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Nostalgia and nationalism create new identities for post-industrial Doncaster

How local conditions and circumstances in the former coal town of Doncaster have led to the creation of post-industrial identities is the subject of [a fascinating new study](#) in the journal *History & Anthropology*.

Cathrine Thorleifsson traces Doncaster's identity from the glory days of coal to its decline in the 1980s and current embrace of nostalgia and nationalism.

As Thorleifsson explains: "The industrial town of Doncaster was for decades emblematic of a golden industrial age. Up until the mid-1980s, the economic and cultural identity of Doncaster was connected to the mining industry that provided a sense of identity, security and future."

Three decades after the Miners' Strike, the people to whom Thorleifsson spoke for her research related a social experience in Doncaster 'partly formulated in terms of disillusionment with the present'.

For them, no matter how hard life in the mines was, the industrial past 'is nostalgically remembered as an era signalling stability, as opposed to the uncertainty, socio-economic decline and hardship of the present.'

Many efforts to transform Doncaster since the late 1990s into a distinctive and proud place and revitalise its economy have been heavily centred on the restoration and commemoration of its industrial past. In contrast, some residents, particularly the young, have looked to the town's diversity or the EU in search of opportunities and ways to cope with decline.

Yet as Thorleifsson explains, still more Doncastrians have turned to nationalism, with increased migration and the uncertainty of work being 'key factors' in its rising appeal. As she observes, nationalism and nationalist political parties 'tap into the anxieties of the working class disillusioned with the broken promises of modernity, economic transition and European integration.'

"Thriving on a fearful working-class electorate, [nationalism] provides a future modelled around a proud history of extractive industries and protective nationalism. This appeared to be a powerful formula for the residents of Doncaster who expressed a pervasive sense of deprivation."

This study provides a fascinating insight into the past and future of a historic town. In many ways, the case of Doncaster illustrates a wider struggle over identity in today's globalising, but post-Brexit Britain: "between a society open to European integration and one that closes its borders on the path of rising English nationalism."

NOTE TO JOURNALISTS

This article was published in a special issue of *History & Anthropology* entitled "[Overheating: Towards an anthropological history of the early 21st century](#)"

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