The 2016 UK Referendum and the Trope of the EU Migrant

The construction of discourse blaming EU migrants as a means of further justifying the need to leave the EU is now investigated. EU migrant is the trope investigated, forming a part of the London-based mainstream national newspaper’s discursive construction of England and its Other: Europe, not just ahead of the 2016 UK referendum on EU membership but also more recently, as Britain hurtled towards Brexit.

A framing (Entman 1993, 2010), including the absence of EU migrant voices, before the referendum and critical discourse analysis (Wodak and Reisigl 2001; Wodak 2015) will explore a possibly coarser presentation of England and its Other: Europe, as articulated through the trope, EU migrant, in the Post-Truth digitally instigated media age (Coughlan 2017; Keyes 2004; Lewis 2016; Laybats and Tredinnick 2016).

Gifford (2014) argues that the distinction between anti and pro-European arguments is not sufficient for understanding Eurosceptic Britain. Euroscepticism has become fundamental to constituting Britain and Britishness in the post-imperial context, despite EU membership.

Weymouth and Anderson (1999) debate Euroscepticism in Britain and the perception of continental Europe as an external Other and refer to its manifestation in the British press and a deliberate exaggeration of the principles, beliefs and intentions of the EU. Morgan (1995) evidenced a
Eurosceptic inflection often added by London-based editors for the public when they thought it necessary. Garton-Ash (2005: 31, 271) evidences how three out of every four UK national newspaper readers “pick up a dose of Euroscepticism”.

The manifestation of Post-Truth in the British national press, in the run-up to the 2016 British referendum over EU membership, is now the focus and more specifically, the language used by mainstream newspapers. The thesis is some British national newspapers are utilising Post-Truth language, as well as providing a platform for politicians to do so. If the language of Post-Truth was indeed manifest in copy produced by UK national newspapers ahead of the vote, it could have had implications for corroboration and veracity at a vital moment for all concerned. There are also the wider implications of Post-Truth emotive rhetoric for the quality of journalism and its ability to hold politicians to account.

Calcutt (2016) and AC Grayling (Coughlan 2017) argue post-modernism and relativism are at the roots of Post-Truth, as does Keyes (2004), harvested by the left but now being exploited by the far right. As part of that relativism, journalists followed academics in rejecting objectivity in the mid-nineties (Calcutt 2016; Gaber 2014). There is a need to address the manifestation of Post-Truth in Eurosceptic MSM discourse. Recent literature focuses on Trump and the particular cultural context of the right responding to the liberal elite and the mainstream media (The Economist 2016; Lewis 2016; Laybats and Tredinnick 2016; Romano 2017).

Baudrillard (1994: 79) suggested: “we live in a world where there is more and more information, and less and less meaning”. There is what Curtis (2016) calls the ‘filter bubble’ of contemporary mediated digital content and its influence on forming and entrenching opinion (Krasodomski-Jones 2016). As Laybats and Tredinnick (2016: 4) argue:

The filter bubble of social media is perhaps only a mirror of the filter bubble that individuals have always created for themselves by choosing to prioritise relationships and to consume information content that reinforces their existing values, opinions and beliefs.

The difference is perhaps the scale, amplified very quickly, so “where information proliferates freely, inevitably, so also do untruths” (Laybats and Tredinnick 2016: 4).
British concerns were fed by the post-2008 economic downturn (Coughlan 2017) together with a preoccupation with immigration (Springford 2013; Taggart and Szerbiak 2004; Gifford 2014; Garton-Ash 2005; Rowinski 2017). Diamanti and Bordignon (2005) found immigration was the argument most utilised by Eurosceptic parties, finding a correlation between fear of immigrants and falling support for EU integration. They also found a rise in xenophobia, alongside increasing distrust of institutions to respond. Ipsos-Mori (2015) conducted a poll, asking what percentage of the population did people think were immigrants. In the UK people thought 24%. It is 13%. Immigration was the key focus in UK newspaper coverage just before the 2016 British referendum on EU membership (Deacon 2016).

The UK national newspapers selected by the author were: The Sun, The Daily Mail and The Daily Telegraph on the centre-right (arguing for Leave) and The Mirror and The Guardian on the centre-left (arguing for Remain).

Deacon (2016) analysed all the London-based national daily newspapers. They found that in aggregate terms, 60 to 40 were in favour of Leave, ahead of the UK’s Brexit vote. By circulation, that figure rises to 80 to 20 for Leave. This vindicates the focus on the largest circulation newspapers in the study: the largest selling Murdoch-owned tabloid (The Sun); it direct centre-left rival (The Mirror); the second largest selling paper, dominating the middle-market (The Daily Mail); the largest selling broadsheet (The Daily Telegraph) and the main centre-left broadsheet, The Guardian. The term EU migrant was inputted into LexisNexis. Main London editions only were selected (discounting Scottish, Irish editions) because these were aimed at the English Eurosceptic audience (Gifford 2014) and main news (not business), to note if there was persuasion and indeed prejudice over the EU surfacing, in what were supposed to be facts-based articles (Chalaby 1996). It was noted if this news moved into the more emotive territory of Post-Truth. Anonymous editorials, as opposed to named columnists, were selected, to really hear the collective voice of the newspaper, especially on the eve of the referendum, when the positioning on Brexit came to the fore. The dates chosen were Wednesday, June 1 and Friday, June 3, focusing on the middle and end of the working week. The final date selected was June 22, 2016, on the eve of the referendum, when most newspapers, but some slightly earlier, included their final editorials, seeking to persuade readers to vote a certain way.
The newspapers themselves could contribute to the “circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Oxford Dictionaries 2016: Post-Truth) by possibly framing (Entman 1993, 2010) and triggering an emotional response with a paucity of supporting facts. For instance, migration and economy-related stories often reflect and sometimes amplify Euroscepticism (Springford 2013; Gifford 2014; Rowinski 2017).

Wodak and Reisigl (2001) refer in Discourse Historical Analysis, to intensification and mitigation of discriminatory utterances. Mautner (2008) refers to the heightening of the sense of urgency and crisis, by the use of adjectives with negative polarity, such as soaring violence and rampant immigration. Mautner (2008) refers to ideologically-loaded keywords surfacing in discourse.

The notion of persuasive news (Rowinski 2016, 2017) is relevant. Britain played a pioneering role in developing fact-centred discourse (Chalaby 1996). Yet it can still be manipulative and comment-laden. British news on the EU is nevertheless littered with argumentation and metaphor (Rowinski 2017). An attempt will be made to establish when there is a coarsening of UK newspaper discourse, beyond argumentation and metaphors, entering the realms of Post-Truth Eurosceptic emotive rhetoric, embedded in news and not just editorials, further into the investigation analysing English media discourse.

Deacon (2016) catalogued how immigration was a key issue in the run-up to the vote, reflected in June 1 newspaper analysis. The author’s LexisNexis EU migrant word search returned: three Daily Mail news stories with the term that day; one news story in the Daily Telegraph; and five in The Guardian. The term did not surface in The Sun or Daily Mirror.

Initial analysis of the Daily Mail’s coverage found collocations presenting the term EU migrant in specific contexts, after key Brexiteer cabinet members, Priti Patel, Boris Johnson and Michael Gove, revealed plans for an Australian-style immigration points system, after Brexit.

Groves (2016a) explained further for readers. Groves’ piece was headlined: How The Tougher Rules Could Work. In terms of the current points system for other immigrants:
“…none of these rules can be applied to EU migrants” then intensified to:

“….three quarters of EU migrants would fail to qualify if the points system was applied to them” and then intensified further still:

Researchers said up to 94 per cent of EU workers currently employed in retail, hotels and restaurants would fail to meet existing entry requirements. (Groves 2016a)

In another June 1 piece, headlined, Immigration Revolution! Grove (2016b) wrote: “At present, Britain is powerless to stop EU migrants”

“….record numbers of migrants coming from the EU”, later in the piece, intensified to: “record number of jobless EU migrants”. (Doyle 2016)

“….widespread fears about the open door to EU migrants”. (Doyle 2016)

The reader is continuously reminded of the implications of continuing with the Freedom of Movement tenet of EU membership, the problem amplified further by the record numbers of jobless migrants coming.

While drawing on facts and some rational presentation of information, there is nevertheless an epistemic selection at work here. The counter-narrative explaining how EU migrants are often highly skilled with few ever claiming benefit and quickly finding work, is not presented (Springford 2013; Wadsworth et al. 2016; Rowinski 2017). Instead the negatively evaluative narrative of EU migrants cast as benefit tourists, acting as a drain on the state coffers, is drawn on.

The narrative that EU migrants in the UK are benefit tourists is misplaced (Wadsworth et al. 2016). David Cameron, ahead of the referendum, failed to renegotiate EU free movement rules on benefits. In terms of EU immigrant ‘benefit tourism’: 0.2% claim unemployment benefit but have never worked in the UK; 0.4% are on unemployment benefit six months after arriving in the UK, rising to 0.8% after a year (Springford 2013).

The western Europeans and subsequent 2004 eastern European influx are better educated than the average Briton. More have finished secondary education and university degrees (Springford 2013; Sumpson and Somerville 2009; Wadsworth et al. 2016). Springford’s research (2013) shows that EU immigrants are net contributors to the treasury.
The post-2004 employment rate is higher than that of British nationals, with 88% in work, as opposed to 77 for UK citizens.

The collocations are not always obvious and longer phrases are needed, to tease out deeper meaning. Furthermore, the exact term EU migrant will not reveal all collocations i.e. migrants from the EU, EU workers, that could prove pertinent to the focus here. Furthermore, when it comes to establishing if there is suspension of rational argument, replaced by a compulsion, drawing on emotion (Post-Truth) wider meaning-making structures (Mautner 2008) embedded within the text are required, regardless.

The Mail (Doyle 2016) claimed in the June 1 headline: Migration Factor Boosts Brexit. In this piece there was no initial mention of EU migrants. However, it was in the wider reference to (EU) immigration that Post-Truth reared its head. The pattern in the discourse was re-enforced by the introductory sentence: “Public concern about immigration has given a huge boost to the campaign to leave the EU, it emerged last night”, and then again lower down:

“They (the opinion polls) showed huge swings to Leave in recent days as immigration dominated the news” and again later, in reference to the polls “in which immigration was the dominant issue”.

Despite the facts relating to the opinion polls and the Australian-style immigration system proposed that day, the newspaper constructed unmodalised declaratives (Mautner 2008), stating the aforementioned as facts—without supporting evidence. The claim Migration Factor Boosts Brexit is unsubstantiated. The emotive stigma words: immigration/migration (Mautner 2008), were repeated eight times in the Doyle article (2016), creating an inherent truth without factual corroboration. Here we enter the realms of compulsion/überreden (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) and Post-Truth rhetoric. The voice of the newspaper here is distinct from the politicians quoted. As Allen (2016) established, there is a tendency for UK journalists themselves to play the role of framing problems in the migration debate, rather than simply reporting on others’ such as politicians.

The notion is continuously presented that EU migration is having a direct impact on public services including: schools, hospitals and on wages—without supporting evidence: a post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy (Wodak and Reisigl 2001). This is a case of mixing up a temporarily
chronological relationship with a causally consequential one. Wodak and Reisigl 2001: 73) argue: “One can find an example of such a fallacious reasoning in the populist and very often racist or ethnicist argumentation that the increase in unemployment rates within a specific nation-state is the consequence of the growing number of immigrants”.

There is subsequently direct reference to the term, EU migrants. Doyle (2016, June 1):

They (statistics showing record numbers of EU migrants entering the UK) sparked widespread fears about the open door to EU migrants and the impact on public services and wages in the UK.

Evidence supporting widespread fears and the impact, is not offered, but this rapport with readers (Mautner 2008) reaffirms what they may feel is happening: Post-Truth. Davis (2017: xii) asks why the usual human habit of seeking truth has in some cases been overridden: “The premise underlying this approach is that it takes more than a liar to create a false belief – the recipients of the lie are often willing accomplices to the falsehood”.

The ground is set by the use of a topos of and direct reference to fear (Wodak and Reisigl 2001), preceding the reference to public services. The topos is arguing: if you are worried about EU immigration, it is best to vote for Brexit.

Then the Mail again in the piece headlined: Immigration Revolution (Groves 2016b): “Migrants could settle here (under the Australian-style points system) only if they have skills needed by the economy. It would mean a ban on jobless arrivals from the EU”. As referred to earlier, looking only for the specific term, EU migrant, is not to consider other related terms, that may be say, more negatively evaluative or even ideologically loaded (Mautner 2008). The term jobless arrival is just such a term, offering up to the reader a series of presuppositions. This epistemic selection (Social Studies of Science 2017) ignores the fact that such migrants do not remain jobless for very long (Springford 2013; Rowinski 2017; Wadsworth et al. 2016). These jobless arrivals, conjure emotions and compel (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) and reaffirm readers in the way they feel—without supporting evidence: Post-Truth rhetoric. A rational discussion, presenting the counter-arguments and indeed the evidence EU migrants do not remain jobless and so are not a particular drain on the state, as being suggested, is not presented.
Following media logic, *The Mail* paraphrases a politician, on the same page, re-enforcing the message they wish to convey. From an ethnographic perspective (Rowinski 2016, 2017) journalists often get politicians to articulate the position the newspaper espouses, selecting quotes and politicians accordingly, as here. Embedded in the Groves piece (2016b): “In other developments in the Brexit debate: Former Treasury minister, Andrea Leadsom warns in the *Daily Mail* that George Osborne’s national living wage is a ‘huge draw’ for migrants, that is fuelling ‘uncontrolled immigration’ from within the EU”.

