



**Universiteit Utrecht**

**“Between head and hearts: Postcolonialism, emotions and  
Brexit”**

“To what extent was the use of postcolonial misconceptions, imperial nostalgia and appeals to emotions present in the campaign strategy and tactics of the Leave side during the United Kingdom European Union membership Referendum (20th February 2016- 30th June 2016)?”.

*Thesis for the International Relations in Historical Perspective Master’s*

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## **Abstract**

On 23rd June 2016, the British public voted in favour of leaving the European Union (EU) following its 47 year long membership of the political and economic union. The result of the referendum shocked the international community, left uncertainty surrounding the future of European integration and has since resulted in the emergence of a great deal of literature committed to analysing the outcome of the referendum. Historically, EU referendums and their results have been a way of examining citizen voting behaviour in which political scientists analyse the result of the referendum in order to determine if public opinion on the current government or the EU had an effect on voting thus placing emphasis and attention on the referendum outcome itself. However, in recent years attention has shifted towards the campaign that precedes the referendum to understand voting behaviour by analysing the output and strategies of the respective campaigns and how they frame the narrative of the referendum topic in order to convince the voter to vote a certain way. Thus, this research explores the campaign output and strategy of the Leave Side and their use of postcolonial misconceptions and imperial nostalgia in order to make specific emotional appeals to their voters.

In this context, it asks the following research question: To what extent was the use of postcolonial misconceptions, imperial nostalgia and appeals to emotions present in the campaign strategy and tactics of the Leave side during the United Kingdom European Union membership Referendum (20th February 2016- 30th June 2016)? This research answers the question by making use of several relevant analytical concepts including the ‘emotional turn’ in politics, the centrality of euroscepticism and exceptionalism to British politics and postcolonial Britain which together form the analytical framework central to this research. The content analysis is accomplished by making use of and consulting a variety of sources that illustrate a broad picture during the given timeframe of the output of the Leave side including campaign posters, key speeches, statements, newspaper articles and op-eds in order to answer the research questions. While a great deal of academic research exists on the traces of the Empire on the Eurosceptic arguments that underpin discourses opposing EU integration, the emotionality of such a framework remains largely underdeveloped. This thesis aims to challenge this emotional absence by examining the prevalence of imperial nostalgia and postcolonial remains in the campaign material of the Leave Side during the 2016 EU referendum in an effort to appeal to the emotions of the voters and thus contribute to the ‘emotional turn’ in international relations.

*Key Words: postcolonialism; Brexit; emotions in politics; nostalgia; European Integration*

## **Abbreviations**

**EC** European Community

**EU** European Union

**IR** International Relations

**NHS** The National Health Service

**UKIP** The United Kingdom Independence Party

## Introduction

Britain and the European Union (EU) have always shared a troubled relationship. It is no coincidence that Britain has been known as the ‘awkward partner’ in the European sphere.<sup>1</sup> Following a referendum on the 23rd June 2016 in which 51.89 per cent voted in favour of leaving the EU, its relationship was changed forever. Succeeding this referendum, Britain entered into three year long negotiations which would eventually lead to its official withdrawal from the common market in January 2020. The campaign that preceded the referendum consisted of two sides, ‘Britain Stronger in Europe’ (the group campaigning for the United Kingdom to remain in the otherwise known as vote remain) and ‘Vote Leave’ (the group campaigning for the UK to leave the EU). The remain side was supported by then prime Minister David Cameron, domestic parties such as Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Scottish National Party, while the leave side was endorsed by conservative MPs Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and political parties such as the UK Independence Party (UKIP). While the official campaign advocating for the British exit from the EU, ‘Vote Leave’ actively distanced themselves from the campaigns spearheaded by Nigel Farage and Leave.EU, this thesis has chosen to combine the campaign activities of all those campaigning to leave under the umbrella term the ‘Leave Side’ and Brexiteers as it was figures such as Farage who was among the most conspicuous pro-Brexit campaigners in the referendum and it was not until 13th April 2016 that the Electoral Commission selected ‘Vote Leave’ as the official campaign in favour of Britain’s exit from the European Union in the Referendum.<sup>2</sup>

In the case of Brexit, the referendum was an outlier in terms of the history of European Integration from the very outset. Traditionally referenda are chances for voters to have their say on whether they want to join a political or economic project. This was not the case with the landmark referendum. For the first time in the history of European Integration, voters were given the choice to leave the EU project and thus the British public were essentially asked if they would like to go back to the past, a past in which they were no longer members of the European project.<sup>3</sup> The tactics of the two campaign

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<sup>1</sup> Anan Menon and John-Paul Salter, ‘Brexit: Initial Reflections’, *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 92, no. 6 (2016), p.1298.

<sup>2</sup> Jon Stone, ‘Vote Leave designated as official EU referendum Out campaign’, *Independent*, 13th April 2016.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/vote-leave-designated-as-official-eu-referendum-out-campaign-a6982491.html>

<sup>3</sup> Elliott Green, ‘They did things differently there; How Brexiteers appealed to voters’ nostalgia’, accessed 1st August 2022.

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2016/07/13/they-did-things-differently-there-how-brexiteers-appealed-to-voters-nostalgia/#comments>

sides can be condensed to a matter of voting on emotions or economy. In the media, the choice was presented as a battle between the voter's "heads or their hearts". While the Remain side focused on the more cosmopolitanism and economic benefits of EU membership to bolster their arguments ignoring any resemblance of an emotional attachment to EU membership and being apart of the project, the Leave side's principle defence was based upon raw emotional issues of restoring British imperialism, domestic issues such as an increased budget for the National Health Service (NHS) resentment towards the political elite of Brussels and nostalgia for British history and times gone by.<sup>4</sup> Furthermore, this research intends to focus on the "emotional" side of the referendum campaign and on the faction of the Leave campaign which framed Britain's membership to the European Union as the main obstacle in renewing its former greatness and restoring its imperial links. Thus the research question of this thesis emerges "To what extent was the use of postcolonial misconceptions, imperial nostalgia and appeals to emotions a campaign strategy and tactic of the Leave side presented to the public during the United Kingdom European Union membership Referendum of 2016 from 20th February 2016-30th June 2016?". Furthermore this research takes a different approach to analyse the strategy of the Leave campaign by focusing on the campaign output in the form of speeches, press releases, posters and newspaper articles in order to answer the thesis question. This thesis aims to explore the ways in which the Leave side engaged the emotions of the British public by tapping into and appealing to a type of nationalistic nostalgia that is the remnants of a nation struggling to deal with its colonial past and where it fits in the world post Empire. The question posed to the people of Britain indeed had a nostalgic element to it as the public were asked if they would like to return to a time in which they were no longer EU members and more importantly a time in which Britain was "the empire in which the sun never sets". This research intends to focus on the "emotional turn" in politics and thus will focus solely on the leave campaign and side which utilised British colonial and imperial history and emotive links to create its campaign. Moreover, this research will use a top-down approach by focusing on the populist Leave Campaign. The "emotional turn" in the field of international relations and politics is a new found phenomena that has only received focus in the last two decades as scholars have increasingly accepted the omnipresent role emotions play in international politics as leading theorists such as Christian Reus-Smit have cast a light on the political implications of emotions that have been ignored in our most prominent theories of international

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<sup>4</sup> Nadine El-Enany, 'Europe's Colonial Embrace and the Brexit nostalgia are two sides of the same coin', accessed 1st April 2022.

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2020/04/29/europes-colonial-embrace-and-brexit-as-nostalgia-for-empire-are-part-of-the-same-story/>

Theresa May, Lancaster House, 17th January 2017.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2017/01/17/theresa-mays-brexit-speech-full/>, accessed 2nd April 2022.

<https://whatukthinks.org/eu/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/The-Economics-of-Brexit-in-voters-eyes.pdf>, accessed 3rd April 2022.

relations and political science.<sup>5</sup> Although the Leave campaign did not exclusively use post-colonialism and imperialist rhetoric as a theme during the referendum this research aims to focus on this more covert aspect of the campaign which underpinned the other arguments to leave the European Union. While the Leave campaign formed formally in October 2015, the side had effectively been campaigning since parliamentary discussions on Maastricht in 1993, gradually bringing anti-EU arguments and attacks from the fringes of Westminster to the fore of mainstream political acceptability.<sup>6</sup> Similarly, the rhetoric of a “Global Britain” is not a new found concept only seen in the Brexit campaign but rather the result of a nation failing to come to grips with its imperial past looking to strengthen its ties with commonwealth countries in lieu of its membership of the European Union.<sup>7</sup> In order to aid analysis to answer the research question, the following sub questions have been established that will guide the direction of this research:

1. To what extent does the Leave Campaign use postcolonialism and imperialism to incite a feeling of nostalgia and yearning for the reestablishment of Britain’s glory days by applauding Britain’s past ?
2. To what extent does the Leave Campaign use postcolonialism and imperialism to incite anger and resentment towards the European Union for their place in the world?
3. To what extent is the Leave campaign’s use of inciting Britain’s imperial and colonial past a justification for Brexit?

**Hypothesis:** The Leave side makes strong appeals of nostalgia, anger and anxiety to its voters in its referendum campaign through the use of postcolonial misconceptions and blaming the European Union and its membership for Britain’s post Empire position in the world. I hypothesise that the Leave side connected the exit of Britain from the European Union with the re-establishment of Britain’s sovereignty during their campaign and thus appealed to the powerful emotions of nostalgia for Britain’s former glory and anger towards the EU by blaming Brussels for Britain’s issues.

Britain and the EU have always shared a vexed relationship largely based on “British exceptionalism” since it first joined the project in 1973. Since the relationship’s inception, Britain has opted for an “A la Carte” approach to the EU project. Nonetheless, the result of the referendum on the 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2016 and its official withdrawal from the common market in January 2020 shocked the

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<sup>5</sup> Christian Reus-Smit, ‘Emotions and the Social’, *International Theory* 6, no. 4 (2014), p.568.

<sup>6</sup> Anan Menon and John-Paul Salter, ‘Brexit: Initial Reflections’, *International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs)* 92, no. 6 (2016), p.1308.

<sup>7</sup> Nadine El-Enany, ‘Europe’s Colonial Embrace and the Brexit nostalgia are two sides of the same coin’, accessed 1st April 2022.

