

Deconstructing Brexit: Eurosceptic Discourse and the Ideational Context of the United Kingdom's Exit from the European Union

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Abstract

The decision by voters in the United Kingdom (UK) to leave the European Union (EU) in June 2016 plunged the UK into arguably the greatest political crisis facing the country since the end of the Second World War. In addition to the economic consequences of leaving the single market, and the diminished standing of the UK both within the EU and beyond, renewed calls for Scottish independence have emerged, and the consequences for the Northern Ireland and the Good Friday agreement remain unclear. The ramifications of this decision, however, reverberate far beyond the confines of these islands. The implications for the EU are seismic, and perhaps even existential. It is not just the EU's future relationship with the UK which is at stake, but the very nature of the Union itself and the future trajectory of the integration project. Will the EU, for example, now face further secession movements in other member-states? EU citizens who have made their homes and built their lives in the UK face an uncertain future, as do the significant number of Britons residing throughout the EU. Outside Europe, questions arise about the attractiveness of the UK for foreign investment and the UK's commitment to other multi-lateral forums.

That the vote to leave the EU was not widely foreseen by politicians (including many of those campaigning for an 'out' vote), political commentators or the financial markets underlines the need for further exploration and analysis of how the UK arrived at this place. This paper aims to address this question by placing the Brexit vote in its longer historical context. More specifically, it examines the embedded Euroscepticism which has dominated British political discourse on the European project and the role of the UK within it for at least the last three decades. Drawing on post-structuralist discourse theory, the paper argues that the vote to leave it was driven by a decades long denigration of the European integration project in the UK and a political discourse in which the terrain of discussion, and the conceptual vocabulary of the debate, were dominated by a right-wing Eurosceptic discourse

which framed the EU as inherently heterogeneous and antagonistic to the UK. It examines how ideas of British exceptionalism, which underpin Eurosceptic discourses, were sustained and reproduced and their affective power amongst the UK population. It documents how these discourses were embedded over decades and then activated by leave campaigners in the immediate run up to the vote. The argument presented here will be of interest to scholars and students of British and European politics both in the UK, and elsewhere in Europe and beyond who seek to understand the origins of the Brexit decision and the evolution of Britain's position with regard to the EU in recent decades. It is of relevance also to those interested in the relationship between political decision making and wider societal discourses which shape the terms in which policy debates are couched and the terrain on which they are conducted.

Introduction

The decision by voters in the referendum on the 23rd June 2016 that the United Kingdom (UK) should leave the European Union (EU) has plunged the UK into its greatest political crisis since the end of the Second World War. Despite the narrow margin of the leave 'victory' – 51.8% to 48.2% on a turnout of 72.2% of eligible voters – and the lack of clarity prior to the vote about what 'Brexit' meant in concrete policy terms, the Government of Prime Minister Theresa May has taken a maximalist interpretation in the result. Whilst the final shape of the UK's post-Brexit relationship is still to be determined, the UK Government's current negotiating position proposes withdrawal from both the EU's internal market and customs union, along with a range of other policies, agencies and agreements, including the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom).

The referendum result was not widely predicted and its causes have been the subject of significant debate amongst scholars since the result (see Evans and Menon 2017; Clarke et al. 2017). This paper summarises ongoing attempts by the present author to add to, and complement this emerging literature, by placing the Brexit vote in its longer-term historical and political context. More specifically, it argues that the referendum result cannot be understood in isolation, and accounted for solely in terms of the immediate short-term political circumstances in which it was held, as important as these were. Instead, we must see the result emerging from the embedded Euroscepticism, which has dominated British political discourse on the European project and the role of the UK within it for at least the last three decades (Usherwood and Startin 2012). As Dennis MacShane (2016) has commented, the referendum campaign, as with political campaigns more generally, is unlikely to have been the decisive factor in the 'out' vote. Instead, it was underpinned by, and able to draw on the tropes of, a decades-long denigration of the European integration project in the UK. The terrain of political discourse on the EU – and the conceptual vocabulary employed – were dominated by a right-wing Eurosceptic discourse, which framed the EU as inherently heterogeneous from, and antagonistic to, the UK.

The article draws on post-structuralist discourse theory (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Howarth 2000) and the critical logics approach to social and political explanation derived from this (Glynos and Howarth 2007). To demonstrate the long term nature of the Eurosceptic discourse it traces this back to debates about the European integration process which predate the entry of and 'in-out' referendum onto the policy agenda, via a case study of the negotiation of the Lisbon Treaty in the UK political discourses. This in turn builds of

previous analyses of key events in the representation of European integration in the UK media (Anderson and Weymouth 1999; Diez 1999; Ichijo 2002; Diez Medrano 2003). It is argued that the campaign to leave the EU and the motivations for voters in expressing this desire draw on long-standing and highly sedimented discourses about the relationship 'between Britain and Europe,' which set the terms of debate about the EU. Within Eurosceptic discourses there is a fundamental separation created between Britain and the EU which is presented as a hostile 'other', against which the UK is defined (see Hawkins 2012). This depiction of the EU as the very antithesis of the UK, posing an existential threat to its independence and well-being, chimes with the feelings of disconnection and loss of control which underpinned the consistently low levels of support for the UK's participation in the European integration process and, ultimately, the vote to leave. Any account of Brexit which fails to take account of these contextual factors is necessarily incomplete. Through the application of the critical logics approach to examine the discursive context in which the UK's exit from the EU emerged, we are able to understand not just the structure and form of Eurosceptic discourses, but their affective power over large sections of the population.

Background

In addition to the economic consequences of leaving the single market, and the diminished standing of the UK globally, it is questionable whether the UK itself will survive intact. Renewed calls for Scottish independence have emerged in the wake of the vote, and the consequences for Northern Ireland and the Good Friday agreement remain at best unclear. Aside from the destabilising effects on the delicate political settlement, which has prevailed since 1997, the economic consequences of Brexit for the entire Island of Ireland will be significant regardless of what form Brexit settlement takes. The ramifications of this decision, however, reverberate even further.

The implications for the EU are also significant, and perhaps even existential, given the potential for Brexit to undermine the fundamental principles underpinning the Union and the solidarity and trust amongst its member states. It is not just the EU's future relationship with the UK which is at stake but, faced with the rise of nationalist populism in member-states from Sweden to Hungary, increasingly overt challenges posed to EU standards and norms by Governments in Poland and Italy and intractable policy dilemmas such as clandestine migration, the very nature of the EU itself and the future trajectory of the integration. Brexit is thus occurring at a very challenging moment in the EU's history. By

attempting to unpick the hugely complex, fraudtly negotiated and finely balanced status quo in the EU at precisely the moment it is being placed under multiple pressures Brexit may be the catalyst for the European integration project to unravel even further as some member-states seek to renegotiate their own settlement with the EU and reassert what some see as their national interest.