Mention of the term, *EU migrant*, also surfaces in the *Daily Telegraph* (Dominczak and Swinford 2016), in a news story headlined, *Boris: Learn English if you want to move to UK….*

And although this time is attributed to Gove and Johnson, in heralding their points-based immigration proposal and not the voice of the newspaper, the *Daily Telegraph* nevertheless selected and framed their piece with an argumentum ad verecundiam (Wodak and Reisigl 2001: 72), an appeal to authority, to justify its positioning: “Mr Johnson and Mr Gove warn that the scale of immigration is putting a ‘particular strain’ on public services and that ‘class sizes will rise and waiting lists will lengthen’ if Britain does not leave”. There is no evidence to support this emotive rhetoric. Yet it is presented categorically, albeit only including an unmodalised declarative at the start: *strain* (Mautner 2008). Although the focus of this paper is the post-truth emotive rhetoric of newspapers—not politicians, newspapers do choose when to harness and utilise such political rhetoric for their own ends.

The term, *EU migrant*, did not surface again in *The Sun* or *Daily Mirror* on June 3. The term was prevalent in two *Daily Mail* news pieces; four in *The Guardian* and again, only one in the *Daily Telegraph*.

Although *The Sun* did not use the term, there was a piece built around quotes from former Tory defence secretary, Liam Fox. Fox referred to how if Britain remained in the EU it meant “uncontrolled immigration”.

He utilised a post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy, in a piece in *The Sun*, headlined: *Fox: Vote Out to get a house* (Hawkes 2016a, June 1), served *The Sun*’s purpose and the politician’s: Leave. Mr Fox is quoted: “If we remain in the EU, if we have uncontrolled immigration, you will find it harder to get a home of your own. You will find it harder to see a GP, harder to get a school place, and you will see green spaces disappear”. This compels the reader to reach certain conclusions, devoid of substantiating
facts—but ones they may feel or want to be true, hence Post-truth (Davis 2017) albeit articulated by the politician—and not the actual newspaper.

As made clear earlier, what has to be considered is that the term EU migrant can be substituted for more negatively evaluative terms, seeing an intensification in the discourse. It will be seen subsequently, how the referential strategies used by newspapers (Mautner 2008) can move from relative neutral terms, such as EU migrant, EU national, EU citizen, EU student, EU worker to more emotive terms: EU killers, EU convicts/criminals, EU rapists.

The headline in the Daily Mail piece: Poll Blunders Could Let EU Nationals Vote, ahead of the EU referendum, is self-explanatory (Slack and Stevens 2016, June 3). The article refers to: EU citizens and EU nationals, but it takes a quote from the Vote Leave chief executive, Matthew Elliot, to conjure a negative evaluation: “There should be an urgent inquiry... to discover who is responsible for illegally giving EU migrants the vote and undermining the foundation of our democratic process”.

In the Mail (Slack and Groves 2016, June 3), headlined: Dave learns what voters really think on Migration, the focus is on then Prime Minister, David Cameron, being quizzed on TV.

In the first part of a construction of reality that helps to create Post-truth Eurosceptic emotive rhetoric, the second line of the article reads: “In a bruising encounter, the Prime Minister was told that Britain’s public services were sinking as a result of the never-ending stream of EU migrants”.

Alison Hyde-Chadwick asked him: “I think we’re struggling. I think we’re sinking. How do we deal with the increased demands on our public services given the never-ending, it feels stream of people arriving from Europe?”

This is not to decry how Hyde-Chadwick feels (Kaltwasser 2014: 470). It is nevertheless unsubstantiated, Post-Truth emotive rhetoric, drawing a conclusion, without any rational argument in support. An interpretation would be, Hyde-Chadwick and others have been fed misinformation over decades (Gifford 2014; Garton-Ash 2005; Rowinski 2017). Much as newspapers encourage politicians to concur with their agendas (and vice versa), so newspapers similarly know when to utilise members of the public, to construct a rapport with the readership (Mautner 2008), reflecting how the audience feel. The use of the analogical metaphor
(Musolff 2004) conjured by the word stream in this context, is to reinforce a negative evaluation of EU migrants and conjures further, albeit mitigated (a stream not a river), Enoch Powell’s infamous River of Blood speech, regarding the threats of immigration. Whether members of the public were conscious of this, is debateable. It is assumed that The Mail, in its usage of the word stream was conscious of the negative evaluations the public could form (Mautner 2008).

We then see an intensification in the Mail: A Dumping Ground for the EU’s Criminals (headline in the anonymous editorial) coupled with a news story, headlined: EU Killers and Rapists we’ve failed to deport (Drury and Slack 2016, June 3). Around the issue of EU criminals held in the UK we see clear evidence of persuasive news full of argumentation and metaphor, in the thrust to encourage people to consider voting Leave. The Daily Mail’s news story (Drury and Slack 2016, June 3) starts: “Thousands of violent thugs from the EU are walking Britain’s streets and clogging up our jails because the Government has failed to send them home”.

This is to create an evaluative picture from the outset, denigrating and vilifying specific groups, linking them explicitly to their EU status. This simultaneously creates a topos of fear: they are a threat to the country—so if we leave the EU they will no longer be able to be. There is a process of intensification (Mautner 2008) reaffirming the danger of EU nationals in the second paragraph. “The inquiry by MPs found the top three foreign nationalities inside our packed prisons are all now from inside the EU”. The intensification continues apace in the third paragraph: “They include rapists, robbers, paedophiles and drug dealers”. The article then claims: “More of those now living in the community after finishing their sentences, have successfully resisted deportation by using human rights legislation”. This remains unsubstantiated, though it is hoped the Home Affairs Committee report, which is the basis for the piece, does offer confirmation.

Both in this piece and the accompanying editorial headlined, A Dumping Ground for the EU’s Criminals, the failure to deport criminals is “so dire that it casts doubt on the point of the UK remaining a member of the EU” and then in the editorial: “No wonder the committee warns that the persistent failure to send these inmates back is ‘undermining confidence’ in the UK’s EU membership”. There is no clear attribution to the committee report. For that we have to go to the Telegraph’s piece (Riley-Smith 2016, June 3) on this subject, where he quoted the committee directly: “The clear inefficiencies demonstrated by this process will lead
the public to question the point of the UK remaining a member of the EU”. Further down in this news story, the use of persuasion through argumentation is again evidenced: “The clear inefficiencies demonstrated by this process will lead the public to question the point of the UK remaining a member of the EU”. Again the topos of fear (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) is extended to embrace this wider point, re-enforced by the constructed rapport with the reader (Mautner 2008) reaffirming how the reader may feel about these issues, but without evidence to support it. It could be argued, the only reason this compulsion/uberreden, does not evidence Post-Truth emotive rhetoric at work in the pieces, is because of the attribution of some ‘facts’ to the committee.

There were instances when news discourse was framed in such a way to support populist political discourse, with the voice of the publication clearly heard. This was apparent with the pejorative use of elite. The Mail (Stevens 2016, June 3) headlined with: Now it’s the EU Luvvies who are telling us what to think. Luvvy is a derogatory term for actors who are particularly effusive or affected. What should be noted, is the prefix: EU. Some 140 of Europe’s leading figures from the arts, science and sport urged voters not to back Brexit. The article states: “Organisers of the letter, which appeared in the Times Literary Supplement, claimed it was not designed to lecture British voters”. An interpretation could be here that here we are not dealing with a phrase synonymous with EU migrant. Although EU Luvvies is pejorative, it is not in the same caustic territory as EU killers and rapists.

The importance of context and not just the initial collocation is again apparent, when upon closer viewing, the solitary instance the Telegraph (Swinford and McCann 2016, June 3) mentioned EU migration, it was about the possibility of Turkey joining the community, with no mention of EU migration to the UK at all.

Again one of the four articles on June 3, when the term EU migrant appeared in The Guardian can similarly be discounted, with the article focusing on the “EU migrant deal” between Greece and Turkey. In the remaining three Guardian news pieces the term EU migrant was attributed to Vote Leave and in all cases regarding the claiming of unemployment benefits.

There was a further intensification of the negatively evaluative load of EU migrant just ahead of the vote. Headlined: Super-Size School Run. Brexiteer Priti Patel predicts influx of 570,000 migrant children to UK schools if Brits vote Remain, Hawkes (2016b, June 22) wrote in The
Sun: “An estimated 152,000 EU migrants of school age came to Britain between 2000 and 2014”. Continuing this theme in the discourse, under the headline: Schools Could Face an Extra 570,000 pupils from the EU, the Mail (Slack and Martin 2016, June 22) wrote: “The number of EU migrants applying for UK citizenship rocketed by 30 per cent”.

And although mitigated somewhat, the negative evaluation also comes from the Daily Mirror, in its editorial on June 22, which started: “Tomorrow you have the chance to change the course of our country. How you vote will decide your future and that of your children, grandchildren and generations to come”.

And lower down: “After much consideration, in our view it is better for the people of this country if we stay in the EU”.

In contemplating Leave: “We would be lumbered with the worst of all worlds, having to accept EU migrants but with no say at the top table”. As Buckledee (2018) argued, one of the key problems with the language of Remainers, was a lack of unequivocal support, often qualifying it at the outset, as the Mirror does here.

The chapter now focuses on the editorials in the national newspapers scrutinised on the eve of the referendum. The aim is to tease out any Post-Truth Eurosceptic emotive rhetoric relating to the notion of the EU migrant.

The Daily Mail flagged up its editorial on the front page, continuing inside. The unequivocal headline on June 22 read: If you believe in Britain Vote Leave.

From the outset, the Daily Mail prepares to convince. The writer presents “the most striking fact”, that the Remainers: “Have failed to articulate a single positive reason for staying in the EU”. This is Wodak and Reisigl’s (2001: 70) notion of überreden. There is no attempt to justify, or indeed offer the reader an alternative reality. Initially the article focuses on economics, but soon the core focus becomes immigration (Deacon 2016) and a topos of threat to the national interest, posed by immigration.

We needn’t look far for the explanation. For not only is the euro destroying livelihoods, but the madness that is the free movement of peoples has brought waves of migrants sweeping across Europe, depressing wages, putting immense strain on housing and public services, undermining our security against criminals and terrorists - and making communities fear for their traditional ways of life.
The persuasive force of the piece is heightened by harnessing a path-movement-journey metaphor (Musolff 2004: 60) and the use of common sense to help the public fully conceptualise the threat posed by “waves of migrants sweeping across Europe” akin to the stream of people that surfaced earlier. The section finishes with the flag-waving banal nationalism (Billig 1995) for the indigenous, fearful for their “traditional ways of life”. The emotive rhetoric comes to the fore, with an argumentum ad populum, popular fallacy, appealing to the emotions of the readers, with no substantiation offered for the “destroying livelihoods”, “depressing wages” or “undermining our security” caused by EU migrants. These are presented as unmodalised declaratives. Here Post-Truth rhetoric is at work, coupled with a post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy (Wodak and Reisigl 2001), as earlier.

The editorial attacks then Prime Minister, David Cameron with: “second deception on migration – so obviously untrue that he even seems increasingly embarrassed to repeat it. This is his frankly pathetic ‘reforms’ he secured during his humiliating tour of European capitals will have any impact on numbers”. This evaluative section is however utilised to attack “Brussels bureaucracy” “incapable of meaningful reform” and articulated through an unmodalised declarative “refuses to listen to the British public’s concerns”. There is no substantiation offered for the aforementioned EU positions. Post-Truth emotive rhetoric is again prevalent.

The editorial intensifies (Heer and Wodak 2008). We are again reminded of what was written at the outset. The writer presents “the most striking fact”, namely that the Remainers: “Have failed to articulate a single positive reason for staying in the EU”. Wodak and Reisigl’s (2001: 70) überreden resurfaces with an emotive post-truth appeal, clouding over the tenuousness of the ‘facts’ presented. And then again:

No, if the Remainers have been unable to make a positive popular case for our membership, this is because the task is virtually impossible.

The lack of a “single positive reason for staying in the EU” at the start is untrue and a further example of Post-Truth rhetoric. There is a relentless attempt by the Daily Mail, to create fear, around immigration. EU migrants to the UK tend to be young and skilled and with the highest employment rates of any EU country, paying in £22 bn in British tax
between 2001–2011 (Springford 2013). Britons in that period took out £624 bn in benefits.

*The Telegraph* editorial (2016, June 21) is headlined: *Vote leave to benefit from a world of opportunity*, employs a topos of history, referring back to its 1973 editorial, when Britain joined the EEC—but does not utilise EU migration to score any points.

*The Sun*, in its June 22 editorial, *Look Into His Eyes: Beleave in Britain*, takes issue with Cameron’s claim that he could reform the EU, making explicit to readers that it will “NEVER reform”. Here we have *überreden*, imposing the Sun’s position on the reader while not offering another means of comprehending events: Post-Truth. In an unmodalised declarative, evaluative in tone, *The Sun* states at the outset that Cameron knew he could: “*never* control immigration while in the EU. Yet he shamefully continued promising voters he could...meanwhile mobs of illegal migrants force themselves aboard UK-bound lorries”. Migrant is used generically in this instance.

*The Mirror*’s June 22 editorial, which starts: For the sake of our great nation’s future, avoids argumentation but declares to readers that if we want to carry on trading with the EU, we will “almost certainly have to accept freedom of movement”, citing non-EU Norway and Switzerland, as examples. *The Mail* utilised *argumentation* to convince and persuade readers, often without substantiation. Instead the *Mirror* counters such attempts “we are kidding ourselves” in thinking the UK could get preferential terms, instead “being lumbered with the worst of all worlds, having to accept *EU migrants* but with no say at the top table” presenting the facts (Ashworth-Hayes, April 2016).

