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Brexit as a conjuncture

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Abstract

This academic paper presents the results of a small-scale research project with the title “Brexit as a conjuncture”. We combine the theoretical reflection on the conjunctural tendencies in the United Kingdom (UK) since the Thatcher era with the empirical media analysis at the moment of the rupture. Unlike academic papers that discuss either political and economic reasons of Brexit (see Clarke, Goodwin and Whiteley, 2016; Arnorsson and Zoega, 2016) or its conjunctural dynamics (see Jessop, 2016), our work combines the multi-disciplinary insights of both critical political economy and cultural anthropology. In particular, we, on the one side, consider the long-term conjunctural dynamics of labour–capital contradictions in the UK from the theoretical perspectives of Jessop, Hall, Gallas, Poulantzas, Gramsci, and Laclau/Mouffe. Consequently, our goal is to understand the current rupture of Brexit as a path-dependent outcome of a long-standing crisis of neoliberalism.

On the other side, we attempt to think “out of the box”, not “take[ing] institutions and social and power relations for granted, but call[ing] them into question by concerning itself with their origins and whether they might be in the process of changing” (Cox, 1981: 129). We seek to uncover the emergent elements of the social reality in which the conjunctural and the organic come together in a single rupture. This practically means the analysis of the discourses, narratives, strategies, and tactics of the media coverage over a period of one month from 23 May –23 June 2016, immediately followed by the day of the Referendum. Four nationally circulated newspapers were selected, based on their readership and political tone. These media sources are the Mirror and The Guardian (centre–left), broadcasting in favour of the Remain camp, and the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph (centre–right), supporting Brexit.

Methodologically, we craft our analysis technique based on framing theory and ethnographic content analysis. News items are viewed as political tools of influencing public perceptions and choices. How their content is framed, consequently, defines the success of political mobilization. Our analysis unfolds throughout the paper within four chapters. The first of them theoretically maps the development of Brexit as a conjuncture, tracing it back to the establishment of Thatcherism. The second chapter explains our methodology. The third one contains the empirical analysis of the coverage of the Referendum in Mirror and The Guardian. Finally, the fourth chapter empirically studies how the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph reported on this issue.

Our findings show that the Brexit campaign and the referendum have become the rupture of the organic crisis tendencies in the UK. We have built the conjunctural map of Brexit which illustrates the contradictions traced back to the Thatcher era. These contradictions led to the rise of the UKIP as a path dependent outcome. Our discourse analysis shows that the reporting of the newspapers The Guardian and The Mirror remained within the common-sense framework of neoliberalism. Lastly, the reporting of the Daily Mail and the Daily Telegraph presented the UKIP as a common-sense of change in contrast to Cameronism and its contradictions.

1. Tracing Brexit as a conjuncture

1.1. *Introduction*

The analysis of the Brexit campaign as a conjuncture is hardly possible without taking into account previous developments in the UK and their theoretical interpretations. To understand where to place Brexit, we provide a periodization of the crisis, tracing it back to the constitution of neoliberalism within the Thatcher era, and going further with New Labour, which we view as the continuation of Thatcherism. Following this, we narrate the Cameron era as the succession of Thatcherism and strengthening of Euroscepticism that leads to the rise of the right-wing populist party, UKIP. We conceptualize these long-term dynamics as part of a conjunctural map. Outlining these developments allows to set the scene for further media analyses that explains why the Tories were put under heavy political pressure with the rise of the UKIP and why the Referendum became the culmination of the political struggle.

The first part of this chapter, therefore, reflects on the theoretical approaches we employ to understand contemporary UK and to analyse its discourses. Within conjunctural analysis as our main approach, we aim to clarify the exact dynamics, strategies, tactics, and struggles of the current moment around the Referendum. Therefore, the question to start is: What is exactly a conjuncture? To give a short and precise answer, we quote Stuart Hall: “A conjuncture is a period when different social, political, economic and ideological contradictions that are at work in society and have given it a specific and distinctive shape come together, producing a crisis of some kind” (Hall and Massey, 2010: 55).

This relatively vague definition is in fact to the point since it goes beyond defining a conjuncture as a fixed set of characteristics applied to view a crisis. However, a conjuncture is not an abstract theory through which one can view the reality, rather it is a flexible instrument to capture the processes inside the reality and it is the instrument which is open for different theoretical approaches. Admittedly, this is a highly complicated way of viewing a crisis because it stands on more than a single perspective, so it throws a researcher into the complexity of economic, social and cultural aspects. They come together at some point, overlap with each other, and “overdetermine” the dynamics of the crisis (ibid.: 57). As Clark points out, conjunctural analysis should try to avoid economic determinism, which is widely common within approaches for analysing a crisis (Clark, 2010: 339f). Against this backdrop, he argues for keeping in mind two things: “the first is to escape the fixation on the dominant, by attending to the residual and emergent. The

second is to consider their dynamic interactions as the dominant struggles to contain, displace, neutralize or incorporate elements of the others” (ibid.: 340).

In other words, the current crisis is a crisis where different elements in society are in motion and interact in an interwoven field. This preconditions the methodological difficulty of structuring the elements of the crisis into a certain kind of order because it has “different temporalities” (ibid.: 342). This may preclude the researcher from grasping the whole complexity, instead of focusing on one specific element. To control this risk, we have developed a periodization to identify the complexity of cultural, political, and economic continuities that led to the current situation in the UK—the moment of Brexit as a rupture.

1.2. *Brexit as a long-running conjuncture*

As a start of the discussion about Brexit, we refer to Bob Jessop who argues that Brexit is not to be viewed as a singular event of crisis, but that it should be put in the context of an ongoing organic crisis of the British state in the sense of Gramsci (Jessop, 2016: 2). The starting point of the conjuncture is the establishment of Thatcherism at the end of the 1970s and the reaction to the crisis of Atlantic Fordism. This led to the constitution of a neoliberal agenda as a countermovement to the crisis of the welfare state and the social democratic period of the post-war era. Jessop describes this agenda as follows: “These policies privilege opportunities for monetary profit over the provision of substantive use-values that meet social needs, facilitate human flourishing, protect the environment, and safeguard planet earth.” (ibid.: 3).

These neoliberal policies are the privatization of the public sector, the decreasing of the power of trade unions, and the reliance on the self-regulating forces of the market. Furthermore, this led to a split within the population into a small part of wealthy people and an increasingly growing part of people in precarious social and economic circumstances. Jessop calls this a “two nations project” established in the Thatcher era that produced social inequality and class antagonisms (ibid: 4). In the New Labour era of Blair and Brown, these problems receded, but the Thatcherite legacy continued, so that it marked the neoliberal turn of the Labour Party (Hall and Massey, 2010: 58).

However, Jessop points out some differences in the conjunctures of the Brexit and the rise of Thatcherism. For him, the Brexit is a long-term conjuncture which means: “a long-running split in the establishment, a worsening representational crisis in the party system, a growing crisis of authority for political elites, a legitimacy crisis of the state, and a crisis of national-popular hegemony over the population” (Jessop, 2016: 2).

These long-term shifts in politics led to a crisis of the power bloc in Great Britain. One reason why they occurred is the entry of the UK to the EU and the imperialist nostalgia for Britain as a global power. Jessop also depicts a split between the parties and its voters, which means a crisis of representation that caused “radical demands for change that were countered by populist appeals” (ibid: 2) and the crisis of the neoliberal project behind the financial crisis in 2008. The main part of this chapter presents the conjunctural periodization that starts with the period of Thatcherism, the establishment of the neoliberal agenda, and its aftermath.

1.3. Starting point: Thatcherism (1979-1997)

The term “Thatcherism” becomes popular with Stuart Hall who analysed the shift to the political Right in Britain with Margaret Thatcher at its forefront at the end of 1970s (Hall, 1979: 14ff). He refers to Thatcherism as a response to the 1970’s conjunctural crisis, and for him, this means the formation of a new political ideology and the constitution of a new power bloc (ibid: 15). This conjuncture has its economic roots in the global economic crisis of the 1970s and in the specific crisis of capital accumulation in Britain at the time. Crucially, Hall refers to Law-and-Order politics and the resulting Moral Panic, which established a new common sense and, at the same time, destroyed the old social democratic national consensus, as the ideological basis of the new Right (ibid: 16). In *Policing the Crisis*, Hall et al. explain this in detail (Hall et al., 1978: 139–181). They examine why the “traditional” viewpoint on crime is the dominant perspective across all the classes—a sort of common sense. To start with, they determine universal social values dominant in Britain at the time, such as respectability and work and discipline, which relate to protestant ethics of being diligent, focused, rigorous, conformist, and austere. The primary sphere in which these regulations take place is the family. Importantly, the city is the local and modern room of identification, especially for the working class, and the nation is the common ground of identification for all classes. The pride of England as an imperial empire and its firefighter status in world politics produce a feeling of superiority towards “outsiders”. As the final element of universal values, they mention the diametrical character of the law, which is “producing, on the one hand, a misrecognition in the working class of its contradictions of interest, and, on the other hand, serving to split and divide sections of the class against each other” (ibid.: 149). All these elements, as a model of an English ideology, constitute what is crime ex-negative.

