



Origins of Brexit: History at the service of media representation

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Introduction

On the 24th of June 2016, the British made history by voting to leave the European Union (EU), thus causing a seismic shift. This shift already had a name, Brexit, which was added to the Oxford English Dictionary the same year. It first appeared in 2012, and four years later, it is front-page news in all media outlets. The very possibility of leaving the EU did not exist before the Treaty of Lisbon in 2007, and now it has become reality. The *Leave* vote victory requires from the media to explain what had no legal or lexical existence beforehand. Brexit realise this double movement. However, defining Brexit presents the same difficulties as defining Europe, which, as Jean Monnet said, “would be the sum of the solutions we bring to these crises” (Monnet, 1976: 488) (our translation). The crisis represented by Brexit highlights Europe as a “composite”. That is, a “mixture of objects, representations, and practices [that] serve as operators for representations of the world, but also for cultural postures and categories of judgment that a culture can recognise” (Jeanerret, 2008: 16) (our translation). The Brexit eventful nature stems from the rupture it causes in this composite, “through its capacity of disorder [it] distributes a before and an after. [...] [It] opens up this rift of meaning that forces to look back on what has happened” (Arquembourg, 2006) (our translation). The historical narrative that journalists use in the press to make sense of Brexit is the subject of the following analysis. The writing of the past is structured by a plot that organises events by dividing reality, as explained by Paul Veyne (2013). The historian traces a path through his narrative. In the same way, the journalist constructs a plot in the past to make sense of Brexit. However, the path traced by the journalist does not only respond to a historiographical requirement of research and information, but also to the establishment of power relations. Indeed,

In the process of attributing meaning or value to an event, journalists combine the interpretation of symbols linked to the information [...] with the connection of these symbols to historical memory – the similarity with other events, the repetition or rupture that the information presents in relation to this memory (Garcin-Marrou, 1996:56) (our translation).

The concept of device enriches the analysis of writing history in media at different levels. This particular constraints of the press result in specific ways of writing his-

tory, both in terms of informing and analysing the Brexit crisis. These two characteristics are embedded in the device concept: the first as the “macro-device” (Meunier, 1999), meaning the media itself, its socio-economics profile, its editing committee etc. The second level is the “technosemiotic micro-dispositives whose function is not to report, but to construct meaning from reality” (Meunier, 1999) (our translation), history writing belongs to this tier. In addition to these discursive functions, the concept of symbolic device is used to analyse representations of Europe as constructing a norm “at the crossroads of [institutional] actions, media industries, social movements and everyday media uses” (Damian-Gaillard, 2023) (our translation). Europe is thus considered as a “historically situated principle of power relations that organise statements, bodies and architectures” (Pailler, Vörös, 2017) (our translation). Therefore, “the device does not refer to media content or technical devices, but to the complex of relationships that, in a given situation, give them form and meaning” (Pailler, Vörös, 2017). These different meanings of the concept of device allow us to question the mobilisation of history in press discourse as a device for the symbolic reconfiguration of the United Kingdom (UK) and the EU following the Brexit crisis.

Two hypotheses structure the analysis. The first lies in the tension between history and myth and how the shift from one to the other reveals the role of journalists in the representation of Europe and the making of a European identity. The second hypothesis posits that the writing of history reveals the constituent elements of a “European semiosphere” (Bal, 2023) and, at the same time, the limits of a European public sphere due to its artefactual nature.

The relationship between history and myth in the context of crisis in the media representation of Europe has been the subject of several research works, particularly in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis. The device’s nature of writing history comes to the fore in thinking about Brexit as a crisis:

the discursive construction of histories [is considered] as creative and purposeful processes that ‘allow for the fabrication, rearrangement, elaboration and omission of details about the past, often pushing aside accuracy and authenticity so as to accommodate broader issues of identity formation, power and authority, and political affiliation’ (Zelizer, 1998: 3; see also Le, 2006: 28ff.). (Strath, Wodak, in (Triantaphyllidu, Wodak, Krzyżanowski, 2009: 23).

The very construction of Brexit as a crisis depends on a historical narrative as analysed by Michal Krzyżanowski:

the discursive conceptualisation of Brexit was not only geared towards constructing an imaginary crisis but also how it was effectively made real by recontextualising various social/political/economic crises thus allowing for the de facto description of Brexit as one of the most significant critical occurrences in post-War Europe (Krzyżanowski, 2019: 466).

