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LENNON, Henry and KILBY, Laura <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9766-1985>

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A Multimodal Critical Discourse Analysis of ‘Brexit’: Flagging the nation in Political Cartoons.

Dr. Henry Lennon, University of Derby

Dr. Laura Kilby, Sheffield Hallam University

Introduction

Constructing nationhood and national identity

Given the comparatively modern construction of the nation-state, the study of nationhood, nationalism, and national identity has a relatively young history (Billig, 1995). Nations are typically characterised as bounded, finite entities, with a sovereign right to act as a self-determining agent on an international stage (Anderson, 2006). Nationalism, understood as the habitual identification and strong devotion to one’s own nation, is an inseparable aspect of nationhood, and closely linked to conflicts that centre on ethnic and political fault lines (Guibernau, Berdún, & Rex, 2010). Over the course of the 20th century, national identity - a sense of connectedness to the nation that is embedded in everyday civic life - has increasingly entered political thought (Anderson, 2006). The nation can be understood as an ‘imagined community’, insofar that most members will never know each other, yet will share an “image of their communion” (Anderson, 2006, p.6) irrespective of social, ethnic or economic inequalities within. Anderson (2006) further highlights that, regardless of how national identity is socially engineered or politically reworked in elite discourse, it always requires the emotional endorsement of its citizenry. Billig (1995) emphasises that national identity comprises a typology of commonplace narrative mechanisms such as values, achievements, and everyday practices that facilitate the binding of a nation. These characteristics may reflect ambiguities and contradictions that can subtly change over time. Thus, overt and more implicit prejudice discourse towards different out-groups, such as immigrants, can gradually alter in shared societal discourse as some groups are assimilated or side-lined, whilst newer or more newsworthy out-groups take centre stage. Shared history is also pertinent to national identity, providing both a resource for the community to meet the future, as well as an anchor that can provoke feelings of pride and, equally, feelings of shame or ambivalence (Parekh, 2000).

Billig's (1995) thesis on 'banal nationalism' demonstrates that nationalism is endemic in the mundane language of the nation-state, largely unnoticed in the social psychology of everyday life. Rather than viewing nationalism as an 'identity' unique to individuals, it is an 'everyday ideology' that implicitly informs social life as a shared experience, unless circumstantial political events necessitate explicitly confrontational, expressive, and/or proud rhetoric. Billig (1995) describes nationalism as a "way of being in a world of nations" (p.65), with the nation continually flagged in political and media discourse. Billig illustrates his argument via a 'day survey' of British national newspapers, which evidences how the nation is a repeated feature of news stories. In some cases, where the news concerns international current affairs, explicit reference to 'Britain' or discussions of 'Brits' serve to flag the nation. However, reminders of nationhood are also routinely embedded in the sports pages, in weather reports and in home news stories. For example in the sports pages, individuals are regularly referred to through terms such as 'British hopeful', and images of the British flag are a common feature. Weather reports routinely feature a map of Britain and refer to weather variations across 'the country', and this is sometimes also contrasted with weather coming in from 'abroad' (Billig, 1995). Billig's thesis on the mundane, everyday forms of nationalism is a particularly powerful argument when set against the pervasive narrative in 'western' nations where nationalism is often framed as an exceptional perspective, on the edges of civilised or 'reasonable' political discourse (e.g., Goodman & Johnson, 2013). Following Billig' s (1995) work, there is a body of discursive research interested in the dynamics of national identity and nationalism, much of which has been conducted around the British and Irish archipelago (e.g., Abell et al., 2006, 2007; Condor, 2000, 2010; Joyce, Stevenson & Muldoon, 2012; Stevenson & Abell, 2011). These studies explore national identity as "ways of talking about nationhood" (Billig, 1995, p.8).

The UK and Brexit

The UK has long been constructed as a nation through discourses of Britishness. As befitting a national identity, Britishness is an overarching identity of civic and political status, subsuming a series of regions, nations, and ethnic groups, set against a backdrop of a Protestant culture, recurrent war and an increasingly multicultural empire (Colley, 1992). There are important debates regarding the relative dominance of Englishness within the construction of British national identity in relation to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland (see Cohen, 1994; Macphee & Poddar, 2007; Ward, 2009). Whilst rehearsing these debates is outside the scope of current paper, our analysis will explore how such issues play out where they are shown to be relevant in our data. Britishness has increasingly featured in social questions concerning globalisation, 'super' diversity, democratic deficit, social stratification, digitalisation and automation of work (e.g., Cruse, 2008). UK Prime Ministers have repeatedly (re)defined Britishness in their political discourse to rally the nation, transforming social issues into national causes: from John Major's 'European Britishness', Tony Blair's 'cool Britannia', Gordon Brown's 'civic Britishness', David Cameron's 'one-nation conservatism', through to Teresa May's 'burning injustices'.

EU Membership has featured as a particularly contentious saga in UK political discourse; an ideological struggle between nationalist and internationalist sentiments have led to discernible constitutional challenges in every decade since UK entry to the-then EEC in 1973 (Kaiser, & Varsori, 2012). The 2016 UK referendum on continued membership of the European Union, presented the EU question to the British public in very simple terms. The British Electoral Commission, who oversee the process of elections in the UK, selected two campaigns arguing opposing perspectives in response to the question *"Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union?"* The 'In Campaign' argued for continuing EU membership (some within arguing for the status quo, others for internal reform). In contrast, the 'Vote Leave' campaign argued for leaving the EU (with variable formulations of what that might mean in practice). Whilst there are many interesting and complex questions in these opposing referendum campaigns, and indeed a great deal more in continued debates in the post-referendum political landscape, for the purposes of the current chapter, suffice to say that a small majority of 52% voted in favour of the UK leaving the European Union. Following this vote, empirical studies have investigated the ways that 'Brexit' was constructed via categories, shared histories and political attitudes.