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2020/04/29/europes-colonial-embrace-and-brexit-as-nostalgia-for-empire-are-part-of-the-same-story/>

international community. The study of EU referendums and their results has long held an important place in the analysis of the behaviour and sentiments of the citizens of the EU and have been held in high regard as an indicator of public opinion. However, in recent years attention has shifted from looking at the results of referendums to the campaigns itself to further understand voting behaviour.<sup>8</sup> Referendums hold an important place in the history and process of European integration as indicators of voters' satisfaction with the Union. Their campaigns can be a particularly divisive political instrument in which voters are vulnerable to making decisions based upon false information circulated by political entrepreneurs and actors due to their core purpose of engaging to the politically disengaged general public. While the names of domestic political parties and candidates do not appear on the referendum ballot, many voters rely on the information circulated by political parties during the subsequent referendum campaign to inform them of which vote to cast on polling day. As a result of this, referendum campaigns and those involved have an important role to play in influencing how the average voter perceives the issue at hand and thus the analysis of campaigns and their strategies is paramount to our greater understanding of the outcome of a given referendum.<sup>9</sup> This point is arguably even more salient in terms of a referendum on European Integration such as Brexit. It is a widely recognised fact that EU citizens “lack direct interaction with the Union in their daily life” as voters place more importance on “bread and butter” issues at home rather than obscure European legislation and thus are more susceptible to campaign tactics and strategies .<sup>10</sup>

In many respects, the controversy surrounding the Brexit referendum has called into question the usefulness and integrity of referendums as a source of information on public opinion on important subjects. The question is whether they are accurate gauges of public opinion or do they oversimplify issues by appealing to the emotions of the general public by boiling complex topics down to a matter of either/or choices heavily influenced by political parties and vested interests. Since 1972 a total of 48 EU referendums have taken place on European Integration. Therefore, as direct democracy in the form of referendums becomes more and more ingrained in the process of European Integration, it is integral to evaluate the political information circulated by campaigns that heavily affect and are aimed to influence the voting behaviour of the general public.<sup>11</sup> In addition to this, this research also aims to further analyse and gain insight into the relationship between the UK and the EU as conceived by UK citizens. Brexit has been seen as the last “straw that has broken the camel’s back” of the long held belief by EU scholars of Ernst B. Haas’ neofunctionalism spillover effect and the contention that

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<sup>8</sup> Ece Özlem Atickan, ‘Agenda Control in EU Referendum Campaigns: The Power of the Anti-EU Side’, *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no.1 (2017), p.94.

<sup>9</sup> Sara Binzer Hobolt, ‘How Parties Affect Vote Choice in European Integration Referendums’ *Party Politics* 12, no.5 (2006), p. 623.

<sup>10</sup> Ece Özlem Atickan, ‘Agenda Control in EU Referendum Campaigns: The Power of the Anti-EU Side’, *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no.1 (2017), p.94.

<sup>11</sup> Sara Binzer Hobolt, ‘When Europe Matters: The Impact of Political Information on Voting Behaviour in EU Referendums’, *Journal of elections, public opinion and parties* 15, no.1 (2005),p.86.

further political and economic integration would result in a greater union and a strong feeling of ‘EU-ropeanness’.<sup>12</sup> If we apply Haas’ reasoning and theory to Brexit, why then did the Leave side utilise British and English nationalist tropes and why did those on the side of ‘Remain’ not make active appeals to a sense of a European (Union) identity in their campaign? Therefore, this research aims to further analyse how the relationship between the EU and its citizens is conceptualised through the lense of Brexit.

### **Academic Debate**

Since the referendum that took place in 2016, studies on the topic of Brexit have emerged as a comprehensive field of study that encompasses a number of disciplines including history, international relations, politics, anthropology and sociology. A plethora of explanations to the Brexit puzzle have been introduced to the public since the world received the shocking result of the referendum in June 2016. Academics have namely pointed to the inequalities of European integration and the theory of the ‘winners and losers’ of globalisation as the main explanation for the result.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, this thesis aligns itself with ‘how’ the opposing end of the scale and the existing research that sees Brexit as a culmination of and a symptom of a nationalist mobilisation within the United Kingdom based upon the familiar themes of sovereignty and British exceptionalism that reiterates the importance of and centrality of nationalism in understanding the Brexit enigma and why the Leave campaign’s referendum tactics embraced Britain’s colonial past. Upon analysing the historiography and academic debate of this era, a number of themes emerge in relation to why, how and in what form this referendum presented itself. A pervading theme of the literature produced by the leave campaign was the romanticisation of the ‘glory days’ of the British Empire and the production of a sense of nostalgia for its former imperial endeavours in efforts to deliver it once again to its former Imperial greatness. Alexander Spencer and Kai Opperman argue that the success of the Leave campaign lies in their construction of a consistent romantic narrative which frames Britain as the oppressed underdog and framed leave the EU as an exciting quest which was as Nigel Farage put it ‘a once in a lifetime opportunity’ and a ‘defining moment in British history’ while the Remain campaign mixed narrative genres.<sup>14</sup> A large faction of the leave campaign framed Britain’s membership to the European Union as the main obstacle in renewing its former greatness and restoring its imperial links. While imperial nostalgia and the tendency to view it’s colonial past with rose tinted sunglasses are certainly not new

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<sup>12</sup> Russel Foster, ‘I want my country back: the resurgence of English nationalism’, accessed 2nd August 2022.

<https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/brexit/2016/09/06/i-want-my-country-back-the-resurgence-of-english-nationalism/>

<sup>13</sup> Ben Wellings. "Brexit, Nationalism and Disintegration in the European Union and the United Kingdom." *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 29, no. 3 (2021): p.322.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander Spencer & Kai Oppermann (2020) Narrative genres of Brexit: the Leave campaign and the success of romance, *Journal of European Public Policy* 27, no.5 (2020), p. 669.

themes in British history and are an integral part of a long history of Euroscepticism in Britain, the leave campaign spearheaded by political entrepreneur, Nigel Farage, shaped their politics by harnessing these notions of British exceptionalism and fear of the dilution of Britishness to appeal to the patriotism of working-class Britain and middle class Eurosceptics. Paul Beaumont addresses and corroborates scholarship that suggests British identity politics mattered as much as economics during the referendum. He argues that the narrative of British exceptionalism and tales that “Britain once ruled the world” make Eurosceptic arguments of being suppressed by Brussels, sovereignty and “border control” particularly arresting to nationalists.<sup>15</sup> Beaumont concludes Brexit manifested as a way of reviving Britain during a period in which it was in an apparent decline based upon a rose-tinted and nostalgic version of its history and place in the international sphere.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, John McLeod argues “Brexit Literature” in the form of postcolonial fiction existed before Brexit and thus contends Brexit as driving an English nationalism that disturbingly appropriates the history of the British Empire and in particular World War II.<sup>17</sup>

The role of emotions in the Leave campaign has received some attention in recent years as the referendum campaign has been increasingly referred to as a battle between “heads” and “hearts” as focus in international relations and political science has seen an “emotional turn”.<sup>18</sup> A London School of Economics survey showed that almost half of voters aged 18 to 24 ‘cried or felt like crying’ after the result.<sup>19</sup> While political science has conventionally focused on the rationality of the public sphere rather than the “emotional” private sphere, this has been brought into question as the international political sphere has more and more been defined by populist campaigns, the promotion of misleading information across social media platforms and general voter mistrust.<sup>20</sup> The scholarly debate on voting behaviour in EU referendums has traditionally been consumed by three competing schools of thought: the “attitude” school, the “second-order election” school and the “utilitarian expectations” school.<sup>21</sup> The “attitude” school argues that voting behaviour is a broader reflection of more general attitudes towards European integration.<sup>22</sup> In “second-order elections”, the votes cast by citizens are seen as a

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<sup>15</sup> Paul Beaumont. ‘Brexit, Retrotopia and the perils of post-colonial delusions’, *Global Affairs* 3, no.4 (2018), pp 379-390.

<sup>16</sup> Beaumont. ‘Brexit, Retrotopia and the perils of post-colonial delusions’, pp 379-390.

<sup>17</sup> John McLeod. ‘Warning sign: Postcolonial writing and the apprehension of Brexit’, *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56, no.5 (2020), pp 607-620.

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Moss, Emily Claire Robinson and Jake Watts. “Brexit and the Everyday Politics of Emotion: Methodological Lessons from History.” *Political Studies* 68, no. 4, (2020), p.838.

<sup>19</sup> Toby Helm, ‘Poll reveals young remain voters reduced to tears by Brexit result’, *The Guardian*, 2nd July 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/02/brexit-referendum-voters-survey> , accessed 10th August 2022.

<sup>20</sup> Alex Prior and Y. van Hoef. "Interdisciplinary Approaches to Emotions in Politics and International Relations." *Politics and Governance* 6, no.4, (2018), p.48.

<sup>21</sup> Sara Binzer Hobolt, ‘When Europe Matters: The Impact of Political Information on Voting Behaviour in EU Referendums’, *Journal of elections, public opinion and parties* 15, no.1 (2005),p.87.

<sup>22</sup> Hobolt, ‘When Europe Matters’ (2005), p.87.

signalling of their level of satisfaction with their government and domestic issues while with the ‘‘utilitarian expectations’’ school, citizens vote ‘‘yes’’ in an EU referendum based on whether they will benefit economically from European Integration or not.<sup>23</sup> Sara Binzer Hobolt argues that while these schools of thought provide us with mass informative predictions about voting behaviour in the EU, they fail to note the interests and personal preferences of the individual and do not explain a number of variables between different referendums i.e. the various campaign strategies which influence voters behaviour which is where this research sees an opportunity to bridge a gap in research.<sup>24</sup>

Jorge Martins Rosa and Cristian Ruiz analyse how during the final weeks of the campaign, four key political actors (David Cameron, Jeremy Corbyn, Boris Johnson and Nigel Farage) utilised twitter to bolster their respective campaigns and investigated whether they appealed to the rationale or the emotions of their voters.<sup>25</sup> They conclude that an appeal to emotions and the criticism of the opposing views was particularly salient with voters and resulted in higher engagement than those who did not and thus they question the overall democratic and political legitimacy of referenda if emotions are deemed one of the most defining factors. Jonathon Moss, Emily Robinson and Jake Watts analyse how citizens perceive the role of emotions in political decision-making by adopting the 2016 EU referendum as their case study and using the Mass Observation Project Directives as their source of information. This unique archive is a collection of the anonymous responses of 408 individuals collected between 2016-2017 on the EU referendum and Brexit, providing a rich insight into how British voters interpreted the referendum, its subsequent campaign and the European Union in general. They concluded, similar to Rosa and Ruiz, that many citizens relied on and trusted their emotions as apolitical and neutral sources of political intelligence. However, they also argued that given the emotional intensity of the referendum other voters explained that they were forced to rely on ‘gut feeling’ in the absence of trustworthy sources of information.<sup>26</sup> Unlike Rosa and Ruiz, they contend that while reason and emotions are inextricable aspects of political decision-making, their findings show that citizens themselves understand the two processes as distinct and competing.<sup>27</sup> The academic puzzle of Brexit, thus emerges, can the voting behaviour of the British public during the referendum be considered a result of the highly emotive campaign framed by the Leave campaign or rather the result of a lack of trustworthy information being circulated to the electorate? This thesis

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<sup>23</sup> Glencross A and Trechsel A, ‘First or second order referendums? Understanding the votes on the EU Constitutional Treaty in four EU member states’. *West European Politics* 34 (2011), pp 755–772.

<sup>24</sup> Hobolt, ‘When Europe Matters’ (2005), p.87.

<sup>25</sup> Jorge Rosa Manuel Martins and Cristian Ruiz. ‘‘Reason vs. emotion in the Brexit campaign: How key political actors and their followers used Twitter.’’ *First Monday* 25 (2020)

<sup>26</sup> Jonathan Moss, Emily Claire Robinson and Jake Watts. ‘‘Brexit and the Everyday Politics of Emotion: Methodological Lessons from History.’’ *Political Studies* 68 no. 4, (2020), p.838.

