

GlobalBritain™: The Discursive Construction of Britain's Post-Brexit World Role

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Abstract

Of the many dilemmas faced by Theresa May in negotiating Britain's withdrawal from the EU, finding a workable narrative to accompany Brexit proved one of the most intractable. She and her top government ministers alighted on the idea of "Global Britain", unpacked in this article using qualitative discourse analysis. It begins by positioning the contribution in the literatures on constructivist approaches to British foreign policy. Next, it explains the method used to select the relevant sources, develop the codebook and interpret the data. The third section outlines the policy architecture intended to make GlobalBritain™ practical reality. The final section unpacks the accompanying "vision" behind GlobalBritain™, which is framed as the story of Britain escaping a damaging period of confinement inside the EU "prison". The central argument is that GlobalBritain™ puts a marked Eurosceptic twist on a long-standing UK grand strategy aimed at remaining at the top table of global affairs using a pragmatic approach to international relationships. Always a troublesome arena for the conduct of its external relations, Brexit shows Britain continuing its half-in, half-out approach to European integration. The conclusion critically reflects on the research we can now conduct to discover more about this foreign policy narrative in-the-making. Like the politicians, scholars are still puzzled by the "why" and "how" of Brexit. This article contributes to the research on the "how" of Brexit by exploring the Conservative government's foreign policy vision for Britain's role in the world outside the EU. It first explains the contributions the research makes to constructivist interpretivist foreign policy analysis. Next, it explains the method used to investigate the discursive substance of the GlobalBritain™ narrative: spatiality, temporality, ethicality and intertextuality. The third

section outlines the proposed policy architecture of Global Britain™. The final section reports the findings on the narrative side, showing how the discourse approach yielded comprehensive insights into this vision in the making, bolstered by the politicians' colourful use of metaphor. The central argument is that Global Britain™ puts a Conservative Euro-sceptic twist on long-standing British foreign policy traditions, making for a negative, defensive narrative that will likely limit its resonance to key stakeholders domestically and internationally. The conclusions reflect on the utility of using this method to connect discourse analysts and foreign policy analysts and, thereby, its potential to impact on the policy community by mainstreaming discourse analysis as a toolkit for conducting foreign policy evaluation.

Keywords

Brexit; discourse analysis; British foreign policy; Global Britain; narrative; Theresa May

Word count: 7,9767,979

Introduction

So, is there any substance to the claim that GlobalBritain™ is a meaningful “turning point in our nation’s story” (Davis, 2016) – and how can we find out? Attacking GlobalBritain™ was, and will continue to be, another device for contesting Brexit. elites use epideictic rhetoric (unpacked in the methods section below) to generate and legitimise foreign policy narratives “through which they seek seeking “to unite the citizenry around a set of shared ideals and a common identity” (Atkins, 2015, pp. 603–605). Although this is understandable in such a febrile political climate, it is also unfortunate because GlobalBritain™ provides a fascinating insight into how elites use epideictic rhetoric (unpacked in the methods section below) to generate and legitimise foreign policy narratives “through which they seek to unite the citizenry around a set of shared ideals and a common identity” (Atkins, 2015, pp. 603–605). Finding answers to these questions is no simple task for two reasons. First, at the time of writing, GlobalBritain™ is happening but has not yet happened: it is “under construction”, literally and metaphorically, meaning that the constellation of material practices that will give concrete expression to the vision (such as trade deals and security agreements) have not yet been agreed or implemented. Second, lasting innovation in UK foreign policy is difficult to achieve, whether born of ideological choice (on New Labour’s “ethical dimension” see Little and Wickham-Jones 2000; Wheeler and Dunne, 2002; Daddow, 2011), or the exigencies of internal government management (on the 2010–2015 Coalition government’s “liberal Conservatism” (Beech, 2011; Clarke, 2015; Daddow and Schnapper, 2013; Daddow, 2015a). These governments have left important

legacies on the ground, but less of a mark on Britain's post-1945 grand strategy, including an
it is high time that we step away from the heat of controversy and shine a light on what
more informed debate about Global Britain™ and Brexit and the future of British foreign
this article is to shine that light using. According to this broad scholarly consensus, the
consider assessing the shape of the contours of the vision it lays down for Britain's foreign
Brexit (May, 2017a). The opening section grounds root explains the article's contribution
foreign policy analysis and the study of British foreign policy. The second section explains
the rationale for treating the subject matter discursively (Milliken, 1999) and the method of
theory of where Brexit decision-making lay in the of European policy decision-making in
Section three we outlines Global Britain™'s policy architecture using a four-pillar framework
incorporating the mutually reinforcing instruments of its hard power – military, diplomatic
economic – and soft power – the power to attract (Hill and Beadle, 2014) and persuade other
states to the rightness of one's national goals power dimensions (hard and soft power are
2008); applied to the study of British foreign policy in Daddow, 2015a. :). The final section
audiences of the appropriateness of the journey on which Britain has embarked through
Brexit fashion their into a story about the purpose and direction of Britain's travel on leaving