This English ideology, as a sort of common sense, connects the subaltern classes with the ruling classes by creating the borders of thought. Within these borders, the general ideas of

the ruling class are taken for granted, however, the situated judgments by the subaltern classes can be contradictory to common sense and work in a counter-hegemonic manner. This leads to a certain kind of instability of the English ideology, including the use of scapegoats as disturbers of social and moral order. Hall et al. (1978: 149) describe ruptures in the leading ideology with the caesura from the post-war protestant ethics to the “New Hedonism” of the consumer-society and youth cultures. This leads to a “sense of loss” of certain moral and social values for the lower middle class who then see immigrants and especially “muggers” as scapegoats.

In this, the academics find the excess of traditionalism which, from the working class perspective, is rooted in rationalism and, from petty bourgeois perspective, in moralism. Furthermore, there are three positions in meaning-making on crime: the judiciary, the media, and the “lay public”, in which the latter builds the basic paradigms of thinking and explaining crime. Within conservative explanation, this means that crime is the evil in human nature, and so these values should be defended. In contrast, the liberal explanation views crime as a social dysfunction. Thus, there are practical ideologies, i.e., the framed field in which crime is judged. Authors conclude that in times of crisis of authority, the conservative mode of thought dominates the others and builds a cross-class alliance which finally leads to a crisis of state and authoritarian populism.

Moreover, from an economic perspective, Hall says that the Keynesianism of the welfare state is replaced by Anti-Statism, Anti-Collectivism, and the philosophy of “competition and personal responsibility for effort and reward” – a neoliberal agenda – which for him constitutes the new “populist common sense” of Thatcherism (Hall, 1979: 17). This development is visible within the discourse on educational politics: here the Right seems to replace the social democratic credo of “equal opportunities for everyone” to market orientated educational politics that shall require the needs of the industry (ibid: 18f). In resume, Hall et al. develops the political ideology of Thatcherism, the common sense that glue society, and the English ideology that was established in this period and shaped Thatcherism—a cross-class-alliance hegemonic project.

On the other hand, Gallas points out that Jessop and his colleagues view Thatcherism from another perspective (Gallas, 2016: 11f). They question that Thatcherism is a hegemonic project that created cross class consent. Instead of ideology, they put the focus of their analysis on political economy. For them, Thatcherism failed in building the institutional and economic basis needed for a hegemonic project because the neoliberal policies were not saving the wealth standard or solving Britain’s economic problems in the long-term.

This finally led to a split in society with one part of the people remaining in a “state of passivity” within the “two nations project” (ibid: 15ff).

With that said, Gallas develops his own analysis of Thatcherism, heavily relying on a Poulantzasian frame. Poulantzas worked on “authoritarian statism”; with this concept he tried to depict the “weakening of the state”, the rise of a “dominant mass party”, and the rise of an “administrative” social group coming together to form a rather anti-democratic phase in politics. Gallas uses this and views Thatcherism as “a class political regime” that is based on the “two nations project” (ibid: 62f). He discusses an extraction strategy containing:

“repressive legislation, the appointment of executives of state-owned companies known for their hostility towards unions, the preparation of a plan aimed at attacking the National Union of Mineworker as the spearhead of militant trade unionism in Britain, discursive interventions against the labour movement, and support to employers willing to take on the unions.” (ibid: 63).

These Thatcherite policies are clearly targeted against organized labour with the aim of weakening their formation as a political class. Gallas argues that the working class is dominated through neoliberal free-market policies that favour privatization and the international flow of monetary capital over labour rights. That is why Thatcherism is viewed here as a class political regime that suppresses the working class in order to keep intact the domination of the bourgeoisie.

In conclusion, the Thatcher era has laid the ground for the Brexit conjuncture because it established the populist common sense that builds a certain kind of hegemony which disguises class antagonisms. At the same time, it constitutes the “two nations project”, which consists in a sharpening of class contradictions. On the other hand, their neoliberal economic policies of free market radicalism, privatization, and weakening of organized labour preconditioned the financial crisis of 2008 and the right-wing-populism. Therefore, Thatcherism marks a far-reaching focal point in Britain’s political and economic history which continues with the Tory government by John Major till 1997 and forms the backdrop for the rise of New Labour.

1.4. *Second stage: New Labour (1997-2010)*

The New Labour period with the Labour Prime Ministers Tony Blair (1997–2007) and Gordon Brown (2007–2010) is widely recognized as the neoliberal turn of the Labour Party, renouncing from politics of Keynesianism and the welfare state to free market authoritarianism. For Gallas, this period means the consolidation of neoliberalism: New Labour made concessions to the labour unions, but these were limited, and the broad outlines of economic policy under Thatcher were not withdrawn (ibid: 280f). Furthermore, the concessions to the working class were rather addressed to an individual worker than to trade unions:

“rights to parental leave were expanded; part-time workers gained the same rights as full-time workers; work hours were limited to 48 per week; the qualifying period for coverage by unfair dismissal legislation was halved to one year; employers were barred from laying off workers because they were involved in collective bargaining, union recognition procedures, or legal strikes that lasted no longer than eight weeks; and a statutory union recognition procedure was introduced.” (ibid: 281).

However, objectively speaking, trade unions were still repressed by the Thatcherite legislation. Gallas describes New Labour’s approach as more inclusionary, especially when it comes to workfare and as a shift from a “two nation” to a “one nation” project because of a new welfare system aiming at low-wage-workers (ibid: 282f). But on the other hand, it retains many of the neoliberal policies and state institutions established within the Thatcher era, keeping the neoliberal economic order. Jessop argues in the same manner when he states that the Blair era and New Labour are substantially the continuation of Thatcherite neoliberal economics, containing “liberalization, deregulation, privatization, re-commodification, internationalization, and reduced direct taxes”, even if this kind of neoliberalism is ideologically rooted within Christian socialism (Jessop, 2007: 284). He also speaks of a shift to a “one nation project”, though excluding “the enemies from within”, the ones that are not willing either able to integrate in the project culturally or economically. Within this development, he identifies a tendency to a strong state and authoritarian populism. Another discontinuity in the shift from Thatcherism to New Labour is the introduction and promotion of a “knowledge based economy” that shall prepare the British economy for the global market. (ibid: 286). Jessop sums up New Labour’s strategy in the following sentence:

“Likewise, New Labour’s social strategy reflects not only the continuing desire to subordinate social policy to the alleged economic imperatives of global competition but also to address the marked increase in social polarization and exclusion that has

accompanied the neo-liberal project as pursued by the Thatcher-Major governments.” (ibid.: 287).

In a nutshell, New Labour marks the continuation of the Thatcherite neoliberal agenda, even if it makes limited concessions to the socially and economically excluded people. Yet, all in all, organized labour and the trade unions are still repressed by the Thatcherite legacy. Moreover, this goes together with traditional, local industries with the economic policies of New Labour heading towards a “knowledge-based economy” aimed at being globally competitive. This leads to a crisis of representation in the Labour Party because New Labour marks a shift in the political history of the party. Traditional voters of Labour feel alienated because New Labour’s neoliberal agenda becomes indistinguishable from the Tory politics. This constitutes a subaltern political group that feels attracted by the right-wing-populism because their topics are no longer represented in the established political landscape. Recalling Hall et al., the conservative mode of thought, i.e. a kind of authoritarian populism, is preferred in times of crisis of authority.

1.5. *Third stage: Cameronism (2010-2016)*

In 2007, shortly after Gordon Brown took over office from Tony Blair, the financial crisis hit Great Britain, turning the economy into a year-long recession. This blew away the ground for New Labour’s politics, with Brown’s dealing with the crisis was helping the banks with public funds without taking control over them (Gallas, 2016: 287). This resulted in a high public debt and the loss of the 2010 elections. Cameron took over and re-established Thatcherite neoliberal policies whilst reducing taxes for middle and upper classes, cutting welfare and social systems, and decreasing unemployment through precarious labour and privatizing state enterprises (Fuchs, 2016: 172f).

