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Brexit and the Borders and Boundaries of the European Union

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Abstract

The article makes the case for the study of borders and boundaries as intertwined concepts that bear multiple implications for understanding the prominence of anti-migration in the public discourse. In this sense Brexit is approached as the epitome of the rebordering of Europe and the analysis' focus falls on the influence on the outcome of the referendum of the discourses of 'invading' Eastern Europeans that burden the British state. The data used includes the declarations of British political leaders, found in media articles and in the official communication of the British Government, over the period of the campaign for the Brexit referendum, as well as in relation to the main milestones of Romania's European integration. The referendum campaign rhetoric is placed within the wider strategy for obtaining restrictions and exceptions from the principles of freedom of movement in order to curb the mobility of the poor and of those perceived as threateningly different. At the same time, the case of Brexit reveals how outsiders are strategically portrayed as invaders and parasites in order to reclaim territorially binding powers.

Keywords: EU freedom of movement; Brexit; migration; borders; boundaries; discourse.

1. Introduction

On January 1st 2014, the British media brought into the spotlight an event one might have thought unlikely to receive so much attention: the arrival at Luton airport of a Romanian carpenter named Victor Spirescu. There had been much media frenzy around the lifting of restrictions to the British labour market of Romanians and Bulgarians. Claims of an imminent invasion of Eastern Europeans had also been made. On January 1st, when journalists together with one Labour Party Member of Parliament went to the airport to witness the arrival of the alleged hordes of migrants, they found only one man from Romania entering the country: Victor Spirescu.

Mr. Spirescu achieved more than fifteen minutes of fame. He was pictured in various newspapers and branded the ‘poster boy’ of Romanian immigration. A year after his arrival a BBC report followed up on his situation (BBC, 2014). In 2018 Mr. Spirescu died in a car crash he caused – an event that was also covered in the media (BBC, 2018). The explanation behind the portrayal as something sensational of the otherwise uneventful arrival of Mr. Spirescu at Luton airport might be found when relating this episode of media frenzy to the media ‘scares’ spurred around Romania’s integration into the European Union. Romanians make up a category of EU citizens in the UK that is more recent, but also second most populous (Office for National Statistics, 2017). As shown above, they are well targeted by the media. As early as 2006, the introduction of low cost flights from Bucharest to the UK was received with newspaper titles such as ‘Get ready for a huge new invasion’ (Daily Express, 2006). More importantly for this research paper, the stories of invading Romanians became an important topic in the debate around Brexit. Although Mr. Spirescu and the other Romanians moving to the UK were EU citizens making use of their right to freedom of movement since 2007, some media and British politicians continued to present their mobility as some sort of a transgression.

In focus of this article is the role played by the representation of an alleged European ‘migration problem’ as an invasion of destitute, criminal, and ill Roma from Eastern Europe (Yildiz and DeGenova, 2017) in the ultimate decision in the Brexit referendum. The article investigates how discourses of invasion and parasitism have reaffirmed a boundary between the wanted and the unwanted migrants and framed the free movement of Romanians as an epitome of the latter. The scope is that of revealing the interweavement of the concepts of boundaries and borders. By approaching the British example, the article makes the case that the social, material, and symbolic screens (van Baar, 2014: 88) that frame the mobility of specific categories of EU citizens, can culminate with the reinforcement of a physical border and the separation from the European Union altogether.

A more detailed coverage of the concepts of borders and boundaries in (anti)migration research is included in the second section of the article. Section three bridges the concepts of borders and boundaries and anti-migration discourse. In order to do so, the analysis method and the data used are also described in this section. Subsequently, the paper covers the representation of the circulation of Eastern European EU citizens towards the UK by British political leaders in the build up towards the Brexit referendum and during the campaign, and how the ‘us’ and the ‘them’ were constructed.

2. 'Borders', 'boundaries' and their significance in studying migration and anti-migration

The resilience of the mobility of poorer categories of Eastern Europeans despite the symbolic and even institutional hurdles may be considered an argument of cosmopolitanism from below taking place in the EU (Ciulinaru, 2018). At the same time, the symbolic and institutional hurdles set in the path of this mobility seem to challenge the discourse of a cosmopolitan, borderless European Union. As Newman (2006) argues, the borderless world discourse has spurred the study of borders. There is an interest to explain the inter-group and inter-societal difference with the 'us' and the 'here' being located inside the border while the 'other' and the 'there' is everything beyond the border (Newman, 2006: 172).

