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“Take Back Control of Our Borders”: The Role of Arguments about Controlling Immigration in the Brexit Debate

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Simon Goodman

“Take Back Control of Our Borders”: The Role of Arguments about Controlling Immigration in the Brexit Debate

Abstract: In the run-up to Brexit, the British referendum on leaving the European Union (EU), immigration was one of the top issues of concern to voters. Discussions about immigration dominated the campaigns, with the “Vote Leave” campaign linking leaving the EU with the opportunity to prevent immigration into the United Kingdom (UK). The focus on this was in part due to the migration and ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe that coincided with the referendum. This paper presents an analysis of how the key players in the Brexit debate focused on immigration. The question is, therefore, how did the participants in the Brexit debate talk about immigration and what did this talk accomplish. Discourse analysis of campaign coverage reveals that: 1. Leave campaigners presented immigration as out of control, including that from within and outside of the EU and those arriving in Europe as refugees; 2. “Remain” campaigners presented Brexit as an ineffective way of controlling migration; and, 3., in limited cases, immigration was presented as beneficial. The conclusion is that the focus on immigration appeared to have been a major factor in the eventual success of the Leave campaign. Although it remains to be seen what impact Brexit will have on immigration, opposition to immigration has become mainstream.

Keywords: Brexit, immigration, discourse analysis, borders, European Union

Introduction

The UK is leaving the EU in the process dubbed “Brexit”, which occurred as a result of a referendum on June 23, 2016, in which the public were given the choice to vote to remain in the Union or to leave it. The result of the referendum was 51.89 percent of the 72 percent who voted (37 percent of the electorate, 17.4 million voters) voted to leave the UK.¹ This paper addresses the role of the debate about

1 The electoral commission, *EU Referendum results*, <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/find-information-by-subject/elections-and-referendums/upcoming-elections-and-referendums/eu>

immigration in the referendum campaign and demonstrates how it was a prominent part, perhaps a deciding factor, in the Brexit outcome. Polls in the lead up to the referendum showed that immigration was a key concern of voters, with one poll (ORB survey) asking, “When considering how to vote, the economy is a bigger issue than immigration,” with 52 percent agreeing and 37 percent disagreeing,² showing that for many immigration was of more concern than the traditional most common topic of concern. The interest in immigration may be explained by the coincidence of the Brexit campaign with the mass migration and ‘refugee crisis’ in Europe, during which the movement of refugees moved into Europe from Africa and Asia (including many Syrians fleeing the civil war there). During 2015 alone, more than one million crossed into Europe.³ While Germany took in over one million refugees during this time, the response across the rest of Europe was mixed. In the UK, which was unaffected by the crisis, there was opposition to taking in refugees, and this led to the blurring of issues related to refugees, immigration and the role of the EU in migration policy.

1 Types of Migration and the Role of the EU

● A key aspect of membership of the EU is the principle of free movement across the Union. Therefore, any citizen of any EU country can move to, and work in, any other member state in the same way that they could move within their home country. Free movement proved controversial in the UK. At the end of 2015, six months before the referendum, there were more than 3 million EU citizens living in the UK, of which almost one million were from Poland.⁴ EU nationals living in the UK are termed “EU migrants” and EU law allows them into the

referendum/electorate-and-count-information [2017-08-10].

- 2 A. Grice, ‘EU referendum: Poll reveals 10-point swing towards Brexit as Leave campaign gains momentum’, *The Independent*, 10 June 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eu-referendum-poll-brexite-leave-campaign-10-point-lead-remain-boris-johnson-nigel-farage-david-a7075131.html> [2017-08-10].
- 3 UNHCR, *A million refugees and migrants flee to Europe in 2015*, <http://www.unhcr.org/567918556.html> [2017-08-10].
- 4 Office for national statistics, *Population of the UK by Country of Birth and Nationality: 2015*, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/populationandmigration/internationalmigration/bulletins/ukpopulationbycountryofbirthandnationality/august2016> [2017-08-10].