The prime argument below central claim in what follows is that the policy architecture
of Global Britain™ puts a Conservative Euro-sceptic twist on long-standing British foreign
policy traditions. The policy architecture is firmly in line with the “pragmatic” foreign policy
tradition since 1945 (Honeyman, 2017) in British foreign policy since 194, aimed at
promoting British prosperity, guaranteeing its security, and keeping Britain at the “top
table” of global affairs through the careful calibration of its international relationships and
institutional collaborations (Bratberg, 2011) (see above). Against this backdrop, Brexit has
been packaged as a change of tactic in pursuit of a familiar grand strategy. More novelty is
evident on the narrative side, with Global Britain™ discourse casting Britain as a captive

[making a “great escape” from the EU “prison” \(Rankin, 2018; Staunton, 2018\). The variously, been described as a story of “redemption from the European venture” \(Kenny and Pearce, 2018, p. 105\), a former great power seeking “lost status” outside the EU \(see Beaumont, 2017, pp. 385-387\) and a an “escaping prisoner”, wrapped up in the Conservative after it had been subjugated by an empire” \(von Bismarck, 2017\). The article concludes by critically reflecting on and a former great power seeking “lost status” outside the EU \(see policy narrative in-the-making. In a nutshell, May’s government has constructed Britain as a](#)

Interpreting Foreign Policy Narratives: A Discourse Approach

Constructivists (see Bevir and Daddow, 2015) theorize foreign policy as a social activity with meaning-making at its heart (applied to the UK in Gaskarth, 2013). [These meanings underpin and are given practical expression by foreign policy practices.](#) Narratives are, [therefore](#), widely considered to be vital to the process of defining Britain’s role in the world (see McCourt, 2014; [Blagden, 2017](#); Blagden, 2018), but they are often explored [well](#) after the event, [or treated](#) as historical curiosities. It is rare to see narrative analysis applied contemporaneously at the [policy](#) development stage to untangle [vision-ideas literally and metaphorically as they are in the proces](#) under constructions of informing controversial or contested policy goals such as Brexit. Whilst this potentially leaves hostages to fortune, it also provides ways for academics to impact upon debates by providing [richly contextual, systematically derived empirical](#) context sensitive evidence from a morass of [often confusing](#) text data, little of which usually makes it to the public domain, beyond the odd soundbite (Broad and Daddow, 2010). [The article](#) finds much to commend Knud Erik Jørgensen’s [\(2015\)](#) opinion, therefore, that there is [still much potential for much value in](#) cross-

fertilization between discourse theorists on the one hand and foreign policy analysts

Method

But if we wish to interpret Global Britain™ as a foreign policy narrative, how do we do it
discourse method for research adapted the discourse method interpreting British European
approach to identifying and analysing the relevant qualitative data, as explicated by Todd

Step 1: Which texts?

Not being “inside” the policy-making process — and observing things as an “outsider” — on
meant — means that we have to work with publicly available knowledge about how Brexit
and who “authored” the main contours of the strategic communications. Most credible
during her long stint running the Home Office (May 2010 to July 2016), May ran a “closed”,
non-inclusive decision-making centralized operation (Pickard and Mance, 2017): “she does
not care to share power any more than is necessary” (Usherwood, 2017).
small, dedicated team” (Mohdin, 2018) — puts May her in line with many a previous UK prime
minister confronted with “wicked” foreign and/or European policy dilemmas (Daddow,
2011).

the Cabinet Office (Casalichio and Rutter, 2018), side-lining even supposedly heavyweight
departments such as the FCO, the Cabinet Office and Downing Street (Casalichio and
Rutter, 2018). We can fairly assume that the same has been true, to varying degrees, for the
other main government departments. The exigency of policy management by and from the
centre became more obvious. May’s grip over Brexit policy tightened as the withdrawal
negotiations proceeded and fractures inside government began to appear (Kirby, 2018). For
instance, at the time of writing DxEU had been led by three ministers: David Davis (July

2016-July 2018), Dominic Raab (July 2018-November 2018) and Stephen Barclay (November 2018-present), the first two resigning citing an overbearing Downing Street operation.