Moore and Ramsay (2017) demonstrate in their content analysis that Brexit talk dominated political discourse in over 14,000 mainstream media outlets between April-June 2016, infiltrating all other political and social issues as the quintessential political event of the UK in the 21st century. Recent research highlights that themes of nationhood, identity, and belonging permeate Brexit discourse. Meredith and Richardson (2019) examine how 'Brexiter' and 'Remainer' categories were formulated in online responses to both Brexit-supporting and Brexit-opposing newspaper articles in 2016. They also found these terms paired together within the broader ‘voters in the referendum’ categorisation device. Descriptors for both terms were typically employed by the opposing group with pejorative attributions used to explain political standpoints, such as “lack of intelligence” for Brexiters, and “scaremongers” for Remainers (pp.46-47). Elsewhere, Goodman and Narang (2019), have argued that depictions of the ‘refugee crisis’ in internet forums which present child refugees as adults; as a ‘burden’ to taxpayers, and as oppositional to the public’s will, provide key political rhetoric and impetus for the Leave vote campaign. Krzyżanowski (2017) examines the constitution of ‘Brexit-as-crisis’ through conceptual mapping of past, present and future, showing how Brexit becomes signified and grounded in peril and possibility. Zappettini (2019) shows how the two campaign websites feature trade and immigration as their main argumentative schemes, producing a ‘toxic’ logic concerned with promoting mercantile policies and excluding ‘outsiders’. Elsewhere, Maccaferri (2019) places Brexit within the question of Europe’s re-narration through ‘border talk’ in traditional and online media, drawing on cultural and historical tropes, whilst research by Valdés-Miyares (2018) contrasts a film speech in *This is England* with a ‘victory’ speech by Nigel Farage in June 2016. This research demonstrates how they both utilise mythology, symbolic allusions to war, and an idealised future to advocate nationalist themes. Such works mark an emergent interest in the discursive construction of Brexit, but also speak to longstanding research exploring how political communication constructs social psychological issues such as social identity, prejudice and belonging (Condor, Tileagă, & Billig, 2013). In the current chapter, we seek to further these interests by undertaking a multimodal critical discursive analysis of Brexit cartoons with a specific concern to examine the place of ‘rhetorical ambiguity’ in Brexit discourse.

Political communication, discourse analysis and multimodality

The study of political communication is an established canon in discourse analysis, not least in traditions concerned with the maintenance and reproduction of social problems (Wooffitt, 2005), this is especially so in discursive psychology (DP). DP researchers utilise a range of approaches for data collection and explore varying genres of political discourse. Previous research has examined data collected via interviews (e.g., Abell, Condor, & Stevenson, 2006; Condor & Gibson, 2007), and focus groups (e.g. Goodman & Burke, 2010;

Xenitidou & Morasso, 2014) to explore everyday or lay discourses on a range of social political issues. Other work has sought to examine elite forms of public discourse such as political speeches (Capdevila & Callaghan, 2007); analysis of policy documents (e.g. Popoviciu & Tileagă, 2019); constituent or open letters (Barnes et al., 2004; Lynn & Lea, 2003), print media articles (Kilby, Horowitz, & Hylton, 2013; Rosie, MacInnes, Petersoo, Condor, & Kennedy, 2004), and radio/television talk (Goodman & Johnson, 2013; Kilby & Horowitz, 2013). This diverse body of work marks the territory in which the articulation of political attitudes, the negotiation of discrimination or prejudice, and the construction of civic identities have been studied (Condor et al., 2013).

Critical discourse studies (CDS), comprises discursive work that sets out with an explicit commitment to examine areas of social inequality, and seeks to reveal how relations of power and institutional structures are underpinned by discursive practices (e.g., Fairclough, 1989, 2001; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997; van Dijk, 2001; 2015; Wodak & Meyer, 2015). Historically, tensions arose when classic DP research focused on the construction of psychological themes argued that DP is “critical” (Potter & Wetherall, 1987, p.175; Edwards & Potter, 1992, p.33; Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p.1), where work has since moved in disparate directions away from an overtly critical agenda (e.g., Goodman, 2017). Indeed, some CDS scholars claim that much of DP is not critical enough because of the habitual retience to invoke extra-discursive, or ‘macro’ social concepts (Fairclough, 1995). These issues are widely rehearsed elsewhere (see Wooffitt, 2005 for overview) and we do not intend to revisit them here. For our own part, we see social and analytic benefits to synthesising the unique contributions that both DP and CDS offer, upholding a critical ambition for our work, whilst remaining agnostic about the benefit or necessity of drawing strict boundaries between them

Our concern with criticality and our DP background directly informs our analytic approach, however our distinct focus on multimodality leads us to position our work as multimodal critical discourse analysis (see Machin, 2013). Multimodal research is concerned with examining a full range of complex semiotic forms including imagery, sound, language, and so on. Expanding a focus beyond the linguistic is driven by awareness across both CDS and DP that discourses are increasingly multimodal, and that meaning is constructed, and derived, holistically (Iedema, 2003; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001, 2006; Levine & Scollon, 2004, van Leeuwen, 1999, 2005). Moreover, as Machin (2013, p.351) points out that “different semiotic resources allow certain qualities to be glossed over and others communicated more specifically” Thus, the key issue for multimodal analysts is to examine what differing semiotic resources can be used to do.

Political Cartoons

Since the turn of the 19th century, political cartoons have provided a means of societal critique, political commentary and frivolity. They “represent an aspect of social, cultural or political life in a way that condenses reality and transforms it in a striking, original and/or humorous way” (El Refaie, 2009, p.175). They place a spotlight on situated events, simplifying complex issues, and upholding some narratives whilst de-legitimising others (Silaški & Đurovic, 2019). Their satirical humour often parodies political figures and places them into nonsensical or extreme situations, often through metaphor. We contend that the political cartoons genre is unique in its capacity for satire and subversion. It is grounded in the potential to provoke, and to convey contentious or risky discourse. Moreover, the visual mode affords a clear potential for ambiguity. These features combined give visual satire an interesting capacity for constructing ideological positions whilst avoiding explicit challenge. However, as Mazid (2008) highlights, this does not mean that ‘anything goes’. When it comes to what is said, and how it is received, political cartoons must rely on a shared socio-historical background as a basis for its subversion. They must also tread a delicate line of ethical and moral acceptability.