The idea of writing history as a device is obvious in research on re-narrating and disinformation strategies (Maccaferri, 2019; Henkel, 2019) in pro-Brexit discourse. The present analysis enlarges the corpus including reference press articles in France, the UK and Germany supporting, at different levels of involvement, the European Union

against Brexit. Considering these three countries allows us to consider the European semio-sphere through an approach of a European media sphere. From this perspective, the analysis is not comparative between different national frameworks but rather seeks to identify the elements circulating within the different titles. This approach enabled to identify the relevance of classifying journalistic positions on the European project beyond the national framework in a thesis from which the corpus and elements of analysis are derived. The mobilisation of history in media discourse is relevant in order to move away from a vision that differentiates and compares according to national criteria and instead identifies the circulation of discourse and the imaginaries that it constitutes.

The first point concerns the criteria for constructing the corpus and the quantitative and qualitative methods used to address the challenges of identifying circulation. The second point presents the different ways in which history is mobilised in media discourse, particularly from two perspectives: the Brexit origins narrative and the shift between history and myth. The third point discusses the use of history as a device in two opposing but coexisting axes of symbolic reconfiguration of the EU and the UK. The first is the construction of the threat to Europe and the call to action, and the second is the British determinism in Brexit, allowing for minimal questioning of the European project.

1. Method

1.1 Constitution of the corpus

As mentioned, the corpus analysed in this article comes from a doctoral thesis work questioning European imaginaries in the context of Brexit. Media representations are considered from a perspective of circulation rather than comparison. Indeed, the objective is to identify the conditions for configuring a European space in media discourse. The three countries concerned by the analysis are France and Germany as the core of Europe, that is to say economic and symbolic engine of European integration and the UK, carrying out Brexit and whose status within the Union has been the subject of several controversies.

To broaden the perspective between conservative and progressive, the chosen media is the press. Considered as an information device, the press has a clear and claimed opinion display through its editorial line, therefore three titles per country were selected with two criteria. The first one is the economic press and the reference press as prime definers on the construction of Europe, meaning their targeted audience is the European elite. For the UK, the *Guardian* and the *Financial Times* were selected, for France *Le Monde*, *Les Échos*, *Le Figaro* and for Germany the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. For the UK and Germany, a second one was introduced. The tabloid press was added to the corpus based on the audience reach. Indeed, the *Bild* like the *Daily Mail*, the two selected titles, are published in millions of copies. Furthermore, the *Daily Mail* is the only title in the corpus to support Brexit when all others are opposed to it.

One of the advantages of a press corpus concerns its collection, facilitated in the case of the French press and two English press titles (*Financial Times* and *Guardian*) by the *Europresse* and *Factiva* databases. The corpus is made of articles in their text format, which allows automated processing. The collection of the corpus spans the first three years of Brexit, from 1st January 2016 to 31st December 2018. This reflects the event-driven nature of Brexit mentioned in the introduction but goes beyond the moment of the election to take place in time, throughout the negotiation.

	2016	2017	2018
Le Monde	97	110	71
Le Figaro	139	117	101
Les Échos	136	131	85
Süddeutsche Zeitung	23	28	19
Bild	101	88	16
FAZ	186	170	81
Daily Mail	17	15	12
Financial Times	322	314	216
The Guardian	47	70	105

Distribution of the corpus with the keywords Brexit, crisis/ Crise/crisis, popul*

9550 articles in total compose the definitive corpus based on a combination of keywords adapted in the three languages: a first base *Brexit, crise/crisis/Krise* followed by *nation**, *popul** and *frontière/ Grenze/border*. In the context of this article, the analysis is based on the *Brexit, crisis, popul** corpus, dealing with questions of populism with a total of 2817 articles.

The description of the corpus addresses the challenges for European research on media analysis. As shown in the table, the reference press includes on average around a hundred articles per year with the notable exception of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and the *Financial Times*. For the German title, the collection of the corpus could not be systematized by a

database and therefore depended on the search engine of the newspaper's website, limiting access to the articles. For the *Financial Times*, database access to archives does not differentiate between editions of countries other than the UK and therefore includes all English-language variants of the newspaper.

However, certain particularities allow us to establish hypotheses. Indeed, the *Daily Mail* stands out with a low number of articles which decreases over the years of the corpus. This effect can be explained by the pro-Brexit stance of the editorial line and the pejorative connotation of the term "populism" which therefore appears very little in the newspaper. The *Guardian*, for its part, is the only one to have an increasing number of articles. This is explained by some initial caution towards the term "populism" by journalists around its definition and then an operativeness of the term to describe the political situation.