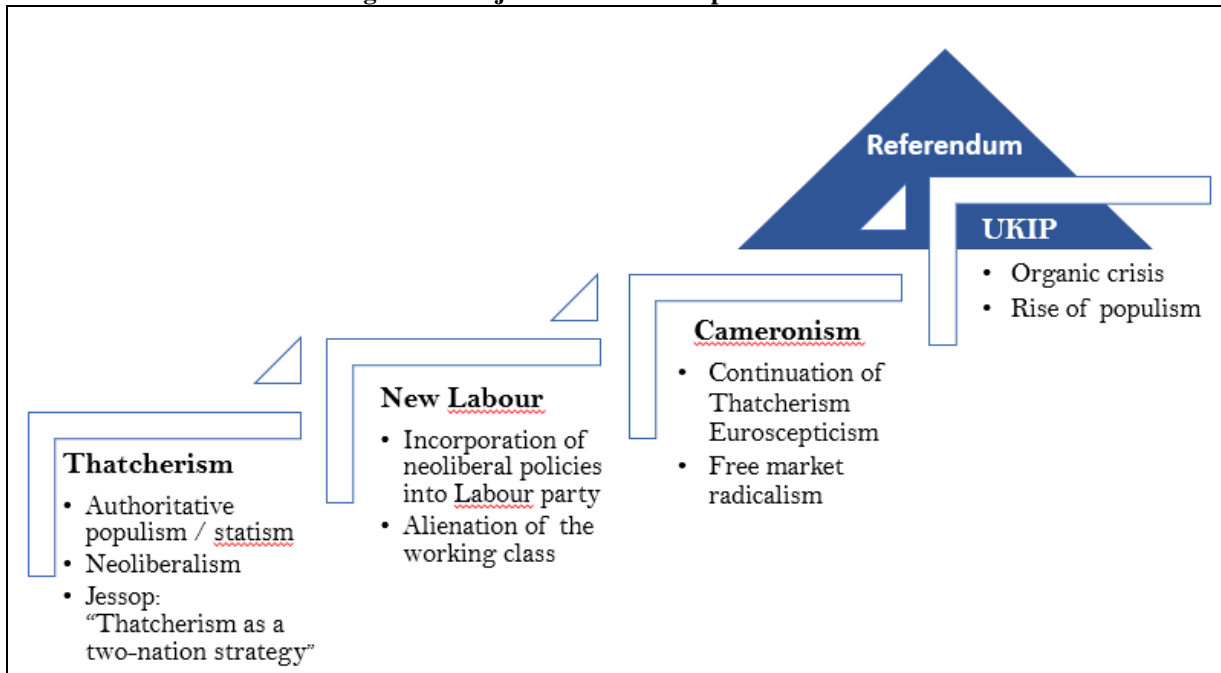
At the same time, the classical neoliberal ideology of “hard work efforts for success”, which is based on individual competitiveness, spreads again. This develops along the scapegoating of “immigrants, welfare recipients, the unemployed, the poor, gangs and criminals, terrorists, and the European Union” (ibid: 174). Consequently, this demonstrates the return of the “two-nations-project”. The repressed trade unions find it more difficult to make legal strikes and a strong law-and-order-state based on conservative moralism was established. Within these developments, Cameronism places itself seamlessly in the legacy of Thatcherism. Additionally, Cameronism establishes Euroscepticism as an explicit form of authoritarian populism. His main critique of the EU is summed up by Fuchs: “Cameronism is politically a specific form of Euroscepticism that argues that the European

Union limits British business interests by too many rules and that its bureaucratic centralism questions British national sovereignty” (ibid: 175).

Instead, Cameron projects his vision of the European Union as a free economic market with loose social and political regulation. This goes along the concept of the British nationalism, the idea of a great British Empire, and imperialist nostalgia. This means the idea of a politically independent UK from the EU and especially from its Eurozone-core consisting of France and Germany (ibid: 178). For Fuchs, this reflects the British struggle in establishing a modern, post-imperialist imagined community of a British nation.

Against this backdrop, we put into focus the Referendum as the reaction to the financial crisis, especially in the Eurozone, and to the rise of the UKIP. Cameron’s authoritarian populism creates a crisis of authority and a “growing disconnect between the natural governing parties in Westminster, their members and their voters” (Jessop, 2016: 2). This works as humus for the right-wing-populist UKIP. The ever-growing demand for a Brexit within the population is fueled by the mainstream media, together with the switch of many Tory voters to the UKIP and a growing pro-Brexit wing within the Tories, putting political pressure on Cameron. A referendum, which has approved a helpful political instrument for Cameron when winning the Scottish referendum, should dissolve this tension by asking a yes/no question. However, the accompanying risks of a referendum have been miscalculated by Cameron. According to Jessop, it fails to address the key problem, the crisis of neoliberalism: “The dominance of neoliberalism indicates that the choice posed in the referendum was misleading: the real choice should have been in or out of neoliberalism rather than in or out of the European Union” (ibid: 5). As anticipated, the disguise of “the real question” and the vote for “stay”, fail to come true and to stabilize the hegemonic project of Cameronism.

Figure 1. Conjunctural crisis map of Brexit



1.6. Conclusion

All in all, we view Brexit as part of a long-term conjuncture of an organic crisis of the British state, rooted in the establishment of Thatcherism and its neoliberal politics back in the 1970s (see Fig. 1). This reaction to the crisis of Fordist capitalism, authoritarian populism, and neoliberal economic policies culminates in the ongoing crisis, which became obvious with the onset of the financial crisis in 2007. However, this crisis is not just economically determined, but rather it is a conjunctural crisis where cultural, economic, and political contradictions are at work. Therefore, we attempt to identify them by answering the question: what elements of this crisis can be traced in the media through discourse analysis? Is there a break with the past political configurations constructed by Margaret Thatcher and her allies and New Labour in Britain? What is the role of the UKIP in this rupture?

2. The methodology of media analysis

Media analysis in this paper is based on framing theory and ethnographic content analysis. According to framing theory, the media presentation of ideas, issues, and personalities influences how people think about them (Tettah and King, 2011: 505). Reporters present the information in a way that generates a specific response from the public by appealing to the underlying schemas among the audience (Freyenberger, 2013: 12). In this way, the selected newspapers are viewed as a playing field for political articulation of ideas about Brexit. Consequently, we regard the news coverage a month before the Referendum as a documented political struggle for the future of UK–EU relations.

As a second inference, we assume that the winning camp succeeded in correctly identifying and appealing to the underlying schemas of the UK public on the pages of the leading newspapers. The underlying schemes are the prior knowledge, or predispositions, assumed in the articles. While mapping the content of the articles as dominant discourses, themes, and frames, we also attempt to uncover these predispositions. We assume that they bear the elements of a conjunctural crisis of the UK. The consequent assumption is that the camp whose claims better resonate with the conjunctural elements receives more attention and empathy from the public, and thus, wins political influence, which was decisive in the Referendum. The political influence shapes social processes, decisions, and collective action.

In selecting the news articles for deeper scrutiny, we rely on the principle of salience, meaning that journalists attempt to “mak[e] a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audience” (Freyenberger, 1993: 53). This principle guides our search for dominant meanings, themes, and concepts in the news articles. Our data collection approach is as follows: i) build the initial news list by searching by the keywords “Brexit” and “referendum”, ii) view all the headings and select the news with dominant (most frequent) themes and discourses, iii) apply systematic content analysis to the selected newscasts.

In doing systematic content analysis, we rely on a set of basic concepts, discussed in the first theoretical chapter of this project. These concepts are “economic market”, “social and political regulation”, “parties”, “welfare and social systems”, “unemployment”, “labour”, “enterprises”, and “privatization”. On the other hand, we respect the postulates of the ethnographic content analysis and “include[e] an orientation toward constant discovery and constant comparison of relevant situations” (Altheide, 1996: 16). Practically, we attempt to discover and compare emerging patterns, emphases, and themes in the newspapers. We look into how the situation is depicted, what the settings and the nuances are, and what

meanings are attributed to and disjointed from specific categories and concepts. All these enable us to reflect upon the discursive strategies of the newspapers to portray the reality in specific pro-and anti-Brexit ways.

For the systematic content analysis, we initially subject the collected data to the following categorization: i) main political actors; ii) portrayal of governing/oppositional party; iii) social (contra) justifications of Brexit; iv) tones and language of news; v) locational attribution of justifications. These categories help to define the techniques of news broadcasting and the thematic dominance in these techniques (strategies). To identify how the narratives differ between the two groups of newspapers, we find and examine news' frames and discourses to answer our guiding questions, set in the previous chapter.

3. UK referendum and British media discourse in *The Mirror* and *The Guardian*

3.1. Introduction

The 2016 UK referendum was present in the media as a heated debate which portrayed a frustrated, divided, and unclear socio-political scene in Britain. The political climate a month before the Referendum was characterized by a toxic and polarized public discourse, horrendous claims, and shocking practices, such as the murder of Jo Cox, a Labour MP, in June 2016. Focusing on these facts would allow us to provide the evidence of deep socio-political, ideological and representational crises – in other words, an ongoing conjunctural crisis. From this perspective, it is crucial to ask the question and better understand: Why did the political system and media fail to adequately manage the crisis, especially on the level of discourse?

