abdul, 2022). These arguments had none of the hegemonic appeal in the 2020s that Hall had identified in the visceral attractiveness of Thatcherism to Britain's rising middle classes in the 1980s. Hall's method of articulation aids us in avoiding however categorical distinctions between 'protectionist' and 'individualist' dimensions of the new authoritarianism. Truss' subsequent political evolution has sought to parrot closely the Trumpian right, condemning the liberal elite for her fall from power, calling for the dismantling of the 'administrative state' and attacking the rise of so-called 'wokenomics' (Truss, 2024). Analysing this heterogeneity identifies the need to engage in—as Hall put it—'adding, adding, adding, the different levels of determination' (Grossberg and Hall, 1986, p. 58) to build up a multidimensional picture of the complex whole.

Hall's theory does not, however, provide a simple template for exploring the relationship between consent and compulsion in the complex transition towards alternative frameworks to neoliberal hegemony. While he offered a means of analysing how disparate discourses became fused in biosocial, apparently coherent ideational systems, this was focused on the 'social formation' (society), i.e., largely internal to a specific state. He did not engage the role that 'the international' or 'societal multiplicity' (Kurki and Rosenberg, 2020; Rosenberg, 2016) plays. At the level of consent, the latter may include how the diffusion of ideas across polities, and imagined geopolitical interests (Bank, 2017), shape the emulation and repetition of authoritarian and geo-economic strategies. 'The international'—as the Truss government learnt—also creates a range of compulsions structured by the uneven and combined nature of the global capitalist system (Saull, 2023a, 2023b). This points to a need for greater study of how actors, when they engage in articulation to render their material circumstances intelligible, do so in societies that are territorially bounded entities but are also interacting continuously with the outside world to shape their 'local' development. The political visions formed necessarily have to take account of this relation between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the border. Indeed, one potentially consequential example of this lies in the American far right information landscape and networks of donors that are increasingly cultivating transnational links with the aim of advancing their radical political agenda. Upon leaving office, Truss consciously moved into this information space, promoting her book aggressively in the 'Trumposphere'. It is illustrative of how political actors and networks criss-cross territorial borders, in ways that are likely to be consequential for the decisions that states make about their development. Future research on articulation will need to engage this problématique of 'the international' in the complex interaction between authoritarianisation and post-neoliberalism.

Author contributions

LC: Writing – original draft.

Funding

The author(s) declare that no financial support was received for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Conflict of interest

The author declares that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.

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