

# A textual analysis of the League of Empire Loyalists' campaign against the end of the British empire using fantasmatic narratives

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## Abstract

This study addresses the question: 'how can fantasmatic narratives be utilised to understand the League of Empire Loyalists' campaign against the end of the British empire?'. The purpose of this study is to analyse the identity and behaviour of the League of Empire Loyalists (LEL), a pressure group operational from 1954 to 1967, using the theoretical framework of fantasmatic narratives and ontological security. The LEL has predominantly been studied by scholars of the far-right; it is often overshadowed by the British Union of Fascists and National Front. Existing studies have largely focused on the LEL's fascist connotations at the expense of its imperialist aspects, making a study of their identity and behaviour in relation to the end of empire particularly important. This study utilises post-foundational discourse analysis to deconstruct the narratives of the LEL and provide an understanding of their beliefs and reasons for action. Data on the LEL and their founder, A. K. Chesterton, has been collected from the University of Bath's Chesterton Collection and the Social History Archive's newspaper collection. A key finding of this study is that the beatific and horrific scenarios seen in fantasmatic narratives can be interpreted in the narratives of the LEL, helping to explain their vehement defence of an otherwise lost cause. Their construction of 'objects of fear' in individuals and organisations can be attributed to the LEL's wider anxiety about imperial decline and their desire to blame someone for this, a narrative which has been perpetuated in modern nationalist debates.

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## **Acronyms and abbreviations**

BNP – British National Party

BUF – British Union of Fascists

EEC – European Economic Community

EU – European Union

LEL – League of Empire Loyalists

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organisation

NF – National Front

UN – United Nations

PDA – Post-foundational Discourse Analysis

WW1 – World War One

WW2 – World War Two

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## 1 Introduction

This introductory chapter will set out the basis in existing literature for this study of the LEL, drawing on wider studies about the British empire and its impact on British society. It will then address the research puzzle and questions of this study, before exploring the theoretical framework, research design and methodology which will be used, along with the sources of data. The limitations of the study will then be considered, followed by a brief assessment of this study's contribution to the literature, before then setting out the thesis structure.

### 1.1 Critical review of literature

The question of how much influence the British empire had on British society is highly contested, characterised in academic literature as the Porter-MacKenzie debate (Sanghera, 2021). The minimalist view is headed by Bernard Porter, who argues that the empire was largely irrelevant to British society (Scott, 2014, p.8) and that any imperial promotion was done “absent-mindedly” (Gleeson, 2022, p.539). The maximalist side is advocated by John MacKenzie, who argues that the influence of the empire was pervasive, all-encompassing and can be seen throughout British society (Scott, 2014, p.8). MacKenzie (1985, p.1) refutes the idea that empire attitudes were characterised by “indifference and ignorance”, arguing instead for the central importance of imperialism in understanding the British “world view”. Other scholars have called for a more nuanced approach, arguing that the empire meant “different things [...] to different people at different times” (Scott, 2014, p.10).

These debates about the impact of the empire can also be seen in modern discussions of British identity and nationalism. It has been argued that underneath many virulent forms of British nationalism there is a sense of anger and “humiliation” at the decline of Britain's status in the world from its position as a “once great imperial power” (Ware, 2007, p.92). A sense of fear can be seen to pervade these narratives, especially in the idea of ruination through immigration (Ware, 2007, p.93). The 2016 Brexit referendum can be seen as one of the most notable examples of this, with the ‘Leave’ campaign variably framed as representing a renewal of “imperial vigour” or a “last gasp of imperial nostalgia” (Ward, 2022, p.170).

This fits into the broader literature about nations, nationalism and the formation of national identities in relation to imperialism. The construction of national myths, historical “amnesia” and selective historiographies are particularly relevant to those debates that link national identity and empires (Brocklehurst and Phillips, 2004, p.xxi). Imperialism has often been seen as an important factor in national unity and the projection of a superior national identity (Hobsbawm, 2012). The “capacity for conquest” can be seen as an important part of perceived national strength, and it could be argued that Britain’s loss of this capacity led to a “post-imperial fog” and partial loss of national identity (Brocklehurst and Phillips, 2004, pp.227, 243).

Despite their imperialist ideas, A. K. Chesterton and the League of Empire Loyalists (LEL), a pressure group founded by him in 1954, have almost exclusively been studied by scholars of the far-right (Scott, 2014). This is largely because Chesterton was a member of the British Union of Fascists (BUF) from 1933 until his disillusionment with leader Oswald Mosley in 1938 (Baker, 1996). Additionally, the LEL was one of the groups that joined together to create the National Front (NF) in 1967 (Baker, 1996, p.197). This bookending of the LEL’s existence with decidedly fascist organisations has led many scholars to classify it as a fascist organisation itself, a perception not helped by Chesterton’s oft-denied but overtly racist and antisemitic beliefs (Scott, 2014, p.219).

Despite these fascist links, some scholars have argued that the formation of the LEL marked a break with inter-war fascist ideology, with Chesterton stating that fascism had become a “genocidal failure” (Stocker, 2021, p.46). Additionally, it can be argued the LEL was not a “genuine neo-fascist enterprise” and that instead it’s *raison d’être* was, as its name suggests, loyalty to the British empire (LeCras, 2020, p.106). Similarly, Billig (1978, p.113) argued that “names are rarely chosen haphazardly” and “can indicate the group’s political status or pretensions”, emphasising the empire connotations of the LEL. The LEL tends to get defined as fascist because of its nationalist and imperialist ideas, however, some scholars of fascism have argued that it is important to consider “fascists not only in terms of their beliefs but in the ways they sought and exercised power” (LeCras, 2017, p.46). The LEL’s total lack of interest in power-seeking, overthrowing democracy or building “a new nationalist authoritarian state” therefore make it difficult to define as fascist (LeCras, 2017, pp.37-40).

It has been argued that this fixation with the LEL’s fascist links has meant that its role in making sense of “anachronistic residual imperial Britishness” has been almost entirely overlooked (Scott, 2014, p.218). The idea of a continuing “imperial nostalgia” in Britain is still important and can be used to help understand modern empire-related debates (Sanghera, 2021, p.175). These debates are not a new phenomenon and are often seen as a “proxy for nationalism” and relate to contested ideas about what it means to be British (Sanghera, 2021, p.195).

## 1.2 Gaps in the literature

Studies of the LEL have been limited for several reasons. Its tendency to be grouped in with fascist studies means that it is almost always overshadowed by work on the BUF or the NF (LeCras, 2017). BUF studies tend not to consider the LEL in much detail (Baker, 1996); studies of the NF do not generally consider the LEL individually but as part of the foundation story of the NF (Walker, 1979). The perception of the LEL’s activities as limited to “schoolboy political pranksterism” have also led it to be overlooked for academic study (Copsey, 2008, p.6). Additionally, the absence of a publicly available archive of the LEL has made it more challenging to study than other similar groups (Scott, 2014).

When the LEL is subject to its own study, it is predominantly from a historical rather than political perspective, meaning that there has been a lack of application of political theories to the LEL. Scott’s 2014 study is perhaps one of the most extensive on the LEL in the context of the British empire, but it does not go into detail about constructions of identity. The historiography compiled for the A. K. Chesterton Trust (Black and McNeile, 2014) provides a more complete coverage of the existence of the LEL, but it is a descriptive rather than theoretical account and its source of funding brings its objectivity into question. These studies, and others like them, leave open a significant research gap for political studies of the LEL.

## 1.3 Research puzzle and questions

The identity and behaviour of those campaigning against the end of the British empire is an area that has been largely under-studied. The prevailing idea about the end of empire is that the British public were “apathetic on the subject” and that only “very fringe right-wing organisations” like the LEL were concerned by it (O’Neill, 2021, p.64). Therefore, this

study will examine the identity and behaviours of Chesterton and the LEL in the context of imperial decline to gain a better understanding of where their ideas and narratives came from, regardless of the impact that they did or did not have. The main question posed by this study is 'how can fantasmatic narratives be utilised to understand the League of Empire Loyalists' campaign against the end of the British empire?'. This study will approach this question through three secondary questions which are rooted in the theoretical framework of ontological security and fantasmatic narratives covered in the following section. These questions are concerned with how Chesterton's worldview, the LEL's identity and the LEL's behaviour can be understood using fantasmatic narratives. Chesterton's views need to be covered due to his vital importance in the formation and shaping of the LEL (LeCras, 2017), while the division into topics of identity and behaviour has been done to look at the extent to which the identities held by the LEL fuelled their behaviour (Klandermans, 2014).

#### **1.4 Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework which will be utilised in this study is that of fantasmatic narratives in the context of ontological security. This framework has been most notably utilised in Adisonmez and Onursal's 2021 and 2022 studies on Turkish state security. Fantasmatic<sup>1</sup> narratives relate to the concept of "ideals" and "obstacles" and can be mobilised in identity debates, often to establish a fear-based narrative. They create the notion that to achieve a predetermined "ideal", a specific "obstacle" must be circumvented. Additionally, a narrative is constructed that the "obstacle" threatens the very existence of the "ideal", leading to the idea that it not only needs to be circumvented but removed entirely (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, pp.63-64).

Ontological security relates to feelings of security and insecurity and can be used to understand how fantasmatic narratives are used in identity debates. The concept of security is defined as "the need of the subject to exist in a stable way and feel oneself as whole", while insecurity is characterised as a "deep, incapacitating state of not knowing how to get by in the world" (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.63). The inability to maintain a state of ontological security produces two main reactions: fear and anxiety. Fear in this context is defined as a known, visible and definable threat which is often acting in the short term; anxiety, meanwhile, is an unknown, unidentifiable threat situated somewhere

in the future (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.64). These fears and anxieties about ontological security can be utilised in fantasmatic narratives in two main scenarios: beatific and horrific. The beatific scenario is where the "ideal" triumphs over the "obstacle" and ontological security is maintained or improved; the horrific scenario, however, is where this "obstacle" cannot be overcome and threatens, if not destroys, the "ideal" (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66). This theory has been applied to international relations, especially the case of Turkey (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021; 2022) but has not been used extensively in domestic politics, making it a useful theory to help fill the gap in the literature.

