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European spaces and the Roma: Denaturalizing the naturalized in online reader comments

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Abstract

With the entry of several Eastern European nations into the European Union (EU), a “third” space has developed in the discourse for nations perceived as not fully integrated “inside” the EU system. This article investigates the construction of this “third space” in the resultant “moral panic” about undesired immigration from other EU countries and its potential drain on the social services of the United Kingdom and links it to Euroskeptic discourse in British media. The article uses construal operations from cognitive linguistics combined with critical discourse studies as a way of denaturalizing the discourse in online comments that focus on the Bulgarian/Romanian immigration issue which we then connect to anti-Roma discourse. Results reveal a view of the United Kingdom as contaminated by Roma and underscore the need for novel metaphors to be countered before they become entrenched and used as tools for political propaganda.

Keywords: Brexit, immigration, metaphor/metonymy, online comments, Roma, United Kingdom

Introduction

The construction of a European identity in the 21st century has been particularly complex given the recent entry of several Eastern European (i.e. former Communist) countries into the European Union (EU), Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 and Croatia in 2013. This changing

composition of Europe and European identities has resulted in a post-colonial “third space” (Bhabha, 1994), created in part by the 7-year transitional restriction on the right to work for citizens of Bulgaria and Romania. Thus, while part of the EU, they have not in fact been fully integrated into the EU community and are not viewed as “authentic” Europeans by many EU members.¹ When this right-to-work restriction was lifted in January 2014 for Bulgaria and Romania, a “moral panic” resulted in media discourse in the United Kingdom, where people were mainly concerned with the so-called burden these new migrants would put on social programs. This article focuses on one article in a UK online newspaper and in particular on the online comments it evoked. One reason for examining online forums is because research has demonstrated that although taboo against prejudice has remained a consistent finding in this area, online discussion forums constitute a space where “this taboo against prejudice does not seem to operate” (Goodman and Rowe, 2014: 43). Hence, these online forums become a primal breeding ground for the discursive construction of the “Other” (Fielder and Catalano, 2017).² Moreover, in light of increasing populist discourse and hostility toward the EU (Wodak, 2015; Wodak et al., 2013), a focus on mediated public spheres (such as reader response) and the way in which they are used to manipulate public opinion for political reasons have become increasingly important. Utilizing construal operations from cognitive linguistics in conjunction with critical discourse analysis (CDA)/critical discourse studies (CDS) (Hart, 2011), we perform description- and interpretation-stage analysis in order to unpack competing ideologies in the discourse and to gauge reader response to, or consumer consumption of, the ideology regarding EU migrants. Our close analysis which incorporates metaphor, metonymy, deixis and epistemic modality demonstrates how a “third space” is constructed by this particular group of text-consumers in which Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants are categorized and positioned with the explicitly unwanted and marginalized Roma.

Conceptual framework

A primary concern of CDS is “to reveal how complex social problems are linguistically represented and to suggest ways of challenging them, deconstructing them, understanding them and opening up possibilities

of overcoming them” (Angermuller et al., 2014: 361). In order to do this, we align ourselves with the method outlined by Hart (2011) that incorporates construal operations from cognitive linguistics together with CDA in the analysis of immigration discourse. Since “the same situation or event is potentially conceptualized in any number of different ways but alternative language structures necessarily encode some particular conceptualization, which is prompted in text-consumers” (Langacker, 1991: 140), the identification of construal operations, such as metaphor, metonymy, deixis and epistemic modality, provides a concrete means of deconstructing how specific conceptualizations are produced, then taken up and reproduced by text-consumers. With respect to metaphor and metonymy, Fauconnier and Turner’s (2002) Conceptual Blending Theory (CBT) is particularly useful. CBT is based on the idea that blending is a cognitive operation, which takes place in a conceptual integration network (CIN) in the brain. The CIN is an array of mental spaces that includes a generic space, two input spaces and a blended space (Kok and Bublitz, 2011). A salient example of a blending operation (AKA metaphor) is when dance teachers of young children ask them to stand up “nice and tall, like a giraffe.” In this case, the generic space is the mental concept of a living being (agent) that stands up (action). Input Space 1 would be a young dancer’s body and his or her ability to stretch the neck and stand up tall. Input Space 2 would be a giraffe, which many 4- to 5-year-olds have seen either in photos or at the zoo, and therefore know that it has a long neck and is very tall. The blended space would be when the dancer’s body takes on these salient characteristics of a giraffe, namely, being tall and having a long neck. The end result (if done correctly) would be the young dancer standing like a ballet dancer, neck stretched and shoulders back (note, this is not a natural position for most people to hold their bodies). This metaphoric blend works because of the motivating metonymy PART FOR WHOLE³ or, more specifically, ATTRIBUTE FOR ENTITY in which the defining property of the giraffe (its height, via the long neck) stands for the whole animal. Thus, in this blend, metonymy motivates the metaphor *like a giraffe* (for more on the interaction of metonymy and metaphor, see Goossens, 2002; Mittelberg and Waugh, 2009; Ruiz de Mendoza and Diez Velasco, 2002). As a construal operation, blending constitutes an “invisible, unconscious activity involved in every aspect of human life” (Fauconnier and Turner, 2002:19) and can also be used in conscious