UK. Conversely, there are an estimated 900,000 UK citizens living outside of the UK in the EU.⁵ For the UK, leaving the EU means the end of free movement and the resumption of the right of the government to treat EU migrants as they might non-EU migrants. Ending unregulated EU migration was a stated aim of many campaigning for Brexit.

"Non-EU migrants" refers to people living in the UK who are citizens of countries outside of the EU. In 2016, there were an estimated 5.5 million non-EU migrants in the UK.⁶ This type of migration is not affected by EU law. A further type of migration to the UK not affected by EU membership is asylum seekers and refugees. Refugees are people who flee their country of origin because of a fear of violence or persecution from their state or because it is unable to protect them. Asylum seekers are people who reach European countries as refugees and who are in the process of having their refugee status determined by the host country. The right to asylum for refugees is provided in international law. This means that although the European refugee crisis occurred during the Brexit campaign, the EU had no influence on the UK's response to the crisis. In fact, the UK's asylum-seeker figures actually dropped in 2016 at the height of the crisis.⁷

2. Responses to Migration in the UK

Opposition to migration in the UK has become commonplace, with successive governments and leading political parties vying to be the most anti-migration. In the 2015 UK general election, both main political parties promised to reduce the levels of migration if they were to win,⁸ supporting the idea that opposition to immigration has become normalized and unproblematic. Research addressing the rep-

5 A. Travis, 'Fewer Britons living in EU than previously thought, study finds', *The Guardian*, 27 January 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/jan/27/fewer-britons-in-rest-of-europe-than-previously-thought-ons-research> [2017-08-10].

6 Office for national statistics, op.cit.

7 L. Taylor, 'UK asylum claims drop despite rising Middle East refugee crisis', *The Independent*, 24 February 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-asylum-claims-drop-immigration-middle-east-refugee-crisis-brexite-a7596871.html> [2017-08-10].

8 A. Taylor, 'General Election 2015: Immigration—how the parties are playing the numbers game', *The Independent*, 24 February 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/generalelection/general-election-2015-immigration-how-the-parties-are-playing-the-numbers-game-10196924.html> [2017-08-10].

resentation of different types of migrants into the UK has emphasized the negative ways in which migration is portrayed. All types of migrants are presented as economically threatening to the UK, with the term “economic migrant” implying that migrants are in the UK purely to “take” from it without contributing. Gibson, Crossland and Hamilton⁹ show how migrants from Europe are presented negatively as likely to claim benefits and as likely to be low skilled. Gibson¹⁰ further demonstrated how European migrants are also presented as a cultural and even sexual threat to the UK. Opposition to refugees is also rife, with refugees presented as a threaten economically and culturally, as well as being linked to terrorism.¹¹ It has been shown that opposition to migrants and refugees becomes conflated¹² so that “refugees” and “economic migrants” are mixed when they are described, with opposition directed towards both. Opposition to EU migration into the UK is strong enough that discussions about refugee issues were shown to feature calls for the UK to leave the EU.¹³ However, what has not been demonstrated is how the campaigners in the Brexit debate spoke about migration. The aim of this paper is therefore to fill this gap by addressing how participants in the campaign talked about migration, and what this talk achieved.

3. Method

The approach taken for this project is discursive psychology,¹⁴ which focuses on what speakers and writers accomplish through their speech, spoken or written, rather than attempting to ascertain what they may “really think”. This is an ideal approach for understanding

- 9 S. Gibson, M. Crossland and J. Hamilton, ‘Social citizenship and immigration: Employment, welfare, and effortfulness in online discourse concerning migration to the United Kingdom’, *Qualitative Psychology*, 2017, DOI: 10.1037/quip0000078.
- 10 S. Gibson, ‘Constructions of “the Polish” in northern England: Findings from a qualitative interview study’, *Journal of Social & Political Psychology*, vol. 3, 2015, pp. 43-62.
- 11 S. Kirkwood and S. Goodman, ‘Discursive psychological research on refugees’, in: S. Gibson (ed), *Discourse, peace and conflict: Discursive psychology perspectives*, in press.
- 12 S. Goodman and S. Speer, ‘Category use in the construction of asylum seekers’, *Critical Discourse Studies*, vol. 4, no. 2, 2007, pp. 165-185.
- 13 S. Goodman and A. Narang, ‘“Sad day for the UK”: The linking of debates about settling refugee children in the UK with Brexit’, *European Journal of Social Psychology*, under review.
- 14 D. Edwards and J. Potter, *Discursive Psychology*, London: Sage, 1992.