Through this framework, fantasmatic narratives can help to explain why individuals and groups "cling to unfeasible or unrealistic hopes" as they have become integral to their ontological security, and the prospect of sacrificing them comes with the fear and anxiety of insecurity (Behagel and Mert, 2021, p.80). Furthermore, fantasmatic narratives can be used to simplify the political world (Behagel and Mert, 2021, p.84), while at the same time constructing an "Other" for individuals to define themselves against (Glynos, 2011, p.71). This simplification function is most prevalent in the popular press, small parties and pressure groups as they can blame all the nation's problems on a specific issue, for example immigration (Glynos, 2011, p.71). It is harder for a government to use such overt simplifications and maintain credibility, meaning that fantasmatic narratives tend not to present in official communications (Glynos, 2011, p.71). As such, this framework is relevant for a study of the LEL as a small pressure group in whose narratives the simplification and othering functions of fantasmatic narratives are likely to be found. This framework will also help to give a better understanding of how the LEL's identity was formed and how this fed into their behaviour by understanding the narratives that they based themselves on and why they therefore saw it necessary to act (Klandermans, 2014).

#### **1.5 Research design**

The research design of this study draws from the theories of fantasmatic narratives and ontological security, with key elements identified in the theories which will be used to interpret the data. The creation of beatific and horrific scenarios is a significant element which will be looked for in the data (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66), as well as the

construction of “champions and protectors of the paramount ethical ideals”, as opposed to “subjects that endanger or obstruct the attainment of the ideal social order” (Marttila, 2015, p.129). The desire to realise the beatific scenario can be seen in an “unending quest for the lost” which seeks to recover an “imagined golden age” (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, p.262). Another important aspect that will be considered is the “invention of objects of fear” which can be seen as “related to the avoidance of anxiety” (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259). These objects can be substituted for a “mythical agent that is not visible” if there is no obvious candidate present (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.61). These are the main elements of the theoretical framework which form the research design, with other elements being drawn into the study where relevant.

### **1.6 Methodology**

The theoretical framework and research design described above will be operationalised using post-foundational discourse analysis (PDA). PDA consists of a “theoretically informed approach to empirical research, whose primary aim is to lend empirical visibility to all parts of discourses constituting and structuring social life” (Marttila, 2015, p.155). Under this approach, discourse is defined as a “range of practices of articulation which create and regulate the social meaning of an object” (Grodecki, 2021, p.2036). It is appropriate for the case of Chesterton and the LEL because it prioritises deconstructing social and political meanings, looking at how they are produced by individuals and groups for different ends (Marttila, 2015, p.149). The idea of “popularist discourse” will be especially relevant to this study, with Marttila (2015, p.128) describing this as a “means of representations of the ‘common negation or threat’”.

Data has been collected and processed for this study with relation to the research design and methodology described. Quotes were collected from the data sources described in the next section and then labelled based on which secondary research question they related to, what specific topic they covered, and which elements of the research design could be applied to them. From these annotated sources, several were selected to use for each chapter, with an attempt to cover the broadest range of topics possible, within the parameters of the study.

### **1.7 Sources of data**

The sources of data for this study originate from the archive collection at the University of Bath and the Social History Archive’s newspaper collection. The Chesterton Collection was donated to the University of Bath by Chesterton’s biographer David L. Baker and includes much of the material used in his research (Richmond, 2009). The materials of particular interest to this study are five scrapbooks compiled by members of the LEL, containing fliers, event programmes and newspaper cuttings covering many of the activities of the LEL. Other sources of data from the Chesterton Collection used in this study include transcripts of interviews conducted by Baker, as well as some of Chesterton’s published and unpublished writings. To combat the potentially prejudicial nature of these sources, this study will also include analysis of newspaper reports published during the LEL’s active years, found by searching the Social History Archive’s newspaper collection. Given the incomplete nature of sources around Chesterton and the LEL (LeCras, 2017, p.26), the University of Bath’s Chesterton Collection was chosen for this study as it is one of the most significant, publicly accessible, collections on Chesterton and the LEL. The Social History Archive’s newspaper collection was chosen as it is one of the “most comprehensive indexes of British and Irish records and newspapers available today” and has searchable newspapers available for the whole period of the LEL’s existence (Social History Archive, 2025).

### **1.8 Limitations of the study**

Any study of the LEL is inherently limited by the absence of a definitive archive (Scott, 2014), with Bath’s Chesterton Collection limited by “its reliance on individual reminiscences rather than concrete records” (LeCras, 2017, p.19). These “individual reminiscences”, such as those in Baker’s interviews of Chesterton’s friends and family, are useful in places, but their lack of objectivity must always be considered. Data has been included from the Social History Archive’s newspapers in an attempt to off-set this issue, though these newspapers are still partially reliant on individual testimonies. Studying the LEL so long after its disbandment makes it very challenging to build an indisputable picture of their identity and behaviour as these are open to many interpretations, especially when the individuals involved are not there to be questioned.

Another limitation of the study is that it was not possible to undertake a full examination of all the material held in the Chesterton Collection due to the highly time-consuming nature of archive-based research. A more thorough examination of Chesterton's *Candour* publication could have rendered a more detailed account of his views and those of the LEL, but the sheer quantity of it made this impossible for this study. Additionally, the correspondence held in the Chesterton Collection could also have proven to be a useful avenue of study for how Chesterton and the LEL defended their views, especially in libel cases (Richmond, 2009, p.37).

### **1.9 Contribution to literature**

The aim of this study is to contribute to the existing literature on the British empire and the LEL by using the theoretical framework of fantasmatic narratives and ontological security to provide an understanding of the identity and behaviour of the LEL. Despite its small size, the LEL can be used to help understand why the empire mattered for some sections of society, and how it continues to influence modern debates (Stocker, 2021). A political study in a largely historically based field can help to broaden understanding about the beliefs held by the LEL and their reasons for acting in the ways that they did. Furthermore, this study views Chesterton and the LEL from the lens of imperialism rather than being drawn into debates about fascism, helping to fill this gap in the literature and linking the LEL's narratives to modern nationalist debates, such as those around the Brexit campaign (Rogstad and Martill, 2022).

The key findings produced by this study are that beatific and horrific scenarios can be seen throughout the narratives of Chesterton and the LEL and can help to understand why they viewed so many people as "traitors" to their cause (Marttila, 2015, p.129). The empire was of fundamental importance to the identity of the LEL, with their behaviour driven by their desire to protect this ideal from the "objects of fear" that they saw as critical threats (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259). The relatively small amount of people acting for the LEL is demonstrative of the fact that only those most committed to the ideal of empire were willing to act in defence of it, helping to explain the very limited impact of the LEL's campaigning.

### **1.10 Thesis structure**

Having introduced the topic and scope of this study in broad terms, the following chapters will examine key aspects of the study in more detail before the empirical research is presented. Chapter 2 will provide a critical introduction to the case with an overview of the existing literature on Chesterton and the LEL. Chapter 3 will expand on the theoretical framework, explaining the main aspects of the theory which will assist in the study. Chapter 4 is the first empirical research chapter and will cover how Chesterton's worldviews can be understood through fantasmatic narratives, with particular reference to his views on Britain and the empire, as well as international organisations. Chapter 5 will consider how fantasmatic narratives can help make sense of the identity of the LEL, providing an overview of different types of identity and building upon the views of Chesterton explored in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 is the final research chapter and will cover the behaviour of the LEL and the importance of group identity to collective behaviours. Chapter 7 will conclude this study, recapping on the research questions and theoretical framework while also summarising the main arguments and implications of the study.

## **2 Case background**

After a broad overview of the study in Chapter 1, this chapter will cover the background and context of A.K. Chesterton and the League of Empire Loyalists through a critical review of the existing literature. This will enable a better understanding of the wider issues at play during the LEL's existence, providing a basis on which to build an understanding of their identity and behaviour.

### **2.1 A. K. Chesterton before the LEL**

Arthur Kenneth (A. K.) Chesterton was born in South Africa in 1899 and served in World War One (WW1), gaining a "distinguished war record by the age of eighteen" (Baker, 1996, p.2). Some scholars have argued that the place of his birth and his military service early in life were significant contributing factors to Chesterton's awareness of the British empire and his "interest in preserving British imperial power" (Shaffer, 2017, p.23). Others have also argued that Chesterton's "colonial outlook on race" originated from his childhood experiences of racial segregation in South Africa (LeCras, 2017, pp.249, 252).



The point at which Chesterton came to hold fascist views is contested, with LeCras (2017, p.14) arguing that his “militaristic nationalism, cultural pessimism and heroic essentialism” were evidence of him holding fascist views before joining the British Union of Fascists (BUF). Shaffer (2017, p.20) argued that Chesterton joined the BUF because of “his desire to preserve the Empire, his opposition to liberal democracy and his interest in ‘achieving the god-like in man’”, again making the point that Chesterton’s pre-BUF views had fascist tendencies. Baker (1996, pp.122-123) accepted that some of Chesterton’s pre-BUF views could be considered as heading towards fascism but stated that Chesterton “was never moved to write of fascism in general, or of any particular fascist, before he joined Mosley”. Chesterton joined the BUF in 1933, becoming a leading figure and playing an important role in the literary output of the BUF, including writing Mosley’s official biography (Baker, 1996, pp.129-130). Chesterton left the BUF in 1938 and went on to serve in World War Two (WW2); he was one of the most significant ex-BUF members to avoid internment under Defence Regulation 18b<sup>2</sup> (LeCras, 2017, p.154).

In the immediate post-war period, Chesterton broke ties with fascism, stating that he “had been sickened by the horrors of the Nazi genocide” (Copsey, 2008, pp.10-11) and viewed British fascism as “dead beyond the possibility of return” (LeCras, 2017, p.198). Despite this denunciation, Chesterton would be followed by the shadow of Mosley and the BUF for the rest of his life (LeCras, 2017, p.5). Much of the scholarly interest in Chesterton is situated in this period, with the LEL significantly overshadowed by studies of the BUF (Baker, 1996; LeCras, 2017). Scott (2014, p.231) suggested that “it could be argued that ‘over-concentration’ on Chesterton’s fascism has caused his imperialism to be neglected” in academic literature, with imperialism forming a key part of the LEL’s modern relevance.

## 2.2 Formation and aims of the LEL

The LEL was founded on 13<sup>th</sup> April 1954 at Caxton Hall, Westminster as a result of funding received from Robert Key Jeffery, “an eccentric English millionaire residing in Chile” whose donations had enabled the formation of Chesterton’s views-sheet *Candour* in the previous year (LeCras, 2020, pp.98-99). The LEL was formed as a “pressure-group which would force upon existing parties policies favourable to national and imperial survival” (Black and McNeile, 2014, p.19). Beyond the label of pressure group, there is no

consensus on how best to describe the LEL, with it being variously labelled as “ultra-patriotic”, “conservative-imperialistic” (Copsey, 2008, p.6), as well as an “extreme right advocacy group” with “some ideological connections to fascism” (LeCras, 2017, p.9).