The size of the corpus determines a two-stage analysis, quantitative then qualitative, explained in the next point.

1.2 Quantitative and qualitative analysis

The quantitative analysis is lexicometric and carried out using the IramuTeQ software¹ developed by Pierre Ratinaud based on the work of Max Reinert. Computer processing of the analysis makes it possible to “highlight an organizational dimension of the text which “memorizes” its production conditions” (Reinert, 1993) (our translation). To do this, the text is considered as a series of statements composed of words, these words are then classified according to “context units according to the differentiated distribution of the vocabulary” (Reinert, 1993). Following the lexicometric analysis, the software produces dendrograms to provide an overview of the content of the articles grouped by press title and by year. Indeed, lexicometry allows “a description of what [the corpus] contains, of the importance of the parts which compose it and of its structure, that is to say of the organization of oppositions and connections between these themes” (Ratinaud, Marchand, 2015: 57) (our translation). The corpus is divided into years and by press titles. There are therefore three dendrograms per year per title, which gives a total of twenty-seven dendrograms for a keyword.

Once the words have been classified, the software allows these words to be placed in the context of the sentence using the concordance function. Thus, the emerging hypotheses from the analysis of dendrograms can lead a qualitative analysis of the discourse based on the themes identified.

The qualitative analysis considers press articles as narratives based on the concept of mimesis developed by Paul Ricoeur. Mimesis guides the analysis in two directions. The first is the “pre-understanding the world” idea and consists of the identification of reference frames and symbolic relationships inherent to a story. For an article to be understood, its author is part of a shared frame of meaning with the reader to whom it is addressed. Linked to the symbolic device concept, this pre-understanding is built on the historical and social context of norms and journalist’s projection on his public imaginaries, leading to a framing of media discourses. The second element is plotting, meaning “the arrangement of facts [...] in the total action constituting the story told” (Ricoeur, 2006: 112) (our translation). The journalist identifies the elements and agencies them to constitute the Brexit narrative, and “the configuration of the plot imposes on the indefinite series of incidents ‘the meaning of the end point’” (Ricoeur, 2006: 131).

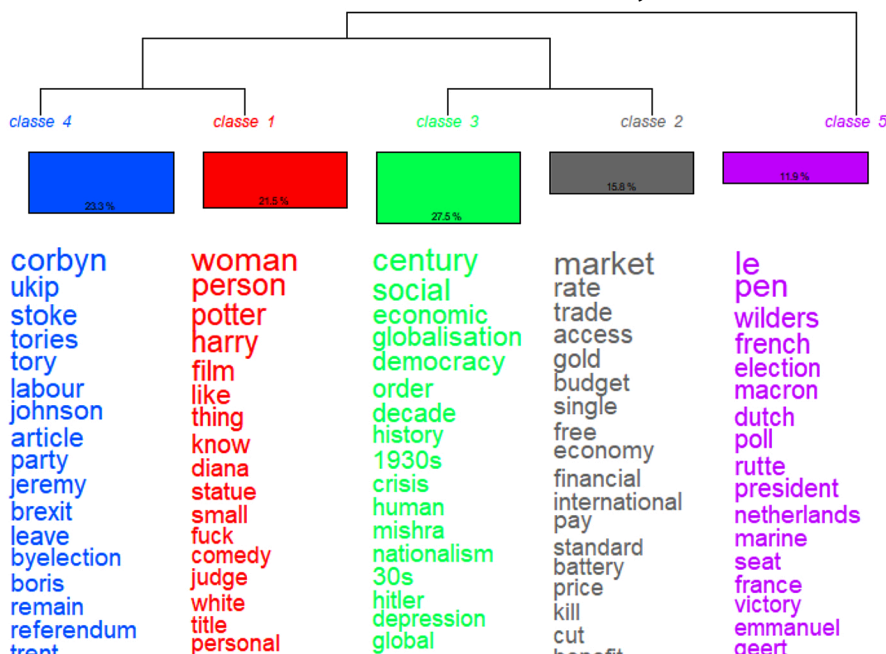
The qualitative analysis is first lexical, in continuity with the quantitative analysis, then narrative, considering each story as “the transformation (or passage) located between two successive and different states” (Courtès, 2003: 79) (our translation). To this story meaning is added three actantial roles: a subject of doing, a subject of state and an object. Narrative analysis shows, for example, the transition from object to subject of the European Union.

