Brexit and the Border

- A critical discourse analysis of the European Research
Group's position on the Irish border issue

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Abstract

This thesis investigates how the discourse of the Eurosceptic European Research Group (ERG) relating to the Irish border issue in the Brexit negotiations is constructed. The purpose is to analyse an English nationalist and populist discourse which seemingly does not make sense. This is done using Norman Fairclough's version of critical discourse analysis. The ERG is in the paper defined as English nationalists and populists based on previous research into Euroscepticism. English nationalism, which manifests as a defence of British sovereignty, and populism are used as theories for the social practice level of analysis within the CDA framework. The analysed material consists of the official ERG report on Northern Ireland, TV interviews with ERG members, and texts written by individual ERG members. The analysis of the ERG's discourse suggests that for them a reclamation of sovereignty is more important than a supposed risk to the peace process on the island of Ireland. In fact, because of their populist belief that complex issues do not exist, they do not think there is a risk, and that the issue can be solved with simple 'common sense' solutions.

Key words: brexit, irish, border, populism, nationalism

Words: 9214

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1. Introduction

In June 2016, the British electorate voted to leave the European Union. Since then the country has been engulfed in debates about how to best achieve 'Brexit' or even whether the whole process should be cancelled altogether. There has also been debate about the reasons why Brexit happened, both inside and outside academia. Some scholars have suggested that Brexit as a social and political project was the result of populist messaging stretching back several decades as well as a newly politicised English nationalism (Fieschi 2019: 120); Calhoun 2017: 58).

One of the biggest issues in the negotiations between the United Kingdom and the European Union has been Northern Ireland and its border with the Republic of Ireland, an EU member. Theresa May's withdrawal agreement was rejected three times in the British parliament, in large part thanks to the hardline Brexiteers of the European Research Group (ERG), a faction within May's Conservative party. The ERG claimed that the backstop, which was meant to stop a hard border between Ireland and Northern Ireland being erected, would have to be removed from the withdrawal agreement (Ryan 2019: 7; Elgot and Stewart 2019). The ERG themselves offered their own technological solutions to the border issue, but according to the EU, Ireland, and experts these were not viable (Edgington 2019; O'Neill 2016: 12; Ryan 2019: 15-16). The ERG seem to not care about the possibility of a no-deal Brexit which would be disastrous and possibly lead to a hard border on the island of Ireland and a return to violence (Campbell 2019; Soares 2016: 841). In this context it is of interest to investigate the discourse of the ERG regarding the Irish border issue and how this relates to them being populists and English nationalists. The purpose of the study is therefore is to see how an English nationalist and populist discourse which appears to be incongruent with reality is be constructed.

1.1 Research Problem

This thesis aims to apply a critical discourse analysis on the argumentation that the European Research Group has put forward regarding the Irish border issue during the Brexit negotiations. The objective is to analyse their discourse on the Irish border issue and how it relates to populism and English nationalism. The research question that this thesis will try to answer can thusly be stated as follows:

- How is the European Research Group's discourse on the Irish border issue constructed?

2. Background

In this chapter I provide contextual information regarding topics that are central for understanding the rest of the thesis. A short text about the Conservative Party and their views on Europe is followed by a short history of Northern Ireland. After this I provide an overview of the sectarian conflict that took place in Northern Ireland in the late 20th century as well as the following peace process. Lastly, I explain what the Irish border issue the Brexit negotiations is.

2.1 The Conservative Party and Europe

An ideological struggle has taken place within the Conservative party between 'remainers', those who wish to stay in the EU, and Eurosceptics who are against European integration (O'Neill 2016: 11). During the early 1990s roughly have of the members of the Conservative members of parliament were against European integration and roughly half were for it (Berrington & Hague 1998: 50), but the amount of Eurosceptics in the party increased during the 1990s (Berrington & Hague 1998: 67; Lynch & Whitaker 2013: 335) and got more and more influence amongst MPs. These Eurosceptics have organised as the European Research Group since the referendum on leaving the European Union. They favour a clean break from the EU, "the hardest form of Brexit come what may" (O'Neill 2016: 11) and have been called highly influential in the making of the British government's Brexit policy (Chaplain 2018a). In 2015 there were 183 Conservative MPs who wanted to remain in the European Union, but in 2019 only three 'remainers' were standing in the general election. The Conservative Party is now "overwhelmingly pro-Brexit" (Alexandre-Collier 2020: 27-28).

In this thesis the European Research Group is defined as English nationalists and populists since they are deeply Eurosceptic, and Euroscepticism in the UK is the same thing as English nationalism, and its nature is populist (Elsayed, 2018: 100, Wellings 2012: 1, 26).

2.2 Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland is a part of the United Kingdom which lies in the north of the island of Ireland, sharing a land border with the Republic of Ireland. Until the 1920s all the island was a part of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Through the Government of Ireland Act in 1920 the island was split in two parts, Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State, which had a dominion status within the British Empire. In 1949 the Republic of Ireland declared independence, while Northern Ireland stayed as part of the United Kingdom (Britannica Academic, Northern Ireland).

Northern Ireland is well known for its two distinct groups, nationalists and unionists. The nationalists are mostly comprised of Catholics who want to see Northern Ireland unify with the rest of Ireland. The Unionists are mostly comprised of protestants who see themselves as British and wish for Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom (Britannica Academic, Northern Ireland).