The LEL’s main aims were broadly stated in their initial publicity as “the maintenance [...] of the sovereign independence” of Britain; the “strengthening of the spiritual and material bonds between the British Peoples”; the “conscientious development of the British Colonial Empire”; and the “resurgence [...] of the British spirit” (LeCras, 2020, p.100). While their stated aims are agreed upon, there is “considerable ambiguity in what the LEL wanted to achieve” as their aims lacked obvious routes to success (Stocker, 2015, p.169). The “cornerstone” of the LEL is generally seen as “the preservation of British sovereignty” against threats from “international institutions” (Scott, 2014, p.227). Thayer (1965, p.56) summarised the LEL’s true aims as seeing “Britain return to her 19th-century position of strength where few nations ever dared question her authority”. This fantastical notion is furthered by a quote from a former member of the LEL who stated that “these people have never really believed that Queen Victoria is dead” (Thayer, 1965, p.53).

It is this idea of looking “back to a golden age” which has given the LEL some of its fascist connotations (Scott, 2014, p.230). However, a key difficulty with defining the LEL as fascist is that it did not pose “a direct threat to democracy and personal freedom” (Billig, 1978, pp.6-7). Though the LEL did possess the nationalist, anti-communist and statist elements required for Billig’s general definition of fascist organisations, this lack of threat to democracy is one of the main reasons why the LEL is more accurately classed as far-right rather than fascist (LeCras, 2020, p.106).

## 2.3 Membership and activities of the LEL

The membership of the LEL can be broadly summarised as “privately educated; military; conservative, even reactionary; patriotic and imperialistic” (Scott, 2014, p.188). The predominance of many elderly ex-military men created a “Colonel Blimpish”<sup>3</sup> image that has contributed to the dismissal of the LEL in many studies of the far-right (LeCras, 2020, p.102). Some scholars have argued that this benign image was not discouraged by Chesterton, because it was a convenient way to “stave-off accusations that the LEL was a disguised attempt to rekindle British fascism” (LeCras, 2017, p.207). Despite this,

fascist connotations followed the LEL, not helped by the fact that the early membership contained several people who would go on to become key post-war neo-fascists, including John Tyndall, Martin Webster, Colin Jordan and John Bean (Shaffer, 2017, pp.23-25). Membership of the LEL peaked at around 3,000 in 1958 but had dropped to 300 by 1961 (Liburd, 2023, p.137), with Ward (2022, p.167) characterising the group as “tiny but nasty”.

Several scholars have argued that the LEL turned to unconventional political strategies due to their political marginalisation, which can be seen as having resulted from their membership and views, as well as from their status as a pressure group (Black and McNeile, 2014, p.27; LeCras, 2017, p.78). Scott (2014, p.198) recorded “forty separate demonstrations” by the LEL against the Conservative Party from October 1954 until December 1957. These largely consisted of “heckling politicians and public gatherings, painting slogans and engaging in theatrical stunts” (LeCras, 2017, p.9). These activities were aimed at achieving maximum publicity, however, despite relatively significant newspaper coverage, it can be argued that the LEL “had little impact on public or government opinion” (Scott, 2014, p.181). These “agitational” tactics (Hanna, 1974, p.49) led to the LEL being seen as a recurring annoyance rather than anything to be taken seriously. It was dismissed by Thayer (1965, p.59) as “the political scene’s most effective nuisance” and has generally been regarded “as a novelty in many accounts of the post-war extreme right” (LeCras, 2017, p.77).

#### **2.4 The LEL in the broader context of imperial decline**

The classing of the LEL as merely a “nuisance” or “novelty” does not just reflect their theatrical tactics but reflects a broader context where “only a tiny section of British society felt strongly about the empire” (Scott, 2014, p.196). Despite the polarising debate about how much the empire mattered to British society, it is generally argued that domestic concerns far outweighed empire matters in the 1955 and 1959 general elections (Scott, 2014, pp.213-214). It can be argued that the end of WW2 precipitated a “crisis of empire” with major economic and political pressures on Britain to facilitate a path towards decolonisation (LeCras, 2017, pp.187-188). The notion of a “general indifference to imperial decline” among the British public has been variously attributed to a greater focus on domestic issues, post-war societal changes and “the wider effects

of the Cold War”, among other factors (Mulhall, 2016, p.460). The LEL and other pro-empire far-right groups have therefore been summarised as:

"a marginal and often forgotten, but important strand in British twentieth-century politics: those who hopelessly sought to turn the tide on British imperial decline and processes of decolonisation" (Stocker, 2021, p.5).

The Suez Crisis of 1956 – a failed and widely condemned attempt by Britain, France and Israel to regain control of the recently nationalised Suez Canal – is considered by many scholars as the last real gasp of British imperialism (Mulhall, 2016, p.469). This crisis can be seen as “a gift to the LEL in the sense that it highlighted Tory imperial incompetence” and it led to a spike in membership (Stocker, 2015, p.168). However, the wider impact of the Suez Crisis was to destroy “any realistic belief that Britain maintained an imperial future” (Stocker, 2021, p.45), with LeCras (2020, p.104) arguing that this demonstrated the LEL’s growing irrelevance as it was “loyal to a lost empire”.

#### **2.5 Subsuming of the LEL into the NF**

By the 1960s, the LEL and various splinter groups, formed from disgruntled former members, were struggling to retain political space or wider relevance (LeCras, 2020, p.110). This came to a head after the 1966 general election which saw a “crushing Labour victory” decimate any hopes that far-right groups had of electoral success (Walker, 1979, p.184). As a pressure group, electoral results were of less concern to the LEL, however, they had reached a financial crisis following the death of their patron, Jeffery (LeCras, 2020, p.110).

The National Front (NF) was officially formed on 7<sup>th</sup> February 1967 following negotiations between the LEL, the British National Party<sup>4</sup> and the Racial Preservation Society (Shaffer, 2017, pp.26-27). Those involved attempted to characterise the formation of the NF as “a rare moment of compromise on Britain’s far right” which would act as a “stepping stone to winning mass electoral support” (Taylor, 2018, p.386). Shaffer (2017, p.27) argues that the NF was formed in an attempt to reverse the “damage done by needless fragmentation”, while Taylor (2018, p.386) portrays its formation as a “desperate act of survival led by Chesterton” (Taylor, 2018, p.386). Chesterton was the first chairman of the NF but resigned in 1970 over a constitutional dispute (Shaffer, 2017, p.33). Many former

members of the LEL left with Chesterton (LeCras, 2017, p.10), leaving the NF in the hands of “the more militant working-class Greater Britain element”, led by Tyndall<sup>6</sup> (Hanna, 1974, p.10). Given this, the further history of the NF has a very minimal bearing on the history of the LEL and will therefore be taken no further in this study.

This chapter has sought to summarise the relevant existing literature on Chesterton and the LEL, including debates about its fascist connotations, how best to describe the group, what its aims were and how it can be considered in the context of wider imperial decline. These issues will be considered further later in the study, with Chesterton’s views explored in Chapter 4, and the identity and behaviour of the LEL considered in Chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

### **3 Theoretical framework**

This chapter will set out the theoretical framework which will be utilised in this study, comprising of ontological security and fantasmatic narratives. The key elements of theory to be specifically applied to the LEL will be highlighted and explained further. This theoretical framework has been selected as it has not been widely used in studies of domestic politics and provides an angle on Chesterton and the LEL that is missing from existing literature.

#### **3.1 Ontological security**

The first aspect of the theoretical framework in this study to be discussed is ontological security as this plays a foundational role in fantasmatic narratives. Ontological security refers to “the needs of the subject to exist in a stable way and feel oneself as whole” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.63). In other words, to feel a sense of security, an individual needs to feel that their identity is stable and not under threat. In contrast, insecurity is defined as a “deep, incapacitating state of not knowing how to get by in the world” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.63). Eberle (2019, p.244) identifies that ontological security is “ultimately unattainable” due to the ever-changing nature of the modern world. As such, ontological security is related to a “constant security-seeking process” under which insecurities can never be fully overcome (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.64).

Therefore, to deal with these unending insecurities, individuals identify with “collective symbols” and a “collective national identity” as a means of attempting to remedy the “often-ineffable sense that ‘we’ are missing something that would make us ‘whole’” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.63). Of course, it is impossible for the individual to fully rectify their sense of incompleteness; this insecurity can be exploited by certain actors who seemingly provide the “solution” to an individual’s insecurity by identifying an obstacle that is preventing them from achieving a state of ontological security (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, pp.63-64). This is a false but self-perpetuating narrative as there is always going to be something else in the way of achieving the unattainable but desired level of security and feeds into the idea of fantasmatic narratives.

#### **3.2 Fantasmatic narratives**

##### ***3.2.1 Identity construction and the role of desire***

Fantasies can be defined as “stories we tell ourselves and to one another to make sense of the multifaceted and ambiguous world” (Eberle, 2019, p.245). They are the building blocks from which the world can be understood and can be constructed at individual or collective levels (Scott, 2001). Additionally, “fantasy is the means by which real relations of identity between past and present are discovered and/or forged” (Scott, 2001, p.287); the only way for individuals or groups to connect their identities to those that have gone before is to construct a connective fantasy. A critical part of the fantasmatic construction of identities is the distinction between “an ‘inside’ from an ‘outside’, a ‘self’ from an ‘Other’, a ‘domestic’ from a foreign” – identity requires something to be defined against, something to which the individual or group is the opposite (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.60). This creation of an ‘Other’ provides the obstacle that can be blamed for the presence of ontological insecurity and the non-fulfilment of an ideal (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022).

Desire in this context can be understood as an “unending quest for the lost”, whereby the fulfilment of ontological security is continuously promised and sought but never achieved (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, p.261). As such, desire is a fundamental feature of fantasmatic narratives because its unending nature sustains the fantasies, even when they reach an impasse, such as the removal of an obstacle not leading to the fulfilment

of the ideal (Martin, 2016, pp.156-157). The quest for reattaining something that was lost or is impossible can provide “the fantasy support for many of our political projects and choices”, as we desire to return to a time that we perceive as better, even if this is detached from reality (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p.147). Therefore, fantasy acts as a means of sustaining, rather than fulfilling, the desire for ontological security because it can always present “some kind of discord whose presence ‘blocks’ fulfilment” of this desire (Martin, 2016, p.155).

