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Fantasies of subjugation: a discourse theoretical account of British policy on the European Union

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Fantasies of subjugation: a discourse theoretical account of British policy on the European Union

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The decision by the UK government to hold a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union (EU) marks an important development in policy towards the EU. Policy changes of this kind must be understood in the historical and political context in which they occur. This includes the framing of the policy issues within public discourse. In the UK, policies are formed in a discursive environment which is overwhelmingly hostile towards the EU. Debates are structured by a predominantly Euroskeptic discourse which emphasizes the UK's separation and heterogeneity from the rest of the EU. Drawing on the logics of critical explanation, this article examines the structure and affective power of Euroskeptic discourses which dictate the terms of the EU debate. It presents a case study of the recent EU treaty revision process, culminating in the Treaty of Lisbon. In so doing, it enables a deeper understanding of recent policy developments.

Keywords: EU; UK; Euroskepticism; logics of critical explanation; media; policy

1. Introduction

On 23 January 2013, British Prime Minister David Cameron announced his intention to hold a referendum on UK membership of the European Union (EU) in 2017. The announcement represents the culmination of the slowly shifting, and increasingly hostile terrain on which British debates surrounding the EU have been conducted since the agreement of the Treaty on European Union in 1992. The possibility that the UK may leave the EU within the lifetime of the next parliament marks an important juncture in UK policy towards the EU, with enormous potential ramifications for the future of the UK and the rest of Europe.

British policy on the EU must be viewed in the historical and political context in which it is made. Mr Cameron's decision to hold an 'in-out' referendum was taken against the background of enduringly low levels of popular support for the EU amongst the British people (Diez-Medrano 2003; Geddes 2004; Eurobarometer 2007, 2013). In addition, the referendum announcement was designed to assuage Euroskeptic backbench MPs in the Conservative Party, many of whom blamed their failure to win an outright majority at the 2010 election, and the rising popularity of the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), on Mr Cameron's failure to take a more robust stance on core Conservative policy issues, including the EU. The emergence of UKIP as a dislocatory force in British

politics is indicative of a wider trend in European politics: the increasing popularity of right-wing populist parties critical of the EU (see Wodak, Khosravinik, and Mral 2013).

In the UK, both government policy and public opinion towards the EU are formed in a discursive environment which is overwhelmingly hostile towards the EU (Anderson and Weymouth 1999; Ichijo 2002; Geddes 2004; Hawkins 2012). The British media, and the British press in particular, are dominated by a Euroskeptic discourse which emphasizes the UK's separation and heterogeneity from the rest of the EU (Hawkins 2012). Any attempts to explain the policy choices of the British government towards the EU must take into account the discursive environment in which these policy decisions are taken.

This article aims to contextualize current policy debates on the EU, offering an account of British Euroskeptic discourses grounded in the critical logics approach to policy analysis (Glynos and Howarth 2007). Post-structuralist policy analysis – drawing on the discourse theory of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) and the Lacanian psychoanalytic theory (Lacan 1977) – offers a conceptual toolkit which can be deployed to understand the structure, longevity and affective power of the predominant Euroskeptic discourses, which provide the backdrop for the policy-making on the EU (Howarth and Griggs 2012). The underlying objective of the critical logics approach is to offer new, theoretically informed insights into this highly vexed policy issue (Glynos and Howarth 2007; Howarth 2000).

The article draws on a case study of the most significant recent development in the EU: the treaty revision process, which culminated in the entry into force of the *Treaty of Lisbon* in January 2009. It examines the debates surrounding the development of the treaty in the British print media. In so doing, it builds on the emerging literature on discourse theory and critical media politics (see Dahlberg and Phelan 2011). The article identifies a hegemonic and highly sedimented Euroskeptic discourse, which constructs a radical separation between Britain and the EU and which structures British debates about the EU. Whilst the clearest articulation of the Euroskeptic discourse can be found in the right-wing press, it dictates the terms in which the EU is discussed in other sections of the media and in elite political discourse (Hawkins 2012; see also Daddow 2013). By examining the discourse in terms of social, political and fantasmatic logics, it is possible to comprehend the structure, political dynamics and affective power of this account of Britain's relationship with the EU.

Whilst the article offers important insights for scholars of British politics and European integration, it makes a broader theoretical and empirical contribution to the literature on the critical logics approach to policy analysis. The critical logics offer an important analytical toolkit for examining the phenomenon of British Euroskepticism. In particular, the concept of fantasmatic logics presents new insights into the affective hold of Euroskeptic discourses. The insights derived here may in turn inspire further, creative applications of this lens to more vexed and poorly understood policy debates, including the emergence of right-wing populist movements elsewhere in the EU.