Using this theory of how Brexit policy was made, the decision was made to focus on May and her top team in the formative early years of Brexit when the GlobalBritain™ script was being authored. It takes the story from July 2016 to a neat cut-off in July 2018, when Boris Johnson resigned from the FCO, hours after Davis left the DxEU. In effect, this was the first “wave” of GlobalBritain™ discourse: designing the strategy and establishing the essentials of the vision. In the same period Jeremy Hunt replaced Boris Johnson in July 2018, tracking how successful its proponents were in establishing its legitimacy in the minds of key stakeholders. Nevertheless, by setting out the discourse terrain the article can be used as a tool of policy evaluation, as described in the conclusion. Table 1 sets out the main primary documents ~~sources~~ used to interpret GlobalBritain™. Reflecting the power structures described above, the focus is on May, ~~aided and abetted in the crucial formative early months of Brexit by high profile figures from the Leave campaign, notably Boris Johnson at the Foreign Office, Liam Fox at the newly created Department for International Trade and David Davis at another newly created ministry, the Department for Exiting the European Union (DxEU). The core material is fleshed out with the words of other ministers such as Priti Patel (July 2016–November 2017) and Penny Mordaunt (November 2017–present) at the Department for International Development’s Downing Street operation, with the concentric circles of influence emanating out to the FCO, DxEU, Department of International Trade and DfID, thence to the diplomatic operation abroad (the latter not covered here).~~ ~~At the core are speeches on Brexit, British foreign and European policy delivered by the key members of May into economic practice through free trade deals and so on’s foreign policy team. Then, there is an array of~~ This data is complemented by reports plus those from think tank

~~documents from from published by right leaning~~ think tanks known to have close
(see for example O’Murchu and Mance, 2017). ~~which we use to understand more about the~~
~~to sketch~~generate a picture of where, beyond Westminster, GlobalBritain™ was being
and marketed. However, a full analysis of think-tanks and the production of GlobalBritain™
~~discourse will have to wait for another day, deliberated and advocated. Between them, the~~

Step 2: Reading, analysing and reporting ~~the Text Data~~the text data

~~This is not a content analysis of GlobalBritain™, concerned only or mainly with what was~~
~~said and how often~~about it, but a discourse analysis of how propositions are expressed -
~~which foregrounds how “propositions are expressed.”~~on the basis that the linguistic choices
[speakers] make are crucial for an analysis of what the text communicates” (Cameron and
Panović, 2014, p. 67). The research questions driving the coding process were: (i) What was
the proposed policy content of GlobalBritain™? (ii) How did GlobalBritain™ advocates
explain, ~~and justify~~ and thereby mobilize support for this vision for British foreign policy
after Brexit? In line with established discourse methodology (Wetherell et al., 2009, p. 39),
the ~~research~~ questions were answered by categorizing and coding the text data to elicit the
relevant keywords. In tightly controlled political messaging there is often frequent repetition
within a politician’s oeuvre (temporally), as well as across speeches by different politicians at
the same “moments” (spatially), making the keywords relatively easy to identify from a core
corpus of texts, as described below. The keywords signal what is important to a given speaker
and/or set of speakers and are used to work up a picture of the linguistic “hooks” on which
the discourse hangs.

~~plus in tightly controlled political messaging there is often frequent repetition within~~
that stays as faithful as possible to what the speakers appear to have wanted to convey by
their words. By “piling up” quotations from the speakers on each of the themes sparked by

the research questions (policy content and “vision”, respectively) one can write a richly detailed account of what we think the speakers were getting at in phrasing things as they did. ~~The research questions driving the coding process were: (i) What was the proposed policy~~ foreign policy aspirations in several of the speeches and there was also a strong path dependency to the discourse. The script did not change much over the years 2016 to 2018, ~~in any discernible way over~~ identify from a surface reading. For example Helpfully, May’s January 2017 Lancaster House speech (May, 2017a) included a section halfway through ~~section~~ titled “A Truly Global Britain”.¹ This passage ~~which staked out her policy aspirations~~ became the agreed “script” for describing Britain’s ~~preferred~~ foreign policy ~~architecture~~ preferences post-Brexit, meaning the codebook on policy architecture ~~was built around coding for~~ words relating to hard and soft power, especially trade, the economy, security, science and innovation. ~~The rest of the speeches showed that neither May nor her ministers deviated from this initial template in any significant way. I am confident, therefore,~~

¹ See the online appendix which shows how to code a speech using research questions. A full codebook is available on request.