Beyond the EU, questions arise about the attractiveness of the UK for foreign investment and the UK's commitment to other multi-lateral forums. And this is occurring at the precise time that the regional and global institutions of the post-World-War-Two settlement face unprecedented challenges from the wider geopolitical context and the equivocation of the current United States (US) Government is equivocating on its commitment to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and even the World Trade Organization (WTO).

That the vote to leave the EU was largely unforeseen by politicians (including many of those campaigning for an 'out' vote), political commentators or the financial markets underlines the need for further exploration and analysis of how the UK arrived at this place. Much has been written about the conduct of the campaign, principally by participants in the campaign and the journalists who covered it (Gibbon 2016; Oliver 2016; Shipman 2016). Others, such as Ian Dunt (2016) and Daniel Hannan (2016), have sought to chart the future course for the UK outside of the EU. More scholarly analyses of the Brexit decision and the motivations for the 'out' vote and others are sure to follow (Hobolt 2016; Vasilopoulou 2016; Usherwood 2016), as are discussions on the structure of political discourses surrounding it (Hellman 2016; see also Startin 2016). The emerging consensus is that concerns about immigration, linked to the principle of freedom of movement played a crucial role in the leave vote, along with a sense amongst some voters that they wished to 'take back control'; principally of their borders, their laws and their money. While the first of these relates principally to concerns about immigration, the second and third imply a sense that the UK was in some way in thrall to the EU: subject to its 'diktats' and picking up the tab for its seemingly unnecessary and often incomprehensible projects. This implies a particular kind of relationship *between* the UK and the EU: that the UK is both alienated from the EU (exercising no influence over its activities) and subservient to it. These tropes appeared frequently throughout the referendum campaign, which is stood out less for the novelty of the arguments made than for the extreme poverty of the political discourse on both sides of the debate. Whilst informed voices on the myriad consequences of Brexit were there to be heard they remained on the periphery of much of the debate, while the mainstream

coverage in the print and television media was characterised by almost a complete absence of evidence informed discussion the choices facing the UK politically and economically, and a highly reductionist understanding of the political issues at play. For example, there was complete failure to engage seriously with the issue of the Northern Ireland border, which even the official pamphlet posted to every household in the UK setting out the Government's position on Brexit omitted to mention. On social media, meanwhile, the parameters of the debate appear and have become the focus of intense scrutiny since the referendum debate as wider concerns emerge about the implications of online activity for our political culture and the responsibility of companies such as Facebook to guard our personal data and police content published on their forums.

What characterised the referendum debate instead was the extent to which it focussed on emotion. Tellingly, one of the most widely noted soundbites from the campaign suggested that – according to Joint Chairman of the Vote Leave Campaign, Michael Gove – people had ‘had enough of experts.’ This was widely interpreted as a rejection of the political-economic establishment in the UK, Europe and beyond, which had uniformly predicted dire and immediate economic consequences for the UK should it vote to leave the EU. On one level this can be written off as a rejection of economics as the ‘dismal science’ which speculates about the future but whose projections are often wrong, and a cynicism towards the self-interestedness of those making these arguments whose interests – as opposed to those of ‘the people’ – would be served by remaining in the EU. Yet this is only half the story. Gove’s aphorism reveals something more fundamental about the referendum debate, about UK political discourse and perhaps about politics more widely. The debate about the EU is one which is conducted almost entirely in terms of emotion. Whilst Gove was widely pilloried for his intervention, it (perhaps inadvertently) revealed important insights into the nature of debate; insights which alluded commentators certain in advance of the event that the UK would vote to remain and those who have struggled to make sense of the result since, namely that politics is not merely about the rational allocation of resources but about something more visceral and emotive, and that peoples’ votes would be decided in the referendum on this basis. Familiarity with the ‘leave’ and ‘remain’ campaigns suggest that the former understood this better than the latter. The fact that the remain campaign allowed itself to be labelled ‘project fear’ by a political project tugging at the most basic insecurities of its voters is highly revealing. Leave campaigners dismissed the waves of economic data produced to support a remain vote as scaremongering, whilst using highly

inflammatory imagery around immigration and associations with the National Health Service – perhaps the most emotive of all British Political debates – to counter this.

That emotion and affect are key aspects of political debate is true not just of the UK, but of politics in general, and it is beyond the scope of the current paper to identify whether this is more true of the UK than other polities. Yet it has been widely observed in the aftermath of the referendum that the structure of political discourse in the UK emphasises personality and drama over facts and issues; and seeks to promote conflict and contestation (in the pursuit of ‘balance’ between the ‘two sides’ of the argument) versus political consensus about the optimum outcomes. To some extent this reflects deeper aspects of the UK’s political culture (e.g. the adversarial nature of the UK Parliamentary politics), and is symptomatic of wider blurring of the lines between information and entertainment in news media globally.

The question also arises whether the EU referendum debate was particularly amenable to this emotive form politics? The debate is perhaps the archetypal example of this shift towards emotive discourse and false equivalence in place of critical debate. This is because it deals with fundamental concerns about the state of the UK (in both sense of the word). That is to say existential questions about what the UK is and where its future lies. As Yannis Stavrakakis comments ‘[n]ationalism works through people’s hearts, nerves and gut’ (Stavrakakis, 2005: 76). As such, the EU debate touches on issues in which the emotive, affective aspects of politics is projects more obviously to the fore.

The Brexit vote occurred in a discursive environment which is overwhelmingly hostile towards the EU (Anderson and Weymouth 1999, Ichijo 2002, Geddes 2004, Hawkins 2012; Daddow 2012; 2013; 2015; Gifford 2014). The British media, and the British press in particular, are dominated by a Eurosceptic discourse, which emphasises the UK’s separation and heterogeneity from the rest of the EU (Hawkins 2012). Through the application of post-structuralist discourse theory, the paper examines how these Eurosceptic discourses, are sustained and reproduced and the affective power they exercise amongst the British population. Post-structuralist policy analysis – drawing on the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (Lacan 1996) – offers a conceptual toolkit which can be deployed to understand the structure, longevity and affective power of the predominant Eurosceptic discourses, which provide the backdrop to the referendum decision (Howarth and Griggs 2012). The article draws on a case study of the

treaty revision process, which culminated in the entry into force of the *Treaty of Lisbon* in January 2009 in the British print media. In so doing, it builds on the emerging literature on discourse theory and critical media politics (see Dahlberg and Phelan 2011). Whilst the clearest articulation of the Eurosceptic discourse can be found in the right-wing press, it dictates the terms in which the EU is discussed in other sections of the media and in elite political discourse (Hawkins 2012, see also Daddow 2013).