¹ <http://iramuteq.org/>

2. Results

2.1 Quantitative presence

The interest in analysing the use of History in media discourses originates from the dendrograms of the corpus on the keyword populism as shown in the figure below. The "classe 3" column is made of a history lexical field.



Dendrogramm of Guardian, 2017, keywords : Brexit, crisis, populism*

In total, the history lexical field is present in seven dendrograms spread over four press titles and in the three years of the corpus. This observation leads to specific research in the entire corpus.

This first finding shows the importance of mobilising history in the representation of Brexit and populism.

The word *histoire/Geschichte/history* is, in fact, present in the dendrograms of 2016 in *Le Figaro*, *Les Échos* the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, in 2017 in the *Guardian* and in 2018 in *Le Figaro*. The use of a specific period comes in two forms, the "1930s" in the *Daily Mail* in 2016 and the *Guardian* in 2017 and "80's" in the *Guardian* in 2018. The third term is "light" in

	2016	2017	2018
Le Figaro	96		48
Les Échos	38	7 (lumière)	
Süddeutsche Zeitung	15		
Daily Mail	6 (1930's)		
The Guardian		56 32 (1930's)	12 (80's)

Frequency of the lexical field of history in dendrograms of the corpus Brexit, crisis, populism*

2017 in *les Échos*. After verification, the word refers to the Enlightenment of the 18th century. The frequency of the term history is summarised in the following table. When the term is other than history but comes from the same lexical field, it is specified in parentheses.

This table shows the importance of the lexical field of history in *Le Figaro*, except for the year 2017. This absence is explained by the primacy given to the French presidential elections which occupy two classes out of the five identified by the software. This observation is similar in the *Guardian*, whose story is absent from the 2016 dendrogram but the most present in the corpus in 2017.

2.2 Two perspectives on the presence of History in the corpus

2.2.1 The origin story of Brexit

The first perspective on the use of History in articles comes, as mentioned in the introduction, from the definition of Brexit as an event which causes a rupture in intelligibility and thus brings out its own past (Arquembourg, 2006). The origin story answer to informative and analysis functions of the press. Two forms of writing history are present: the first is event-based and dated as the quantitative analysis shows with the terms “1930’s” and “80’s” and the second is more periodic, referring to a past that can’t or doesn’t need to be restricted with dates.

For the first event-based history writing, the 1930s is a pattern that regularly comes up to compare the 2010s as shown in these two extracts:

The 1930s saw a number of democracies swept away by totalitarian revolutions [...] In fact, the 2010s have many points in common with the 1930s (*Le Figaro*, 2018/07/16, Retour aux années 1930 ?, Nicolas Baverez)².

The verb “swept away” suggests a marine metaphor, with totalitarian revolutions becoming synonymous with a destructive wave. The indeterminacy of the “number of” and totalitarian revolutions gives a character of generality which accentuates the threat and contributes to an effect of general truth. The repetition of totalitarian revolutions in the democracies of the 1930s is then reflected in the term of the 2010s. The comparison allows the journalist to emphasize the importance of the current events. The informative function of the historical motive is weakened by the generality of the decade and the countries.

The early 30s share with the mid-2010s a sense that the political establishment has lost the confidence of large numbers of voters, who have rejected “business as usual” and backed politicians they see as challenging the *status quo* (*Guardian*, 2017/03/04, Crash course: what the Great Depression reveals about our future, Larry Elliott).

The generality is again central but the analysis of what was happening: the loss of confidence, allow the journalist to support his analysis. This generality gives the comparison a general truth because the parallel between the 1930s and 2010 is not limited to a country. The political establishment and the large numbers of voters mentioned are not attached to a nation.

The *Daily Mail* denounces this comparison with the 1930s and the rise of Nazism as an insult to Brexit voters:

PRINCE Charles evoked Nazi-era Germany yesterday to warn that the rise of ‘populist’ groups across the world had led to religious persecution on a par with the ‘dark days of the 1930s’ (*Daily Mail*, 2016/12/23, BEWARE RISE OF POPULISM SAYS CHARLES THE POLITICAL PRINCE, Rebecca English, Daniel Martin).