ways. It is important to note that a primary purpose in the construction of blends (metaphoric and metonymic) is the promotion of particular representations of reality (Hart, 2010: 123). Because of this particular metonymy (the salience of the giraffe's long neck rather than its spots or tail), this blend is successful and yields the intended, positive results. Successful blends, however, can also result in negative consequences (see also Fauconnier and Turner, 2002: 34–35) as seen in example (1), which illustrates the metonymy *ATTRIBUTE FOR ENTITY* (taken from Hart, 2011: 178):

(1) *Sunday Times*, 21 May 2006

*Tony McNulty, the immigration minister, seemed to accept that there may be between 310,000 and 570,000 **illegals** in Britain.*

According to Hart, the metonymy *illegals* highlights or profiles the legal status of the individuals over other possible attributes (p. 176). A negative effect of this successful blend then is that the individual stories of the immigrants (humanizing details such as their reasons for immigration) are backgrounded or even made invisible (erased). Moreover, this profiling of their (il)legal status also positions them as criminals, which is then used to justify restriction immigration policies (Hart, 2011: 178).

Hart demonstrates that *deixis* is another powerful construal operation in which actors and events are positioned on the discourse stage with respect to coordinates on the spatial axis (relative to the speaker), temporal and modal axes (here and now, real/unreal) and social axis (shared values). Example (2), by employing the *COUNTRY IS CONTAINER* metaphor so typical of immigration discourse (Charteris-Black, 2004; Chilton, 1994), positions immigrants outside of the container as the *THEM* of an *US/THEM* dichotomy:

(2) *Daily Telegraph*, 30 August 2006 (from Hart, 2011: 177)

*[It] is clear that at least 600,000 eastern Europeans **have entered** Britain in the past two years.*

Moreover, deictic construal can be combined with the cognitive strategy of *proximization* “whereby the speaker presents the events

on the discourse stage as directly affecting the addressee, in negative and threatening ways” (Cap, 2011: 81). An example of *proximization* is the positioning of propositions on the modal axis (where proximal = real and distal = unreal), such as example (2) in which the proposition is encoded not just as real and proximal through use of the perfect tense (and a somewhat inflammatory “at least”). In political discourse, “text-consumers rarely have perceptual access to the situations and events at issue and must rely instead on what gets reported as real in text. Epistemic modality is therefore a particularly important device in all political discourse, including immigration discourse” (Hart, 2011: 187). As Chilton (2004) and Hart (2010) make clear, ideologies are reproduced when those representations are accepted by text-consumers as real. While a quantitative study such as Musolff (2015) shows the pervasiveness of metaphor in anti-immigrant discourse in the United Kingdom, our qualitative analysis of online comments about a single article demonstrates how these metaphors (already established as pervasive) are taken up and consumed. Our analysis of the online comments and responses not only uncovers these strategies but also documents which ideologies are being produced and reproduced by text-consumers.

Why analyze *comment*?

Comment (used in the singular) is “social, meant to be seen by others, and reactive” (Reagle, 2015: 2). It is not just a way we express our opinion online; it is its own genre of communication. Also known as “the bottom of the web,” comment is “easily seen but invisible and taken for granted” and people often prefer not to look into this “online reflecting glass of humanity” (Reagle, 2015: 3, 172). While many people choose to ignore the comments, we believe there is much to learn from them about ourselves and the ways that our social selves are exploited by others through the use of comment. Comment provides us with a sample of what some people think, and, as a characteristic of contemporary life, comment “can inform, improve and shape people for the better or it can alienate, manipulate and shape people for the worse” (Reagle, 2015: 185).