<sup>27</sup> Jonathan Moss, Emily Claire Robinson and Jake Watts. ‘‘Brexit and the Everyday Politics of Emotion: Methodological Lessons from History.’’ *Political Studies* 68 no. 4, (2020), p.838.

aims on bridging the gap that exists within this field of research by analysing how the Leave side framed the topic of leaving the European Union in distinct postcolonial and nostalgic terms. The analytical framework for this thesis is in part based on the substantial amount of literature on Euroscepticism that approaches the phenomenon from a historical perspective and has improved our understanding of the background well-established tradition of British criticism of European Integration backed by exceptional ideas of national history, culture and identity. However, the emotional politics of many of these historical examinations remain underdeveloped. Few academics have focused on the emotional politics of the Leave campaign and even fewer have examined the output of the Leave side and their use of imperial nostalgia and postcolonial misconceptions in order to appeal to the emotions of the British public.

### **Analytical Framework**

This research intends on evaluating by using the case of the Brexit referendum, its harnessing of emotions and post-colonial tropes, the value of referendums as political instruments and finally the relationship between the UK and the EU as regarded by the Leave side and in turn the British public. Existing research has focused separately on the emotional and post colonial aspect of the Leave Campaign and thus this research intends on bridging this gap by combining the two areas of study and focusing upon the connection between the use of postcolonial and imperial tropes and the emotions they invoke namely nostalgia, anger and resentment. Politics and International relations has seen an ‘emotional turn’ since the 2000s as Western democracies have increasingly been described as emotional.<sup>28</sup> Thus this thesis aims to contribute to this growing scholarship in international relations and politics which focuses on emotions, and in this case how a sense of colonial/imperial nostalgia can be used in a referendum campaign and thus affect voting behaviour. The campaign preceding the EU referendum on Brexit has frequently been characterised in emotional terms, voters were described to have been battling it out with their heads and hearts and their reason and emotion. Nevertheless, the scholarship pertaining to Brexit often does not fully explore the ramifications of emotions on the outcome of referendum or the campaign that came before it, a point which this thesis aims to rectify.

### **Methodology and Sources**

This research project proposes to use the qualitative methodology of content analysis. Given the fact that this campaign occurred six years ago, this research will primarily be based upon sources available online. The primary archives this project plans on utilising and examining through content analysis is the collection of campaign leaflets collected by the British Library and the London School of Economics which include literature from several political parties and affiliated organisations such as UKIP and the Anti-Common Market League. These pieces of literature will illuminate the kind of

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<sup>28</sup> G. Marcus, ‘Emotions in Politics’, *Annual Review of Political Science* 2, no.1 (2000), pp 221-250

rhetoric of imperial nostalgia bolstered by the Leave Campaign that appealed to the emotions of voters rather than providing the real facts and economical ramifications of a British exit from the European Union. While Newspapers, along with other forms of mass media, play an important role in informing their readers of the political issues at the core of referendums, particularly those citizens disengaged with politics, this research will focus mainly on the leaflets, statements and op-eds produced by the Leave side.<sup>29</sup> The reason for this choice is because pre-existing research focuses mainly on the media coverage throughout the campaign and thus this thesis would like to fill in the gaps left out by this literature. Therefore, this research aims to focus on a number of sources including the literature produced by the Leave campaign and the various speeches held in the months leading up to the referendum such as Michael Gove's "The facts of Life say Leave" Speech in order to get a broader picture of the campaign and investigate if they changed their tactics in the various mediums.<sup>30</sup> The analysis of speeches delivered by campaign leaders will illuminate the emotional aspect of this research and will further aid in the examination of the emotions leaders aimed to incite by referring to various postcolonial misconceptions and imperial tropes. Emotional content and how it is integrated in political discourse through the power of speech and rhetoric has been ingrained in the study of politics since Greco-Roman society and is salient today more than ever as mass media takes on a greater role in the democratic process. This thesis will focus on speeches of the political elite through discourse analysis and critical discourse analysis by examining both speech content, rhetoric and language.

### **Structure**

The structure of this research and thesis is shaped by and divided according to the proposed timeline of 20th February 2016- 30th June 2016 with each analytical chapter being posed the three subquestions. The rationality in choosing this particular time frame is because on the 20th February 2016, David Cameron announced the official date the referendum would be held; 23rd June 2016. I have chosen the 30th June 2016 as the cutoff point date as this allows me to briefly analyse post-referendum sentiments present in the Leave campaign along with the Leave campaign's reactions to their victory.

Chapter One will explore the analytical concepts of the "emotional turn" in international relations, exceptionalism and euroscepticism in British politics and postcolonialism and imperial misconceptions and apply these to the Brexit Leave campaign. This chapter will provide the analytical framework in which this research is based upon. This research has chosen not to follow a

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<sup>29</sup> C.H De Vreese, 'Primed by the Euro: The Impact of a Referendum Campaign on Public Opinion and Evaluations of Government and Political Leaders', *Scandinavian Political Studies*, 27, no.1, (2004) pp 45-64.

<sup>30</sup> [http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key\\_speeches\\_interviews\\_and\\_op\\_ed.html](http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key_speeches_interviews_and_op_ed.html), accessed 27th January 2022.

chronological order and will instead take a thematic approach as this research while focusing on the entirety of the campaign from February-June 2016 will only be examining to what extent postcolonial/imperial rhetoric pervaded the campaign. These chapters will explore through a content analysis of the various campaign leaflets, newspaper articles and speeches produced by the Leave Campaign in the months leading up to and shortly after the Brexit referendum while also establishing the saliency of why campaigners chose to focus on certain themes and tropes. The primary focus of these chapters will be how the Leave campaign exploited postcolonialism to appeal to the emotions of the British public and created a new narrative of the referendum as a way in which Britain can reestablish itself to its former glory by breaking free from the shackles of Brussels. These chapters will further evaluate the emotions employed by the leave campaign and to what extent they may have aimed to affect voting behaviour. Finally, the conclusion will answer the main research question, reflect on the results of the content analysis, give recommendations for additional research and will further assess the merits of referenda in EU decision making as a whole in the wake of the emotional turn in politics.

## Chapter One: Analytical Framework

This chapter establishes the necessary and pertinent base for analysing the extent of which postcolonialism, imperial misconceptions and appeals to emotions made up the strategy of the Leave Side's campaign. It does so by explicating a number of key analytical concepts, which are closely tied to the sub-questions of this thesis including the "emotional turn" in political science and international relations, the centrality of British euroscepticism and exceptionalism to British politics and finally postcolonialism and imperial misconceptions.

### The "Emotional Turn" in Politics

In order to analyse the extent of which the Leave campaign used emotional appeals as part of their campaign strategy, it is pertinent to give context as to why emotions have received more attention by political scientists in the last number of years. The "emotional turn" in politics and international relations refers to the new found phenomenon of the 21st century which sees an increased amount of attention being paid to the role and effects of emotions in foreign policymaking and international interactions.<sup>31</sup> The relationship between rationality and emotions has long been an issue at the heart of international relations as IR scholars traditionally have believed that rationality and emotions root in different sources. However, new IR thinkers have questioned this premise and have focused increasingly on the emotional aspect of politics which has traditionally been ignored in all major political theories. Referendum campaigns as a political tool have the unique capacity to play with the emotions of the voters and thus influence the voting behaviour of the electorate. The main goal of any referendum campaign is to widely circulate their message to the general public, however, it is not only the information which is communicated during the campaign that plays an important factor in determining voting behaviour. The true art of electioneering rests in how that message is delivered.<sup>32</sup> According to Ted Brader, leading scholar in the field of emotions in politics, emotions can play a central role in whether and how campaigns are successful and are able to significantly alter their influence on the voter.<sup>33</sup> While Brader's research focuses exclusively on the political ads of emotionally expressive campaigns and their influence attempts of communicating negative messages in fear-inducing music and images to impact the voting decision process of voters, Brader's analysis is relevant and applicable to other forms of referendum campaigning including the type of campaigning seen throughout the Leave campaign. Brader highlights that emotionally convincing and expressive

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<sup>31</sup> Todd H. Hall. "We will not Swallow This Bitter Fruit: Theorising a Diplomacy of Anger", *Security Studies* 20, no.4 (2011), pp 521-555; M.Sucharov, "Imagining ourselves then and now: nostalgia and Canadian multiculturalism". *Journal of International Relations and Development* 16, (2013), pp 539-565; Andrew A. G. Ross "Realism, Emotion, and Dynamic Allegiances in Global Politics." *International Theory* 5, no. 2 (2013) pp 273-99

<sup>32</sup> Ted Brader. "Striking a Responsive Chord: How Political Ads Motivate and Persuade Voters by Appealing to Emotions." *American Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 2 (2005), p. 389.

<sup>33</sup> Brader. "Striking a Responsive Chord"(2005), p. 391.

campaigns have the ability to not only sway a voter but alter how voters make decisions as a whole.<sup>34</sup> Thus, campaigners are able to influence citizens' voting behaviour by appealing to certain emotions and in the case of Brexit the emotions most susceptible to the public were ones of nostalgia and anger. We live in an interesting time in which the political realities of Europe and the world does not necessarily correspond with the traditional reason and rationality driven major political theories of international relations and politics. The presence of political emotionality across Europe cannot be underestimated as national populism surges in countries such as France, Austria, the Netherlands and more importantly Britain. EU integration faces unique challenges in this day and age as it faces increasing emotional intensity in the wake of Brexit. Despite the relevance and pertinence of emotions in EU politics, there is still little academic research and knowledge on what role emotions play in EU politics and how it will affect EU integration and thus is in need of further development across the board. While many scholars in recent years have explored the emotions central to the Brexit campaign, this thesis aims to advance this literature by focusing on the connection between the themes of postcolonialism and imperial misconceptions and the emotions the Leave campaign aimed to invoke by utilising these tropes in their speeches, posters and campaign advertisements across newspapers.

### **Euroscepticism or Exceptionalism?**

In the wake of the result of the 2016 referendum, there has been a renewed interest and focus in the ‘road to Brexit’ in an effort to establish why the British public voted to leave the European Union.<sup>35</sup> This thesis aims to examine the significance of the use of emotive, postcolonial and imperial themes in the campaign tactics of the Leave campaign. Thus, an overview of the supposed road to Brexit and Britain’s inherent euroscepticism is crucial to our understanding of why, if the Leave campaign did in fact utilise postcolonial/emotional appeals, it found salience within the British public. What the referendum result indicated has been heavily contested by scholars in the last number of years. One interpretation, which has dominated the media and academic world, of why the British public voted to leave is the argument that the ‘losers of globalisation’ voted to leave the EU and ‘the winners of globalisation’ voted to remain.<sup>36</sup> While the globalisation and ‘left behind’ theory certainly contributes a great deal to our understanding as to how the Brexit vote manifested, it does not explain the entire story. Another interpretation of the result sees emphasis placed on the well-established history of euroscepticism in Britain and argues that the outcome is the culmination of what British journalist Tim Shipman calls ‘three decades of Euroscepticism cloaking a nation in its suffocating

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<sup>34</sup> Brader. "Striking a Responsive Chord"(2005), p. 403.

<sup>35</sup>Jonathan Moss and Nick Clarke. "A Folk Theory of the EEC: Popular Euroscepticism in the Early 1980s." *Contemporary British History* 35, no. 4 (2021), p.545.