The interpretation of the 1930s parallel as an image of Nazism is given before the quote as shown by the term “evoked”. The generality of the 30’s shown in the preced-

² « Les années 1930 virent nombre de démocraties emportées par des révolutions totalitaires (...) De fait, la décennie 2010 comporte de nombreux points communs avec les années 1930. »

ent quotes is erased for a precision on Germany and the Nazi-history. This specification is a mean for the *Daily Mail* to denounce the polemical use of history.

Historical references are also of a more precise nature, such as the Suez Canal crisis. The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* headlines one of the articles: "What the Suez crisis has to do with Brexit?" (*Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 2016/10/26, Was the Suez-Krise mit dem Brexit zu tun hat, Gina Thomas).

In the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, this crisis marks a process started by the first two World Wars:

A major consequence of the First World War is the foundations of imperial claims dissolution. [...] This development accelerated with the Second World War, which almost ruined the country. The Suez crisis of 1956 made it clear to the world that the former empire had become a lightweight and had to subordinate its wishes to those of the superpowers (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2018/11/19, Außenansicht : Lasst sie gehen!, Magnus Brechtken)³.

The Suez Canal reference enable the identification of a revealing element, with the term "clear": the UK shift from a great empire to a second-rate power. Chronological succession serves a narrative of decline, placing Brexit in this continuity. The terms "consequences" and "development" emphasize the deterministic nature. The historical motive performs the information function by building Brexit's past to make sense of it but with a limit: the Suez crisis is not explained, hence building a cultivated audience sharing this pre-understanding of the world but also allowing the journalist to not detail the role of other European countries in this crisis.

The second form of writing history is at a period scale. In addition to an event history is added one which is not precisely measured and takes place over a long period of time:

the result threatens [...] the two fundamental principles which for centuries constituted the basis of England's policy: keeping the British Isles united and the European continent divided⁴ (*Le Figaro*, 2018/11/24, Des siècles d'efforts ruinés, Adrien Jaulmes).

The immemorial time included in the «for centuries» gives a factual tone of general truth. It therefore builds an identity feature. History swing toward myth to build the UK as an «imagined community» (Anderson, 2002), namely an outsider at a political and territorial level. The chiasmus between the islands unity and the continent division reinforces the duplicity representation of the UK vis-à-vis Europe.

The history writing can also underline the fracture within the same society:

it was also the year in which troubles that had been stored up years or decades earlier – some ignored, others denied – burst through the surface, demanding our

³ « Es war eine wesentliche Konsequenz des Ersten Weltkrieges, dass sich der imperiale Anspruch in seinen Fundamenten auflöste. [...] Diese Entwicklung beschleunigte sich mit dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, der das Land nahezu ruinierte. Die Suez-Krise von 1956 führte aller Welt vor Augen, dass das einstige Weltreich einige Gewichtsklassen abgestiegen war und seine Wünsche denen der Supermächte unterzuordnen hatte. »

⁴ « le résultat menace [...] les deux principes fondamentaux qui constituaient depuis des siècles le socle de la politique de l'Angleterre : garder unies les îles britanniques et le continent européen divisé. »

attention and crying out for something else too: a reckoning long overdue (*Guardian*, 2017/12/23, «From Trump to Brexit, 2017 was the morning after the year before, Jonathan Freedland»).

The indefinite “troubles” suggest the impossible task of perfectly explaining what led to Brexit, highlighting two versions of history separating the elite from the people. Between years, or decades, the issue represented is not to determine a precise moment but to settle the situation. The only certainty is the “We” of “our attention” as the actor in the solution. This «we» show the journalist’s perception of his audience. Regarding the device aspect, this «we» including an elite disconnected from the people reflect the particularity of reference press :

"It is designated as such, on the one hand, because it is explicitly ‘referred to’ (by other media, the political establishment, ‘intellectuals’, etc.) and, on the other hand, because it is thought of as a ‘reference’, the embodiment of something like a higher moral authority" (Charbonneaux, 2015) (our translation).

The notion of «reference» becomes therefore an excluding feature of the press as a device building the symbolic and information power of an elite.

The indeterminate writing of history also evokes the construction of a national narrative whose historical relevance is questioned:

Influential milieus on the island conjure up supposedly grandiose old times. They don't like the suggestion that this past is nothing more than a psychologically pleasant illusion⁵ (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2018/11/19, Außenansicht : Lasst sie gehen!, Magnus Brechtken).