Much research has been done that examines online communities and the ways in which identities are shaped and public opinion is influenced in these spaces for digital discourse (Binns, 2012; Citron,

2013; Denzin, 1998; Grabill and Pigg, 2012; Hardacker, 2010; Sakki and Pettersson, 2015, to name a few). Studies such as Grabill and Pigg (2012) have examined interaction in online public forums and argue that these forums present methodological challenges for researchers because of the messy, non-linear ways in which participants engage.⁴ In addition, they posit that online forums provide unique argumentative spaces for the leveraging of identity as a form of rhetorical agency:

Those who do not hold traditional forms of expertise participate by performing identity in ways that extend beyond establishing individual credibility. These performances create argumentative space by shaping how the conversation unfolds and enables the exchange of information and knowledge. (Grabill and Pigg, 2012: 101)

Hence, in these forums, group memberships can be ascribed, avowed, displayed and ignored, and identity can be leveraged to move conversations in a particular direction. Our study utilizes a case-study approach in order to focus on the strategies of negotiating conflicting ideologies in a specific context and to provide a framework that can potentially be extended to other contexts. Thus, we examine the important role that reader response forums such as this one in *The Telegraph* can play in the garnering of support for right-wing populism discourses and the formation and re-shaping of European identities in which migrants (and in this case, Roma migrants) are largely blamed for societal problems.

Method

Data collection

This “moral panic” in several articles in UK news sources such as *The Guardian* was initially brought to our attention in February 2014 by the outraged backlash in Bulgarian news sources.⁵ We conducted a Google search using search terms “Bulgaria and Romania,” “UK” and “work restriction lifted.” After seeing a pervasive pattern in multiple articles that were found in the search, we decided to focus on how racist discourse is naturalized and escalated by examining one article and in particular the comments it generated in order to perform a close,

bottom-up analysis of the interactions between these participants in this particular time and space. Our claim then is not that these readers and their comments are representative of any larger group, but rather that their linguistic strategies can be logically inferred to be representative of anti-immigrant, populist discourse in general. The final article chosen for analysis was selected on the basis of four criteria:

1. Topic: Work restriction lifted for Bulgaria and Romania. Effects on the United Kingdom.
2. Time period: January–February 2014.
3. Comments: The article needed to contain a sufficient number of comments to make up a substantial corpus, in this case 263 comments.
4. The article contained racist discourse that included comments that explicitly refuted it (Van Dijk, 2005) which is diagnostic of the strategies of populist discourse (Wodak et al., 2013).

Selected article

The single article chosen for analysis is entitled “Number of Romanian and Bulgarian workers reaches record high” (Barrett and Swinford, 2014) and was published in the UK online version of *The Telegraph* on 19 February 2014. *The Telegraph* has a largely conservative readership. While the article itself is not the focal point of this study, but rather the text-consumer response in the 263 online comments generated from the article, we will first present a brief outline of the article, its tone and its topics in order to better understand the response that it generated.

Just below the headline, the lead of the article reads as follows:

Official data shows a 42 per cent surge in numbers from the two former Communist states during 2013, ahead of rule changes at start of January.

We want to draw attention to the use of the word “surge” which is part of the strategy of *proximation* and the characterization of Bulgaria and Romania as “former Communist states” which positions them on the outside as part of a former enemy and implicitly questions their qualifications for membership in the EU, which stands for Western European values. The article goes on to discuss the “steady

increase” in the number of Romanian and Bulgarian workers in the United Kingdom, the “public anxiety” that the government is attempting to “quell” and how the UK benefits system must be “protected.” It also features a photograph of a crowded border control entry at an airport with many people in line waiting to enter the United Kingdom.

Data analysis

Data analysis began with a close reading of the 263 comments by text-consumers in which salient elements and themes were highlighted and notes made in track changes. The authors then uploaded the file of comments into MAXQDA and conducted a metaphor/metonymy analysis of comments with target domains of “immigration/immigrants” and “EU.”⁶ A number of blends were categorized and tabulated (see Tables 1 to 3). A close reading also revealed that along with metaphoric and metonymic conceptual blends, strategies of deictic construal, that is, positioning, proximization and (de) legitimization, were also deployed; therefore, comments containing these elements were also coded.