*The Guardian view on the EU referendum: keep connected and inclusive, not angry and isolated* (June 20, 2016) is a direct challenge to the UK Eurosceptic press. The editorial describes the focus on immigration as often xenophobic; admitting to the EU’s shortcomings; challenging the inward-looking approach of the Leave campaign. The piece challenges its readership, in a way that sets up a binary between two concepts, forcing the reader, it could be argued, to accept how they feel about the former rather than the latter, countering the rapport (Mautner 2008) of the *Mail* and *Telegraph*, with its own: “Are we one member in a family of nations, or a country that prefers to keep itself to itself and bolt the door?” Yet there is room provided for the reader to rationally formulate a position, weighing the two up.
The editorial picks up on how immigration became the central issue and the core conduit for Euroscepticism (Gifford 2014). It warned that the referendum risked: “descending into a plebiscite on whether immigrants are a good or a bad thing. To see what is at stake, just consider the dark forces that could so easily become emboldened by a narrow insistence on putting the indigenous first”. The Guardian referred to “the most unrelenting, unbalanced and sometimes xenophobic press assault in history”. The Guardian also highlighted the contradiction between Leave campaigners professing to be pro-immigration, while “fear-mongering” over possible Turkish accession.

The Guardian argues the EU is used as the “whipping boy” much as Wodak and Reisigl (2001: 266) articulated it, for lots of ills, such as frozen wages and job insecurity.

Conclusions.

In news stories, not only was there evidence of persuasive news (Rowinski 2016, 2017), in the form of argumentation, but also a suspension of rational argumentation, presenting emotive purported facts unequivocally, in the form of unmodalised declaratives (Mautner 2008). Closer inspection revealed there was no substantiation, but instead an appeal to how readers may have felt about issues like immigration, which became a central focus. In terms of the linguistic means by which this was achieved compulsion/überreden was effectively employed. Another way of understanding this is such texts reaffirmed for readers what they wished to believe. As Davis (2017: xii) argues, it takes more than a liar to create a false belief, but that the recipients of the lie are often willing accomplices to the falsehood. Yet again we return to the Salvini example (Camilli 2019): “Whatever Salvini does is right”.

The British public were made aware of the lies surrounding aspects of the Leave campaign, ahead of the referendum and the centre-left yet nevertheless vociferous wing of the UK media highlighting how Johnson during the campaign and before it, had told many untruths relating to Europe. The British voted for Brexit and subsequently reaffirmed him as prime minister in 2019, regardless.

In this analysis of EU migrant articles there is at the very least the maintaining often, of a constructed emotive rhetoric, reaffirmed through the differentiation from the Other: Europe. However, what should also be noted was the specific term, EU migrant only surfaced in a couple of
stories. Yet when related terminology was used or indeed articles touching on EU immigration, it was at that point that Post-Truth reared its head. There was indeed a correlation between the surfacing of immigration as either a central focus or at least mentioned in texts—and the prevalence of Post-Truth emotive Eurosceptic rhetoric. This is unsurprising given immigration is one of the key drivers of Euroscepticism. Stories were often framed (Entman 1993, 2010) to facilitate the foregrounding of immigration.

And beyond the term EU migrant it was even more prevalent. What was apparent was a theme in the discourse equating EU migration with a strain on public services and the benefits system—despite a complete lack of evidence to support this from either politicians and most pertinently for this paper, newspapers directly. Newspapers themselves were generating their own Post-Truth around these issues, in what was only a fleeting snapshot of overall coverage.

However, looking briefly at the research on a quantitative level, relatively few texts revealed Post-Truth emotive Eurosceptic rhetoric. It has to be considered that all the examples of Post-Truth over the days investigated are cited in this section. For the rest, the journalists may have often been guilty of hyperbole and argumentation in news—but it rested on a substantiating fact, albeit brief often, especially in The Sun and The Daily Mail. Nevertheless the coarseness of the discourse is very much apparent on the eve of the referendum, in the editorials explored.

In conclusion, while newspapers are guilty of Post-truth Eurosceptic emotive rhetoric surrounding the notion of EU migrant, it is not on the scale expected and is akin to the coarseness found by Mautner (2008). Although the digital age may be impacting on how stories are written, the digital offerings of these newspapers are still working to the formulaic structures of news and editorials and not producing shouting on the scale prevalent on social media, such as Facebook and Twitter. However, although not so apparent in this part of the analysis, the Italian investigation demonstrated how, in giving a platform to populist, emotive Eurosceptic rhetoric, that has first appeared on Facebook say, newspapers can end up intensifying that message, whether intended or no—because that coarseness in the rhetoric is eminently quotable and therefore not easily escaped. It has to be used, to some extent. As highlighted in La Repubblica earlier, the most intelligent response is to quote it, but then systematically challenge the Post-Truth perpetrated.
The game changer, as mentioned earlier, may be the “circumstances,” returning to the dictionary definition (Oxford Dictionaries 2016: Post-Truth).

The filter bubble of mediated digital content (Curtis 2016) may help to influence and entrench opinions, as Laybats and Tredinnick (2016: 4) argue.

The difference is perhaps the scale on which this is now possible, amplified very quickly, so “where information proliferates freely, inevitably, so also do untruths” (Laybats and Tredinnick 2016: 4).

On social media, politicians and the public are circumventing having to communicate via the medium of the mainstream media. On the strength of this research, mainstream newspapers have not succumbed to the shouting (Coughlan 2017) yet. But there is a danger they will, maybe by how they package their stories on Facebook and Twitter, compromising their role as gatekeeper in preserving the sanctity of facts, in the face of the seduction of how people feel, in this case, about EU migrants. The dangers for holding politicians to account are clear—and it falls to us, in turn to help journalists to maintain their standards. At the time of writing, the EU was warning EU migrants in the UK to brace themselves for the worse and a no deal over Brexit.

Newspaper articles were collated for June 2016—the month before the UK’s EU referendum on June 23, using the search terms Brexit and EU on Lexis Nexus, with immigration increasingly looming large as the issue. At the start of June, persuasive news (Rowinski 2016, 2017) ahead of the vote became somewhat darker and a Post-Truth emotive Euroscepticism in some instances surfaced. There was a conscious decision to omit the wider analysis of editorials, full of argumentation and persuasion on the eve of the referendum. In UK news you do not expect to find argumentation and persuasion, but the author’s previous research has established their prevalence in UK persuasive news over Europe (Garton-Ash 2005; Morgan 1995: 324; Weymouth and Anderson 1999), challenging the notion of facts-centred news discourse in Britain (Chalaby 1996: 303).

The argument advanced by journalists critiquing the academy sometimes, is that those salient facts may not be present in editorials (but are embedded in news stories). Focusing on news precludes this possible omission. So the analysis of news will note epistemic competition (Social Studies of Science 2017) and the framing of stories through the selection of which facts are used (Davies 1997; Heer and Wodak 2008) or indeed their omission completely (Oxford Dictionaries 2016: Post-Truth).
Instead, in the run-up to the June 8, 2017 British general election, Facebook was used as a means of filtering articles by all the aforementioned newspapers, insofar as they related, in some aspect to Europe and, more specifically, Brexit. The strategy here was to establish if articles—or indeed the initial packaging of those articles—on Facebook, offered some emotive Post-truth Euroscepticism (or indeed the opposite), as the debate in the MSM became highly polarised (Deacon 2016). The author made a point of directly going to the newspapers’ Facebook pages on the relevant days, circumventing the need to negotiate the filter bubble (Curtis 2016) and the skewed data that would have provided.

Wodak and Reisigl (2001: 265) argue democratic legitimacy results from discourse where there is a free, open and rational formation of public opinion. This rationality is oppressed with überreden akin to Post-truth. Various manifestations of überreden will be articulated through various fallacies, which will be referred to and examined, when they surface (Wodak and Reisigl 2001). There are also rules for characterising and discerning reasonableness in critical discussions (Kienpointner 1996: 26; van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1994). It is argued: when such rationality is suspended; and when there is such a coarseness in the discourse; when there is an attempt to compel, by appealing to people’s emotions; and when substantiating facts are either selected or absent, we are in the realms of Post-Truth. Here the press is shouting loudly.

**Persuasive News. A Look Back at Previous Post-Truth**

An analysis of persuasive news from the author’s previous research (2016, 2017) is relevant, insofar as an attempt will be made to establish when there is an escalation and coarsening of the UK newspaper discourse over Brexit, beyond the persuasion and argumentation found previously and into the realms of Post-Truth and possibly hate speech. Post-Truth is not news, it’s articulation in social media, amplifying and disseminating the messages widely and the circumventing of the mainstream media by populist politicians, very much is. The author wanted to briefly establish if there had been the emergence of emotive Post-Truth rhetoric in any of his previous research on persuasive news.

To that end, *The Times* piece on June 14, 2008 focused on the Irish rejection of the then Reform Treaty designed to help the EU to evolve. The Reform Treaty still needed ratifying by the British parliament. Voices
were calling for a referendum on this particular EU constitutional treaty. The piece is headlined:

*Irish voters sign death warrant for EU treaty* (Charter and Sharrock 2008)

1. European leaders look for way round decisive rejection
2. Irish voters tore up the European Union’s blueprint for the future yesterday
3. in a dramatic and decisive rejection of the Lisbon treaty.
4. The result leaves Brussels’ plans to streamline EU power – creating a president and foreign minister and reducing the influence for smaller countries such as Ireland – in tatters.
5. The 53.4 percent ‘no’ vote should in theory sign the death warrant of the treaty which has been eight years in the making, since it requires ratification by all 27 members.
6. Gordon Brown faced immediate calls to scrap British ratification.
7. But some European leaders remained determined to ignore the result. Suspicions grew of a Franco-German plot to forge ahead and leave Ireland behind after Jean-Pierre Jouyet, the French Europe Minister, said:
8. ‘The most important thing is that the ratification process must continue in the other countries and then we shall see with the Irish what type of legal arrangement could be found’.
9. Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, and President Sarkozy of France seen as the architects of the treaty – issued a joint plea for the remaining eight countries to complete ratification. (Charter and Sharrock 2008)

The article’s strapline (Line 1) should be noted: *European leaders look for way round decisive rejection*. The impression created at the outset, is re-enforced by a fallacy of authority or *argumentum ad verecundiam*. This fallacy entails backing one’s own standpoint by reference to competent authorities. The appeal to such authority is fallacious if, say, the authority is not competent or qualified. French Europe Minister, Jean-Pierre Jouyet, is quoted in Lines 14–16. The quotation creates the impression in strapline (Line 1) that European leaders will look for a way around the rejection. *The Times* is supporting
its standpoint, as a political actor (Mautner 2008: 43), arguably expressed in the strapline, by reference to this competent authority: the French Europe Minister. However, this appeal to authority is arguably fallacious. The French Europe Minister is only qualified to comment up to a point. Jouyet does not speak for the whole French government, which had not formulated a clear position yet. A clear response to the Irish referendum result would be finally formulated by a European summit of prime ministers and councils of ministers from all the EU members. The EC would also have a say.

Revisiting this earlier analysis, the opening line can also be interpreted as an attempt to compel (Kopperschmidt 1989: 116–121) readers to view EU leaders looking for a way around the rejection. It is also presented as an unmodalised declarative (Mautner 2008). Then there is a selection of facts (Lewis 2016), framing the unfolding story in a certain way, with an epistemic selection undertaken (Social Studies of Science 2017). Preceding the reference to Jouyet there is another unmodalised declarative (Mautner 2008) in Line 11: But some European leaders remained determined to ignore the result. This argumentation strategy (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) then relates back to Britain: Gordon Brown faced immediate calls to scrap the British ratification (Line 10). The story does not attribute these claims. In all these instances, we have also arguably entered the realms of Post-Truth.

Persuasive news is further evidenced. The argumentation is re-enforced by a cluster of conceptual metaphors (Musolff 2004). The headline refers to the Irish signing the death warrant of the EU treaty. Then in the article’s introduction: Irish voters tore up the EU’s blueprint for the future (Line 2). Then the EU’s plans to reduce the influence of smaller countries, like Ireland, was left in tatters (Lines 4–6). These metaphors possibly reaffirm the perception of a French–German axis driving through integration and ignoring little Ireland.

This underdog conceptualization may appeal to how the British sometimes see themselves (in Europe). The analogical conceptualization (Musolff 2004) continues, with Merkel, the German Chancellor, and Sarkozy, the French President, seen as the architects of the treaty (Line 18). Relating this back to an earlier reference, it is therefore their blueprint that has been torn up (Line 2).
Il Giornale and the Irish Rejection of the Reform Treaty.

The front page Il Giornale pastone on the Irish rejection of the Reform Treaty, criticised Brussels bureaucracy (concurring with Berlusconi’s pronouncements 2000; Owen 2002). Yet, it also lamented the loss of the Europolicy, akin to Trenz’s (2007: 98) findings that most European newspaper commentaries relating to the EU constitution, opted for a positive identification with the past (except Britain). The article evoked Italy’s founding fathers, painting them as also builders of Europe.

The dominant genre of Italian political reporting from the 1960s was the pastone, written by the most prestigious journalists and appearing on the front page (Dardano 1976). Pastone combined a review of the major political developments of the day with comments by the journalist. Despite journalism’s increased market-orientation this commentary-oriented journalism has yet to be abandoned (Roidi 2001).

The scene is set at the start. The headline reads Europe dies, the Europeans, nearly (Macioce 2008). A rapport (Mautner 2008: 43) is developed with readers, playing off a double meaning: with (political) Europe dead and Italy’s chances of progressing (in the European football champions) nearly. From the very start, political metaphors (Musolff 2004) are at play. The language of football is continuously used to describe an arguably failing Europe. In the first line of the article, the ball silently rolls over the line as Italy loses the football match. The analogy is the Irish rejecting Europe at the polls.

Here Il Giornale populism, as a relatively speaking mass-circulation title, is apparent, with what Bourdieu (2005) described as an audience ratings mentality. The intentionality plays off the public’s understanding of the championships—to simultaneously lament the state of the other (political) Europe. There are competing forces engendered in the text.