<sup>36</sup>Sara Binzer Hobolt. "The Brexit Vote: A Divided Nation, a Divided Continent." *Journal of European Public Policy* 23, no. 9 (2016), p.1260

embrace.”<sup>37</sup> Euroscepticism is defined as “the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European Integration”.<sup>38</sup>

Euroscepticism as a phenomenon sees its roots in British politics, the word was conceived in the 1980s as a response to describe Margaret Thatcher’s zero-sum attitude and policies towards the European Community during an era in which she focused on the idea of reasserting British sovereignty in the face of further European integration via political and monetary union.<sup>39</sup> Thatcher’s most explicit condemnation of further European Integration is evident in her Speech to the College of Europe, more famously known as “The Bruges Speech” in September 1988. During her speech, Thatcher highlighted her aversion towards further integration, stating, “[w]e have not successfully rolled back the frontiers of the state in Britain, only to see them re-imposed at a European level with a European super-state exercising a new dominance from Brussels.”<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the rest of Europe does not remain untouched by the grasps of euroscepticism both in political parties and the general republic as reflected by several European Parliament elections and in the rejection of European treaties in referendums in countries such as Ireland, France and the Netherlands. Nevertheless, the UK remains in a conflicting situation where while Europe has become more Eurosceptic, its island-mentality driven perception of itself as semi-detached from the rest of Europe remains. Thus British euroscepticism remains disparate from mainland Europe as a result of its post-imperialist and “hyperglobalist” outlook.<sup>41</sup>

Andrew Glencross contends British euroscepticism is largely hinged upon its culture of British exceptionalism and as a result is in many regards a direct manifestation of it.<sup>42</sup> Historically British exceptionalism refers to the state of mind that Britain is an exception in Europe due to its historical excellence of the 18th and 19th century, isolated geography as an Island on the periphery of Europe and overall economic prosperity. During the nineteenth century, Britain concentrated its efforts upon the creation of a global empire which spanned 25% of the world’s land surface. By the 1890s, Britain was in a state of “splendid isolation” in terms of its international diplomacy in Europe as it ruled the

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<sup>37</sup> Tim Shipman. *All Out War: The Full Story of How Brexit Sank Britain’s Political Class* (London 2016), p. 1041.

<sup>38</sup> Paul Taggart. "A Touchstone of Dissent: Euroscepticism in Contemporary Western European Party Systems." *European Journal of Political Research* 33, no. 3 (1998): p. 366.

<sup>39</sup> D. Baker, Schnapper, P., ‘Euroscepticism in Britain: Cause or Symptom of the European Crisis?’. In: *Britain and the Crisis of the European Union*. (London, 2015), p.61

<sup>40</sup> Margaret Thatcher, Bruges Belgium, 20th September 1988.

<sup>41</sup> David Baker, Andrew Gamble, and David Seawright. "Sovereign Nations and Global Markets: Modern British Conservatism and Hyperglobalism." *British Journal of Politics & International Relations* 4, no. 3 (2002), p.401.

<sup>42</sup> Andrew Glencross. "British Euroscepticism as British Exceptionalism: The Forty-Year “Neverendum” on the Relationship with Europe." *Studia Diplomatica* 67, no. 4 (2014), p.8.

waves with no need for a tactical continental alliance.<sup>43</sup> At the same time, Germany's rise in Europe meant that Britain could not turn a blind eye and resulted in their involvement in two major wars during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>44</sup> The Second World War marked a power shift from European imperial supremacy to US and Soviet hegemony and marked the start of the collapse of Britain's imperial base and thus challenged this exceptionalist mindset. Nevertheless, the feeling that Royal Britannia had saved the world only bolstered and propelled British exceptionalism by adding to it a sense of pride and a self-image of a superior nation different to their European counterparts.<sup>45</sup> This sense of pride is paramount to the basis of the 2016 Leave Campaign and how Britain approached its 47 year long term as EU members. From the very inception of its EU membership, the UK approached European Integration as a practical and rational foreign policy devoid of a normative commitment to the ideal of an 'ever closer union' as conceived in the Treaty of Rome.<sup>46</sup> Thus, Britain became the 'awkward partner' in the European sphere lacking any desire to commit past 'business arrangement' status.

The request for a referendum on EU membership is a direct extension of so-called British superiority and an entrenched exceptionalist mindset that suggests the UK could withdraw from a federalizing EU with no tangible repercussions. This trope of 'British superiority' as an extension of exceptionalism is certainly not a new found phenomenon that we have only seen during the Brexit years. In 2006, former Prime Minister of the UK Tony Blair called recent rejections of the European constitution as an opportunity to 're-shape a different vision of Europe's future; and for Britain to feel comfortable within it' reiterating this idea and belief that the UK is an exceptional outlier that has the capacity to contribute something 'missing' in Europe.<sup>47</sup> Blair's criticism of European Integration and his desires to shape it to fit British values is just one example of exceptionalism masked as euroscepticism and also illustrates how debates surrounding the advantages and disadvantages of integration does not only pertain to relatively recent developments such as intra-EU migration in the past decade but rather much of the core arguments concern the building blocks of which European integration was founded upon.<sup>48</sup> From a historical perspective, sovereignty is at the epicentre of the UK's turbulent relationship with, and within, the European Union.

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<sup>43</sup> Marie-Christine Veldeman. Britain and Europe: From 'Splendid Isolation' to 'Semi-Detachment'. In: *Équivalences*, 39e année-n°1-2, (2012) p. 39.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew J. Crozier "British Exceptionalism: Pride and Prejudice and Brexit." *International Economics and Economic Policy* 17, no. 3 (2020), p.637

<sup>45</sup> Crozier "British Exceptionalism", (2020), p.641.

<sup>46</sup> Glencross. "British Euroscepticism as British Exceptionalism" (2014), p.8.

<sup>47</sup> Chris Gifford. "The UK and the European Union: Dimensions of Sovereignty and the Problem of Eurosceptic Britishness." *Parliamentary Affairs* 63, no. 2 (2010), p.329.

<sup>48</sup> Andrew Glencross, "Why a British Referendum on EU Membership Will Not Solve the Europe Question." *International Affairs* (London) 91, no. 2 (2015), p.307

As a result of British exceptionalism, its EU membership must be an articulation of sovereignty rather than an abrasion of it. Oliver J. Daddow asserts that there is a tendency to envisage Britain's past in terms of its events up to 1945 and as a series of military successes rather than failures, paying homage to a distinct conception of nation and nationhood that highlights Britain's "otherness" and individuality from continental Europe and its inability to conform to normative Europe rooted in the belief Great Britain just retain its sovereignty in order to stay "Great".<sup>49</sup> As a result of this exceptionalist mindset cloaked as euroscepticism, a nostalgic campaign which focused on the greatness of British history would be particularly salient to a British public lamenting its imperial losses and struggling to come to terms with its postcolonial position in global politics. Thus, this thesis aims to investigate to what degree did the Leave campaign utilise this exceptionalist mindset by conducting a campaign saturated with postcolonial and imperial tropes.

### **Postcolonialism and Imperial Misconceptions**

This thesis aims to analyse to what extent did the Leave campaign utilise imperial and postcolonial tropes, rhetoric and history in their campaign material and speeches in order to appeal to the emotions of the British public. If the Leave campaign did evoke these themes in order to incite nostalgia in voters, it would not be the first time in British history. In 1968, Conservative politician Enoch Powell delivered a highly contentious speech now known as the "Rivers of Blood" speech to a meeting of the Conservative Political Centre in Birmingham, United Kingdom. During the speech Powell criticised mass immigration and the proposed Race Relations Bill by the Labour Party by making nostalgic calls for the return of the "real" England with "pre-empire ethno-purity".<sup>50</sup> Although Conservative leader Edward Heath fired Powell shortly after the controversial speech, opinion polls conducted at the time indicated eight out of ten Britons were in favour of Powell's ideas with 100,000 letters of support arriving at Powell's doorstep in the month following the speech.<sup>51</sup> These letters voice an emotional response to Powell's speech in which the British public voiced their support, frustrations, anger, anxieties and hostilities. The letters offer an insightful window into the true consciousness of the British public, released from the fear of judgement and in the privacy of their own thoughts and feelings. While the letters focus on immigration issues, many of them voice concerns over globalisation and Britain's declining global significance clearly illustrating the power of Powell's appeal to nationalistic pride and use of nostalgic language rooted in the history of Britain's colonial and imperial past.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Oliver J Daddow. "Euroscepticism and History Education in Britain." *Government and Opposition* (London) 41, no. 1 (2006), p.73.

<sup>50</sup> Enoch Powell, "Rivers of Blood" Speech, Birmingham, 20th April 1968.

<sup>51</sup> Amy Whipple. "Revisiting the "Rivers of Blood" Controversy: Letters to Enoch Powell." *The Journal of British Studies* 48, no. 3 (2009), p. 734.

<sup>52</sup> Whipple. "Revisiting the "Rivers of Blood" Controversy" (2009), p. 734.

Similarly the Leave campaign have been alleged to have used nostalgic imperial rhetoric and English nationalist tropes in order to incite a feeling of nostalgia, pride and anger in the British public for their current global position. During the campaign trail for Brexit, Nigel Farage, former leader of the UK Independence party, would play the soundtrack from the Second World War film *The Great Escape* on a purple campaign bus to warm up the crowd and make an emotional connection between leaving the EU and the national myth entrenched in the minds of many British people that Britain ‘won’ the Second World War.<sup>53</sup> This imperial misconception of Britain winning The Second World War holds a particularly important place in the canon of British history and its nationhood as the last large-scale political and military event before the demise of the Empire. Britain’s collective memory of the role it played in WWII is perhaps the greatest imperial misconception as a heavily mythologized narrative of a time when Great Britain ‘stood alone’ against Adolf Hitler which in turn further consolidated British exceptionalism. As a result, WWII has been a staple of British imperial fortitude that fosters a legitimate sense of collective national attachment and affection and thus devolving any sort of power to Brussels has been seen as a threat to Britain’s historical self-narrative.<sup>54</sup> Drawing upon Joshua Freedman’s introduction of temporal status comparisons to international relations that states base their collective self-esteem upon comparisons with their former national self, Paul Beaumont argues one explanation for why Euroscepticism is synonymous with British identity is because Britain’s self-narrative hinges upon glorifying its former empire, mourning its subsequent loss and fixating over its triumphs (such as WWII) and thus transferring power to a supranational institution like the EU undermines nationalists’ sense of self-esteem and progression.<sup>55</sup> Linda Colley asserts over the course of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, Britishness and British cultural identity was constructed in competition to European Catholicism and absolutism and was correlated with the colonial enterprise.<sup>56</sup> As a result of this, it became more difficult for the British to accept the idea of a European future post WWII since Europe continued to be perceived as alien to an ‘open seas’ postcolonial identity rooted Britain.

## **Chapter Two: “Sovereign Nation or Invaded Nation?”**

<sup>53</sup> Beaumont. ‘Brexit, Retrotopia and the perils of post-colonial delusions’, (2018) p.380

<sup>54</sup> Caroline Koegler, Pavan Kumar Malreddy, and Marlina Tronicke. "The Colonial Remains of Brexit: Empire Nostalgia and Narcissistic Nationalism." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56, no. 5 (2020), p. 587

<sup>55</sup> Beaumont. ‘Brexit, Retrotopia and the perils of post-colonial delusions’, (2018) p.380

<sup>56</sup> Linda Colley. *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837*. (London, 1994).