There have been relatively few MDA or MCDA studies of political cartoons. An early study by Gamson and Stuart (1992) explored what they interpreted as a ‘symbolic contest’ between universalism and nationalism in nuclear weapon cartoons. More recently, Mazid (2008) investigated a corpus of President Bush and Bin Laden cartoons, showing how contrasting features mutually invoked God and justified ‘righteous’ action. Notably, despite opposing representations, they were both ridiculed and delegitimized as warmongering, murderous actors. A study by Müller, Özcan and Seizov (2009) examined depictions of the Muslim prophet Muhammad published in the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. They investigated how aggressive imagery conflated Islam with violence, or terrorism. Despite the ambiguous potential to see cartoons like ‘Bomb in the Head’ as satirising fundamentalism, they can also be seen as inflammatory to those who would present Islam as a peaceful way of life. In our earlier work (Kilby & Lennon, 2018), we examined the prophet Muhammad cartoon that featured on the front page of the Charlie Hebdo magazine following the terror attacks on the Charlie Hebdo offices in 2015. We demonstrated how the concepts of peace and violence were simultaneously constructed, and how the ambiguity of the multimodal form facilitated quite distinct interpretations of the same discourse dependent on the cultural and ideological context of the audience. Recently, Silaški and Đurovic (2019) studied how the 'journey' metaphor in Brexit cartoons portrays a process filled with evaluative content.Recently, Musolff (2019) investigated the fascinating history of the proverb 'having your cake and eating it' in regards to UK-EU political negotiations, landing itself to both opposition critiques of its 'absurdity' as well as 'bold' assertions of hope and possibility.

Our aim is to contribute to the developing body of discursive work that explores Brexit (e.g. Krzyżanowski, 2017; Meredith & Richardson, 2019; Moore & Ramsay, 2017; Zappettini, 2019) by examining how Brexit is constructed in political cartoons published between March and October 2016. Of particular interest to us is an exploration of the ways in which satirical forms of combined linguistic and visual discourse facilitate rhetorical ambiguity.

Data and Analytic Approach

Via a Google search using the phrase "political cartoons on Brexit, UK-EU relations", time-filtered for March-October 2016 to cover an eight-month time period with the referendum vote occurring mid-way in June 2016, we source twenty-five individual cartoons and two collections of Brexit cartoons that feature in media review articles by The Guardian (20 March 2016) and Politico (25 June 2016). The inclusion criteria are that Brexit should be the focal issue of the cartoon. We ensure that the corpus reflects a range of perspectives including more distinctively 'pro' and 'anti' positions and, as befitting the satirical nature of political cartoons, cartoons that offer an ambiguous stance. Data collection took place between January-March 2019.

We review and group the initial corpus according to common tropes of nationhood. This reviewing process highlights the prominence of two metaphorical tropes, that we name *'Boundedness and Isolation'* and *'Uncertain Waters'*. These tropes are the most common means of representing Brexit across the data. They feature in cartoons that upheld both pro- and anti-Brexit rhetoric, as well as cartoons that convey ambiguous positions. In total, twelve cartoons are categorised under these two tropes. The focal imagery involves depictions of, either, the nation as a bounded geographical island (‘Boundedness and Isolation’), or depictions of ships/boats at sea (‘Uncertain Waters’). These metaphorical concepts have previously been identified in discursive analyses of nationhood and belonging (e.g. Ana, 1997, 1999; Charteris-Black, 2006, 2013; Musolff, 2004, Silaški& Đurovic, 2019). Given the prominence of these tropes in our data, and the existing use of such metaphors in discourses concerned with nationhood and belonging, we selected these cartoons as the data for our analysis. The ‘Boundedness and Isolation’ trope comprises four cartoons, the ‘Uncertain Waters’ trope comprises eight.

Our analysis draws upon the multimodal analytic methods of Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) and related works (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2005; van Leeuwen & Jewitt, 2001). Characteristics including composition, colour, represented participants, perspective, and textual components are examined in order to reveal multimodal rhetorical mechanisms that are used to flag nationhood. Whilst each cartoon is unique, our focus is with examining common features across the data to understand the shared ways in which nationhood, otherness and belonging are (re)produced, and to assess how the multimodal qualities of these satirical cartoons interact and intersect in the construction of this complex, highly flexible form of discourse.

It is helpful at the outset to state that we are not seeking to assess the ‘truth’ of the messages conveyed in our data. We recognise that in the context of political discourse, and particularly with regard to Brexit, analysis of how facts are presented, and indeed, how they are distorted can be a valid endeavour. However, as Kress and van Leeuwen (2006; p.145-155) highlight, “from the point of view of social semiotics, truth is a construct of semiosis, and as such the truth of a particular social group arises from the values and beliefs of the group”. In keeping with this stance, ours is not an attempt to reveal any objective truth, but to assess how multiple forms-of-knowing are realised in these Brexit cartoons through the interplay of visual and textual semiotic form. Each cartoon has been coded (C1, C2, C3, C4, etc.). Links to each of the cartoons are provided at the end of the chapter.

Analysis and Discussion

Throughout our analysis we refer to visual depictions of the British Isles, as depictions of 'the nation'. We stress that in many cases, such depictions are only partial, and often do not include Northern Ireland, The Republic of Ireland and the Channel Islands. Central to our thesis is the contention that, that in all cases, what is being constructed are arguments that foreground nationhood and national identity in a manner wholly in keeping with Billig's (1995) account of banal nationalism. As our analysis will emphasise, what is absent, and what is only partial in portrayals of 'the nation' can itself reflect important rhetorical and ideological elements within these constructions of Brexit.

Trope One: Boundedness and Isolation

Composition Overview

Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) outline three inter-related elements to composition, which, together cohere the representational and interactive meanings of the multimodal product: (i) Information values, which result from the relative placement of each element; (ii) Salience, which concerns how attention is directed to particular elements; (iii) Framing, which involves the disconnection or connection of the elements. Composition is a holistic achievement that takes into account all components of the multimodal object. In the case, of cartoons, analysis thus involves an assessment of both the textual and visual elements.