The actants in this extract, the “influential milieus”, are shown as disconnected from reality while the emphasis of the adjective “grandiose” underlines the comfort of the illusion. The history conception is denounced as a myth, nursing a delusion and reinforcing the social fracture between the people and an elite.

The disillusionment representation is also identified in the history writing as a populist argumentative tool against Europe:

It's a past that probably never existed. European history has been anything but that. Populists use half-truths and oversimplifications at will, which are the two favourite weapons of propaganda experts⁶ (*Le Monde*, 2016/09/09, «Zeid Raad Al-Husseini : En Irak ou ailleurs, les communautés sunnites font partie de la solution»).

The term history emphasizes that a European historical truth exists. The populists’ simplifications are therefore intentional, which helps justify the propaganda qualification. The artefactual nature of writing history is represented in its device dimension as a political communication tool used by the populists. Yet this mythical function of history writing is mobilised in the constitution of Europe as an imagined community in the reference press discourse.

⁵ « Einflussreiche Milieus auf der Insel beschwören vermeintlich grandiose alten Zeiten. Sie mögen den Hinweis nicht, dass diese Vergangenheit nicht mehr ist als eine psychologisch angenehme Illusion. »

⁶ « C'est un passé qui n'a sans doute jamais existé. L'histoire européenne a été tout sauf cela. Les populistes utilisent à l'envi demi-vérités et simplifications excessives, qui sont les deux armes préférées des experts en propagande. »

2.2.2 History at the service of the mythical construction of Europe

On one hand, reference press journalists make sense of Brexit by writing its past. On the other hand, they contribute to the construction of a European origin story as a counter-narrative of the Brexit crisis:

If Europe was created, it was to put an end to wars, of course, but it was also because there is a common identity of Europeans. Philippe Herzog sums it up luminously in an essay: it is born in Christianity, which “invented a culture of equal dignity of the person”, goes beyond in the Enlightenment, which introduces “citizenship in a city where freedom is combined with the search for a common good”⁷ (*Les Échos*, 2017/03/24, Recommencer l'Europe par la culture, Eric Le Boucher).

The artefactual nature of the European creation is stated and at the same time presented as determined through a common religious and philosophical culture. Evoking the objective of peace makes it a project that cannot be objected to. The verb “born” reinforces the idea of Europe preexistence to the institution. Europe is not created by man; it was born from religion and grew up in the Enlightenment. This two-step process affirms the European project as a humanist utopia achieved through the dignity of people and citizenship: the mythical foundation relies on two historical root which are still present.

The mythical construction provides an undisputable narrative shifting the polemical nature of the referendum away from questioning the EU:

“What went wrong? Why are so many people, not only in the United Kingdom, turning away from what I consider to be the greatest civilisational project in human history?”⁸ (*FAZ*, 2016/07/04, Mit Herzblut und Leidenschaft, Martin Schulz).

One of the particularities of the press is to allow outsider of the title to write their own article without depending on the mediation of a journalist through an interview, as shown with this extract of Martin Schulz comment in the *FAZ*. The information relevance is relegated to the background for the benefit of the opinion function of the press. Martin Schulz redesigns the referendum and the anti-European position, countering it with the superlative “greatest” and “in human history” European project. The symbolic and normative function of the history narrative as a device appears in the impossibility of questioning the EU.

However, the EU monolithic representation and the common European identity narrative outreaching national boundaries collide with the definition of a “We”, distinguishing between East and West Europe:

These countries are Counter-Reformation countries. They have an ethnic conception of the nation and a national-religious identity. This was their strength against

⁷ « Si l'Europe s'est faite, c'était pour mettre fin aux guerres, certes, mais c'était aussi parce qu'il existe une identité commune des Européens. Philippe Herzog la résume lumineusement dans un essai : elle naît dans le christianisme, qui « a inventé une culture d'égalité de dignité de la personne », se dépasse dans les Lumières, qui introduisent « la citoyenneté dans une cité où la liberté se conjugue avec la recherche d'un bien commun » »

⁸ « Was ist schiefgelaufen, warum wenden sich nicht nur in Großbritannien so viele Menschen ab von diesem, wie ich finde, größten Zivilisationsprojekt der Menschheitsgeschichte? »

the USSR⁹ (*Le Monde*, 2016/04/09, Le saviez-vous ? Le référendum très orienté de Viktor Orban, Arnaud Leparmentier).