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~~that the four pillar framework for interpreting the policy horizons of GlobalBritain™, set out~~

Getting at the narrative and “vision” components ~~identity strand~~ of GlobalBritain™ discourse required ~~a more nuanced reading of the material, necessitating attention to the~~ epideictic rhetoric through which foreign policy elites consolidate national community identity through exclusions and a attention to the differentiations drawn in the texts between what social psychologists call ~~what social psychologists call~~ “in-groups” and “out-groups” (Beaumont, 2017, p. 380), ~~or,~~ and what political scientists refer to as the national “Self” and international “Others” (Atkins, 2015, p. 605; Jørgensen, 2015, p. 501). In British European foreign policy discourse this antithesis has tended to surface, ~~historically,~~ in tales of an “island” Britain set apart from continental Europe an machinations, only involving itself when absolutely necessary for urgent security reasons or to protect vital, mainly economic, interests (Saunders, 2018), ~~initially as “balancer” in the Victorian heyday of Empire (Daddow, 2015)~~ and, in the twentieth century, as a lone or one of a few “good” powers battling Europe’s tyrannical dictators when they threatened to dominate the continental against British interests (Saunders, 2018).

While interconnected and overlapping in important ways, they are reported separately below for reasons of clarity. In line with previous findings on political oratory (~~von~~ Bismarek, 2017; Charteris-Black, 2005, p. 26; see also Finlayson, 2007) the data also indicated that metaphors did a lot of heavy lifting in constructing the ~~in the construction of~~ GlobalBritain™ vision, so ~~and~~ these became an equally important component of the codebook. In brief, metaphors are creative associations in language used to make “your hearers see things” by bringing “something fresh” to an audience’s cognitive and emotional engagement with a given issue (Aristotle, 2012, p. 182 and p. 179). That political oratory “deals with future events” (Aristotle, 2012, p. 161) using evidence culled from history, makes journey metaphors particularly useful to the politicians who want to spell out where a country

has come from, where it is, the dilemmas it faces and where they want to take it as navigatory devices. In the what was over the years 2016-2018 an insurgent narrative-in-the-making in Global Britain™,⁵ where concrete progress was always likely to be behind the need for a vision, we would expect the metaphorical imagination to play an even more important role. As shown below, this proved to be the case, with journey, lightness/darkness and family metaphors were all in operation-. Having positioned the contribution and explained the method, the remainder of the article reports the findings. While all of these thematic elements and linguistic devices cross-cut in important ways, they are reported separately below for the purposes of clarity.

The initial codebook was drawn up using the government's most influential purveyors of Global Britain™ discourse: Theresa May (2017a), Boris Johnson (2017) and Liam Fox (2016). It was expanded—albeit not significantly—as further sources were brought to the

⁵ I have borrowed the telling word “insurgent” from one of the anonymous reviewer’s comments on an earlier draft.

~~table.⁶ The keywords signal what is important to a given speaker, but crucially they — or their~~

Policy architecture: the four pillars of GlobalBritain™

~~Figure 1 sets down the [proposed policy architecture for policy vision underpinning](#) GlobalBritain™. Given the paramountcy of economics to the Brexit debate has resulted in a national conversation “monopolised by the future trade and customs relationship” (Ricketts, 2018a), it is important to note that, away from specialized publications (for instance Kienzie and Hallams, 2016), the wider policy political, defence and security objectives have had less of an airing. The take home theoretical point in this section is, therefore, that a sober discourse reading, away from the heat of Brexit minutiae, can shed light on themes and issues forgotten in the cut and thrust of a polarized policy debate such as that instigated by Brexit.~~

[Figure 1 here]

~~The Pillar 1 priority for Global Britain is [Pillars 1 and 2 of GlobalBritain™ are about](#) economics and the requirement to replace Britain’s financial benefits from its expiring EU [membership with new](#) financial relationships with [and beyond the EU](#). Top billing goes to Pillar 1 and -“a bold and ambitious free trade agreement with the European Union” covering goods and services (May 2017a). ~~This plays to a long tradition in the British Conservative Party and British European policy, where the politics of integration, especially concerning the loss of sovereignty involved, were hotly contested from Thatcher’s September 1988 Bruges speech onward (Thatcher, 1988; Fontana and Parsons, 2015; Vail, 2015;). The British always preferred to construe European integration instrumentally as a source of nourishment for the domestic economy. The economic benefits of membership of the Single European Market (SEM), plus those accruing to the City of London as a global financial hub, were reasons why even the EU’s harshest detractors in Britain acquiesced in membership for so long.~~~~

~~This Discourse in pillar Pillars 1 and 2 drew on an influential stand of economic liberalism in Conservative Party thought, interweaving several propositions in support of an exceptionalist narrative (elaborated in Atkins, 2015) about seemed to be drawing on long established strands of Conservative Party thinking about Britain's role in the global political economy: first, that Britain ~~was the architect of~~built the global free trade system in the nineteenth century; second, that free trade is a powerful force for good economically and politically; third, that Britain is uniquely well placed to benefit from free trade; fourth, that the EU's "highly regulated and expensive Single Market and Customs Union approach" inhibited Britain from achieving its "historic mission of supporting global free trade" (Stewart and Monteith, 2016, p. 2); and, finally, in terms of ethicality and imperial temporality, that the spread of free trade supplies the "a moral dimension to our mission" (Fox, 2017; see also Johnson, 2016). Intertextuality was in operation at this point, with Priti Patel (2017) name-checking Thatcher to argue of free trade that it is "one of the most dynamic forces for good in the world. It creates jobs, and fosters peace. It raises incomes and it unleashes the power of private enterprise. It changes individual lives, and by doing so it can transform entire economies."~~