All four cartoons in trope one, share some interesting commonality with regard to broad composition. Three cartoons (C1, C2, C4) offer a visual portrayal of 'the nation' via a simple geographic sketch outline of the landmass of Great Britain. The fourth cartoon (C3) includes Ireland and so the landmass portrayed is The British Isles. The relative invisibility of Ireland is something we return to later. This visual depiction of the 'nation-as-Island' foregrounds a familiar portrayal of the UK, which is often engaged in discourses of nationhood (Charteris-Black, 2006), and regularly deployed in debates about immigration, belonging and otherness (e.g., Gibson & Hamilton, 2011; Condor, 2000). In each cartoon, 'the nation' is visualised as a bounded land with no other nation at its borders. Two of the cartoons depict 'the nation' floating at sea (C1, C4), whilst another offers a simple satellite-map style portrayal of 'the nation' upon a white background (C3). The final cartoon gives the impression of viewing the earth from outer space with ‘the nation’ depicted as the only discernible landmass (C2).

The relative placement of elements on the page is central to the production of information values. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), outline three primary analytic considerations: (i) the value of the left and right, which relates to how visuals convey given and new information; (ii) the value of top and bottom, which concerns the construction of ideological and factual information; (iii) the information values of centre and margin. All four cartoons locate the visual of the British Isles as central to the overall image. Moreover, each cartoon offers a relatively simple composition with little to detract from that central image. van Leeuwen (2005) proposes that with regard to information values, centrality communicates importance, such that the more central an object is, the more important it becomes. In these cartoons, the relative lack of other elements around the central image of ‘the nation’ constructs the UK as, by far, the most important issue in the Brexit debate. Moreover, due to the lack of other content, in two of the four cartoons the UK appears to be the *only* consideration (C2, C3). As our analysis develops, we will further consider this satirical construction of Brexit as a fundamentally inward-looking political debate.

In the other two cartoons (C1, C4), continental Europe/the EU is flagged in distinct ways. We use a general reference here to Europe/the EU because it is not analytically possible to discern if the intended focus is Europe itself, either as a geographic landmass or as a collective citizenry, or if the focus is the European Union as a political entity. This kind of visual ambiguity is reminiscent of the classic rhetorical linguistic act of synecdoche. Synecdoche describes “a figure of speech from classic rhetoric in which part of a category or item is used to refer to the whole (pars pro toto) or […] the whole is used to denote only a part (totum pro parte).” (Kilby et al., 2013, p.54). In these cartoons (C1, C4) it is not possible to know the direction of such rhetorical pointing, leaving interpretation as a flexible matter for the viewer to resolve. We suggest this is a prime example of the capacity for ambiguity inherent to forms of visual discourse. This point is underscored by Machin (2013, p.350), who states “images do not have such specific denotative meaning as language and therefore it is a less easy matter to pin down precisely what meanings they convey”.

C1 flags Europe/ the EU in a small area at the bottom right of the image. Three elements are located in this bottom-right section: a black landmass, presumably Europe, disappearing from view, the EU flag flying aloft but also disappearing from view, and the side profile of the faces of two onlookers. Before unpacking this further, it is worth stating that, whilst continental Europe lies geographically to the bottom-right of the British Isles, the overall composition of this image could have been presented differently and still retained the same level of geographical accuracy. For example, the composition could have centred Europe in the overall frame and positioned the 'the nation' toward the top left of the frame. However, locating Europe/the EU in the bottom right location does interesting work in terms of information values. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) point out that information located to the left conveys what is already known, and what is widely accepted, whereas information at the right is typically contestable, problematic, or "not yet agreed upon by the viewer" (p.181). The extreme right-hand positioning is understood therefore to construct Europe/the EU in these terms. Moreover, locating Europe/ the EU at the bottom of the image conveys additional information values regarding the ideal and the real. In this particular cartoon, 'the nation' is located top and centre compared to Europe/ the EU bottom right. Relations between what is contained in the top and the bottom convey information about the ideal and the real. Whilst the top is concerned with generalised or ideological messages, the bottom typically conveys details, information and "practical consequences" (van Leeuwen, 2005, p.205). Whilst the marginal positioning of Europe / the EU compared to the UK constructs a discourse in which the UK is the focal concern, the relative scale of the EU flag located in the bottom foreground ensures that, whilst marginal, it remains a salient element of the discourse. Salient aspects are those that attract attention, often through foreground placement (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Hence, whilst Europe/the EU is constructed as lacking agency and as largely secondary to the UK, the location and scale of the still visible flag ensures it is not overlooked entirely.

Colour

There is a limited colour palette across all four cartoons, with mainly muted shades of grey, brown, blue and green dominating. However, one of the cartoons to depict the EU makes use of vibrant colour (C4). Here 'the nation' is portrayed as an island-shaped plug that has been pulled from the sea causing the water to flow away. The outline of the space where the plug once nestled is retained, emphasizing a nation shaped void. Into that void flows vivid blue water, along with yellow stars that are flowing toward the void from across the bottom of the composition. Drawing on Halliday's metafunctional semiotic theory, Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) theorise that colour can fulfil ideational, interpersonal and textual metafunctions. Colour is understood to act as a signifier, providing ready associations to existing shared knowledge, and flags provide a prominent example of the ways in which colour can fulfil ideational functions (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). In this cartoon, the water and stars are clearly indicative of the EU flag, constructing a vision of the EU rapidly disappearing without the UK to plug the void. The significance of centrality within a composition is not governed by what is, or is not, depicted in that central space. With regard to emptiness or absence, van Leeuwen (2005, p.208) highlights that "even when the centre is empty, it will continue to exist in absentia, as the invisible pivot around which everything else turns". Hence, in this construction of Brexit, 'the nation' remains dominant even when it is no longer in situ. The use of vivid colour to portray the EU flag commands attention, ensuring that this depiction of the disappearance of the EU is part of the overall discourse.

