'Love Europe, Hate the EU': A genealogical inquiry into populists' spatio-cultural critique of the EU and its consequences

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ABSTRACT

This article analyses the genealogy of the expression "love Europe, hate the EU" that is taken as a spatio-cultural critique of the EU that has important consequences for how European integration is contested. Closely associated with the Brexit movement, but also popular among other populist movements opposing the EU, this catchphrase is analysed as the latest stage in the contestation over the political meaning of Europe. However, the article demonstrates that the desire to do away with a rules-based institutional order rests on a deliberately ahistorical reading of European inter-state relations following the rise of the sovereign state. What is overlooked is the way Europe was conceptualized by the end of the eighteenth century as a distinct political unit with its own peculiar dysfunctionality, namely a naturally antihegemonic order that often resulted in violent conflict. The spatiocultural critique of EU institutionalization nonetheless expects that shared European interests and values can seamlessly recreate cooperation across sovereign states, an argument that culminated in the UK's Brexit decision. Yet as shown by the debate over the future of UKEU relations, this cultural and idealized understanding of Europe's commonalities ignores the economic and political significance of borders and forgets the part played by the EU in managing contested spaces. This emerging cleavage between institutional and cultural understandings of Europe suggests that European integration after Brexit needs to focus on demonstrating the value of institutionalized cooperation per se as much as on the cultural symbolism of supranationalism.

KEY WORDS

'Europe is not the creation of the Treaty of Rome. Nor is the European idea the property of any group or institution … The European Community is one manifestation of European identity, but it is not the only one'

Margaret Thatcher, Bruges Speech 1988

Introduction

Margaret Thatcher's Euroscepticism, best captured for posterity in her 1988 speech at the College of Europe in Bruges, is generally remembered today as a red-blooded defence of sovereignty against the encroachments of a putative EU 'super-state'. Yet as the epigraph for this article demonstrates, her hostility to European integration was also couched in terms of defining what Europe actually consists of and who gets to control the said definition. A similar logic was in evidence throughout the 2016 UK referendum on EU membership – as well as in populist Eurosceptic rhetoric in other countries – when 'love Europe, hate the EU' began circulating as a catchphrase amongst supporters of Brexit (Smith, 2017). This slogan – reproduced on a campaign sweatshirt sold by the United Kingdom Independence Party[1] – rests on a deliberate juxtaposition contrasting supposedly oppressive institutionalized cooperation under the EU's legal-administrative architecture and the equally internationalist defence of Europe as a looser community of sovereign nation-states. In this vein, the aim of this article is to analyse the genealogy of this spatio-cultural critique of the EU, not forgetting the succour given it by the Brussels institutions' attempts to monopolize who, as implied by Thatcher, 'speaks for Europe'. This genealogical approach serves as the platform for exploring the consequences this critique of EU integration has for political contestation within Europe, using the UK-EU Brexit negotiations as a case study.

Disparate cries from supporters of Brexit to far-right populists such as Victor Orbán or Marine Le Pen, for less restrictive forms of political association are accompanied by the promotion of a certain idea of Europe devoid of the EU. This alternative to integration via the EU is permeated by assumptions that shared values and interests among European peoples can seamlessly replace the political-legal ties of EU membership. Painting a picture of common values or decency corrupted by bureaucracy and self-interested elites is a classic trope of populists (Mudde, 2004). Significantly, this genre now extends transnationally to the extent that the EU itself is considered a common enemy of peoples that have developed the same preferences and values. Thus the Dutch populist Pim Fortuyn could write that 'I love Europe, I love its multitude of peoples, cultures, landscapes, weather conditions, languages, and human beings. I sometimes hate the euro-elite in its negligent arrogance. In short, I want a Europe of the people, of the human scale. A Europe of you and me!' (quoted in Liang, 2007: 12). This kind of paean to European distinctiveness couched within a common political identity – different to the left-wing Eurosceptic critique of EU economic policies that is nonetheless at ease with the principle of supranationalism (Van Elsas et al., 2016) – is increasingly present in the rhetoric of right-wing populists across the continent. At a 2017 meeting of radical right party leaders, Marine Le Pen declared that 'because we love Europe, we accuse the EU of killing Europe' (quoted in Janicek, 2017).