In a European Union context, (re)-bordering refers rather to social, material, and symbolic screens (van Baar, 2014: 88) that limit specific groups' rights as EU citizens. The British example brings back into the spotlight the physical border. On the other hand, borders, as territorial limits defining political entities and legal subjects, and the social constructs establishing symbolic differences and producing identities, henceforth named boundaries, have to be approached as intertwined concepts in order to grasp how migration is governed and experienced (Fassin, 2011:2014). Social and cultural boundaries are usually important in how states produce and reproduce expressions of territoriality and various forms of inclusion/exclusion (Paasi, 2005). In the case of Mr. Spirescu for example, the physical border can be crossed freely but his belonging in the receiving country is still questioned. Social groupings and distinctions between them are created and maintained through spatial practice and discourses. Practice and narratives of boundaries underpin the constitution and the governance of social groups and of their identities. Hence boundaries are often understood as exclusive constituents of identity and are taken for granted (Paasi, 2005).

The case of the mobility of Eastern Europeans in the EU, especially that of the Roma ethnics, and its significance for the study of borders and boundaries has been approached from a securitization perspective, such as that of Huub van Baar (2014). Van Baar focuses on the proliferation of ambivalent mechanisms and practices of migration management, in the context of the Europeanization of migration policy and the emergence of new practices of crossing and challenging both borders and boundaries (van Baar, 2014: 88). A second stance is that of a subjective collective delineation of whose place is where. Aidan McGarry (2017: 101–104) explains in this sense the difference between citizenship and belonging. According to McGarry (2017: 103) this is the boundary between the minority and the citizens whose presence in the homeland is assumed as rightful because they are part of the homogeneous nation the homeland is inextricably associated with. Minorities such as the Roma migrants from Eastern Europe are not perceived as belonging (McGarry, 2017: 104) despite having the legal status of EU citizens enjoying the right of crossing the member states' borders freely. Beyond the formal recognition by the state of membership to a political community, the majority's recognition of one's belonging is the condition for the fruition of participation, identity, and rights. This notion can further be related to that of moral universe inclusiveness (Schwartz, 2007), which explains the breadth of the

community of people to which one applies the same values of justice, help, and compassion as to oneself. In this way one can explain not just the physical border, or the physical removal through expulsion, or physical isolation outside the community through segregation, but one can also make salient the boundaries separating those for which such exclusive measures are regarded as acceptable or even justified.

Mezzadra and Nielson (2011) acknowledge the potential of the border as not only a site of exclusion, but also as the friction point between processes of reinforcement and blocking and traversing and crossing. Citizenship alone cannot capture the exclusion minorities are experiencing, as these citizens are both under the protection of the law and members of the juridical-political space, but are still not included (McGarry, 2017: 103). The moral ground for restrictive migratory policies is found in an emphasis on the membership, on the duties, on the social ties and on the sense of loyalty that arise from a shared life and history (Sandel, 2009:230–232).

3. Data and methods

Opinion polls among British voters (Khan, 2016) prior to the Brexit vote, as well as opinions from various areas of academia (Kaufmann, 2016; Glencross, 2016; Yildiz and DeGenova, 2017) explain the victory of the ‘leave’ campaign by its ability to emphasize the ‘us versus them’ divide and by stirring the fears of the public towards immigrants. Strategies of positive self-representation and negative presentation of others are the markers of discursive construction of in- and out-groups (Wodak, 2009: 39). The aim of the analysis was to reveal the explicit or tacit arguments employed by British politicians and the *topoi*, or ‘reservoirs of generalized key ideas’ (Richardson, 2004: 230) to which they made reference in order to underpin their arguments concerning migration (Wodak, 2001). Of high relevance for the analysis was the use of metaphors through which social actors were categorized. More specifically, of importance were two metaphors appealing to the imagery of a border that would stand against particular categories of migrants.

The discourse of invasion tends to interconnect with and mutually reinforce the discourse of parasitism, as both are metaphors appealing to the imagery of an infestation. The more radical form of the discourse of parasitism is rooted in the practice to use vermin, disease and decomposition metaphors to vilify Jewish people (Musolff, 2010). In line with the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) tradition, this paper places the use of the discourses of invasion and of parasitism within the resurgence of far-right and populist discourses across Europe and its aim at determining membership, setting clear borders between those who belong and those who are excluded (Wodak, 2009; 2015). Those perceived as significantly different are the preferred targets of populist discourse which exploits the doubts of the majority towards the belonging of those ‘not-alike’. As well in line with the CDA paradigm that discourse and social practice constitute each other (van Leeuwen and Wodak, 1999), the analysis assumes a dialectical relationship between discursive events and their respective situational, institutional and social contexts. In this sense the analysis traces the relation between Brexit related discursive events and the wider discourses of British politicians concerning migration in general and the free movement of Romanians in particular.