2.3 The Troubles & the Good Friday Agreement

The Troubles is the name for the violent sectarian conflict which took place in Northern Ireland from roughly 1968 to 1998 (Britannica Academic, The Troubles). The burgeoning civil rights movement and Catholic's increased resentment towards "heavy-handed unionist rule" led to riots which then led to the conflict starting (Stevenson 2017: 121). The civil war was fought between Nationalists and Unionists. The former, mostly comprised of Catholics, fought to unite Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. The Protestant groups, the main ones being Royal Ulster Constabulary, the Ulster Defence Regiment, and the British army, fought what they described as the terrorism of the nationalist side. About 3 600 people died and more than 30 000 were wounded during the conflict (Britannica Academic, The Troubles).

In the 1990s peace talks started in earnest. The result was the Good Friday Agreement in 1998. Under the terms of the agreement, Northern Ireland remained part of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland gave up its territorial claims on the province. This was possible because of the principle of 'consent' enshrined in the agreement. According to that principle, Northern Ireland could in the future unify with the Republic, but only through a majority vote in a Northern Irish referendum. The Republic also gained a role in the

governing of Northern Ireland through 'cross-border bodies' (Stevenson 2017: 112). The accord also called for a devolved government in Northern Ireland (Britannica Academic, Good Friday Agreement).

The Good Friday Agreement was mainly negotiated by the British government, Northern Irish political parties, and representatives of Ireland (Britannica Academic, Good Friday Agreement), but the European Union was crucial to its success. John Stevenson argues that "The most important factor in making this overlay of a single multicultural nation on top of separate sovereign entities a psychologically sustainable compromise was the membership of both the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland in the European Union" (Stevenson 2017: 111). The European Union's single market made national borders less important (O'Neill 2018: 6), and the diplomatic arena in Brussels allowed Ireland to refrain from its "inward-looking tradition of acrimony with the UK" (Stevenson 2017: 113). Though both sides of the conflict still cared about national sovereignty, the increasing Europeanization "created economic incentives and political ideas compelling enough to move the UK, the Irish Republic and Northern Ireland to moderate their national identities" (Stevenson 2017: 114).

Even though the Good Friday Agreement largely ended violence in Northern Ireland, the cultural and political divide is still stark. The politics of the province is still largely based on this. There are even today sectarian tensions (Stevenson 2017: 117-118) and sporadic violence has continued ever since the agreement was signed, including terrorist activity (Stevenson 2017: 115). Since the Brexit vote many people have warned that Brexit risks destabilising the Good Friday Agreement (Gormley-Heenan & Aughey 2017: 503; Soares 2016: 842), and that the imposition of customs controls on the Island of Ireland might become the target of violent paramilitary activity (Soares 2016: 841; Gormley-Heenan & Aughey 2017: 499).

2.4 The Border Issue

After the British electorate voted to leave the European Union in 2016, British prime minister Theresa May triggered Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty on March 17, 2017. This decision formally started the negotiations between the UK and the EU on the terms of Britain's departure from the Union (BBC 2017). May soon made her objective for the negotiations clear: the UK was to leave the jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice, be able to control immigration from the EU and have the capacity to sign their own trade deals. They would also

leave the EU's single market and the customs union (Ryan 2019: 1-2). The UK government acknowledged that the border between Northern Ireland and Ireland needed to be kept "as seamless and frictionless as possible" and they stated that their goal was to avoid the erection of a hard border (HM Government White Paper 2017). These goals however made the negotiation process long and arduous.

The three goals of keeping the border on the island of Ireland soft, being able to sign their own trade deals and maintaining the territorial integrity of the UK were not mutually compatible. If Britain were to keep its territorial integrity and the ability to make trade deals, there would have to be a hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland. If they wanted to, they could gain the ability to make trade deals, but that would undermine the territorial integrity of the UK by putting a border between the UK and Northern Ireland. Lastly, they could have chosen to stay in the single market and customs union (Jones & Miller 2019). All these three possible scenarios went against Theresa May's negotiation objectives in one way or the other.

The biggest hurdle to a deal soon became the issue of the border between the UK and Ireland on the island of Ireland. May claimed that a 'customs partnership¨, where the UK would collect EU tariffs, or a technological solution would keep the border soft, but this was deemed untrue by the EU, Ireland, and observers (Barret 2018). Ireland also wanted to keep the border soft, and they were backed up by the EU. Keeping the entirety of the UK, or at least Northern Ireland in the customs union would achieve this goal, but the May government would not have it. Ireland was worried that if a solution like this was not negotiated, they would risk the peace process and the cross-border trade and commerce. The problem for May was that if she were to agree to either solution, she would risk losing the support of the hardline Brexiteers in her party, including the European Research Group (Barret 2018)

In July 2018 May's announced her 'Chequers plan', which would effectively keep the UK in the single market for goods. This upset many Conservative MPs, leading to the resignation of 10 officials and ministers and "a fresh wave of plotting from members of the Eurosceptic European Research Group", who thought that the proposal would give away too much sovereignty (Ryan 2019: 5, 40)

In November 2018, an agreement was reached between the EU and the UK on a Withdrawal Agreement and Political Declaration (BBC 2018a). Included in it was the so-called 'backstop', which meant that the UK would be in the EU's customs territory if the negotiations on the future relations failed. It also meant that Northern Ireland would have to follow some of the EU's rules. The Withdrawal Agreement was highly unpopular with Eurosceptic Conservative MPs, who argued that it might keep the UK in the EU's customs union forever. May tried to win the approval of the Eurosceptic European Research Group but failed (Ryan 2019: 7). Instead of voting for her deal, the ERG tried to oust her as Prime Minister through a vote of no confidence, but this also failed (Inews 2018b). Theresa May's deal was voted on and rejected by the British parliament three times (Elgot and Stewart 2019).