Pillar 3 shifts from the hard power of economics to the softer power of politics and culture,⁷ the aim being ing to create "a far-reaching science and innovation pact with the EU" (May, 2018c). This is to be anchored in "our academic and scientific communities...some of the world's best universities... And... cutting-edge research and innovation" (May, 2017a). May envisaged cooperation on space exploration, clean energy and medical technologies (May, 2017a), as fleshed out in her February 2018 Munich Security Conference speech (May, 2018b). Pillar 3 of GlobalBritain™ drew soft power comparative advantages that have been staples of elite foreign policy thinking for decades (see also Newman et al., 2017). In 1997,

⁷ For a characteristic list of Britain's hard and soft power capabilities, see "The Prize" segment of (Davis, 2016).

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for example, Chancellor Gordon Brown (1997) eulogized the pioneering spirit and the “British Genius” (invoking George Orwell’s wartime essay on socialism and the “English Genius”) which Brown believed marked the country out for a leadership role in Europe and globally. May insinuated the same by referring to “the talents of our people” (May, 2018b; May, 2018c; May, 2018d). Johnson (2017) averred that British leadership would be exerted through the efforts of “inventors, scientists, business people, students and dreamers.”

Pillar 4 deals with ~~hard power politics~~[the hard power dimension of](#) security cooperation between Britain and its European partners on “[cross-border] crime, terrorism and foreign affairs”. The latter was geared towards containing “dangers presented by hostile states”, not least Russia (May, 2017a), which under Putin was persistently accused of transgressing the norms and rules of international society, including through its “reckless use of chemical weapons on the streets of Britain by agents of the Russian GRU [Russian military intelligence]” (May, 2018c). ~~May (2017d) wanted practical measures around law enforcement and intelligence sharing, formalised in “a treaty between the UK and the EU.”~~[The goal, according to Davis \(2017b\), was “a strategic partnership that allows us to tackle the full range of threats we face”. Taken together](#)~~Between them, the four pillars of~~[GlobalBritain™ tell us what the government wanted from its international relationships after Brexit](#), prolonging decades-worth of thinking on how to secure British interests and promote its values in the global arena (Gilmore, 2014; Daddow, 2015a). [The next section reports how the policy proposals were](#) framed through an investigation into the narrative underpinnings of GlobalBritain™.

GlobalBritain™: plotting the “great escape”

[As explained in the methods section, to map GlobalBritain™’s discursive terrain is to consider it as “a coherent and comprehensive set of representations.”](#) (Todd, 2016, 23;

~~emphasis in original), revolving around (ibid., citing Hansen; and agreeing with Daddow,~~
using representative illustrations from the text data.

~~Othering via differentiation~~ Self and Other

Othering was achieved by comparing and contrasting “British” identity, interests and values with those of its “European” neighbours, pointing out elements of overlap and difference. It is a fact, said May, that Britain and Europe “share common interests and values and so much else” (May, 2017c), making Britain, in Johnson’s words, “one of the great quintessential European nations” (Johnson, 2017; see also Davis, 2017a). The unavoidable reality of existing in a shared geographic space had ~~has~~ encouraged the build-up of a dense web of cultural and commercial ties over centuries, or “lived, shared experiences” rooted in “centuries-old shared cultural, social and economic ties that exist between us” (Davis, 2017b). This observation anchored one of May’s most common soundbites (2017d): “We may be leaving the European Union, but we are not leaving Europe.” May drew on both Labour’s internationalism (May, 2017c) as well as thinking more familiar to Conservatives from Thatcher’s Bruges speech onward (~~Thatcher, 1988;~~ Daddow, 2013) that: “We are a European country – and proud of our shared European heritage” (May, 2017a). Britain’s values of “peace, democracy, human rights and the rule of law” (May, 2017d; May, 2018b) were sometimes presented as unique to Britain, at other times not specific to Britain, which ~~unique~~: “is not the only member state where there is a strong attachment to accountable and democratic government, such a strong internationalist mindset, or a belief that diversity within Europe should be celebrated” (May, 2017a).