Within the predominant Eurosceptic discourse in British media debates, the UK is presented as being external to, rather than part of, the EU. Indeed, there is seen to be a fundamental heterogeneity between the UK and the EU. The EU operates a hostile 'other' against which the UK is defined. In this account, the EU is something which is 'done to' the UK, and is a threat to its interests and independence which must be guarded against. Alternative, pro-European discourses are marginalised in media debates and are largely reactive to an agenda set by the Eurosceptics. The critical logics framework employed in the book (Glynos and Howarth 2007) demonstrates how media discourses provide the prism through which the EU is seen and understood in the UK, and the affective 'hold' it is able to maintain over British citizens (Hawkins 2014; see also Stavrakakis 2005). Consequently, it provides key insights into the enduring and powerful nature of British Euroscepticism, which is leading the UK out of the EU.

Explaining Brexit

The decision by former Prime Minister, David Cameron, to hold a referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, and the subsequent vote for 'leave,' represents the culmination of the slowly shifting, and increasingly hostile, terrain on which British debates surrounding the EU have been conducted since at least the negotiation of the Treaty on European Union, culminating in 1992. The European integration project had proceeded against the background of enduringly low levels of popular support for the EU amongst the British people (Diez-Medrano 2003, Geddes 2004, Eurobarometer 2007, Eurobarometer 2013, Gifford 2014). The referendum was designed to assuage Eurosceptic backbench MPs and others in the Conservative Party, who had engaged in a decades-long campaign to agitate against the UK's EU membership and to seek a referendum, on its departure. Even more moderate Conservatives saw their failure to win an outright majority at the 2010 election, and the rising popularity of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), as a result Mr

Cameron's failure to take a more robust stance on core Conservative policy issues, including the EU. Cameron's decision to hold the referendum can be seen as the most robust in a long line of attempts by UK Prime Ministers to demonstrate their Eurosceptic credentials to what they perceive as a Eurosceptic audience in their political party and the wider country (see Daddow 2013; 2015). The emergence of UKIP as a dislocatory force in British politics is indicative of a wider trend in European politics: the increasing popularity of right-wing populist parties critical of the EU (see Wodak et al. 2013; Clarke et al 2017).

The referendum campaign became a lightning rod for broader social and political discontentment and, as in all referendums, voters were motivated by a range of issues which became subsumed under, or conflated with, the by economic dislocation and a broader rejection of the political culture and the political elite which dominate this. Yet the fact it was the EU, which became the touchstone for these issues and the receptacle for this discontent is indicative of the symbolic position the EU has come to play in British political discourse.

The focus of voter rebellion on the referendum may reflect in part the consequences of the UK's 'first past the post' electoral system and the broad 'coalition' this leads to, leaving voters with a choice between two parties of government (Aspinwall 2004). Despite the fabled ability to 'kick the rascals out' which is cited as a strength of the system (and, as will be argued below, the absence of which in the more complex EU system contributed to many Britons' incomprehension at EU politics), it largely excludes small parties from government, rare examples of coalition government, as between 2010-2015, notwithstanding. Higher levels of turnout (72%) than in recent general elections (66.1% 2015; turnout last reaching 71% in 1997) is testament to the power of the referendum to engage politically disconnected voters by offering the prospect of genuine change against the will of the 'establishment'. Yet if frustration with the unresponsive nature of the political system, and thus the political class, were the root cause of the discontentment which drove the Brexit vote, the overwhelming rejection of electoral reform in a referendum in 2011 (by 67.9% to 32.1%).

Alongside the political dislocation argument, economic dislocation was also cited as a key explanatory variable for the referendum result. Areas in the north of England and the midlands which had previously been reliant on manufacturing and heavy industry, and which had suffered significant economic downturns since the entry of China into the global economy in the 1980's, voted overwhelmingly in favour of leaving the EU (Hobolt 2016;

Zhang 2017). Assuming that economic factors drove the decisions by voters in these areas, it is noteworthy that EU membership is identified as a cause for the widespread outsourcing of the industries, which were once at the heart of these communities. In this account, the EU becomes synonymous with globalization more generally and the vote to leave can be seen not just a rejection of European integration, but its wider integration in to the global economy. The call to withdraw from the EU is thus a call to insulate the UK from the effects of its exposure to global economic competition. Again, it is noteworthy that the EU is seen as complicit in these processes and a barrier to the UK changing course. An alternative narrative would emphasise the commonalities of the European social and economic model across member-states and the vital importance of the EU in maintaining elements of 'social Europe,' while the ability of the EU to bargain collectively in global forums allows member-states to influence the contours of the global economy in mutually beneficial ways.

Allied to concerns about economic globalization, it is undeniable that immigration played a vital, perhaps definitive role in the EU referendum debates. The effect of immigration on voting in the referendum is extremely complex and widely contested. For example, areas of the UK with the highest levels of both intra-EU and external migration – cities such as London and Manchester – voted overwhelmingly to remain within the EU. Conversely, area of the UK with much lower levels of ethnic diversity and fewer non-UK born inhabitants voted in significant volumes for Brexit. Other evidence suggests that areas which had comparatively low levels of aggregate immigration, but which had experienced rapid changes in levels of migration, due in many instances to the arrival of EU citizens from the Central and Eastern European states which joined the EU in 2004 voted leave. As such, there appears to be correlation between rapid demographic change and support for Brexit, with voters correctly attributing this to developments in the EU. However, the significance of migration in the EU referendum debate extends beyond people's lived reality. Perhaps more important than empirical changes voters may witnessed in the local communities or the wider country, was the perception of migration, and whether migration was perceived as being positive or negative and whether rates of migration were seen as being acceptable or too high, with the EU being identified as a proxy for migration levels because of its association with free movement.

Whilst concerns about migration existed also amongst sections of remain voters, there is a strong correlation between concerns about migration and propensity to vote leave (Clarke et al. 2017). As such, it was beliefs about immigration, rather than immigration as an empirical phenomenon that appears to be the key factor in explaining the referendum

outcome. In addition to the fact that the majority of net migration emanates from outside the EU, it appears that the question of EU membership became conflated with factors beyond the actual remit of EU membership. This is evident in some of the main tropes of the leave campaign. The notorious poster campaign, depicting trails of migrants apparently on foot towards the UK through Europe, unveiled by the Leave.Eu campaign group on the morning Labour MP Jo Cox was murdered, associated EU membership with the arrival not just of EU citizens but with migrants from outside the EU. This was replicated on vote leave leaflets which explicitly associated the EU with arrivals from Syria and beyond via Turkey.