3. Previous Research

Unfortunately, I have not been able to find any previous research which relates directly to the topic of this thesis. However, this give the study a scientific relevance as it will contribute to the production of new knowledge. Because of the lack of directly related previous research, I will in this section provide a short overview of research on Euroscepticism as a phenomenon with a focus on the UK. The reason for this is that it will give me knowledge about Euroscepticism, which will be useful for the analysis.

3.1 Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom

There are two main schools of thought in research on Euroscepticism, the 'Sussex school' and the 'North Carolina school (Cas Mudde 2012: 193). Since around 2013 a new school of thought on the topic has emerged, titled here the 'School of Embedded Persistence'. A short description of their main findings is provided down below.

3.1.1 The Sussex School

The Sussex school was created by Szczerbiak and Taggart through their voluminous work *Opposing Europe?* which includes a large series of in-depth case studies by many different researchers (Mudde 2012: 193). The most important point is their binary categorisation of Euroscepticism. 'Hard' Euroscepticism is defined as a principled opposition to the EU as a project of European integration. 'Soft' Euroscepticism, meanwhile, is defined as opposition to

the planned future expansion of EU competencies (Szczerbiak and Taggart 2008: 247-248). This categorisation has been criticised however for not being able to clearly divide the 'hard' and the 'soft' Euroscepticism, and it has also been criticised for focusing too much on party classifications (Szczerbiak & Taggart 2008: 250; Usherwood & Startin 2013: 4).

3.1.2 The North Carolina School

The North Carolina school has its origins in a 1999 research paper by Leonard Ray, entitled *Measuring Party Orientation towards European Integration: Results from an Expert Study.* Its most prominent researchers are arguably Hooghe and Marks since they have done most of the research found within the school. The North Carolina school mostly uses large quantitative data sets for their research (Mudde 2012: 195).

Whereas the Sussex school has focused on defining and categorising Euroscepticism through detailed analysis of cases, the North Carolina school focuses more broadly on how parties and the public relate to ideology. In the beginning this analysis was done using the classic right-left spectrum, but it was soon found out that the GAL-TAN dimension was more suitable. They found that especially parties on the TAN-side opposed European integration because they thought it violated their national sovereignty (Marks 2009: 16).

Hooghe and Marks argue that the pivotal moment in history regarding Euroscepticism and European Integration was the Maastrich Treaty in 1991-1993. Before this, they claim, a 'permissive consensus' reigned, wherein party elites could make deals which furthered European integration without the European public giving it much attention. After 1991, however, this 'permissive consensus' gave way to a 'constraining dissensus', in which the party elites in Europe now had to contend with a growing mobilisation of exclusive national identities across Europe, which resulted in the public becoming more wary of further integration (Hooghe & Marks 2009: 5, 22). The North Carolina school has also been criticised for focusing too much on party classifications (Usherwood & Startin 2013: 4).

3.1.3 The School of Embedded Persistence

Writing in 2013, Usherwood and Startin argued that academic research on Euroscepticism has focused too much on the division in the literature on party classifications. Since Euroscepticism has increased all over Europe since the 1990s, and even entered non-governmental sectors, the public imagination, and the media, a more "holistic, nuanced, and

interdisciplinary approach.." was needed, they claimed (Usherwood & Startin 2013: 4). This call to action was answered, and research shows that Euroscepticism is embedded and persistent, transnational, and pan-European (Fitzgibbon, Leruth & Startin 2017: 11).

Ben Wellings argues that this type of "embedded resistance" was caused by an English nationalism that was a result of opposition against European integration (Wellings 2019: 16), and that Euroscepticism and English nationalism is the same thing (Wellings 2012: 26). Other scholars have also pointed to the link between English nationalism and Euroscepticism (Henderson et. al. 2016: 187; Gifford 2014: 6). Research has also made clear that English nationalism is by its nature populist (Elsayed, 2018: 100; Wellings 2012: 1), and that it was this populist English nationalism which led to the leave vote winning the British referendum on the European union (Elsayed 2018: 95, Wellings 2019: 7).

3.2 Reflections on Previous Research

The research on Euroscepticism in the UK covered above has implications for the rest of the thesis. I deem the 'Sussex' and 'North Carolina schools, with their focus party classifications, as too simplistic to be able to explain the Euroscepticism which lead to Brexit. The third school of thought on Euroscepticism, which considers changing cultural and political changes in the form of English nationalism and populism, gives a more comprehensive explanation of Euroscepticism and in extension Brexit. Therefore, in the analysis part of the thesis Brexit is seen as a social practice of English nationalism and populism.

4. Theoretical Perspectives

As mentioned in the previous section, Euroscepticism in the United Kingdom is intimately linked with populism and English nationalism, and it is partly this combination which led to the leave vote winning (Elsayed 2018: 100). In this thesis populism and English nationalism is used as theory within the framework of the social practice of a Critical Discourse Analysis. In this section I explain how these two phenomena are defined and how the manifest. An explanation of how they are used in the study is provided in the next section, titled "Method."