The Referendum results came as a shock, the reverberations of which are still felt in British politics. To better understand this shock, this chapter focuses on the Remain campaign, and the two major newspapers that openly supported this camp—*The Mirror* and *The Guardian*. The newspapers present media discourses which endorse a party's opinion or a side in the election campaign. The analysis of the discourses will help to identify how elements of a conjunctural crisis appear in newspaper articles whose aim was to report on the current socio-political situation. More crucially, this chapter contributes to a better comprehension of how the remain-camp failed to construct a positively charged hegemonic framework — *trasformismo*.¹

¹Trasformismo is “absorption of potentially opposing forces that may disrupt passive revolution, involving the incorporation of cultural, social, economic, and political leaders into the networks of the elite” (Moore, 2015: 45), from Gramsci's theory.

The economic arguments analysing why leaving the EU would be destructive for the UK are the common denominators of the referendum debate. The debate, in other words, is framed within a neoliberal context itself, and the progressive forces were also influenced by this tendency, failing to construct a hegemonic political platform that could debunk the “take back control” sedimentation slogan of the UKIP. If this is indeed the failure of Cameron’s dominant ideology, what does it signify for UK’s socio-political situation? What is the interplay between parties, social classes, and the media discourse during this election? Most importantly though, what can media analysis tell us about the current crisis? This chapter analyses how online publications of *The Guardian* and *The Mirror* reported the UK Referendum during the last month before the Referendum and especially the last week of the debate. By trying to trace strategies, patterns, and categorizing the argumentation of most of these articles, this paper attempts to shed some light into what discursive practices were used by this particular media online in order to inform or influence voters.

3.2. *Tracing elements of the distortive neo-liberal construction of common sense*

The Guardian

In line with its journalistic reputation, *The Guardian* attempted to stay close to the role of an objective informer. Even though it openly sided with the Remain camp, it nevertheless allowed for some level of controversial opinions to be heard. To a large extent, the online newspaper hosts opinions and interviews from almost every existing political party and interest group. However, the form in which most of this reporting takes place indicates a few interesting patterns, which can be linked to our theoretical analysis of a crisis of neoliberalism, as was depicted in the first part.

First, despite the sporadic acknowledgement of complications that fused in this Referendum, it was often the case that articles aimed at giving “the obvious-simplifying” keys to the answer, without really addressing these complications any further. From early on the matter was addressed through a “guide to UK’s biggest political decision of the century”, giving textbook-like answers to what will happen if a “yes” or “no” prevails, why this happened in the first place, while also framing the profile of a typical “remainiac” or “brexiter”, which as it was proven by results was a rather crude categorization.

3.2.1. *London, political, and technical discourses*

In this subchapter, we begin with the month of the Referendum and present the political analysis of the communicated discourses. We observe how important questions raised by the Referendum were often projected within the limits of a neoliberal “common sense” frame, regularly linked to the statements coming from the Conservative camp, while the coverage of the Labour camp seems to focus more on the internal conflict between Corbyn and New Labour rather than on the party’s actual position on the debate. Finally, we also traced the inability to diagnose the depth of the current crisis, of which the contradictions within the Conservative party were part. Several elements indicate biased and superficial reporting (table 1).

Table 1. Labels, paradoxes, and predictions of the Conservatives’ camp

<p>7 March 2016 by Jessica Elgot</p> <p><u>Article headline:</u> <i>EU referendum: Guide to UK’s biggest political decision of the century.</i></p> <p><i>It is probably the most important decision the British public has faced in decades, but how is the EU referendum actually going to work? [...]</i></p> <p>Some of the article’s sub-titles:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -<i>Why are we having a referendum?</i> -<i>Who is your typical “remainiac”?</i> -<i>Who is your typical Brexiter? [...]</i>
<p>6 June 2016 by Henry McDonald</p> <p><u>Article headline:</u> <i>Osborne: Brexit would bring “economic shock” to Northern Ireland.</i></p> <p><i>[...] With polls showing consistently that Northern Ireland is the most pro-EU region of the UK, Osborne will appeal to voters to get registered and go to the ballot boxes on polling day.</i></p> <p><i>“If you follow the logic of the likes of Boris [Johnson] on the issue of immigration, I cannot see any other way they can fulfil their promise to control the numbers coming into the UK unless they set up border controls between the north and south on this island. That would be a catastrophe in terms of business and the movement of people every single day north and south on the island,” he said. Meanwhile, one of Northern Ireland’s largest public-sector unions, NIPSA, voted at the weekend in favour of Brexit.</i></p>
<p>19 June 2016 by Daniel Boffey</p>

Article headline: “*EU referendum: What comes if Britain votes in or out?*”

After a broad analysis through which Cameron’s options seem to be rather clear in case of a “No” scenario, characteristically the article concludes:

[...] *A vote to leave the EU might put pressure on Jeremy Corbyn, who some have criticised for what they see as half-hearted support for the Remain campaign. While it is unlikely that the Labour party’s membership would support a coup, one shadow cabinet minister said a vote in favour of Brexit could prove to be as damaging to Labour in England and Wales as the Scottish referendum was to the party north of the border. “It would mark the moment at which the Labour vote ignored the party,” the MP said. “It will be a breach from the party, and millions of voters, especially in the north, will go elsewhere, maybe to Ukip, maybe to a new-look Conservative party.”*

21 June by Dave Hill

Article headline: *Paradoxes of a London Brexiter.*

Sub-header: *In Britain’s multicultural, Labour-leaning, Europhile capital you meet all sorts of people with very diverse views.*

The first article indicates how narrow was the descriptive interpretation behind the causes for having such a referendum. It also demonstrates how different framing techniques were used, for example, creating a distinction between “brexiter” and “remainiac” or producing “quizzes” or “guides”. In doing so, a sense of simplicity (or “common sense”) for the debate was reinforced. Putting aside the fact that reporting on a certain region or topic is a journalistic/political choice on its own, the next two articles portray how *The Guardian* had a stronger concern about what might happen to London or Northern Ireland (following the Tory campaign discourse) in comparison to other regions. Additionally, both articles demonstrate how the media played the key role in supporting—if not reproducing—the Thatcherite depiction of the Conservatives as “the responsible” party that cares for business, and the Labour as “the economically-politically irresponsible” party and as an unstable force. To this end, another reinforcing technique can be traced: bold headlines and clear positions-statements with regards to the Conservative Party in contrast to short remarks about the Labour Party that often imply controversy, inconclusiveness and confusion on the side of the oppositional camp. Moreover, most reporting about the left’s strategy seems to focus on the internal divisions and issues that are outside the actual debate, while the Conservative camp is depicted as “homogenous. Even in cases where the

Tories are juxtaposed to UKIP, the discourse never discusses the causes or the significance of this contradiction, namely, as a class fraction within the Conservatives; instead most reports treat this division superficially, not going deeper than a “friends that fell off” depiction.

Another significant pattern in *The Guardian* is the focus on the technical-economic aspect of the Brexit scenario. It is evident that the reporting neglects the political issue behind the debate and the conjunctural crisis of the party representation. Furthermore, it is not asked what the driving force behind Brexit is, and who has responsibility for the referendum in the first place. Therefore, *The Guardian* can be seen as being rather London-centric because it avoids tracing the crisis genealogy and, instead, only frames the debate within the perspectives on important referendum-related institutions and figures.

The last article in Table 1 provides another example of how journalists tried to address/tackle the issues raised by UKIP through a rather London-centric narrative, which lacks critical analysis. Framing certain “paradoxical” examples of every-day people in the city, the aim is to demonstrate the dead-end argument of UKIP, without even enquiring about similar comparisons in other parts of the UK. Although London voted largely for Remain, it is obvious that other regions greatly differed. This article and its strategic argument can be seen as an example of how the mainstream discourse failed to effectively capture the conjunctural political problems of the UK socio-political system.

3.2.2. *Regional differences and technical argumentation*

Another critical issue that is also relevant to our analysis is the use of data and polls in the media, which are often cited in order to make predictions and create impressions. As recent experiences have shown (for example, the referendum and the 2017 general elections), it is plausible to assume that during a conjunctural crisis, certain prediction techniques may be inefficient. Through our perspective this is explained, firstly, because the conjunctural crisis signals a temporal “break” or discontinuity with past political processes. Secondly, during times of organic crisis the changing circumstances and new, emerging actors create an unstable political landscape that might be rather unique. The first article of Table 2 demonstrates how such methods and comparisons can be unfortunate or simply inadequate to capture the full picture. Arguing in favour of the economic ties of the EU and the City, a comparison of the recent polls (60% in favour of EU, 40% against) with the referendum held in 1975 (67 as opposed to 33%) is made, concluding that “today polls are slightly more Eurosceptic” and that “Remain” will most likely prevail. The question of “what about other regions, or different periods” is not addressed. The fact that such a frame is absent means

that not only regional differences are ignored, but also certain organic changes that have emerged since 1975 and how they might intersect are ignored and not discussed.