For selecting the data, it was taken into account that populist discourses on migration and minorities are not to be found only with the overtly right-wing parties and politicians. Political parties across the spectrum have accommodated some of the radical rhetoric (Pohl and Wodak, 2012). The moderate political camp might be attracted rather by the discourse of parasitism, in an attempt to still preserve the advantages of migration, once the alleged free riders and the abusers are excluded. The trademark of right wing populism is the politics of fear. In this sense, appeals to common sense and anti-intellectualism underpin the construction of a scapegoat minority (Wodak, 2015). At the same time, the far-right raises the stakes by pushing more provocative, even scandalous ideas in the public debate, which overshadow the attempts to present other frames, values, counterarguments, and any other relevant agenda (Pohl and Wodak, 2012).

The data include the declarations of British political leaders over the period of the campaign for the Brexit referendum, from March until July 2016, as well as prior declarations in relation to the main milestones of Romania's European integration. The analysis uses written text from two sources: media articles available online and official communication materials of the British Government. In what the texts produced during the Brexit campaign are concerned, the data is comprised of the declarations of Government members and of political leaders of the 'Leave' camp from March until July 2016. The declarations of the Ministers, especially those of the Prime Minister, were collected from the British Government's web portal. All materials under the 'Announcements' section of the portal for the period 1st March - 1st July 2016, were collected. Those who did not mention the topic migration were filtered out. Regarding the 'Leave' camp political leaders, the speeches and declarations of Nigel Farage and of Boris Johnson published in the on-line editions of newspapers in the same period were collected. As a search key the name of the politician and the name of the respective month and the year were used. The first two search results in the list were used. After all search results were collected, those not making any reference to migration were filtered out. In total 9 texts from the Government web page and a sample of 10 media articles were used.

After aggregating the texts, i.e. politicians' speeches and declarations that made reference to migration in the context of the Brexit referendum, a first stage of the analysis identified how the topic of migration was approached: was it referred to extensively, or mentioned as a side issue? If migration was the most covered topic, then which were the secondary ones? The next stage of the analysis focused on the discursive strategies employed in order to depict the migrants in relation to the decision of remaining or leaving the European Union. The discursive strategies used by the Government and by the other political leaders were placed within the historical discourses concerning migration. The references to migration in the context of Brexit were linked to the reactions towards the alleged migration risks of the EU's expansion to the East.

Also of relevance was the interdiscursivity between the Brexit discourse and the discourses around migration policies adopted in the past by the British authorities. Persuasion strategies were of interest, as it might be achieved through sound arguments or by using fallacious arguments that influence the public suggestively and manipulatively (Reisigl, 2014). Of importance was whether the persuasion strategies used by the political leaders engaged the *topoi* which came to be typical of the

migrants exclusionary discourse: the topoi of parasitism, and the topoi of infestation (Reisigl and Wodak, 2001).

4. A feeling that the border has been breached: anxiety towards migration from the EU's Eastern member states

The UK Independence Party (UKIP) had been stirring the British public anxiety towards migration for some time before the Brexit referendum. Like challenger parties elsewhere in Europe in the aftermath of the economic crisis in the late 2000s (Hobolt and Tilley, 2016), while the mainstream left and right converged on a policy of austerity and an adherence to the fiscal policy-making guidelines of the EU, UKIP proposed an agenda focusing on the desire to reclaim national sovereignty by controlling immigration and taking back powers from the EU. Farage's preference for depicting the citizens of Romania and Bulgaria as an unmanageable threat has a rather long history, dating back from the pre-accession period. After a visit to Romania in 2006, Farage concluded: 'I spoke to Government officials in Bucharest. They told me 'We have a problem in this country with Roma but soon it will be yours' (Daily Express, 2006).

The UK had not applied transitional restrictions on EU 8 workers. The influx of citizens from the new member states was already at the forefront of the public debate and the dissatisfaction over the handling of the 2004 EU 8 accession amplified the fears towards Romania and Bulgaria joining the Union. Studies of British media coverage of the issue of migration from Romania and Bulgaria, such as that of Light and Young (2009), reveal that a 'scare' preceded every step of the process of EU integration. Discourses of threat intensified (Light and Young, 2009: 287) as British tabloid newspapers announced and imminent invasion of thousands of Romanians and Bulgarians that were expected to raise levels of criminality and trigger an 'explosion' in cases of tuberculosis (TB) and AIDS (The Sun, 2006).