Concerns about the prospect of Turkey joining the EU propagated by the leave campaigns – over which the UK Government as an EU member-state exercised a veto; but on leaving the EU would be unable to prevent – demonstrates the low levels of understanding of how the EU works and how its policies affect the UK, not just amongst the general population but amongst many of those making these arguments most vehemently. Similarly, the responsibility for migration policy in the UK remains largely the responsibility of the UK government given the general balance of competences between the UK and its member-states, and the additional opt outs secured by the UK government in this area under the Lisbon Treaty. Completely absent from the referendum debate was any consideration of the more than two million UK citizens estimated to be permanent residents in other EU member states. Whilst confined to the margins of much debate about the Brexit referendum, the failure to even recognise these ‘expats’ as migrants (let alone to take into account their interests) reflects the post-imperial nationalism which frames much political discourse in the UK, on the EU and more generally, and which will be discussed below. Whilst purely anecdotal, news agencies reported countless stories of ‘Brits abroad’ supporting Brexit and, with no small degree of irony, citing ‘immigration’ as the reason for their decision. The role of immigration in the Brexit vote was thus highly complex with EU becoming a focus for a collection of related and overlapping concerns and beliefs about the UK, and the changing nature of British society.

The question this paper seeks to ask is how the EU specifically became the focus of this more general discontentment and concern amongst significant sections of the UK electorate. The argument developed here is that the EU became the rock on which wider dissatisfactions with the political establishment, with economy (particularly the post-2008 austerity programme) and with immigration became anchored. This was possible because of an underlying alienation from and hostility towards the EU as a political entity and widespread ignorance about the workings of the EU, the role of UK in the European

integration project and the effects of EU membership on the UK. In discourse theoretical terms, the EU functioned as an 'empty signifier' which operated as a 'surface of inscription' for various disparate political complaints and objectives (see Howarth 2000).

In British political discourse, the EU is the hostile 'other' against which the UK is defined and which is easily portrayed as the malevolent force behind the current political and economic difficulties facing both the country and individual citizens. The remainder of this paper examines the structure and contours of the predominant Eurosceptic discourses through a detailed analysis of the coverage of the debates surrounding the Lisbon Treaty in a representative cross section of the British print media (in terms of circulation, political alignment and genre). This demonstrates the long standing and consistent nature of Eurosceptic discourses, which facilitated the campaign for a referendum on EU membership to be held and a 'leave' vote to be delivered. The 'leave' vote can thus be seen as the logical consequence of a deep seated and enduring antipathy to the EU expressed by large parts of the British population. This embedded Euroscepticism was incubated in a discursive environment dominated by a vehemently Eurosceptic press that both shapes and reflects the terms of wider public debates about the UK's position within the EU.

The Wider Research Context

Previous studies have found that attitudes towards the EU are intimately tied to political identities, with Eurosceptic sentiments closely correlated with exclusively national identities, which eschew any identification with 'Europe' (Hooghe and Marks, 2009; Wellings 2012). Eurobarometer surveys consistently find that British citizens exhibit both high levels of opposition to European integration and exclusively national identities (see Eurobarometer 2007; 2015). That so few Britons identified as being 'European' in any form at all is key to understanding the enduring antipathy towards the EU in the UK. This in turn is linked to the form and content of political discourses on the EU. This separation between the idea of being British and European reflects exactly the structure of Eurosceptic discourses which create a fundamental separation between the UK and the EU.

The paper thus aims to build on recent scholarship about English - or Anglo-British (Wellings 2002; Vines 2015) - identity and Euroscepticism (Wellings 2010, 2012; 2015; Wellings and Power 2016; Wellings and Vines 2016; Wellings and Baxendale 2015; Vines 2014; Usherwood, S. & Startin, N. 2012; Usherwood 2015; 2016; Gifford 2014). The analysis

below will highlight the way in which specific ideas of Anglo- British national identity are reproduced in Eurosceptic discourses and, through the application of the concept of fantasmatic logics, imbued with significant affective power, which explains both their longevity and political force. Second, the analysis of UK media coverage of the EU and its connection with anti-EU sentiments in the UK also builds on recent scholarship in this area (for an overview see Hawkins 2012; 2014; see also Daddow 2012; 2015; Startin 2015). Third, the relevance of the UK case will be discussed in the context of the emerging trend towards nationalist populism and rising Euroscepticism across Europe and beyond (Ignazi 2006; Mudde 2007; Wodak et al 2013). Finally, the book will reflect critically on the application of the critical logics approach to the specific issues it examines and the implications this has for the further refinement and application of this approach.

Important insights for the study of British Euroscepticism can also be drawn from studies of right-wing populism in Europe since the 1990s (see Wodak et al. 2013, Bustikova 2009, Mudde 2009, 2007, Hainsworth 2008, Bar-on 2008, Ignazi 2006, Betz 1994). At the same time, the application of the critical logics approach to the study of British Euroscepticism highlights the potential insights which may be gained from this approach to studying analogous political movements elsewhere.

Recent studies identify common structures and tropes in the narratives of populist movements across Europe (see Wodak et al. 2013). Right-wing populist discourses are overtly nationalist, and structured around the identification of 'outsiders' against which the national in-group is defined, and in terms of which its problems are articulated (Pelinka 2013, Wodak 2013). The national 'other' may be a foreign ethnic or religious group, or elements within the national in-group seen as working against the 'real' interests of the nation (e.g. corrupt, internationalist elites sacrificing the national interest at the altars of globalization and/or Europeanization) (Pelinka 2013, Wodak 2013). Often, both elements are present in populist discourses, with plots alleged between the nation's internal and external enemies. However, whilst there are clear resemblances between populist movements, the specific content of their discourses, for example the 'others' they identify, varies between states.

As will be argued below, British Eurosceptic discourses construct a radical separation between Britain and the EU, seen as an elitist project undermining the national interest. As such, it functions as the classic right-wing scapegoat for the ills of the nation. It is thus

possible to see British Euroscepticism as simply a local manifestation of broader political developments which have emerged as a response to the new uncertainties and socio-cultural realities in the context of globalization. However, this neglects the particularity of the British Eurosceptic discourse, and the particular role of the EU within this.

There are at least three important differences which exist between British Euroscepticism and other right-wing movements which are of crucial relevance in understanding British policy towards the EU. First, despite clear similarities with anti-EU discourses elsewhere, there is a radical separation constructed between Britain and the EU, which constructs Britain in direct opposition to the EU, which is indicative of a particularly British strand of opposition to the EU. Second, British Euroscepticism in its current form predates the populist re-emergence of the 1990s and is traceable at least to the negotiations of the British budgetary contribution which emerged in the late 1970's (see Daddow 2012; Gifford 2014; Tournier-Sol and Gifford 2015; Vines 2015). Third, British Euroscepticism is a mainstream political phenomenon, not associated with extremist parties as in many EU member-states, where the mainstream consensus is pro-European (Aspinwall 2004; Startin 2015). Outright opposition to the EU now represents the majority position within the British Conservative Party.