The speech accentuates an opposition in the identity construction between “these countries” and “they” and on the other side a We. The distinction between the two is fundamental in the conception of “imagined community” (Anderson, 2002) which represents a strength but also an insurmountable difference. The coexistent narratives of the EU as one civilisation and the cultural divide between East or West and North and South of Europe reflects the polemical nature of the myth building. The media discourse diverges from the institutional norm of European representation as undivided.

The undefined and mythological mobilisation of history also allows journalist to anchor their stance in a perspective outside the information and news timescale, belonging to an intellectual elite. The classical antiquity motive, in particular, perform this function:

We know, since the collapse of Athens during the Peloponnesian War, that democracies die first from within, undermined by demagogy¹⁰ (*Le Figaro*, 2016/05/30, Ce populisme qui progresse partout, Nicolas Baverez).

The “we” summons, once again, the reader and the journalist, it shows the public constructed by the evidence suggested by the “know” and the reference to the Peloponnesian War. The ancient reference accentuates the effect of truth of the sentence which follows, becoming a maxim.

As opposed to “demos”, the people, “ochlos” designates the crowd, its chaotic, tumultuous, disordered and unpredictable aspects [...] if the populace replaces the people, then settles in its place another regime, ochlocracy. This is what Polybius maintained, in book VI of his “The Histories”¹¹ (*Le Figaro*, 2016/12/09, Connaissez-vous l'ochlocratie ?, Roger-Pol Droit).

The opposition explained by the Greek terms of “demos” and “ochlos” grants the reasoning a scientific legitimacy which is further justified by the Polybius reference. Enrolling the Brexit debate in the classical antique democracy concepts feature a cultural and historical knowledge of the audience the journalist is addressing.

3. Discussion

3.1 History writing to substantiate a threat

The Brexit historical inscription answers to its importance measurement:

Each piece of information calls for a reading which must take into account symbols relating to history and memory in order to be meaningful. Information can only be-

⁹ « Ces pays sont des pays de Contre-Réforme. Ils ont une conception ethnique de la nation et une identité nationalo-religieuse. Cela a été leur force face à l'URSS. »

¹⁰ « Nous savons, depuis l'effondrement d'Athènes lors de la guerre du Péloponnèse, que les démocraties meurent d'abord de l'intérieur, minées par la démagogie. »

¹¹ « Par opposition à « demos », le peuple, « ochlos » désigne la foule, ce qu'elle a de chaotique, de tumultueux, de désordonné et d'imprévisible (...) si la populace remplace le peuple, alors s'installe à sa place un autre régime, l'ochlocratie. Voilà ce que soutenait Polybe, au livre VI de ses « Histoires ». »

come an event if its relationship to the historical context reveals a sufficient symbolic “charge” (Garcin-Marrou, 1996: 55).

The Brexit contextualization in the World Wars and the 1930s narrative gives it a status of menace. References to the European totalitarianism rise make it possible to assess the threat posed by the event while recalling the European project foundations. The historical reference has an argumentative aim, in the sense that it draws on the continent traumatic memory. It confers an irrefutable nature to the EU. In this sense, the European project is a device: the power relations are sustained by the mythical foundation consisting of classical antiquity, Christianity and Enlightenment.

The events interpretation as a repetition of History is a call for reaction through the re-emergence of a European “We” as the only possible response to nationalism. In the media narrative, Brexit becomes a warning and a reaffirmation of the pacifying capacities of the European project.

The 1930s reference enable also the adversary delegitimization: on the one hand by associating him with deadly totalitarianism and on the other by drawing a parallel with disinformation and propagandist strategies. The quotes from the Daily Mail denouncing this parallel show that this reference fuels the polemical nature and the struggle over media representation that Brexit opens up. As an event, the rupture operated by the Brexit in Europe representation can also be linked to the device theory:

One of the characteristics of the device is that it survives the intentions and visions that led to its creation: the device continues to exist beyond its initial strategic objective. [...] Each effect [generated by the device], whether positive or negative, intended or unintended, resonates or contradicts the others, and calls for a review and readjustment of the heterogeneous elements (Beuscart, Peerbaye, 2006) (our translation).

One part of the Brexit crisis is the representation crisis of the EU vis-à-vis its public. The 1930’s traumatic history sketch a shared sense of meaning at the European level which could lead to a European public sphere momentum but the different representation of the readers and the people in the reference press shows a fracture preventing the constitution of a public. The renegotiation process of European history in the crisis context opened by Brexit is indeed directed, in the reference press, towards a dialectic constitution of a civilized *us* facing a barbaric *other* on two levels. First of all, this border is established within the European Union between a differentiated representation of Western and Eastern Europe. Then, it also echoes a break within society with the distinction between people and crowd which makes it possible to delegitimize citizens against the European Union by ostracizing them. The Other figure is thus not necessarily outside the borders as shown by the terms “chaotic populace”.