By playing this same card, UKIP managed to establish itself as the party with the third largest number of votes overall (without winning any seats) in the 2015 General Elections. In order to achieve this, the party improved its position among British parties by assimilating Euro-scepticism with anti-migration and adopting a populist critique of the main political parties due to their alleged inability to deal with migration (Dennison and Goodwin, 2015: 172). It capitalized on the public debate over the lifting of transitional measures for Bulgaria and Romania. The party leader, Nigel Farage, predicted that catastrophic numbers of Romanians and Bulgarians would come to Britain starting with 2014.

'This will be the biggest campaigning issue for UKIP in 2013 and one which will influence every local and by-election we fight' (Nigel Farage) (Giannangeli, 2012)

'In Bulgaria, 46 per cent of people are living below the poverty line. This is real poverty - not being able to feed your family - not the relative poverty David Cameron speaks about. If I was Bulgarian I'd be packing my bags now, getting ready to come to the UK on an unrestricted basis, in the secure knowledge that

if I can't get work, I'd get benefits and housing.' (Nigel Farage) (Giannangeli, 2012)

The postponement of free access for Bulgarian and Romanian workers was intended to protect the EU 15 member states from the alleged poor and morally compromised individuals who intended to capitalize on their right to free movement by abusing welfare support and social services (Manolova, 2017). The transitory conditions imposed on the free movement of Romanians were not sufficient to appease the fears of some parts of the British public. The end of transitional restrictions was looked at with anxiety not only by the British Government, but also by the governments of Austria, Germany and the Netherlands. This anxiety was expressed in April 2013 in a common letter of the respective countries Interior Ministers to the then Irish Presidency of the EU Council. The letter stated that 'currently, a number of municipalities, towns and cities in various Member States are under considerable strain by certain immigrants from other Member States' (Letter to the Presidency, 2013).

In reference to the concept of boundaries and borders, the 2013 letter of the ministries of the interior can be seen as a means to draw the line between those considered the real citizens and the wrong kind of people coming from the other EU member states, especially from the new member states (Guild, 2016). According to Guild, the letter discerns between the 'nationals of the Member States and in whose name the interior ministers allegedly are acting, the Union citizens who enjoy that title because they comply with EU secondary legislation as understood by the interior ministers, European citizens who are really immigrants because they fail to meet the requirements and Union citizens and their third country nationals (family members) who are fraudulently using and abusing EU free movement rights to avoid national laws' (Guild, 2016: 55). It is worth noticing that the latter two categories in the letter are not perceived as citizens exercising their rights, but as immigrants abusing the freedom of movement. According to the four ministers, these people are not proper beneficiaries because they, by default, do not fulfil the requirements for the exercise of the right of free movement.

The social security system is the likely domain for drawing the separation line between the desired and undesired migrants. Member States have exclusive competence for the design, organization and funding of their social security systems. Within the overarching EU framework, they are free to decide who is entitled to be insured, which benefits are granted and under what conditions, and how benefits are calculated (D'Angelo and Kofman, 2017). Hence, the social security system becomes a lever at the disposal of national governments to act as a filter of migrants, more specifically of migrants with limited resources. The existence of some level of nationalism in the allocation of welfare benefits is not a novelty. In some cases the creation of welfare entitlements schemes had the defence or promotion of the nation as a reason. Migrant biographies may deviate from expectations of welfare states; consequently, the underpinning assumptions of welfare which applies to citizens can no longer be presupposed in the case of migrants (Bommes, 2000). Though it means comparing two different welfare models (Esping-Andersen et al., 2002), one can extrapolate to the British case Michael Bommes' (2000: 105) observations regarding German migration policies and their aim to reduce welfare provisions for those who

are in a legal position to acquire permanent residence permits. Western European states facing increased migration such as Germany and Great Britain redefine welfare recipients by introducing the criteria of legal residence and participation in the labour market, in order to reduce welfare access for migrants, as well as to keep migration flows under control.

Policy proposals for managing the public discontent at the arrival of poor immigrants from the new EU member states were packaged by British politicians as measures to counter welfare tourism. The idea that the UK was a welfare magnet was common on all sides of the British political spectrum. In 2013, the Conservative Government announced increasing restrictions on welfare rights for EU migrants. The pro-European Liberal Democrats supported limitations on the right to free movement of future entrants as well as limitations for new entrants coming as self-employed. Subsequently, the Liberal Democrats leaders supported Cameron's proposals to restrict access to benefits for Jobs Seekers Allowance, child benefits and child tax credits to three months instead of six months as from November 2014, under the condition that the individual had been in the UK for three months. The Labour Party supported that only those migrants who had previously paid national insurance be eligible for welfare payments (D'Angelo and Kofman, 2017: 188). The inflated figures and scary stories used by the tabloid papers sustained the growing anti-immigration feeling in the mainstream political discourse (D'Angelo and Kofman, 2017: 189).