2.   Explaining British policy on the EU

Attempts to explain the UK policy towards the EU are often couched in terms of the UKs 'awkwardness' or its 'semi-detachment' from the EU (George 1992, 1998). These accounts are based on an idea of British exceptionalism, grounded in essentialist narratives of the UK's geographical separation from the continent, the heterogeneity of its political and common law system from the European democratic and legal traditions, or its history of conflict with continental Europe (Wallace 1991; George 1992, 1998; Diez 1999; Diez-Medrano 2003; Geddes 2004; see also Colley 1996). Diez-Medrano (2003)

argues that cognitive frames, grounded in broader cultural and historical understandings, provide the lenses through which debates on the EU are refracted in Britain, Spain and Germany. Whilst for Spain and Germany the EU symbolizes emancipation from the past, for Britain EU membership is emblematic of declining economic and political power (see Turner (2010) for a critique of this narrative of decline).

Nevertheless, Diez-Medrano's argument remains grounded in a static and essentialist conception of British history, which is unable to explain either the durability or the emotive force of the discourses surrounding the EU. Narratives of British history and national identity, such as those he identifies as structuring attitudes towards the EU, must be continually reproduced in public discourse. The logics of critical explanation offer a conceptual toolkit with which it is possible to examine not only the structure, but crucially the affective power of British Euroskeptic discourses.

3.   British Euroskepticism and right-wing populism

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

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

As will be argued below, British Euroskeptic discourses construct a radical separation between Britain and the EU, seen as an elitist project undermining the national interest. As such, it functions as the classic right-wing scapegoat for the ills of the nation. It is thus possible to see British Euroskepticism as simply a local manifestation of broader political developments which have emerged as a response the new uncertainties and sociocultural realities in the context of globalization. However, this neglects the particularity of the British Euroskeptic discourse, and the role of the EU within this.

There are at least three important differences which exist between British Euroskepticism and other right-wing movements which are of crucial relevance in under-standing policy British policy towards the EU. First, despite clear similarities with anti-EU discourses elsewhere, the radical separation constructed between Britain and the EU, is indicative of a particularly British strand of opposition to the EU. Second, British Euroskepticism in its current form predates the populist reemergence of the 1990s and traceable at least to the negotiations of the British budgetary contribution which emerged in the late 1970s (see Daddow 2012). Third, British Euroskepticism is a mainstream political phenomenon, not associated with extremist parties as in many EU member-states,

where the mainstream consensus is pro-European. Outright opposition to the EU now represents the majority position with the British Conservative Party.

Mark Aspinwall (2004) argues that the first-past-the post (FPTP) electoral system in the UK has led to the emergence of broad coalition parties including a wide range of views on the EU. The presence of 'extreme' positions on the EU *within* governing parties means that they are reflected in government policy to a far greater degree than in coalition governments in which smaller, anti-EU parties may serve, but are often unable to influence policy. As such, the UK represents a particular case in which Euroskeptic discourses are able to structure the content of political debates on the EU from the center ground of British politics.

4.   Logic of critical explanation

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

The process of explanation consists in the mobilization of three separate yet interrelated logics – social logics, political logics and fantasmatic logics – which build on and supplement the conceptual architecture developed by Laclau and Mouffe (1985). Social logics are concerned with the rules of formation of a specific social structure or discursive formation. Laclau (2000, 76) refers to social logics as a 'grammar' or 'cluster of rules' which govern the emergence of identities within an order of discourse. It is, therefore, useful to think of social logics as 'the rules of the game' which exist within any sedimented social structure and dictate the relationship between specific identity positions within it.

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

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

of equivalence and difference enable us to examine and explain the process through which rival political projects construct competing social objectivities.

In order to fully explain any given issue, consideration must be given to the fantasmatic support structures which underlie existing social structures or the emerging discursive projects which challenge the status quo (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 145). Fantasmatic logics explain why a particular, hegemonic articulation of the social is able to maintain its 'grip' over the subjects (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 145). They explain the ability (or inability) of a particular discursive formation to attain preeminence, or to resist change, by successfully interpellating subjects within that discourse and maintaining its hold on their loyalty (Glynos and Howarth 2007, 145). Eleveld (2012) has highlights how the entry of new signifiers into the policy lexicon arouses 'surprise' and 'excitement,' and leads to an affective investment in the newly coined terms.