Declaring an attachment to a common Europeanness that can make up for unwinding the EU system is a convenient way to promote a rival mode of internationalism and fend off accusations of insularity or xenophobia. However, rather than dismissing this rhetoric as merely spurious, this article seeks to explore the genealogy behind a speech act used as a potent weapon for attacking the EU's rules-based institutional order. Here the aim is to analyse the historical imagination of Eurosceptic populism – thereby engaging in the kind of thematic cross-fertilization advocated by Rooduijn (2019) – notably the way historical claims about a common Europeanness serve the populist narrative regarding a virtuous people battling corrupt elites and institutions (Mudde, 2004).

In order to examine the attractiveness of this language and its potential ramifications, the analysis situates the antagonism pitting institutions – an extension of elite interests in the moralized language of populists (Mudde, 2004) – versus place and culture as the latest stage in a much older contestation over the political meaning of Europe (Den Boer, 1993). Building on Bartelson (1995: 8), the objective is 'not to tell what actually happened in the past, but to describe how the present became logically possible'. Tracing the genealogy of the politics behind the notion of Europe is necessary to understand the nature and impact of contemporary populist opposition to European integration as defined by the emerging cleavage between a spatio-cultural definition of Europe and an institutional one represented by the EU. Included in this genealogical analysis is a reflection on the EU's own contribution to this cleavage through its imperial-like claim (cf. Zielonka, 2006) to speak on behalf of Europe, as if the cultural and political identity of the continent are coterminous and no rival definition of Europe were possible.

This article ultimately demonstrates how the narrative of Europeanness constructed in terms of a special geographical place and culture is dependent on a very particular reading of European inter-state relations. An appreciation of the genealogy of Europe as a political entity shows that a secular definition of Europe as a political space originally rested on an understanding that the European continent was united by a certain dysfunctionality. That is, the emergence of a common secularized political space (as opposed to the earlier concept of the *respublica Christiana*) required an equilibrium of power, which in practice was often a violent enterprise, or at least one underpinned by the threat of conflict. The ahistoricism of the populist Eurosceptic imagination stems from ignoring the problems associated with competition between sovereign states and overlooking the heated history of frictions arising from political and economic borders.

In this context, the creation of a contemporary Eurosceptic narrative that neglects the proper place of borders and violence in the development of the continent represents a conscious misreading of history, one intended to project a positive future in the absence of the EU. Brexit has greatly raised the stakes in what could otherwise be more readily dismissed as a recondite academic critique. This is because, as the article demonstrates, the UK government's negotiations over how to leave the EU are fundamentally beholden to a historical vision that imagines European values and interests can replicate the achievements of integration without the baggage of EU rules or institutions: sovereignty can be regained without trade-offs. The spatio-cultural critique of the EU has real world consequences by virtue of creating conditions in which

the residual importance of borders and their relationship to thorny questions of commerce or identity can be forgotten.

The debate on future UK-EU relations is thus analysed here to illustrate the inherent contradictions that arise from wishing to regain sovereignty by withdrawing from the EU and expecting a common sense of European values or interests to resolve outstanding differences. That is, an unwillingness to accept the EU as a legitimate expression of Europe's civic identity fuels the expectation that a common European culture is sufficient to resolve disputes arising over how to redraw economic or political borders in a way that satisfies citizens' demands for more sovereignty. The spatio-cultural critique of the EU, the article argues, is what enables supporters of Brexit to dismiss the role played by supranational institutions in managing clashing sovereignty claims over bordered spaces. Ultimately, it is this act of forgetting that explains the double paradox of the UK's withdrawal talks. For all the importance attributed to regaining sovereignty during the 2016 referendum, the UK strategy for Brexit is strangely relaxed about the significance of borders – except for migrants. At the same time, the EU, long understood by international relations scholars and lawyers as having established a post-sovereign space (MacCormick, 1993; Caporaso, 1996), insisted on establishing certainty over its economic and political borders with the UK, even at the cost of a breakdown in negotiations.