'So, welfare and training reform are a key part of our approach to immigration. Indeed, one of the problems that the government has had in the past when it comes to immigration is that it's been working in silos. Controlling immigration has been a job for the Home Office, but the reality is you can't control immigration if you have a welfare system that takes no account of who it's paying out to. You can't control immigration if you have a healthcare system that takes no account of the people using it. And you can't control immigration if you have a housing policy that doesn't take account of how long people have lived and contributed to a local area.' (David Cameron's immigration speech) (Prime Minister's Office, 2013)

In the build up to the Brexit referendum, a majority of the British public opinion seemed to favour the proposal to place restrictions on EU citizens claiming benefits. This prevalent attitude might be a good indicator of what the public came to perceive as a main issues of free movement. An IPSOS-Mori poll conducted late June/early July 2016 further confirms this hypothesis, as 60 per cent of the participants in the study answered that freedom of movement should be restricted. 70 per cent of respondents said that their option for restrictions was due to pressure on public services, 59 per cent due to the number coming to the UK to claim benefits, and 55 per cent because of pressure on housing. Support for staying in the Union dropped from 52 per cent to 36 per cent when considering a scenario under which freedom of movement was not limited (IPSOS-Mori, 2016). And it seems that the figures confirm immigration as the single most important factor influencing the decision of voters in the Brexit referendum (Khan, 2016). The same IPSOS- Mori Issues Index followed the public attitude towards migration up to the Brexit referendum and after. In the wake of the victory of the 'leave' camp, an analysis of the statistics concluded that the

outcome of the EU referendum coincided with an increase of ten per cent in respondents saying immigration was the biggest issue faced by the country (Khan, 2016). This peak in May-June 2016 was also the moment when immigration took prominence over all other topics in the referendum campaign, such as the economy.

5. The UK Government arguments to strengthen the welfare boundary

One preliminary observation about the speeches of the Cameron Government in the period March- June 2016 is that they favour to a great extent the topic of the economy. The arguments of the Remain camp, most importantly of the Prime Minister, are built on economic indicators that highlight the advantages of being a member of the EU single-market. As the vote statistics show, these arguments fell short of influencing a majority of the electorate. Hence, the 'leave' camp moved the focus of the campaign away from any facts based arguments. The catastrophic economy scenarios made by experts were likely to be countered by an already existing resentment against experts, as well as against elites in general, be it intellectual or political (Glencross, 2016: 3).

'I don't think we should risk our economy. We shouldn't risk the investment that a company like this brings into Britain. So I think the most important argument in this debate is the one about our economy.'(Prime Minister's Office, 2016a)

Immigration is present in David Cameron's speeches but to a lesser extent than the economy. Free movement is presented as the backside of retaining the advantages of the common market. Free movement is the necessary price even countries that are not EU members such as Norway and Switzerland have to pay in order to have access to the EU market.

'If we chose the Norway option and said we're going to stay in the single market because it's so important for our jobs, we'd have to accept free movement of people. In fact, Norway doesn't even have the deal. I've got to make sure people have to pay in before they get out on welfare. So that's the choice.' (Prime Minister's Office, 2016a)

Though secondary to the economic aspects, the coverage of migration in the Prime Minister's speeches is highly relevant as it underlines that the rights of EU citizens in Britain should be defined by the host Member State in the interests of the protection of its own nationals. For the Prime Minister, the EU citizens are immigrants subject to authorization from state bureaucracies on whether they can enter, reside, work and enjoy family reunion in the 'host' state. The Prime Minister's coverage of the issue of migration marks a transition from entitlement and rights of citizens to precarity and exclusion of foreigners (Guild, 2016).

As free movement was presented as the necessary cost, the Remain camp in the Conservative party emphasized the importance of the renegotiation of access to welfare of EU citizens. What is moreover interesting for this research is that the Government engaged in distinguishing between deserving and non-deserving

recipients of welfare, in ways which bore consequences not only on the entitlement to welfare, but also frames their worthiness as people. The changes to the conditions of welfare entitlement have to be looked at within the intention of keeping the undeserving migrants out, which the British Government set out as early as 2013.

