THE OFFICIAL VISION FOR 'GLOBAL BRITAIN'

Brexit as rupture and continuity between free trade, liberal internationalism and 'values'

Franco Zappettini

Department of Communication and Media

University of Liverpool, UK

Introduction

While at the time of writing (June 2017) the exact nature of Britain leaving the EU is still unclear, one cannot escape the fact that institutional and public discourses since the referendum result have primarily boiled down to a debate over the UK's future organisation of its economic activities. Striking the best possible free trade agreements with the EU and the rest of the world has become common currency in Brexit parlance. Likewise, imagined new 'global' economic and political roles for Britain – which were among the key drivers of the Leave campaign (Zappettini, 2019a) – have escalated into institutional discourses legitimising Brexit as 'a new era for Britain' and its place in the world. As Prime Minister Theresa May put it in a key talk given just before triggering Article 50:

> *(1) A little over 6 months ago, the British people voted [. . .] to leave the European Union and embrace the world [. . .] June the 23rd was not the moment Britain chose to step back from the world. It was the moment we chose to build a truly global Britain (May, 2017).*

This chapter aims to show how the institutional discursive productions of 'global Britain' have been sustained by the ideological vision of a new liberal (inter)national order that has been one of the key legitimising tools in the 'critical juncture' of Brexit (Zappettini & Krzyżanowski, 2019). Internationalism, like many other broad concepts, is laden with different, sometimes opposed, ideologies. For example, what Marx meant by internationalism – solidarity across borders that would

unite work- ers under a common socialist cause – is different from, say, how the American idea of internationalism (as opposed to isolationism) has shaped post-war involvement in world affairs. This chapter draws on two interrelated dimensions of internationalism: international liberalism as a political economic theory of inter-state governance that has defined most world economic policies in the last few decades, and liberal inter- nationalism as an international relations theory emphasising interdependence and cooperation between states (see for example Moravcsik, 1997 and 2008 for both definitions). Trading on these perspectives, this chapter examines a corpus of official documents in which the British government sets out its vision for a new partner- ship with the European Union, aiming to foster a 'global Britain' that trades freely with the world. This data is analysed through argumentation theory (Fairclough & Fairclough, 2012) to identify how specific representations of internationalism and global free trade act as legitimising tools for post-Brexit Britain. From this standpoint, the chapter addresses the following questions: (i) What kind of internationalism is pursued by the British government? (ii) Which specific meanings of 'global Britain' have been discursively constructed and used to legitimise Brexit? (iii) Given that EU membership grants the UK access to the world's largest free trade area, how can one understand the seeming paradox of Britain wanting to leave the EU to expand its trade by pursuing new international trade arrangements?

This chapter argues that the official vision of a new, global, and out-of-the-EU Britain imagined in the texts draws on discourses of Brexit as both rupturing and continuing international narratives. From an economic perspective, the internationalism advocated by the British government indulges in post-imperial nostalgia and is predicated on mercantile logics. While it rhetorically supports a social liberal vision of Britain's economy 'that works for all', it remains unclear how that could be concretely achieved through Brexit. Furthermore, this chapter analyses the rhetoric of Brexit, its discursive logics and its underlying values, arguing that while the institutional vision of a new international Britain conveniently shifts between national, European and global imaginaries, any actual economic policies that would follow Brexit still remain underdeveloped.

The rest of this chapter is organised as follows: the next section introduces inter- national liberalism and discusses discourses of free trade and liberal policies as the backdrop of the Brexit referendum. Data sources, theoretical and methodological considerations are unpacked in the subsequent section. Key findings are discussed in the penultimate section and a critical discussion of these is offered in the concluding section.