Logic of critical explanation

Glynos and Howarth (2007) provide those working within the field of post-structuralist discourse theory with a clear conceptual framework for the conduct of systematic empirical research into specific questions of importance to the social sciences. The logics of critical explanation they develop enable discourse theorists to describe, explain and critique the emergence, maintenance and dissolution of structures of meaning, rules and practices in the social world (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 133). Logics of critical explanation are intended to account not only for the specific characteristics of a given social order (its established norms and institutions), but for the political practices through which it emerged, is maintained and can (potentially) be dissolved and replaced by an alternative regime of practices.

The process of explanation consists in the mobilisation of three separate yet interrelated logics – social logics, political logics and fantasmatic logics – which build on and supplement the conceptual architecture developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Social

logics are concerned with the rules of formation of a specific social structure or discursive formation, and allow us to describe its internal architecture. Laclau (2000: 76) refers to social logics as a 'grammar' or 'cluster of rules' which govern the emergence of identities within an order of discourse. It is, therefore, useful to think of social logics as 'the rules of the game' which exist within any sedimented social structure and dictate the relationship between specific identity positions within it.

If social logics refer to the internal structure of a discursive formation, political logics refer to the practices involved in the 'constitution, contestation and sedimentation' of a particular discursive formation (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 142). The concept of articulation is of crucial importance to understanding the function of political logics. Articulation is the process by which the meanings of social elements are temporarily fixed in relation to one other within specific discursive formations. Political logics account for the way in which a particular articulation of the social is able to achieve and maintain hegemony. Alternatively, they can be employed to explain how existing, sedimented discourses may be challenged by rival discursive projects, bringing about a dislocation in the hegemonic discourse and a rearticulation of existing social relations.

Glynos and Howarth (2007: 141-5) identify the logics of equivalence and difference developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985) as political logics in that they describe the processes of association and differentiation through which political contestation takes place. Political movements seek to achieve hegemony through the construction of equivalential chains structured around central nodal points which offer a surface of inscription for different social demands (Laclau and Mouffe 1985; Laclau 2005). Together the logics of equivalence and difference enable us to examine and explain the process through which rival political projects construct competing social objectivities.

In order to fully explain any given issue, consideration must be given to the fantasmatic support structures which underlie existing social structures or the emerging discursive projects which challenge the status quo (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 145). Fantasmatic logics explain why a particular, hegemonic articulation of the social is able to maintain its 'grip' over the subjects (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 145). They explain the ability (or inability) of a particular discursive formation to attain pre-eminence, or to resist change, by successfully interpellating subjects within that discourse and maintaining its hold on their

loyalty (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 145). Eleveld (2012) has highlights how the entry of new signifiers into the policy lexicon arouses 'surprise' and 'excitement,' and leads to an affective investment in the newly coined terms.

Glynos and Howarth (2007: 147) identify two principal forms of narrative in which the ideological and affective functions of fantasy are played out, which they term the 'beatific' and the 'horrific' dimensions of fantasy. The former is structured around the idea of 'a fullness-to-come' once a specific obstacle to this fullness is overcome; the latter, meanwhile, tells of the impending disaster which will prevail if the obstacle in question is not surmounted (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 147). Whilst the specific beatific and horrific aspects of fantasy may take various forms in different contexts, they are often associated with images of 'omnipotence or of total control' in the case of beatific narratives or of 'impotence and victimhood' in the case of horrific narratives (Glynos and Howarth, 2007: 147). As will be argued below, the Eurosceptic discourse is characterised by precisely these fantasmatic constructions of the EU and the threat it poses to the UK.

Methodology

In keeping with the underlying ontological assumptions of discourse theory, there is no single, prescriptive methodological approach for conducting discourse theoretically informed research. Instead, there are a number of principles and guidelines which have been identified by scholars which should guide the conduct of discourse theoretically research (Glynos and Howarth 2007, Howarth 2000). Many studies draw on discourse analysis methodologies developed in related fields such as critical discourse analysis (see Phillips and Jorgensen 2002). These insights informed the qualitative discourse analysis conducted of British newspaper coverage of the negotiations surrounding the *Treaty of Lisbon*. It examines the social, political and fantasmatic logics underpinning constructions of relationship between Britain and the EU. Whilst other forms of media (e.g. television news coverage) would have provided an interesting case study there are several reasons for focusing on newspapers here. Newspapers offer a clear expression of a range of positions on the EU in sufficient detail to examine the key characters of the emerging discourses. Furthermore, written texts are readily amenable to discourse analysis (Taylor 2001; Jorgenson and Phillips 2002).

In addition to practical considerations, the print media continue to be of enormous significance both politically and within broader societal debates. In the UK both politicians

and other forms of media often respond to a news agenda driven forwards by the national press. Nowhere is the agenda setting role of the press more obvious than on the issue of the EU. For example, it was widely rumoured that the decision by Tony Blair to hold a referendum on the forerunner to the Lisbon Treaty, the *Treaty Establishing and Constitution for Europe*, resulted from fears about the adverse reaction to support for the treaty from *The Sun* and *The Times* (Watt 2004).

The focus of the study is limited to the English editions of national daily and Sunday newspapers. However, it analyses the full spectrum of newspapers genre (tabloid, mid-range and broadsheet) and political alignment (left v right wing). In order to control the volume of articles generated, only the highest selling title in each section of the market was selected for analysis (see Table 1). Since there was no suitable mid-range, left-of-centre publication available for analysis, five daily newspapers were included in the study: *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Daily Mail*, *The Sun* and *The Daily Mirror* along with their Sunday equivalents.¹ Whilst this may bias the selection of articles towards the right, it reflects the skewed nature of the British press in terms of both the number of titles published and their circulation.

Table1: The Structure of the British Press

	Left	Right
Quality	<i>The Guardian</i> (364,513) <i>The Independent</i> (240,134)	<i>The Daily Telegraph</i> (882,413) <i>The Times</i> (642,895)
Mid		<i>The Daily Mail</i> (2,353,807) <i>The Daily Express</i> (789,867)
Tabloid	<i>The Daily Mirror</i> (1,525,477)	<i>The Sun</i> (3,126,866) [<i>The Daily Star</i> (771,197)

Source: *Guardian* (2009).

Articles were collected from the Lexis-Nexis database for a period of one month around key events in the treaty negotiation process using the following keyword search:

¹ From here on, I shall not distinguish between daily and Sunday newspapers. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, references to daily titles refer also to their Sunday equivalents.