Prime Minister Cameron's intended limitations on access to welfare protection of EU citizens are in line with the Conservative Party's policies to curtail the access of persons from abroad to the welfare state since the 1980s onwards. As a broadly 'liberal' welfare regime (Esping-Andersen et al., 2002), a low support of the British public for redistribution to outsider groups is expectable (Balch and Balabanova, 2016). The UK welfare system has been on the path of restructuring that targeted those deemed undeserving for decades (Sales, 2002: 457). Previous waves of immigration to the UK, from Ireland and the former colonies, had also been enabled by free movement frameworks but were replaced with permission-based frameworks. A retreat from the rights-based migration policy of the 1948 British Nationality Act took place 1962 and 1981 (Dennison and Geddes, 2018: 1140). The major discursive frame in introducing restrictions were welfare abuse and fraud. Claims of abuse, opportunism, and benefit tourism to fraudulent entry were used to justify the restrictions (Sainsbury, 2012) which, in their turn, followed the logic of marginalizing alleged welfare abusers while barring migrants from social integration and ensuring that migration is reversible (Geddes, 2000: 143). For example, in 1996 and 1999 asylum legislation was introduced to restrict welfare benefits in order to deter so called bogus asylum seekers.

After the 1999 Immigration and Asylum act, asylum ceased to be enforced as a human right, but rather was organized as a political discretion (Geddes, 2000: 137) with the purpose of curbing migration flows instead of facilitating the settlement of those allowed to remain (Sales, 2002: 457). The myth of the welfare-scrourning bogus asylum seeker (Geddes, 2000: 137) permeated welfare policy and was reflected into measures that used social exclusion as a means to prevent unwanted migration (Sales, 2002). At the same time, the community of legitimate welfare receivers was reassured and delineated from the category of perceived illegitimate migrants. The welfare state instead of offering the means of inclusion and participation rather marginalized asylum seekers.

As in the case of asylum, welfare control on EU citizens resulted in the construction of different categories of 'EU migrants'. Unlike in the case of asylum seekers, for Eastern European unwanted migrants, barriers could not be set higher by British Government without the interference of the European Union. Hence the complicated negotiation the Cameron Government had to go through. Though the outcome of the negotiations failed to be perceived as a resounding victory, and in the end it did not turn the faith of the referendum, the concessions requested by the British side reveal the fear towards EU citizens. The demands amount to a nothing less than a restriction of EU citizens' entitlement to move and reside in the UK (Guild, 2016: 76).

'But we need to go further to reduce the numbers coming here. As I have said previously, we can reduce the flow of people coming from within the EU by reducing the draw that our welfare system can exert across Europe. So we have proposed that people coming to Britain from the EU must live here and

contribute for four years before they qualify for in-work benefits or social housing. And that we should end the practice of sending child benefit overseas.’ (Prime Minister’s Office, 2016b)

In the letter to the President of the EU Council in which the demands were set out, the section concerning free movement is entitled ‘Immigration’. Under the same optics as in the 2013 letter of the Ministers of the Interior, this is a shift from entitlement and rights of citizens to precarity and exclusion of foreigners (Guild, 2016: 15). It is assumed that it was UKIP that imposed the term ‘EU immigrant’ so decisively in public debate. By looking at Prime Minister Cameron’s choice of terms when referring to EU citizens, it might be assumed that his strategy opened the way for UKIP’s success. Referring to EU citizens as ‘immigrants’ further exacerbated the British self-perception as substantially distinct from Europeans (Dennison and Geddes 2018: 1140). At the same time all Europeans in the UK were placed under an umbrella term with rather negative connotations.

And while UKIP made the gains among British voters, the Cameron Government persuaded the EU Commission to approach EU citizens as immigrants, and to propose a safeguard mechanism that was intended as ‘a solution to the United Kingdom’s concerns about the exceptional inflow of workers from elsewhere in the European Union that it has seen over the last years’ (European Council, 2016). The safeguard mechanism meant that the Commission proposed a roll-back of the protection directive 2004/38 offered to EU citizens against arbitrary expulsion, and of EU citizens’ rights overall (Guild, 2016: 79). If applied, the mechanism would have opened the way for discrimination on the basis of nationality. The mechanism proposed a softening of protection against other forms of discrimination, as suspicion and prejudice regarding EU citizens’ activities would not have to be confirmed by a court of justice as grounds for expulsion. On the contrary, the fears of administrators regarding an EU citizen would be sufficient to do so.