### **3.2.2 Role of fear and anxiety**

Fantasmatic narratives contain two key sides related to their obstacles and ideals: beatific and horrific. The beatific side is a promise of an “imaginary fullness-to-come” once the obstacle has been removed, whereas the horrific side “foretell[s] a disaster scenario if the obstacle cannot be eliminated” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66). These two perceived outcomes to each scenario create a “false safety of a clear-cut choice between the two”, feeding on our “hunger for certainty” and desire for ontological security (Eberle, 2019, p.249).

Though often used interchangeably, in this context a distinction must be made between concepts of fear and anxiety before proceeding. Fear can be defined as “present-oriented and short-lived”, based on a visible, known or quantifiable threat, for which a solution can be presented. Anxiety, on the other hand, is “future-oriented and long-acting”, it is unknown, unidentifiable and unquantifiable, making it much harder for any solutions to be constructed (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.64).

Fantasies can therefore be used as a protection device from otherwise unsolvable anxieties by providing a constructed and tangible source of fear for these anxieties to be funnelled into (Glynos, 2011, p.71). Therefore, the “invention of objects of fear is related to the avoidance of anxiety” (Hirvonen, 2017, p.260), with the fantasies about these objects providing a temporary cover for the “unescapable ontological lack” which would otherwise see us “overcome by anxiety” (Eberle, 2019, p.246). Where there is no obvious object of fear to be constructed, the idea of an invisible “mythical agent” arises as something that is constantly working against the realisation of the beatific scenario (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.61).

### **3.2.3 Fantasmatic logics**

There are three main strands to the logics approach of which fantasmatic logics are one, with social and political logics making up the other two. Social logics can be defined as those which “help characterise practices by setting out the rules, norms, and self-understandings informing the practice” (Glynos, 2008, p.278). Political logics, meanwhile, “account for the historical emergence and formation of a practice by focusing on the conflicts and contestations surrounding its constitution” (Glynos, 2008, p.278). Fantasmatic logics combine these two approaches to gain an understanding of “social identities against the fluidity of politicisation”, considering how social and political threats to an individual’s identity and ontological security affect actions (Behagel and Mert, 2021, p.81).

In this way, the fantasmatic logics approach attempts to understand how individuals and groups become “over-invested in a fantasy” and fight vigorously against anything that threatens their ideals, as this could lead to a feeling of insecurity (Glynos, 2008, p.289). This relates back to the idea of each fantasy having an “ideal and an impediment”, whereby the desirable state of ontological security would be reached at the ideal, but the subject is prevented from this due to the impediment (Glynos, 2011, p.73). Through this approach, the often seemingly irrational “resistance to change” exhibited at various times by groups and individuals can be better understood, as any change could threaten the fantasy that their idea of security is based upon (Glynos, 2011, p.101).

### **3.3 Application to Chesterton and the LEL**

The theoretical framework of ontological security coupled with fantasmatic narratives can be applied to the case of Chesterton and the LEL to understand how their identities and behaviours relate to the context of imperial decline. Fantasmatic narratives can be identified in many realms of politics; they are seen to have a “black and white character” with a very clear distinction between what is “good” and what is “bad”, leaving very “little space for ambiguity” (Behagel and Mert, 2021, p.84). This can help to fuel “a sense of resentment and entitlement” where individuals feel that they are entitled to their desired security and resent the obstacles that they see as impeding their achievement of this (Glynos, 2011, p.78).

In a nationalist context, fantasmatic narratives are often utilised to set up an “imagined golden age” as an ideal where ontological security was fulfilled, only for it to be “later destroyed by an evil ‘Other’” (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, p.262). This ‘Other’ is seen to be actively working against the achievement of the ideal and can be characterised as an internal or external “common enemy” (Glynos, 2011, p.78). Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008, p.262) advocated the idea that fantasy “fosters the solidarity of the national community, consolidates national identity, and animates national desire” and can be used to justify otherwise unlikely alliances. The fantasmatic narratives created against the imagined ‘Other’ are often irrational and contradictory; for example, many antisemitic conspiracy theories see Jews as both capitalists and communists, while Eurosceptic narratives often describe the EU as both “inefficient” and “over-reaching” (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, p.149). Through these ideas, ontological security and fantasmatic narratives can be used to understand the mindset of both Chesterton and the LEL.

This chapter has demonstrated the broader theoretical base of this study and specified the key elements of theory which will be applied to Chesterton and the LEL in the discourse analysis that will follow. The theory is a sound one to use for this study as it has not previously been applied to this case, and it provides an analysis of the rationale behind narratives used by the far-right which have often been written off as far-fetched and irrational.

#### **4 To what extent can A. K. Chesterton's worldview be understood through fantasmatic narratives?**

Having investigated the existing literature on A. K. Chesterton and the League of Empire Loyalists in Chapter 2 and described the theoretical framework of fantasmatic narratives and ontological security in Chapter 3, the next phase of this project is to present the empirical research. The data collection and analysis was conducted in line with the research design described in Chapter 1.5 alongside the methodology of post-foundational discourse analysis which was explained in Chapter 1.6. This chapter will examine the worldview of the founder of the LEL, A. K. Chesterton, and how this can be interpreted through the framework of ontological security, fantasmatic narratives and PDA. It is important to address the views of Chesterton before looking at the identity and

behaviour of the LEL because Chesterton was fundamentally important to the shaping of the LEL. John Tyndall, a prominent early member of the LEL, stated in an interview that Chesterton “was the predominant influence in the LEL [...] so the LEL really reflected his political views 100 per cent” (A.11, Baker, 1978).

Three main elements of Chesterton’s views will be examined in this chapter, these are: key elements of his personality and general views; his views about Britain and the empire; and his views about the wider world and international organisations. These three elements will combine to give a broad picture of Chesterton’s worldview, with the theoretical framework helping to provide an understanding as to why he chose to convey his message in particular ways, both in his individual writings and through the LEL.

#### **4.1 Personality**

##### ***4.1.1 General views and approach to life***

Chesterton’s central views can be understood through his writings and through interviews with those that knew him. A caveat must be made with the use of interviews conducted with third parties after Chesterton’s death in 1973 – though they can provide useful insights, they cannot be treated as a definitive account of Chesterton’s views. These interviews have been used in this study because there is not a great deal of material from Chesterton about his general views in the Bath Chesterton Collection. His unfinished autobiography, *Blame Not My Lute*, is more a collection of anecdotes than an account of his views, though there are some useful elements (B.3-B.7, Chesterton, n.d.).

His wife, Doris, stated that he never believed in the concept of inevitability, instead believing that “mankind had a strong hold on its destiny” (A.14, Baker, 1978, p.1). This indicates a belief in human agency, seeing people as capable of an active choice between supporting or obstructing the achievement of an ideal (Marttila, 2015, p.129). This relates to the underpinning of the LEL which was based upon the idea that the group could persuade politicians and the general public to support their cause through their messaging (LeCras, 2020, p.99).

When speaking about Chesterton’s writing style, Doris said that it “was characterised by a propensity to use a hammer to crack a nut - his response was often exaggerated when on the attack and there could be no excuses on the part of the accused” (A.14, Baker,

1978, p.2). The framework of beatific and horrific scenarios can help to explain this attitude, with Chesterton placing himself as the saviour of his idea of the beatific scenario, while his opponents were constructed as traitors or attackers trying to bring about what he saw as the horrific scenario (Marttila, 2015, p.129). This “hammer to crack a nut” approach can also be seen as a sign of Chesterton becoming “over-invested in a fantasy” (Glynos, 2008), with him going on the attack against what could be seen as legitimate criticisms. This can also be conceptualised as feeding into the “black and white character” of political fantasy, with Chesterton’s “hammer” leaving “little space for ambiguity” (Behagel and Mert, 2021, p.84).

#### **4.1.2 Views on patriotism**

This “black and white character” can also be seen in Chesterton’s views on patriotism, with Doris stating that “Kenneth would never allow others to criticise England without cause” (A.14, Baker, 1978, p.2). This situates Chesterton as a saviour of the beatific ideal of England against the ‘traitors’ who would seek to unjustly criticise it (Marttila, 2015, p.129), while also providing an identification of Chesterton’s self against an ‘Other’, namely the critics of England (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.60). Despite spending his early life in South Africa, Chesterton stated that “England [...] come Hell or High Water, was my country” (B.3, Chesterton, n.d.). This statement again places Chesterton in the role of the champion of the beatific ideal of the country (Marttila, 2015) while also providing some evidence for “future-orientated” anxieties about what may befall England in the future and what it may need defending from (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.64).

Chesterton’s patriotic identification can be seen as key in his decision to support his country rather than his ideology at the outset of WW2. Doris Chesterton stated that “his patriotism was bound to overcome his idealism for national socialism in such a situation” (A.12, Baker, 1978, p.5). The outbreak of war can be seen as a critical situation with the potential to “disrupt subjects’ sense of order, continuity, and self” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.65), with Chesterton choosing to cast aside his “idealism” in this moment to reaffirm his patriotic sense of self. The importance of patriotism to Chesterton was also evidenced in his outrage at the implementation of Regulation 12B, which he saw as imprisoning “hundreds of men and women, mostly extremely patriotic” (B.6, Chesterton, n.d.). Chesterton saw these people as defending the beatific scenario of

British victory and global importance rather than the state’s view of them as endangering the security of the country (Grant, 2009).

A further demonstration of this is seen in Chesterton’s writing where he states that “we and our fathers have kept our country inviolate for nearly a thousand years” (B.21, Chesterton, c.1970). Chesterton places himself on the defensive side with the use of the inclusive “we”, aligning himself with other saviours who have strived for the beatific ideal of keeping the country “inviolate” (Marttila, 2015). Chesterton was willing to bring legal action against those who questioned his patriotism, with proceedings brought against the Evening Times in 1959 for an article which “plainly implied that he had been and still was disloyal to the Crown” (C.5, LEL, 1958-1962). He stated that “he was unable to allow such a serious and unwarranted imputation as this to pass unchallenged” (C.5, LEL, 1958-1962). This demonstrates that patriotism was important enough to his identity and “sense of belonging” for him to want to set the record straight in the courts against those that attempted to construct him as unpatriotic (Grodecki, 2021, pp.2040-2041).