Hence the re-emergence of political contestation over the definition of Europe – closely associated with a broader form of civilizational chauvinism made by populist parties (Brubaker, 2017) – needs to be taken seriously as an object of study in contemporary European integration. This definitional struggle demonstrates the fundamental importance of the conceptual distinction between civic and cultural community in contemporary debates over European integration (Bruter, 2003; 2009). The fact that a certain cultural understanding of Europeanness is compatible with a rejection of the civic community that is the EU – as illustrated by numerous supporters of Brexit – gives reason for pause. The genealogical analysis offered here reveals that the promotion of an anti-EU cultural definition of Europe is based on a variety of ahistorical claims used to reject the need for a civic community bound together by law and institutions. At the same time, EU actors' apparent assumption that civic and cultural definitions of Europe inherently overlap, and thus that Brussels is best placed to speak for Europe, points to a problem when seeking to challenge the ahistorical foundations of populist Europeanness. Seen in this light, the Brexit process appears as a potentially key moment for not only demonstrating the value of institutionalized cooperation per se, but also for accepting the existence of a cultural community beyond the civic parameters of the EU. In turn, this cultural understanding of Europe may in fact be required to help reshape that civic community (cf. Cotta, 2018) and combat the overriding populist narrative that elite-serving institutions act against the interests of the 'real people' (Mudde, 2004; Müller, 2017).

The article proceeds as follows. The first section engages with the fundamental question of 'what is Europe?', the answer to which has largely been shaped by inter-state dynamics since the early-modern period. A genealogical reconstruction of that debate is undertaken to show that what emerged in parallel with the so-called Westphalian state system was a sense of Europe's distinctive political identity – replacing an earlier cultural commonality built on Christianity – as well as its resulting dysfunctionality. Section two then explores the heavily politicized distinction made by

populist Eurosceptics (channelling Margaret Thatcher more or less consciously), especially with reference to Brexit, between the EU and Europe. This separateness is central to the idea that Europe is a common source of values on which cooperation between nation-states can be organized without recourse to the EU (i.e. its institutions, elites, and norms) itself. A contrast is made with EU actors' blurred understanding of the relationship between the civic definition of Europe in terms of the EU system and a wider cultural definition, which manifests itself in an imperial-like claim to be uniquely capable of speaking on behalf of Europe. The third and final section discusses the remarkable insignificance of economic and political borders – except for keeping out migrants – in the anti-EU mindset. This attitude is exemplified by the Brexit debate on future UK-EU relations, which conveniently ignored the bordered nature of economic relations arising out of sovereignty. The UK chose to forget the part played by the EU in managing contested frontier spaces such as Northern Ireland, while the EU responded by putting certainty over control of borders at the heart of the negotiations. The conclusion then reflects on the singular history of Europe from the perspective of inter-state relations and how the relationship between civic and cultural conceptions of Europe matters for the current EU order.

1. What is Europe? Contested Meanings and Inter-State Relations

As well as being a commonplace geographical expression, Europe is also a value-laden concept used to explain and justify separateness, in particular from the rest of the Asian landmass to which it is connected. This section sets out to reconstruct the emergence of a political definition of Europe that was intimately connected to the nature of how inter-state relations came to be understood. Coinciding with the rise of the Westphalian order, a novel civic understanding of Europe provided a frame of reference for attempts to improve this political order via the creation of new institutions to correct its inherent dysfunctionalities. In other words, as Europe came to be defined because of a common political order and not a shared Christian culture, the relationship between sovereign state and pan-European institutions was considered complementary. Excavating this genealogy – whereby Europe was identified politically as a space of sovereign states in need of a new institutional structure – is of vital importance to shed light on current cleavages over the meaning of Europe. This is because contemporary scholarship on European identity points to a clash between inclusive and exclusive nationalisms, dependent on cultural identification with the EU and the nation-state respectively (Fligstein, 2008; Risse, 2010). However, as this section demonstrates, the original political definition of Europe could not be couched in such a mutually exclusive fashion. Historically speaking, Europe, as a collective political identity, emerged as a space in need of institutions to manage the downsides of competition between sovereign states. Hence this analysis of the origins of a European political identity sets the stage for exploring a contested middle ground in which Europeanness and the European nation-state are co-constituted.