*“And perhaps because of our history and geography, the European Union never felt to us like an integral part of our national story in the way it does to so many elsewhere in Europe”.*<sup>57</sup>

Since the official end of colonialism and the collapse of the British Empire in the later half of the 20th century, it has been said no political event has shaped British national identity and its political landscape as much as Britain’s abrupt exit to the European Union.<sup>58</sup> While Brexit is not a postcolonial event per se, it does represent a “Breaking point” in which Britain’s widespread colonial amnesia, anxieties surrounding its global position and immigration concerns came to a headway, solidified and materialised into a divisive campaign and an even more divisive referendum result. In 1962, just one year before Britain first attempted to join the EEC, former United States State Secretary Dean Acheson remarked ‘Great Britain Has Lost an Empire But Not Yet Found a Role’ and fifty years on it remains as true.<sup>59</sup> Similarly, Nadia El Enany has stated the terms on which Brexit took place are indicative of a Britain struggling to develop its post-Empire identity and position in the world, blinded by the rose-tinted nostalgia and haze of a time in which Britain’s imperial embrace consumed a quarter of the globe.<sup>60</sup> As a result of the pervasive legacy of colonialism and imperialism on world politics, the 1980s saw the birth of a critical form of International relations theory. Postcolonialism and Postcolonial International Relations as a study focuses on how societies of formerly colonised regions experience international relations and global politics. This critical branch of scholarship has begun to successfully renarrativise politics to address the significant impact of imperialism and colonialism on the global political order. While much research in postcolonial legacies focus on the previously colonised, this thesis aims to focus on how colonialism and imperialism has significantly affected the coloniser: Britain. This research aims to evaluate how an unaddressed past and distorted self-narrative and national identity materialised into the departure of Britain from the European Union by the Leave campaign utilising Britain’s post-colonial identity and anxieties to convince the public to vote to leave the EU. Prior to Brexit, scholars and academics predicated a “Remain” victory due to the possibility of a “status quo” bias and the direct consequences of leaving the EU, however, as a result of how the Leave side reframed leaving the EU and the potential risks associated with it, successfully won the referendum and thus an exploration of the campaign strategies of the campaign serves as a significant topic of research.<sup>61</sup>

This chapter will discuss the two most prominent and successful tropes harnessed by the Leave Side; “Take Back Control” and “Independence Day” as exemplars of how the Leave Side masked issues surrounding sovereignty and immigration with highly emotive imperial misconceptions of a loss of control, a colonial/dictatorship power struggle between the EU and Britain, immigration and sovereignty. In this analysis, this chapter will particularly draw upon the frames conceptualised by Jonathan Charteris-Black in his refreshing book entitled *Metaphors of Brexit :no cherries on the cake?* in which he explores how metaphors were ‘weaponised’ and used as a political weapon in discourses surrounding Brexit and how it contributed to the tone and emotionality of the Brexit debate. Charteris-Black contended the Leave side framed the referendum in terms of a ‘War and

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<sup>57</sup>Theresa May, Florence, 22nd September 2017

<sup>58</sup> Caroline Koegler, Pavan Kumar Malreddy, and Marlina Tronicke. "The Colonial Remains of Brexit: Empire Nostalgia and Narcissistic Nationalism." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56, no. 5 (2020), p. 586.

<sup>59</sup> Dean Acheson, West Point Military Academy, West Point U.S.A., 5th December 1962.

<sup>60</sup> Nadine El-Enany. *Bordering Britain: Law, race and empire*. (Manchester, 2020), p.6.

<sup>61</sup> Ece Özlem Atickan ‘Agenda Control in EU Referendum Campaigns: The Power of the Anti-EU Side’, *European Journal of Political Research* 57, no.1 (2017), p.111.

Invasion' and developed two complimentary scenarios one based primarily on moral reasoning and the other on moral intuition. The Leave Side conceptualised and framed its messages using the language of war by representing the campaign trail as preparation for war and the EU and migrants as 'foreign' threats encroaching on their sovereignty. The 'Sovereign Nation' frame and scenario was based upon moral reasoning and a desire to defend the nation, its people and uphold the democratic values that symbolise the freedom and democracy of the UK, on the other hand the 'Invaded Nation' frame and scenario is based on a fear of an alien force encroaching on the nation (immigration) and its honour and is populist in tone.<sup>62</sup> 'Take back control' and 'Independence Day', the two most prominent and successful narratives produced by the Leave side owe much of their success because they appealed respectively to the Sovereign and the Invaded Nation scenario. We live in turbulent times in which many people feel they lack control in their lives, these tropes offer voters the 'security blanket' of regaining control of their national identity through familiar and nostalgic tropes.

The sources for the following content analysis come from a variety of contributions from leading voices and figures from the Leave side during the given time period. The analysis relies on statements, op-eds, speeches and articles from the Leave Side taken from the official website of 'Vote Leave' alongside material unavailable on the official website from figures such as Nigel Farage. As previously mentioned, this thesis has chosen to analyse the campaign output of the 'Brexiters' and all those. This thesis has chosen to particularly focus on the output of the prominent figures of the Leave side in order to gain a clearer picture of how the campaigners play with and use emotions in their rhetoric and how they frame the referendum. In addition to this, these sources will be complemented by the analysis and examination of a collection of campaign posters and leaflets housed on the website of the London School of Economics and Political Science entitled the *Brexit Collection*. Together with the British Library they have compiled campaigning leaflets from the 1975 and 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the common market and EU respectively from various individuals, political parties and vested interests involved in the Leave Campaign illustrate the extent to which themes on Britain's sovereignty, control and seeking lost status pervaded the campaign. The collection houses 183 campaign posters, adverts and leaflets from the 2016 referendum from both the Leave and Remain side.

### **'Take Back Control'**

While imperial Nostalgia, a strong tradition of euroscepticism and pervading colonial links are certainly not new themes in British history, the leave side for the first time in British history managed to harness these themes in order to create a campaign that preyed on the emotions of the British public and succeeded in making the EU membership referendum into a matter of control and supposed British 'sovereignty' from Brussels. Houtum and Lacy argue that at the heart of the Brexit narrative presented by the Leave side is akin to what is currently fueling other populist insurgencies across liberal democracies; an amalgamation of postcolonial grievances and imperial nostalgia masked through the discourse of 'political emancipation' in the case of Brexit.<sup>63</sup> The Leave side's nostalgic elements fostered the lie that EU membership has resulted in a lack of control of British borders despite Britain's traditional 'A la carte' approach to its membership by opting out of several

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<sup>62</sup> Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Metaphors of Brexit :no cherries on the cake?.* (Bristol, 2019), p.108.

<sup>63</sup> H. J. van Houtum and R. Bueno Lacy. "The Political Extreme as the New Normal: The Cases of Brexit, the French State of Emergency and Dutch Islamophobia." *Fennia* 195, no. 1 (2017) p.91.

immigration measures including not joining the Schengen area and thus allowing them to exercise border control over other EU member states and shaping European Integration on their own terms and conditions.<sup>64</sup> On the 20th February 2016 Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Justice released an essay explaining his support for Vote Leave ‘‘But by leaving the EU we can take control. Indeed we can show the rest of Europe the way to flourish. Instead of grumbling and complaining about the things we can’t change and growing resentful and bitter, we can shape an optimistic, forward-looking and genuinely internationalist alternative to the path the EU is going down. We can show leadership. Like the Americans who declared their independence and never looked back, we can become an exemplar of what an inclusive, open and innovative democracy can achieve.’’<sup>65</sup> Despite this, the campaign continued to shape their arguments around the notion of Britain escaping the control of the EU and granting Britain their sovereignty. ‘‘Taking back control’’ was a key element and frame of the Leave campaign’s case for Brexit, which as a slogan and prevailing banner for the Leave Campaign resonated and found salience among the British public. In political contexts frames and framing ‘‘represents a social situation as problematic, conveys a moral perspective and offers arguments for solutions to that problem’’.<sup>66</sup> A frame is created when something is continually portrayed in the same manner that it in turn creates an established and socially shared perspective on something.<sup>67</sup> Frames were an integral part of the output produced by the Leave Side in how they produced the narrative on issues such as sovereignty, immigration and the cultural value of Britain as a liberal democracy to the British public. Interestingly, the issues that the Leave Side framed all had one unique characteristic in common, the EU in conflict with the British nation state. In the case of the frame surrounding ‘‘Take Back Control’’, the frame is created through the assumptions they make that highly suggests that in the past the British people had been in ‘control’, and now no longer were in control thus suggesting a melancholic tendency for the Empire and a yearning for times gone by. Furthermore, by connecting this vague, nostalgic conceptualisation of ‘‘back’’ to the EU insinuates a time before the UK was a member of the EU and a time in which the British Empire was at the height of its power and global influence. Furthermore, ‘‘back’’ framed the history status of Britain; the Leave Side deliberately framed a situation in terms of nostalgia for the past through the linguists coined-term ‘implicature’.<sup>68</sup> The phrase was repeated in such a systematic way that it became the slogan which donned campaign buses, cars, newspaper headlines and billboards across Britain became synonymous with the Leave campaign and is perhaps the most effective phrase and frame coined by the Leave campaign for a number of reasons. Firstly it plays into the anxiety and emotions of the British public by assuming a loss of control or a perceived inability of Britain to govern itself whilst being a member of the EU. Secondly, it creates a narrative of the EU adopting the role of a colonising power, a role that British society has a problematic relationship with accepting of its own past. ‘Take back control’ amalgamated both the future and the past in three words by promoting a bright future but also implied a sense of rightful ownership based on nostalgic interpretations and imperial misconceptions of Britain prior to its EU membership.

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<sup>64</sup><https://www.euractiv.com/section/uk-europe/linksdossier/europe-a-la-carte-the-whats-and-whys-behind-uk-opt-outs/> accessed 25th January 2022.

<sup>65</sup> Michael Gove speech

<sup>66</sup> Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Metaphors of Brexit :no cherries on the cake?*. (Bristol, 2019), p.16

<sup>67</sup> Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Metaphors of Brexit :no cherries on the cake?*. (Bristol, 2019), p.16.

<sup>68</sup> Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Metaphors of Brexit :no cherries on the cake?*. (Bristol, 2019), p.20.



Figure 1: Heather Stewart and Rowena Mason, ‘Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster reported to police’, *The Guardian*, 16th June 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants>, accessed 22nd July 2022.



Figure 2: ‘Vote Leave’ campaign poster published 23rd May 2016  
 Daniel Boffey and Tony Helm, ‘Vote Leave embroiled in race row over Turkey security threat claims’, *The Guardian*, 22nd May 2016.  
<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/21/vote-leave-prejudice-turkey-eu-security-threat>, accessed 20th July 2022.