The recurrent adjustments of social support by the British Government in response to perceived migration pressures, indicates an alignment between the grasp of welfare and the ‘us’ in-group. The perceived legitimate/ illegitimate divide between welfare receivers, seems to coincide with the border between those considered to have a genuine claim to reside on British soil and those who do not. These changes have intensified differences among the local population and migrants as well as among different categories of migrants, with a widening gap between the rights of the most precarious and the long-term secure residents (Sales, 2002: 461). Aside the formal restriction to social services and, subsequently, to rights, the official discourse of ‘illegitimate migrants’ likely spurs discriminatory practices and adds institutional informal barriers. Access to rights is dependent not merely on formal status, but on social divisions based on gender, class and ethnicity (Kofman et al., 2000).

6. Reinstate a physical border: the rhetoric of the ‘Leave’ camp

Though dramatic in its effects over the right of free movement (Guild, 2016), the technical aspects of welfare entitlement renegotiation were unlikely to be of interest for the general public (Glencross, 2016). The so-called success of the negotiations in Brussels helped the campaign of the ‘leave’ camp, especially that of UKIP. Even if it

was promoted as a major Government achievement that should appease migration concerns, the 36 pages conclusions document of the February European Council became a symbol for the Eurosceptics' message that the EU was 'irreformable' (Glencross, 2016). Moreover, the Government's discourse of the deserving and non-deserving migrants played into the hands of the anti-EU camp.

The Remain lead in the polls gradually vanished as the referendum campaign came to focus on controlling immigration. The Leave campaign chose to counter the pro-European pro-common market arguments by underlining that migration control was restricted by the common market itself. Prime Minister Cameron's attempts to discern among the good and the undeserving migrants were undermined by his own party members. The Leave supporters inside the Conservative Party downplayed the possibility of controlling migration while still an EU member, as well as the role of expert opinions in decision making (Glencross, 2016: 44)

'it is deeply corrosive of popular trust in politics that every year people in power say they can cut immigration' (Boris Johnson) (The Telegraph 2016)

'people in this country have had enough of experts' (Michael Gove) (The Telegraph, 2016)

Overall, the Conservatives' policies during the summer of 2016 were reactions to changes in public opinion that were both reflected and led by the media. Tabloids had gained an influential role in setting the agenda on immigration, and these newspapers reproduced mostly the messages against it. As confirmed by Bennett's analysis of messages on social networks (Bennett, 2016), the Government attempted to stay in tune with the public debate led by the populist UKIP party, which had anti-migration as its focus. UKIP represented itself as the single source of truth in the name of as true, real or unitary popular voice (Freedon, 2017). By this it rejected plurality and exacerbated the fears of an anxious public, which it positioned as the 'authentic' people. With the help of tabloid media, UKIP managed to impose its own electorate as the 'people' and their fear of migrants as the main topic of the Brexit campaign.

In his argumentation, Nigel Farage often uses the topos of cultural difference to equate Europe to failed multiculturalism (Bennet, 2016). Reference to Eastern Europeans is made in order to support the superiority of the more advanced British culture for which the tides and floods of migrants are a threat. Hostility towards migration from (post socialist) 'Eastern European' EU member states in particular was channelled to a politically focused antagonism towards Britain's membership in the EU (Yildiz and DeGenova, 2017). A yearly increase of about 25 per cent or more since 2012 in the numbers of Romanian and Bulgarian migrants in Britain (Office for National Statistics, 2017), was exploited as a confirmation that UKIP is the only political player able to anticipate the effects of free movement, unlike the political establishment. Let alone that many of Eastern European migrants did not match Farage's description of welfare profiteers, higher numbers of voters got hope that UKIP's strategy to take Britain out of the EU would protect them against the economic and cultural effects of the demographic change brought about by migration (Dennison and Goodwin, 2015).

UKIP's 'Say No to EU' campaign actually entailed a very calculated and manifold degradation of the EU citizenship of both British and non-British alike (Yildiz and Degenova, 2017). This strategy was underpinned by the conflation of the working-class 'Eastern European' migrants with the more specific abjection of – often homeless – Roma migrants. The success of such arguments stands proof that anti-Roma racism is neither an aberrant relic nor a 'local' peculiarity of Eastern European countries, but rather a potent and viral agent in contemporary European anti-immigrant nativism (van Baar, 2015).