Lines 29–40:

29 Europe was a dream. It was the monk Isidoro Pacensis, who described 30 “Europeans” the soldiers of Carlo Martello who stopped the Arabs. It was 31 the secular, moral and spiritual religion of Mazzini. There was Altiero 32 Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Coloni at Ventotene. It was the 33 suicidal war and the dawn of the American century, with the will to re- 34 build, brick by brick, with the American dollars of the Marshall plan. It
35 was the redemption of the defeated, who looked ahead, turning to
36 Adenauer and De Gasperi. It was the common market as an ambassador
37 of peace, cancelling centuries of French, Prussian, Spanish, Dutch,
38 Scandinavian and also Italian soldiers fighting for a metre of land in the
39 name of their faith or country, or finding any other excuse to
40 spit at each
41 other. (Macioce 2008)

Dreams are mentioned 11 times in the 76-line article. The author,
Macioce, appears to want a more effective Europolity, lamenting paucity
of ambition. The EU Constitution focused principally on economics. The
dream collides with the bureaucrats and bankers, mentioned directly and
indirectly seven times. The positive evaluation of the dream is juxtaposed
with the negative evaluation of bankers and bureaucrats. Oberhuber and
Krzyżanowski (2007: 4) argued constitutionalisation was a chance to
make meaning of fundamental European values and objectives. Yet, like
previous treaties, it finally limited itself to the design of institutions.

The role call (Lines 31–36) can be interpreted as demonstrating Italy’s
centrality to Europe, although not articulated explicitly. The need, for
instance, for Italy’s earlier prime minister Romano Prodi and later Mario
Monti (Feltri 2011), to maintain Italy’s centrality (in the face of France
and Germany), is a recurring theme: the topos of centrality mentioned
earlier (Wodak and Reisigl 2001). However, Europe is also seen through
the Weltanschauung of the centre-right Berlusconi coalition, the party–
press parallelism (Hallin and Mancini 2004) of Il Giornale is apparent.
Hence, Carlo Martello stopped the Arabs (Line 30), the contradiction of
the secular and religious aspects of Italian society, in mentioning Mazzini
(Line 31). Berlusconi made it clear that he wanted God in the EU Consti-
tution (Johnson and Farrell 2003). In the anti-immigration law, proposed
by Berlusconi and Umberto Bossi (leader of the coalition secessionists,
the Northern League), they claim that theirs was a ‘Christian model of
society’ (Ter Wal 2002: 162–165):

53 Europe has been communicated badly. You receive directives from desks
54 far away, from faceless people. The man on the street, sympathises with
55 Cassano (Italian national team footballer), intolerant to any type of
56 bureaucracy and the impression that the men in grey suits are trying to
57 codify their lives. They tell you when and how to milk your cow, how
58 much air you can breath, who you can choose as your neighbour.
This is
the problem with Europe. It is boring and a nuisance.
It is your mortgage that goes up each time they say to increase interest rates. It is to appoint people who do not count but earn a fortune. It is to have as a hero a banker. It is to ask yourself where Estonia is. It is to nullify all the identities for something that floats. It is the disappointment of an entire generation who really believed in Europe...
Hence, you receive directives from desks far away, from faceless people (Lines 53–54), with bureaucrats in grey suits: trying to codify lives (Lines 56–57). (Macioce 2008)

The intensity increases with: It is to appoint people who do not count but earn a fortune. It is to have as a hero a banker (Lines 61–62). Finally, it is the disappointment of an entire generation who really believed in Europe (Lines 63–64)—but whose dreams were dashed. In terms of persuasive force, it could be argued that this continuously recurring notion of the dream being thwarted by a bureaucracy re-enforces this particular construction of reality. Italian national footballer Cassano (Line 55) is employed to good effect, as a means of persuasion, developing a rapport with the reader (Mautner 2008: 43), the supposedly unifying force of common sense.

Berlusconi himself (Owen 2002) spoke earlier of a bloated and cumbersome European bureaucratic machine. The article arguably laments a European constitution falling short of a Europolity (Oberhuber and Krzyżanowski 2007: 4).

As a pastone, the writer has licence, comparable to a commentary in the UK context. Therefore the need to substantiate the information here with supporting facts can remain lacking, but only if working on the assumption that they are prevalent in news stories relating to the subject, in that day’s Giornale. However, judging by the what is written, in terms of the generic nature of the unmodalised declaratives and emotive rhetoric, used, they will unlikely have surfaced in Il Giornale’s news that day. Most of the piece above, comments on history. However, there is also a framing of the narrative, selecting information in the following to corroborate, albeit very tentatively:
Hence:
Europe has been communicated badly. You receive directives from desks far away, from faceless people. The man on the street, sympathises with Cassano (Italian national team footballer), intolerant to any type of bureaucracy and the impression that the men in grey suits are trying to codify their lives. They tell you when and how to milk your cow, how much air you can breathe, who you can choose as your neighbour. This is the problem with Europe. It is boring and a nuisance.

However, as there are some attempts at corroborating evidence, the piece above stops short of Post-Truth. What it unequivocally is, is emotive Eurosceptic rhetoric that builds a specific picture through the caricaturing of Brussels and its bureaucrats: communicated badly, faceless people, grey suits, trying to codify our lives, how much air you can breathe.

**Newspaper discourse ahead of UK’s EU referendum**

As Deacon (2016) evidenced, immigration loomed large as a central issue in the debate just ahead of the EU referendum. A common theme that emerged was the discursive construction of strains put on the UK in several newspapers, resulting from EU immigration. A revisiting of articles previously analysed in relation to the notion of EU migrants, is undertaken.

In a *Daily Telegraph* piece headlined—*Boris: Learn English if you want to move to UK* (Dominiczak and Swinford 2016, June 1). The article was analysed previously, specifically in relation to the term EU migrant.

It starts: “Migrants will be barred from entering Britain after Brexit unless they can speak good English and have the right skills for a job. Boris Johnson and Michael Gove pledge today as they set out their vision for the UK outside the European Union”.

The article explains the intensions of UK ministers Johnson, Gove and Patel to introduce an Australian-style points-based immigration system. However the voice of the newspaper itself, as a political actor, is also heard in the third paragraph: “Their statement, which is also signed by the employment minister, Priti Patel, will infuriate Downing Street and represents a major challenge to David Cameron’s authority”. This unmodalised declarative (Mautner 2008) is compelling the audience to see the events
as the *Telegraph* does and in suspending rational argument (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) presenting the information as the outcome if the readers take collective action and vote for Leave (Keith and Lundberg 2008). Here *überreden* (Kopperschmidt 1989: 116–121) is at work and emotive Post-Truth.

The *Telegraph* goes further still, in the next paragraph: “It will be seen as the first policy of a *Eurocceptic manifesto* that could be enacted after a Brexit and will bolster claims by Mr Cameron’s critics that he cannot remain as Prime Minister until 2020 in the event of a Leave vote”. The politicians are not talking of a *Eurocceptic manifesto* — the *Telegraph* is, a political actor here. Again this emotionalisation, although not compelling, is part of a process of intensification (Mautner 2008) leading readers to vote Leave.

Halfway down the piece: “Mr Johnson and Mr Gove warn that the scale of immigration is putting a ‘particular strain’ on public services and that ‘class sizes will rise and waiting lists will lengthen’ if Britain does not leave”.

A compelling is again in operation: *überreden* (Kopperschmidt 1989: 116–121).

It is also an example of a post hoc ergo propter hoc fallacy. This is a case of mixing up a temporally chronological relationship with a causally consequential one (Wodak and Reisigl 2001: 73), where: “One can find an example of such a fallacious reasoning in the populist and very often racist or ethnicist argumentation that the increase in unemployment rates within a specific nation state is the consequence of the growing number of immigrants”. This fallacy is another means of compelling readers to reach a certain conclusion, coupled with the fallacy of *argumentum ad verecundium*, those in authority saying this, reaffirming its inherent truth value. There is no concrete evidence to support the claims class sizes will rise and waiting lists lengthen because specifically of immigration or at least immigration alone. It is not causally consequential. The lack of evidence, let alone a selection (Lewis 2016) coupled with the compelling established, closing down of the possibility of rational formation of public opinion (Wodak and Reisigl 2001: 265) makes for more Post-Truth Euroscepticism and a call to collective action again (Keith and Lundberg 2008). There is no attempt to present evidence to the contrary, regarding immigration (Springford 2013; Taggart and Szczerbiak 2004; Gifford 2014; Garton-Ash 2005; Rowinski 2017). A selection of the facts is in full cry (Lewis 2016; Social Studies of Science 2017).
The Telegraph then explores Johnson’s critique of Osborne and Cameron (then still prime minister) in some detail, originally aired in a BBC2 documentary, where he argued they were part of a “small group of people who do very well out of the current system” and keen on staying in so they could go “mwah mwah with Christine Lagarde, the head of the IMF”.

Here an *argumentum ad populum* appeals to the prejudiced emotions of those who feel this elite is undercutting them and this quote was also used in a Sun (Newton-Dunn 2016, June 1) news story on the same day.

Johnson was given the platform by the Telegraph to go further than The Sun, comparing Osborne’s warning over the economic implications of Brexit to “an avalanche of scaremongering, a sort of Himalayan snow job of statistics”. Here there is a conjuring of metaphors (Musolff 2004) and imagery and an emotional response—overshadowing any actual facts to support the allegation of propagandising by the other side.

The Daily Telegraph in this piece goes beyond giving Johnson a platform. It actively contributed to the Post-Truth manifested in the piece and goes beyond persuasion, to compel and cajole the reader into going along with Johnson. Much like Il Giornale previously, the Telegraph is an active and willing participant in the construction of emotive, Eurosceptic Post-Truth rhetoric, as outlined.

The Daily Mail (Groves 2016a, June 1), produced a piece headlined: Brexit immigration revolution!

The piece was analysed previously in relation to the term EU migrant. Boris and Gove pledge to bring in tough Australian-style points system to slash arrivals from EU and bar entry to migrants who do not speak English if UK votes Out. It also focuses on the proposals for an Australian-style points-based immigration system. The article starts: “BREXIT would pave the way for an immigration revolution to slash numbers arriving from the EU, leading Out campaigners pledge today”.

The newspaper continues lower down: “It would mean a ban on jobless arrivals from the EU – something originally promised by the Prime Minister but thwarted by Brussels”. Again this relies on a mixing up of a temporally chronological relationship with a causally consequential one. They are presented as the drain on the public purse. Here the fallacy, post hoc ergo propter hoc, is at work again. No facts support immigrants are the ones draining the public purse by claiming lots of benefits. As previously, there is no attempt to present evidence to the contrary, regarding immigration (Springford 2013; Taggart and Szerbiak 2004;
The unmodalised declaratives “originally promised by the Prime Minister but thwarted by Brussels” compel (Kopperschmidt 1989: 116–121) the reader to reach certain conclusions, with their inherent truth value not tested by rational discourse and exchanges of opinions (Wodak and Reisigl 2001). The paper is embellishing on the positions of the politicians and is a clear Post-Truth political actor, in this instance.

This paragraph is immediately followed by another line, referring to the former Treasury minister, Andrea Leadsom, in a process of intensification (Mautner 2008). She: “warns in the Daily Mail that George Osborne’s national living wage is a huge draw for migrants that is fuelling uncontrolled immigration’ from within the EU”. (Groves 2016a, June 1) This unmodalised declarative (Mautner 2008) is re-enforcing through a series of fallacies. Leadsom is an example of argumentum ad verecundiam, a misplaced reverence to this source, who is expressing an opinion here, presented as if laced with an inherent truth. Again, that this is indeed a ‘huge draw’ is not corroborated (so a lack of factual substantiation) or indeed challenged elsewhere (Springford 2013; Taggart and Szerbiak 2004; Gifford 2014; Garton-Ash 2005; Rowinski 2017). ‘Fuelling uncontrolled immigration’ is to create a topos of fear (Wodak and Reisigl 2001)—so we must vote for Brexit. It is equally emotive yet unsubstantiated, compelling (Kopperschmidt 1989: 116–121) the reader to draw this conclusion without offering any rational arguments (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) to the contrary. Post-truth looms again.

The Sun. Headline: Osbo in ‘fantasy’ fund dig at Gove. June 1, 2016. Tom Newton-Dunn.

Linguistic and argumentative means by which the text pursues its ends.

The first line of the news article reads: “George Osborne has accused Brexit ministers of fantasy economics as the Tory EU war hit a new low”.

This is already evaluative and a form of commentary (Mautner 2008), further evidencing how UK news can be persuasive (Rowinski 2016), challenging the notion that it is always facts-based (Chalaby). As this comment is linked to Osborne, it is fair to assume it is he who is hitting a new low, in the war of words.

Johnson then looms large, quoted saying Osborne gave “air kisses” to IMF chief, Christine Lagarde, then describing the referendum fight as a
struggle against “people who know Christine Lagarde and can go mwah, mwah with her”.

The tenuous nature of the accusation, suggests it may not be couched in fact yet it is emotive and appeals on a populist level to the notion of a Brussels elite pushing Britain around, at this particular historical moment and drawing on the Eurosceptic historical narrative of Britain. It is an argumentum ad populam or pathetic fallacy (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) appealing to the prejudiced emotions of a populous increasingly angry with the elite. The quote is non-argumentative but compels approval, suspending reality and not offering an alternative (Kopperschmidt 1989: 116–121).

It can be also seen as Post-Truth, appealing to the anger among British working people at these elites and both quotes are presented but crucially not questioned, linguistically constructed as unmodalised declaratives. Another way of articulating this is as an argumentum ad verecundiam (Wodak and Reisigl 2001). A person in authority is saying this, so it must be true. There is, it could be argued, a suspension of reality, as the Johnson quotes are used to convince the reader of how Osborne is in it (the elite) with Lagarde, hence an element, albeit small of uberzeugen (Wodak and Reisigl 2001).

Although the focus is the Post-Truth emotive rhetoric of newspapers—as opposed to that advanced by politicians, newspapers do choose when to harness and utilise such political rhetoric for their own ends. From an ethnographic perspective (Rowinski 2016) journalists often get politicians to say or use what they say, to support the position the newspaper espouses, selecting quotes and politicians accordingly. This is just such an instance, with the introduction to the piece, revealing the newspaper’s position on the issue, corroborated further by the careful selection of quotes.