Key discursive logics of (inter)nationalism, liberalism and Brexit

Different political and economic rationales have historically underpinned the case for free trade, i.e. trans-border trade conducted without the application of restrictions such as tariffs and quotas. For example, according to the classic doctrine of economic liberalism that emerged at the height of British mercantile power and was notably expounded in the work of Adam Smith (1776/1993) and David Ricardo (1821/1951), nations will benefit from opening up to international trade and reducing barriers. According to this line of thinking, this is because, while they compete with each other and focus on the specialised production of goods, the market for selling those goods will expand and so will national wealth. In this sense, free trade has also been a political corollary of the liberal tenet that cooperation between states helps the development of democratic institutions and ultimately

benefits individuals as they prosper in a cosmopolitan peaceful society (Moravisck, 1997). Most liberal internationalists assume that two countries with trading arrangements are less likely to engage in war as any gains from fighting is greatly outweighed by the economic losses they would incur. This rationale was a key driver of the early European Coal and Steel Community, which in the aftermath of the Second World War attempted to pool French and German resources in the hope that their inter- dependence would prevent conflict occurring again.

Since 1960, liberal internationalist ideology has sustained an accelerating worldwide pattern of trade liberalisation through the proliferation of Free Trade Agreements – especially via multilateral agreements under the World Trade Organisation (WTO) – resulting in an overall exponential growth of inter-state trade (Ortiz-Ospina & Roser, 2018). While market democracies have often legitimised the introduction of free trade policies through the ideological premises that wealth production would lead to democratic and peaceful domestic and foreign societies, it is in fact market rationalities that have prevailed, exposing a disjuncture between the theory of liberal internationalism and its practice (Jahn, 2013). Since the 1980s the expansion of liberal internationalism has been especially fuelled by neoliberal approaches to economic policies, primarily – but not exclusively – promoted by Anglo-Saxon governments on both sides of the political spectrum (notably Reagan and Bush in the United States, Thatcher and Blair in the UK). This has resulted in policies that emphasise competition, financial deregulation and privatisation. Aspects of the neoliberal economic model have also filtered down to the EU's single market project, of which the UK has been a keen promoter (Menon & Salter, 2016), especially as financial liberalisation greatly benefitted the British service industry and "British trade shifted away from the Commonwealth towards the EU" (Thompson, 2017, p. 436).

In the wake of this liberal economic surge, goods – as well as capital and labour – have become freer to move transnationally and economies have become ever more closely integrated. However, the benefits of free trade have also increasingly been questioned vis-à-vis growing national and global patterns of social inequalities exacerbated by major global and European financial crises and austerity policies. These dynamics have resulted in different political and economic responses from most national governments. In broad terms, there has been a notable tendency to decelerate or even revert transnational agreements and a shift back to bilateralism (for example with the US decision to pull out of the Transpacific Partnership, to renegotiate the North America Free Trade Agreement and to introduce 'trade war' policies). These attitudes have tallied with various forms of economic populism and national protectionism (instantiated for example in slogans such as 'America first') which have overtly opposed global trade as the perceived cause of falling economic standards (Hopkin, 2017). Economic nationalism has thus (re)emerged as a powerful discourse in many political quarters resulting in some states adopting different protectionist measures in the name of economic nationalism. Rather than isolationism and economic retreat from global markets, however, these economic policies have primarily advocated national independence by focusing on competition for resource among countries and by emphasising the zero-sum logic of one nation's gain vis-à-vis others within the international economic system (The Economist, 2016).

It is within this complex social, economic and political conjuncture that different discursive nexuses of international economic policies conflated into the polarising 'in' and 'out' opinions of the EU referendum campaigns. In those campaigns, economic and political arguments were frequently invoked by both Leave and Remain sides to (de)legitimise Brexit. While the Remain camp legitimised the status quo through arguments about the benefits of the single market and the risk of leaving it (Hughes, 2016), the Leave choice rested on a set of contradictory arguments. On the one hand, the single market (and the whole EU project) was seen by a minority of Labour voters as too skewed