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

4.1. Critique and ideology

The Lacanian concept of fantasy is also essential in understanding the *critical* dimensions of the critical logics approach. Fantasy is concerned with masking over the essential incompleteness of the social and the consequent impossibility of the fully constituted subject (Stavrakakis 1999). Fantasy objects offer the illusion of completeness and identity and, in so doing, symbolize the absent fullness of the Real within the social order. In terms of the beatific dimensions of fantasy, the fantasy object is the Thing which must be strived for in order to achieve social harmony. In the horrific dimension, it is that which must be protected from those who wish to steal it and disrupt the prevailing order.

The promise of fullness and completeness has clear political consequences; it implies the permanent fixation of meanings and the sedimentation of the social order. If identities are fixed then the rearticulation of the prevailing social order is impossible; we must accept the necessity of the status quo. Against this essentialism, the ontology of the critical logics approach posits a radical contingency in the social order, and the possibility of a different world. The ethical thrust of the critical logics approach is to reveal the radical contingency of all social relations.

Whilst fantasmatic logics offer the illusion of a final fixation of meaning and the utopian promise of a fully reconciled social order, radical contingency holds open the possibility of fundamental social change. The power of fantasmatic narratives is that they mask over the contingency of prevailing social relations and the possibility of a different world. The illusion of necessity is referred to as the ideological component of fantasmatic discourses. Against this, the ethical challenge of the discourse theorist is to reveal the very contingency which fantasy seeks to hide. In so doing, ethical critique holds out the

possibility of challenging prevailing discourses and bringing about a fundamental realignment of social relations and identities.

It is important to note that the ethical commitment of the critical logics approach does not imply a commitment to a specific political project or normative position. In keeping with the commitment to radical contingency, and the concept of articulation (Howarth 2000), the content of policy discourses and the structure of the prevailing social order which emerges from a period of dislocation, are the result of political contestation and the interpellation of individuals into subject positions in competing discursive formations. The critical logics approach does not imply a specific 'ontic' content for a given policy issue, but rather the ontological conditions of possibility for social change. The implications for the present case are clear: Euroskeptic discourses are historical artifacts, enshrining certain forms of social relations which can be challenged by competing accounts of the social order. Another articulation of Britain and the EU is possible, which may itself become the hegemonic articulation of the national mission.

4.2.   Deploying the critical logics approach

The critical logics approach has now been used to address a range of public policy issues in the UK and elsewhere (see Glynos and Speed 2012; Eleveld 2012; West 2011, 2013; Clarke 2011; Griggs and Howarth 2011). These studies demonstrate the way in which specific signifiers are rearticulated within specific discursive formations, combining disparate, and sometimes contradictory, elements within a single chain of equivalence. As such, they highlight the institution of particular ideological forms of social relations, in ways which mask the political and the contingent nature of the hegemonic discourses.

For example, in his analysis of Australian education policy documents, Clarke (2011) identifies how neoliberal logics of competition, privatization, monitoring and accountability are enacted as key mechanisms for improving educational standards and achieving greater social justice, masking over the obvious tensions which exist between increased competition (which requires losers as well as winners) and a fair, equitable education system equity. The 'illusory harmony' constructed between neoliberal ideology and political demands for better education thus sustains at the level of fantasy precisely what it precludes in practice (Clarke 2011). Crucially, the 'economistic fantasy' of the effectiveness and efficiency of technocratic governance practices, squeezes out the space for genuine political and ethical deliberation and the possibility of alternative, radical, class-based diagnoses of the policy issue. The result is to buttress the neoliberal policy regime through the domestication of public demands for better educations within fantasies of strived for educational utopia. As will be examined below, similar practices are evident within the British Euroskeptic discourses in which sectoral, class-based analyses of specific policy issues are marginalized at the expense of a dominant narrative of the national interest.

Further studies have used discourse theoretical approaches to examine to contemporary media debates (see Dahlberg and Phelan 2011). Chang and Glynos (2011) offer a Lacanian-inspired account of the coverage of the parliamentary expenses scandal in British tabloid newspapers, drawing insights about the ideological structure and political function of tabloid discourses. In particular, they identify the fantasmatic components of the discourse structured around the 'theft of enjoyment,' in which a corrupt political class profits at the expense of the newspapers' target audience. The moral indignation evoked explains the emotive investment in the discourses by the readership. Crucially for the current article, the dislocation of British (political) life brought about by the scandal is

articulated in terms of the theft of the nation and is grounded in an antipolitical culture of skepticism and cynicism about the ruling elite. Parallels are evident between the expenses scandal and the Lacanian-informed analysis of Euroskeptic discourses in the British tabloid press which are examined below (see also Stavrakakis 2005). This article aims to build on both strands of the discourse theory literature identified here, employing an analysis of the media debates to contextualize policy decision towards the EU.