debates around contentious issues such as migration in the political arena. Discursive psychology has already been used to great effect regarding talk about migration and refugee issues.¹⁵ In discursive psychology, the focus of analysis should be on the action of the speech, which means attention should be paid to what the speech is accomplishing. In the case of speech about migration, the actions that such speech may achieve has been shown to include presenting migrants as a threaten and out of touch with British culture.¹⁶

4. Data

The Brexit campaign was, of course, a major news story in the UK, dominating much of the news, as well as current affairs discussion programs and newspaper editorials. It was a high-profile campaign, with election material sent to all homes in the UK, televised pieces and posters. The materials used in this research project were gathered during the campaign from the start of 2016 until the referendum on June 23rd. The corpus consists of all the major campaign materials from both the Leave and Remain campaigns. The initial analysis identified the use of arguments about controlling migration to the UK, so these were analyzed further and developed into the findings presented below. Extracts included in the analysis are those that exemplify the type of arguments that were made in the campaign.

5. Analysis

The analysis identified three broad arguments that were used during the campaign. First, and most prominently, Leave campaigners presented immigration as out of control. Second, Remain campaigners presented Brexit as an ineffective way of controlling migration. Third, and only in limited cases, Remain campaigners presented immigration as beneficial and not something to be reduced. Each of these will now be addressed in turn.

¹⁵ S. Kirkwood and S. Goodman, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ S. Gibson, *op.cit.*

1. Leave Campaigners Presented Immigration as Out of Control

“Vote Leave” and the anti-EU political party the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) campaign, whose overall slogan was “take back control”, consistently presented immigration to the UK as too high and unable to be regulated because of EU membership. The logical conclusion of this is that the UK should leave the EU so that it could “control” immigration. The first example, from the UKIP campaign, works to present immigration as threatening.

■ *Extract One: UKIP Campaign Poster*¹⁷

This poster contains a simple image of a finger pointing towards the reader. The caption states: “26 million people in Europe are looking for work. And whose jobs are they after?”. In smaller writing, on the right of the poster, it says: “TAKE BACK CONTROL OF OUR COUNTRY”. The UKIP logo appears beneath it along with the words “VOTE UKIP 22ND MAY” at the bottom.

This poster works to present all EU citizens as potential migrants, who in turn are a threat to British people. The unreferenced claim that 26 million people are looking for work is presumably based on the total of unemployed people across the member states. Rather than being presented as simply jobless, they are presented as actively looking for work (which is the opposite of the more common representations of unemployed people who are commonly presented as intentionally idle). Following this statement, which is presented as fact, comes the rhetorical question, “And whose jobs are they after?”. The use of “whose” and “after” suggest that these potential migrants are a direct threat to people who already have jobs. The “answer” to the rhetorical question is clearly signaled, but the use of the image of a finger pointing at the reader means that there is no room for any other answer than “you”, the reader. Unemployed EU citizens are therefore presented as a direct threat to job security in the UK. The use of the slogan “TAKE BACK CONTROL OF OUR COUNTRY” on the right side of the poster draws attention to this threat being out of control of the British (“our”) people, with a vote for UKIP and to leave the UK

17 UKIP, *UKIP national billboard campaign*, http://www.ukip.org/ukip_national_billboard_campaign [2017-09-05].

as the only solution to the problem. The following extract, taken from the official "Vote Leave" campaign, builds on this idea, by adding an additional country—Turkey—to the sense of threat.

■ *Extract Two: "Vote Leave" Campaign Poster*¹⁸

This poster consists of an image of an open doorway with the cover of a British passport serving as the door and footprints going through the opening, along with the text "TURKEY (population 76 million) IS JOINING THE EU," followed by the slogan "Vote Leave, take back control."