towards a free market ideology and thus preventing any progress towards a true social democracy (see Demata, Chapter 8 this volume), while, on the other hand, the same EU set-up was deemed as not business-friendly enough by a large cohort of neoliberal advocates who resented the 'red tape' and 'chains' imposed by Brussels to British business (Buckledee, 2018, pp. 79–84; Zappettini, 2019a). Further polarisation around the in/out split was constructed in a large section of the media, especially in the tabloid press (Zappettini, 2018; Koller & Ryan, forthcoming), which typically represented Brexit as an opportunity for the 'British people' to reassert economic nationalism and to withstand political interference from the economic and inter- national political and economic elite (variously identified as Brussels, the IMF and President Obama). The different argumentative positions that validated the two referendum choices also cut across political parties and members of the Cabinet, highlighting deep ideological divides and a shift from traditional Left/Right parti- san affiliations towards the in/out split (Wenzl, Chapter 3 this volume; Zappettini & Krzyżanowski, 2019). These divisions notwithstanding, and despite the lack of consensus – or preparation – among politicians and the public on how exactly Brexit 'should be done' (Allen, 2018, p. 106), the British government took the referendum outcome as a mandate for a 'hard Brexit' (that is ruling out any possible British membership of the single market or any customs union) and com- mitted to execute the 'will of the people' by triggering Article 50 to leave the EU in March 2019. In the run-up to the negotiations that will eventually define the nature of such a hard Brexit, the institutional rhetoric has focused on a narrative of national unity and on constructing a new imaginary for an 'EU-free' Britain on the world's political and economic stage. As discussed in the following sections, it is on the discursive manifestations of this soul-searching process – in particular on the official vision(s) of 'global' Britain constructed in a corpus of governmental positioning papers – that the analysis in this chapter has focused.

Data, theoretical and methodological approach

Data

The corpus analysed in this chapter consists of a collection of public documents that the newly created Department for Exiting the European Union (DExEU) published on the official UK government website.1 Those documents comprise White Papers, position papers, PM and Cabinet Ministers' official speeches, statements and press releases in which the Government provides "[i]nformation about the Article 50 process and our negotiations for a new partnership with the European Union" (British Government, 2017). These documents belong to a dis- cursive genre strategically aimed at communicating the Government's view and obtaining public support for the proposed actions (which are necessarily condi- tional on the actual negotiation with the EU). The context of production is also crucial. Papers were released ahead of each negotiation round and conceivably reflect early negotiating positions rather than actual detailed implementation plans. In fact, in the phrasing of these documents one must assume a degree of rhetorical spin and "calculated ambivalence" (Wodak, 2015, p. 20), which would allow the Government some room for manoeuvre around their proposed strategies while 'sounding out' the other negotiating party. Finally, it must be noted that, as dis- cussed above, even as the official British Government standpoint, these documents only voice selected Cabinet views rather than the gamut of contradictory opinions within the Conservative Party or, indeed, the devolved national parliaments of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

Due to space constraints and the balance between breadth and depth of anal- ysis, this chapter focuses on the analysis of two position papers that are highly representative of the macro-discursive themes that characterise the corpus. These documents are: the Department for International Trade's 'Preparing for Our Future UK Trade Policy' (42 pages) and the Government's 'Foreign Policy, Defence and Development: A Future Partnership Paper' (24 pages).2 As they focus on how post-Brexit economic and intergovernmental relations are envisaged through new trade deals and through cooperation on security with the EU and third countries, respectively, these documents were also selected because they relate to the key dimensions of internationalism discussed earlier.

Theoretical and methodological approach

The general theoretical approach to the analysis has been informed by the post- structuralist view of (political) discourse as constitutive – rather than simply descriptive – of social reality and social action (Critchley & Mouffe, 1997). In this sense, discourses represent powerful – albeit not the only – forms of action available to political actors to achieve certain goals. More specifically, as argued by Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), political discourse can be seen as a form of prac- tical reasoning aimed at directing change from one current state of affairs ('the way things are now') to an imagined future state of affairs ('how things ought, should, must or will be in the future'). The analytical operationalisation of this theoretical approach has followed Fairclough and Fairclough's (2012) systematic identification of argumentative schemes and their typical constituents. This analytical taxonomy sees arguments as typically constructed around:

(i)   a claim for action carried out by certain means (what should/will be done and how) in order to achieve

(ii)   the desired goal (a future state of affairs) in accordance with

(iii)   certain values (e.g. ideological stances on individual and social prosperity, equality, etc.) and warranted by

(iv)   certain circumstantial premises (i.e. representations of the 'problem' that the action is trying to resolve).

For Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), representations – or "imaginaries" (Jessop, 2010) – of current and future states of affairs and/or of values underpin- ning the goal are key to how political agents are able to frame an argument and increase its rhetorical effectiveness. Thus, in addition to other components, the argumentative analysis has also focused on imaginaries as discursive representations of present realities (or circumstantial premises) and future states of affairs (or intended goals) as meaning-making frames that organise the discursive field in which the argument is developed (e.g. the understanding of economic issues at stake). Finally, following Fairclough and Fairclough (2012), the analysis was not simply concerned with the structure of an argument per se but it also involved a critical evaluation of its intended goals (i.e. a normative critique). This was achieved for example by addressing questions such as: are the values underlying the proposed

action morally acceptable? Is the action proposed to achieve the desired goal effective? What other possible consequences could the proposed action have? Are there any other means whereby the action could be achieved in an equally or more effective manner? Of course, the limitation of such normative critique is that no universal moral standards can be applied and ultimately the evaluation of arguments rests on my own personal belief that social progress is achieved better through the transnational rather than (inter)national organisation of economic and political activities (Zappettini, 2019b).

Key arguments and imaginaries of 'global Britain'

Different clusters of arguments and different internationalist visions emerged from the documents' analysis, which portrayed Brexit as both rupturing and continuing international narratives and related discursive logics as they were discussed above. While arguments relating to trade policy were oriented towards a legitimisation of Brexit as a macro-means to further liberalisation of the UK's economy and its independence from the EU institutional framework, in relation to foreign policy the institutional discourse portrayed Brexit as a form of continuity of the international state of affairs and the current balance of powers. Three key discursive constructs associated with these visions are discussed in detail below: (i) arguments for further trade liberalisation and the imaginaries of 'British influence' and the 'great trading nation'; (ii) arguments of wealth (distribution) and protection from competition; and (iii) arguments of shared European values.

The argument for further trade liberalisation and the imaginaries of 'British influence' and the 'great trading nation'

One of the key themes articulated in the texts is the UK's desire to expand its trade activities outside the European area while maintaining a 'deep' relation with the EU (these future trading partners are represented as 'new allies' and 'old friends'). The overarching discourse on a future economic partnership with the EU is thus driven by arguments of both closeness with and independence from the EU. The imagery of the 'trading nation' is invoked as a historical premise for the implementation of an ambitious trade policy that would enable the UK to trade freely and independently with other countries after Brexit:

> (1)   The United Kingdom has a long and proud history as a great trading nation and champion of free trade with all parts of the world. We want to maximise our trade opportunities globally and across all countries – both by boosting our trading relationships with old friends and new allies, and by seeking a deep and special partnership with the EU (Preparing For Our Future UK Trade Policy, p. 5).

> (2)   The Prime Minister also underlined that the people of the UK have decided to be a global, free-trading nation, able to chart our own way in the world (Preparing for Our Future UK Trade Policy, p. 5).

Example (1) constructs the circumstantial premises around the imaginary of the proud British trading tradition, a historical discourse that links with Adam Smith's Wealth of Nations and the British Empire. This argument sets out the primary goal of increasing worldwide trade (with the significant implicit assumption that achieving this goal is incompatible with remaining in the EU) and puts forward the means to achieve the goal, i.e. negotiating independent trade policies with the EU and other countries (note the expression 'deep and special partnership', introduced into the Government's discourses since the triggering of Article 50). Example (2) presents a similar goal based on a circumstantial premise that equates the referendum outcome with a deliberation on the free-trading nation imaginary. The latter is linguistically expressed via a realisation of the maritime metaphor NATIONS ARE SHIPS ('chart our own way'). In addition to representations of the 'great trading nation', the imaginary of British influence was often invoked in the cor- pus analysed as the means to future trade policies of an 'independent' Britain. For example, one of the frequent argumentative schemes that legitimised Brexit as a means to a 'global' Britain pivoted around the ostensive benefits of the UK's future membership of the WTO, as exemplified by example (3):