5. Methodology

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

In addition to practical considerations, the print media continue to be of enormous significance both politically and within broader societal debates. In the UK, both politicians and other forms of media often respond to a news agenda driven forwards by the national press. Nowhere is the agenda setting role of the press more obvious than on the issue of the EU. For example, it was widely rumored that the decision by Tony Blair to hold a referendum on the forerunner to the Lisbon Treaty, the *Treaty Establishing and Constitution for Europe*, resulted from fears about the adverse reaction to support for the treaty from *The Sun* and *The Times* (Watt 2013).

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

Articles were collected from the Lexis-Nexis database for a period of one month around key events in the treaty negotiation process using the following keyword search: *European Constitution* or *EU Constitution* or *EU Treaty* or *Reform Treaty*. The articles returned were reviewed for relevance and those articles which did not explicitly focus on the EU treaty reform process were discarded. All types of article were included, but letters to the editor were not. This process yielded a total of 1346 articles which were then coded thematically (see Table 2).

Table 1.   The structure of the British press.

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

Source: *Guardian* (2009)

Table 2.   The number of articles collected by publication.

Newspaper	No. of articles examined
The SUN/ NOTW	295
Daily/ Sunday Mail	288
Daily/ Sunday Telegraph	393
Daily/ Sunday Mirror	87
The Guardian/ Observer	283
Total	**1346**

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

6.   The British Euroskeptic discourse

The Euroskeptic discourse presents an account of British national identity, defined in direct opposition to the EU. The construction of Britishness depends on the simultaneous production of the EU and its principal member-states (i.e. France and Germany) as fantasy objects which pose an existential threat to Britain. Sections 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 analyze the different dimensions of this discourse through the lens of social, political and fantasmatic logics.

6.1.   Social logics

The Euroskeptic discourse can be characterized by an underlying logic of nationalism which underpins the various political and fantasmatic components of that discourse. The nation is taken to be the primary and necessary form of political community and the nation-state the only legitimate unit of social and political organization. Any form of political institution at either the subnational or, in the case of the EU, the supranational level is seen to run counter to the natural order. Whereas the nation-state is an organic form of political community, the EU is seen as an artificial invention (see Phillips 2003). Thus, whilst democracy can exist at the national level, it is impossible at the supranational

level, because it is only the nation which can provide the collective bonds of shared community that are the prerequisites for democratic government (see Wilson 2005; Steyn 2005). As Daniel Hannan (2004) argues, the European democracy because there is no European 'demos', just the 'kratos' of the ruling elite. The popular mandate of national governments is frequently juxtaposed with the 'anti-democratic' EU which, it is claimed, is run by a narrow elite against the interests of those they govern (see Hannan 2005).

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

The construction of the EU as an international organization presents it as a forum for international bargaining in which rival member-states compete against one another to maximize the benefits they receive from the EU. This is reflected in the frequency with which EU politics is described using the metaphors of sport and war. In particular, it focuses on the rivalry and disputes which arise between the three largest member-states: France, Germany and the UK. Melanie Phillips likens the agreement reached on a European reform treaty at the European Council meeting in June 2007 as being 'the equivalent of a white handkerchief waved at Trafalgar' (Phillips 2007). Whereas in the nineteenth century international conflict was fought on the battle field, modern day conflicts play out behind closed doors in the Justus Lipsius building in Brussels. What remains constant is that the UK is faced with a hostile coalition of European states, led by France, against whom it must engage to defend its interests.

The role of government ministers is to defend the national interest rather than seek mutually beneficially solutions to common problems. The *Telegraph* (2005a), for example, urges Prime Minister Tony Blair to 'stop fretting about his communautaire credentials and concentrate on protecting the national interest'. In other words, it is not the job of a British Prime Minister to concern himself with the well-being of the EU as a whole, but simply to defend Britain's interests.

At other times the EU is not depicted as forum for international bargaining, but as an emerging super-state, which aims to subsume reduce member-states to mere provinces of a single political entity (see Sayers 2005; *Telegraph* 2005b; Nicolson 2003). The idea of the EU as an emerging super-state is evident in the repeated references to the EU as a 'foreign' power (Brogan 2003; Phillips 2003). Describing the EU in this way depicts the EU as a neighboring state with which the UK is engaged in bilateral relationship. It is an entirely separate entity from the UK rather than a political entity of which the UK is an integral part.