4.1 English Nationalism

English nationalism was created around Euroscepticism and manifests as a defence of British sovereignty rather than as an English identity. A key part of English nationalism is the idea of the defence of parliamentary sovereignty. This parliamentary sovereignty is based on the thought that the British parliament is unique because of its long history and how long it has lasted (Wellings 2012: 8-9, 17). The British façade of English nationalism exists because England has historically been the dominant force in the United Kingdom and throughout its empire (Wellings 2019: 7, 170; Wellings 2012: 2). A positive view of, and nostalgia for, the British empire is also a key aspect of English nationalism (Virdee & McGeever 2018: 1805). This perspective on the empire also provided an imagined path for the United Kingdom after leaving the EU, in seeking closer relations with the countries of the Anglosphere (Wellings 2019: 171). Because of its intimate relationship with Euroscepticism, English nationalism is deeply anti-European, and sees Europe as "the ultimate expression of British and English decline. From the perspective of English nationalism, the EU did not bring freedom like the continental countries saw it, but instead curtailed it. In the view of English nationalists, the EU has too much bureaucracy, an open border policy which is seen as negative and is seen eroding the sovereignty of the UK (Wellings 2012, p. 2, 16-17).

4.2 Populism

Populism is a type of politics which is centered on an imagined divide between the people and an elite (Fieschi 2019: 19). It is defined by political scientist Cas Mudde " as a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite," and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde 2007: 23). As an ideology it is constantly struggling with other ideologies about how the world should be understood, as well as promoting certain types of actions. The goal for populists is for their ideas to become the new consensus (Fieschi 2019: 30).

Populists are antipluralist and see themselves as the only legitimate representatives of the people (Fieschi 2019: 35, Müller 2016: 57). This gives them a perceived moral right in any political debate, since those who oppose them are not considered legitimate representatives of the people, but rather "are an enemy to be annihilated" (Fieschi 2019: 33). What is defined as

'the people' by populists is not the entire electorate, it is instead an imagined community of people who agree with the populists (Fieschi 2019: 35, Müller 2016: 57).

According to Catherine Fieschi, the most important component of populism is authenticity. She explains:

> Authenticity is first and foremost a concept that allows for a politics rooted in instinct rather than reason. It is useful (1) to brand all others as hypocrites; (2) as a blanket excuse to speak one's mind in ways that are as disruptive as possible, unbounded by received social and political norms; and (3) to make good on the populist claim that instinct and common sense trump reason and strategy (Fieschi 2019: 40).

Claiming one is being authentic is therefore strategically sound in several ways. Statements which might not be true can be considered being 'authentic', allowing the politician to avoid blame. It is also useful for lying since normal, 'authentic' humans lie. Using lies liberally can even be beneficial when it is obvious that it is a lie, since it shows that you have no scruples against doing whatever it takes to show how stupid or immoral whatever you are fighting against is. In addition, the opponents of populists are often deemed immoral or amoral (Fieschi 2019: 41, 156).

Democracy is used by populists in two ways. First, it can be used to silence people they do not agree with when the majority decides something. The majority becomes 'the people' and anyone who does not agree with the decision is labelled an enemy since "The people, the nation, and the majority are intrinsically linked, indeed they are often fantasized as one" (Fieschi 2019: 40). Second, because a democracy will always leave some people disappointed with any policy, populists can always claim that 'the people' have been betrayed by the politicians. Without this betrayal populism would not be possible (Fieschi 2019: 40).

Furthermore, populism creates ideas about how one should act. Expertise is discouraged by populists, instead they propagate the view that the instinct and common sense of 'the people' is more worthwhile. This results in the populists providing simplistic solutions to problems that are complex and multi-layered. Those who claim that a certain problem has many complexities are branded as weak or as trying to fool the people. In addition to this, populists also renounce diversity (Fieschi 2019: 42, 162).

5. Method

Discourse analysis can be used for all sorts of different studies and purposes. It is important to remember that theory is intimately linked with method, which means that one cannot use any discourse-based method with any type of theory. The type of discourse analysis used in this study, critical discourse analysis, has certain philosophical premises about the role of language in constructing the world, theoretical models, methodological guidelines as well as tools for language analysis (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 10). This section will start with the epistemological and ontological premises for the study, after which Critical Discourse Analysis and the methodology of the study is explained.

5.1 Social Constructionism

Social constructionism is the name for theories within the social sciences which claim that society is *socially constructed.* There are many variations between different social constructionist theories, but all of them share a few basic epistemological premises. Knowledge about the world is not seen as objective truths, but as a result of the categories we use to make sense of the world. Therefore, one should have a critical attitude towards knowledge. Social constructionist theories also claim that knowledge in a society is always dependent on the specific cultural and historical time it exists in. In a different time and culture, the knowledge could be completely different. Another thing which is central to social constructionist theories is that what is seen as knowledge is created through social interaction, in the form of common truths. This is part of the battle of what is going to be seen as true and false, respectively. All the things listed above creates worldviews which allows certain actions while banning others. These are the social consequences of the social construction of knowledge (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips, 2000: 11, 12).

5.2 Discourse Analysis

There are many different types of discourse analysis which define the word 'discourse' in different ways. A basic definition can however be given as "a specific way of talking about and understanding the world" (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 7). The conceptions of discourse that are used in the social sciences usually refer to discourse as semiotic practices - the use of language as well as other character systems - which are part of wider social

practices. Some definitions of the word 'discourse' refer only to the semiotic practices, others include the wider social practices. What they all have in common, though, is the fact that conventions and rules for how to speak and write are interconnected with ways of acting (Bergström & Boréus 2018: 23).

The purpose of discourse analysis is to investigate questions connected with power. This is done by studying the creation of meaning in different contexts, what is and is not allowed to be expressed in certain contexts as well as what categories are used and what is taken for granted without being explicitly stated (Bergström & Boréus 2018: 23). There are many types of discourse analysis, but they can be summarised thusly: "discourse analysis is the close study of language in use" (Taylor 2001: 5). This is done by looking for patterns in the language, to try to find out the meaning inherent in the study object. This can be done since language is at its essence made for communication. Using language people can transfer meanings to one another. However, language is not neutral, but rather constitutive. That means that it is through language that meanings are created and changed (Taylor 2001: 6). Therefore discourse analysis is also the study of ".. human meaning-making" (Wetherell 2001a: 3). This meaning-making is called *semiosis,* and in addition to language also includes body-language, visuals, and other actions which involve signifying (Fairclough 2001b: 229). As stated above there are many different types of discourse analysis. The one chosen for this thesis is Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is explained in the next section.