Table 1. Conceptual blends for target domain immigration/immigrants.

<i>Source domain/Example</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Burden e.g. <i>We are importing freeloaders</i>	21	30
War e.g. <i>stop this senseless taking over of GB</i>	14	20
Dangerous water e.g. <i>tide of human excrement</i>	14	20
Criminals e.g. <i>non British criminal</i>	9	13
Contamination e.g. <i>inflict so many foreigners into our system</i>	7	10
Animals e.g. <i>cuckoos pushing out our own chicks</i>	6	8
Total	71	100

Numbers were rounded to the nearest percentage.

Table 2. Conceptual blends for target domain BRITAIN/UK.

<i>Source domain/Example</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Container		
e.g. <i>getting anyone into here, a lot of pressure</i>	7	64
House/Building/Castle		
e.g. <i>raising the drawbridge does not work</i>	4	36
Total	11	100

Numbers were rounded to the nearest percentage.

Table 3. Conceptual blends for target domain EU.

<i>Source domain/Example</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
Person		
e.g. <i>whist the EU was still young, turned the country's back</i>	6	24
Monster/Parasite		
e.g. <i>sucking the life out of the UK, bleeding people to death, out of control monster</i>	5	20
Container		
e.g. <i>get out of the EU, bloated EU</i>	4	16
Criminals		
e.g. <i>EU mafia, state of corruption</i>	4	16
USSR		
e.g. <i>NATO kept the peace in Europe not the EUSSR, One-size-fits-all socialist utopia</i>	4	16
Place		
e.g. <i>leave the EU</i>	2	8
Total	25	100

EU: European Union.

Numbers were rounded to the nearest percentage.

Data and discussion

Immigration blends

Because the article's topic focused on new immigration due to work restrictions being lifted for Bulgaria and Romania, numerous conceptual blends regarding immigration/ immigrants were found in the data (see Table 1).

Table 1 illustrates how immigration and immigrants are viewed in multiple ways by text-consumers, almost all of which are negative. The most frequent blend is that of IMMIGRANTS ARE A BURDEN (see example (3)):

(3) **anotherbigneil** (19 February 2014)

*Will someone in govt show figures for the amount of roma gypsies here, how many have worked, their tax contribution, and what they have collected in benefits. never mind the cost of NHs treatment, schooling, police time etc - - - I wont hold my breath for the answer. - -We are **importing freeloaders** - and the only reason can be is- - - DC accepted to take them, as part of the bribe conditions for getting the EU job he has been promised.*

Here, the topos of BURDEN (a frequent topic in the comments and indexed here by the use of **freeloaders**⁷) negatively construes immigration as a drain rather than a resource. In addition, this burdensome immigration is portrayed as a negative consequence of EU membership and delegitimizes it by calling it a "bribe" (unclear whether accepted by or offered to Prime Minister David Cameron). Even more disturbing, and this point will be important for our argument, is while the topic of the article is specifically about immigration from Bulgaria and Romania, this text-consumer has made the metonymic leap from Romanian/Bulgarian to Roma which foregrounds a specific group of immigrants that has been negatively stereotyped in the press (Goodman and Rowe, 2014) while obscuring the fact that many people from Romania/Bulgaria coming to the United Kingdom are not Roma.⁸ This is a trend that runs consistently through our data.

Due to the scope of this article, we will not take time to discuss all of these blends, the implications of which are clearly negative. The blend IMMIGRANTS ARE ANIMALS, for example, has already

been especially well-documented in the literature (i.e. Santa Ana, 1999, 2002, 2013). Our focus rather will be on IMMIGRANTS AS WATER and the related blend IMMIGRANTS AS CONTAMINATION, both of which are frequently found in immigrant discourse (see Santa Ana, 2002, 2013; Charteris-Black, 2004; Hart, 2010; Wodak, 2014). These blends also co-occur with another metaphoric blend COUNTRY AS CONTAINER in what Hart (2010) calls a complex blend (pp. 139–140) that both frames how immigration is conceptualized with respect to the United Kingdom and serves as a reference point for deictic construal operations.