European Constitution or *EU Constitution* or *EU Treaty* or *Reform Treaty*. The articles returned were reviewed for relevance and those articles which did not explicitly focus on the EU treaty reform process were discarded. All types of article were included, but letters to the editor were not. This process yielded a total of 1346 articles which were then coded thematically (see Table 2).

Table 2: *The Number of Articles Collected by Publication*

Newspaper	No of Articles Examined
<i>The SUN/ NOTW</i>	295
<i>Daily/ Sunday Mail</i>	288
<i>Daily/ Sunday Telegraph</i>	393
<i>Daily/ Sunday Mirror</i>	87
<i>The Guardian/ Observer</i>	283
Total	1346

Included articles were first read in their entirety and the key themes which emerged from them were recorded. These provided the codes used to analyse the content of the articles systematically and the second reading. Finally, the coded material was analysed through the lens of critical logics approach to identify the social, political and fantasmatic dimensions of the predominant Eurosceptic discourse, and its wider impact on policy debates around the EU. The articles referenced here are given as examples of the themes identified and are thus representative of wider trends within the corpus of texts examined.²

The British Eurosceptic discourse

The Eurosceptic discourse presents an account of British national identity, defined in direct opposition to the EU. The radical heterogeneity constructed between the UK and the EU sees the latter positioned not just as the ‘other’ against which the UK is defined but as a hostile ‘other’ against which the UK must defend itself (see Hawkins 2012). The construction of Britishness depends on the simultaneous production of the EU and its principal member-states (i.e. France and Germany) as fantasy objects which pose an existential threat to Britain. It is this fantasmatic dimension of the discourse which explains its ability to capture the imagination and direct the attitudes of significant parts of the population. The sections

² For a more detailed explanation of the methodology and for additional empirical examples from the articles examined see Present Author (2010) [anonymized to facilitate peer review].

below analyse the different dimensions of this discourse through the lens of social, political and fantasmatic logics. Whilst the analysis focusses on overtly Eurosceptic discourses found principally in the right wing press, its significance extends beyond that. It structures the wider political discourse shaping that way in which even pro-European voices engage with the topic, the language they use and the arguments they are able to make. The analysis in this section draws extensively on analysis of the Eurosceptic discourse found in Hawkins (2014).

Social logics

The Eurosceptic discourse can be characterised by an underlying logic of nationalism which underpins the various political and fantasmatic components of that discourse. The nation is taken to be the primary and necessary form of political community and the nation-state the only legitimate unit of social and political organisation. Any form of political institution at either the sub-national or, in the case of the EU, the supra-national level is seen to run counter to the natural order. Whereas the nation-state is an organic form of political community, the EU is seen as an artificial invention. Thus, whilst democracy can exist at the national level, it is impossible at the supra-national level, because it is only the nation which can provide the collective bonds of shared community which are the pre-requisites for democratic government. As Conservative MEP Daniel Hannan (2004) argues European democracy fails because there is no European 'demos', just the 'kratos' of the ruling elite. Elsewhere, he describes the EU not just as undemocratic, but as 'anti-democratic' since (he claims) it is run by a narrow elite against the interests of those they govern (see Hannan 2005).

In this perspective, the nation-state which provides the conceptual lens through which the EU is viewed within the Eurosceptic discourse. The EU is presented either as an *international bargaining forum* made up of sovereign nation-states, or as an *emergent super-state* itself. Neither of these accounts is, however, able to capture the complex and multifaceted collection of institutions, policies and governance mechanism that make up the EU.

The construction of the EU as an international bargaining forum sees rival member-states competing against one another to maximise the benefits they receive from the EU in a zero-sum game. This is often described using the metaphors of sport and war and places the UK's interests in opposition to those of other member states, particularly France and

Germany. Absent is any sense of mutual gain, or collective political purpose. The role of government ministers is, therefore, to 'defend the national interest,' which is synonymous with resisting any collective European action, not seeking compromise to find solutions to common problems. Meanwhile, the EU *qua* emerging super-state is seen to reduce member-states to mere provinces of a single political entity. In this guise the EU depicted as a (hostile) foreign power with which the UK is engaged in bilateral relationship, as with states. As such, the UK is depicted as an entirely separate entity from the EU rather than an integral part of a political Union. EU politics, seen through this prism, is reduced to a contest between member-states for power and influence or a battle for survival for the nation itself. What results is an impoverished conception of the EU, which precludes any meaningful discussion of the UK's position within it and the benefits, which may derived from EU membership for different groups in society.

Political logics

The logics of equivalence and difference are essential to understanding the construction of Britain and the EU within the Eurosceptic discourse. Both the depiction of the EU as a bargaining forum and as an emerging super-state rely on the construction of equivalential ties between certain actors which position them collectively in opposition to the UK. The former positions the UK's interests in opposition not to individual states – in a war of all against all in the Council – but to a hostile coalition of member-states, led by France and Germany, whose interests are identical, or reducible to the Franco-German consensus. An equivalential chain emerges in which the common interests of these states are privileged over the differences which may exists between them, to the extent that the latter become invisible. What binds this equivalential chain together is their common heterogeneity from the UK. The idea of a 'core' set of EU member-states – from which the UK is excluded – emerges as a key element of the Eurosceptic discourse.³

The construction of the EU as an emerging super-state depends also on the logics of equivalence and difference. It relies on the construction of the EU as a unitary, internally homogenous actor, from which the UK is radically heterogeneous. As Laclau (2005) has argued, the act of naming plays a crucial role in the emergence of an equivalential chain. Thus the metonymic representation of the EU as 'Brussels' and 'Europe' facilitate the construction of an equivalence between the different aspects of the EU machinery,

³ The references to the 'core' and 'periphery' of the EU are at times replaced with the terms 'old' and 'new' Europe.

positioning them in opposition to the UK. The separation which exists between Britain and the EU is evident in the repeated references made to the relationship *between* Britain and the EU and Britain's relationship *with* Europe. Similarly, frequent references are made to the transfer of powers 'to the European Union' (see *Telegraph* 2006, emphasis added) and 'from Westminster to Brussels' (see Helm 2007a).

As above, the equivalential ties, which unite the disparate institutions, bodies, policies, rules and member-states which constitute 'Europe' are foregrounded at the expense of the differences which exist between them. What binds this equivalential chain together is again the shared heterogeneity to the UK. At the same time, any idea of internal heterogeneity within these equivalential chains are entirely absent from the discourse. Within the EU differences between Portugal and Finland, let alone between institutions like the Council and the Commission, or between Directorates General within the Commission are not just absent from view but resist articulation within the terms of the discourse and the ideological standpoint from which it emerges. Similarly, the UK is presented as an internally homogenous entity, defined in opposition to the EU. Internal differences, for example between the different nations, social classes or interest groups, are absent from discussion, subordinated under an opaque notion of the apparently shared national interest which must be defended against external threat.