The author of the second article attempts to oppose the UKIP slogan “take back control” by defending the EU legislation as realistic. Unfortunately, she sticks to the technical aspects and the legislative analysis of a lawyer, linking most of the arguments to economic factors and consequences. The article’s discourse is paradigmatic as the technocratic argument of the Tories addressing socio-political volatility was endorsed uncritically by *The Guardian*. On a similar note, the story of the last article provides recent updates regarding the development of sterling, gives a rather optimistic view of the stock market experts and quotes senior analyst Laith Khalaf, who attempts to pass on the message of how Brexit would negatively affect sterling and the economy in general. In addition, a quote from George Soros about how Brexit would “trigger 20% fall in the value of the pound” and a quote from strategists of the French bank Société Générale are adduced to back up the article’s concluding message. All these experts are supposed to support the conclusion that Brexit should simply be dismissed and that anyone with “basic common sense” should vote Remain. What is important to note here is that these articles are not just the exception, but rather the rule when it comes to the rational argumentation observed in the media discourse at large over the month of the Referendum. It is simply true to state that the discourse was dominated by reports of how the economy would suffer in the case of Brexit, without really addressing in any political manner the deeper long-term economic problems that many regions in UK already face.

Table 2. Economic and technical argumentation

<p>20 June 2016 by Dave Hill</p> <p><u>Article headline:</u> <i>London and the EU: how Brexit could damage Remain City.</i></p> <p><u>Sub-header:</u> <i>The British capital is strongly in favour of staying in the European Union and strongly connected with it too.</i></p> <p>22 June by Elizabeth Prochaska</p> <p><u>Article Headline:</u> <i>A vote to leave is a vote to needlessly destroy our legal system.</i></p> <p>22 June by Larry Elliot and Jill Treanor</p> <p><u>Article Headline:</u> <i>British Financial sector sure of EU remain vote despite latest FTSE dip.</i></p>

3.2.3. *Brexit: deflected as irrational, but not diagnosed - working class not addressed*

One of the clearest patterns that emerged during this period was that the Brexit scenario is often projected to be economically harmful, and is often framed as simply irrational and foolish. This was not just a strategic error, but also a sign of a broader systemic inability to diagnose the conjunctural crisis at hand. As tables 1–3 show, issues that were raised from the oppositional political parties were not explained or analysed thoroughly. Instead, they are reduced and dismissed through economic argumentation that almost always drew its rationale from the discursive toolbox of “Cameronism”. Even in the last hours before the Referendum, many articles rather framed the Conservative camp by contrasting it with UKIP’s discourse, while the articles referring to Labour rather touch upon the ideological differences within the party itself (Table 3). The latter discourses aim at raising concerns about party leadership and its cohesiveness. Even the few articles that solely addressed the Left directly (for example, Willmott/Bickerton, 22 June), criticized Corbyn’s cabinet for missing out on the opportunity to radically politicize the Brexit referendum. In other words, the Labour party was depicted critically from both sides. The frames used either depicted the party as not radical enough or as not strong enough to support a “Cameronist” referendum. What is also interesting, and what results from the pattern mentioned above, is that the political positions of the Tories and of UKIP were mentioned more often and to a larger extent. For example, the last article quoted the Conservatives nine times, while the Left was mentioned only twice (and the Labour Party only once).

Last but not the least, a pattern that dominated the media discourse overall is “Project Fear”. The function of this strategy can be understood as something much more than just “distortion” or building up “dramatic tension” (especially from a class-analysis perspective). Both the UKIP and the Conservative’s campaign adopted the type of “common sense” that had no clear-cuts with the Thatcherite organic crisis. In other words, the discursive backbone of both “brexiters” and “remainiacs” did not offer any real policy answer-suggestions to UK’s working-middle class problems. That and the patterns traced previously support the conclusion that *The Guardian*’s reporting did not address the working class in any manner since it mostly stayed within the narrative of a Conservative–UKIP debate.

Table 3. Brexit framed as irrational

<p>22 June by Rowena Mason and Anushka Asthana <u>Headline:</u> <i>Cameron: Gove has lost it in comparing pro-EU economists to Nazis</i></p>
<p>22 June by Nigel Willmott <u>Headline:</u> <i>Remain and reform is wishful thinking – the left should vote leave</i></p>
<p>22 June by Zoe Williams <u>Article Headline:</u> <i>The return of Project Fear: How hope got sidelined in EU vote.</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">[...] <i>When it comes to voting day, what is the more potent weapon: hope or fear? Judging by rival campaigns in Britain’s imminent EU referendum, there can only be one answer. Both sides routinely accuse the other of adopting “Project Fear” tactics. But according to Marcus Roberts, the leave camp has not completely given in to the fear tactic. “They still do both. [The leave strapline] Take Back Control is a genius slogan because it simultaneously plays to your hopes and your fears.”</i></p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">[...] <i>The key question is for the remain side: how has it failed so consummately to attach any optimism to its message, anything good at all to be said for Europe, beyond “it’s not perfect, but still better than chaos”?</i></p>
<p>22 June by Chris Bickerton <u>Headline:</u> <i>Brexit is not the property of the political right. The left is disenchanted</i></p>
<p>22 June by Rupert Jones <u>Article headline:</u> <i>Surge in travelers buying holiday money before EU vote. Holidaymakers nervous about what may happen to the pound after Thursday’s EU referendum are rushing to stock up on foreign currency, with the Post Office reporting a 380% surge in online orders. [...] In February, investment bank Goldman Sachs claimed the value of sterling could fall by up to 20%.</i></p> <p>22 June by Julian Borger <u>Headline:</u> <i>Exclusive: NATO chief says UK staying in the EU is key to fighting terrorism.</i></p>

3.2.4. Thatcherism in the Conservative camp

As a matter of fact, on the very day of the Referendum, one of the columns in *The Guardian* depicted Margaret Thatcher’s 1975 pro-Europe Referendum jacket, which consisted of the flags of the EU members who signed that agreement (Table 4). Ironically,

the next article suggests that this picture is “historical rather than political”, adding the appropriate comment.

Table 4. Thatcherism

<p>22 June by Morwenna Ferrier</p> <p><u>Headline:</u> <i>Thatchers pro-Europe jumper – perfect referendum day fashion.</i></p>
<p><i>“The picture of Thatcher in the sweater is one of the few images of her without her signature power suit” – “we like the contradiction it throws up” [...] It might be tricky for some people to wear the jumper of the British left’s bête noir. But while Thatcher wasn’t exactly pro-Europe – after winning office in 1979, she pushed back against Brussels, and her 1990 tirade against EC president Jacques Delors helped lead to her downfall – she did sign the Single European Act in 1986, which helped create the single market.</i></p>

This seemingly unpolitical “fashion” article could be seen as touching upon the current conjunctural crisis more than all the previous articles combined. A further comment is the fact that a major Left-leaning newspaper has reached the point where it brings up Thatcher’s fashion choices to the fore in order to create certain positive impressions in favour of “remain”. Does this reflect a shift in the interpretations of Thatcherism or does it also indicate certain side-effects reflecting authoritarian statism and its impact on administrative actors? We may understand the newspapers as agencies in an authoritarian statist political field and assume that they develop strong ties to the mainstream political representatives. Because newspapers have long-term experience of reporting on the majority political group, they become discursively and, therefore, politically biased towards the mainstream ideological framework. Overall, *The Guardian’s* depiction of the main political parties can be summarized in the Table 5.

Table 5. Overview of The Guardian’s discourse

Party	Political Discourse	Frequency/Focus	Ideological
Conservative	Economic common sense, fear of the unknown. Often influenced the discourse.	Often in the headlines and main segment of articles; many “neutral” articles can be seen as reinforcing the	“Not always right”, but under the given economic and political situation projected as the “lesser evil” and the “most responsible” force in terms

		Conservative position.	of running the economy. TINA principle.
UKIP	“Take back control” as irrational, emotional slogan, which is contrasted with Conservative agenda. “Silent confused majority”. Often influenced the discourse.	Scattered articles and segments not depicting the conjuncture behind UKIP’s agenda – superficially reported as a paradox with “economic” denominators.	Populist, counter-productive and reactionary vis-à-vis the complexities of globalization. Nationalist but usually normalized. Portrayed as a fraction of the Conservative Party.
Labour	Economic common sense with social characteristics, no clear agenda, rarely influencing the discourse, different priorities and objectives.	Least depicted in the headlines/main segments of articles, many “controversial” articles. Usually referred to in the side-lines, depicted as irrelevant.	Ideologically divided. Supporting Remain but within an ideological framework which was sidelined and drowned out by internal party struggle.