The only other noticeable use of colour involves the use of red, white and blue in the depiction of the British flag, which features in two of the cartoons (C1, C2). Moreover, the only use of primary colours across all four cartoons is in the portrayal of the British flag or the EU flag. Colours are understood to carry meaning potentials linked to shared cultural history (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001), thus, when red, white and blue are depicted on the British flag in the context of UK/EU Brexit debates, British nationhood is clearly signified (cf. Annabell & Nairn, 2019).

Textual Components and Represented Participants

Three of the cartoons (C1, C2, C3) include some very limited textual content. In each case, there is a notable ideological contrast or tension between the text and the image. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) distinguish between represented participants (RP's) - people, objects, places depicted in images - and interactive participants (IP's) - producers and viewers. Before exploring textual components further, it is useful to also consider RP's in these cartoons. As previously indicated, all four cartoons in this trope (C1, C2, C3, C4) present a minimal composition with limited content; this includes strikingly few RP's. Two of the cartoons have no RP's (C3, C4), and one of the cartoons without RP's also has no textual content (C4). C4 relies solely on the visual image of the EU draining away down a plughole where 'the nation' once resided to convey the narrative. The other cartoon without participants (C3), presents a two-part title above an image that is divided into two distinct panels. Dividing the image in this way acts as a framing device. Framing devices connect or disconnect aspects of the composition (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001), in this case signifying a clear disconnection between the left and the right of the image. The left-hand panel appears directly below the first half of the title, namely "Britain before Brexit". This panel portrays a simplistic satellite map of 'the nation'. The right-hand panel appears directly below the second half of the title "Britain after Brexit". This panel portrays the same image but the image is inverted. There is no other textual content in the left-hand panel, however the right-hand panel depicts a word bubble emanating from somewhere in the middle of the map that contains the words 'Bugger Off!' Here again, we see how the use of the left and the right constructs the 'given' and the 'new' (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006). On the left, we see 'the nation' pre-Brexit, a known and unremarkable environment. Conversely, on the right, 'the nation' post-Brexit is constructed as an unfamiliar and confused land, it is literally upside down. As the only words in the image, the demand to "bugger off" is highly salient. It directs attention to the right hand panel, increasing the focus on the upside down map, emphasising claims of an unknown future, a place where isolationism and exclusion rule.

Turning our attention to the two cartoons that contain RP's, one cartoon (C2) portrays 'the nation' as if being gazed down upon from space, appearing as the only visible nation on the planet. Depicted as standing on the map of 'the nation' is a quintessential English man in hat and umbrella, at his side is a similarly regaled woman. Above them rises a banner which reads "Free at Last". A speech bubble emanates from the side of the UK with the words "Who are we going to blame for our problems now?" There is an obvious tension between the message on the banner, which suggests a welcome liberation of 'the nation', and the speech bubble, which suggests this newfound freedom, might not be all it appears. As with C3, the image constructs a future outside of the EU as unknown and potentially ill conceived. It further conveys isolationism and separation.

The other cartoon (C1) includes four RP's, two standing on the map of 'the nation', and another two at the bottom right of the image. This image is the only one to make reference to differing nationalities within the UK via a stereotypical depiction of a Scottish man, wearing a kilt and walking down toward the bottom of 'the nation' with a knapsack over his shoulder. The second actor lacks the level of visual stereotyping reserved for the

Scottish character. The contrast achieved between the kilted Scottish man and the unremarkable shirt and grey trousers of the second actor suggest that this is an English man. He is closing an exaggerated, over-sized border gate to the channel wearing a somewhat harried facial expression. The gate holds a sign facing outward across the channel with the words "Keep Out", whilst the Scottish actor calls out "Hold It!" clearly intending to leave before the gate closes. The other two RP's are bland profile portrayals of one man and one woman in the bottom right corner*,* they are gazing across the channel from what is presumed to be Europe, looking somewhat askance.

Overall, RP's are a limited feature of the discourse, the primary job being to convey something about nationality, but little emotion or closeness is constructed. There is no use of direct gaze, therefore no direct address between the RP's and the viewer (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 2006). In cases where no direct contact with the viewer is made, images are understood to contain an 'offer'. They "offer the represented participants to the viewer as items of information, the objects of contemplation, impersonally as though they were specimens for a display case" (Kress and van Leeuwen, 2006, p.119). Moreover, the size of the RP's relative to the overall image suggests a social distance between the viewer and the RP's. The smaller the participants, the greater the distance. There is the depiction of distance in both images; indeed the distance depicted in C2 as the viewer looks down upon the earth could not be greater. We contend that the lack of emphasis on people witnessed across the four cartoons minimizes Brexit as a site of individual human concern, whilst the focus on 'the nation', serves to emphasize banal ideologies of nationhood (Billig, 1995). C1 reflects national tensions within the United Kingdom as well as presenting 'the nation' as separate from the EU/Europe. Whilst C2, C3, C4 overlook any such internal tensions and solely construct a singular, isolated British nation.

Perspective

In each case, the visual perspective of the cartoon delivers a perpendicular, top-down angle such that the viewer is looking down upon the map of the British Isles from a high vantage point. Following Kress and van Leeuwen (2006), this perspective presents the viewer with an objective image. An objective image does not suggest there are elements hidden from the viewer, rather it offers all there is to know. Images such as maps and diagrams are routinely understood to convey objectivity, and where a perpendicular angle is created, it provides the viewer with a privileged vantage. Kress and van Leeuwen (2006) contend that the top-down angle is “the angle of maximum power […] It contemplates the world from a god-like point of view, puts it at your feet rather than within reach of your hands” (p.145). Using this perspective suggests the viewer has the privilege of seeing the ‘whole picture’, and yet, simultaneously that Brexit is happening far beyond reach.