### **4.2 Britain and the empire**

#### **4.2.1 Empire preservation**

The central importance of the preservation of the British empire to Chesterton can be seen throughout the recollections of those who knew him and in his own writings. Doris Chesterton described his reasoning for fighting in WW1 as being based on his real belief in “the principles for which it was fought”, namely “the preservation of the British Empire” (A.12, Baker, 1978). Doris Chesterton stated that Chesterton’s attitude towards empire “remained frozen in the period 1914-1918” (A.12, Baker, 1978, p.2) while John Tyndall classed Chesterton’s views as “definitely dated back to pre-War times”, considering them largely “out of date” (A.11, Baker, 1978, p.3). This feeds into Glynos and Stavrakakis’ (2008, p.261) idea of the “unending quest for the lost” which can be seen as the core of Chesterton’s political thinking, and part of the reasoning behind the formation of the LEL. Tyndall’s interview can be seen to demonstrate Chesterton’s over-investment in the ideal of the empire (Glynos, 2008, p.289), with Tyndall stating that Chesterton always “used to talk in terms of the Empire”, regardless of the issue in question (A.11, Baker, 1978, p.3).

In a 1954 publication entitled *Sound the Alarm! A Warning to the British Nations*, Chesterton stated his belief that “it is necessary for the British peoples and for the world that the British Empire should remain and revive” (B.23d, Chesterton, 1954). He also stated his intention for the function of what would become the LEL as a group that would “fight against the internationalisation - that is, destruction - of the British nations and of the great world system known as the British Empire” (B.23d, Chesterton, 1954). These statements demonstrate part of Chesterton’s “unending quest for the lost” for the “imagined golden age” where the British empire was a “great world system” (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, pp.261-262). This also links to Glynos’ (2008, p.73) notion of an “ideal and impediment” to each fantasy, with the “ideal” of the empire as a “great world system” only impeded, in Chesterton’s mind, by “internationalisation”. This is indicative of a wider disbelief at the time that Britain’s role could have declined so much in the post-war years (Brocklehurst and Phillips, 2004, p.253), with the fantasmatic element seen in a desire to attribute blame to the unseen agents of “internationalisation” to quell the anxiety created by this otherwise unaccounted for decline (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.61).

#### 4.2.2 Britain’s global position

Chesterton’s concern over what he saw as the threat of “internationalism” continues from statements about the empire specifically to those about Britain more generally. In *The New Unhappy Lords*, his infamously antisemitic book (Liburd, 2023, pp.135-136), he states that there has been an “internationalist attack on British overseas interests” which he saw as part of a “gigantic campaign to smash the British world system” (B.19a, Chesterton, 1965, pp.52, 65). The use of “internationalist” can be seen as an example of the construction of a “mythical agent” as an object of fear where there is no obvious candidate to attribute blame to (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.61).

Chesterton believed that Britain’s overseas ties were essential to “the possibility of a great British revival” but that this “possibility may seem remote and every year traitorous policies make it ever more remote as one by one the overseas bonds are loosened or destroyed” (B.19a, Chesterton, 1965, p.119). The notion of a “revival” demonstrates Chesterton’s “unending quest for the lost” as theorised by Glynos and Stavrakakis (2008, p.261), with this insatiable desire driving much of Chesterton’s theorising. A populist discourse can be seen in Chesterton’s writings, with “two mutually antagonistic camps”

established between those that desire the “revival” and those that are perpetuating the “traitorous policies” (Marttila, 2015, p.67). Describing policies as “traitorous” also feeds into the notion that those who support them are actively working to “endanger or obstruct” the ideal of “revival” by enacting these policies (Marttila, 2015, p.129).

Chesterton saw these “traitorous policies” as having the potential to culminate in “Britain’s final abandonment of her overseas relations” which he believed would “facilitate the American takeover which has been progressively stepped up ever since the last war” (B.22, Chesterton, 1971, p.33). Chesterton saw the United States (US) as constantly working to bring about horrific scenarios of British subordination after the key dislocatory moment of WW2 (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.65). Chesterton saw the 1956 Suez Crisis as a “catastrophe” and “humiliation” which was proof of an “American takeover”, as well as the increasing influence of what he saw as internationalist control (B.19a, Chesterton, 1965, p.57).

### 4.3 International politics

#### 4.3.1 Internationalisation

Chesterton’s biggest fear in the immediate post-war era seems to have been the potential for what he saw as a world government. In 1946 he wrote of fearing the “impending union of finance-capitalism and socialism in the bonds of unholy matrimony” (B.17, Chesterton, 1946). This fear is built on the contradictory notion that capitalism and communism would unite against nations, and specifically Britain, and is indicative of the irrational and contradictory claims often made in defence of a fantasy (Glynos and Howarth, 2007, pp.148-149). As with many of Chesterton’s internationally-based views, this statement carries the undertones of antisemitism, with him referring to the “masters of the modern world” as the “lords of finance and monopoly” (B.17, Chesterton, 1946). The horrific scenario of subjugation is built upon the construction of a mythical agent working to unite what Chesterton saw as the biggest threats to Britain, adding an element of agency and planning to what could otherwise be seen as an unaccountably globalising world (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021).

Chesterton further justified his prophecy of the unification of capitalism and communism by stating that these systems “are only different means to the same end, and that end is

power – power over mankind” (B.19, Chesterton, c.1954). This furthers his perception that there are traitors and attackers working towards this unification which represents a horrific scenario for Chesterton where his “ideal social order” is significantly endangered (Marttila, 2015, p.129). The final manifestation of this notion for Chesterton is the subjugation of the British people “as serfs to the tyranny of a One World State” (B.19a, Chesterton, 1965, p.122). This represents a horrific scenario whereby Britain can no longer defend itself and its sovereignty and individuality are lost (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66). This is also a demonstration of the elimination of difference (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.64) as for Chesterton, any internationalisation leads directly to this “One World State”, with his existential anxiety about the decline of Britain projected onto a fear of international organisations (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259).

#### **4.3.2 United Nations and European Economic Community**

This fear of international organisations leading to a “One World State” was primarily projected onto the United Nations (UN) by Chesterton. He believed the UN to be “the embryonic World Government which has been planning for the enslavement of mankind” (B.19a, Chesterton, 1965, p.40). This constructs the UN as an object of fear that Chesterton sees as actively plotting the demise of nations and is indicative of a desire to either avoid or rationalise his wider anxiety about the declining position of Britain in the post-war world (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259). The targeting of the UN by the LEL is further explored in Chapters 5.4.3 and 6.4.2.

As well as the UN, Chesterton’s concerns about internationalisation were also projected onto the European Economic Community (EEC), with his fear that this organisation was the forerunner to a “United States of Europe” (B.19a, Chesterton, 1965, p.113). This is demonstrative of his fear that the EEC would expand and take over Europe with his foretelling of the horrific scenario of the “United States of Europe” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66). The attacking of the EEC became a key tenet of the LEL, with this expanded on in Chapter 5.4.2.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated how the theoretical framework of fantasmatic narratives and ontological security can be used to help understand Chesterton’s worldview,

specifically through an examination of his general views, his views about Britain and the empire and his views about international organisations. The most important elements that have been shown in this chapter are the use of horrific scenarios (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66) and the construction of objects of fear to mitigate against wider anxieties (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259), especially about Britain’s declining role in the post-war world. It is important to understand the views of Chesterton before exploring those of the LEL because of Chesterton’s central importance to the aims and objectives of the LEL. Chapter 5 will provide an examination of the identity of the LEL, how it was constructed and how the theoretical framework can help to understand the attraction of the group to members, their key policies, and how these linked to Chesterton’s views. Chapter 6 will then consider the main behaviours of the LEL in light of the theoretical framework, with reference to Chesterton’s views and the group identity of the LEL.

### **5 How can the identity of the League of Empire Loyalists be understood through fantasmatic narratives?**

This chapter will examine how the identity of the LEL can be understood through the theoretical framework of fantasmatic narratives and ontological security, building upon the analysis of Chesterton’s worldview in Chapter 4. Before proceeding to this, a distinction will be made between the different elements of identity that will be used in this chapter, as opposed to the behavioural aspects which will be explored in Chapter 6. Following this, the group identity of the LEL will be explored by using data from the University of Bath’s Chesterton Collection and the Social History Archive’s newspaper collection. This includes material relating to the electoral campaigns of certain members of the LEL who ran as ‘Independent Loyalists’. While not strictly part of LEL publicity, their campaigns were consistent with the general ideology and identity of the LEL, making them applicable to this study. This chapter will cover three main areas of the LEL’s group identity: its functions, its attitudes towards Britain and empire, and its attitudes towards international politics.

#### **5.1 Identities**

Identities can be seen as “ways of representing oneself and influencing communication and interaction” and are both “biologically determined and socially constructed” (Khan



et al., 2024, p.99). They can be split into three main categories: personal, social, and group/collective identity (Baray et al., 2009). Personal identity can be understood as “the definition of self in terms of personal attributes and interpersonal relationships”, while social identity is constructed upon “a shared category membership based on intergroup comparisons” (Baray et al., 2009, pp.627-628). Klandermans (2014, p.3) draws an important distinction between social and group identity, stating that “while social identity is a characteristic of an individual and involves more than one group, collective identity is a characteristic of a group and involves more than one individual”. All types of identity can be studied as “constructed in discourse” (Bamberg et al., 2011, p.178), with collective or group identity being the most important to this study. Personal and social identities can be seen as influencing the group identity of the LEL, but ultimately it is the group identity that is projected in their publications and messaging (Klandermans, 2014).

## **5.2 Functions of the LEL**

### **5.2.1 Purpose of the LEL**

Chesterton saw the purpose of the LEL as to “organise public opinion so as to force upon existing parties policies favourable to national and imperial survival in place of the present policies of national and imperial eclipse” (B.23d, Chesterton, 1954, p.8). In their *Policy for Patriots* leaflet, the LEL’s primary purpose was stated as “to resist all attempts to sacrifice British sovereignty, from whatever quarter they come” (C.8, LEL, c.1954). These descriptions place the LEL as saviours and defenders of the beatific scenario of “national and imperial survival” and the maintenance of “British sovereignty” (Marttila, 2015, p.129). The idea is proposed that the ideal of “national and imperial survival” can be reached if the LEL is listened to, with the “present policies” constructed as the main impediment to this ideal (Glynos, 2011, p.73). The horrific scenario is presented as a “national and imperial eclipse” where British sovereignty is destroyed, with the implication that there are malicious actors working towards this scenario, including the advocates of “present policies” and the more mythical threat of agents coming from “whatever quarter” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.61). Right from the outset, this represents the LEL’s high opinion of their ability to influence public debate, something which continued to be a core tenet of their identity throughout their existence.