The Mirror

The Mirror literally urged readers to vote for Remain for the sake of the future and our great nation (Smith, 2016). In contrast to *The Guardian*, *The Mirror* appears to have operationalized the Remain campaign’s economically grounded argument in a more systematic manner. Experts from all fields or types of columns had their say on the vote, with a clear majority supporting the Remain side. In addition, *The Mirror* often remarked on pop-idols and celebrities, highlighting their political position on the Referendum (Table 6).

Table 6. The discursive timeline of *The Mirror*'s discourse

Headline	Date	Discourse / Argumentation
ISIS Backs Brexit, David Cameron claims (Blanchard, 2016)-	17 May	Security/Fear
EU referendum campaign recap: David Cameron claims Brexit will “put a bomb in our economy” (Bloom and Smith, 2016).	6 June	Economic / Fear
Hitachi boss says Brexit would “force rethink” of UK operations and jobs (Nakanishi, 2016).	6 June	Economic / Employment
Brexit will make ICE CREAM more expensive warns Unilever boss (Bloom, 2016).	7 June	Economic / Consumer goods
Will Brexit send the pound crashing? How the EU referendum affects the value of sterling (Rampen, 2016).	7 June	Economic / Currency value
Would a Brexit trigger another house price crash? The winners and losers revealed (Rampen, 2016).	7 June	Economic / House prices
“Tribal” politicians have misled public over the EU referendum, says Martin Lewis (Selby, 2016).	11 June	Political dismissed as pure populism / Common sense economics claim of “truth”
EU referendum campaign recap: David Cameron warns of “risks” of Brexit (Smith, 2016).	12 June	Economic / Trade / Business
EU referendum campaign recap: The poor will suffer the longest from Brexit, says George Osborne (Bloom and Smith, 2016).	13 June	Economic / lower classes
EU referendum recap: George Osborne threatens NHS cuts and tax hikes after Brexit (Bloom and Smith, 2016).	14 June	Economic denominator of the NHS

Will Brexit make mortgages more expensive? How quitting the EU could affect interest rates (Rampen, 2016).	14 June	Economic / Mortgages
Will Brexit shrink my pension? How quitting the EU could affect your chances of a happy retirement (Rampen, 2016).	14 June	Economic / Pensions
Brexit vote will “force car sales decline over next few years as UK heads for recession” (Lancefield, 2016)	15 June	Economic / Consumer goods
Vladimir Putin suggests David Cameron called Brexit referendum “to blackmail or scare Europe”. <u>Sub-title</u> : Putin waded into the EU referendum debate for the first time tonight – and couldn’t understand why the PM had given the British public the vote in the first place (Jones, 2016)	17 June	Political / International Relations
Separating Brexit facts from fiction in the EU referendum campaign (Mudie, 2016).	18 June	Technocratic / Economic / Legal
Richard Branson warns Brexit would be “devastating” for prosperity of the UK (Hardy, 2016).	20 June	Economic / Business
EU Referendum: Our experts give their opinions on what’s best for Britain (Beattie et al. 2016).	21 June	Economic / Political / Social
Brexit “would cost Brits £580 a year as price of food, drink, petrol and clothing rocket” (Beattie, 2016).	21 June	Economic / Basic Goods
City traders “braced for mayhem if Brits vote for Brexit in EU referendum” (?).	23 June	Economic / Stock Market

The articles which are chronologically referenced in Table 6 were the most popular (the ones with the most views, most widely read) in the “UK referendum” category of *The Mirror*’s online website. In general, what becomes clear from the table is that most of the patterns that were traced in *The Guardian* are also present in *The Mirror*. In contrast with *The Guardian* though, *The Mirror* at first published fewer “political analysis articles”, and focused much more on short, mainstream “fireworks”. As it can be seen from this table, there is a repeated pattern of “making a good-selling headline” instead of providing coverage of political messages in the first weeks of June. Later, this approach did not completely change, but instead the discourses drew closer to the advocacy of the Remain camp. This chronological-depiction also offers a view on how often/intense the economic/Cameronite discourse was present on the website of *The Mirror*. Across different categories, subjects and editors, the narrow economic “common sense” denominator persists. The fact that this is so dominant in the case of *The Mirror* is not completely unrelated with UK’s conjunctural crisis itself. Perhaps, this poor journalistic approach to UK’s most crucial political debate of the past decades can be viewed as the result of what happens when website visitor clicks is what matter the most, while there “is [still] no such thing as a society” (Thatcher, 1987) outside the economic sphere.

3.3. Conclusion

The analysis of the news contents and the headlines of *The Guardian* and *The Mirror* allow us to identify the strategy of appealing to the technical, economic “common sense” of the electorate. However, as Hall and O’Shea note, in reality, the common sense is nothing more than contradicting narratives “stitched together”, which partially have a rather conservative inclination (2013: 9). The other part of this contradiction consists of what Gramsci framed as the “healthy” core which “also contains critical or utopian elements” (Gramsci in Hall and O’Shea, 2013: 10). Consequently, the strong focus on the economic aspects of the debate and the systematic framing of the “brexiters” and “remainers” by expert led to the failure of the media to address this utopian element. The voters might have opted for Brexit despite the fact that they would otherwise identify with the Labour or the Conservative Party. Correspondingly, the political parties in favour of Remain were not represented strongly.

On a deeper level, the reason why this “economic common sense” appeal failed to work is because the current crisis is a conjuncture of political, social, and ideological crises. In particular, a great role is played by the transformation of neoliberalism into “authoritarian-neoliberalism” (Bruff, 2014). There are two important points to be made here. First, part of

the electorate is ever more disenchanted or alienated by the neo-liberal discourse. Second, the shift in the media discourse and the discourse of think tanks can be seen as an organic shift, resulting from the emergence of authoritarian neoliberalism (Bruff, 2017; Hall and O'Shea, 2013: 12).

Although journals and institutions in a democracy should be able to act independently of the dominant ideology or political parties, as Nicos Poulantzas explained in "the Decline of Democracy", a certain "rise of the administrative" class takes place at the current stage of neoliberalism (Poulantzas, 1978: 229), producing authoritarian statism in the sense of increased state control over society. An organic connection develops between the administrative and the political spheres. Any progressive or critical political analysis is on the long run sidelined by the dominant "there is no alternative" economic logic that seemed to be the common denominator and limit of the UK referendum debate. The media seems to have fallen into the trap of "chopping down" what might be the most complex moment in British history into simple and digestible bullet points that in the end can only explain partially the current organic crisis. In other words, the reason why the Remain parties and media failed may be that they represented only part of an organic consensus that reached its limits and could no longer create a hegemonic political agenda. Elements of a more controversial and conjunctural crisis were present in the discourse, but only superficially.

4. Conjunctural dynamics and UKIP's hegemonic strategies

4.1. Introduction

UKIP's struggle for influencing the common sense of Brexit takes place on the pages of *the Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph*. Usually representing conservative and centrist values (BBC, 2009), these newspapers contain pro-leave discourses in the Brexit campaign. On their pages, UKIP emerges as a powerful transformative force capable of shaking the "historic bloc" of UK politics (Hall and Massey, 2010: 61). UKIP's articulations are present in the media in such a manner that they reach the voters, win their consent, and mobilize supportive action. Assuming that *the Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph* positively frame the hegemonic project of UKIP, we exclude from this chapter's analysis the "formative efforts" of the establishment for a passive revolution (Fatton, 1986: 732). Instead, we analyse how UKIP presents competitive articulations to construct its own hegemony. Therefore, the angle of this chapter's media analysis is how "new meanings and new developments" evolve to respond to certain conjunctural contradictions and to become the "basis for a radical change" (Hall and O'Shea, 2013: 9–10).

Conjunctural contradictions are organic contradictions coming together at the moment of Brexit. This approach is based on Gramsci's understanding of rupture in which "short-term relations came to express long-term determinations". In other words, this is a meeting point of conjunctural and organic crises (Martin, 1997: 50). More precisely, the organic crisis is a "break-down of long-term relations" and a "moment of incomplete transition"; whereas conjunctural crisis is "economic and other crises" (political and ideological) (ibid.). Jessop's understanding of conjuncture is an "overdetermined condensation of generic crisis elements plus specific crisis tendencies and contingent events [...] with [their] own distinctive rhythms" (Jessop, 2012: 16). Drawing from these definitions, we relate UKIP's articulations with the long-term neoliberal tendencies/determinations in the Brexit conjuncture, in line with the theoretical discussion of the first chapter of this paper. More specifically, we attempt to answer in this chapter what prior developments enable the opportunity for the UKIP to intervene (become a discontinuity) and what strategies, tactics, and re-articulations are employed by the UKIP to manifest a popular bourgeois offensive.