Fantasmatic logics

Glynos and Howarth (2007: 147-8) argue that fantasmatic logics may be identified through both the form and the content of the claims made within a particular discourse. Firstly, they argue, the presence of a fantasmatic object is indicated by the resistance of a particular discourse to 'public official disclosure,' for example in official pronouncements by government and other actors. Secondly, fantasy objects can be identified through the attribution to them of contradictory and mutually exclusive characteristics. Both of these features are present in the case of Eurosceptic discourses.

Stavrakakis (2005) has highlighted that Eurosceptic discourses exhibit precisely the dichotomy between 'official' and 'unofficial' discourses, which is indicative of fantasmatic logics. Whilst official discourses may articulate Eurosceptic positions, they do so in very different terms to the 'obscene' components of Euroscepticism articulated by commentators in the tabloid press in particular. These extreme elements of the Eurosceptic discourse find

expression in the words of specific commentators and politicians, but are avoided by other more mainstream political actors. Nevertheless, as will be argued below, the official discourse is inextricably linked to the unofficial Eurosceptic discourse, with politicians drawing on elements of this in more measured terms to gain support for the policy positions they adopt. This dichotomy was seen during the EU referendum in the approaches of the official Vote Leave campaign and the more obscene discourse and imagery associated with Leave.EU and Grassroots Out (GO) movements associated with by Nigel Farage. Arguably, these two campaigns had a symbiotic relationship appealing to different demographic and different political concerns. The dichotomy between the official and obscene also breaks down in the figure of Boris Johnson who as a senior cabinet minister continually failed to eschew the tropes of the obscene, unofficial discourse.

The construction of the EU as both an international bargaining forum, and an emerging super-state attribute to the union contradictory characteristics. On the one hand, the institutions of the EU are depicted as subservient to the interests of its most powerful member-states: France and Germany. On the other hand, the EU is seen to be on an inexorable path towards statehood, subsuming member-states, which are powerless to halt its momentum.

Fantasmatic narratives are structured around ideas of repression and victimhood; they foresee the impending doom which will transpire if a certain threat is not overcome (Glynos and David Howarth 2007: 147, Stavrakakis 1999: 108-9) and/or hold out the promise of a mythical 'fullness-to-come,' currently precluded by the presence of a particular obstacle or impediment (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 147, Stavrakakis 2005: 73). Both the 'beatific' and 'horrific' dimensions of the fantasmatic narrative are present within the Eurosceptic discourse (Glynos and Howarth 2007: 147).

The claim is made repeatedly that the UK could prosper if it were able to cast off the shackles of EU membership, freeing it from the burdensome regulation. Whilst the benefits of trade with the EU were recognised, it was argued that leaving the EU would give the UK government greater control over domestic policy, and also greater influence internationally, whilst continuing to enjoy the benefits of the single market. Alongside this 'beatific' element of the Eurosceptic discourse, it is argued that the UK is the victim of a conspiracy by the EU to assume control over ever more areas of British life and government. There are constant

warnings from commentators about the impending disaster, which looms for Britain if the EU gains more power through the proposed treaty revisions. The EU is thus presented not just as a foreign power, but as an 'imperial' power which aims to undermine the UK's independence and to turn it into a mere province of a trans-European state, under centralised control from Brussels. The impression given is of a piecemeal, yet coordinated, attempt by the EU to assume control of the UK one policy at a time.

Since the European integration process is seen as a plan to undermine the UK, there is enormous emphasis placed on the maintenance of the veto within the Council of Ministers. Qualified Majority Voting (QMV) is viewed as a potential threat to the British national interest which must be curtailed wherever possible. There is no consideration of the fact that QMV may allow the UK to pass measures that are in its interest and which may otherwise be blocked.

Elsewhere, the threat to the UK is posed by France, Germany and their allies, which successfully use the EU institutions as a means for pursuing their interests. Crucially, the EU is not seen as a neutral framework managing the relations between states, but are designed to favour the interests of 'core' members at the UK's expense. Core states are able to rely on the support of the EU institutions such as the European Commission in conflicts with the UK. Within the Eurosceptic discourse, therefore, the EU is the very institutionalisation of Britain's subjugation to its historical rivals.

Both the representations of the EU as an emerging super-state and as an international forum position the UK as a victim of a plot by those across the channel to undermine her freedom and independence. This standpoint is captured by Melanie Phillips assessment of the Constitutional Treaty (Phillips 2003):

This constitution is simply nothing less than a blueprint for tyranny. It would mean the end of our independence and the tearing up of 1,000 years of history. We went to war to prevent such a calamity from engulfing our country. What Hitler failed to do, Europe is now proposing to bring about by edict - this time with the connivance of the British Government.

The motives behind the EU's desire to subsume the UK remain opaque. Little is said about the precise reasons why the European Commission or the French and German

government to want to undermine the UK's independence beyond. It is assumed to be obvious and inevitable that they. Nor is it clear why it is that the UK is singled out for this apparently unique treatment. Yet it is precisely because the motives of the European 'other' remain vague and impenetrable to us that they appear so menacing. To fully appreciate this point it is necessary to examine these narratives in terms of the Lacanian conception of fantasy.

Following Lacan, the apparent threat posed to the UK by EU within the Eurosceptic discourse, can be understood in terms of the shared national 'enjoyment' peculiar to the British. The functionaries behind the emerging EU super-state, and the governments of France and Germany, it is feared, want to steal this enjoyment. In this sense, the relationship between Britain on the one hand, and the EU on the other, has the structure of the basic racist/ nationalist fantasy outlined by Žižek (1993: 200-205). For Žižek (1993), what defines a nation is the unique way in which it organises its enjoyment (see also Bracher, 1996). Yet this national enjoyment is under constant threat from the presence of the 'other' whose aims and motivations remain hidden from us. Fear and hostility towards the 'other' results from our incomprehension about the way they organise *their* enjoyment:

We always impute to the "other" an excessive enjoyment: he wants to steal our enjoyment (by ruining our way of life) and/or he has access to some secret, perverse enjoyment. In short, what really bothers us about the "other" is the peculiar way he organises his enjoyment, precisely the surplus, the "excess" that pertains to this way: the smell of "their" food, "their" nosy songs and dances, "their" strange manners, "their" attitude to work (Žižek, 1993: 203).