3.2 Brexit: British determinism

The Brexit construction as British determinism is found in the research of Michal Krzyżanowski (2019) who identifies two *topoi* of discourse on this subject: “UK Socio-

Political and Economic Crisis (Topos 1), UK Constitutional and Democratic Crisis (Topos 2)" (Krzyżanowski, 2019: 473). Brexit is thus represented as:

First and foremost, a result of ongoing divisions and malaise in the UK society and economy and that it will further solidify the ongoing crisis in UK's 'broken' and divided society (Krzyżanowski, 2019: 474).

Indeed, the sequence of events descriptions in the United Kingdom, from the First World War to the Suez Crisis, construct the Brexit history as a uniquely British process. This history writing aims to explain, while simplifying, Brexit. This simplification echoes the use of number in narratives. Indeed, the precision of dates or events gives the story "the prestige of objective appearances, evidence and rationalist scientific discourse" (Koren, 2009: 73) (our translation).

Placing Brexit in a chronology deprives it of its exceptional character. While being recognised as a crisis, certain English history elements are represented as revealing a Brexit determinism linked to the decline of the United Kingdom. The Suez Canal is presented as a British failure and omits France's role in this conflict. This omission contributes to the image of isolation of the United Kingdom and its disillusionment. Presenting Brexit in a form of determinism enable to locate the crisis and thus limit its reproducibility to other member states of the EU. The referendum success becomes only possible in the United Kingdom, countering this way the narrative of the "domino effect", a phrase present in the press following the result. Indeterminate time, for its part, avail to explain Brexit by no longer representing events but processes, some in a short history, others long.

The indeterminate time also allows the journalists to denounce a biased writing of the national story. The golden age evocation associated with an illusion shows the mythological character of the story. The story is mobilized in its fictional effect of a British national story of greatness not representing the greatest number.

Historical references have multiple and contradictory effects. The event inclusion in a chronology can deprive it of an exceptional character, by transforming it into a fact resulting from a logical continuity specific to the UK and also make it threatening with 1930s reference. Historical context induces plotting (Ricoeur, 2006) which reveals the subjectivity of the author of the article; it does not have the scientific value of historiography and is not limited to an informative aim. The Brexit historical writing belongs to the argumentation device register because it benefit the European project construction legitimization by recalling its particularly democratic values.

Conclusion

The journalist History writing does not meet the scientific requirements of a discipline but serves to fuel power relations by determining who is on the good or bad side of History. The plotting of History as described by Paul Veyne serves here to reinforce the referential frameworks shaken up by the Brexit crisis. These intrigues go beyond national borders and participate in the mythical creation of an identity which is not individual but collective when the stories reinforce a pro-European positioning.

The common elements circulating between the different press titles show the reinforcement of stereotypes. The UK decline story thus fuels the sick man of Europe image.

Addressing the problematic of this article: the UK and EU symbolic reconfiguration is therefore a result of the history writing as a device outreaching its informative function for an ideological one as the reinforcement of power relations.

The two hypotheses have been answered: the history writing analysis shows the journalist involvement in building an EU mythical origin story regardless of the press information function. The historical determinism of Brexit in the UK representation also reinforces the Europe mythical construction. The journalist's support to the EU identity construction is however tampered by other sorts of fracture represented within the EU administrative borders and which doesn't answer the unity ideal of the European institutions. Regarding the second hypothesis, the role of journalist is limited in ensuring the building of a European public sphere but the word "Brexit" by its circulation participate to a European semiosphere (Bal, 2023).

The symbolic space configured by the media stories of the leading European press shows a public going beyond national borders but distinguishing itself from ordinary people. The European democratic ideal is maintained by a reconfiguration of the legitimate people, those who are not influenced by populist speeches and who are pro-European. The humanist qualification does not have a value of universality but on the contrary of spatialisation and limitation within societies. The history writing as a device serve a double purpose of legitimation and delegitimization simultaneously. The mythical European origin construction anchored in Christianity or the Enlightenment questions a form of radicalisation of discourses in the sense of developing values regimes allowing the exclusion of the European population parts.

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