All t This said, the government believed that whatever historico-cultural affinities Britain shared with “Europe”, it did not feel sufficiently “EU” to remain embedded in the organization ~~the people had spoken in the referendum~~. Davis explained (2016) that Britain

always saw the EU “differently” from its “European neighbours” because of different historical trajectories and “that has been one of the problems”. Johnson (2016) concurred that the referendum result proved that the British could never “endorse the finalité politique of the EU” because it embodied a cornucopia of differences from the British way of “doing” governance:

Our political traditions are different. Unlike other European countries, we have no written constitution, but the principle of Parliamentary Sovereignty is the basis of our unwritten constitutional settlement. We have only a recent history of devolved governance...and we have little history of coalition government (May 2017a; see also May, 2017b) .

One of the stated causes of the differentiation between “Europe” on the one hand and “Britain” on the other, was Britain’s status of an island cut adrift from mainland Europe by the English (~~not British~~) Channel, opening the way to consider the spatial elements of ~~the~~ discursive construction of GlobalBritain™ discourse.

Spatiality

Mobilizing Britain’s island geography prompted the producers of GlobalBritain™ prompted discourse to imagine “Europe” as an inconvenient or even hostile outlet for the expression of Britishness, driving a further wedge between the two imagined entities of “Britain” and “Europe”.⁸ It is evident that Henrietta Marshall’s famous 1905 school history textbook, *Our Island Story*, has had a strong hold over the national historical imaginary back to Victorian

⁸ The imposition of Conservative interpretations of Englishness onto UK foreign policy and GlobalBritain™ discourse is beyond the remit of this article, but see (Kumar, 2003; Marquand, 2009; Vail, 2015)., suffice to say it further weakens the resonance of the narrative in Remain-voting countries such as Scotland.

times (see Daddow, 2011; Brocklehurst, 2015; Wellings, 2018). Its account of English and British history has sustained two important spatializing narratives that surfaced in the 2016 membership referendum campaign ~~and, later, and after, now fuelling~~ Global Britain™’s ~~spatializing dimensions.~~

First, the requirement to uphold a loosely defined notion of British “sovereignty” (Ichijo, 2008; Todd, 2016) in the face of sovereignty-degrading practices in the EU (~~Thatcher, 1988~~). This was exemplified in ~~the May’s~~ claim that, after Brexit, Britain would be “in control of its own destiny *once again* [as in pre-1973, when it joined the European Community]” (May, 2017, emphasis added). This “control” purportedly extends over a variety of policy areas ~~such as national borders, immigration numbers (Davis, 2016) and national security (Davis, 2017a)~~. The second important spatializing narrative has been the perceived imperative to uphold a historically constituted sense of “traditional” (pre-Community entry) British identity in the face of “centralizing” tendencies in the maligned “Brussels” institutions, especially those downloaded from the European Commission and other institutions staffed by what are described as unelected “bureaucrats”. ~~In this Thatcherite vein,~~ May (2017a) said her biggest problems ~~s~~ with the EU ~~were~~ its “supranational institutions” (May, 2017a) that “struggled to deal with the diversity of its member countries and their interests. It bends towards uniformity, not flexibility.” ~~And third, as David Marquand has shown (2009, pp. 11–12), the historically constituted narrative of which proclaims the island people to be a ‘providential nation’, ‘uniquely freedom-loving, and at the same time uniquely oceanic and uniquely imperial’.~~

The political implications of these spatializing narratives were clearly articulated by May in the Florence speech (2017d), where she suggested that because ~~Britain was of being~~ geographically separate ~~from mainland Europe~~, “the European Union never felt to us like an integral part of our national story in the way it does to so many elsewhere in Europe”. After

1945, GlobalBritain™ ~~enthusiast~~ ~~entrepreneur~~ remarked, Britain’s international journey had taken on a qualitatively different character from that of “core (integrationist) Europe”. As Johnson put it, a “group of European countries” integrated regionally, while Britain and the US “had a different approach” (Johnson, 2016), carrying out a global mission [as part of the post-war “Big Three” and, later “Big Five” UN powers](#) that ~~have~~ “defined the modern world” (May, 2017b), as well as being “present at the creation” of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) as the irredeemable guarantor of European security (on Brexit and NATO see Dunne and Webber, 2016). Summing up the “exceptionalist” element of this discourse, Fox (2016) reflected that [the British story was one of triumph against all odds](#): “A small island perched on the edge of Europe became the world’s largest and most powerful trading nation”⁹ (see also [Davis, 2016](#); Fox, 2017). Britain’s national trajectory, he implied, had simply been out of step with Europe’s, and Brexit was the practical realization of that “fact” of international life.