The imagery and the wording of this poster work together to present immigration from the EU as especially problematic. Turkey, which is currently not in the EU and unlikely to gain membership for the foreseeable future, is presented as factually joining the EU. There is no qualification of this statement, however the bold and large font and the inclusion of the definitive "IS" works to present this as fact. The reference in brackets to the population of the country—"(76 million)"—works to present this as a very large and significant threat, the implication being that 76 million new migrants could move to the UK. The image of the footprints through the open door further emphasize the threat along with the lack of the UK's ability (signaled by the image of the British passport) to stop these huge number of people from entering the country. The final slogan, "Vote Leave, take back control," therefore works as the remedy to the potential threat. The explicit reference to "control" completes the suggestion that the current situation is that the UK has no control over immigration. Immigration is therefore a serious threat to the UK, and leaving the EU is presented as the obvious way to address this threat. The next extract shows how the same argument is made in a British newspaper, the *Daily Express*, which campaigned to leave the EU.

■ *Extract Three: Daily Express, May 14, 2016*¹⁹

[Headline] Migration is OUT OF CONTROL: Farage blasts Government's European Union immigration farce

18 Facebook 'Vote Leave', 23 May 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/voteleave/photos/a.512228762287386.1073741828.505084413001821/598515206992074/?type=3&theater> [2017-09-05].

19 V. Wood, "Migration is OUT OF CONTROL": Farage blasts Government's European Union immigration farce, *The Express*, 14 May 2016, <http://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/670225/Migration-is-OUT-OF-CONTROL-Farage-blasts-Government-s-European-Union-immigration-farce> [2017-08-10].

[Deck] NIGEL Farage has slammed the Government's record on open door migration after a shock report revealed the number of EU migrants coming to Britain was higher than first thought

This article reports on comments made by the (then) leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, who had responded to the publication of figures about net migration to the UK in 2015. The headline begins with a quote and follows this with a description. The quote "Migration is OUT OF CONTROL" repeats the reference to "control", which has now been seen in all the extracts in this section. However, unlike the posters in the previous extracts where migration is implied to be uncontrolled, here this claim is explicitly made and emphasized through the use of capital letters. The explanation works to attribute this supposed lack of control to the UK government via the EU. This is achieved by claiming that Farage, the source of the quote, directed this claim to these bodies. The use of the metaphor "blasts" works to present this statement as an effective assault in an ongoing conflict. The reference to "immigration farce" clearly aligns with Farage's opposition to migration, which is presented as extremely problematic. By blaming the government and the EU, the newspaper (alongside Farage) is able to present both entities as the reason migration is out of control. The deck (second line) goes into a little more detail, beginning with a partial repetition of the headline, this time using "slammed" as the fighting metaphor. Here it is "open door migration" and (unspecified) high numbers of migrants that are presented as problematic, and it is "EU migrants" that are presented as being uncontrolled because of this "open door". Coming a month before the referendum, this newspaper report can be seen as part of the Leave campaign.

Together, these examples demonstrate how different parts of the Leave campaign drew on the unified idea that migration from the EU is not controlled, but that it should be. The first extract, from UKIP, worked to present EU migration as a potential threat to job security. The second, from the "Vote Leave" campaign, presented a potential future member of the EU (Turkey) as providing an even greater threat, and the final extract, from the anti-EU *Daily Express* quoted the leader of UKIP and explicitly presented the EU as the reason for the "out of control" migration. Together, these extracts develop the idea that migration is bad because of the threat to jobs that it poses and that it

should be controlled, but that it is not controlled because of the EU. The implication of this, which is made explicit in the campaign slogan (featured in Extract Two) is to "Vote Leave, take back control".

2. Remain Campaigners Presented Brexit as an Ineffective Way of Controlling Migration

It has now been shown that Leave campaigners presented EU migration as out of control and that the only way to control it is through leaving the EU. In this section, it will be shown that the Remain campaign did not challenge the idea that migration is "out of control," but instead challenged the idea that leaving the EU is the solution for dealing with this "problem". The first extract comes from the website of the Remain campaign, "Britain Stronger in Europe".