Religion was, historically speaking, the first point of reference for identifying European 'difference'. This self-identification emerged as the Germanic and other tribes that overran the newly-Christianized Roman Empire converted to the religion of the cross (Le Goff, 2005). The Christian element of Europe was underscored when in 1095 Pope Urban II called for volunteers to travel to Byzantium (Constantinople, modern-day Istanbul) to wage a holy war. Even after the end of large-scale crusading, Catholic popes such as Pius II (1458-54) renewed calls for a holy war to fight non-believers in

the east following the fall of Constantinople to Turkish forces in 1453, which had made the threat of the Muslim Ottoman Empire more real again. The Europe the Popes wanted to defend against this invader was the *respublica Christiana* or Christian commonwealth, also known as Christendom (Den Boer, 1993). Indeed, it was in this period that George of Podiebrad, the King of Bohemia, appealed to his fellow monarchs to unite to protect Christianity, a plea sometimes seen as the first project of European union (Le Goff, 2005: 158-9).

If Christendom marked a territory separate on religious grounds from the rest of Eurasia, a secular political interpretation also came to be attributed to Europe as a distinct geographical entity. With the Ottoman threat receding and European Christianity further divided by the sixteenth-century Reformation, it was in the seventeenth and eighteenth century that political philosophers discussed the 'natural republic of Europe' (Deudney, 2007: 136-160). By this they meant that the territorial units into which Europe was divided produced a sort of republican order, whereby no single state dominated, just as in a republic the presence of checks and balances prevented the consolidation of power in a single ruler. Although the Peace of Westphalia of 1648 is ingrained in international relations as a starting point for an international order founded on sovereignty, the way that this settlement was used as a marker of a collective European political identity is much less well remembered. The notion, common in the international relations literature, of a 'Westphalian system' bound together by nascent shared norms, would not have registered with Enlightenment figures, who instead emphasized the material and social factors that produced a type of republican order (Deudney, 2007: 139). This idiom, which stitched together concepts found in both antiquity and contemporary domestic political debates, was used by figures such as Emmanuel de Vattel, Voltaire, or Edmund Burke, when discussing Europe as 'a sort of republic', 'a species of great republic, and the 'diplomatic Republik of Europe' respectively (quoted in Deudney, 2007: 141).

As in a republic – rather than a monarchy – the Europe constituted by the treaties designed to end the thirty years' war lacked an all-powerful leader. Combinations, fluid over time, of states could check the hegemonic ambitions of a powerful monarch such as the French king Louis XIV, thereby approximating to the institutional checks and balances found in republican constitutions. Of course, this so-called republican international order contained a great deal of violence: states, led mostly by dynastic rulers, would often resort to war in their disputes. Nevertheless, this understanding of Europe as a shared political space with unique characteristics – notably territorially-bounded states led by secular leaders – replaced the older notion of Christendom (Schmidt, 1966). This uniqueness was considered in part natural, in that topographical fragmentation was seen by early modern theorists as a physical check on aspirations to dominance by any one state. A further boon was the maritime power of England – commercially embedded in Europe, but militarily protected by the channel – which provided a natural balancing ally for continental states seeking to avoid domination by a single country (Deudney, 2007: 146-150). These partial and fickle anti-hegemonic alliances in turn became part of the evolving diplomatic standards of behaviour that took root in Europe considered as a single political entity with multiple poles of attraction.

Not by coincidence, therefore, this novel understanding of Europe arose in tandem with proposals for uniting the continent through new political structures. This is because the Westphalian order, instead of resolving territorial conflicts through the norm of non-intervention, helped channel international rivalry into an inter-linked system of balancing in which borders and statehood became of central importance. The balancing on which state sovereignty in Europe depended implied the possibility of using force to stop a state becoming too powerful and was indifferent to the plight of weak states, whose territory could be carved up between major powers in order to preserve an equilibrium between stronger states (Nexon, 2009).