According to Norman Fairclough discourses have three different functions. Firstly the "discourses contributes to the construction of systems of knowledge and beliefs" (Fairclough 1992: 64), expressing how something is or ought to be. This is called the *ideational* function. Secondly, they have a *relational* function, which means that they create relations between groups. Lastly people's identities are constructed through discourse (Boréus & Seiler Brylla 2018: 309).

5.3 Critical Discourse Analysis

Critical Discourse Analysis is a type of discourse analysis which is used for conducting critical research. It has its roots in critical realism and the Frankfurt School, and its purpose is to lay bare and investigate questions pertaining to power and power structures. At its core it has a purpose to work for progressive political and social change, and it is especially used a

for analysing racism, nationalism, and antisemitism (Boréus & Brylla 2018: 306, 308), which is fitting for this study. CDA sees discourse as both constituting the social world, but also as being constituted by material things such as political institutions and is thusly somewhat less constructionistic than other types of discourse analysis (Boréus & Seiler Brylla 2018: 305; Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 67-68) Within the framework of this study, Norman Fairclough's dialectical-relational version of CDA is used.

Within Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis, ideology is seen as "meaning in the service of power" (Winther-Jörgensen 2001: 79). This means that constructions of meaning which serve to create, sustain, or change relations of dominance in society are ideological. These relations of domination can be based on representations of for example class, gender or sexual orientation (Winther-Jörgensen 2001: 79), and they come to be "...through achieving a measure of hegemony" (Fairclough 2001b: 238).

Hegemony is a term used in many different types of discourse analysis. It is the state which commences when there are no longer different meanings within a certain discourse and when the contradictions of the discourse have disappeared. The term 'hegemony' was originally used by Italian marxist Antoni Gramsci, who used it to refer to the state of a subjugated class in society not questioning the current system and its justifications (Bergström & Ekström 2018: 262). In other words, hegemony is a power struggle in which consent or acquiescence, rather than violence, is used. These types of struggles permeate all of society in the social, cultural, political, and economic spheres. Hegemonies keep their power through people accepting them as natural and not questioning the fact that they very well could change, a process Fairclough deems ideological (Fairclough 2001b: 232). In fact, a hegemony is never stable, and the seeds to its demise is found within those who question it - "consensus is always a question of degree" (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 80). Critical Discourse Analysis is uses to investigate what role language plays in the battle for hegemony and domination, as well as how language manifests in an ideological manner (Fairclough 2001b: 30).

5.3.1 Fairclough's Three-dimensional Model
CDA contains three levels of analysis: discourse as text, discourse as discursive practice, and discourse as social practice. The three levels are first analysed separately, and the results from

these analyses are then analysed together (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 74-75). Since the second level is what binds the other two together, it will be explained after the first and third levels to give the reader of this thesis a better comprehension of the concepts.

5.3.2 Discourse as Text

Critical discourse analysis as a method is strongly influenced by linguistics. The first level of the analysis, 'discourse as text', is done through studying texts using linguistic tools (Boréus & Seiler Brylla 2018: 305). It is important to note that Fairclough does not mean 'text' in the narrow sense it is used in everyday life; for him 'text' is also other types of semiotic activity such as conversations or television programmes (Fairclough 2001b: 40). Several different types of linguistic tools can be employed for the study of the textual level, such as metaphors, words, grammar, and argumentation. In any Critical Discourse Analysis, only a few of these approaches can be used for any one study (Boréus & Seiler Brylla 2018: 305), and therefore I have chosen to focus only on the word aspects of the texts. Analysing the grammar of the materials was briefly considered and then abandoned since it requires skills in linguistics (Boréus & Seiler Brylla 2018: 343) which I do not possess. There are two lexical units which are the focus to the textual analysis in this thesis: key words and collective nouns.

Key words are semantically complex words that are central to a communication. They are dynamic, context dependent, and semantically productive. Different people might use the same key words but mean different things. In other words, they express complex ideas about the world, ideas, worldviews, or goals that correspond to the views of the person or group using them. In the analysis of these words focus is put on what purpose they serve in the discourse. A lot of times the meaning of key words is vague, allowing the person using them to fill them with a meaning of their choosing. This is part of a semantic struggle wherein different people try to define words in different ways. Another feature of key words is that they often spawn new words that are based on the original (Boréus & Seiler Brylla 2018: 322-324). I also study the character of words that are not key words but are nonetheless recurring.

Collective nouns are nouns that are used to represent a group of people as a collective, for example 'population' or 'police'. These categorisations are not natural, but rather done by humans, and how a collective noun is used will say something about how the person doing it values what they are describing and will also say something about their worldview (Boréus &

Seiler Brylla 2018: 321). The last thing I look for during the textual analysis is the use of quotation marks, bold font, and the use of the words 'so-called'. These metalinguistic markers can show what words in the texts are part of a semantic struggle of meaning and can also be used to redefine a word for special own purposes (Boréus & Seiler Brylla 2018: 324).