EU politics, seen through this prism, is reduced to a contest between member-states for power and influence or a battle for survival of the nation itself. In each case what results is an impoverished conception of the EU, which precludes any meaningful discussion of the UK's position within it and the benefits which may derive from EU membership for different groups in society.

6.2. *Political logics*

The logics of equivalence and difference are essential to understanding the construction of Britain and the EU within the Euroskeptic discourse. Both the depiction of the EU as a bargaining forum and as an emerging super-state rely on the construction of equivalential ties between certain actors which position them collectively in opposition to the UK. The

idea of Britain's separation from other EU member-states is a key component of the Euroskeptic discourse. It mirrors also the sense of separation expressed by British citizens (Eurobarometer 2007), which is linked with low levels of support for the European integration process (Hooghe and Marks 2009).

The depiction of the EU as an international bargaining forum positions the UK's interests in opposition to a hostile coalition of member-states led by France and Germany. An equivalential chain emerges in which the common interests of these states are privileged over the differences which may exist between them. What binds this equivalential chain together is their common heterogeneity from the UK. The idea of a 'core' set of EU member-states – from which the UK is excluded – emerges as a key element of the Euroskeptic discourse (see Chapman 2004; Rees-Mogg 2005).[3] The effect of this is not only to construct an antagonistic frontier between the UK on the one hand, and the Franco–German alliance on the other, but also to position France and Germany at the heart of the EU whilst confining the UK to the periphery. As Evans-Pritchard (2004) comments:

> Germany joined France yesterday to insist that Britain and other 'non-core' countries should be barred from proposing candidates for president of the European Commission

The construction of the EU as an emerging super-state depends also on the logics of equivalence and difference. The idea of EU as a foreign power against which the UK is defined relies on the construction of the EU as a unitary, internally homogenous actor, from which the UK is excluded. Similarly, the terms 'Europe' and 'Brussels' are often employed within the Euroskeptic discourse to refer to a reductive conception of Europe which excludes the UK. Within the rump EU, the equivalential ties which unite the disparate member-states are foregrounded at the expense of the differences which exist between them. What binds this equivalential chain together is the shared heterogeneity of the rump-EU from the UK. At the same time, any idea of internal heterogeneity within the UK (for example, between the different nations, social classes or interest groups) is entirely absent from the discourse. The UK is presented as an internally homogenous entity, defined in opposition to the EU.

The separation which exists between Britain and the EU is evident in the repeated references made to the relationship *between* Britain and the EU. As Laclau (2005) has argued, the act of naming plays a crucial role in the emergence of an equivalential chain. Thus the metonymic representation of the EU as 'Brussels' and 'Europe' facilitates the construction of an equivalence between the different aspects of the EU machinery, positioning them in opposition to the UK. Reference is made throughout the media coverage of the treaty reform process to 'Britain's relationship *with* Europe' (*Telegraph* 2004, emphasis added) and to transfers of powers '*to* the European Union' (*Telegraph* 2006, emphasis added). Similarly, there is talk of a 'transfer of sovereignty from Westminster to Brussels' (Helm 2007a).

6.3. *Fantasmatic logics*

Glynos and Howarth (2007, 147–8) argue that fantasmatic logics may be identified through both the form and the content of the claims made within a particular discourse. Firstly, they argue, the presence of a fantasmatic object is indicted by the resistance of a particular discourse to 'public official disclosure,' for example, in official pronouncements by government and other actors. Secondly, fantasy objects can be identified through the

attribution to them of contradictory and mutually exclusive characteristics. Both of these features are present in the case of Euroskeptic discourses.

Stavrakakis (2005) has highlighted that Euroskeptic discourses exhibit precisely the dichotomy between official and unofficial discourses, which is indicative of fantasmatic logics. Whilst government and official discourses take issue with certain aspects of the EU's activities, they do so in very different terms to the 'obscene' components of Euroskepticism articulated by commentators in the tabloid press in particular (Stavrakakis 2005). These extreme elements of the Euroskeptic discourse may find expression in the words of certain commentators or marginal politicians (see *BBC* 2010), but would be impossible from a representative of the British government or a mainstream political party. Nevertheless, as will be argued below, the official discourse is inextricably linked to the unofficial Euroskeptic discourse, with politicians drawing on elements of this in more measured terms to gain support for the policy positions they adopt.