It was this process of power balancing that gave Europe features of a common political system, albeit a highly dysfunctional one because it privileged states' rights and interests over peace. Hence the aim of early-modern figures such as William Penn (1693) and the *abbé* de Saint-Pierre (1713) was to improve Europe's political system by finding a mechanism to avoid war in a system of sovereign states. They did not wish to see unity imposed by force or by a return to a common religious identity. Rather, these authors sought to overcome the deficiencies of the balance of power system by limiting states' right to make alliances or use force to settle their disputes. The improvement they had in mind came by virtue of creating common political institutions to overcome the limitations of ad hoc cooperation and bargaining.

In 1693, with war raging in continental Europe, Penn proposed a system for a congress of nations to procure peace. His *An Essay towards the Present and Future Peace of Europe by the Establishment of an European Dyet, Parliament or Estates* spoke of Europe's 'harassed inhabitants' and criticised the doctrine that 'peace is the end of war' as used by Europe's princes to justify the resort to violence. In the absence of a common government between states, leaders across Europe were unrestrained in their potential ability to wage war, resulting in numerous armed disputes over territory or dynastic succession. Such arbitrary conflict was not a legitimate use of force according to Penn because it prevented the establishment of a stable peace, which ought to be the only legitimate reason to wage war. Instead, his proposal called for Europe's states to send delegates (based on a country's wealth) to a general assembly or parliament, which would meet yearly to arbitrate disputes, settling them by a three-quarters majority.

Penn was not a utopian; he did not expect sovereign states to yield to this arbitration without some means of enforcement. This is why his plan called for a collective security approach. That is, if any country refused to abide by the decision of the European parliament, all the countries 'united as one strength' would enforce compliance. Joint military action was thus threatened against violators of this system. Although this sounds potentially violent, Penn did not expect disputes to end in military conflict because the great characteristic of Europe was the fact that no single state was more powerful than the rest combined. In this context, he envisaged peaceful dispute resolution as no state would dare challenge all the rest. Anticipating objections, he argued that this same logic would mean even the most powerful European country would feel obliged to join this parliamentary system rather than stay on the margins of a united continent. Moreover, limiting the use of war did nothing to diminish domestic

sovereignty (e.g. over religious matters), so this could not be an excuse for non-participation either.

Penn's visionary project failed to make an impact on European politics. Yet this did not stop others trying to imagine institutional solutions for making Europe work as a coordinated political unit. The *abbé* de Saint-Pierre, a French cleric who served his country as a diplomat was another thinker determined to help the pacification of Europe by building on its existing commonalities. He participated in the negotiation of the Treaty of Utrecht (1713), which put an end to over a decade of warfare involving an anti-hegemonic alliance of powers against Louis XIV's plan to put a Bourbon on the Spanish throne. This first-hand experience of major European conflict helped inspire his most famous work, a *Project for Perpetual Peace in Europe* (1713). Responding to the jealousies between states over territory and trade – the principal underlying causes of the wars ended by the Utrecht peace settlement – De Saint-Pierre proposed a European Union to not only remove war but also stimulate trade via free commerce (Hont, 2005: 27-8).

De Saint-Pierre's project of union was intended to remedy the deficiencies of balance of power. He assumed that peace treaties like that signed in Utrecht were only ever temporary expedients bound to be broken because of the jealousies and fickleness of rulers. European Union in his eyes needed to be established on a permanent basis through a treaty establishing a congress of all the leading rulers. Again the purpose of this union was to provide the weakest state with the backing of all, so that even the most powerful state would have to accept the binding decisions of this congress. The most important matters De Saint-Pierre expected the congress of this union to settle were territorial and dynastic claims as well as commercial disputes. The latter were increasingly important in Europe with warring states not only cutting off trade with one another – beggaring themselves – but also trying to restrict neutral trade, thereby bringing more states into conflict (*abbé* de Saint-Pierre, 1713).

Like Penn's plan, therefore, the *Project for Perpetual Peace in Europe* was an institutional scheme for obliging states to stand by a promise to accept collective dispute settlement. Living under the shadow of this collective use of force would be far preferable – even for the strongest European state – to relying on a *ad hoc* balancing alliances, continuously made and unmade, for security or more transient reasons such as dynastic, trade, or religious rivalries. From a rationalist perspective, kings and princes capable of understanding their true interest in stable trade relations and secure rule over their territories would sign such a treaty. Moreover, De Saint-Pierre thought this model of political military union was universal, meaning other regions should adopt it.