> *(3)   When we leave the EU we will regain our independent seat at the WTO. As an independent member and one of the largest economies in the world, we will be in a position to intensify our support for robust, free and open interna- tional trade rules which work for all, and to help to rebuild global momentum for trade liberalisation [. . .] we will continue to work within the WTO to pro- mote global action to cut red tape across borders, phase out distortive subsidies, scrap tariffs on trillions of dollars' worth of trade, and work to ensure the rule book stays relevant as patterns of trade change and technological innovations develop. We will do this all firmly in the belief that the WTO should remain central to the liberalisation and governance of international trade. Already a champion of multilateral trade from within the EU, the UK is preparing to take on an even greater role in the WTO outside the EU, but still firmly along- side our partners (Preparing for Our Future UK Trade Policy, p. 7).*

The goal discussed in this argument is to promote further liberalisation and is associated with the circumstantial premises that Brexit will enable the UK (which, as all EU member states, is currently represented at the WTO table by the EU) to be a single independent actor and, as such, to exercise greater influence on WTO policies. This argument echoes prominent discourses of the Leave campaign on the burden of Brussel's red tape and the need for better influencing WTO rules which were used to delegitimise the EU as an inefficient actor and the single market as a static and distorted economic system (Zappettini, 2019a). The presup- position that the UK will be able to shift its trade away from the EU and at the same time to significantly shape WTO rules rests here on the imaginary of British influence. While this representation constitutes an effective rhetorical device as it nostalgically appeals to an 'imagined' powerful nation, it represents a much more problematic factual warrant for a number of reasons. First, as the influence that a party is able to exert in a Free Trade Agreement negotiation is normally a func- tion of the size of its internal market and its output, the British government would not conceivably be able to exert the same influence as the EU, of which the UK is only one of the 28 members. Second, the representation of British influence backgrounds the fact that considerable financial and time resources would be required in any future reorganisation of the UK's trade. For example, shift- ing the UK's trade pattern from the EU to, say BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) – which currently represent about 44% and 8% of UK exports respectively (Full Fact, 2016) – could not happen without significant economic

damage, as acknowledged by the Government itself in a recently leaked paper (Fox, 2018). Similarly, considerable resources would be needed to renegotiate anew the trade deals that currently give Britain access to 53 countries under the EU membership. Third, EU membership has not prevented the UK from benefitting from various tariff-free deals negotiated by the EU. As acknowledged in the document containing example (3) above, the statement on scrapping 'tariffs on trillions of dollars' worth of trade' refers to a trade deal reached in 2015 by 24 WTO members (including the EU and therefore the UK) that guarantees that no tariffs will be paid on 201 high-tech products. Fourth, representations of the UK as enjoying the highest degree of free trade outside the EU are also problematic since WTO rules in fact exist to promote fair competition and result in most countries applying some tariffs to foreign trade unless such countries are part of a customs union such as the EU, whose internal market is tariff-free (while EU external trade is still subject to different tariffs).

Arguments of wealth (distribution) and protection from competition

The positioning paper 'Preparing for Our Future UK Trade Policy' also makes the case for free trade through arguments of wealth, growth and social prosperity. Typically, these arguments restated the classic economic theory of international trade and specialisation of labour as key drivers of one country's growth and prosperity (as discussed above). For example, page 6 of the paper discusses international trade and its impact on business efficiency, innovation and job creation, which, in turn, are said to result in wider choice of cheaper goods for consumers. Along with arguments for international trade as beneficial to the wider society, the paper raises the question of the uneven distribution of such benefits (euphemistically referred to as 'adjustment effects of trade'). As discussed above, such unevenness is increasingly being seen as the counterargument against further liberalisation. The issue of the 'left behind', however, is only sketchily addressed by the Government's ambitious vision of free trade post-Brexit. For example, the following argument is developed under the heading 'Making trade work for everyone':