5.3.3 Discourse as Social Practice

In CDA language is not considered completely constituting of reality, unlike many other forms of discourse analysis. Language is rather seen as something which is constituting, but which is also constituted by social practices. These practices are changeable in the same way that discourses are, but they are often institutionalised and are therefore slow to change. Because of this the social practice is studied separate from the text analysis, using theories from social sciences such as sociology or political science. Exactly what is to be regarded as social practice is hard to determine, Fairclough does not give clear instructions on this, but a general rule is that the social practice is the context within which the discourse takes place (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 73). Boréus and Berström define the social practice as "patterns of behaviour, habits or conventions which follow more or less explicit rules" (Bergström & Boréus 2018: 23).

The unclear nature of what is to be regarded as social practice allows the researcher to decide for themselves what is to be used as social practice. As stated in the theory section, this thesis uses English nationalism and populism as social practice. The definitions and expressions of these phenomena that were outlined in the theory section is used to analyse and interpret the textual and discursive analyses.

5.3.4 Discourse as Discursive Practice

The discursive practice, which is the second level of Fairclough's three-dimensional model, is what links the textual and social levels together. The discursive practice concerns how people consume and produce texts using language, and it is in this way that texts ".. form and are formed by social practices" (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 75). The goal of CDA is to determine the relation between social practice and language in use (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 76). In practice this is done by analysing a specific case of language in use or a communicative event as part of the order of discourses (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 76).

The order of discourses is "the sum of all the genres and discourses used within a social institution or social domain" (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 76). In other words, the order of discourses contains the discourses and genres as person can use in a certain setting. However, it is not a strict system, in that it can be changed through a creative use of language. Therefore, it both creates and is created by specific uses of language and is "both structure and practice" (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 76). Interdiscursivity is the part of a discourse that connects it to other discourses. This is done through an expression of different discourses within and in between the orders of discourse. Using discourses in a new way creates a change in the sociocultural context, whereas using them in the normal manner is a sign that the order of discourse that has so far been dominating is maintained – and in extension the current social order is also maintained. *Intertextuality* is the concept that all texts refer to older texts in some way. Earlier texts are the building blocks for the new texts, and the discursive practice in the form of a communicative event can either reinforce a certain discursive practice by restating elements from a previous text, or it can use these older elements in order to facilitate change in the discourse (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 77).

In my analysis of the discursive practice I do two things, using linguistic methods. Firstly, I analyse the interdiscursivity, which means the different discourses that the texts are made up of. Secondly, I analyse the intertextuality to see if there are any changes. This procedure is in line with what Norman Fairclough normally does in his analyses (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 86). This will show whether the ERG's discursive practice and use of language is used to sustain the status quo of the social practice or whether it is used to change it, socially and culturally (Boréus & Seiler Brylla 2018: 309).

5.4 Materials

In this section I will explain what materials I analyse within the framework of the thesis, and why. The choice of materials for any study must be well justified (Bergström & Boréus 2018: 39), and the choice depends on what the research problem is, what knowledge one has about the topic of study, and whether or not it is accessible (Winther-Jörgensen & Phillips 2000: 76). Since this study aims to understand how the discourse of the ERG is constructed diversity

of sources and mediums is used to be able to capture their full discourse on the Irish border issue. The materials that are used are introduced below.

Firstly, *The Border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland post-Brexit* released on 12th September 2018, is an official report by the ERG wherein they put forward their technological solution to the border issue. This was selected to avoid having only the statements of individual ERG members. Two TV interviews with Theresa Villiers and Jacob-Rees-Mogg, respectively, were chosen to capture the discourse when speaking (sourced from YouTube). A blogpost written by Villiers on the "conservativehome" website in September 2018 was also chosen, as well as a column by Rees-Mogg written in *The Telegraph* in February 2018. A blog post from Iain Duncan Smith on the "conservativehome" website was also selected. For a list of these materials and links to where they can be accessed, see "Materials" in the bibliography.

The materials were also selected because the Irish border issue is explicitly talked or written about in them. These criteria limited the amount of material that was found, but it is judged to be enough for the analysis. The earliest source comes from early 2016 before the referendum, and the rest are from the course of 2018. This was done to be able to investigate the intertextuality of the ERG members' discourse. It would have been preferable to have had access to sources covering 2017 and possibly 2019 as well, but this was not found and the time available for the study was limited. Therefore, I am only studying the ERG's discourse during 2016 and 2018. Future studies can use a more comprehensive material.

5.5 Approach to the Analysis

First, I watched the two interviews on YouTube, and then downloaded the transcripts of them and put them in a document. Thereafter the procedure was the same for all the materials. I read them to get a sense of what they contained, and then I started analysing the texts linguistically as described above. The discursive practice was technically done separate, but the analysis started in my head during the textual analysis. After I had identified the intertextual elements, I interpreted the textual and discursive results through the theory of English nationalism and populism.

5.6 Credibility and Reflexivity

Validity in a study means that what is supposed to be measured is measured. However, since this study uses a social constructionistic perspective the matter is not as easy as that. The researcher actively helps to create what he studies since the researcher's preunderstanding of the subject and his life in a certain social and historic world affects his decision when conducting the study (Bergström & Boréus 2018: 38-40). Exploring the role of the researcher more will allow us to see what the influence is.

A common staring point, or at the very least a smart one, for any researcher is to choose a topic which interests them (Teorell & Svensson 2007: 17). Stephanie Taylor claims that these "personal interests, sympathies and political beliefs", are not to be viewed in a negative fashion, but rather they should be acknowledged (Taylor 2001: 17). I as the author of this thesis chose the topic of the ERG and the Northern Ireland issue because I have had an interest in British politics for a long time. I have not been in favour of the United Kingdom withdrawing from the European Union, nor am I in favour of English nationalism or populism. This is not necessarily a bad thing for the sake of this study, since it allows me to study the discourse of a group that I do not have much in common with to try to understand them. Even though full intersubjectivity is impossible with the epistemological and ontological presumptions upon which the thesis rests, transparency and well-founded results are critical to the process (Bergström & Boréus 2018: 41), and this will be provided.