Political cartoons enjoy a unique capacity for satire and subversion of current affairs, able to critique and disrupt political ideology from all sides. Moreover, the creative affordances of visual satire make political cartoons particularly adept at deconstructing normative arguments and opening new possibilities regarding what can be said (Mazid, 2008). Satirical humour is applied across these cartoons, variously arguing that Brexit has turned the UK ‘upside down’ (C3); that Brexit is ‘pulling the plug’ on Europe (C4); that Brexit is short-sighted and isolationist (C2); and that Brexit is divisive for the UK (C1). However, it is striking that each of these cartoons relies upon a central visual representation of the British nation as a distinct, separable landmass as a basis for satirising Brexit which concentrates attention toward Brexit as a 'UK problem'. Irrespective of any given pro, anti, or ambivalent stance toward leaving the EU offered by each cartoon, adopting this UK centric approach relegates Europe to, at best, a supporting role. Moreover, little focus is given to emphasising internal UK divisions. In sum, we suggest that trope one conveys a sense of national myopia affecting all sides in the political cut and thrust of Brexit debate.

Trope Two: Uncertain Waters

Composition Overview

Eight cartoons (C5 to C12) comprise this trope. All depict either, a galley style ship and/or a rowing boat or lifeboat. Three are characterised by the depiction of a ship containing numerous RP’s aboard choppy seas (C5, C6, C7). A fourth cartoon (C8) conveys a similar scene but the ship is only partly visible, and there is only one RP. Broadly, these four cartoons portray Brexit as chaotic and riven with political strife. RP’s are busily engaged in oppositional tasks, the vessels appear precarious, yet the RP’s are largely unaware, and ideological tensions are played up via actions and speech. A further three cartoons present ships or boats on still seas (C9, C10, C11), two contain RP’s. The overall composition of these three cartoons is relatively simple, constructing Brexit via variable notions of ‘leaving’ or ‘splitting’. The final cartoon (C12) depicts a small rowing boat run aground on a dry seabed.

All but one of the cartoons in trope two make use of central composition (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) to locate the vessel, and whilst there are varying levels of detail used to depict what is happening aboard, there is little else in the overall composition. Visual placement mainly locates signifiers of the UK (i.e. British flag) to the left, thus constructing the UK as what is known (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006), whilst EU signifiers are to the right and thus the EU appears unfamiliar or contested (C5, C6, C9, C10, C12). However, C11 locates the EU to the left, and the UK disappearing to the right. The focus of C11 is a critical commentary about the potential impact of leaving the EU to British commerce and business. Hence, on these issues, the EU is presented as what is known, whilst a future UK has become uncertain or problematic.

Colour

Colour, and in particular, colour contrasts serve to increase the salience of selected elements within the visual (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). As with trope one, the use of colour in trope two directs attention toward the British flag and the EU flag. Repeatedly there is a signalling of British nationhood via portrayals of the British flag flying at full mast (C5, C6, C9, C11), whilst a fifth cartoon depicts ‘Britannia’ - the culturally familiar national personification of the UK - as a represented participant, regaled with a British flag coloured shield and helmet (C12).

Coloured flags further construct opposition between the UK and the EU with four of the aforementioned cartoons also depicting the EU flag (C6, C9, C11, C12), however, on three occasions the EU flag is subverted. It is variously depicted as a plug being pulled from the ocean floor (C12); as a just-visible edge of a landmass, presumably Europe, from which the UK is sailing away from (C9), and as a sign erected on the shore of a landmass, again presumably Europe (C11). In the only cartoon to portray the EU flag as a flag (C6), we see it waving battered and torn on a ship about to crash over a ledge, whilst, in contrast, the British flag waves pristine upon a ship, sailing smoothly in the opposite direction toward a sunny horizon. The meaning potentials of colour are often related to cultural history, and national flags are a prime example of this (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2001). These portrayals of the Union and EU flags in Brexit cartoons emphasise British nationhood, connecting contemporary debate to familiar histories of British Empire, whilst also conveying tensions between the UK and the EU. The preservation of the British flag *as* a flag, in contrast with the subversion of the EU flag, we suggest, serves to emphasise sovereignty and pride in British national identity (c.f. Billig, 1995), whilst the EU is constructed as less about identity or belonging, and more about physical place. In this way, attention is directed toward geographic separation, whilst any exploration of identity as a multiple, layered concept that might simultaneously embody both Britishness and Europeaness is obscured.

Textual Components and Represented Participants

All cartoons contain some limited textual content, and all but one contain RP's. The more chaotic 'choppy seas' cartoons (C5, C6, C7, C8) offer a detailed composition of various RP's which include key political actors in Brexit. Most notably, UK Prime Minister David Cameron who fought to keep the UK in the EU (C7, C8); UK politician and subsequent Prime Minister Boris Johnson who fought for the UK to leave the EU (C7), and German Chancellor and former President of the European Council Angela Merkel (C6). Stereotypical cultural portrayals of various EU nations, and one reference to Pakistan, which we read as a nod to the EU-Pakistan trade relations strategy, feature in one cartoon (C6), however only one cartoon makes reference to differing nationalities within the UK by inclusion of a man wearing a jacket emblazoned with 'Scotland' (C5). This RP is aboard a rowboat named 'HMS Brexit' headed away from a large ship named 'Europe'. A speech bubble reads "Nay, I'm thinking I'll swim back to the ship!'

Amongst the 'calmer seas' cartoons, two depict collections of bureaucratic featureless men dressed in grey (C10, C11), and a further cartoon constructs an iconic personification of nationhood via depiction of 'Britannia' and a 'Lion'. Both of these RP's are portrayed sitting in a boat alongside a fantastical creature (Unicorn) who has pulled an EU styled plug from the sea (C12). The only cartoon without RP's (C9) portrays a UK-shaped boat sailing away from what appears to be the EU landmass.