Newton-Dunn should be challenging the unsubstantiated position of Johnson, in framing and presenting Lagarde and Osborne as the elite. Instead a story is built around the quote. In so doing, much like Il Giornale and the Daily Telegraph pieces previously, where it is found, The Sun is contributing to Post-Truth in its failure to hold Johnson to account, but merely gives him a platform. This further undermines the position of journalism in relaying the facts and questioning potential untruths.
**The Sun.** June 1, 2016. **Headline: Referendum; Blunder sparks rerun Calls; Farce as EU vote cards ‘sent to Germans and Poles’** Craig Woodhouse.

**Genre and context.**

The news piece focuses on the possibility that EU citizens could vote in the EU referendum due to blunder by councils. The piece only cites one example in a specific council, yet uses this as a platform for calls by Polish-born Tory MP, Daniel Kawczynski and Farage, if the result is close. Kawczynski called for a judicial review.

**Linguistic and argumentative means by which the text pursues its ends.**

The piece is built around a quote from Kawczynski and is evidence of an intensification building up the story (despite tenuous evidence and only one case cited). Although it has an emotive effect, it falls short of Post-Truth rhetoric or even persuasion, but is again re-enforcing on some emotive level the flagging of immigration as an issue, albeit in a different way from other pieces.

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**The Sun.** **Headline: Block on Low-Skilled.** June 1, 2016. Steve Hawkes.

**Genre and context.**

The news piece starts: “Britain will block low-skilled EU workers from coming here by 2020, after a Brexit, Tories Boris Johnson, Michael Gove and Priti Patel pledge today”.

The nature of this emotive rhetoric, is in effect calling the readers to collective action and to vote leave (Keith and Lundberg 2008), appealing to their fears over immigration.

The newspaper in the second line, fuels, through intensification (Mautner 2008) with the aforementioned Tory troika: “Blasting their own Government’s ‘corrosive’ failings on immigration, the trio promise voting Out will lead to the introduction of an Aussie-style points system at borders”.

**Linguistic and argumentative means by which the text pursues its ends.**

In selecting this perspective, it could be said the newspaper is presenting a persuasive news story (Rowinski 2016)—but many stories are constructed in a similar vein, around quotes.
It cannot be said, although emotionalisation may be at play (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) that the article is presenting any Post-Truth rhetoric and although there is an element of persuasion at play, in presenting this perspective, this is not the same as to convince, as in uberreden.

*The Guardian* (Asthana and Stewart 2016, June 21) dedicated its front page, *Cameron: Brexeters stoking intolerance*, to an interview with then Prime Minister, David Cameron. Although a person in authority is put centre stage, as the key advancer of the Remain campaign, an important distinction has to be drawn. He is not utilised to convince the audience of the veracity of something that is open to conjecture (as was the case with the *Telegraph* and *Daily Mail* earlier). As is customary in news, the piece is built around the authority’s quotes. This again is distinct from selected quotes utilised and harnessed to support the advancement of a position by a newspaper, such as Steve Hilton (Cameron’s former advisor) in the *Daily Mail*, claiming Hilton had been told (by unnamed and unsubstantiated) sources, that immigration could not be kept down—something Cameron described in this *Guardian* piece as “wrong” (Line 16). Cameron responded to the Brexit campaigners, saying the suggestion Turkey would join the EU was a “lie” (Line 30).

What is however noticeable from the piece, is that Cameron accused the Brexeters of “stoking intolerance and division with extreme warnings on immigration” (Lines 1–2). Rather than the emotive compelling seen earlier in the chapter, he does provide a rational, substantiated argument for his position in the piece. Cameron went on to accuse Farage of scapegoating people, after unveiling a poster of refugees fleeing to Slovenia (Lines 21–23). In this instance the persuasion is left to the prime minister, giving him a platform to respond to the invective peddled by the *Daily Mail* and others. A spokesperson for Leave did respond to Cameron’s arguments, in the piece. It is not the case that *The Guardian* handed over a platform to Cameron. He does substantiate his position and the Leave campaign is allowed to counter his positioning. However, what *The Guardian* piece reaffirms is the polarisation of coverage on both sides, with the *Guardian* and *Mirror* trying to compel, it can be argued, as much as the *Telegraph*, *Daily Mail* and *Sun* (Deacon 2016)—although less apparent in this particular article and in this case, beyond the realms of Post-truth.
THE MEDIUM CHANGING THE MESSAGE? THE 2017 UK ELECTION THROUGH THE PRISM OF FACEBOOK

A conundrum for research into the phenomenon of Post-Truth and the hypothesis it is permeating into the mainstream media and not just spoken by (populist) politicians, is that linguistically, the notion of emotive rhetoric devoid of or highly selective of facts, was already prevalent. What the subsequent analysis ahead of the 2017 UK election explored is if social media has precipitated other manifestations of Post-Truth from the media, possibly responding to it this new phenomenon (Baudrillard 1994; Laybats and Tredinnick 2016).

The date Tuesday May 30 is the focus here, selected because it was a week before the 2017 general election and immediately following the televised election debate the night before, where Brexit and the related issue of immigration featured. The author went to the Facebook pages of: The Daily Mail, The Sun, The Mirror, Daily Telegraph and The Guardian, to find the stories that were being flagged up that day that may have related to Europe/Brexit. Neither The Sun nor The Mirror had any stories that day that it could be discerned, related to Europe at all.

Of the ten articles flagged up on Facebook that either clearly or at least implied they related to Brexit/Europe, six were commentaries. In the relentless battle to: (a) end up in someone’s Inbox and create that filter bubble (Curtis 2016) where they would be swayed by your positioning; (b) follow you and not the politicians or bloggers, this at least suggests a “relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief” (Post-Truth: Oxford Dictionaries 2016). The different medium of Facebook is possibly creating a different message, to paraphrase McLuhan.

Of the six commentaries, three appeared in the Guardian. While this is only a snapshot, the author noted the preponderance of Guardian commentaries on a series of other issues, in comparison to other titles. There could be many contributory factors explaining this.

Another point noted was that the packaging of stories, whether they were commentaries or indeed news stories, was always quotes-led. Quotes by their nature are often emotive. Again the platform is creating the need for different presentation, with headlines consistently only shown on Facebook after usually one selected quote.
Exemplifying this point, the Daily Mail had a commentary flagged on Facebook, which read: “More than 17 million people voted Leave. We’ve got no choice other than to give Theresa May a solid mandate to turn that decision into reality. The alternative is too horrible to contemplate”. Below was a photograph of a stateswoman-like May and only then the headline: “Richard Littlejohn. Wobble or not, Theresa May is the only show in town”. The emotive quote was used more than three-quarters of the way through this opinion piece.

The Facebook entry highlights the fact 17 million voted Leave and is already a form of framing and epistemic selection on which to premise the subsequent compulsion and überreden (Kopperschmidt 1989: 116–121): “We’ve got no choice other than to give Theresa May a solid mandate…”. This closes down further rational discussion and debate (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) and is achieved by an argumentum ad populum (Wodak and Reisigl 2001), appealing to the prejudiced emotions and convictions of a specific group: the 17 million, not in relation to how they voted, but in the subsequent evaluative comment: “The alternative is too horrible to contemplate”, intensifies the compulsion (in this instance to vote Conservative). It was arguably the most emotive tract of Littlejohn’s piece.

It can be interpreted as the Mail as a political actor, mobilising the electorate.

It will not be possible to establish if the assertions and compulsion are in some way supported by a news story elsewhere (weary of the point made by journalistic colleagues). However, it is the opinion piece that is flagged on Facebook—not a possible linked news story.

Maybe this is part of the new digital world, where emotion becomes central to journalism, but as D’Ancona (2017) has argued, not necessarily in a way that has to indulge in a paucity of facts and Post-Truth.

Two pieces can be juxtaposed in their treatment of the same information. In news analysis, bordering on commentary (so persuasive news, Rowinski 2017), the Telegraph writes on Facebook: “Like Hillary Clinton, Theresa May is running as what might be called the ‘safe pair of hands’, candidate” (The Telegraph Facebook page).

This re-enforces the rhetoric of the PM, when she continuously used the refrain ‘safe and stable.’ The modality stops short of any compulsion however, does use the word, might. This is followed by the headline, below the picture: “May is relying on her opponent being ‘unelectable’. So was Hillary Clinton”. However on reading the body of the text, rather
than reaffirming May is a safe pair of hands, feeding the feeling readers may have over the issue, it does the opposite.

In a pertinent tract of text, Millward (2017) writes: “Still, like Hillary Clinton, Theresa May is running as what might be called the ‘safe pair of hands’ candidate”. And it appears that offering “strong and stable leadership, is not capturing voters’ imagination”. The tract of text flagged on Facebook is misleading, appealing to emotions and reaffirming what readers want to hear. This suggests a degree of argumentation is creeping into what, on downloading the piece, is actually a news article.

*The Guardian* on the same day questions the mantra used ahead of the election: “May didn’t appear the ‘strong’ candidate last night. She appeared shaky, on edge, falling back on a strategy of boring Britain to death with waffly, empty answers”. This is followed by a May photograph and then the headline: Theresa May’s authority slips as she bored Britain with empty answers. Owen Jones’s (2017) commentary reaffirms the polarised nature of the debate (Deacon 2016). There is a returning of fire regarding the ‘safe and stable’ refrain of May in the election and the support for that position (at least in part) taken by *The Telegraph*.

In this instance, *The Guardian* goes further than *The Telegraph*, with an unmodalised declarative in the headline below the citation from Owen’s piece: “May’s authority slips”. Accumulatively, coupled with the citation above, there is an element of compelling the readership to perceive her as weak.

**Interpretation.**

This is no less überreden (Kopperschmidt 1989: 116–121) than the *Telegraph* piece. In this instance, it is achieved by an argumentum ad hominem (Wodak and Reisigl 2001: 72) and in essence a verbal attack on her character.

Whether it is plying Post-Truth beyond the emotive rhetoric, is hard to discern, as that would entail digging out all the news articles in that day’s newspaper, to see if Owen’s comments are based on substantiation elsewhere. The emotiveness and the siding against the Conservatives is however clear and there is no less emotive rhetoric here than that found on the centre-right pro-Leave side of the argument, suggesting that the polarisation Deacon (2016) was alluding to, was at that moment, developing apace.

Other than a commentary by former Conservative leader, William Hague, in the *Telegraph*, headlined: *The way to turn Brexit into disaster*
would be electing Corbyn as Prime Minister, there were two more from the Guardian, both flagged by citations from the commentators and both emotive and compelling the reader to see things the newspaper’s way, through unmodalised declaratives and emotive language:

Saying you’re going to be a bloody difficult woman right at the start of negotiations tends to make sure you do get a bad deal rather than working with partners across Europe. Theresa May has made us look like ogres across Europe. We’re a laughing stock. (Elgot and Asthana 2017)

The Supreme Leader did her best to fill the 22 minutes with the deadest of dead air. She hadn’t changed her policy on anything because what was in the manifesto was never intended to be policy. It was just a series of vague talking points. And when sometime after the election she had decided what was best for everyone, she would let the country know. (Crace 2017)

Conclusions.

What is apparent is that the notion of discourse designed to compel and frame the story, feeding off the reader’s emotion-fuelled preconceptions, pre-dates the Brexit and Trump related Post-Truth debate (Oxford Dictionary 2016), as evidenced with the Charter and Sharrock (2008) piece. What was established in the news ahead of Brexit (as exemplified here) was that the discourse went beyond persuasion and into the realms of emotion-driven compulsion and Post-Truth. What was also established in the Charter and Sharrock (2008) piece and indeed several of the news articles ahead of Brexit, is that further qualitative critical discourse analysis can and may establish a clearer coarsening of the news discourse in certain circumstances, as we move closer to and indeed past Brexit.

Using Facebook as a means of looking at Post-Truth Euroscepticism, created a completely different vantage point, forcing the author to predominantly look at commentaries packaged by citations of an emotive nature (as opposed to foregrounding of a breaking news story on the printed front page in the old days). These commentaries demonstrated the traits of compulsion and again selected or a lack of facts, but in the main not a clear-cut case of Post-Truth, only possible to establish in trawling all the related news stories in all of the newspapers. An interpretation is that the mainstream media wants also to be heard shouting, alongside the competing (populist) politicians and bloggers, who threaten further a struggling economic model for the mainstream. In the filter bubble,
readers are not directed to news stories, but to the emotive commentariat (negating to some extent the position of journalism colleagues, that the facts are just elsewhere, in news stories).

The polarised positions of the mainstream London-based national daily newspapers ahead of the vote for Brexit, with 80% of readers directed to Leave publications and 20% to remain (Deacon 2016) was arguably duplicated in the coverage analysed, ahead of the 2017 general election, insofar as polarising was evidenced with *The Daily Telegraph* very much in one corner over Europe—and *The Guardian* in the other, packaging a position countering the Telegraph’s emotional sentiment, with its own, rather than questioning the facts (on Facebook at least). The need to counter with facts is the way *The Guardian* and others should tackle it, as Lewis (2016) argued. It is incumbent upon journalists to call it out, when they see it—rather than just castigate it with the binary opposing position. If the medium becomes the message then this type of packaging of opinion and emotion-fuelled journalism appealing to millennials, the sanctity of veracity and corroborated facts is at least in part under threat—unless they are woven into the tapestry of journalism.

**THE 2019 SUPREME COURT RULING AFTER ILLEGAL PROROGUING**

*Explanation of genre and context.*

The aftermath of what was deemed the illegal proroguing of the British Parliament, precluding the possibility of debating Brexit further, is the focus for analysis. A prorogation is when Parliament is temporarily suspended at the end of a parliamentary session. The event was selected as the author noted very different framing and prioritisation of information in what became a highly volatile situation. Boris Johnson, the Prime Minister, was in effect forced to reconvene Parliament by the Supreme Court and had to answer to his critics on the Labour benches and indeed his own. Parliament resumed.