As Hart (2011) points out, profiling (or foregrounding) of a particular property or characteristic is a “pervasive” construal operation in immigrant discourse (p. 174). The blends IMMIGRANTS AS (DANGEROUS) WATER and IMMIGRANTS AS CONTAMINATION work to focus our attention on certain (negative) aspects and to background or obscure other (potentially positive) ones (Charteris-Black, 2013: 203) as can be seen in examples (4)–(6) from our data:

(4) **tedsanityville** (19 February 2014)

*They come to work then pay taxes which go to pay the benefits to the **idlers from the third world** who are **pouring in**.*

(5) **limeyexpat** (19 February 2014)

*Just what we need another **tide of human excrement** from Central Europe, will it ever cease?*

(6) **rosierosierosie** (19 February 2014)

*Let's start with the **deluge of Romanian beggars infesting** the streets of major UK cities pushing their belongings round in stolen supermarket trolleys.*

In these examples, characteristics of water are mapped onto immigrants (“pouring in,” “tide” and “deluge”) which frames them as “inanimate and therefore do not have motives, intentions and volition” (Hart, 2010: 149) and erases their humanity. This opens the discursive space for stereotyping, that is, “idlers from the third world,” and what Charteris-Black (2004) calls “double metonymy”:

a particular example of an immigrant, “the terrorist,” represents a sub-category of immigrants – “illegal immigrants” – that in turn represents the whole category of “immigrants.” Because *some* immigrants are illegal immigrants and *some* illegal immigrants are terrorists, an illogical link can be made between terrorists and all immigrants. (p. 574)

What we see in examples (4)–(6) is an escalation of negative and derogatory metonymies that feed into the related blend IMMIGRATION AS CONTAMINATION, that is, “tide of human excrement,” but also a “semantic contagion” (Charteris-Black, 2004: 574) of two categories – Romanian (and Bulgarian) immigrants with Roma immigrants. This bleeding of categories into each other (Hart 2011: 180) is explicit in the natural disaster blend in example (6), “deluge of Romanian beggars,” which makes explicit the bleeding of Romanian immigrants with the Roma.⁹ This double metonymy or bleeding, we argue, licenses the extremely derogatory and racist portrayals of Bulgarian and Romanian immigrants in this corpus.

IMMIGRANTS ARE (DANGEROUS) WATER/IMMIGRANTS ARE CONTAMINATION is a complex blend that incorporates yet another blend, the UK AS CONTAINER, which was pervasive in the comments (see Table 2).

The image schema of “container” is motivated by the bodily experiences we have from the time we are born. Namely, our bodies are containers of body fluids and organs, but we also have experiences living inside things that contain us (i.e. buildings, houses and rooms) (Kövecses, 2006). The basic logic of the CONTAINER schema is that everything is either inside it or outside it. Example (7) construes the United Kingdom as an embattled castle that cannot be protected from outside forces:

(7) **Bannertree** GreatBrithole (19 February 2014)

*You won't stop globalisation, so don't even think about it. **Raising the drawbridge** does not work.*

Here, **Bannertree** is refuting discourse earlier in the exchange about “letting” or “not letting” immigrants “in” to the United Kingdom. The United Kingdom is thus conceptualized as a blended space that protects those inside but that can only hold a certain quantity. The drawbridge functions in the same way as doors, that is, for immigration policies that either allow or prohibit immigrants from

entering (Hart, 2010). Moreover, the UK AS CONTAINER needs to be protected from contaminating elements (immigrants) who would breach its protective walls.

Similarly, example (8) construes UK AS HOME that needs to be protected from criminal elements. What we also observe in this example is the strategy of *proximization* through the use of the second person pronoun to evoke a threat that endangers the addressee and their children:

(8) **rosierosierosie** Elena Urda (19 February 2014)

*Those who wish to work and make a net contribution will be welcome in any country but would you let someone into **your house** if they only wanted to live off of your earnings and take the bread out of your childrens' mouths if you were forced to borrow from a money lender to survive?*

Example (9) is from the same contributor and specifies the individual containers of social services within the United Kingdom that are “full up to bursting.” It invokes the commonsense right of the British to defend themselves from immigrants from other countries and at the same time overtly denies that there is any racism in this stance:

(9) **rosierosierosie** mauao7 (19 February 2014)

*If we Brits have to be robbed by the welfare system I would prefer it was fellow Brits that were doing the robbing not other countries who refuse to support their own poor. Our schools, hospitals and prisons are full **up to bursting** so we have the right to be concerned and demand a stop to this abuse of our economy. **It's not racist** to want to protect your own people.*

It is instructive to compare the conceptual blends for EU which are much more varied and generally more negative¹⁰ (see Table 3).