As with trope one, text is used to play up ideological tensions, either through contradictions in the text itself, or through contrast between text and image. Often, this is achieved through the inclusion of just a word or two. For example, in C9, the only word is the name of the ship - 'Victory'. The text is very small, and yet is highly salient, occupying the central position of the overall image, emblazoned on the back of a UK shaped ship, which is sailing away from the EU into bright blue waters with a British flag flying high. In contrast, in C11 a stream of orderly British bureaucrats – each uniformly wearing a bowler hat and overcoat, carrying an umbrella and briefcase - are seen disembarking lifeboats from dark and ominous seas onto European shores. A sign above them reads ‘Refugees Welcome’. In many cases uncertainty of the political position is maintained, with political actors arguing over Brexit with no clear winner (C7); or bureaucrats on a boat split in two ith the British flag emblazoned on one side and “U.E.” on the other (C10).

Overall, as with trope one, there is lack of direct gaze used in these images, with no attempt made to create a direct connection with the viewer (c.f. Kilby & Lennon, 2018). Relatedly, and again, as with trope one, there is a notable use of distance in the portrayal of RP’s. Whilst some are recognisable through caricature of familiar features (e.g. Boris Johnson with an overly elaborate mane of foppish hair; David Cameron with an exaggerated elongated jawline), these actors are depicted using full body ‘long shots’, conveying significant distance from the viewer. Distance shots such as these make no ‘demand’ (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006) of the viewer, with little attempt to construct a close, or social, connection (Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). In contrast to trope one however, the images in trope two do reflect a substantial concern with the role of RP’s, and they place a clear emphasis on contemporary political figures. Hence, whilst trope one downplays human action and emphasizes Brexit as a site of abstract political ideology, trope two emphasizes Brexit as a site of human endeavour, whilst the use of distance and the lack of direct address locates the viewer as external to these events, permitting the viewer to look on at Brexit without being part of it. Regardless of any discernible ‘pro’ or ‘anti’ stance conveyed in these images, Brexit is routinely constructed as something beyond the reach of the public. In this way, any concern with Brexit as an event reflecting democratic choice, resulting from a public referendum is downplayed, allowing the viewer to observe these events whilst not being accountable.

Perspective

In contrast to the objective perspective in trope one, cartoons in trope two engage subjective perspectives. Subjective perspectives use angles to convey a partial view of the ‘whole picture’, hence the viewer is ‘subjected’ to a particular point of view (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). Subjective perspective is developed via horizontal angles, utilising either a frontal or oblique positioning. These cartoons rely mainly on a horizontal frontal angle such that the viewer experiences looking directly on at the scene. This angle is understood to convey involvement between the RP's and the viewer, with frontality maximising that involvement (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006; Jewitt & Oyama, 2001). Whilst there are differences across the data regarding what political point of view is upheld, subjective perspective in these cartoons construct Brexit both as a subjective issue which involves both the RP's and the viewer. As Jewitt and Oyama, (2001, p.135) point out however, relations depicted in visual form have the capacity to "symbolically make us relate to people who in fact have very considerable power over our lives". Thus, the portrayal of relatability between the audience and the RP's may serve to normalise political chaos. Moreover, given the lack of direct gaze, the social distance, and the wider context of these cartoons, we suggest that the elite political RP's are represented as relatable only inasmuch as they are humanised as hapless and/or flawed and in this way confusion and uncertainty around Brexit is to be expected.

In contrast to the nation-as Island focus of trope one that emphasises boundedness and separation from Europe, trope two constructs Brexit by recourse to ideologies of 'the nation' that draw into view national history and political elites. Brexit is constructed as egoistic political theatre underpinned by competing ideologies of nationhood, with either the UK or the EU facing a perilous future; or as a 'very British' orderly separation with undertones of 'keep calm and carry on'. The satirising qualities of the genre are engaged to parody political figures (C5, C6, C7), variously constructing them as lacking direction, chaotic, and ill equipped to navigate the political seascape of Brexit. Themes of British sovereignty and histories of Empire (C5, C12) embed narratives of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995) into these Brexit debates, whilst the future of industry and commerce in Britain is presented as both vulnerable to isolation (C10), and at risk of leaving the UK (C11). Throughout, trope two utilises visual metaphors of troubled seas and of still waters to convey various themes of uncertainty, risk and folly. As with trope one, the capacity of visual discourse for constructing ambiguity allows the cartoons to remain open to varied interpretation, whilst ideological dilemmas (Billig et al, 1988) surrounding Brexit are revealed but left unresolved.

Discussion

Machin (2013) draws on the work of Van Leeuwen and Wodak (1999) to outline how social practices can be transformed via a process of "recontextualisation" whereby concrete people or processes are not logically or transparently represented, instead "a process of abstraction, addition, substitution, and deletion" is deployed via a range of semiotic resources (Machin, 2013, p.352). This appears relevant to the discourse of these cartoons that simplify complex political discourse into easily consumed themes of nationhood, which benefit from ambiguity that is readily achieved when words are kept to a minimum and satirical visuals offer multiple readings. Whilst satirical humour offers a means for critiquing and challenging the social order, we take a cautious approach to assessing how these satirical cartoons operate in the given context. In his thesis on humour and the social order, Billig (2005 p.202) draws a distinction between disciplinary and rebellious humour, arguing "disciplinary humour contains an intrinsic conservatism, whilst rebellious humour seems to be on the side of radicalism". Political satire aligns comfortably with Billig's account of rebellious humour, and it is certainly the case that the cartoons in our analysis reflect the qualities of rebellious or 'contestive' humour that Billig describes. However, as Billig (2005) notes, deciding how to classify humour is rarely unambiguous and, in part, personal, ideological and ethical factors are brought to bear. Moreover, whilst rebellious humour has a long history of challenging political authority, this should not be readily assumed, particularly in the context of late capitalism where "dutiful consumption encourages us to mock apparent authority" (Billig, 2005, p. 209). Billig suggests the potential for a disconnect between the experience and the consequence of humour such that "what is experienced as rebellious humour possesses disciplinary functions" (p.211).