6. Results and Analysis

In this section the results of the study are presented. The three dimensions of Fairclough's framework are presented in turn. The results of the textual analysis are presented first, followed by the analysis of the discursive practice and the analysis of the social practice.

6.1 Textual Analysis

'The people' is a recurrent collective noun in the texts. In Theresa Villiers' interview about the Irish border issue in 2016, she claims that a leave vote would mean that "… we would be facing the democratic exercise of choice by the people of the United Kingdom to leave the European Union, I think that's entirely consistent with the Belfast Agreement" (Sky News

2016). This use of the "the people" refers to those who would vote to leave the EU. 'The people' is also used as a collective noun in the materials from 2018, after the referendum. Jacob-Rees Mogg uses it to refer to the part of the electorate who voted for Brexit, and he also claims that the task of the cabinet was "to deliver on what the people told us to do when they voted to leave the EU." Iain Duncan Smith uses it to say that 'people' voted to get rid of the EU's regulatory requirements in the referendum, and he also claims that "the British people voted to leave the EU, and take back control of our borders, our laws and our money", also referring to the part of the electorate that voted to leave. Further he also claims that "… leaving the EU is also an opportunity because, if we deliver the Brexit that the public voted for, we will find ourselves in an incredibly strong position" (Duncan Smith 2018). These uses of 'the people' as a collective noun implies both that the entire electorate voted for Brexit and that those who did all voted for the same version of Brexit, namely the type of Brexit that the ERG wants to see happen.

As stated in the method section, a key word is a semantically complex word which forms the basis of a communication. The main key word found in the materials is 'Brexit'. Jacob Rees-Mogg puts a "genuine Brexit" in opposition to a transition deal that goes on indefinitely, which would be "Brexit in Name Only" (Rees-Mogg 2018). The word 'Brexit' is on some occasions used to signify the process of leaving the European in a relatively value-free way. Other times it is filled with semantic content congruent with their own ideas about what Brexit does, and should, mean. Iain Duncan Smith claims that "Leaving the Customs Union is a vital component of Brexit" (Duncan Smith 2018). He defines Brexit in this manner, claiming that this is the true meaning of Brexit, and that it will enable the UK "to create a global network of free trade deals." He further reinforces the ERG's definition of Brexit when he writes about Theresa May's New Customs Partnership that "this arrangement would run the risk of destroying the great prize of Brexit – namely, the ability of the UK to strike trade deals with the rest of the world" (Duncan Smith 2018). Theresa Villiers does something similar, claiming that a free trade agreement would mean the "vote to leave is respected" (Villiers 2018), implying that a Brexit deal which did not include a free trade agreement would not really be Brexit.

'Straightforward" is a word which is not be a key word to understanding the discourse but is nonetheless recurring. In the ERG report it is written that determining equivalence for agricultural products between the UK and the EU after Brexit "should be straightforward", though they mention that the standards might change after the departure (European Research

Group 2018:17). Rees-Mogg claims that the technological solution would be "straightforward", and that achieving no hard border between Northern Ireland and Great Britain, no hard border between Northern Ireland and Ireland, and no customs union for the UK is "straightforward." He also claims that the backstop issue is "straightforward" (Rees-Mogg 2018).

Quotation marks and the use of the phrase 'so-called' are metalinguistic markers that are found in the ERG report: "The so-called *'backstop'* of *'full alignment'* would automatically apply *'in the absence of agreed solutions',* i.e. in the event of the EU disagreeing on the overall relationship" (European Research Group 2018:6). The use of the wording 'so-called' and the quotation marks implies that the backstop is not really a solution to avoid a hard border, but instead some sort of ploy on the part of the EU. The report also says that the EU's suggestion that Northern Ireland might remain in the customs union is not a possible solution, but rather a "solution" (European Research Group 2018:6). The Irish border problem is written with quotation marks around the word problem, thusly: "... the Irish border 'problem' " (European Research Group 2018:11) which implies that is in fact not a problem at all.

6.2 Discursive Analysis

A discourse of downplaying the importance of the border issue is an intertextual element that is found in all the analysed materials. A part of this discourse is the idea that no physical infrastructure is necessary because of the ERG's technological solution. Furthermore, the texts claim that little about the border would change, that the border issue has been blown out of proportion, and that the border will remain as free flowing as it is now. Warnings about the potential dangers to the Belfast Agreement are portrayed by Theresa Villiers as "scaremongering of the most irresponsible and even dangerous kind (Sky News 2016). Similarly, Jacob Rees-Mogg says about the warnings that the peace process might be jeopardised by a hard border that "it's a really dangerous type of scare mongering actually because it is raising the spectre of a return to violence to achieve a short-term political goal" (BBC 2018b). He also claims that the border issue is one of several "imaginary problems" that are only put forward by people who were always against Brexit (Rees-Mogg 2018). The EU is also framed as using the issue to gain leverage in the negotiations and to bully the UK rather than being concerned for the peace process and single market (Duncan Smith 2018). This view towards the border issue shown in all the texts is best summarised by the opening

line to the ERG report on Northern Ireland: "The issue of the border between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland has been allowed to frame the Brexit negotiations" (European Research Group 2018:1).