Johnson’s use of language that day in Parliament—September 25, 2019—was deemed at best divisive and at worst hateful, by fellow MPs, it should be added. For this reason, this crucial nexus in the Eurosceptic narrative of the UK was selected, with the possibility of Post-Truth being part of the volatile, emotive rhetoric.
Labour and other opposition parties wanted to delay an election until the possibility of a No Deal departure was ruled out by statute. Johnson, now governing a minority government, was facing an intransigent Parliament, keen to stop securing a hard Brexit and not willing to face the electorate until such confirmation was attained. Johnson’s government stood firm, accusing the opposition of preventing the will of the people. Levels of antagonism on both sides were very high at this juncture.

The newspapers selected were: The Sun, The Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph on the centre-right (arguing for Leave), and The Mirror and The Guardian on the centre-left (arguing for Remain).

_Linguistic and argumentative means by which the text pursues its ends._

_Daily Telegraph_. **Headline:** “Parliament must stand aside or face its day of reckoning” Front page. September 26, 2019. Gordon Rayner.

The sub-headline reads: Johnson accuses rivals of cowardice in refusing an election as Commons returns from prorogation. September 26, 2019.

The full quote by Johnson, used later in the article, read: “This Parliament must either stand aside and let this Government get Brexit done or bring a vote of confidence and finally face the day or reckoning with the voters”.

From the word go, The Daily Telegraph creates a very clear binary of an in- and out-group (Wodak 2001). Johnson is portrayed as a strong leader standing up to Parliament, evoking a one-dimensional Churchill, the national war leader, which Garton-Ash (2005: 31, 271) describes as the ‘meta-story’ of a plucky Churchillian Britain. This is to imbue the story with hot nationalism (Billig 1995) from the start. The Daily Telegraph supports this position further, by actually portraying Johnson as Churchill in its cartoon next to the editorial headlined: Johnson will fight his way out of this corner. Johnson is portrayed in this cartoon with a burned-out hat and with soot all over his face as he smokes a damaged cigar. Embedded in the cartoon there is a quote from Churchill: “Success consists of going from failure to failure without loss of enthusiasm”. That Churchill was also a founder of the Council of Europe that was keen to maintain the post-war peace and therefore enshrined core elements of human rights and campaigned against hate speech, is nothing short of ironic, in the context of this article and what was said that day in Parliament. The ECRI (2016) documentation, used to gauge hate speech in this book, comes from an organisation working for the Council of Europe.
The story starts with the intro: “Boris Johnson last night accused Jeremy Corbyn of ‘running scared’ of an election after the Labour leader turned down the chance to topple the Prime Minister with a confidence vote today”.

At no point in the front-page news story is it clarified for the reader why Jeremy Corbyn would not bring down the government at this point, the most important question to ask, taught to all reporters in training, as the author can attest to. That it was because Corbyn and Labour were worried Johnson would still be able to drive through a No Deal Brexit without legislation preventing him from doing so, before an election was called, was not mentioned. Here the Telegraph is framing the story in a certain way. The article from the very start creates a series of presuppositions. This epistemic selection (Social Studies of Science 2017) ignores the fact Corbyn may not actually be “running scared”. Corbyn’s counter-narrative is omitted.

In this Churchillian meta-story (Garton-Ash 2005) emotions are conjured for the majority who voted leave (Wodak and Reisigl 2001), indeed believing that Parliament is blocking the will of the people, while the Telegraph journalist also quietly forgets to mention that nobody actually voted for a No Deal Brexit in the referendum. The introduction already reaffirms to readers the way they feel—Corbyn is, for them, running scared, with Johnson again quoted in the second paragraph, appealing for a confidence vote, triggering an election so Parliament can “finally face the day of reckoning with voters”.

There is no supporting evidence for why Corbyn is running scared and it is not offered up to the readers at any point in the piece: Post-Truth rhetoric, by the prime minister is given a platform, without the balance and wider perspective of the rationale behind Labour’s positioning.

In paragraph four, the article reads: “But neither Mr Corbyn, nor the leader of any other opposition party was prepared to take up the offer [of a confidence vote] prompting Mr Johnson to accuse them of ‘political cowardice’”. The platform for Johnson and his emotive rhetoric is intensified, in the next paragraph: “Mr Johnson accused his opponents of attempting to ‘sabotage’ Brexit”,’ his Post-Truth, clearly given a platform by The Daily Telegraph, without again reference to the No Deal possibility the opposition were keen to avert. Again there is a deepening of the binary here (Wodak 2001). The Telegraph is clearly standing behind Johnson.
In terms of the framing (Entman 1993) of the story, it is only in the seventh paragraph that reference is made to why Parliament had reconvened on September 25: that the Supreme Court had ruled that Johnson had acted illegally in proroguing Parliament. It could be argued that again here the *Telegraph* is guilty of epistemic selection in that no reference in this particular context is made (as is the case elsewhere in the media) of how many Conservatives in favour of Leave, argued continuously for the sanctity of Parliamentary sovereignty. Many MPs of whichever political hue and on either side of the Brexit divide, wished to fully debate the next phase of Brexit.

At no point in the frontpage article was Corbyn or indeed any leader of an opposition party, given a chance to be quoted. The only attempt at some form of balance was in the last paragraph on the front, when Johnson was: “criticised by opposition MPs for saying the best way to honour the murdered MP Jo Cox and bring the country together would be to ‘get Brexit done’”.

In the very last line on the front and first on the continuation of the story on page three, Corbyn is finally quoted, condemning the actions of Johnson: “Mr Corbyn said that ‘for the sake of this country he should go’, but refused to agree to an election until he ‘gets an extension’ to Article 50”. Yet again there is the epistemic selection. *Why* Corbyn wants an extension, is not shared with the readers.

Corbyn’s quote is mitigated (Wodak 2001) very quickly by a series of quotes by the prime minister, which are now cited: “Mr Johnson claimed Mr Corbyn had intended to use his party conference speech to agree to an election but that ‘it was censored by the Stasi in the form of the shadow chancellor’.”

*The Telegraph* wrote: “When Mr Corbyn called on him to resign, he shot back: ‘Go on then!….what are they scared of?’” He went on: “The leader of the opposition and his party don’t trust the people. All that matters to them is an obsessive desire to overturn the referendum result”.

In the populist political age, you have a choice as a reporter. You can hold politicians to account and ask them to evidence their positions, or call it out as Post-Truth and lying. BuzzFeed’s editor-in-chief of news, Ben Smith recognised early on that reporting on Trump necessitated relinquishing typical assumptions about political coverage.

Smith argued (Lewis 2016): “The structure of political reporting is to tacitly assume that candidates typically tell the truth about basic things, and that lies and open appeals to bigotry are disqualifying”.

Buzzfeed took a conscious effort to call it out and challenge politicians. Smith continued: “Trump violated all these rules without—in the eyes of the Republican primary voters who mattered—disqualifying himself”. In December of 2015, Smith declared that BuzzFeed staff could call Donald Trump both a liar and a racist. “He’s out there saying things that are false, and running an overtly anti-Muslim campaign”, he wrote in a memo (Lewis 2016).

The Daily Telegraph has not called it out here. The suggestion that Corbyn is beholden to his shadow chancellor, who is like the Stasi, is to create a demonization of Labour, creating an analogical metaphor (Musolff 2004) with the infamous German secret police. All the Telegraph does is give it a platform.

Interpretation.

When Johnson uses the Logos, as if to say: they are trying to reverse Brexit people—so we need an election, by referring to Labour’s “obsessive desire to overturn the referendum result” again the Daily Telegraph are giving a platform for Johnson’s emotive Post-Truth—without challenging the veracity of what is claimed.

But perhaps the most serious issue is that, unless Telegraph readers read the coverage on page two and three, they would not even be aware of how a series of MPs (including on the Tory benches) complained about the prime minister’s inflammatory language, replicated by trolls who had made death threats against a series of MPs on social media. Very little of this was covered all the same. “Epistemic competition is as much about choosing which truths can be considered salient and important as about which claims can be considered true and false, and these choices have important consequences” (Social Studies of Science 2017). The Daily Telegraph chose not to highlight the language used by the prime minister, accusing fellow MPs of ‘surrender’ and ‘betrayal’.

Post-Truth may be a way in journalism, of reaffirming national, Eurosceptic perspectives. In re-affirming certain truths, others (regarding the narrative of a country in Europe) can be sidelined (Wodak 2015) in what Nietzsche described as active forgetting (Heer and Wodak 2008: 4). It was made clear to the prime minister, by a series of MPs, that his provocative language had been repeated by others who had made death threats. Johnson’s hate speech was potentially inciting violence, in effect. The Daily Telegraph quietly airbrushed nearly all of this parliamentary discussion out of this first draft of history.
Daily Mail. September 26, 2019.  
Headline. Poll: Give Us Election Now...and voters blast Establishment ‘plot’ to block Brexit. Simon Walters.

Explanation of genre and context.

The Mail conducted a poll ahead of the Supreme Court decision on the proroguing of Parliament by Johnson, framing what it knew would be Corbyn’s resistance to an election as corroboration of him and indeed ‘the establishment’ trying to stop Brexit—rather than the issue of concern to many, which was a snap election. A Johnson victory would still allow the Johnson government to take the UK into a No Deal Brexit.

Linguistic and argumentative means by which the text pursues its ends.

The introduction reads: “Jeremy Corbyn faces a mass revolt by millions of Labour supporters over his refusal to agree to a snap election”.

The Daily Mail is framing the story in such a way as to suggest that refusal to have a snap election could result in a mass revolt from Labour supporters, who want an early vote. The cause of Labour’s historic defeat three months later is a matter for conjecture, but the Daily Mail was astute enough to see, in conducting its poll, with the train coming down the track, so to speak.

Subtly but surely, by means of the poll, the Daily Mail sets up a topos of threat to the national interest. Geddes (2013: 14) argues that the EU’s progression from “market-making to polity-building has created more space for Euroscepticism in British politics that draws from the representation of the European project as a threat to national identity…” The topos (Wodak and Reisigl 2001), in this instance, works along the following lines: it is prudent to get Brexit done and relent to the will of the people Jeremy and Labour—or you will be punished at the next election. The Daily Mail was very much present as a news actor (Bell 1991: 59; Tuchman 2002) in this instance, pushing its agenda as an ardent supporter of Brexit at that juncture.

The subsequent paragraphs in the piece read:

A survey for the Mail found that 64 per cent of those who voted for his party [Corbyn] in 2017 want an early poll. It also showed that most voters think ‘the Establishment’ is determined to stop Brexit. The opinion poll was carried out after the Supreme Court ruled that Boris Johnson’s suspension of Parliament was unlawful.
The article subsequently quotes Tory claims that Corbyn was ‘running scared’ in not calling for a no confidence vote in the government motion. A no confidence vote would have triggered a general election.

The poll asked voters if they thought there was an ‘establishment plot’ to block Brexit? It should be noted that the public saying they thought there was, does not actually mean this is so. Readers, in the framing of the material, could easily conflate that data, collating views on the issue, with the fact there is an establishment plot. There is no such fact substantiated in the piece. In Aristotle’s Logic, the notion of proof is woolly, dealing with probabilities rather than certainties, with the use of analogy and generalisation. This creates scope for the use of metaphors, common in persuasive argument. This is prevalent here, coupled with another way of constructing a proof: clever use of data to support what is your position, but these are not actually facts.

Returning to the topos of a threat to the national interest, it has evolved, with an intensification of the argument. Previously it could be said to have meant: it is prudent to get Brexit done and relent to the will of the people Jeremy and Labour—or you will be punished at the next election.

Now another layer in the line of argumentation is added: it is prudent to get Brexit done (addressing all parties this time) otherwise you are perceived to be part of the Establishment preventing that from happening.

There are no facts affirming there is a plot and this is to conjure, using what can also be interpreted as an argumentum ad populum or pathetic fallacy (Wodak and Reisigl 2001) appealing to the prejudiced emotions of a populous increasingly angry with the elite.

If Post-Truth is the articulation of emotions, where facts are secondary, then this survey and its use to present an article by the Mail, is testament to that understanding. It is giving credence to those emotions—with no facts supporting that emotive notion—because that is what people feel to be so.

The Daily Mail reported that some 52% in the Survation survey, believed the Establishment wanted to block Brexit. The Daily Mail also defines ‘the Establishment’ for readers, as: “a loose term applied to institutions ranging from the Commons and Lords, the civil service, big business and the judiciary to the BBC”. Whether old Etonian and Oxford-educated Johnson, among others, is outside of that elite, is a completely separate discussion.

The Daily Mail piece, unlike the front of the Telegraph, does include at the bottom of the front page: “Mr Corbyn says he wants to delay until
a No Deal departure has been ruled out”. However, in framing the story for the reader, there is no further exposition as to how No Deal could still happen or sharing with the reader why Corbyn wanted to avoid a No Deal. This cursory approach is also a form of epistemic selection (Social Studies of Science 2017).

Much like the Telegraph in again framing the story for the reader in a specific way, the narrative is how, despite the Mail conceding at some point that the proroguing had been ‘unlawful’ there was a majority who wanted to push on with Brexit, despite that. This was the narrative in the Mail, unlike the vindication of the ‘Churchillian’ Johnson in the Telegraph.

Readers were only encouraged to think about (Entman 2010) the provocative language of Johnson in parliament in the final part of the piece. In paragraph 15, the Mail wrote:

‘Mr Johnson was criticised for dismissing as “humbug” complaints that he was using inflammatory language. Labour MP Paula Sherriff had referred to the 2016 murder of Labour MP Jo Cox as she called for Mr Johnson to moderate his language. The Prime Minister caused further controversy by saying that “the best way to honour the memory of Mrs Cox” was to “get Brexit done”.’

The Mail did not feed the emotions, by providing the readers with Johnson’s emotive rhetoric, which the Telegraph very much did. However, nor did they provide the reader with a sense of the furore that resulted in Parliament, with a series of MPs explaining they had received death threats on social media from people using the very same language as Johnson and the protestations also coming from the Tory benches. The Daily Mail readers were not given a chance to think about these issues at all (Entman 2010).