Temporality

The post-Brexit direction of Britain’s journey through international history was captured in a series of lightness/darkness metaphors representing Britain as a place of progress and enlightenment in contrast to the EU’s zone of “backwardness and intransigence” (Todd, 2016, p. 31). Outside the EU, the framing went, Britain’s “future is bright” (May, 2018c) because it could once more operate as an international “beacon” when it regained its status as an “independent trading nation” (Fox, 2016; see also Singham, 2017, pp. 3-4).⁹ The assertion that Britain could resist any Brexit-induced decline by operating as a “beacon for good for the world” also appeared in the Global Britain report (Stewart and Monteith, 2016, pp. 15-16 and

⁹ The marked use of the word “beacon” to describe Britain’s international “character” evokes the “Britain “standing alone in 1940” frame supported by a “lightness” metaphor, showing the overlapping nature of spatiality, temporality and ethicality, all of which can be captured in single words or metaphors.

18). Other examples of lightness/darkness metaphors ~~of the light-dark, semi-religious~~ (2017c) that in the 2016 referendum the British people “fixed their eyes on that brighter future and chose a bold, ambitious course”; second, May ~~(2017a) and Davis’s (2016) (2017a)~~ ~~description of Britain being~~ assertions that Britain was on a journey to “a brighter future for our country” or “a brighter and better future” respectively, ~~one in which it could “make the most of the opportunities ahead”;~~ fourth, Fox’s (2016) reflections on creating a “bright future”, one not to be “darkened by the shadows of [implicitly EU] protectionism”; and finally, Johnson’s (2017) concern that Britain not end up living out its days “in some dingy ante-room of the EU”, ~~which as May surmised (May, 2017a) would place Britain in a kind of “permanent political purgatory”.~~

Ethicality

~~Ethicality shone through whenever Britain was personified, as frequently it was, as “by instinct and history a great global nation” (May, 2017b). We have also seen~~ We saw previously that ~~the idea moral judgements around the concept~~ of Britain rediscovering lost or repressed “freedom” was an important constituent of GlobalBritain™ discourse. It was encapsulated in ~~allusions~~, first, ~~to both~~ ~~Ethicality around~~ Britain ~~as an~~ the exceptional nation ~~with a unique contribution to make to global politics, was, therefore, found to reside in~~ and, second, ~~metaphors~~ depiction~~s~~ Britain as a prisoner returning to his/her former life following an unhappy period of incarceration ~~inside the EU~~. This echoed Eurosceptic discourse that gained popularity around the time of the debate over the EU’s Constitutional Treaty in 2004 (later the Lisbon Treaty), the *Daily Mail* arguing that EU member states were “hopeless captives of an all-encompassing, antidemocratic bureaucracy with a life of its own” (cited Ichijo, 2008, p. 79). In contrast, the EU was characterized as a “corpse” (Mason, 2012) a group of “losers” making a deadweight bloc in decline, holding Britain back. Nothing was

more unpalatable to pro-Brexit politicians than “staying shackled to the EU” because it portended only further “national humiliation” (Fysh, 2018) or the realization of “vassal status” (Jacob Rees-Mogg cited Clegg, 2018) as a “colony” of the EU (Johnson, 2018).

In GlobalBritain™ discourse, the cascading metaphors around darkness/lightness and family underscored the righteousness of the journey on which Britain had embarked with Brexit. On leaving its prison, ~~GlobalBritain™, said,~~ Britain could ~~once again~~ once more “embrace the world” after Brexit (May, 2017a), a figure of speech operating at the nexus of spatiality and ethicality. May went big on the word “embrace” throughout her speeches (May, 2017c); it was also used several times in the report by the Legatum Institute (Stroud, 2017; Singham et al., 2017, p. 4). “Embrace” has two connotations: to accept something enthusiastically, or to hold someone closely in one’s arms as a sign of affection. While both are poignant, the latter is particularly ~~especially~~ resonant in the context of GlobalBritain™ for two reasons. First, it suggests that the EU was preventing Britain expressing its “higher moral loyalty” to the Commonwealth and US, arising from “ties of family, kinship and history” (May, 2017b). Second, it established ~~ds~~ the Commonwealth, US and Anglosphere as ~~better~~ more aligned than was the EU for the fulfilment of British interests, values via the enactment of its global leadership role. ~~behind~~ Britain’s “determination to lead a race to the top in global standards” (Davis, 2017a).