■ *Extract Four: Britain Stronger in Europe*²⁰

Will immigration go down if we leave the EU?

Answer: Leaving the EU will not stop immigration to the UK. Countries such as Norway and Switzerland, who are not part of the EU, have to accept free movement and have higher rates of EU migration than the UK. If we adopted the Australian points system proposed by Vote Leave, would give us double the levels of immigration.

At the moment we have control of our borders as we are out of the Schengen, and cooperation with France allows us to manage illegal immigration. Also, our border controls would shift from France to Dover, potentially making illegal immigration more difficult to control.

Most of our immigration is from outside the EU, this is not linked to our membership of the EU.

The question posed in the heading demonstrates an orientation to the Leave argument identified in the previous section, because it acknowledges public concern about the levels of migration. The question does not challenge the premise that immigration should go down, but sets up a response about whether leaving the EU would achieve this end. The answer begins with a definitive, negative statement that

20 Britain Stronger in Europe, *Will immigration go down if we leave the EU?*, <http://www.strongerin.co.uk/immigration> [2017-08-10].

“Leaving the EU will not stop migration to the UK.” This is presented as factual, rather than speculative. The statement therefore rejects the claims made in the previous section, where leaving the EU is presented as the solution to migration. The sentences that follow are used to provide evidence to support the statement, by claiming that non-EU countries have higher levels of migration. The next sentence demonstrates more clearly how this statement is in direct response to the Leave campaign’s claim, because it is stated that the “we” (UK) “have control”. The reference to “control” is a clear reference to, and rejection of, the Leave campaign’s claims that the UK is not in control. The statement goes further, claiming that rather than gaining control by leaving the EU, that the UK would have less control. The argument is therefore about how best to control migration, underpinned by an acceptance that migration should be controlled. Further evidence of the Remain campaign arguing that leaving the EU would not be an effective way to control migration can be seen in the next extract, from the pro-Remain *New Statesman*.

■ *Extract Five: The New Statesman, May 26, 2016*²¹

[Headline] Leave will leap on the immigration rise, but Brexit would not make much difference

[Deck] Non-EU migration is still well above the immigration cap, which the government is still far from reaching

As with the Remain campaign material in Extract Four, this article is oriented directly to the Leave campaign’s claims about migration. The “rise” refers to the migration figures that Farage was responding to in Extract Three above, where he made exactly the sort of claims about controlling migration that are being criticized here. This is a recognizable argument (repertoire) in which politicians are criticized for trying to make “political capital” from events. This criticism is followed by “but”, which signals the author’s version of reality, which is that Brexit will not change immigration figures. The reference to “much” here is

21 H. Zeffman, ‘Leave will leap on the immigration rise, but Brexit would not make much difference’, *The New Statesman*, 26 May 2016, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/staggers/2016/05/leave-will-leap-immigration-rise-brexit-would-not-make-much-difference> [2017-08-10].

noteworthy because this shows some hedging to allow for the possibility that Brexit may work to reduce migration, but only to a limited extent. Again, controlling migration is the stated aim, and as with the previous extract, leaving the EU is presented as not the solution. The deck repeats the argument made in the Remain campaign statement (from the previous extract) that any control of EU migration would still not deal with non-EU migration. Unlike the Remain campaign statement, and like many of the extracts in the first section, the government is blamed for the "problem." Again, migration is presented as a problem to be dealt with, and here again, leaving the EU is presented as an insufficient way to address the problem. The final extract of this section also demonstrates how pro-Remain arguments are based on Brexit not being able to control migration.

■ *Extract Six: The Independent, January 25, 2016*²²

[Headline] Leaving the EU will not stop immigration to the UK, says leader of campaign to stay in the EU Stuart Rose

(Deck) He described immigration as a 'world crisis' rather than a 'European crisis'

Once more, it can be seen that Brexit is presented as an inadequate way to deal with the "problem" of immigration. The problematic nature of immigration can be seen in the references to "crisis" in the deck. Again, the headline, which quotes a key Remain campaigner, is explicit that Brexit will not prevent immigration, a claim that is now recognizable as the response to the Leave campaign's claim that Brexit will add controls to an "out of control" system, with the claim that Brexit does not offer this control.