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

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

The claim is made repeatedly that the UK could prosper if it were able to cast off the shackles of EU membership, freeing it from the burdensome regulation (Lea 2007). Whilst the benefits of trade with the EU were recognized, it was argued that leaving the EU would give the UK government greater control over domestic policy and greater influence internationally, whilst enjoying the benefits of the single market (Lamont 2007; Howe 2007; Trimble 2007). Countries such as Norway and Switzerland provide a precedent which the UK could follow in redefining its relationship with the EU (Hitchens 2007).

Alongside this 'beatific' element of the Euroskeptic discourse, it is argued that the UK is the victim of a conspiracy by the EU to assume control over ever more areas of British life and government. There are constant warnings from commentators about the impending disaster which looms for Britain if the EU gains more power through the proposed treaty revisions. The EU is thus presented not just as a foreign power but as an 'imperial' power which aims to undermine the UK's independence and to turn it into a mere province of a trans-European state, under centralized control from Brussels (see *Mail* 2007). The impression given is of a piecemeal, yet coordinated, attempt by the EU to assume control of the UK one policy at a time (see Helm 2007b; Evans-Prichard 2007; *Mail* 2003; Cecil 2003).

Since the European integration process is seen as a plan to undermine the UK, there is enormous emphasis placed on the maintenance of the UK's veto within the Council of Ministers (see Kirkup and Waterfield 2007; Heathcoat-Amory 2004; Evans-Prichard and Jones 2004). Qualified majority voting (QMV) is viewed as a potential threat to the

British national interest which must be curtailed wherever possible. There is no consideration of the fact that QMV may allow the UK to pass measures that are in its interest and which may otherwise be blocked.

Elsewhere, the threat to the UK is seen to be posed by France, Germany and their allies, who successfully use the EU institutions as a means for pursuing their interests. Since EU politics is a zero-sum game, any benefits they derive from the EU are seen to come at the direct expense of other member-states such as the UK. Crucially, the EU is not seen as a neutral framework managing the relations between member-states. Instead, the 'core' EU member-states are able to rely on the support of the EU institutions such as the European Commission in their conflicts with the UK. For example, following the referendums in France and the Netherlands, Paul Eastham (2005) claims that Prime Minister Tony Blair has to convince 'Brussels, France and Germany' that the Constitutional Treaty must now be abandoned. Within the Euroskeptic discourse, therefore, the EU is the very institutionalization of Britain's subjugation to France and her allies.

Both the representations of the EU as an emerging super-state and as an international forum position the UK as a victim of a plot by those across the channel to undermine her freedom and independence. This point is made abundantly clear by the following evaluation of the Constitutional Treaty by Melanie Phillips of the *Mail* (Phillips 2003):

> This constitution is simply nothing less than a blueprint for tyranny. It would mean the end of our independence and the tearing up of 1000 years of history. We went to war to prevent such a calamity from engulfing our country. What Hitler failed to do, Europe is now proposing to bring about by edict – this time with the connivance of the British Government.

However, the motives behind this desire remain opaque. Little is said about the precise reasons why the European Commission or the French and German governments want to undermine the UK's independence beyond a general assertion that it is in their interests. Nor is it clear why it is that the UK is singled out for this apparently unique treatment. Yet it is precisely because the motives of the European 'other' remain vague and impenetrable to us that they appear so menacing. To fully appreciate this point, it is necessary to examine these narratives in terms of the Lacanian conception of fantasy.

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

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

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

Whilst the preceding example focused on the 'other's' strange food, the next focuses on their sexual proclivities and attitudes to work. Referring to the rules for using the sauna installed in the newly opened European Commission's Berlaymont building, Justin Stares (2005) informs readers:

> Nudity is de rigueur, according to the commission's infrastructure office, but bravado is not. 'Reckless competition about who stands heat best is out of the question. Leave your clothes in the dressing room – nakedness is natural,' the code tells its 18 male and seven female commissioners. 'Sweating makes swimsuits uncomfortable.' The list of dos and don'ts is comprehensive. Commissioners in the sauna, installed in the EU's recently renovated Berlaymont headquarters in Brussels, are advised to take their time, allowing 'at least an hour and a half' for each session.

In this passage, a contrast is drawn between the loose sexual mores (enforced nudity in a mixed setting) and their officious enforcement of the rules. This goes hand in hand with the implied laziness of the Commission staff encouraged to sweat for an hour and a half. It depicts a corrupt, inefficient and decadent culture. In contrast to this stands the concept of competition which is discouraged, and which elsewhere in the Euroskeptic discourse is seen as an archetypally British value against the cosseted protectionism fostered by the EU. As such, it reinforces both the fundamental heterogeneity of the European and the British moral codes and imbues this separation with the power of fantasmatic representations of the other's strange enjoyment.