The curious bemusement at the perverse enjoyment of the European other is evident at various points in the Eurosceptic discourse. Two examples demonstrate this point. Describing the proposed *Charter of Fundamental Rights* Charles Moore (2004) says that 'Everyone has a right to a "high level" of this and that – healthcare, environmental protection, ciabatta, whatever.' The reference to 'ciabatta' underlines both the apparently spurious nature of the Charter's proposed protections by associating them with the strange culinary quirks of the Europeans.

Alongside food, the strange sexual proclivities and attitudes to work underline the heterogeneity of the UK and the EU. Discussing guidelines circulated to Commission officials about the installation of a new sauna in the Berlaymont building, Justin Stares (2005) contrasts the alien sexual mores (enforced nudity in a mixed setting) and their officious enforcement of the rules (the comprehensive list of dos and don'ts) with the implied laziness of the Commission staff (encouraged to sweat for an hour and a half). In the guideline, competition – seen as an archetypally British value eschewed by the EU's protectionists – is discouraged. As such, it reinforces both the fundamental heterogeneity of the European and the British moral codes and imbues this separation with the power of fantasmatic representations of the other's strange enjoyment.

Fantasmatic logics are crucial in understanding the power and durability of Eurosceptic discourses via the perceived threat to the national in-group. By standing as an impediment to the full realisation of the British national mission, the EU functions as a barrier to a stable and fully constituted social order, which we are kept from realising by this by the malevolent forces of a hostile foreign power.

The political implications of the Eurosceptic discourse are clear, when viewed through the lens of social, political and fantasmatic logics. The privileging of the nation as a political community, the construction of the EU as a radical other against which the UK is defined, and the overwhelming focus on defending the national interest preclude attempts to structure debates around the normative and political substance of the issues at hand. The impoverished and depoliticised conception of a supposedly objective national interest closes off the space for class or gender based analyses of policy debates. Fantasmatic logics account for the affective power of these discourses, masking over the contingent and contestable nature of the social order it constitutes. The ideological dimension of the Eurosceptic discourse functions in ways analogous to other policy discourses analysed using the critical logics approach (see Clark 2011).

From a discourse theoretical perspective the idea of a national interest can be seen as the projection of certain particular interests to a position of hegemony in which they are taken represent the interests of the collective. This implies the marginalisation of the politically least empowered sectors of society, whose interests may instead be served by recasting policy debates in terms of the economic, redistributive and social impact of

proposed policies for different sections of society. Viewed in this way, complaints that EU social regulation is undermining the competitiveness of the British economy may lead to a more critical debate about which groups in society are the beneficiaries of greater labour market flexibility and great social protection. In revealing the ideological nature of Eurosceptic discourse, this article opens up the ethical space for a radical re-articulation of Britain's relationship with the EU, and the wider social relations which are maintained through the current discourses.

Conclusion

The 2016 referendum result emerged from a discursive environment, structured by a hegemonic Eurosceptic discourse. The logics of critical explanation developed by Glynn and Howarth (2007) provide a conceptual toolkit with which to analyse the structure and force of that discourse. The ability of the critical logics framework not just to describe, but to explain and critique Eurosceptic discourses, moves us beyond the insights derived from existing studies of British media discourses on the EU (Anderson and Weymouth 1999, Ichijo 2002, Hawkins 2012, Daddow 2012, Hawkins 2014) and wider studies of Anglo British nationalism and Euroscepticism (Gifford 2014; Usherwood 2015; 2016; Vasilopoulou 2016; Vines 2014; 2015; Wellings 2015; 2016)

Social and political logics enable us to understand the principal assumptions and political cleavages which are constructed within this discourse, whilst the concept of fantasy is able to account for the affective hold which these discourses are able to generate and maintain over the subjects interpellated into that discourse. Revealing the contingent nature of the discourse, through this analysis, opens up the possibility of a radical re-articulation of the relationship between Britain and the EU. Fantasmatic logics meanwhile account for the affective power of these discourses and the hold which these are able to exercise over citizens.

Analysis of the EU treaty reform process which culminate with the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon enables us to place the Brexit decision in its longer terms historical context. The tropes of separation and threat which permeate the Eurosceptic discourse came to structure the wider discursive context in which public opinion is formed and government policy is developed. Whilst there were also proximate procedural (i.e. the timing of the vote) and political (i.e. economic consequences of austerity and concerns about immigration)

variables which impacted in the referendum result, it is impossible to understand how the EU became the surface of inscription for these wider political grievances without understanding the way in which the relationship between Britain and the EU is depicted and the assumptions about both the UK and the EU which underpin these representations.

The emergence of the Eurosceptic discourse as the predominant account of the politics of European integrations in the UK outlined above occurred over a period of decades, fuelled by political sponsored of that discourse in parliament and beyond and finding a ready outlet in the UK print media and other forums, most latterly social media. The mark of its success is perhaps most obvious in the extent to which success even pro-European voices adopted the language and assumptions of the Eurosceptic discourse perhaps as the only way to get purchase in debates or be admitted as legitimate participants in those conversations. Political leaders too sought to appease the Eurosceptics, sensing that their views were echoed more widely in the population or articulated more vociferously the milder sceptic tendencies amongst the population that made them soft leavers. At the same time the EU seemed an issue that was likely to remain latent. Soft leavers were felt to j=be just that; unlikely to agitate for change ranking issues such as the economy, health case and immigration above this. To that extent the pro-European voices in the UK are guilty of complacency and a dereliction of responsibility to challenge and common assumptions about the EU; to present an alternative pro-European narrative; and to explain what the EU does and what its consequences for the UK are. Instead, in the vacuum left by pre-European and in an environment dominated by the assumptions of the Eurosceptic discourse, the EU was able to become the receptacle for various disparate grievances associated with globalization, demographic change and the fallout from the financial crisis. With no small amount of irony, it is only since the referendum result that pro-Europeans have become to assertively and pro-actively argue for the benefits of the UK's positon in the EU in ways analogous to the Eurosceptics. It is impossible to know whether a fundamental re-articulation of the political discourses surrounding the EU would have been possible without a dislocatory moment of crisis such as the referendum result, and it is now a moot point. What is certain is that the fallout from the referendum offers the opportunity for a fundamental for a new discourse about the UK and its place in Europe and the wider world to emerge which captures the internationalism, solidarity and commitment to a rules based order symbolised by the EU, whether this will lead to the UK remaining in the EU or another forma of relationship between the EU.

This paper is a work in progress and summarised the development to date of wider project to link longer term analysis of Eurosceptic discourses to the Brexit decision. The next step in the process is to map how these established tropes from the Eurosceptic discourses translated into the shorter term debates in the lead-up to the referendum and the political deliberations which have followed that result about the specific form which the UK's future relationship with the EU should take.

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