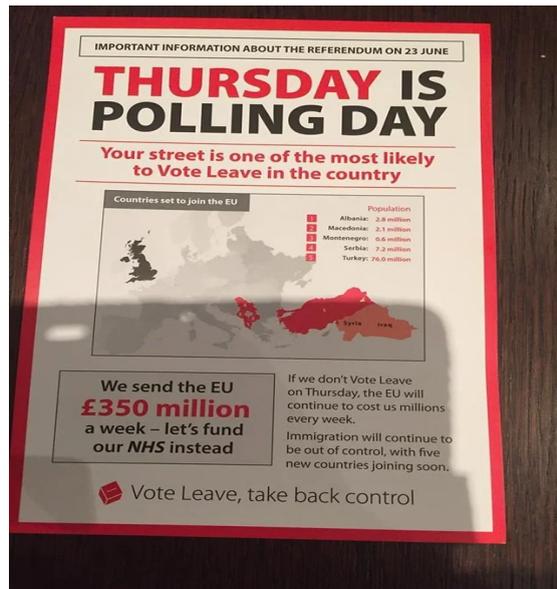


Figure 3: “Thursday is Polling day”, Vote Leave, June 2016. leaflet circulated in the week before the referendum held on 23rd June 2016

It is no secret that arguments surrounding Brexit often centered around immigration but what was often masked by discourse surrounding a “Global Britain” was a fear of Muslim immigration and in particular the prospect of immigration from Turkey. The most visceral example of this blatant weaponising of immigration as a threat to British sovereignty is the widely circulated image of UKIP leader Nigel Farage posing beside a poster which showed mainly non-white refugees crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border in 2015 along with the slogan ‘Breaking Point’.<sup>69</sup> The poster became a contentious topic during the campaign trail as many argued it not only incited racial hate and was against British race law but it was also incredibly misleading to the British public as these migrants would have had no legal right to enter Britain while under EU membership and prior to the referendum. The idea of claiming back Sovereignty from a supranational organisation captured the imagination of the British public despite the troubles surrounding it in the wake of an increasingly globalised world and managed to encapsulate many of the main arguments which summarised the campaign including border and immigration control and a return to times when Britain had “control”.

The poster circulated by Farage and his party UKIP not only promotes anxiety and anger about the prospects of immigrants but also the Syrian Refugee crisis which consumed Europe’s mind since the Summer of 2015.<sup>70</sup> In the early phases of the Brexit campaign, “Vote leave”, the official campaign of the Leave side made the decision to differentiate themselves from organisations like Leave.EU and Grassroots Out by not merely focusing on migration, however, this tactic turned on its head a month

<sup>69</sup> Figure 1: Heather Stewart and Rowena Mason, “Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster reported to police”, *The Guardian*, 16th June 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants>, accessed 22nd July 2022.

Anti-Migration poster unveiled by Nigel Farage, June 2016 (The Guardian, 16th June 2016)

<sup>70</sup> Figure 1: Heather Stewart and Rowena Mason, “Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster reported to police”, *The Guardian*, 16th June 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants>, accessed 22nd July 2022.

before the referendum when the organisation began to steer the campaign fully towards migration by publishing misleading leaflets, one example was published in May 2016 on Turkey depicting an EU passport as an open door, with footprints leading through it. entitled: “Turkey (population 76 million) is joining the EU. Vote Leave, take back control.”<sup>71</sup> A similar leaflet was circulated in the week leading up to the referendum which encapsulated and is the epitome of the campaign driven by the Leave side which incited fear and anger amongst the public of the prospects of an endless stream of immigrants from Eastern Europe but especially from Turkey and Syria coming to Britain.<sup>72</sup> This poster illustrates the victim-complex perpetuated by the Leave side during the Brexit campaign by creating a false narrative that immigration was exerting pressure on Britain and taking money that could be allocated to the National Health Service (NHS) instead and thus fostering a morally deceitful misrepresentation of some of the most vulnerable members of society and inciting anger in the British public for this misinformed loss of control and loss of money for Britain’s sole unifying system, the NHS.<sup>73</sup> The NHS is a pillar of British society and national identity as illustrated by a 2018 YouGov poll which found that the NHS is the institution that Britons are second most proud of, surpassing that of the monarchy.<sup>74</sup> The leaflets account for the rhetoric presented by the Leave side in which migrants are villainized as multiculturalism and the prospects of immigration are seen as ideologically opposed to British values and people while at the same time making melancholic calls upon the Commonwealth to increase their economic, political and cultural ties. This narrative revealed a fascinating revelation about Brexiteers; it is not immigration they feared but a certain type of immigration based upon xenophobia, a fear of muslim georgraphy and Islamaphobia.<sup>75</sup> For Brexiteers it is far easier to be nostalgic and create a romantic narrative surrounding the ‘good old days’ associated with the Commonwealth and the creation of a ‘Global Britain’ than to

### ‘Independence Day’

This trope of Britain taking on colony status and using the language of oppression in order to create an emotive response of anxiety permeated the Leave campaign. Boris Johnson further perpetuated the imperial myth of Britain becoming a colony by announcing in the final Televised debate on European Union membership that he believed ‘this Thursday can be our country’s “Independence Day”’.<sup>76</sup> Traditionally, an ‘independence day’ marks a country’s independence from a colonising power and the end to its nationalist struggle for its nation’s independence similar to the 65 countries who have claimed independence from Britain thus far since the United States of America first declared its

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<sup>71</sup> Figure 2: Daniel Boffey and Tony Helm, ‘Vote Leave embroiled in race row over Turkey security threat claims’, *The Guardian*, 22nd May 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/may/21/vote-leave-prejudice-turkey-eu-security-threat>, accessed 20th July 2022.

<sup>72</sup> Figure 3: ‘Thursday is Polling day’, Vote Leave, June 2016.

<sup>73</sup> H. J. van Houtum and R. Bueno Lacy. "The Political Extreme as the New Normal: The Cases of Brexit, the French State of Emergency and Dutch Islamophobia." *Fennia* 195, no. 1 (2017) p.93

<sup>74</sup> YouGov Poll

<https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2018/07/04/nhs-british-institution-brits-are-second-most-prou>, accessed 13th August 2022.

<sup>75</sup> H. J. van Houtum and R. Bueno Lacy. "The Political Extreme as the New Normal: The Cases of Brexit, the French State of Emergency and Dutch Islamophobia." *Fennia* 195, no. 1 (2017) p.93

<sup>76</sup> Jon Stone, ‘EU referendum: Boris Johnson says Thursday could become Britain’s ‘independence day’’, *Independent*, 21st June 2016.

<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eu-referendum-boris-johnson-independence-day-live-debate-bbc-vote-leave-brexit-remain-a7094531.html>

sovereignty on 4th July 1776.<sup>77</sup> Johnson in an aim to rationalise his decision to support the leave campaign and appeal to the anxieties of the British public used the analogy that Britain needed to gain its independence from the EU and subverted the traditional image of colonialism to do so.<sup>78</sup> By making this analogy and utilising the language of oppression and victimisation Johnson not only inferred that the European Union was a colonial power that they must be free themselves from but also created a harmful narrative that perpetuates an imperial amnesia for the 65 countries who fought hard against British colonial rule. On 22nd February 2016 Johnson wrote in the Telegraph setting out his case for why to Vote Leave promoting a misconception that the EU has colonial powers over Britain; ‘‘We are seeing a slow and invisible process of legal colonisation, as the EU infiltrates just about every area of public policy...’’ ‘‘We have become so used to Nanny in Brussels that we have become infantilised, incapable of imagining an independent future.’’<sup>79</sup> By adopting the language of oppression and the colonial experience Johnson fosters the imperial myth that pervades British/English nationalism that lacks an understanding of the atrocities committed in previous colonies and accommodates a myth that the relationship between the EU and Britain has robbed Britain of its sovereignty. ‘Independence’ heavily infers invasion and colonisation and thus Johnson explicitly used this language to instil a sense of pride in British voters of the possibility of being ‘‘freed’’ from the shackles of Brussels whilst simultaneously free the public from the guilt and shame surrounding its colonial past by presenting an image of liberation that fits in with and interests British/English self-narrative and identity heavily connected with involvement in WWI, WWII and devoid of the imperial restraints of the history of the British Empire and colonisation.<sup>80</sup> The fact this metaphor appeared in the mainstream discourse of the Brexit political debate is a shocking occurrence considering Britain is widely recognised as the epitome of European Imperialism and colonial power.<sup>81</sup>

Despite the obvious fact that Britain joined the EU and can leave it voluntarily, what gives this misguided discourse salience and ability to shape public opinion is its repetition throughout the campaign and therefore its ability to silence alternatives.<sup>82</sup> The EU is neither an imperial power and the UK is certainly not a colony, however, the Leave side portrayed the EU as a dictatorship and the open borders that characterise the project as its main threat by using language of oppression and colonialism. In addition to the repetitive nature of the Leave Side’s ‘‘Independence Day’’ discourse the claims of the European integration project taking on dictatorship status that has robbed the sovereignty of the UK may have further found relevance amongst the British public for the simple reason that the British public during the referendum campaign trail did not know a great deal about what the EU was or did for them thus were more susceptible to emotional and powerful metaphors such as ‘‘Independence Day’’ that appealed to their nostalgia and angered them that their sovereignty was being encroached upon by the EU. In the last two decades scholars have argued and critiqued the

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<sup>77</sup><https://www.statista.com/chart/26297/countries-gained-independence-from-the-uk/#:~:text=As%20our%20infographic%20shows%2C%20over,Brunei%20became%20an%20Islamic%20sultanate>, accessed 6th August 2022.

<sup>78</sup> Jonathan Charteris-Black, *Metaphors of Brexit :no cherries on the cake?*. (Bristol, 2019), p.89.

<sup>79</sup> Key Speeches, Interviews and op-eds

[http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key\\_speeches\\_interviews\\_and\\_op\\_ed.html](http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key_speeches_interviews_and_op_ed.html) , accessed 6th August 2022

<sup>80</sup> Charteris-Black, *Metaphors of Brexit* , p.192.

<sup>81</sup> H. J. van Houtum and R. Bueno Lacy. "The Political Extreme as the New Normal: The Cases of Brexit, the French State of Emergency and Dutch Islamophobia." *Fennia* 195, no. 1 (2017) p.91

<sup>82</sup> H. J. van Houtum and R. Bueno Lacy. "The Political Extreme as the New Normal: The Cases of Brexit, the French State of Emergency and Dutch Islamophobia." *Fennia* 195, no. 1 (2017) p.91

EU and its supposed ‘‘information deficit’’ which has challenged the legitimacy of the EU as it lacks engagement with the public. As a result, individuals know more about their national government than the EU largely due to the higher salience of ‘‘Bread and butter’’ issues in national politics.<sup>83</sup> A Eurobarometer survey conducted in May 2015 suggested that British citizens are less informed about the EU than citizens of any other member state: 84 per cent of the British public answered at least 1 of the three questions correctly while only 27 per cent of the British public could answer all three questions correctly.<sup>84</sup>



Figure 4: The Brexit Collection: 2016 referendum (London School of Economics Digital Catalogue) <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/collections/brexit/2016> , accessed 10th July 2022.

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<sup>83</sup> Nicholas Clarke. "The EU's Information Deficit: Comparing Political Knowledge Across Levels of Governance." *Perspectives on European Politics and Society* 15, no. 4 (2014): p.445.

<sup>84</sup> Standard Eurobarometer 83 - Spring 2015, <https://europa.eu/eurobarometer/surveys/detail/2099> , accessed 13th August 2022.



Figure 5: The Brexit Collection: 2016 referendum (London School of Economics Digital Catalogue) <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/collections/brexit/2016> , accessed 10th July 2022.