Furthermore, UKIP cast doubt on the credibility of the 'remain' campaign by throwing unlikely but highly unpopular scenarios as the accession of Turkey or that of overflows of refugees into the debate. Despite the gross misrepresentation of the issues, the assurances of the Remain camp were easily linked to the electorate's memory of the Blair Government miscalculations of the influx of migrants post the 2004 enlargement. Unlike the Cameron Government and the other parties that adjusted their message to the shifts in public opinion, UKIP exploited each event and recontextualized it within its message against Europe. The party reacted to the 2015 terrorist attacks in Paris by linking Europe, migration, and terrorism (The Independent 2015). For the refugees in Calais, Farage called on the army to intervene to defend Britain. (The Telegraph 2015).

The anti-immigration discourse of the Brexit campaign is also a very good example of what Walters (2010) describes as the depoliticized representation of migration as a chain in which the origins primarily relate to the 'disorderly' regions from which the migrants come. The pro-Brexit camp gave the image of an EU in which immigration and its causes always run in 'from the distant, corrupt, chaotic borderlands of 'failed states' and 'conflict zones', through the weakly-policed borders and cities of transit countries', and into the heart of European territory (Walters, 2010: 89). This image prevailed to such an extent that a majority of the public came to believe as necessary to separate the United Kingdom from Europe through erection of borders even there where an open border has been a factor for peace, namely the Irish border.

The 'leave' campaign's nostalgic arguments for reinstating the British border aimed at defending the superiority of Britishness from a dangerous Europe, makes a good example of what van Houtum and van Naersen name as early as 2002 'a relentless reproduction of mythically imagined borders of the past and scalar fixation of borders of solidarity' (van Houtum, and van Naersen 2002: 128). Van Houtum and van Naersen explain that the liberalization and cross-border integration deliberately sought by the EU, has as a backside the increasing need to protect what is imagined as one's own legacy and economic welfare. The opening of borders spurs the tendency to protect familiarity and certainty.

Amidst the proliferating discourses of 'migrant crisis' and refugee 'emergencies' that have been at the forefront of the European public debate in 2015, the fact that rhetoric of the kind practiced by UKIP took prominence in the 2016 Brexit campaign and ultimately decided the fate of Britain in the EU, points out that at stake was not so much a threat from 'immigrants' as socio-economic competitors, but rather as a threat to the imagined British moral community. In order for the internal sameness, unity, and sense of belonging to be confirmed, the creation of an outsider was necessary. In

this sense, history, ancestry, religion, and morality intertwined in a form of nationalism that creates the outsider (Gullestad, 2002).

7. Conclusions

The Brexit campaign and the build up to it are an epitome of how the outsiders are strategically portrayed as invaders and parasites in order to reclaim territorially binding powers. Through the reinforcement of the discourses of invasion and infestation, the control and containment of local identities is re-strengthened. The success of these discourses is yet another confirmation of the assertion that the post-9/11 world seems to be marked to a large extent by fear (van Houtum et al., 2005). Transnationalism and immigration are perceived as dangerous streams that risk flooding the protective and protected lands of domestic sovereignty (van Houtum et al., 2005).

The discourses associated with Brexit counter those of a borderless Europe and reveal that notwithstanding the growth of mobility across the EU, the number of ordered and bordered identities has not diminished (van Houtum et al., 2005). The multiple layers of possible identification have increased. The extent to which the receiving population is willing or prepared to overcome feelings of fear and exclusivity determine who is permitted to cross the borders and who is perceived as rightfully belonging. The 'here-there' and 'us-them' cut-off points are marked through the construction of mutually reinforcing physical and visible walls and fences as well as by invisible boundaries (Newman 2006: 177). In this context, the desire to control and reclaim space has recently found new political adherents and partisans. The 'leave' campaigners in the UK are examples of neoconservatives that counter the logic of progressive cosmopolitanism and transnationalism by reworking the territorial foundations of national sovereignty through bordering practices (Buck-Morss, 2003).

The chain of negotiations, transitional restrictions, and exceptions from the principles of freedom of movement were legal barriers meant to curb the mobility of the poor and of those perceived as threateningly different. As indicated by Guild (2016), the British Government demands to the EU reduced rights bearing EU citizens to threatening migrants that needed to be filtered out. These legal barriers responded to and at the same time exacerbated the invisible boundaries that separated 'immigrants' from the unmarked citizens who 'belonged' (Gullestad, 2002).

The considerable moral and political weight the issue of migration has had in a major decision such as remaining or leaving the European Union can be explained also by the fact that among of the three pillars bearing on the management of migration, namely the economy, humanitarianism and the police, the latter is taking prominence. The importance of immigration is related to the construction of borders and boundaries, in other words, of sovereignty and identity (Fassin, 2011). Or, according to Etienne Balibar (1998) borders are 'no longer the shores of politics but [...] the space of the political itself'.

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