What emerged, therefore, in parallel with the Westphalian state system was an intellectual self-awareness of Europe's distinctive political identity compared to other regions as well as its resulting dysfunctionality. The anti-hegemonic balance that existed within the 'natural' republic of Europe was considered inherently fragile and in need of consolidation via common institutions. A genealogical exploration of Europe as a political expression for a certain geographically bounded space thus reveals a double-edged meaning. On the one hand, Europe by the early modern period could be defined as an international system based on a shared language of sovereignty and

an associated set of beliefs about its nature (Beaulac, 2004). On the other hand, this definition co-existed alongside an understanding that, in the absence of common institutions, state sovereignty underpinned by power balancing was an inherently unstable and potentially violent order.

Hence the original political definition of Europe was a civic one, in the sense that European states were considered part of a 'political system whose rules, laws, and rights have an influence on [citizens'] daily life' (Bruter, 2003: 1155). Europe took hold in the political imagination as an imperfect political system in need of institutional improvement. In this context, competition between inclusive and exclusive nationalism – the one accommodating European institution building, the other rejecting it – is a subsequent intellectual and political force associated with the rise of modern nationalism in the wake of the French revolution (Kohn, 1944; Schulman, 2002). This civic conceptualization of Europe came prior, therefore, to cultural understandings of identity that could be either for or against the development of pan-European legal-political institutions. In contrast, contemporary European politics has witnessed the rise of a cultural definition of Europe that suggests cooperation can be achieved without a common political system. The very slogan 'love Europe, hate the EU', expresses, in the moralized language of populism, an imagined cultural community as a preferable replacement for a flawed civic one. This Eurosceptic contention, that states in Europe can interact perfectly successfully based on voluntary association underpinned by shared norms or interests, is fundamentally at odds with the genealogy of the political definition of Europe, as explored below.

2. Leaving the EU not Europe: A cultural community as a replacement for a civic one?

This section explores the creation of a cultural and spatial narrative of Europe that has been nurtured as a form of opposition to the EU both within the Brexit movement and beyond. This requires looking more closely at the historical narratives deployed by populists to justify their vision of a culture European community. In this way, the argument adds nuance to Risse's (2010) contention that the clash over European identity is primarily a dichotomy between an open, modern Europe and a closed, nationalist version. The objective is to expose the subtle historical take on European integration that is part of the core message – designed to promote a sense of enduring openness and internationalism – of the British government that the UK is only leaving the EU, not detaching itself culturally or even politically from the rest of the continent. That message is part of a wider 'Global Britain' rhetoric indicative of a self-confident actor with a renewed sense of purpose on the international stage. As the then Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson explained 'there is a massive difference between leaving the EU and our relations with Europe, which if anything I think are going to be intensified and built up at an intergovernmental level' (*The Independent*, 2016). The de-institutionalization of UK relations with European countries represents a preferable alternative, according to this view, because mutually beneficial cooperation is equally possible outside of the EU's institutional constraints. What this section shows is most significant about this critique is its ahistoricism, in that it neglects to take account of the dysfunctionalities associated with Europe in the absence of common political institutions. At the same time, to make full sense of this emerging spatio-cultural cleavage, it is also necessary to examine EU leaders' own claim that the EU

represents a neatly overlapping cultural and civic community, which places implicit limits on the inclusiveness of European identity.

Eurosceptic populists, especially in the context of Brexit, have created a moralized narrative that seeks to separate the concept of Europe and Europeanness from association with the EU. This spatio-cultural critique rejects the EU's use of a geographical expression as a synonym for a contested institutional structure. In the provocative words of Brendan O'Neill (2016), writing for the libertarian magazine *Spiked*, 'the EU grates against everything that is brilliant about Europe. The EU is an ugly, illiberal, undemocratic blot on the wonderful continent of Europe. The EU is a stain on the best, most inspiring values of Europe and its peoples. It is the EU that is anti-Europe'. Writing in *The Sun* after the UK referendum, the journalist Tony Parsons (2017) similarly set out a vision of Britons as having 'only affection and admiration for European culture'. The implication being that Brexit was not a personal slight against fellow members of a common civilization. The academic pressure group 'Historians for Britain', created to support the campaign to leave EU, played exactly the same card, claiming that 'we could equally well have been entitled "Historians for Europe", for we are not hostile to Europe' (Abulafia, 2015). To use a Schmittian distinction, the foe is the EU and its acolytes, whereas ties of friendship extend across the entire continent. On that basis new relations after the UK leaves – or for that matter, with other countries that might choose to follow suit – can be imagined without the overweening influence of EU institutions.