4.2. Referendum: Cameron's pressure tool within neoliberal dynamics

The processes in the EU precondition Brexit as a possibility of rupture. They are external processes and the starting point for voicing the internal problems of the UK. UKIP is also a rupture, in a way. It expresses and embraces the breakdown of long-term monetary and ideological continuities in the UK and the EU. The Eurozone crisis laid bare power balance problems between Euro-and non-Euro countries; and the migration crisis made political disagreements even more visible. "The crises over Greece and migration, in particular, have produced a high degree of acrimony and a lack of trust among EU member states" (CRS, 2017: 6). Responding to these dynamics within the EU, Prime Minister and Conservatives leader David Cameron started negotiations with the EU on business, legislation, political participation, and migration. The Referendum was intended to serve as a pressure tool for David Cameron in these negotiations. Table 7 presents the comparison of Cameron's demands for a new UK's role in the EU (Ham, 2016: 1) and UKIP's main positions (UKIP, 2017). This comparison shows that Cameron's and UKIP's positions have commonalities.

Table 7. Cameron's demands for a reformulated role of the UK in the EU and UKIP's main positions

Cameron's demands	UKIP's main positions
Allow Britain to opt out from the EU's founding ambition to forge an "ever closer union" so it will not be drawn into further political integration	Leave the Single Market
Restrict the access of EU migrants to social benefits	Control borders
Offer greater powers to national parliaments to block EU legislations	Create own laws
Ensure that the Eurozone does not become the core of the EU and that non-Euro EU member states will not be disadvantaged within the EU	

The frame referring to the political crisis of the EU contains the following themes, whose meanings are being reshaped in favour of UKIP: union/leave/single market, migrants/border, and legislation/law. The meanings of these concepts became blurred during the Referendum campaign, and these themes start to denote new values and morals due to UKIP's offensive. So, UKIP emerges as a transformative force at the moment of deepening the split between the UK and the EU's political establishment.

4.3. UKIP's re-politicization of structural concepts

The re-politicization of concepts that denote common good takes place in *the Daily Mail* and *The Daily Telegraph*, and embraces the build-up of pre-conditions for UKIP's hegemonic intervention. The comparison of UKIP's main positions and the newsframes in the pre-Brexit month shows the rise of Labour topics. This means that consensus-bearing concepts become re-framed in a way to discuss the neoliberal conjunctural issues of the UK. These concepts become re-politicized to appeal to conjunctural Labour problems which comprise part of UKIP's agenda. This process motivates a rupture and enables a possibility for the UKIP to exercise a hegemonic offensive.

Table 8. Re-politicization of consensus-bearing concepts

Main positions	<i>Daily Mail's and Daily Telegraph's narratives</i>	
Leave the Single Market	250 business chiefs back Brexit because red tape is destroying jobs (Peev, 2016)	Membership has proved to be extremely expensive and increasingly detrimental to job creation (Sunday Telegraph, 2016)
	Trade deficit with Germany (Sunday Telegraph, 2016)	EMU – “Lost Decade” (Evans-Pritchard, 2016)
Control our borders	Mass immigration will deprive young people of housing (Slack, 2016)	Sex attacks could happen if stay (Hughes, 2016c)
	Immigrants - “strain on public services, on housing , on the National Health Service , and of course on school places ” (Hughes, 2016c)	“Immigrants are bumped up the [housing] list ... am I right to want to leave?” (Boult and Molloy, 2016) Make Britain safer . Easier to deport terrorists and control borders (Daily Mail Reporter, 2016)
	Security: diplomatic influence in the Balkans, the Ukraine (Putin has a reason to intervene) (Sunday Telegraph, 2016)	Labour Party is split. “A number of us feel his inability to address voter concerns about immigration could push them into the arms of UKIP after June's vote.” (Hughes, 2016b)
Create our own laws	The EU court is picking apart our laws (Howard and Aikens, 2016)	Sovereignty of the British Parliament is key to voting for Leave (Dominiczak, 2016)
	Power is shadowy interplay of <i>elites in Berlin, Frankfurt, Brussels, and Paris</i> . No political union (Evans-Pritchard, 2016)	“The Project bleeds the lifeblood of the national institutions , but fails to replace them with anything lovable or legitimate at a European level. It draws away charisma, and destroys it. This is

	<p>“The time for Britain to ‘take control’ of its own destiny” (Slack and Martin, 2016)</p>	<p>how democracies die” (Evans-Pritchard, 2016)</p>
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There is the change of meanings of consensus-bearing concepts “union/leave/single market, migrants/border, legislation/law”. During the campaign, these concepts start to be associated with Labour-related themes, such as “jobs, housing, health, and national institutions”. Other core themes of the UKIP are crime and discipline in school (YouGov, 2016). These issues indicate the ongoing moral crisis in the UK when the English ideology becomes shaken by the displacement of the meanings of traditional morals, such as anti-crime, fairness and health. In this moral panic, the UKIP strategically re-politicizes D. Cameron’s political project that serves the neoliberal agenda. In particular, the UKIP employs the imaginaries that usually serve political and social goals of the Left. But since the Left is weak, performing the neoliberal interests of New Labour, the UKIP found its niche where the Left was meant to be strong, to exercise the hegemonic offensive of its own.

The fact that UKIP was capable of this re-politicization speaks in favour of Hall and Massey’s (2010: 57–64) argument that New Labour has been disconnected from its roots, undermining the agency for change and showing that it does not know how to narrate the problem. This agency realized itself once UKIP framed the problem of market forces as causing unemployment; global flows causing the destruction of welfare and state non-intervention—depriving the state of its ability to regulate markets. From this angle, the Referendum became the focal point for organic agency that strategically voiced post-Thatcherite problems as new imaginaries.

4.4. Hegemonic offensive of UKIP

Populist articulations of the UKIP identify the crisis of political legitimacy in the UK. Unlike New Labour, UKIP was able to mobilize classes by drawing boundaries between communities. Antagonisms appeared between the financial (interest-bearing) capital and industrial (productive) capital, as well as between “ordinary” people and metropolitan elites, Cameron (the Conservatives’ agenda), Brussels (global fraction), the Labour Party. The re-framing of existing identities, social forces, and social authority took place in the news spaces, linked to UKIP. As Table 9 shows, UKIP is mentioned in the context of social antagonisms and Labour themes.

Table 9. Re-framing of existing identities towards Labour themes and populist antagonisms

Labour themes	UKIP populist antagonisms
<p>Vulnerable to sterling crisis (inflow of foreign capital) (Evans-Pritchard, 2016)</p> <p>Youth unemployment (ibid.)</p> <p>Membership has proved to be extremely expensive and increasingly detrimental to job creation (Bury, 2016)</p>	<p>People are abandoned by metropolitan elites. Working class people lost trust (Hardman, 2016)</p>
<p>Labour Party is split. "A number of us feel his inability to address voter's concerns about immigration could push them into the arms of UKIP after June's vote" (Hughes, 2016b)</p>	<p>Labour Party is not trustworthy, it is pro-immigration and pro-Brussels, and it ignores voters' concerns (Ross et al., 2016; Pendlebury, 2016)</p>
	<p>Labour leader's flaws – indecision (Ross and Riley-Smith, 2016)</p>
<p>Immigration: Cameron promises to reduce the levels. Reforms are not enough (Slack and Martin, 2016)</p> <p>Out is out (ibid.)</p>	<p>Mr. Cameron may be forced out of Downing Street (Johnson, 2016)</p> <p>Against the establishment, Cameron's integrity and patriotism (Hope, 2016)</p>
	<p>Remainers shouldn't be known as Project Fear [but as] Project Sneer (O'Neill, 2016)</p>

The antagonism “working-class people vs. metropolitan elites” is brought to life through the coverage of Labour problems such as job creation, unemployment, and foreignness. Behind this strategy, there is a simple populist strategic move: the formation of the people “as a block of correlated demands posed against a constituted order through affected investments in a shared empty signifier, appeal to ‘the people’ against both the established structure of power, and the dominant ideas and values of the society” (Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014: 122). In other words, the working people were portrayed as being deprived of jobs, and the metropolitan elites as affiliated with foreign capital.

The articulation of these antagonisms denotes the organic crisis of neoliberalism in the UK, in which the old is dying, and the new is not yet born. The antagonisms refer to the external threat, some unproductive force that is parasitic for the UK people. This split resembles the two nations' project of Jessop (2016), in which people on benefits and old neoliberal elites have a parasitic role. The articulation of this split became associated with UKIP which is perhaps one of the reasons why the party won the populist consent of voters. The Conservative party, being divided between the partisans and the sceptics of the EU integration, was perhaps organically precluded from a clear stance on integration and referendum. "The relationship with Europe [came] close to destroying the Conservative Party (Oliver, 2015: 77)". Thus, in view of organic dynamics, the question of the referendum could be put as follows, is Europe an external threat within neoliberal "two nations project" (Jessop, 2016)?