Together, the examples in this section demonstrate that the Remain campaign has a standard argument that Brexit will not deliver control of immigration. This argument can be seen as a direct response to the Leave campaign's claims that immigration can only be controlled by leaving the EU. Therefore, this is a defensive argument that accepts and further legitimizes the Leave campaign's claim that immigration

22 J. Stone, 'Leaving the EU will not stop immigration to the UK, says leader of campaign to stay in the EU Stuart Rose', *The Independent*, 25 January 2016, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/leaving-the-eu-will-not-stop-immigration-to-the-uk-says-leader-of-campaign-to-stay-in-the-eu-stuart-a6832866.html> [2017-08-10].

is out of control and that it is problematic. The problematic nature of immigration can be seen through the references to “crisis”, “illegal immigration”, the high numbers of immigrants in the UK and the lack of ability of the government to “control” its borders. At this point, immigration either can or cannot be better controlled if the UK leaves the EU, according to the Leave and Remain campaigns, respectively. The focus is therefore about the best way to control the problem of migration, with both sides of the debate claiming theirs is the best solution.

However, it will be seen that there is another argument used, rarely, by the Remain campaign (and even more rarely by the Leave campaign), which challenges the assumption that immigration is problematic and that it should be controlled. The final section of the analysis addresses this argument.

3. Campaigners Presented Immigration as Beneficial and Not Something to be Reduced

■ *Extract Seven: The Guardian, June 13, 2016*²³

[Headline] Brexit would not mean a big drop in immigration, Hilary Benn says

[Deck] Shadow foreign secretary also urges leave campaign to be more honest about necessity of immigration

The headline of this article initially looks like the strategy is the same as that found in the previous section, where Brexit is clearly presented as not reducing immigration. Hillary Benn is the shadow foreign secretary in the UK’s left-wing opposition Labour party. In many ways, this headline echoes that of the previous extract. As before, it presents Brexit as inadequate for dealing with the “problem” of immigration. The reference to a “big drop” suggests that Brexit may make some difference, but that it will be negligible, in much the same way as “much difference” works in Extract Five above.

However, the deck changes the focus of the newspaper article, which then moves away from agreeing with the need to control im-

23 R. Mason and H. Stewart, ‘Brexit would not mean a big drop in immigration, Hilary Benn says’, *The Guardian*, 13 June 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/13/brexit-will-not-mean-big-drop-in-immigration-hilary-benn-says> [2017-08-10].

migration (as up to this point both Leave and Remain campaigners have stated) to pointing to the benefits of migration. The benefits of migration can be seen in the reference to the “necessity of immigration”, which presents migration as a positive thing and which therefore should not be controlled at all. The comments being reported are clearly directed towards the opposition “Leave” campaign, who are subtly accused of lying through the reference to them being urged to “be more honest”. The comments reported here, therefore, not only attack the ability of Brexit to control migration (as seen in the previous section) but also the presumed benefits of controlling immigration at all. This is a departure from the more defensive strategy identified above because it now challenges the premise of the debate underpinned by a supposed need to reduce migration. It is noteworthy, however, that the comment stops short of stating that migration is good, instead referring to it as “necessary”. The claim that migration can be good is seen in the following extract, an opinion piece, also in *The Guardian*.

■ *Extract Eight: The Guardian, February 18, 2016*²⁴

[Headline] Mass EU migration into Britain is actually good news for UK economy
 [Deck] Far from the unfounded headlines about EU migrants grabbing British jobs, record numbers of British citizens are in work too

This article offers a more direct challenge to the premise that migration into the UK is problematic and must be controlled. The use of the term “actually good” demonstrates this challenge by referring to the many examples where migration is presented as unquestionably bad, as seen in both the Leave campaign’s claims (shown in section one) as well as the Remain campaign’s response (section two of the analysis). The specific reference to EU migration places this article within the Remain campaign. The deck further challenges the common assumption that migration is problematic by criticizing those who make such a claim. Further criticism is brought about by dismissing these as “unfounded headlines”, which, as with the previous extract, implies