The slogan of ‘‘Independence Day’’ quickly was adopted and mobilised by the Leave side particularly in posters produced by the Leave side reiterating the analogy. Another example of this adoption of a colonial struggle between the EU and Britain was a poster produced by the organisation ‘‘Leave.EU’’ entitled ‘‘23rd June Independence Day’’ with the phrase ‘‘Leave the EU, Join the Fight!’’ scribed across the Union Jack Flag clearly illustrating the connection between this myth of a colonial war being fought.<sup>85</sup> Leave.EU (formally known as The Know) is a political campaign group founded in July 2015 in order to support the United Kingdom’s June 2016 referendum on EU membership.<sup>86</sup> The campaign was set up with the intention of becoming the lead official Leave campaign of the referendum but was beaten out by rival campaign Vote Leave.<sup>87</sup> Similarly, in another poster produced

<sup>85</sup> The Brexit Collection: 2016 referendum (London School of Economics Digital Catalogue) <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/collections/brexit/2016> , accessed 10th July 2022. Leave eu poster no.10

<sup>86</sup> <https://web.archive.org/web/20151013010834/http://leave.eu/en/our-campaign> , accessed 10th August 2022.

<sup>87</sup> Stone, Jon ‘‘Vote Leave designated as official EU referendum Out campaign’’, *Independent*, 13th April 2016.

by Leave.EU, voters were presented with the contrasting image of an EU flag set against the background of a storm and a hot air balloon with the Union Jack flag heading in the opposite direction towards the sun with the title ‘Vote to Leave the EU, 23rd June: Independence Day’.<sup>88</sup> This political/imperial myth of a ‘David vs Goliath’ struggle between Britain and the EU came to the fore of British politics during Brexit but is built off of a previously established pattern of Britain resisting EU policies as a continuation and preservation of British exceptionalism since the result of the referendum to join the EEC in 1975.<sup>89</sup> As previously mentioned, British exceptionalism is the inherent belief that consumes the nationalist psyche that Britain is an exception in Europe due to its geographical isolation, economic excellence and distinct history as a Global Empire. As Koegler, Malreddy and Tronicke stated ‘Britain’s EU membership has helped to sustain a victim-like, sacrificial, and defensive position, giving ample opportunity for constructing the country as having to fend off unjust, inferiorizing “onslaughts” of EU bureaucrats, and abject invasions of European immigrants’.<sup>90</sup> Many of the same arguments present in the first ever UK-wide referendum in which voters were asked “Do you think the United Kingdom should stay in the European Community (the common market)?” resulting in 67% of the voting electorate answering "yes" and 33% "no". Sarah Franklin contends that through the commemoration of fallen British soldiers a collective forgetting of how British imperialism and colonialism set the stage for the two world wars has occurred and thus neglecting the violent legacies of WWI and WWII and their reliance on the subjugation of colonised people around the globe.<sup>91</sup> The subversion of colonial roles reveals a former Empire’s blatant inability to envisage or conceptualise transnational cooperation in the form of the EU outside the confinements of coloniser and colonised.<sup>92</sup> The victim complex compounded during the referendum which was an amalgamation of popular WWII rhetoric, imperialist and populist myths, exceptionalism and narcissism revealed a lack of self-awareness on Britain’s side of its post-Empire position in the world and its imperial history and is a symptom of a countries’ inability to acknowledge its colonial past.

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<https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/vote-leave-designated-as-official-eu-referendum-out-campaign-a6982491.html>

<sup>88</sup> The Brexit Collection: 2016 referendum (London School of Economics Digital Catalogue) <https://digital.library.lse.ac.uk/collections/brexit/2016>, accessed 10th July 2022.

<sup>89</sup> Caroline Koegler, Pavan Kumar Malreddy, and Marlana Tronicke. "The Colonial Remains of Brexit: Empire Nostalgia and Narcissistic Nationalism." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 56, no. 5 (2020), p. 586.

<sup>90</sup> Koegler. "The Colonial Remains of Brexit" (2020), p. 586.

<sup>91</sup> Sarah Franklin. "NOSTALGIC NATIONALISM: How a Discourse of Sacrificial Reproduction Helped Fuel Brexit Britain." *Cultural Anthropology* 34, no. 1 (2019): p.52

<sup>92</sup> Koegler. "The Colonial Remains of Brexit" (2020), p. 587.

### Chapter 3: British National Identity

*‘‘We have become so used to Nanny in Brussels that we have become infantilised, incapable of imagining an independent future. We used to run the biggest empire the world has ever seen [...]. Are we really unable to do trade deals?’’<sup>93</sup>*

This chapter will examine how the Leave Side used historically and nostalgically steeped narratives of British national identity including a ‘‘Global Britain’’, the ‘‘Anglosphere’’ and British involvement in both World War I and World War II in order to appeal to the emotions of the British public.

#### Exceptionalism, ‘‘Global Britain’’ and the ‘‘Anglosphere’’

Immigration, sovereignty and border control were the divisive issues that dominated the Brexit campaign. Nevertheless, the Leave campaign continued to illustrate a very different image of a ‘‘Global Britain’’ that took pride in the commonwealth, the relationship between its former colonies and the times in which the British Empire ‘‘ruled the waves’’ and still had ‘‘control’’ based on a skewed and selective representation of Britain’s colonial history and involvement. Nationalistic and exceptional language which instilled pride in British voters of Britain’s history and past rather than shame successfully found salience with the public. Interestingly, the use of anti-immigration sentiments increased towards the end of the Leave campaign, clearly illustrating that Brexiteers discovered the grounds of leaving the EU based upon border control found prominence with the British voters. This is particularly evident from the sources entitled ‘‘Key speeches, interviews and op-eds’’ listed on the website *Vote Leave Take Control* dated from February 2016 to June 2016. While from February to April 2016 sources only mention immigration and border control 3/29 times, from May to June 2016 immigration is mentioned in 14/24 sources.<sup>94</sup> Nonetheless, it was evocation of a ‘‘Global Britain’’ and calls upon to return to the ‘‘Anglosphere’’ was revealed to be a vital tactic since the very start of the Leave side’s campaign. On the 20th February 2016 Michael Gove MP, Secretary of State for Justice released an essay explaining his support for Vote Leave, ‘‘The ability to choose who governs us, and the freedom to change laws we do not like, were secured for us in the past by radicals and liberals who took power from unaccountable elites and placed it in the hands of the people. As a result of their efforts we developed, and exported to nations like the US, India, Canada and Australia a system of democratic self-government which has brought prosperity and peace to millions’’.<sup>95</sup> During the campaign the Leave side argued the UK should leave the EU and return to consolidating trade relationships with the Commonwealth and setting up a points-based migration policy akin to that of Australia clearly illustrating the type of ‘‘Global Britain’’ the Leave side envisaged for Britain based upon ignoring the intricacies of its colonial past. While plans for a Global Britain were as a whole more forward looking to the future beyond the vote on 23rd June 2016, the calls to the Commonwealth nations represent an important part of imperial history and it is of no

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<sup>93</sup> Boris Johnson. ‘There is only one way to get the change we want – vote to leave the EU’, *Telegraph*, 16 March 2016.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/03/16/boris-johnson-exclusive-there-is-only-one-way-to-get-the-change> (accessed 25 July 2022).

<sup>94</sup> Key Speeches, Interviews and op-eds

[http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key\\_speeches\\_interviews\\_and\\_op\\_ed.html](http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key_speeches_interviews_and_op_ed.html), accessed 6th August 2022

<sup>95</sup> Key Speeches, Interviews and op-eds

[http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key\\_speeches\\_interviews\\_and\\_op\\_ed.html](http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key_speeches_interviews_and_op_ed.html), accessed 6th August 2022

coincidence why Brexiteers made this differentiation in their plans as the Anglosphere of New Zealand, Australia, Canada, and the United States was forged out of exceptionalism. The day after the referendum Nigel Farage stated “We are back to being a normal country, in charge of our own laws and able to start making our own relationships with the rest of the world. Maybe even reengaging with the Commonwealth”.<sup>96</sup> Despite the fact that one of the main reasons why voters voted to leave the EU was immigration, the Leave side explicitly expressed their desire for an open-borders agreement with the Commonwealth in lieu of leaving the EU. This call to the friends of the commonwealth to establish open borders and free trade yet again illustrates the simple fact that the Brexiteers do not fear open borders but the type of open borders advocated by the EU that are not in line with the ‘Empire 2.0’ vision of a predominately white union of English-speaking people with Britain at the helm as ‘the motherland’.<sup>97</sup> While many academics contend that modern British multiculturalism arose with the post WWII influx of non-white migrants its origins go back further to the creation of the multinational British state in 1707. Britishness was first conceptualised during the struggle against France and the following period of colonisation, which in turn deeply connected Britain to its imperial role.<sup>98</sup> As a result of this, decolonisation posed a direct threat to Britain’s understanding of itself and its place in the world, and it was the political response to this dilemma that created modern multicultural Britain. However, the Atlee Governments’ great efforts to forge a post-imperial Commonwealth vision immediately after the Second World War and out of the ashes of the British colonial Empire failed resulting in the creation of a political and legal legacy that intertwined race, citizenship and immigration with the pursuit of a post-decolonisation ‘Britishness’.<sup>99</sup>

The nostalgia for the Commonwealth represents a fascinating aspect of British history and culture that points to what Paul Gilroy diagnosed Britain with decades prior to Brexit; postcolonial melancholia. Gilroy suggests that this condition is a result of Britain’s refusal to address its imperial past and come to terms with the end of an Empire that has provided the foundation for its economic and political arrangements and cultural and national identity.<sup>100</sup> As a result of its highly exceptional mindset, Britain, instead of facing its loss of Empire and dealing with its imperial history and colonial involvement, Britain is caught in a collective pathology which results in mood swings that switch from ‘racist violence [as] an easy means to ‘purify’ and re-homogenize the nation’ that is the condition for ‘shamefaced tides of self-scrutiny and self-loathing’, interrupted by ‘outbursts of manic euphoria’ of national celebration.<sup>101</sup> This national celebration largely manifests itself in Britain’s enduring obsession with WWI and particularly WWII as Britain’s finest hour while routinely erasing

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<sup>96</sup>Key Speeches, Interviews and op-eds

[http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key\\_speeches\\_interviews\\_and\\_op\\_ed.html](http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/key_speeches_interviews_and_op_ed.html) , accessed 6th August 2022

<sup>97</sup> H. J. van Houtum and R. Bueno Lacy. "The Political Extreme as the New Normal: The Cases of Brexit, the French State of Emergency and Dutch Islamophobia." *Fennia* 195, no. 1 (2017) p.92

<sup>98</sup> Richard T. Ashcroft & Mark Bevir, ‘Multiculturalism in contemporary Britain: policy, law and theory’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 21 (2018), p.4.

<sup>99</sup> Richard T. Ashcroft & Mark Bevir, ‘Multiculturalism in contemporary Britain: policy, law and theory’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, 21 (2018), p.4.

<sup>100</sup> John Clarke. "A Sovereign People? Political Fantasy and Governmental Time in the Pursuit of Brexit: Brexit, Austerity and Agency." In , edited by Guderjan, M., H. Mackay and G. Stedman, 117-130. BRISTOL: Bristol Univ Pr, (2020), p.119.