> (4)   Free and open trade has had, and continues to have, an overwhelmingly posi- tive impact on prosperity around the world and has taken more people out of abject poverty in the last 25 years. However, we recognise that some areas and sectors may benefit from trade liberalisation more than others, while some people feel left behind. Likewise there is a feeling that increased openness to trade may threaten our protections, including consumer safety standards and public services. The proper response to these concerns is not to turn our backs on international trade. The challenge is clear: to make sure the whole of the UK is able to take full advantage of the opportunities that trade offers. It is for this reason that the Government has committed to building a global economy that works for everyone. We will ensure the way we develop our own trade policy is transparent and inclusive so that concerns are heard and understood, and the right facts are available. [. . .] Through our trade remedies measures [. . .] we will ensure that our domestic industries do not suffer harm as a result of distortions of international trade caused by dumping or subsidy (Preparing for Our Future UK Trade Policy, p. 19).

The circumstantial premises represent free trade as having both positive and neg- ative effects. A rather convoluted response (means) is proposed to address the latter.

This consists of: (i) a non-action ('not to turn our backs on it'); (ii) a restatement of the 'challenge'; and (iii) a generic intertextual reference to the more recent slogan of the Conservative party 'a country that works for everyone'. Further, while open- ness to dialogue with stakeholders is discussed, the argument does not provide an explanation of whether and how redistribution under the new trade policy would operate differently from the current EU's principle of funding poorer regions – a principle that has benefitted some parts of the UK (Di Cataldo, 2017) and might no longer be available after Brexit. Similarly, recognising the potential negative impact of free trade on domestic industries that might be adversely exposed to deregulated worldwide competition, 'trade remedies' are proposed as a means to prevent dumping and subsidy practices. These proposed solutions would, however, simply replicate measures that are already extant under the single market rules and that, paradoxically, in the intention of the Leave voters, would be scrapped through Brexit. Moreover, under these provisions, in a post-Brexit global economy British manufacturers might be somewhat protected against import of foreign cheap goods but they would still have to pay tariffs to export to the single market (unless the EU agreed to remove its tariffs). Additionally, a free trade approach opens up potential risks not only for domestic manufacturers but also for sources of production that, in a competitive and deregulated market, become more exposed to the risk of exploiting cheap labour and suppressing workers' rights. While these issues are acknowledged in the Government's papers, the argument for equal benefits and protection from competition is discussed from the higher moral ground of national values and their diffusion:

> (5)   After we leave the EU, the UK intends to pursue new trade negotiations to secure greater access to overseas markets for UK goods exports as well as push for greater liberalisation of global services, investment and procurement mar- kets [. . .] The Government is fully committed to ensuring the maintenance of high standards of consumer, worker and environmental protection in trade agreements. [. . .] Our standards can also ensure that consumers are able to have confidence in choosing products which conform to UK values, whatever their budget. Trade agreements with single countries or groups of countries can promote and support labour protections, the environment, human rights, anti- corruption, animal welfare and other important factors which support sustainable trade and development across the world. We want to ensure eco- nomic growth, development and environmental protection go hand in hand, and it is in everyone's interest to avoid any 'race to the bottom'. We will have the opportunity to promote our values around the globe in the areas that are of greatest importance to us as a United Kingdom (Preparing for Our Future UK Trade Policy, p. 30).