24 A. Travis, ‘Mass EU migration into Britain is actually good news for UK economy’, *The Guardian*, 18 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/feb/18/mass-eu-migration-into-britain-is-actually-good-news-for-uk-economy> [2017-08-10].

that the opponent is lying. The claims in this headline are presented as factual (or “far from” the problematic headlines) and one of the key anti-migration arguments, that migrants take “native” citizens’ jobs, is undermined through the claim that UK unemployment is low alongside high levels of EU migration. If migration is a threat to UK jobs, as is implied by the Leave campaign material seen in section one of the analysis, then UK unemployment should be high when immigration is high. This claim therefore works to criticize and challenge the Leave campaign’s anti-immigration, economic argument. Therefore, in responding to the Leave campaign’s challenge that Brexit can work to control migration, Remain campaigners can either claim that Brexit would be an ineffective way to control migration, and therefore challenge the claim while accepting the premise that migration should be controlled, or that the premise that migration should be controlled itself can be attacked.

The final extract, from the left-leaning *The Mirror*, is something of an outlier. Like the two extracts above, it is suggested that migration is not problematic, however what is different in this case is that the article reports on a high-profile Leave supporter, Tim Martin, who owns a large chain of pubs (called Wetherspoons) in the UK. Martin was unusual because, despite campaigning for Brexit, he maintained throughout his own campaign that this was not to control migration, but for reasons of sovereignty and democracy.

■ *Extract nine: The Mirror, June 3, 2016*²⁵

[Headline] Pro-Brexit Wetherspoons boss admits he employs 3,500 staff from overseas

[Deck] Tim Martin says his decision to back Brexit has nothing to do with immigration

The headline of this article works to present support for Brexit and opposition to migration as synonymous, this is brought about through the use of “admits” to describe Martin stating that he employs a large

25 M. Smith, ‘Pro-Brexit Wetherspoons boss admits he employs 3,500 staff from overseas’, *The Mirror*, 3 June 2016, <http://www.mirror.co.uk/news/uk-news/pro-brexit-wetherspoons-boss-admits-8109824> [2017-08-10].

number of migrant workers. The headline is then qualified in the deck, which states that Martin's support for Brexit is not related to migration. In both the headline and the deck, supporting both Leave and migration is presented as unusual and opposed to common sense, and therefore in need of further explanation. This works to emphasize the importance of the anti-migration strand of the leave campaign's argument, while also casting doubt on the argument's strength by showing that even a high-profile Leave campaigner can not only accept migration, but employ a large number of migrant workers.

What this section shows, therefore, is that in some rare cases, rather than challenging the likelihood of leaving the EU, allowing the UK to reduce or "control" the number of migrants that enter the country, some Remain supporters, and as can be seen in this final example, even a Leave supporter, challenge the whole premise that migration should be controlled or reduced at all.

6. Discussion

This analysis has demonstrated how, 1. Leave supporters present migration as a risk to the UK and suggest that the only way to manage this problem is through leaving the EU, 2. Remain supporters generally respond to the Leave campaign's claim by stating that leaving the EU will fail to control and reduce the amount of migration into the UK. Finally, it was shown that in rare cases, the premise that immigration should be controlled can be challenged. This strategy is mainly used by remain campaigners, but even a prominent leave campaigner was shown to support migration. Leave campaigners were therefore able to make a positive, offensive argument, which is that through Brexit, migration can be controlled. Remain campaigners responded to this by defending against the argument (by claiming that Brexit cannot control migration). Direct challenges to the argument (claiming that migration is positive) were much rarer, suggestion that the Remain campaign was predominantly defensive, on the back-foot of the Leave campaign's more offense-oriented argument.

The defensiveness of the Remain campaign's claim that migration is problematic and in need of control reflects a broad acceptance within the UK that migration is a problem that needs dealing with. That migration is problematic has become a common notion in the UK.