In leaflets distributed at a Conservative Party conference, the LEL proclaimed themselves to be “the only militant body that fights for British interests”, alongside their slogan “stop the rot” (C.2, LEL, 1957-1958). This identifies the LEL as the “only” saviour of British interests against the unidentified ‘Other’ that they see as working against these interests, specifically with the metaphor of “the rot” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.60). The group identity of the LEL is constructed as fighting against what they see as the social and political threats to the beatific scenario of imperial power (Behagel and Mert, 2021, p.81), with the “stop the rot” phrase linked to the gradual imperial decline, and subsequent threats to the collective identity of Britishness, occurring at the time (Brocklehurst and Phillips, 2004, p.243).

### **5.2.2 Reasons for membership**

Advertisements published by the LEL to attract new members used a similar tone to their narratives regarding their function. An advert appearing in the *Belfast Telegraph* (1955, p.9) stated “The League of Empire Loyalists needs the support of all patriots in the fight for our Sovereignty”. This constructs the LEL as “patriots” who are the saviours of the beatific scenario of strengthened British sovereignty, with a call for all others who see themselves as “patriots” to support this beatific scenario (Marttila, 2015, p.129). The reference to “our Sovereignty” can be seen as the creation of a collective symbol to rally around and provide security, as well as forming something that needs protecting from unseen threats (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, pp.60-62). This furthers the group identity of the LEL as seeing themselves as defenders of their ideals of Britain and Britishness.

## **5.3 Attitudes towards Britain and empire**

### **5.3.1 Empire preservation**

The desire to preserve the British empire can be seen as the most fundamental aspect of the identity of the LEL – it is what all their policies and activities ultimately revolved around (Shaffer, 2017, p.23). The narrative of empire preservation can be detected in Leslie Greene’s 1957 North Lewisham by-election campaign, with an election leaflet stating:

“Do you wish - Great Britain to stand on her own feet? Our beneficent British Empire to be preserved? Once again to have every reason to be proud of

being British? Then get rid of party hacks, reject party humbugs and vote for Leslie Greene" (C.1, LEL, 1957).

Similarly, one of Greene's other leaflets stated, "The British people and their kinsmen in the lands across the seas must at all costs maintain their unity" or else be "swallowed piecemeal either by Dollar Imperialism or by International Communism" (C.1, LEL, 1957). These leaflets construct the retention of the empire as the only way of avoiding the horrific scenario of British subjugation (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66). They also perpetuate the "imagined community" of the empire as the only way of maintaining a "sense of belonging" in the ever-globalising world (Grodecki, 2021, pp.2040-2041). These ideas, along with the construction of the threatening actors of "Dollar Imperialism" and "International Communism" are fundamental to the identity of the LEL with their foretelling of the horrific scenario in store if the empire is allowed to disintegrate (Marttila, 2015, p.129).

This defensive conception is core to the group identity of the LEL and can be seen throughout their campaigning. In a letter published in the Croydon Times, LEL member Aiden Mackey (1955, p.8) states that they "will continue to oppose those of them [politicians] who are prepared to hand over our nation and our Empire to the remote control of internationalists". Additionally, an advertisement in the Torquay Times (1954, p.4) stated "Our nation is in danger" and "The League of Empire Loyalists exists to protect our heritage". These statements construct the LEL as the saviours of "our nation and our Empire" and "our heritage" as opposed to those willing to "hand over" control and bring about the horrific scenario of subjugation (Marttila, 2015, p.129). The group identity of the LEL is thus constructed based on the othering of those they see as working against their ideals, while also constructing singular rallying points using the collective "our" (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, pp.60-62). This also represents a wider anxiety about the potential decline of the empire, with an attempt to construct objects of fear in those they see as responsible for this course to help mitigate their anxiety about an otherwise unknowable process (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259).

### **5.3.2 Britain's global position**

The concept that the empire was fundamental to the survival of Britain and Britishness is a recurring theme in the literature of the LEL. This idea is supported by an advert placed by the LEL in the Bradford Observer (1956, p.2) which stated, "STAND BY THE EMPIRE [...] The Empire is essential if we are to retain INDEPENDENCE". Another advert placed in the Edinburgh Evening News (1957a, p.1) stated that "Britain, without the Empire, becomes the satellite of the U.S.A. and U.S.S.R.". Both these adverts demonstrate the fundamental importance the LEL placed on the empire for Britain to maintain its global position, with the LEL's attachment to the empire potentially a sign of their overinvestment in the fantasy of British greatness (Glynos, 2008, p.289).

This overinvestment can also be seen in Leslie Greene's campaign material for the 1957 by-election, with her stating "Vote Independent Loyalist and vote to put the 'Great' back into Great Britain", with a vote for her constructed as being "for North Lewisham, for Great Britain, for the British Empire, for the Great Patriotic Revival" (C.1, LEL, 1957). This can be seen as representing part of the LEL's "unending quest for the lost" in their desire for a "Great Patriotic Revival" (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, p.261). This also links to the idea mentioned in Chapter 4.2.1 that Chesterton's views about the empire were "frozen in the period 1914-1918" (A.12, Baker, 1978, p.2). The similarities of these statements to those made in the 2016 Brexit campaign cannot be overlooked; the narrative of regaining lost British greatness has remained central to the identities of many in the right-wing throughout the years (Rogstad and Martill, 2022). For the LEL, the empire can be seen as representing a collective symbol that provides security in a changing world, while also creating insecurity when its stability is threatened (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, pp.60-62). This insecurity leads to the construction of objects of fear (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021) which pervade the narratives of the LEL as will be shown in the following section.

## **5.4 Attitudes towards international organisations**

### **5.4.1 North Atlantic Treaty Organisation**

A key part of the group identity of the LEL can be seen as a constructed fear of international organisations and the horrific scenario of a world government emerging (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66). A recurring narrative throughout the literature of

the LEL, and their heckling as will be shown in Chapter 6.3.2, was to depict any type of internationalisation as “treasonous” (LeCras, 2020, p.108). When speaking about the potential for “some integration of forces” under the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), Austen Brooks, deputy chairman of the LEL, stated:

“It is the League's view that this principle is treasonable, and that once the British people understand the views involved, they will not tolerate the fact that the British Government, after scuttling the British Empire, is now about to scuttle the United Kingdom” (C.2, LEL, 1957-1958).

This creates the perception that the government and proponents of NATO are working to bring about the horrific scenario of British subjugation and compromised security through NATO integration (Marttila, 2015, p.129).

The creation of NATO as an object of fear can be seen as stemming from the “chosen trauma” of the Suez Crisis of 1956, with this serving as a “collective memory of a calamity that once befell a group” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, pp.61-62). The LEL saw the Suez Crisis as a demonstration of the US’s “unreliability as a friend and ally” (C.2, LEL, 1957-1958), with the US and those who supported them seen as bringing about the horrific scenario of Britain becoming an insignificant global power (Marttila, 2015, p.129). This depiction of the US as an enemy of Britain became a key part of the identity of the LEL, with the “chosen trauma” of the Suez Crisis playing a key role in their justification for this.

#### **5.4.2 European Economic Community**

The European Economic Community (EEC) and European Common Market were a constant source of anxiety for the LEL, with their opposition to Britain’s proposed entry becoming another key tenet of their identity, alongside their anti-Americanism. Throughout the unsuccessful 1961-1963 negotiations for Britain’s entry into the EEC (Deighton and Ludlow, 1995), the LEL constructed themselves as firmly anti-Europe, painting EEC entry as an exceptionally horrific scenario (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66). In 1961, the LEL passed a resolution condemning “the traitorous action of our half-American and totally internationalist Prime Minister [Harold Macmillan] in applying for membership of the European Common Market” (C.3, LEL, 1958-1962). Macmillan became a constant target for the LEL in this period, with them continually depicting him

as bringing about the horrific scenario of British subjugation via the EEC (Marttila, 2015, p.129).

Even in 1964, when active negotiations for entry had halted (Deighton and Ludlow, 1995), the LEL saw the potential for Britain’s entry into the EEC as “by far the most important issue”, even beyond the empire concerns that had so fixated them (C.6, LEL, 1964). This can be seen as a demonstration of the LEL attempting to remain relevant in their later years with the construction of a new object of fear in the EEC (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259). The declining relevance of the empire meant that the LEL had to find a new ‘Other’ to define themselves against beyond those they saw as threatening the empire, and the EEC seemingly provided the perfect outlet for this (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.60).

#### **5.4.3 United Nations**

Though NATO and the EEC were closer to home, the ultimate manifestation of the LEL’s fear of international organisations can be seen in their reaction to the United Nations (UN). The LEL constructed the UN as the ultimate object of fear, seeing it as having the potential to become “an all-powerful World Government, with sole control of armaments and military forces”, involving “a surrender of national sovereignty and independence” (C.8a, LEL, c.1954). This links to Chesterton’s anxieties about the UN touched upon in Chapter 4.3.2 and constructs the UN as an object of fear that is leading to the horrific scenario, seen here in the loss of “sovereignty and independence” (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022).

In Leslie Greene’s 1964 general election campaign, she characterised the UN as “a dangerous, meddling, expensive and thoroughly anti-British organisation”, placing herself as the only candidate in opposition to it (Greene, 1964, p.2). This again constructs the UN as an object of fear, while also placing Greene, and by extension the LEL, as the saviour advocating for the beatific scenario of British greatness rather than the horrific scenario of subjugation (Marttila, 2015, p.129). For the LEL, the UN was the object of fear that could represent their wider anxieties about Britain’s declining role in the world (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259), while also othering its supporters as traitors to Britain (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.61).

## 5.5 Conclusion

This chapter has shown the numerous ways in which the group identity of the LEL was formed, primarily through the identification of themselves as saviours of their ideal of British greatness as opposed to the perceived 'Others' conspiring to bring about the horrific scenario of British subjugation (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021). The LEL constructed themselves as the "champions and protectors" of the British empire and British sovereignty (Marttila, 2015, p.129). Their anxiety about Britain's declining role in the world was manifested in a variety of objects of fear, primarily NATO, the EEC and the UN (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259). Any politicians or parties that the LEL saw as supporting these organisations were designated as traitors working to bring about the horrific scenario (Marttila, 2015, p.129). These adversarial tendencies in their identity can be seen even more clearly in their behaviour, which will be covered in Chapter 6 and finally brought together in Chapter 7.