Nevertheless, the piece stated: “voters had little sympathy for Tory protests about the Supreme Court’s verdict”. Some 41% rejected the claim by Jacob Rees-Mogg that this was a ‘constitutional coup.’ The article also recorded the poll finding of 62% of those polled saying Johnson should apologise to the queen for misleading her.

The Sun. Headline: PM flays ‘scared’ Corb on election. September 26, 2019. Tom Newton-Dunn.

Linguistic and argumentative means by which the text pursues its ends.
The front-page piece starts with:

*Rampaging* Boris Johnson last night dared “scared” Jeremy Corbyn to give him an election so voters can end the Brexit logjam.

Parliament returned after a Supreme Court ruling that its suspension for five weeks by the PM was illegal.

But in *explosive* Commons scenes, Mr Johnson refused to apologise for asking the Queen to order the prorogation. Instead he tried to turn the tables with a fresh election bid so he can *win* a pro-Brexit majority.

“With MPs having *shot down* his two previous attempts to hold a poll, he called on Mr Corbyn to table a vote of no confidence in his Government, which the Tories would also back. The PM *goaded*: “Is he going to dodge a vote of no confidence in me as Prime Minister in order to escape the verdict of the voters? I wonder does he in his heart even want to be Prime Minister anymore?”

From the outset, the Sun uses evaluative language, labelling Johnson positively, as ‘*rampaging*’, and then although not evaluative, describes the scene in the Commons as ‘*explosive*’ followed by, in a negative evaluation, MPS (opposing Johnson) having previously ‘*shot down* his two previous attempts to hold a poll’.

This is the use of a struggle metaphor, Strachle et al. (1999: 72) argue that it is not a particular word or expression that constitutes the struggle metaphor, although the words and expressions allow us to infer its presence. The prime minister, *goading* is synonymous with to hound and also suggests a form of struggle.

In previous analysis (Rowinski 2017) Cameron’s struggle infers the presence of a battle raging. Cameron *stunned* the EU, triggering a response from the euro-plus group. Cameron *drew a line in the sand*, despite being rounded on repeatedly by French leader, Nicolas Sarkozy. Nevertheless, Cameron *marked out his battle lines*, saying he would fight.

*The Sun*’s framing of the narrative is to conjure a Johnson who is actually *speaking to and for the nation* (Hallin and Mancini 2004) on Brexit. This is the position *The Sun*, as a news actor, has taken, in relation to his position.

*Interpretation.*

Much as with the *Telegraph*, the story is framed such, that Sun readers could conclude that they have been presented with the whole truth, rather than the epistemic selection only offering part of it. The reason as to why
Corbyn is reluctant to trigger a general election, as was indeed much of the opposition benches, is not discussed with the readers, so they do not think about it (Entman 2010) namely: concerns the government could still find a way of leading the country to a No Deal Brexit—as opposed to being ‘scared’ of the judgement of the people.

Again, in a similar vein to the Telegraph and the Mail, The Sun does not present the picture of Johnson and his provocative language. Indeed it is only the Telegraph that provides a platform for some of it. While the Telegraph and Mail make cursory mention of the issues over his language in Parliament, The Sun in its main story makes no mention of it at all and unless the reader delves into the subsequent pages, the Prime Minister’s hate speech is not an issue in the narrative at all (Entman 2010).

*Daily Mirror.* **Headline: Man With No Shame.** September 26, 2019.
Pippa Crerar.

Sub headlines: Johnson hits new low.
PM Refuses to say sorry for his lies. Vile Jo Cox jibe leaves MPs in tears.
The front-page introduction reads as follows:

Boris Johnson was hauled back into the Commons yesterday after his Supreme Court slapdown but failed to show an ounce of remorse.

He angered MPs by saying the best way to honour murdered Remainer MP Jo Cox was to ‘get Brexit done’.

But Labour’s Jeremy Corbyn said the PM should have resigned: ‘Yet here he is, forced back to this House to rightfully face scrutiny, without a shred of remorse or humility’.

Much as with previous articles, the article feeds off emotion and evaluative language, with Johnson ‘hauled back’ having faced a ‘slapdown.’

The second paragraph intensifies the language, creating an in-out group (Wodak 2001) scenario with MPs ‘angered’ (in this instance an accurate description, judging by the televised scenes in Parliament) over how Johnson argued the best way to honour Remainer MP was to “get Brexit done”. The Remain-supporting Mirror is presenting the binary to highlight and tease out why Johnson’s comments were deemed provocative by many (reported accurately elsewhere). They added the phrase: Remainer MP.

The intensification of emotion is heightened further, by then including Corbyn’s comment, again reminding the reader that Johnson has been forced back to the Commons and adding his view that Johnson did not
have a “shred of remorse or humility” again reinforcing the message in
the headline: Man With No Shame. The story has clearly been framed
to present and reflect the heightened emotions over Johnson’s lack of
remorse, filmed and widely reported on and the choice of language by
the Mirror reflects that outrage.

Considering the brevity of the front-page piece—the full extent of
which has been covered—the ‘full story: pages 4&5’ flagged up on the
front, is also analysed, it being the main story. The story grows in inten-
sity and to reflect this, and the resulting play on emotions, the first six
paragraphs are presented in full:

Boris Johnson returned to the Commons last night after his unlawful
closure of Parliament and was dealt another blow over a third bid to call
an election.

The PM begged Opposition MPS to call a no-confidence motion in
him during a explosive debate where he goaded them with disgraceful
accusations of ‘betrayal’ and ‘surrender’.

It was an effort at triggering a poll and hopes of getting the victory he
needs to force a no-deal Brexit.

But Labour, the SNP and LibDems resisted falling into his trap, and
turned on him after the Supreme Court ruled the shutting-down of
Parliament and the reasons he gave the Queen were unlawful.

Shameless Mr Johnson repeatedly refused to apologise for his actions.
And his violent language left some MPs in tears as they reminded him
of the murder of Labour’s Jo Cox by far-right thug, Thomas Mair in 2016.

There is an extensive use of a struggle metaphor (Strachle et al. 1999),
both in the cursory coverage on the front and this full story, italicized by
the author. It is notable how a lot of the same words used by The Sun are
used but utilised to frame the story in a very different one from the other
publication.

Johnson is hauled back to the Commons having suffered a slapdown
by the Supreme Court, suffering then a further blow as his third attempt
at securing an election is rejected, in an explosive debate in what are
then labelled by the Mirror (Mautner 2008) as disgraceful accusations
by Johnson of “betrayal” and “surrender”, from the shameless Prime
Minister and his violent language, that were resisted.

Musolff (2004: 31) argues that analogically popular metaphors can be
so powerful they result in politicians and nations committing to specific
courses of action. Wodak and Reisigl (2001: 69–70) in discussing argumentation theory, refer to the notion of persuasion, possibly changing not only a person’s perceptions, but also their disposition to behave or act in a specific way. The rapport with the reader (Mautner 2008) in this Mirror article encourages readers to be incensed and angry—much as Labour and other opposition MPs are—as subsequently articulated in the piece.

Straehle et al. (1999: 71) argue the word struggle means the coming together of competing positions. They also stress it is not a case of defining struggle, but rather as a descriptor of a topic. This is then constructed and acted upon, developing into a conceptual system of metaphor (Mangham 1996: 27), based on the notion of struggle. As Straehle et al. (1999: 72) argue, it is not a particular word or expression that constitutes the metaphor, although the words and expressions allow us to infer its presence.

In this instance, the metaphor revolves around the notion of Brexit and the government’s handing of it and indeed the Mirror’s use of evaluative language: hauled back; slapdown; explosive debate; disgraceful accusations; resisted by the opposition, who turned on him, to create the binary of an in- and out-group (Wodak 2001) and counter the “betrayal” and “surrender” articulated by Johnson.

The Mirror, unlike the Telegraph and Mail, framed the story to include information to explain the rationale of the government regarding an election and the opposition concerns regarding a No Deal Brexit and the answering of the question why, not addressed through the Telegraph’s epistemic selection, was presented here, allowing readers to think about (Entman 2010) what the government’s response meant.

Much as there is a coarseness in the discourse within the Commons, The Mirror succeeds in re-creating and re-enforcing it further, through its choice of language in framing the story in the opening paragraphs cited. The actual coarseness in the discourse then forms the backbone of the rest of the story—as opposed to the positioning of the prime minister on the issues, revealing the framing and epistemic selection at play on the other side of the ideological divide, regarding Brexit. The prime minister is not centre stage and his quotes are not prioritised, as elsewhere.

Following on from the last paragraph cited, the growing intensification (in this instance how the story was framed, also reflecting the intensity within the House) is now cited in the subsequent paragraphs:
And his violent language left some MPs in tears as they reminded him of the murder of Labour’s Jo Cox by far-right thug, Thomas Mair in 2016.

One, Independent Group for Change leader Anna Soubry, said: ‘It takes a lot to reduce this honourable member to tears’.

Labour MP Jess Phillips shared a death threat she had received this week on Twitter and added: ‘I am scared I might be hurt or killed’.

Lib Dem leader, Jo Swinson’s voice cracked as she told how her young child had received a similar threat.

Mr Johnson also faced more calls to quit over his unlawful suspension of Parliament. Jeremy Corbyn told him: ‘Quite simply, for the good of this country, he should go’. The highest court in this land has found the Prime Minister broke the law when he tried to shut down democratic accountability.

After yesterday’s ruling, he should have done the honourable thing and resigned. Yet here he is, forced back to this House to rightfully face scrutiny, without a shred of remorse or humility and no substance whatsoever.

Ms Phillips added: ‘I know the Prime Minister wants to appear as a strong man. But the strongest thing he could do, would be to act with some humility and contrition’.

This looks horrendous to the public and he thinks he speaks for the people. Let me tell you, it will look much better if the Prime Minister rises to his feet and says, ‘I am sorry, I got this wrong’. Let’s try honesty.

But Mr Johnson repeatedly refused to apologise, amid shouts of ‘resign’, ‘liar’ and ‘you should be in jail’.

SNP leader at Westminster Ian Blackford accused the PM of ‘lying and cheating and undermining the rule of law’ in a ‘dictatorship’.

He demanded: ‘Have you no shame, Prime Minister?’

*The Mirror* has clearly decided not to give Johnson a platform for his positioning beyond briefly quoting him close to the start and then only his inflammatory language. *The Mirror*’s framing of the story is diametrically juxtaposed to the Churchillian status provided to him by the *Telegraph*. The framing of the story is very much around the furore created in Parliament from those opposing his positions.

The balance was provided briefly at the end of the story, when the government’s attorney general, Geoffrey Cox QC was quoted—but only to re-enforce the framing of a government using ‘violent language’:
But he too [Cox] faced fury over his language after branding MPs ‘cowards’ and ‘turkeys’ during a rant as he was quizzed over his advice to the PM that prorogation was legal.

To re-enforce its message, the *Mirror* again gave the platform to Labour in the final paragraphs:

‘Labour’s Barry Sheerman said angrily: “This Government cynically manipulated prorogation to shut down the House. He knows that is the truth, and to come here with his barrister’s bluster to obfuscate the truth, and for a man like him and a leader like this PM to talk about morals and morality is a disgrace.”’

**Interpretation.**

*The Mirror* acts a clear counterpoint, ideologically, to the *Mail* and even more so the *Telegraph*, giving a platform to those objecting to the PM’s perceived provocation of the house and obfuscation. There is a coarseness in the discourse and Deacon (2016) noted the inability of either side to tolerate the other’s position.

While there is considerable emotional rhetoric and the *Mirror*, through its evaluative language accentuates it all the more—there is no Post-Truth, as prevalent in some of the copy on the other side of the Brexit argument. Like all newspapers, they will cite somebody reflecting a position similar to theirs and Sheerman at the end reflects *The Mirror*’s positioning on the whole debacle.

*The Mirror* is holding a position and from say an Italian perspective and that of those consciously trying to challenge Post-Truth and hate speech, the notion of impartiality in such a hostile political environment is impossible. This is the notion of a false equivalence not being the way to report. D’Ancona (2017) argued for an equally emotive engagement from those challenging Post-Truth and that the distant yet nevertheless relevant approach of fact-checking, would not capture the public imagination the way those peddling Post-Truth have succeeded in doing.

As Nicco Mele, director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard (Lewis 2016) argues, the pressure to be “balanced” belies an important fact: false equivalence is itself a form of untruth. Mele argues Trump’s presidential campaign forced news-rooms to confront false equivalency head-on. What do you do when
the overwhelming accumulation of facts lies on one side of the argument? Do you have to be seen to offer exactly the same amount of copy for the counter-argument? Think back to the BBC’s coverage of ‘Europe’ over the last decade. The number of times the BBC’s flagship morning news programme, Today, would start with an interview with Nigel Farage, leader of the then peripheral anti-EU UKIP. Was this not creating a false equivalence—which has now, post the vote for Brexit, become mainstream?

One interpretation could be that *The Mirror* is framing the story to highlight an aspect of what occurred in Parliament, as opposed to Johnson’s response. Conversely, maybe *The Mirror* has moved its position, in light of such Prime Ministerial provocation and that to give Johnson more than a cursory defence would be to create a false equivalence, not merited by the seriousness of what happened—on the other side of the argument. This is not to justify the coarseness of the discourse and how there is a clear polarisation of positions. It is, however, with a view to understanding.

BuzzFeed’s editor-in-chief of news, Ben Smith, recognised early on that reporting on Trump necessitated relinquishing typical assumptions about political coverage. “The structure of political reporting is to tacitly assume that candidates typically tell the truth about basic things, and that lies and open appeals to bigotry are disqualifying”, he says. “Trump violated all these rules without—in the eyes of the Republican primary voters who mattered—disqualifying himself”. In December of 2015, Smith declared that BuzzFeed staff could call Donald Trump both a liar and a racist. “He’s out there saying things that are false, and running an overtly anti-Muslim campaign”, he wrote in a memo (Lewis 2016). *The Mirror* included the shouts of “liar” and “you should be in jail” and also Sheerman’s clear accusation of lying, at the close of the piece. Whatever the failings of the *Mirror*’s piece, which have been highlighted—they still called it out.