Example (10) shows the conceptualization of EU AS CONTAINER which has been already contaminated and has therefore become a source of contamination for the United Kingdom which is contained within the EU. Two options are proposed to remedy this contamination: restrict EU membership to Western European countries or the United Kingdom should leave the EU:

(10) **Guest** (19 February 2014)

*It's funny that the UK did alright until all this EU rules and sh*t happened a decade or so ago. **Let's just leave it**, and let destiny take us where it will.*

WilliamJ38748 (19 February 2014)

*Let's stay in the EU, but **only have it for Western European citizens**. Therefore everyone will be happy.*

In this case, the EU AS CONTAINER blend enables the deictic construal of an US (UK) versus THEM (EU) relation, as **Bannertree** explicitly points out to **rosierosierosie** in example (11):

(11) **Bannertree rosierosierosie** (19 February 2014)

You refer to the EU as if it was some external force. The UK has as loud a voice in the EU as any other member state – it is “us,” not “we” and “they.”

The EU AS A CONTAMINATED CONTAINER is realized even more explicitly in the blend THE EU IS THE USSR. The following comments identify how the EU contaminated by immigrants from former communist countries is now located in what we argue is a “third space” now referred to (by some text-consumers) as the *EUSSR*. In example (12), text consumers familiar with this label explain it to other readers:

(12) **onetimetry** Bannertree (19 February 2014)

*NATO kept the peace in Europe not the **EUSSR**.*

Bannertree onetimetry (19 February 2014)

***Get the name right**, it is the EU. The (former) USSR consisted of what is now Russia and the satellite countries under its control. Confusing the two shows that your grasp of facts is weak.*

Guest Bannertree• (19 February 2014)

***The EUSSR is exactly what it is. The basic EU, mixed with the USSR, now in Brussels**. But that's ok – the USSR crumbled, and so will the EU.*

Bob Bannertree (19 February 2014)

*He is clearly calling it the **EUSSR** to compare the EU state to the USSR. If you failed to see that I am truly worried about your intelligence.*

Bannertree Bob• (19 Feb 2014)

As there is no “EU state” it is his intelligence in question, not mine.

Guest Bannertree• (19 February 2014)

The EU is a state. It is in a state of corruption.

The above (somewhat humorous) comments illustrate the use of the acronym *EUSSR* “as a means of depicting the European Union as an organization that produces oppressive regulation, by drawing comparison to the USSR” (Eurocentric, 2010). This is a complex blend where the former country of the USSR metonymically stands for the oppression and regulation associated with its government now attributed to the EU. The signifier *EUSSR* is also iconic since the blend is represented through the placing of the “E” in front of “USSR” (or EU plus SSR as if the EU were a republic of the USSR), and thus, it is not only an ideological blend but a graphic one as well. This blend has now become so entrenched that it has taken on a life of its own and the term is known and used by many Euroskeptics and members of parties with Euroskeptic and/or anti-immigrant policies. For more information on the ideology behind the concept of *EUSSR*, see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ovM6GOTSD54> or visit the *EUSSR* Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/EUSSR>. However, it is important to note that *EUSSR* is a new blend for some of the participants in this forum, for example, **Bannertree**, and the other participants have to do a CDA to explain the use of the term.

It is important to keep in mind, however, that the blend *EUSSR* also bleeds with the conflation of (especially Romanian) immigrants with Roma. *EUSSR* is also the EU that has allowed formerly Communist countries in, so there is a different metonymy at work here, one more parallel to that of *UK AS CONTAINER*. The contamination is transitive, that is, the EU is contaminated by the presence of former Communist countries within, and the United Kingdom also being contained in the EU is thus also exposed to contamination. In example (13), Sapporo

explicitly locates the source of contamination of the United Kingdom from the EU which was used as a “gateway” for Roma (“Romanian non-workers”) immigrants to “masquerade”:

(13) Sapporo (19 February 2014)

What about the Romanian non-workers? There are now large communities of mostly ethnic Roma in most cities in England. They have not come direct from Romania or Bulgaria, but have been living in other EU nations since these countries accession to the EU. Now that UK restrictions have been lifted, large numbers have descended on the UK, attracted by our generous benefits, charity sector and black market opportunities. The fact that they come here from other EU nations allows the political/medial elite to say direct migration from Romania and Bulgaria is low.