One intertextual element which appears in three of the sources from 2018 (Smith 2018, Rees-Mogg 2018, ERG 2018) is the view that the UK government is mismanaging the negotiations. The backstop is described as a "perversion of democracy" (Rees-Mogg 2018), and Duncan Smith suggests that the UK government has seems desperate to and has wasted time satisfying the demands of the EU (Duncan Smith 2018). Furthermore, the ERG report says that the UK government has failed in the negotiations, has been giving in to the EU's demands, and that it should challenge the EU more (European Research Group 20118:6-8).

The sovereignty of the UK is another intertextual element which appears in all the materials. Brexit is portrayed as a way to restore British democracy and as something that will finally allow Britain to be a sovereign state that can take unilateral actions again and, most importantly, sign trade deals with the rest of the world. As Duncan Smith says about the prospect of being in some sort of customs union: "In simple terms, this arrangement would run the risk of destroying the great prize of Brexit – namely, the ability of the UK to strike trade deals with the rest of the world" (Duncan Smith 2018). Another quote which captures their longing for sovereignty is: We want what the Irish have had for a century: the freedom to follow our own start. Our choice is to go…" (Rees-Mogg 2018).

The idea of the UK government mismanaging the negotiations was the only one of the three identified intertextual elements not to appears in all the sources. The reason for this is that the one source where it did not appear is from 2016, before the negotiations or even the referendum took place. The other two intertextual elements, the downplaying of the border issue and Brexit being a way to restore British democracy and sovereignty, was found within all the sources. This high level of intertextuality suggests that none of the ERG members are challenging the dominating discourse found within their group but are instead reproducing it.

6.3 Social Practice Analysis

The intertextual element of downplaying the importance of the border, that no physical infrastructure is need, and that maintaining a free-flowing border without Northern Ireland in the customs union is 'straightforward' are all signs of the dislike of complexity exhibited by populists. Instead of engaging with possible solutions put forward by other parties, they stick to their own 'simple' technological solution. It also shows how they value 'common sense' of 'the people' over rationality, with the people being people who agree with them.

There are many parts of the results which suggest that the discourse is populist in nature. The ERG claims that 'the people' voted for Brexit, which was found in the textual analysis, implicitly says that only those who voted to leave are part of the people. This is the core concept of populism, the thought that society is divided between the real people and the elite. The fact that the ERG also claim that their preferred version of Brexit is what the people voted for reinforces this observation, since a key part of populism is that 'the people' are those who agree with the populists. This is, however, not the only results which suggest that the ERG's discourse in the analysed materials is populist.

The intertextual element of the ERG believing that the UK government is mismanaging the negotiations, the negative view of the UK government trying to meet the demands of the EU, and describing the backstop as a "perversion of democracy" (Rees-Mogg 2018) all point to the populist idea of being the only legitimate representatives of the people. It points to populists' dislike of complexity. The two remarks from Villiers and Rees-Mogg suggesting that those who warn about the risks to the Belfast Agreement are dangerous can be interpreted as the populist practice of painting any opposition as immoral.

Portraying Brexit as a taking back control of borders, laws, and sovereignty and restoring British democracy follows the key tenet of English nationalism: a defence of British sovereignty. This suggests that taking back their sovereignty from the EU whatever the cost is more important than protecting the peace on the island of Ireland. In addition to the focus on sovereignty, the distrust of the EU also shows the English nationalism within the ERG's discourse. The ERG claiming that the EU is using the border issue as leverage and not because they are actually worried about the peace process or the single market reinforces how the discourse of the ERG is centred around anti-European ideas.

Lastly, the goal of Brexit being trade deals with countries around the world suggests that the English nationalist idea of seeking closer relationships with Anglosphere countries is part of the discourse. However, the evidence for this is scant and no conclusions can be drawn from it. Nevertheless, the other examples above show a clear connection between the discourse of the ERG and English nationalism.

7. Conclusion & Discussion

The results of this study show that the discourse of the European Research Group regarding the Irish border issue is constructed around the belief that it is not a problem at all, because as populists they deny complexity and instead try to solve the problem with what they consider a simple, common sense and 'straightforward' technological solution. The results also show that the discourse of the ERG is highly influenced by English nationalism. This is shown by their distrust for the EU as well as by their desire to on take back control of the borders sovereignty no matter what people warn the cost to the peace process would be. The overall discourse of the European Research Group in the sampled materials is both populist and English nationalist.

According to the results of my analysis, the discourse of the Eurosceptic European Research Group is based on populism and English nationalism, which is aligned with the findings of Henderson et. al (2016) and Gifford (2014) that showed a link between English nationalism and Euroscepticism. The results of this study are also congruent with the research of Elsayed (2018) and Wellings (2012) that found that English nationalism is also populist.

I would encourage future researchers to study the discourse of the ERG more thoroughly, using a larger amount of materials and for a longer time span to be able to ascertain the intertextuality more effectively. I would also encourage more discourse-based research around nationalism and populism in general. The results of this study are not objective truths, but they do suggest a path for future research.

It is important to reflect on the method I used in this study. The results are strongly connected to the Critical Discourse Analysis that was used. As an interpretative method it will inevitably lead to a subjective analysis, which was the case also in this study. The lack of real instructions on how to analyse the social practice also led to a somewhat disorganised analysis. The use of English nationalism and populism as a social practice worked, in that I

managed to answer my research question, but operationalising it in a different manner might have yielded more robust results. The amount of the material used for this study was also quite small which limited the study and the amount of intertextual analysis that could be carried out. Nonetheless, I hope that this study can generate greater awareness of how populist and nationalist discourses are constructed so that people who come across them can recognise them for what they are.

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