The Prime Minister’s hate speech was weaponised by the *Mirror*. It was a means of framing Johnson and creating a clear binary—with the *Mirror* the enemy in the ideological divide. What the *Mirror* did not do, at least in its main article, was to outline how the MPs that received death threats complained of their potential assailants using the very language employed by the Prime Minister on the floor of the house. According to the criteria used by the ECRI (2016) and Liberty (2017a, b), inciting violence, makes Johnson’s language hate speech. The MPs received death
threats. That the complaints of MPs regarding death threats, were not included, it is suspected, is an oversight and would have strengthened the corroboration in the *Mirror*. Notably, for all the emotive rhetoric and lack of false equivalence, there was no Post-Truth prevalent in the *Mirror* piece.

*The Guardian*. **MPs’ fury as Johnson claims to speak for Britain on Brexit.**

September 26, 2019. Heather Stewart and Kate Proctor.

Sub headlines:

- Clash with Corbyn after being forced back to Commons
- Gasps as PM uses memory of Jo Cox to bolster Brexit case
- ‘Dangerous’ leader told: ‘You are not fit to hold office’

**Explanation of genre and context.**

*The Guardian*, akin to the *Mirror* on the centre-left and also Remain side in the new fault line in British politics, presented in a fulsome manner, the positioning of the Prime Minister at the outset (unlike the *Mirror*) and in so doing, through this clear context, utilised the positioning of those responding to Johnson, to demonstrate how: he should have resigned; should have toned down his language; and had not allayed fears over a No Deal Brexit scenario.

For all that, the angle at the outset is clear and Johnson, unlike in the *Telegraph*, is not given a platform, with from the very start equal weighting being given to what he says and those who instantly respond. Here *The Guardian* flies in the face of the tendency of British newspapers, giving a platform to prime ministers, who, in the majoritarianism system are seen to speak to and indeed for the nation (Hallin and Mancini 2004).

The introduction reads:

An unrepentant Boris Johnson sparked a furious backlash last night after he repeated criticism of the supreme court judgment, and rejected MPs’ pleas to moderate his ‘inflammatory’ language as ‘humbug’.

Addressing a rowdy and adversarial Commons, just hours after flying back early from New York, Johnson went on the attack, accusing Jeremy Corbyn of trying to thwart Brexit and running scared of an election.

Johnson infuriated opposition MPs by dismissing fears that his use of language such as ‘surrender’ and ‘betrayal’ was dangerous in a heightened
political climate. To gasps, he claimed the best way to honour the memory of the murdered MP Jo Cox was to ‘get Brexit done’.

And he continued the “people versus parliament” rhetoric that has become a signature of his premiership, claiming: “The people outside this house understand what is happening…the leader of the opposition and his party don’t trust the people”.

Much as the *Mirror*, the language issue is prominent, if not more so, in the way the story is framed. Again a struggle metaphor (Straehle et al. 1999: 72) is at play, with an in and out group clearly used (Wodak 2001) and evaluative language (Mautner 2008) used to intensify the emotion further, with Johnson unrepentant thus sparking a furious backlash yet he continued to reject please to moderate his inflammatory language in a rowdy and adversarial Commons, where he infuriated with his talk of surrender and betrayal in what Johnson framed as people versus parliament. The extent to which such evaluative language is used, akin to the tabloid *Mirror*, where it is more commonplace, is noticeable.

The piece is maybe framed, reflecting also the Guardian’s anger with Johnson and its willingness to give Labour’s sentiment a platform. But for all that, Johnson sowed division in Parliament that day and the piece reflected that accurately.

*The Guardian* front also went into greater detail than all the other front pages, including: MP Paula Sherriff’s attack on the PM for continuously describing the Hilary Benn act to take No Deal off the table as the “surrender act”. Sherriff was quoted: “We should not resort to using offensive, dangerous, inflammatory language for legislation we do not like”. She also clarified that many MPs had received death threats quoting the prime minister’s words: ‘surrender act,’ ‘betrayal’, ‘traitor.’ The prime minister was also quoted, responding to all this as “humbug”.

In analysis of rhetoric, Toye (2013: 5) stresses the importance of the social, political and cultural contexts, in the subsequent analysis of language: “Above all, we need to appreciate that rhetoric is not merely the means by which ideas are expressed, it is also a means by which they are generated”.

Sherriff is arguing these ideas have found currency and traction, thanks to Johnson. Johnson has generated such emotive rhetoric from others, in effect.

Brendan Cox, Jo Cox’s widower, also responded later on Twitter and this was included, saying he felt a little sick at Jo’s name being used in this
way, but that we should be passionate but never demonise the other side and “always hold to what we have in common”. Wodak and Reisigl (2001: 265) argue democratic legitimacy has to be the result of discourse: “performed under the condition of largely egalitarian reciprocity and located within the different public spheres or fields of political action, of a free, open and rational formation of public opinion about political problems and questions of shared interest”.

Corbyn’s response to Johnson, appealing him to resign, came late in the article, but also the quote making clear that he also wanted an election—but that meant initially an extension, to prevent the possibility of No Deal, something none of the other newspapers touched upon.

**Interpretation.**

Despite the Guardian accentuating the emotional rhetoric to some extent, as outlined, there is no epistemic selection, with the piece providing the most rounded coverage on that day’s events, taking in all sides. Arguably there is also no false equivalence, despite this, as the article finds the Prime Minister wanting and demonstrates that by going through the narrative of how Johnson went on the attack from the very outset, by his use of inflammatory language and creating the *people versus parliament* dichotomy.

It nevertheless mitigates the ‘calling out’ of Johnson, in comparison to Buzzfeed over Trump (Lewis 2016).

*The Mirror* did not shy away from quoting MPs who called Johnson a “liar” presumably over misinforming the Queen over the reason for the proroguing of Parliament, with Barry Sheerman’s analysis quoted in full.

The hate speech of the Prime minister is however placed into context, by means of the Sherriff quote, clearly inciting violence (ECRI 2016; Liberty 2017a, b; UN 2019).

**Conclusions.**

The BBC (2016, July 22) reported that hate crime was far too high, according to the police, after the Brexit referendum in the UK. Incidents included an attack on the Polish cultural institute (POSK) in Hammersmith; abuse hurled at various EU nationals; and the murder of a Polish man in Harlow. That hate speech was rife in the UK press was established by the (ECRI 2016). Whether the hate speech in the press correlated with hate crime on the streets, is a matter of conjecture. Nevertheless readers are led to certain conclusions, despite paucity of substantiation that correlate directly to the press’s hate speech with subsequent acts. A minority
of Britons responded to the perceived threat posed by immigrants (Lyons 2016; BBC, July 2016; Siddique 2016; Weaver 2016) in and around the 2016 EU referendum.

So conjecture. What however is not, is the use of language by the current British prime minister and the correlation between that and the hate speech hurled at MPs on social media. Boris Johnson, returned to Parliament after the Supreme Court ruled his proposed proroguing of the House of Commons illegal. He then used rhetoric including labelling the act, preventing a No Deal over Brexit, the “surrender act” and accusing those of questioning his actions as “traitors” guilty of “betrayal”. One after another a series of female MPs from all sides of the House, stood up and complained the very language used by the prime minister, was also being used by those issuing them with death threats. They courteously asked Johnson to desist. He has not. What is inescapable is that journalists, when faced by a provocative speech by the prime minister, invariably have to quote him. The key is whether they gave him a platform, amplifying and justifying his language in the lead story—or conversely gave the floor, so to speak, to those condemning his emotive rhetoric. The key is perhaps how that particular debate was framed (Entman 1993, 2010) for the general public to consume. If the press did the former, it could be argued they are parading hate speech and complicit with the prime minister in his verbal attacks, in this instance.

Facebook analysis.

Boris Johnson has 941,000 followers on Facebook and his page flags up conservatives.com. However his address to the nation, on the UK leaving the European Union, on January 31, 2020, received 2.9 m views and was the top video at the top of the page. This was eclipsed by a video on the Coronavirus, going top on March 17, 2020, literally while I was conducting research.

Considering how Johnson’s address to the nation on leaving, was foregrounded and deals with the key issues for Britain outside the EU, the decision was made to view this video and take note of the nature of the rhetoric, as a means of contextualising subsequent analysis of the language used by Johnson in his videos, regarding the recalling of Parliament, after what was deemed an illegal proroguing, by the Supreme Court.

The January 31, 2020 address demonstrates a toning down of the emotive rhetoric, with Johnson’s battle won and with no further need to convince anybody of the argument for leaving. Understandably Johnson
was in a position to present himself in an operative light, speaking to and for the nation (Hallin and Mancini 2004) and seeking to unite the country as it moves forward. He had just won a resounding victory in the December 2019 general election.

Malešević’s (2006) notions of normative and operative nationalism also result in differing Weltanschauungen. Unlike Lakoff (1996), Malešević (2006) suggests that governments behave one way on the world stage (professing a more universalistic, ethical perspective), but relate and present ideas to the populous on another more nationalistic level (operative). Lakoff (1996) notes that Conservatives have developed an elaborate language of moral politics—whereas Liberals lack a similarly powerful metaphor system, putting them at a disadvantage in discourse (ibid.: 387). Unlike elsewhere perhaps, the language of Johnson here is not the hot nationalism (Hutchinson 2006) that can be found elsewhere, with the argument won. To that end the metaphors were designed more to persuade people of the need to pull together and bury their differences.

Johnson in his address to the nation, spoke of those in favour of “hope” for remainers, he did not name beyond those having a “sense of loss” and a third group perhaps the biggest group, he thought, who felt “the political wrangling would never come to an end”.

As Malešević (2006) argued over the operative, Johnson did indeed start moralising:

bring this country together now and take us forward
This is the moment when the dawn breaks and the curtain goes up in our new national drama…
this recaptured sovereignty to deliver the changes people voted for
Whether that is by controlling immigration or creating free ports or liberating our fishing industry…
“doing free trade deals” “simply making our laws and rules for the benefit of the people”
The EU direction “no longer suits this country. And that is a judgement, that you, the people…. Confirmed “not once but twice”.

We don’t know if people in the general election were re-affirming their vote for Brexit or articulating displeasure at Corbyn or for some other reason. Johnson’s claim of this being categorical, with the people voting twice for Brexit, is unfounded. As was noted by Carol Lucas, the Green MP and others, there were more who voted against the Conservatives than for, in the election, and they were nearly all Remainers. Professor
John Curtice (2019) noted in his post-result analysis, that Labour, for instance, lost seats in both Leave and Remain areas of the country.

Johnson had breached the so-called Red Wall in the 2019 general election, to claim seats in the Labour heartlands. Johnson said he accepted it shouldn’t be the case “that your family’s life chances should depend on which part of the country you grow up in”. He added: “We will spread hope and opportunity to every part of the UK”.

He spoke of using “muscles” the country has not used in years, not to detract from the EU. Johnson talked of “friendly co-operation” between the EU and UK. “We have obeyed the will of the people. We have taken back the tools of self-government”.

Interpretation.

There is no emotive Post-Truth rhetoric or hate speech in the language used by Johnson in this scenario. This suggests he is capable of tempering the coarseness of his discourse, when he so chooses. This also demonstrates how language can be weaponised in political rhetoric, when the likes of Johnson and others, choose to do so.

Surrender

On conducting a search on Johnson’s Facebook page, under the term prorogue, no results were understandably returned. However when the emotive, evaluative word ‘surrender’ was used, a series of posts were found, including videos posted in September 2019, around the time of the Supreme Court deciding the closure of Parliament was illegal.

The initial post selected, was on September 4, 2019, entitled: “Corbyn and his surrender bill will mean years of uncertainty and delay. I am determined to lead this country forward and take Britain out of the EU on October 31”. This appeared to be the most popular of all the posts found, using the word surrender. It received 39,000 likes and 10,000 comments.

In terms of the most popular video, under the term surrender, Johnson posted a video on September 10, 2019, which received 16,000 likes, receiving a further 3500 comments and similarly 3500 shares. The text alongside the video read:

Corbyn and his friends in Parliament want to delay Brexit and surrender billions more to Brussels. We cannot allow this to happen. The referendum result must be respected.
The video is of the following text, read out by Johnson at Prime Minister’s Questions in the House of Commons, the main weekly event, when he faced the Leader of the Opposition, Jeremy Corbyn. What is notable at the outset is that all the text can be read below Johnson’s delivery in subtitles, as if to stress it and really drive the message home to those viewing it.

Here is the text in full:

This Government will not delay Brexit any further. We will not allow the emphatic verdict of the referendum to be slowly suffocated by further calculated drift and paralysis. And while the opposition run from their duty to answer to those who put us here, they cannot hide forever. The moment will come. The moment will come when the people will finally get their chance to deliver their verdict Mr Speaker, on how faithfully this house executed their wishes and I am determined that they will see that it was this Government that was on their side.

Johnson employs a life-body-health metaphor (Musolff 2004) to reach his audience, akin to the notion of argumentation-by-metaphor. The people’s verdict (legal metaphor) has been ignored and they have been suffocated and this has created paralysis. The life-body-health metaphor is then reinforced, by the use of path-movement-journey metaphor, with the will of the people stifled by calculated drift, with the opposition running from their duty, with the moment coming, when they, returning to the original metaphor, will get their chance to deliver their verdict.

It has to be said that while the prime minister may have been more provocative on twitter, emotive rhetoric, of the kind complained about in the House on September 25, 2019, was not prevalent in the text.

Interpretation.

This was only a snapshot but it seems, on this cursory viewing, that Johnson reserves his inflammatory and provocative emotive rhetoric for the televised debates in the House of Commons and is far more reasonable and less intemperate on Facebook—unlike his fellow far-right counterpart in Italy, Salvini.

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