## 6 How can the behaviour of the League of Empire Loyalists be understood through fantasmatic narratives?

The views of Chesterton explored in Chapter 4 and the identity of the LEL covered in Chapter 5 can be seen as fundamental contributors to the behaviour of the LEL, which has come to define their legacy. This chapter will attempt to provide an assessment of why the LEL acted in the ways that they did, using the framework of fantasmatic narratives and ontological security. After an explanation of what is meant by behaviour, this chapter will explore the different types of behaviour exhibited by the LEL, including the disruption of meetings, through heckling and stunts, and various forms of street-based disruptions. It is not within the scope of this study to explore the meanings behind every type of behaviour exhibited by the LEL and its members, so the main forms of disruption mentioned above have been focused on, rather than one-off unsanctioned actions of individual members<sup>6</sup>.

### 6.1 Behaviours

Behaviours carried out as part of a group can be seen as an operationalisation of group identity, involving the "pride and significance of being a member of the group" as well as including "the symbols" and "the values" of the group (Klandermans, 2014, p.3).

Klandermans (2014, p.8) theorises that the "more someone identifies with a group, the higher the chances are that he or she will take part in collective action on behalf of the group". Therefore, group behaviour is intrinsically linked to group identity, especially in relation to the level of commitment exhibited to the group identity by individuals. This can be seen in the case of the LEL, with a small group of half a dozen or so of the most committed members carrying out most of their disruptive behaviours, despite having a membership of up to 3,000 (Scott, 2014).

### 6.2 Strategy

John Tyndall described the LEL as having "no political strategy; nothing beyond making noisy demonstrations" (A.11, Baker, 1978), with this seen as one of the main reasons behind the departure of many of the younger and more radical members of the LEL (Copsey, 2008). This is linked to Chesterton's conviction that people would be won over by his ideas if they simply heard them, though he always struggled to understand why his wife "could never be convinced of 'the cause'" (Baker, 1996, p.140). The LEL's lack of serious political strategy can be seen as representative of an overinvestment in the fantasy of their own beliefs (Glynos, 2008, p.289), with the most committed members of the LEL so far convinced of the righteousness of their ideals that they seemed to believe that everyone else would follow suit if they heard them.

Austen Brooks described the LEL's strategy as to "pursue the traditional British practice of heckling at meetings" to "voice their protests against unpatriotic and subversive propaganda from public platforms" (C.3, LEL, 1958-1962). This provides an insight into the "black and white character" of the political fantasies of the LEL, with a firm distinction drawn between patriotic and "unpatriotic" speech, with the LEL adjudicating between the two (Behagel and Mert, 2021, p.84). Chesterton was firm in his belief of the "traditional British right" of heckling, even at private, ticketed events such as Conservative Party Conferences (Northern Whig, 1958a, p.1). This can be seen as representative of his conviction that his ideals and the ideals of the LEL must be defended against all obstructions and endangerments, whether voiced in public or private (Marttila, 2015, p.129).

## 6.3 Disruption of meetings

### 6.3.1 Stunts

The LEL became most widely known for their stunts at political meetings, primarily those of the Conservative Party. These were meticulously planned though often only lasted a few seconds before event organisers stopped them. Plans for many of the stunts can be seen in the scrapbooks held by the University of Bath, including one for a fainting stunt executed by Rosine de Bounevalle in 1957, with the assistance of other members (C.1, LEL, 1957). The premise of the stunt was that de Bounevalle would ‘faint’ while Prime Minister Harold Macmillan was speaking and that another LEL member would come to her assistance as a ‘doctor’ and declare that she was “suffering from a fit at the Government’s betrayal of the British Empire”, followed by a call to join the LEL (C.1, LEL, 1957). This stunt revolved around the horrific scenario of the “betrayal of the British Empire”, with a call to the audience to turn against the ‘traitors’ perpetuating this scenario (Marttila, 2015, p.129). It can also be seen to relate to the importance of the “sense of community” in nationalist narratives and the danger posed to the individual by destroying this, seen in de Bounevalle’s “fit” (Grodecki, 2021, pp.2040-2041).

Another stunt performed in 1957 by the LEL was interrupting a Conservative Party meeting in Brighton by loudly ringing a bell and then shouting, “The League of Empire Loyalists tolls the bell for the Conservative Party, for the party which has betrayed the Empire” (C.2, LEL, 1957-1958). The LEL’s unwavering belief in the potential effectiveness of their stunts is evidenced by their repetition – they seemed to believe that if they told people that the empire was being “betrayed” enough times that they would join their cause, demonstrating how their overinvestment in their own fantasy drove their behaviour (Glynos, 2008).

The most significant stunt performed by the LEL was at the 1958 Conservative Party Conference in Blackpool as this marked the end of Conservative tolerance for the LEL and, while garnering them sizeable media attention, ultimately marked the start of the end for the LEL (Thayer, 1965). The stunt involved the sounding of a bugle during a speech, which was followed by the announcement “The League of Empire Loyalists sound the retreat for the Conservative Party who have betrayed our imperial heritage” (C.4, LEL,

1958), later followed by heckles of “treason” and “traitor” towards Macmillan (Daily News London, 1958a, p.1). This stunt used the narrative of traitorous Conservatives being confronted by members of the LEL trying to protect their “paramount ethical ideals” (Marttila, 2015, p.129). This stunt also used the collective symbol of “our imperial heritage” as something to be rallied around and defended from the threat posed to it by the Conservatives (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, pp.61-62). The LEL constantly used antagonistic narratives against their opponents, but they ended up pushing their use of them against the Conservatives too far, causing the Conservatives to seek to defend themselves against the populist discourse of the LEL (Marttila, 2015, p.67) and therefore alienating them from those most likely to align with their views.

### 6.3.2 Heckling

The most common heckling target for the LEL was Macmillan, whose premiership ran from 1957 to 1963 and included a very significant period of decolonisation (GOV.UK, 2019). The LEL used various heckles against Macmillan, most commonly variants on “You are a traitor to the Empire” (Daily News London, 1958b, p.6). Other heckles included “What we want is freedom from Yankee domination” and “Empire Loyalists say UNO is anti-British. Stand by the Empire!” (C.2, LEL, 1957-1958), among many others. These all placed Macmillan as a “traitor” and attacker of the ideals held by the LEL and as someone working to bring about horrific scenarios (Marttila, 2015, p.129). These statements also show the creation of objects of fear in the UN and the US (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259), furthering the ‘traitorous’ role of Macmillan by implying that he supported these over the interests of Britain. The fixation of the LEL on Macmillan was a contributing factor to the breach with the Conservatives in 1958, with this indicative of the “noisy demonstrations” that were prioritised over conventional political strategies and which Tyndall saw as hampering the political potential of the LEL (A.11, Baker, 1978).

Conservative Party meetings were not the only target of the LEL’s disruptive tactics. On one occasion they interrupted a debate in the House of Commons on the future of Cyprus with shouts of “You are making a start with treason” and “The League of Empire Loyalists decry this as treason” (Shields Daily News, 1958, p.10). For the LEL, the potential decolonisation of Cyprus was a critical situation that disrupted their ideal of preserving the British empire indefinitely (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.65). The narrative of

treason was once again employed to represent those who the LEL saw as impeding their fantasy (Glynos, 2011, p.73). This also represents their “resistance to change” where the beatific scenario of empire preservation was under threat (Glynos, 2021, p.101) and their idea that they needed to act quickly to decry proposed changes that they saw as the start of a slippery slope, seen in the reference to “making a start with treason” (Shields Daily News, 1958).

## **6.4 Street-based disruption**

### **6.4.1 Vandalism**

Beyond their disruption of meetings, another key behaviour of the LEL included vandalism targeted at those they saw as their enemies. After Lord Altrincham made unfavourable comments about Queen Elizabeth II<sup>7</sup>, the phrase “Attacks on our monarchy must cease – Empire Loyalists” was painted on the road outside his home (C.2, LEL, 1957-1958). At another time, “Traitor’s Gate” was painted at the Foreign Office entrance with a spokesperson for the LEL stating that it had been done in protest against “the Government’s policy of subordinating this country and its armed forces to foreign control [...] a treasonable policy” (C.2, LEL, 1957-1958). Nelson’s Column was also vandalised with “Nelson save the Navy from the Yanks”, while “Empire Loyalists say keep the Navy out of N.A.T.O.” was painted on the wall of the Admiralty offices (Northern Whig, 1958b, p.2).

These defacements all place the LEL in the saviour role, defending their beatific scenario of a strong Britain, and a strong monarchy, against those they saw as attacking it (Marttila, 2015, p.129). The brandishing of the Foreign Office with “Traitor’s Gate” provides a visual demonstration of the LEL’s othering of Foreign Office staff as traitors because of the perceived threat they posed to the beatific scenario of empire preservation (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.61). The appeal to Nelson demonstrates a desire to return to an “imagined golden age” which is symbolised by Nelson and the memory of the strength of the navy under him, compared to the threat that NATO poses to it in the LEL’s eyes (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, p.262). The latter two examples also point to the horrific scenario of foreign control and British subordination that the LEL imagined as being the outcome of decolonisation and organisations such as NATO (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66).

### **6.4.2 Loudspeaker van and associated stunts**

The LEL possessed a van with a loudspeaker which was utilised in a number of counterdemonstrations, most notably at a United Nations Day ceremony and at anti-nuclear rallies. At the United Nations Day ceremony held at Trafalgar Square in 1955, the LEL were responsible for removing and trampling the UN flag, with the loudspeaker van accompanying the stunt with shouts of “Put Britain’s flag first!” and “Stand by the Empire!” (Northern Whig, 1955, p.1). Other statements from the van included “There can be no security for Britain in this jerry-built contraption, but only in her own strong right arm” and “No divided loyalties. Fly the Union Jack and not the flag of any other organisation” (Northern Whig, 1955, p.1). This behaviour shows the LEL’s creation of the UN as an object of fear which they saw as threatening their ideal of empire preservation and the security of the nation (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259). The presence of the UN flag was seen by the LEL as the start of the horrific scenario of foreign control (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66), with the LEL later stating that their actions were due to “the stipulation that no flag of a greater size must be flown with the UN flag or at a greater height” (Bradford Observer, 1955, p.2). The LEL focused on the UN flag as a symbol of the wider social and political threats to their beatific scenario of British independence (Behagel and Mert, 2021, p.81), with them attacking the only tangible object that they could in the face of an otherwise invisible threat (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, p.61).