Fantasmatic logics are crucial in understanding the power and durability of Euroskeptic discourses. In part these fantasies operate at the collective level, via the perceived threat to the national in-group. However, to fully appreciate the affective power of these fantasy constructions, we must highlight the existential threat posed by the EU to the individual as well as the nation. By standing as an impediment to the full realization of the British national mission, the EU functions not only as a barrier to a stable and fully constituted social order, but also to the promise this holds for the achievement of a fully constituted subjective identity. The primal *jouissance* of the Real seems to hang just beyond the horizon, but we are kept from this by the malevolent forces of the hostile foreign power.

7. The hegemony of Euroskeptic discourses

Whilst the Euroskeptic discourse is evident most clearly in the right-wing press (*The Daily Mail, The Daily Telegraph* and *The Sun*), its influence is not confined to the pages of these publications. The hegemony of the Euroskeptic discourse is evident through the influence it exerts on both the left-of-center press and the discursive strategies employed by Government ministers in explaining and justifying the policy positions they are adopting.

The influence of the Euroskeptic discourse is found in the public declarations of the British government on the subject of the EU. The UK government's approach to the EU is overwhelmingly negative and defensive, depicting the EU not as a mechanism through

which the UK manages its relations with other member-states to further their collective interests, but as a threat from which the UK must be protected. This rhetoric, which mirrors the construction of the EU in the Euroskeptic discourse, presents the government as the defender of the national interest, protecting the British people from the specter of the EU.

In terms which could have been taken directly from the pages of the *Telegraph* or the *Mail*, Prime Minister Tony Blair warned other European leaders 'that he would not accept anything that interfered with Britain's right to set its own labour laws' (Wintour 2004). As Chancellor, Gordon Brown is also at pains to point out that he would be prepared to use the UK's veto in the ongoing negotiations over the budget in order to secure a deal in the UK's interest (White 2005). The threat to use the veto in treaty reform negotiations comes against a background of debate in which the government claims to be protecting its 'red lines' from attack by other member-states.

On becoming Prime Minister, commentators claim that Brown is keen to cultivate an image as a Euroskeptic because he feels this will be of political benefit in the domestic arena, particularly in terms of the response it will generate from the right-wing press (Clark 2007). Elsewhere, Brown and other senior government figures aim to present a minimalist account of the EU in which they play down its significance rather than explaining the ways in which an efficiently functioning EU is able to produce the policy outcomes voters want. Brown, for example, is keen to point out that he advocates an intergovernmental conception of the EU, arguing that a 'Europe of self-governing states working together for common purposes is in Britain's interests' (Hutton 2004). We learn also that the Prime Minister described the proposed new constitution as 'a good idea, for technocratic reasons, in a Europe of 25 states, but offered little wider enthusiasm for the project' (Wintour 2004).

It should be highlighted at this point that the quotes attributed to both government ministers and officials in the left-wing press are often identical to those which feature in the right-wing press, emanating as they do from the same briefings and press conferences. However, the defensive and confrontational tone of official declarations stands in stark relief against the more sympathetic and nuanced coverage of the EU in the left-wing press (Hawkins 2012). This highlights not only the extent to which government discourse is framed in similar terms to the right-wing press, but reflects also the penetration of Euroskeptic discourse into titles broadly supportive of the EU.

It is argued in the *Guardian* that the government's antagonistic rhetoric reflects the extent to which the latter is beholden to the Euroskeptic agenda pursued in right-wing press. It is suggested, for example, that Prime Minister Tony Blair only agreed to hold a referendum on the Constitutional Treaty for fear that the *Sun* newspaper would change its allegiance from Labour to the Conservatives (Kettle 2005; see also Keegan 2004; Kettle 2007; Toynbee 2003; Young 2003). It is beyond the remit of this article to attempt either to confirm or refute the claims that specific policy decisions were dictated by the Euroskeptic press. However, what is evident is the extent to which the language and rhetoric of government ministers reflects the construction of the EU in the Euroskeptic discourse. This may be the result of a conscious decision by ministers to appeal to the editors of Euroskeptic newspapers or to what they perceive as a Euroskeptic public. On the other hand, it may be the result of a more subtle, subconscious process of socialization, which reflects the extent to which the Euroskeptic discourse informs the most basic assumptions on which the debates surrounding the EU are grounded, and the terms in which they are conducted. In either case, it is further evidence of the hegemony of Euroskeptic discourse within British debates on the EU.