There were said to be fewer or no such problems with these alternative outlets for the exertion of British agency in the global arena. As Kenny and Pearce suggest (2018, pp. 164 and 169), returning to the Commonwealth and former settler colonies of the Anglosphere (Hannan, 2014), would embody a return to “familiar” outlets for the expression of Britain’s international agency. The Anglosphere has always occupied a distinctive role in the Conservative political imagination (Wellings and Baxendale, 2015). It is the name given to the core five countries in the Commonwealth (UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the

US) with which Britain is said to share a number of defining features: “liberal market economies, the common law, parliamentary democracy, and a history of Protestantism” (Kenny and Pearce, 2018, pp. 3-5; Vucetic, 2011). In contrast to the wedges driven by GlobalBritain™ advocates between “Britain” and “Europe”, through Brexit, Britain and the EU would be negotiating a “partnership” between “neighbours” (May, 2018c). They would not be “embracing” but working pragmatically ~~and technocratically~~, “*hand in hand*” (May, 2017d; emphasis added). In sum, the “deep and special partnership” with the EU ~~was~~, ~~however, said implied~~ to be less meaningful to ~~British interests, self-identity and sense of its place in the world~~ Britain than the Commonwealth or the “special relationship” with the US, in July 2018 elevated by Trump on his visit to Britain as “the highest level of special” (Walker, 2018).

Conclusions

This article interpret GlobalBritain™ by using discourse analysis to unpack the two staple ingredients of foreign policy visions: the policies states aim at through their external practices and the accompanying narrative that frames and justifies those national policy choices to domestic and global audiences. On the policy side, the text data suggests that GlobalBritain™ continues the “pragmatic” tradition in British foreign policy, themed around the dogged pursuit of vital British economic and security interests through the exercise of its hard and soft power capabilities. This may seem surprising given the scale of the rupture in Britain’s international relationships wrought about by Brexit. It makes more sense when it is recognized that continuity of grand strategy, occasionally requiring tactical recalibration, is ultimately what has animated British foreign policy for decades if not centuries (Bourne, 1970; Black, 2000). In a very real sense, the dominant GlobalBritain™ narrative evokes that surrounding Britain’s applications and entry to the European Communities in 1973, which

were sold as a change of tactic to achieve higher strategic ambitions, including a global “leadership” role (Daddow and Gaskarth, 2014). In a recent article in the pages of this journal, Paul Beaumont (2017, p. 380) argued that the saliency of Euroskepticism increased in UK politics over the last three decades around an influential consensus that “EU membership is especially threatening to Britain’s historical narrative of the self”. As the phrasing suggests, this was as much a narrative problem for pro-Europeans, as it was an empirical one of demonstrating the “facts” of what Britain did in/for the EU, and conversely what the EU did in/for Britain (see Daddow and Oliver, 2016). This article corroborated Beaumont’s argument about the importance of identity to an understanding of both the “why” and “how” of Brexit, by showing that GlobalBritain™ discourse is a bricolage of spatial, temporal and ethical propositions about Britain, its identity and role in the world, constructed against a malign “European” Other across the English Channel. This narrative construction was circulating before Brexit, but after 2016 was laced with Conservative Euroskepticism that brought the Othering practices more abruptly and bluntly to the fore.

The above findings on this vision in-the-making also give us the analytical tools for evaluating what might make GlobalBritain™ a “success”. Obviously a “successful” Brexit will be key but that itself is a political judgement and one that will be helped by GlobalBritain™ taking hold as an accepted narrative about Britain’s “new” role in the world. The questions future research needs to address to assess the effectiveness of this foreign policy vision are, therefore: The above discussion also suggests that the discourse method can be deployed as a tool of critical policy evaluation, because it is parsimonious and avoids overt jargonizing, which means it can easily “travel” across academic fields (connecting discourse theorists with foreign policy analysts) and from academia to policy (Cairney and Oliver, 2018; Craig, 2019). The requirement for an analytical toolkit for dealing with politicians’ responses to *current* policy dilemmas is evident. British foreign policy makers have long

~~avoided scrutinising the habits of thought and practice on which they base their decisions;~~
(ii) Do ~~domestic stakeholders~~ ~~they~~ believe GlobalBritain™ promotes vital British interests? ~~fundamental British values?~~ (iii) How has GlobalBritain™ been marketed internationally using public diplomacy at the UN (adding to Gifkins et al., 2019), ambassadorial speeches and the practices of the main government departments? (iv) Where have we seen “resistance” or “rival” narratives and what effect have they had in influencing the reception of the central narrative? And perhaps most crucially ~~Underlying all this is the most vital question of all:~~ (iv) one that outlasts the May government, get implemented institutionally and last, or is it government (on narrative as a tool of policy evaluation see Craig, 2019)? As with so much around Brexit, the future remains uncertain. But knowing where to look and how to let the evidence “breathe”, scholars should be able to contribute to informed conversations about the most vexed questions surrounding Brexit and Britain’s future world role.

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Conflict of interest

None

Appendix: Coded speech

Submitted separately

Table 1: Overview of main primary sources

Submitted separately

Figure 1: The Four Pillars of Global Britain

Submitted separately