In this case the argument reiterates the vision of Brexit as an opportunity for increasing international free trade and market liberalisation. This argument represents Brexit as a win-win situation that can provide the maximum benefits to all members of society and is realised through the neoliberal *topos of the 'trickle-down effect'* (see Zappettini & Unerman, 2016 for the use of this *topos* in corporate discourse). Along with these representations of Brexit that were driven by a mix of (inter)national economic and social logics, representations of 'British values' represented another powerful

discursive imaginary deployed in the documents analysed. In example (5) the term 'British values' was used to construct two future scenarios in relation to Brexit. In one case 'British values' can be inferred as quality standards that, in a post- Brexit price-driven economy, consumers would still able to expect (and that could quite possibly replicate existing EU standard requirements). The second scenario constructed around 'British values' draws on the imaginary of British influence and independence (as discussed above). In this case Brexit appears legitimised through the goal of international trade policies that would clearly benefit the imagined national community (such meanings are conveyed by the deictics 'our' and 'us').

Representations of 'values' were key discursive drivers underpinning imaginaries of Brexit that went beyond the trade argument. For example, they were at the core of the framework for future foreign policies, which is discussed in the following subsection.

Arguments of closeness and the imaginary of shared (European) values

In contrast to the trade policy paper discussed in the previous section, which emphasises economic, political and cultural independence from the EU, the Government's paper titled 'Foreign Policy, Defence and Development: A Future Partnership Paper' portrays Britain as highly committed to upholding shared 'European values' with its partners (see also Bennett, Chapter 2 this volume). The vast majority of arguments in this paper rely on imaginaries of British closeness and unity with Europe. These imaginaries sustain a characterisation of Britain as deeply rooted in a continental tradition of democratic values and legitimise Brexit as not disrupting the continuity of a 'deep and special' relationship that would preserve such values in the face of common threats. This is illustrated by the following passage:

> (6)   The UK will remain a committed partner and ally to its friends across the continent, not simply because UK and EU citizens face the same threats and as it is in both our interests to do so, but because the UK has a deep, historic belief in the same values that Europe stands for: peace, democracy, freedom and the rule of law, in our continent and beyond. Promoting our shared values, tackling our shared threats, and maintaining a strong and prosperous Europe will require a deep and special partnership, including on foreign [sic], defence and security, and development engagement (Foreign Policy, Defence and Development: A Future Partnership Paper, p. 2).

Significantly, in opposition to economic discourses making the case for free trade, argumentative schemes in the area of defence and international relations were aimed at recognising the importance of European rather than British influence on a global stage. The imaginary of international Britain in this case is constructed around a de-antagonisation of the UK–EU relationship and on the premise that Britain will contribute to European prosperity. However, an overall controversial representation of antinomic interests and values driving Brexit was also constructed: in example (7) the discourse shifts between different representations of global, European and national interests being pursued by the Government:

> *(7)   The UK supports a strong, secure and successful EU with global reach and influence. UK priorities after it leaves the EU will continue to be based on a European outlook and these shared values. The UK is exiting the EU, not withdrawing from Europe. As the UK leaves the EU, the UK is committed to a 'global Britain': a country actively engaged in Europe and the world in the interests of the British people, and playing a leading role in advancing European and international security and an international rules-based system (Foreign Policy, Defence and Development: A Future Partnership Paper, p. 3).*

In this extract, the overall imaginary state of affairs portrayed by the Government is once again a positive representation of international relations and of close cooperation with the EU. In particular, the claim that the UK supports a successful and influential EU plays into a narrative of 'nested hierarchies' in which national interests are embedded in European and, in turn, global interests (this meaning is supported by the expression 'UK priorities based on a European outlook'). This premise also appears to contradict the delegitimisation of the EU institutions work- ing 'against British interests' that frequently characterised arguments of trade and sovereignty invoked by Leavers during the referendum campaign (Zappettini, 2019a). At the same time, however, while 'global Britain' is imagined through a vision of international engagement it also portrays Brexit along the dis- cursive split EU/Europe. In this sense the claim that 'Britain leaves the EU but not Europe' reinforces the imaginary of Brexit as rupture and continuity. While claiming the continuation of a 'deep relationship' with European values, the insti- tutional discourse also reproduces historical discourses of 'British exceptionalism', which makes the European social and political project incompatible with British aspirations. Global Britain thus shows the tension of these two discourses: wanting to support the EU while distancing itself from it.