One Euroskeptic party that saw a rise in power in 2014 (and would significantly influence the Brexit vote in 2016) is the UK Independence Party (UKIP; James and Osborn, 2014). There are 13 tokens of “UKIP” in the corpus and the various text-consumers connect the anti-immigrant discourse to UKIP policies (see examples (14) and (15)):

(14) **rosierosierosie** Bannertree •(19 February 2014)

*Actually it's £53 million per day and rising because the profligate and **bloated EU** has no intention of scaling back its extravagance when it can bleed the people of Europe dry for its vanity projects [...]. If supports the people of the UK coming first before any others then **I'll support UKIP.***

(15) **aardvark2** (19 February 2014)

*We should stop the NHS advertising for doctors and nurses in these countries. What's the point of having immigration control, when these professionals can come in and take our hospital posts. Need to get out of the EU and stop once and for all this senseless taking over of GB. **Ukip**, appears to be the only responsible party aimed at stopping this!*

In fact some of the comments appear so pro-UKIP that we considered the possibility that UKIP might have planted “trolls” on the site in order to plug their party for upcoming elections (Hardacker, 2013). Not surprisingly, contributors who support UKIP and oppose the EU(SSR) also provide some of the more virulent anti-immigration

comments in our online data. See **rosierosierosie**'s comment in example (16) which uses *proximization* strategies to present the Romanian and Bulgarian immigration as an imminent danger to Britain:

(16) **rosierosierosie** (19 February 2014)

*All we ask is that immigrants who come here to work are self-financing for the first five years and that we should have the right to deport any **non British criminal or undesirable who commits a serious offence**. We have that right as a people and a **country to defend our culture, heritage and economy** for the good of our descendents [sic].*

In addition, several of these text-consumers use icons that depict their political ideology (see example (17) **slyblade** and example (18) **HonkyFronky**):

(17) **slyblade**



(18) **HonkyFronky**



Both icons question the nature of the EU by building upon the generic space of the EU flag: a circle of 12 blue stars on a blue background, which stand for unity, solidarity and harmony among the people of

Europe: https://europa.eu/european-union/about-eu/symbols/flag_en. The first (slyblade) does so in a literal sense, simply by inserting a question mark within the circle of stars that produces a blend that questions who is (or who should be) within this circle of unity. The second icon (HonkyFronky) inserts the abbreviation EUCCP, a blend of EU in Latin script and CCCP (SSSR in Cyrillic for USSR). Thus the initial C standing for Union is replaced by EU resulting in the blend European Union of Soviet Socialist Republics which metonymically conflates the EU with the USSR. An additional insertion is the Communist symbol of the hammer and sickle from the flag of the Soviet Union which ideologically blends the EU with the USSR. HonkyFronky's icon thereby explicitly connects the EU's policies and practices with those of the totalitarian USSR and then rejects this by superimposing the international prohibition sign, a red circle with a diagonal line. In example (19), a clearly xeno-racist ideology, that is, where a language difference is used to "other" migrants and to disguise racist beliefs, is used by **slyblade** reflecting a Euroskeptic ideology consistent with his icon.

(19) **slyblade Bannertree** (19 Feb 2014)

*So what you are saying it is old people who have worked here all our lives and paid in to NHS are the problem. Sorry for getting old and sick. Its all our fault then. Oh and by the way last time i was in A&E i **couldn't understand a word that was spoken in the waiting room,** until all the interrupters turned up. Funny that?*

We have now discussed what is implied by the use of *EUSSR* and associated icons, but what about what is concealed? What is hidden is the actual lack of power the EU has in terms of actually governing the individual countries (and thus it cannot be an oppressive dictator in the same way that the USSR government was). In addition, the many economic and social benefits that have come out of this union of countries have been made invisible in this blend. The blend *EUSSR* has become so conventionalized that its "status as a metaphor becomes invisible" as it is "processed by categorization rather than by comparison" (Charteris-Black, 2013: 203). Furthermore, while this metaphor refers to one aspect of the EU (strong-handed governing), it conceals another way of thinking about the issue such as in the EU

IS FAMILY metaphor found frequently in pro-EU discourse by Musolff (2004) and Petrica (2011).