<sup>101</sup> Paul Gilroy. *After Empire : melancholia or convivial culture?* (London, 2004), p.102

any trace of the Empire from wartime national identity despite the dependence of Britain on the military, industrial and diplomatic support of the dominions and colonies.<sup>102</sup>

## Patriotism and World War II

World War II holds a special place in the canon of British history and is central to our understanding of contemporary British national identity. Britain standing alone against Hitler and defeating the Nazis remains a powerful image and huge source of national pride in Britain and as previously mentioned further consolidated British exceptionalism and the otherness of Britain. The feeling that Royal Britannia had saved the world only bolstered and propelled British exceptionalism by adding to it a sense of pride and a self-image of a superior nation different to their European counterparts.<sup>103</sup> Furthermore 'Blitz and Dunkirk spirit' has shaped patriotic narratives of national identity since the 1940s and during the Brexit campaign became an exemplar of how Britain had been victorious in the past pre EU membership. Throughout the referendum campaign, the political discourse was routinely referred to as a war, a war between the political elite and those left behind by globalisation, a war between "heads and hearts" and a war between the nation state of Britain and the EU.



Figure 7: Poster Vic Bellamy (Independently), draws parallels between famous WWI mythological poster <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/voluntary-recruiting> , accessed 15th August 2022

In a poster produced by the Independent organisation "Vic Bellamy", the Leave side yet again reiterates the referendum campaign as a war in which the Brexiteers are asking the public (the voters) to do their duty to their country and to "Believe in Britain" by voting no in the referendum. The poster further consolidates the "War and Invasion" frame as conceptualised by Jonathon Charteris-Black by drawing parallels with the infamous WWI poster of Field-Marshal Lord

<sup>102</sup> Sonya O.Rose "Race, Empire and British Wartime National Identity, 1939-45." *Historical Research : The Bulletin of the Institute of Historical Research* 74, no. 184 (2001): p.220

<sup>103</sup>Crozier "British Exceptionalism", (2020), p.641.

Kitchener.<sup>104</sup> On 5th August 1914, the day after Britain declared war on Germany, Field-Marshal Lord Kitchener became Secretary of State for War and appealed for volunteers for a much-expanded British Expeditionary Force. This image became an icon of the enlistment spike in which nearly half a million men enlisted between August and September 1914 and is infamous for Kitchener's pointing finger and the words 'Your Country Needs You'.



Figure 6 : "Vote Leave" Bus (23rd May 2016)

The establishment of the NHS collided with a post-war Britain still reeling in the revels of its victory in 1948, the NHS is a source of national pride in the UK as one of the world's first free national health services founded in part as a result of the sacrifices made by the ordinary people during WWII. The Leave Side during the referendum campaign utilised this foundation story of the NHS, its reputation as a source of national pride and thus the ability to bring about an angry emotive response amongst voters if the narrative is presented that the EU was effectively taking £350 from the NHS, money which could be allocated on a national level rather than to the 'Bureaucrats in Brussels'.<sup>105</sup> In a narrated advertisement produced by "Vote Leave" the founding of the NHS is depicted like a phoenix rising from the embers of WWII by wartime leader Winston Churchill and Labour politicians Clement Attlee and Aneurin Bevan.<sup>106</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>104</sup> British Library, <https://www.bl.uk/world-war-one/articles/voluntary-recruiting>, accessed 15th August 2022.

<sup>105</sup> Figure 6 : "Vote Leave" Bus (23rd May 2016)

Michael Gove, Johnson, Boris, and Stuart, Gisela. "Statement by Michael Gove, Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart on NHS funding." Vote Leave Take Control, June 3, 2016.

[http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/statement\\_by\\_michael\\_gove\\_boris\\_johnson\\_and\\_gisela\\_stuart\\_on\\_nhs\\_funding.html](http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/statement_by_michael_gove_boris_johnson_and_gisela_stuart_on_nhs_funding.html)

<sup>106</sup> Vote Leave "Help Save the NHS on June 23". <https://www.facebook.com/505084413001821/videos/586074604902801> (accessed 24/07/22).

Following the result of the referendum, Brexit has emerged as a comprehensive field of study in which academics have extensively explored how and why it occurred. While the result of the referendum certainly shocked the international community, given Britain's history and tradition of euroscepticism and exceptionalism, it is not surprising that if any country were to leave the EU it would be Britain. Paul Gilroy argues in *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture* that the imperial and colonial history of a former coloniser continues to shape and affect its political life despite revisionist accounts of imperial and colonial history that soothe the national consciousness of former colonisers by reducing the imperial experience and its impact in determining the national identity and society of the colonising power, and thus sustaining the false illusion that Britain can be detached from its colonial/imperial past.<sup>107</sup> Gilroy asserts that the scant time in which colonial history and memory actually do enter the public domain; they have been whitewashed and expanded upon imperial myths and history with the sole purpose of promoting imperialist nostalgia.<sup>108</sup> This tradition of accommodating and even celebrating imperialist myths and nostalgic amnesia surrounding Britain's national identity, colonial ventures and "glory days" widely have gone unchallenged due to the blatant fact that Britons know very little about the history of the British Empire and even less about its ramifications on British modern society. In 2014, just two years before the consequential referendum a YouGov survey found that 59 per cent of the British public were proud of Britain's colonial history and just 19 percent of the public regarded it as something to be ashamed of and 23 percent of the public do not know how to feel about it.<sup>109</sup> The survey also found that young people are less likely to feel pride for the British Empire (52%) in contrast to the circa two-thirds (65%) of over 60s who mostly feel proud.<sup>110</sup> Britain's vexed relationship with its Imperial past and legacy holds a troubled place in the canon of British history and is widely facilitated by a lack of knowledge in its history. Britain has long struggled in its evaluation of its Empire and in recent years there has been calls by think tanks such as Runnymede to reform how Britons are taught "how Britain has influenced and been influenced by the wider world" and "Migration, belonging, and empire are central to understanding these processes".<sup>111</sup> With this in mind it is no coincidence that postcolonial and imperial tropes occupied the campaign strategies of the Leave side in order to appeal to a nostalgic British public.

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<sup>107</sup> Paul Gilroy. *After Empire : melancholia or convivial culture?* (London, 2004), p. 2.

<sup>108</sup> Gilroy. *After Empire* (London, 2004), p. 3.

<sup>109</sup> Will Dahlgreen, "The British Empire is something to be proud of", <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2014/07/26/britain-proud-its-empire> , accessed 2nd August 2022

<sup>110</sup> Will Dahlgreen, "The British Empire is something to be proud of", <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2014/07/26/britain-proud-its-empire> , accessed 2nd August 2022

<sup>111</sup> Tide-Runnymede report, "Teaching Migration, Belonging, and Empire in Secondary Schools, [https://assets-global.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/61bcc9eca927205637e401b8\\_TIDE\\_RunnymedeTeachingMigrationReport.pdf](https://assets-global.website-files.com/61488f992b58e687f1108c7c/61bcc9eca927205637e401b8_TIDE_RunnymedeTeachingMigrationReport.pdf) , accessed 3rd August 2022

As aforementioned the Leave campaign, UKIP and Tory backbenchers repeatedly harnessed colonial nostalgia, imperial glory and visions of British global excellence in order to influence voters to vote to leave the EU. This research has illustrated that the Leave campaign did this by framing the most pressing and divisive issues such as immigration, sovereignty border control and NHS money in nostalgic terms that ruminate a feeling of resentment, anger and yearning for a Britain pre-EU in the British public and in the 52% of the voters base that voted to leave the EU. As a result of a pre-existing culture of euroscepticism rooted in a tradition of British exceptionalism, the British public were susceptible to a romantic narrative framed by the Brexiteers. The use of the language of oppression and adaptation of colonial status did not end with the end of the Leave campaign in June 2016. Brexiteer Boris Johnson approached the issue from a distinct angle by reimagining and reconceptualising the coloniser as the colonised. Johnson habitually appropriated the language of oppression to portray Britain as being the victim of colonisation from the Political elite of Brussels and the EU. On the 9th July 2018 Boris Johnson in his resignation letter as Foreign secretary stated that Theresa May's Brexit plan would diminish Britain to "the status of a colony".<sup>112</sup> Johnson reimagined and subverted the analogy of the relationship between the coloniser and colonised by portraying Britain as a victim of the oppressive European Union. In conclusion, the Leave campaign managed to successfully frame the referendum in terms that could resonate emotionally and historically with its voters by invoking familiar images of Britain at war, defending its sovereignty, scapegoating the EU and focusing on bread and butter issues such as the NHS and border control. While this thesis has its limits in its inability to analyse the Remain campaign, it is a well acknowledged fact that the remain side shied away from issues of European identity and focused on the economy and thus perhaps alienating the voters. The Leave side, however, framed the referendum in largely positive terms by romanticising the "once in a lifetime" opportunity for Britain to leave the EU, "take back control" and return to the glory days of the Empire.

This research has offered a comprehensive analysis into how the Leave side evoked imperial nostalgia and postcolonial misconceptions in order to frame the prospect of Britain leaving the EU in nostalgic terms by invoking postcolonial misconceptions and imperial nostalgia. By doing so, this thesis has filled a gap in existing literature in which an analysis of how the Leave side framed the referendum in nostalgic terms in order to appeal to the emotions of the British public was lacking. While the few studies that do exist cover postcolonialism and emotions separately in their analysis, they do not fully explore what connects them to Brexit; nostalgia. This analysis has also illuminated the role emotions have and their value in referenda study. Many academics in the wake of Brexit questioned the value of

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<sup>112</sup> (Buchan 2018, )

referendums in European Integration as a result of the highly emotive nature of the campaign. This research addresses proponents of an "emotional turn" in EU studies more generally by showing how analysis of emotions such as anger and nostalgia aids us in explaining the cultural and emotional resonance of political discourse.<sup>113</sup> This research has also given an insight into the relationship between the UK and the EU as conceived by UK citizens during the campaign as a zero-sum game in which as a result of a strong tradition of British exceptionalism masked as euroscepticism any sort of encroachment on the sovereignty of the UK is seen as a threat to British national identity. Power struggles over sovereignty is at the heart of the relationship between the British nation and the supranational institution that is the EU. Nevertheless, this thesis is not without its limitations, particularly its inability to analyse the campaign output of the Leave side's opponents; Britain Stronger in Europe. As a result this research has not established whether postcolonial/imperial references were employed by the Remain campaign, a point which could be taken into account for future research. In addition to this, due to time constraints this thesis could only examine a limited number of newspaper articles, statements, speeches and op-eds. However, the sample chosen during this content analysis is sufficiently representative of the campaign output and has resulted in a clear examination and answer.

In conclusion, the campaign tactics, ideology and activities of the Leave campaign were effectively transformed by the postcolonial and imperial history of Britain, its unacknowledged past. This thesis has demonstrated that the Leave Campaign consciously rooted its message in British colonial and imperial history, in order to resonate with a British audience and culture unfamiliar with the political elite and supposed bubble of Brussels, apprehensive of their post-colonial position in the world and nostalgic for a time in which Britain was the protagonist and "main character" of the global political stage. The political climate that rules Europe at this moment in time is not without one of the most fundamental elements of the human experience; emotions. Political emotionality is present across Europe as it is encroached upon the pervasive rise of fear and anger driven National Populism. We live in rapidly changing times in which the geopolitical, demographic and technological state of the world is constantly transforming and thus it is no wonder why nostalgic and emotional appeals succeeded during the EU referendum.

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