Conclusions

This chapter has adopted the lens of internationalism to analyse the arguments and imaginaries through which post-Brexit Britain was envisaged in a corpus of positioning papers published by the Government ahead of the UK's official departure from the EU. The analysis has suggested that Brexit is legitimised through different argumentative schemes and different discursive constructions of internationalism. Economic visions of 'Global Britain' and the push for further international trade are key discursive drivers and rest on arguments that represent closeness with the EU framework and its benefits but, at the same time, independence from it. In turn, within this discursive scenario, the means of Brexit as the opportu- nity to trade freely with the world appeals to the imaginary of the 'great trading nation' and the influence that an 'EU-free' UK would be able to exercise in a new international liberal order. The analysis has highlighted how these arguments are warranted by a set of premises that represent the UK as able to effortlessly re-route its current EU trade to other partner countries and the trade-offs of this shift as economically worthwhile.

While the rhetorical appeal to the nation underpins several argumentative schemes in the corpus of papers, the analysis has also shown how such values often shift between global, European and

national discursive frames and imaginaries of British influence. For example, unlike the case for free trade made in the economic policy positioning papes, discourses related to foreign policy, defence and international development legitimised European rather than British influence and represent Brexit as continuing narratives of shared European values rather than rupturing the current institutional system. The duality of these discourses of rupture and continuity is, for example, encapsulated in the Prime Minister's asser- tion that 'Britain leaves the EU but not Europe'. Ironically, however, promoting European values and maintaining a 'prosperous Europe' seems hardly what Brexit was set in motion to achieve in the first place. Despite the widespread use of the phrase 'value sharing', the discursive focus of the Government's Brexit discourse zeros in on a convenient and strictly economic form of neoliberal internationalism. This vision of 'global Britain' decouples economic elements of the single market framework from any political and social implications attached to the EU project such as freedom of movement and redistribution of resources at a European level (an attitude that has often been described as 'having its cake and eating it too'; see Musolff, Chapter 13 this volume). It also reproduces historical discourses of English/British exceptionalism and its incompatibility with the European project, assuming that successful trade is only possible outside the EU and that British influence is dampened rather than boosted by current membership. By contrast, in spite of imaginaries of independence, the policy documents analysed indicate that most economic arrangements post-Brexit would reproduce current provisions existing under the EU institutional framework. While this would effectively normalise 'trade minus political engagement' as the new international 'business as usual', it also raises the critical question of who will ultimately benefit from Brexit. Answers to this question can only be speculative at this stage. However, the analysis has suggested that the argument of Brexit as 'levelling the social playing field' through a mix of liberalisation (e.g. free trade) and restrictions (e.g. freedom of movement) is – ambiguously and perhaps intentionally – not fully developed: the institutional vision does not explain how an out-of-the-EU and further liberalised Britain might foster equal benefits in an inclusive society that 'works for all'. In this sense, 'global Britain' embodies the potential paradox of Brexit as the imaginary of escaping from the negative consequences of global liberalism only to aim for more of the same. Adding to the uncertainty of future scenarios is the unknown quantity of immigration as a topic that was instrumental in the legitimisation of Brexit in the Leave referendum campaign but was absent in the papers. It is not clear how immigrant labour – which is needed by an international supply chain and might no longer be available under new immigration rules after Brexit – will be part of the 'society that works for all'. Most discourses of Brexit in the documents analysed consist of future promises of a better and more prosperous society. Ascertaining whether these promises will be delivered is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it is certainly an open critical question that must be addressed by future research.

Notes

1   www.gov.uk/government/collections/article-50-and-negotiations-with-the-eu

2   These two documents are available at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/ uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/654714/Preparing_for_our_future_UK_ trade_policy_Report_Web_Accessible.pdf and https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/ government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/643924/Foreign_policy__ defence_and_development_paper.pdf, respectively, both accessed 17 August 2018. They contain public sector information licensed under the Open Government Licence v3.0.

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