In the context of our analysis, we are mindful of these possibilities. Our analysis finds that these cartoons do reflect rebellious humour - questioning the integrity and capability of political elites, emphasising uncertainty of political outcomes and highlighting isolationist ideology. However, there is much left unchallenged. Throughout trope one, irrespective of any explicit pro/anti Brexit position conveyed, only scantest attention is given to divisions between Scottish and English national identity, or to Ireland or the Irish border. Moreover, Brexit is repeatedly presented as being an internal issue for the UK to settle, as opposed to a relational one between the UK and the EU. Practical issues such as trade and free movement are ignored, and the relative lack of RP's sets individual concerns and human issues aside. In trope two, again, divisions within British nationhood are left aside, along with any focus on thorny practical issues such as the Irish border question, or Scottish ambitions for independence. As trope one, despite any discernible pro/anti stance, Brexit is largely constructed as a UK issue, for the UK to settle however it sees fit.

As we indicated at the outset of our analysis, there is no absolute or singular lay or an analytic reading of these cartoons, and we do not attempt to the intention of the artist. In our view, these cartoons, and satirical cartoons broadly, do offer a rebellious humour, in this case, offering a critical political Brexit commentary. However, as Billig (2005) notes, the emergence of political caricature in the UK coincided with the development of democracy, and as such, satirical cartoons occupy a normative role in mainstream Western media that might, albeit unintentionally, serve to uphold rather than rebel against the social order. We align with Billig (2005) here and suggest, this potential is always available, and it is very much a matter of how the audience engages with the discourse as to whether rebellious humour leads to rebellious consequences or if political satire serves as a disciplinary function.

As our analysis has demonstrated, the non-literal quality of political cartoons creates a unique capacity for engaging rhetorical ambiguity in Brexit discourse that is resistant to challenge. Sometimes ambiguity is apparent in the lack of a clear pro/anti stance on Brexit, but irrespective of any explicit political position, we suggest rhetorical ambiguity in this Brexit discourse has a far more insidious quality, both with regard to how British nationhood is constructed and concerning the capacity of the UK to enact Brexit. Billig and Macmillan (2005, p.459) point out that “metaphors can function as routine idioms in political discourse in ways that deaden political awareness". In our analysis, via tropes of 'Boundedness and Isolation' and 'Uncertain waters', Brexit is recontextualised as a through and through discourse of (partial) British national identity. Scottish, Irish and Welsh concerns are almost completely obscured and where Europe/ the EU features, it is marginal, lacking agency and contestable. This portrayal of the UK not only deletes integral elements of British nationality, but along with them, practical concerns, which have since become significant stumbling blocks in resolving Brexit, prime of which being the Irish border agreement. Moreover, the overwhelming focus on the UK and relative disinterest in the EU obscures the involvement and authority of the EU in determining how the UK might leave the EU and as such, no attention was paid toward consideration of the political realities that the UK would be subsequently left to confront after voting to leave the EU.

Cartoon links

C1 "Final Preparations" by Chappatte. Published in the New York Times (USA) on 21st June 2016. See https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/21/opinion/chappatte-on-brexit-final-preparations.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Fpatrick-chappatte

C2 "FREE AT LAST" by Chappatte Published in the New York Times (USA) on 23rd June 2016. See https://www.nytimes.com/2016/06/23/opinion/chappatte-on-brexit-free-at-last.html?rref=collection%2Fbyline%2Fpatrick-chappatte

C3 "BRITAIN before BREXIT" by Billy Day. First published on Caglecartoons.com (USA) on 24th June 2016. Found on https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-eu-referendum-leave-david-cameron-boris-johnson-nigel-farage-ukip-cartoons/

C4 No title by Hajo de Reijger. First published on Caglecartoons.com (The Netherlands) on 24th June, 2016. Found on C4 https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-eu-referendum-leave-david-cameron-boris-johnson-nigel-farage-ukip-cartoons/

C5 'Brexit' diminishes Britain and threatens European security" by David Horsey. Published in LA Times (USA) on 28th June 2016. See https://www.latimes.com/world/la-fg-brexit-updates-horsey-brexit-diminishes-britain-and-1467127052-htmlstory.html

C6 "Abandon Ship! Brexit, Great Britain's Escape" by Ben Garrison (UK). First published on https://grrrgraphics.wordpress.com/2016/06/11/abandon-ship-brexit-great-britains-escape-ben-garrison-cartoon/ (UK) on 11th June 2016. Found on https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/14/leave-eu-cartoon-racist-nazi-brexit-antisemitism-1945

C7 "I THINK WE'D BE BETTER OFF STAYING IN" by Kal. Published in The Economist (UK) on 28th May, 2016. Found on https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-donald-trump-us-elections-brussels-terror-attacks-angela-merkel-migration-refugees-aleppo-russia-vladimir-putin-cartoons-best-of-2016/

C8 "I've decided to step down" By Dave Granlund. First published on Politicalcartoons.com (USA), on 24th June, 2016. Found on https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-eu-referendum-leave-david-cameron-boris-johnson-nigel-farage-ukip-cartoons/

C9 "Victory" by S Adams. Published in the Telegraph (UK) on 24th June 2016. See https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/06/24/what-can-we-learn-from-the-eu-referendum-results/

C10 No title by Pavel Constantin. First published on Caglecartoons.com, Romania, 22nd June 2016. See https://twitter.com/globalcartoons/status/745685181852430337. Found on https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-eu-referendum-leave-david-cameron-boris-johnson-nigel-farage-ukip-cartoons/

C11 "REFUGEES WELCOME" by Marian Kamensky. First published on Caglecartoons.com (Slovakia) on 30th June 2016. Found on https://www.politico.eu/interactive/brexit-eu-referendum-leave-david-cameron-boris-johnson-nigel-farage-ukip-cartoons/

C12 "We could always become something like Panama" by Axel Scheffler. Published on the front page of Süddeutsche (Germany) on 23rd June 2016. Image of paper found on https://twitter.com/michaelsteen/status/745899134209622017/photo/1)

UK = 3 (Kal, Ben Garrison, S Adams)
USA = 5 (Dave Granlund, David Horsey, Chappatte, Billy Day)
Europe = 4 (Pavel Constantin, Axel Scheffler, Hajo de Reijger, Marian Kamensky)

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