The success of UKIP has been possible perhaps because of its populist strategies. In "process of antagonism and identification", "the people" move from being an excluded element to the recognized terrain of the political (Laclau, 2005). While UKIP appealed to social antagonisms, the party also raised the problems which would traditionally be represented by the Labour Party. Since New Labour, the Labour Party had a limited capacity to stand for the values and morals of the working class, including the left behinds. The problem of representation became clear when UKIP succeeded in reaching "the unrepresented people" by bringing to light the concerns about immigration and house prices. All in all, UKIP became the rupture on the crossroads of the crisis of "the two nations project" and Labour representation.

4.5. UKIP's re-politicization of the Conservatives' attempts of passive revolution

The Daily Telegraph and *the Daily Mail* contain populist discourses that represent specific agency in antagonistic relationships. The economic-related discourses target big businesses, financiers, and bankers, as well as SMEs and energy companies (Table 10). This strategy is visible in the UKIP-related frame, which leads to strategic boundary drawing in favour of UKIP. A new public group develops on the pages of the newspapers. This group can be distinguished by not representing business and finance and by caring about housing and jobs.

Table 10. UKIP's strategic construction of alternatives

UKIP-related alternative articulations in newspapers	Agency
Soros: Pound and stock market drop (Sculthorpe, 2016) EU bankers warn – will try to crash City if votes for Brexit	Finance and bankers
Industries need protection Big Six energy giant warns about risks Energy is under risk (debated) (Hughes, 2016c) Enlightening era of prosperous global trade (Tapsfield and Dathan, 2016)	Big business
SMEs hurt with Brexit (Sculthorpe and Doyle, 2016) Paperwork and customs control are bad for business	Other business

Another news technique is portraying the alternative as a given split with negative connotations. The following narratives are exemplary: “split between rich and poor, North and South; age and family; Friends divided: business and travel vs. wider world and sovereignty”, “young people will suffer”, and “Cameron threats of Public fund hole and impacts on pensioners”. These antagonisms point at a divide between the parties and the voters. Presumably, shaping the society in antagonisms helped UKIP to convince the voters that passive revolution, Cameron's change, is not a solution to the problems that the UK is facing. The UKIP-related discourses show that the society is polarized, which causes the rise of a party able to voice these contradictions and call for a commitment to change, which is Brexit.

4.6. UKIP as a case of organic intellectualism?

The final topic of discussion is whether UKIP suggested the agenda for organic intellectualism during the campaign. According to Gramsci, the role of organic intellectuals is to “give his class homogeneity and awareness of its own function, in the economic field and on the social and political levels” (Valeriano, 1982). Clearly, the populist antagonisms of UKIP do not represent a stable homogeneous socio-economic programme for classes that could become hegemonic in the long run. Especially with the leave of the party leader, UKIP became a party without a head, less active, and significant in the post-referendum time.

On the other hand, the party became the trigger of the rupture of conjunctural contradictions. More to say, the party is itself the representation of the contradictions, that is, the common sense of change. After Brexit, in the general election 2017, UKIP positioned itself as a “guard dog of Brexit”, the Conservatives campaigned with a “12 point plan” for Brexit, and the Labour aimed for a “close new relationship with the EU” with workers' rights protected (BBC). As facts show, UKIP continued to be devoted to populism without attempting to propose a new hegemonic programme of socio-economic development. Yet, the other parties, especially Labour, changed their programmes. So, one inference on the role of UKIP is to introduce the common sense of change and urgency that could potentially foster organic intellectualism in the other parties.

So, accepted that UKIP is the common sense of change, under what conditions could other political actors become organic intellectuals? According to Hall and Massey (2010: 58), the economic nucleus of Thatcher neoliberal state is the private buying the public, whereas the state is concentrated on the technical management of the consequences. In this setting, the working-class benefits from privatization, and the Labour Party is able to settle New Labour. What is the economic nucleus of the UKIP time? The answer to this question is where the souse of organic intellectualism of the current conjuncture lies.

There could be several scenarios for organic intellectualism. One scenario is the change of discourses and agenda of the Labour Party. There is a step in this direction. In the parliament elections 2017, the Labour Party won seats from the Conservative party with the new discourses about anti-austerity and nationalism. From ideological perspective, this move speaks for the public interest and public ownership that remained largely unspoken in New Labour. However, the current argument of the party seems to be weak compared to the scope of the public damage caused by the financial crisis and free market paradigm that allowed it. A more significant problem is the economic nucleus and the probability of new economic model, including the financial sector reform that should go along with the ideological shifts in the agenda of the Labour party.

The second scenario is the change in the composition and the agenda of the Conservative party. The party represents the interests of the private sector and has diverse interests, split into two major groups. Since production and investment are concentrated around the interests behind the agenda of the Conservative party, this group has a greater chance to suggest the economic nucleus of the post-Brexit time. Whether the sources for economic and financial growth will lie in the closer ties of the UK with the US, or with the EU, or in the reindustrialization of the UK, is difficult to predict. Two problems are distinguished: the first one is new political coalitions within the Conservative party, and the second is the

agreement of the party members on the scope of Labour problems. The outcome of these changes will show if the Conservative party is capable of *trasformismo* despite the backdrop of Cameronist discontinuities.

Finally, the third scenario is the rise of a new social movement that would clearly state the conjunctural problems and have the necessary coalitions among the economic and financial elites to raise the issues on a party level. Potentially, such a movement could bring on board both those economic and financial forces who could form the new economic nucleus of the post-Brexit time, and the organic intellectuals of the Labour Party who are able of envisioning and setting up the deal for the public sector and the labour. Even if a new Party is not set up, such a movement could intervene in the current correlation of forces to stabilize the consensus between the main UK parties and between the classes. In this way, UKIP could indirectly trigger the action that would bring about social transformation.

4.7. Conclusion

In conclusion, the media analysis of the Brexit campaign shows that the pro-Brexit discourse has been associated with UKIP along the strategies of i) thematic dominance of the concepts union/leave/single market, migrants/border, and legislation/law, ii) thematic linking of these concepts with the Labour-related frames “jobs, housing, health, national institutions”, and iii) a populist offensive against Brussels, financials, Cameron, the Conservatives, and the Labour Party. The long-term conjunctural dynamics of Thatcherism pre-conditioned Cameron's Euroscepticism that in turn enabled UKIP's offensive. Whereas UKIP is not organic intellectualism, the party has become itself the common sense of change, which set the setting for organic intellectualism. The main constrains for social transformation among political groups are the search for a new economic nucleus, the articulation of Labour problems, and the political unity of the Conservative Party. If Labour and the Conservative parties are incapable of *trasformismo*, there could be a movement whose role would be to modify the correlation of forces and enable social transformation.

5. Final conclusions

The Brexit campaign and the referendum have become the rupture of the organic crisis tendencies in the UK. This focal moment is a complex conjuncture of social, political, and economic dynamics that can be traced back to the Thatcher era. The conjunctural map of Brexit illustrates the contradictions that have accumulated during the last decades. These are the exhaustion of Thatcherism, the crisis of representation during the New Labour Deal, the economic crisis during Cameronism, and the crisis of trasformismo (crisis management) in the Brexit campaign. These all lead to the rise of the UKIP as a path dependent outcome of these conjunctural contradictions.

Cameron won the 2015 national elections trying to address the right-wing populist voters, but he did not make an accurate diagnosis of the situation. This was most apparent in the manner that the Remain campaign was covered in *The Guardian* and *The Mirror*. It proved to be insufficient to construct another Thatcherite “common sense” narrative and Polanyi “economic fear”. The Conservative and the Labour parties, by not wanting to break from the neoliberal narrative, not willing to address root socio-economic problems and not understanding that the rise of populism comes as a result of a problem of which they are part of, seem to become unable to construct a hegemonic project that would appeal to all the regions and classes. By sticking to the economic side-effects of a Brexit, the Remain camp lost the opportunity to address populist discourses and conjunctural crisis tendencies. This gave the UKIP a significant opening.

UKIP rose as a political force by embracing the conjunctural crisis of the UK. In Referendum campaign, it succeeded in appealing to the underlying schemes in the public consciousness that stand for organic fear, disillusion, and hope. The newspaper content is dominated by core themes of the Referendum linked to traditional labour problems, including “jobs, housing, health, and national institutions”. Highlighting these, UKIP was able to hijack Cameron’s Eurosceptic offensive and target the organic problems of Thatcherism and the New Labour hegemonic projects. Another technique reflected in the news is the economic populism with which UKIP draws the boundary between “the people” on one side and the themes of Brussels, finance, Cameron, the Conservatives, and the Labour Party, on the other side. Whether UKIP’s diagnosis of the UK’s organic problems will lead the consolidation of a new economic-political hegemonic project remains to be seen. After the referendum, the Party vanished as a strong political actor and failed to move from populism to a serious hegemonic programme. However, one of the outcome of

UKIP's intervention and Brexit is the change of the Labour Party programme in the general elections 2017. UKIP has set "the mood" for organic intellectualism.

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