All forms of migration, and especially what is called “economic migration” (i.e., people entering the UK primarily for financial gain), are regularly criticized as an economic burden. A clear example of this comes from the recent UK election campaigns in which both main parties (Conservatives and Labour, which both officially supported Remain in the Brexit debate) called for limits on migration.²⁶ Psychological literature has addressed the way in which opposition to immigration has become normalized, and that suggestions that this opposition is based on racism have been quashed, in favor of economic explanations for this opposition.²⁷

Indeed, it seems to be those supporting migration that have to do the rhetorical work to suggest why it may be a positive thing that brings benefits to host nations. The acceptance that immigration is problematic and a burden to the economy does not seem to be supported in the economic evidence, which suggests that migration brings economic benefits to host nations (for example, they contribute more in taxes than they receive in benefits²⁸). However, despite this, economic arguments in favor of migration (such as those seen in section three of the analysis) are relatively rare compared to those that present migration as an economic burden. The acceptance that migration is problematic, and the defensiveness of the Remain campaign, may also explain the eventual success of the Leave campaign. The widespread opposition to migration in the UK may also explain Leave’s focus on migration throughout the campaign, because while every anti-migration sentiment is strong, it is strategically beneficial to offer to end it. Although both major British political parties campaigned to remain in the EU, it is arguably their own earlier campaigning against migration and failure to speak up for the benefits of migration that allowed for the Leave side to benefit from the widespread opposition to migra-

- 26 N. Morris, ‘General Election 2015: Immigration—how the parties are playing the numbers game’, *The Independent*, 22 April 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/generalelection/general-election-2015-immigration-how-the-parties-are-playing-the-numbers-game-10196924.html> [2017-08-10].
- 27 S. Goodman ‘“It’s not Racist to Impose Limits on Immigration”: Constructing the Boundaries of Racism in the Asylum and Immigration debate’, *Critical Approaches to Discourse Analysis across disciplines*, vol. 4, no. 1, 2010, pp. 1-17.
- 28 A. Travis, ‘Mass EU migration into Britain is actually good news for UK economy’, *The Guardian*, 18 February 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2016/feb/18/mass-eu-migration-into-britain-is-actually-good-news-for-uk-economy> [2017-08-10].

tion, which played a major role in Leave's success. It certainly appears to be the case that a campaign based on fear of the other was able to beat one based on inclusivity.

At the time of writing, it is difficult to predict what impact Brexit will have on migration to the UK. Certainly, it cannot affect migration from outside of the EU, or asylum figures, and an agreement has yet to be struck whether free movement to the UK will continue or end. However, in the short term, there has been a reduction in EU migration to the UK. This is nothing to do with new rules or controls, but instead the Brexit decision, and the resulting spike in hate crimes towards immigrants that occurred following the result²⁹ appears to have influenced the decision of potential migrants to avoid the UK.³⁰ There have already been reports of labor shortages in some areas.³¹

This analysis has shown that the Leave campaign's focus on migration, with its claims that migration is problematic, threatening and can only be controlled through Brexit, appear to have been more successful than the Remain campaign, which predominantly defended against these claims by saying that Brexit would be an ineffective way to control migration. Throughout the debate, migration was presented as problematic, reflecting wider debates where migration is presented as a threat to the UK and therefore in need of controlling. While some dissenting voices argued for the benefits of migration, the negative tone about controlling migration appears to have been most successful.

29 J. Sharman and I. Jones, 'Hate crimes rise by up to 100 per cent across England and Wales, figures reveal', *The Independent*, 15 February 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/brexit-vote-hate-crime-rise-100-per-cent-england-wales-police-figures-new-racism-eu-a7580516.html> [2017-08-10].

30 C. Hope and K. McCann, 'Net migration from Eastern Europe to Britain slows to a trickle after Brexit vote', *The Telegraph*, 25 May 2017, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/25/net-migration-eastern-europe-slows-trickle/> [2017-08-10].

31 Z. Wood, 'UK labour shortages reported as EU worker numbers fall', *The Guardian*, 13 February 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2017/feb/13/uk-labour-shortages-brexit-as-eu-worker-numbers-fall> [2017-08-10].

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