Conclusion

In the preceding analysis, we have demonstrated how various construal operations, metaphoric and metonymic conceptual blends, deictic positioning and proximization, reveal ideologies that are produced and reproduced by the text-consumers of this one article on immigration. What we reveal is the view that Britain is being contaminated by the EU which is in turn being (or has already been) contaminated by Romanians (and Bulgarians). These Romanian and Bulgarian immigrants are conflated with THE group of undesirable immigrants, that is, the Roma. While there were a number of people resisting this ideology and defending Romanians and Bulgarians, it is disturbing that there was no clear voice defending or questioning the way Roma were portrayed in the discourse. We believe that this is because the metaphors of ROMA = CRIMINALS, BURDEN have become so entrenched and naturalized, that people do not even see them as such. These metaphors are seen as fact, and as Goodman and Rowe (2014) have pointed out, discrimination such as that found in these comments is then seen as acceptable because it can be justified by the supposed behavior of Roma.¹¹ The contribution of our analysis for a plan of action is to demonstrate that it is crucial to reveal these hidden ideologies of discourse before they become so naturalized that they are invisible and unconsciously consumed and reproduced.

We would also like to call attention to the fact that as legal and physical walls (i.e. Berlin wall, immigration restrictions) are knocked down (Wodak, 2014), psychological walls are often strengthened, and in the case of our analysis, online forums such as reader comments become places where the walls are rebuilt. It is our view that mediated public spheres such as our data set become ideal “locations” for dangerous ideologies to simmer and later manifest themselves as to affect governmental policies with real and significant consequences. Hawkins (2015) concluded his study of what he termed “a hegemonic and highly sedimented Euroskeptical discourse” in British media surrounding the 2009 Treaty of Lisbon by warning that

an understanding of Euroskeptical discourse is essential in explaining the ambivalent and often conflictual relationship which has existed between British governments and their European partners since Britain's accession to the European Communities almost four decades ago. This discourse lies at the heart of British political debate and provides the backdrop against which the UK may plausibly vote to leave the EU before the end of the decade. (p. 154)

Indeed, the Brexit vote in June 2016 demonstrated the power of such Euroskeptical discourses, and polls revealed that immigration from other EU countries was one of the most important factors for voters (Taylor, 2016). Thus, we would argue that our findings underscore the fact that more attention needs to be paid to the role of reader comment spaces in constructing and reproducing support for populist ideologies that use immigration and migrants as tools of persuasion and manipulation.

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Notes

1. The bias of British press toward new European Union (EU) member Bulgaria has already been documented in Ishpekova's (2012) study of conceptual metaphors and discourse strategies of *The Financial Times* coverage during 2007–2010 immediately following Bulgaria's (and Romania's) accession to the EU.
2. In Fielder and Catalano (2017), we examine the same online forum as this article, but we focus on "Othering" strategies. In contrast, this article concentrates on metaphor/metonymy.
3. Blends (metaphors) and metonymies will be denoted in small caps as is the convention in cognitive linguistics.
4. It is precisely because of this messy, non-linear nature of comment that the qualitative rather than quantitative approach taken here can reveal underlying strategies.
5. This backlash was brought to the attention of one of the authors while teaching and doing research at the University of Sofia under the auspices of a Fulbright grant.

6. In cognitive linguistics, the target domain refers to the issue that is being discussed while the source domain is what the target domain is being compared to and blended with.
7. The term “freeloader” is a metonymy of action for person, which originates when transportation by ship was the most efficient way of transporting goods. In these times, it was common for people to be hired by the captain to load the cargo onto the ship. The name “freeloader” comes about because often captains would sail away without paying the loaders (cf. <http://www.answerbag.com/question/view/1043298>).
8. Moreover, the way that she or he has written *roma gypsies* (as opposed to just Roma or just Gypsies, with capital letters) reveals that she or he lacks knowledge of this group ((a) Roma is an ethnicity and therefore should be capitalized (along with Gypsies), (b) Gypsy is a derogatory term and (c) If one says Roma, then “Gypsies” is redundant).
9. This particular double metonymy whereby all immigrants from Bulgaria and especially Romania are Roma is challenged in several comments.
10. It is interesting to note that some of these blends are similar to Musolff’s (2004) work on EU discourse from eurometa data.
11. In Šarić et al. (2010), for example, which is devoted to the marginalization of Eastern Europe in public discourse, not a single chapter in this book addresses the issues related to Roma.

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