8. Interpreting British Euroskeptic discourses

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

From a discourse theoretical perspective, the idea of a national interest can be seen as the projection of certain particular interests to a position of hegemony in which they are taken represent the interests of the collective. This implies the marginalization of the politically least empowered sectors of society, whose interests may instead be served by recasting policy debates in terms of the economic, redistributive and social impact of proposed policies for different sections of society. Viewed in this way, complaints that EU social regulation is undermining the competitiveness of the British economy may lead to a more critical debate about which groups in society are the beneficiaries of greater labor market flexibility and great social protection. In revealing the ideological nature of Euroskeptic discourse, this article opens up the ethical space for a radical rearticulation of Britain's relationship with the EU, and the wider social relations which are maintained through the current discourses. It is in this moment that the critical component of the logics approach comes to the fore.

Revealing the contingency of current discourses does not imply a particular normative commitment to a specific vision of the EU and the UK's place within it, but simply the assertion that another vision is possible. In keeping with the underlying commitments of discourse theory, dislocation of the current discourse and its usurpation by another would be the result of political contestation between rival discursive formations.

9. Conclusion

British policy towards the EU is formed in a discursive environment, structured by the hegemonic Euroskeptic discourse. The logics of critical explanation developed by Glynos and Howarth (2007) provide a conceptual toolkit with which to analyze the structure and force of that discourse. As such, they offer a framework through which to examine the discursive context in which key policy decisions are taken. The ability of the critical logics framework not just to describe, but to explain and critique Euroskeptic discourses moves us beyond the insights derived from existing studies of British media discourses on the EU (Anderson and Weymouth 1999; Ichijo 2002; Hawkins 2012).

Social and political logics enable us to understand the principle assumptions and political cleavages which are constructed within this discourse, whilst the concept of fantasy is able to account for the affective hold which it is able to generate and maintain over the subjects interpellated into it. Revealing the contingent nature of the discourse, through this analysis, opens up the possibility of a radical rearticulation of the relationship between Britain and the EU.

Despite the insights which can be garnered into the Euroskeptic discourse through the critical logics approach, further research is needed to deepen our understanding of the relationship between the Euroskeptic discourse and policy. The analysis presented here focuses on the debates surrounding policy discourses. Despite the evidence of intertextuality between media and elite discourses presented above (see also Daddow 2013), additional studies are needed to examine more systematically the extent to which political decision-making is shaped and confined by broader societal discourses. Following previous applications of the critical logics approach, this may be undertaken through the analysis of policy documents. West (2011) has identified the potential insights which may be derived from a deeper engagement between the critical logics approach and theories of practice. This offers further potential for examining the development of British policy EU policy, notwithstanding methodological challenges and issues of access.

The focus on media discourses surrounding policy debates opens this up as an avenue of research for policy analysts in other areas. In particular, the focus on broader societal discourses informing the conceptual framework of the critical logics approach could provide important insights into the structure and force of right-wing populist discourses elsewhere and their promotion by emerging political parties. Similarly, the deployment of the critical logics framework to examine newspaper discourses represents a further development of the emerging research agenda on discourse theory and critical media politics (see Dahlberg and Phelan 2011), which can be applied to other media and policy issues.

In democratic societies, governments do not make policy in isolation, but must instead justify the choices they make to their voters. The media play a crucial role as the electorate's main source of information about politics, and particularly about the EU, whose activities may be less apparent in citizens' daily lives. Consequently, the way in which the relationship between Britain and the EU is constructed within the media is of crucial relevance to understanding the policies pursued by British governments towards the EU. The predominance of the Euroskeptic discourse in British media debates curtails the political space open to British politicians in developing policies towards the EU. Consequently, an understanding of the Euroskeptic discourse is essential in explaining the ambivalent and often conflictual relationship which has existed between British governments and their European partners since Britain's accession to the European Communities almost four decades ago. This discourse lies at the heart of British political debate and provides the backdrop against which the UK may plausibly vote to leave the EU before the end of the decade.

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Notes

1. From here on, I shall not distinguish between daily and Sunday newspapers. Unless explicitly stated otherwise, references to daily titles refer also to their Sunday equivalents.
2. For a more detailed explanation of the methodology and for additional empirical examples from the articles examined, see Hawkins (2012).
3. The references to the 'core' and 'periphery' of the EU are at times replaced with the terms 'old' and 'new' Europe.

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