At an anti-nuclear rally held at the Cenotaph in 1958, the LEL used the loudspeaker van to declare that “the retention of the [nuclear] bomb is essential for the maintenance of British independence” and “these people care nothing for our British dead... they are only interested in their own traitorous propaganda” (C.2, LEL, 1957-1958). These statements indicate that the ideal of British independence held by the LEL was dependent on the retention of nuclear weaponry, with disarmament seen as an impediment to this ideal (Glynos, 2011, p.73). Disarmament was seen by the LEL as leading to the horrific scenario of British subjugation, constructing the rally participants as traitors and attackers who were trying to bring this scenario about (Marttila, 2015, p.129). The second quote also feeds into the “chosen trauma” of WW1 and WW2, with the demonstrators constructed as ignoring this while the LEL place themselves as defending the collective memory which is seen as key to the beatific scenario (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2021, pp.61-62).

## 6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has sought to provide an understanding of the main behaviours of the LEL through the framework of fantasmatic narratives and ontological security. This has included a consideration of the expressed strategy of the LEL and their main behaviours: the disruption of meetings through heckling and stunts, and street-based forms of disruption including vandalism and the use of their loudspeaker van. Many of these behaviours revolved around the LEL's identification with various beatific and horrific scenarios, with them working to defend their ideals against those they saw as threatening them. Their targeting of Harold Macmillan, the Prime Minister most associated with decolonisation (GOV.UK, 2019), can be seen as demonstrative of their attempted defence of the British empire and the ideals it represented to the LEL. This marks the end of the empirical research of this project. Chapter 7 will conclude this project, bringing together all the research discussed and considering the main arguments and implications of the findings.

## 7 Conclusion

### 7.1 Research questions

The main research question posed by this study was: 'how can fantasmatic narratives be utilised to understand the League of Empire Loyalists' campaign against the end of the British empire?'. This was split into three secondary questions which were dealt with in turn through Chapters 4-6: these covered Chesterton's worldviews, the identity of the LEL and finally the behaviour of the LEL. The purpose of the study was to apply the theoretical framework of fantasmatic narratives and ontological security to the case study of the LEL in order to provide a political understanding of their campaign against the end of the British empire, where before there had primarily only been historical studies.

To answer the research questions posed, data about Chesterton and the LEL was collected from the University of Bath's Chesterton Collection and the Social History Archive's online newspaper collection. The materials used included scrapbooks composed by LEL members, publicity leaflets produced by the LEL, interviews of Chesterton's friends and relations, and published and unpublished material written by Chesterton and the LEL. Quotations collected from this data were divided firstly into

which question they answered best, before then being subdivided into specific topics and annotated with elements of the theoretical framework. Post-foundational discourse analysis formed the basis for the analysis of the data collected, with this methodology treating discourse as a "range of practices of articulation which create and regulate the social meaning of an object" (Grodecki, 2021, p.2036).

### 7.2 Theoretical framework

This study utilised the theoretical framework posited by Adisonmez and Onursal (2021; 2022) which combined the concept of fantasmatic narratives with ontological security. This framework was introduced in Chapter 1.4 and explored in more detail in Chapter 3. The main elements of the theoretical framework that have been utilised in this study are beatific and horrific scenarios (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022, p.66) and "the invention of objects of fear" for the "avoidance of anxiety" (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259). Another key element is the perceived role of "saviours" and "traitors", with the former as "champions and protectors of the paramount ethical ideals" while the latter are "subjects that endanger or obstruct the attainment of the ideal social order" (Marttila, 2015, p.129).

### 7.3 Main arguments and conclusions

The main argument of this study has been that fantasmatic narratives can be used to make sense of the identity and behaviour of the LEL. These aspects of the group have been largely overlooked in scholarly works on the LEL, with the LEL largely seen as a subtext in studies of the British "right-extremist political fringe" (Copsey, 2008, p.15). Understanding the actions of the LEL in the context of British imperial decline is an important but under-studied aspect of the LEL, which has wider implications which will be covered in the following section.

The main conclusions from Chapter 4 on Chesterton's worldviews are that the idea of horrific scenarios can be seen as central to forming an understanding of Chesterton's perception of world events (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022). The horrific scenarios of British decline and subjugation can be seen throughout Chesterton's views and feeds into the identity of the LEL. They link to an overarching anxiety related to the imperial decline of the time, with these existential anxieties converted into "objects of fear" (Hirvonen, 2017, p.259) such as "traitorous" politicians and international organisations

that were constructed as working against the “ideal social order” imagined by Chesterton (Marttila, 2015, p.129). This can go some way towards explaining Chesterton’s overinvestment in the fantasy of the “imagined golden age” of British imperial greatness (Glynos and Stavrakakis, 2008, p.262), with him, and subsequently the LEL, constantly trying to defend their unattainable beatific scenario, to the consternation of others (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022).

These conclusions about Chesterton’s worldview feed into the conclusions from Chapter 5 about the identity of the LEL. A fundamental aspect of the group identity of the LEL can be seen as their commitment to their role as saviours of the “paramount ethical ideals” related to the retention of the British empire (Marttila, 2015, p.129). Their anxiety about imperial decline was linked to their unwavering belief in the possibility of realising the beatific scenario of a strong and independent Britain (Adisonmez and Onursal, 2022). Through this, the LEL can be seen as having “mobilised people who saw empire as the salient feature of their own political identity”, despite the context of imperial decline (Scott, 2014, p.1). The ability of the LEL to bring people into action can be seen as dependent on the strength of an individual’s identification with the group identity of the LEL and the personal importance they placed on the empire (Klandermans, 2014).

Finally, the conclusions about Chesterton’s worldview and the LEL’s identity are brought together in the behaviour of the LEL which was covered in Chapter 6. Both Chesterton and the LEL were “obsessed with the belief that without the Empire there could be no satisfactory form of Britishness” (Scott, 2014, p.272), meaning that they saw themselves as defending not only the empire but Britishness as a whole. The behaviour of the LEL can be seen as driven by identification with the empire and the horrific scenario of a loss of identity that imperial decline posed. They saw themselves in the saviour role, protecting their “paramount ethical ideals” of empire and Britishness that they believed were being attacked by “traitors”, driving them to act in the defence of their ideals (Marttila, 2015, p.129).

#### **7.4 Implications of findings**

The implications of the findings of this politically rooted study of Chesterton and the LEL include a better understanding of the basis of the identity and behaviours of the LEL, as

well as potential links to understanding modern forms of imperialist-driven nationalism. The actions of the LEL demonstrate that the empire was important to some sections of British society (Scott, 2014, p.196), however, the fact only a very small group of individuals were committed enough to participate in the LEL’s actions can be seen to show that this importance is limited.

Parallels can be drawn between some of the narratives of the LEL and those used in the 2016 Brexit campaign, especially with the idea of putting the “‘Great’ back into Great Britain” (C.1, LEL, 1957). Understanding the roots of these narratives is important to understanding how they are used in the modern day, with the modern campaigns displaying elements of the beatific scenarios seen in the LEL’s campaign (Rogstad and Martill, 2022). This study builds upon others of the LEL that link the group to the idea of “anachronistic residual imperial Britishness” (Scott, 2014, p.218), with a greater understanding of their identity and behaviour important to understanding this “residual” imperialism.

#### **7.5 Avenues for future research**

The limited scope of this study leaves many avenues for further research open, especially for those using the University of Bath’s Chesterton Collection. The eclectic mix of sources in this collection mean that there are many different avenues that could be pursued with it, including a more detailed examination of the *Candour* publication or the correspondence held by the archive. Additionally, a further examination of the overseas branches of the LEL could provide some interesting insights into how the LEL was received outside of Britain. Another interesting research avenue could be a comparison of the narratives used by the LEL and Oswald Mosley’s Union Movement, with these representing two very different sides of imperialism in the 1950s and 1960s. Some studies have touched on the idea that the decline of the British empire was “a key factor in the unravelling of Britishness” (Brocklehurst and Phillips, 2004, p.243) but a further exploration of the meanings of Britishness in relation to the empire could also be fruitful for a more rounded understanding of contemporary political debates, with Ware (2007) making an important contribution to this research avenue. The LEL may have been a small and relatively insignificant group at the time, but it continues to hold importance



for understanding how modern debates about Britain, Britishness, nationalism and the empire are perpetuated.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Alternatively spelled phantasmatic

<sup>2</sup> Under Defence Regulation 18b, approximately 920 members/associates of the BUF were detained in 1939 and 1940 as “the British government believed that they would *act* against Britain in the name of their beliefs” (Grant, 2009, pp.501, 506).

<sup>3</sup> A reference to the 1943 film *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* which presents the older British military gentleman as “by nature conservative, insular, unsuspicious, believers in good sportsmanship and anxious to believe the best of other people” (Puckett, 2008, p.93).

<sup>4</sup> This iteration of the BNP was founded by John Bean, a former LEL member, in 1960 (Taylor, 2018, p.387); it is separate from the BNP currently in existence, founded by John Tyndall and Martin Webster in 1982 (Jamin, 2014).

<sup>5</sup> Tyndall’s Greater Britain Movement (GBM) had initially been excluded from the formation of the NF to avoid controversy about its neo-Nazi links; both Tyndall and GBM members were later allowed to join (Copsey, 2008)

<sup>6</sup> Examples include Philip Burbidge, LEL representative, slapping Lord Altrincham after he criticised the monarchy (Edinburgh Evening News, 1957b) and Derek Johnson, LEL member, throwing an egg at Kenyan leader Jomo Kenyatta (Streatham News, 1961).

<sup>7</sup> These included saying that Queen’s spoke like a “priggish schoolgirl” and that her court was “too upper-class”; his comments were widely criticised at the time (Whitfield, 2019)

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## Appendix

### 1. Material consulted in the University of Bath's Chesterton Collection:

A – Biographical: A.11, A.12, A.13, A.14, A.15, A.16

B – Writings: B.3-B.7, B.17, B.19, B.19a, B.21, B.22, B.23b, B.23c, B.23d

C – League of Empire Loyalists: C.1, C.2, C.3, C.4, C.5, C.6-C.7, C.8, C.8a, C.9-C.11

See catalogue for item details: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/publications/archive-and-research-collections-catalogues/attachments/chesterton-catalogue.pdf>

2. Search criteria used for the Social History Archive's newspaper collection:

Database: <https://www.thesocialhistoryarchive.com/search-newspapers/advanced?sid=197>

Key words: "League of Empire Loyalists" (exact search)

Dates: 01/01/1954 – 01/03/1967

Results rendered: 520

Data manually sorted to remove duplicates or articles with no relevant content.

*Research conducted from 20/01/2025 to 14/02/2025*