Common to this narrative is an underlying assumption that sovereignty itself, unlike in the troubled period of balancing prior to formal European integration, is unproblematic for inter-state relations within this special cultural space. This is best illustrated by the belief that Russia and its European neighbours to the West are perfectly capable of participating in a shared security architecture even without a transatlantic component. The image of 'a common European home' that can include the Russia of Vladimir Putin (Sakwa, 2015) is radically at odds with that articulated by the EU in its normatively-inspired foreign policy. Indeed, support for Russia is a recurring expression of populist Europeanness on the basis that the EU itself is characterized as a hegemonic, expansionist power privileging its own values (notably human rights, but also slavish Atlanticism) above national ethnic or socio-economic cohesion. As Sakwa (2015: 559) puts it, an enlarged EU is associated with 'becoming subsumed into the Atlantic system, compromising in the view of critics its own normative foundations and imbuing its policies with a geopolitical dynamic that the EU had been established precisely to transcend'. So it is not a contradiction for Victor Orbán to say in the same speech that Europe 'cannot hope for protection from anyone else' and to call for a 'historic agreement' with for Russia to settle their differences. Or, from the other end of the political spectrum, Jeremy Corbyn's director of communications, Seamus Milne (2015), to advocate 'a common European security system including Russia' born of hostility to the NATO/EU approach to foreign relations.

A similar logic of recognizing the supposedly true nature of Europe – as opposed to the institutionalized simulacrum embodied by the EU – is at play in what Kratsev dubs 'the clash of solidarities' provoked by the 2015 migration crisis. In the face of an unprecedented breakdown in the Schengen common travel area, EU states were confronted by a situation whereby 'national, ethnic, and religious solidarity chaf[e] against our obligations as human beings' (Kratsev, 2016:9). The solution to this clash,

as advocated by Victor Orbán and others opposed to asylum quotas for redistributing refugees, was a return to sovereignty instead of the Commission's supranational burden-sharing project. Sovereignty, therefore, is both the cause of the clash of solidarities, especially because of the tension between the more cosmopolitan western states and more nationalist countries in central and eastern Europe (Kratsev, 2016), and a solution to it.

Hence cooperation without supranational institutions is presumed to be possible on the basis of cultural affinities or mutual benefits, which is why proponents of de-institutionalized cooperation are wont to draw on potted historical examples predating post-war integration. For instance, Boris Johnson (2018) sought to reassure universities by arguing that outside the EU 'we can continue the whirl of academic exchanges that have been a feature of European cultural life since the Middle Ages'. Where there is an acknowledgement of the travails of the past, it is in relation to power balancing, which – unlike De Saint-Pierre or William Penn – Boris Johnson (2016) describes as a system that thanks to British participation after the defeat of Napoleon 'was remarkably successful for about a century in keeping the peace, until it could not cope with the rise of new states in the European order'.

Johnson's sketch of the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe fails to recognize that the resulting order established at the Congress of Vienna (1814-15) put the interests of small states at the mercy of the agreements made between Europe's power brokers (Kissinger, 1956). It also presents the First World War as the product of new claims or cleavages rather than as a continuation of the uneasy relationship between constituent components of Europe's natural republic. Identifying the rise of new, presumably revisionist, states as the cause of the breakdown of great power peace in 1914 is convenient because it makes the source of that conflict appear novel and unrelated to more longstanding historical problems. Yet the failure of power balancing in the early twentieth century would have been perfectly understandable to earlier generations of European thinkers. Already in the eighteenth century, the Prussian military theorist Dietrich von Bülow foresaw a reduction in the number of countries that Europe's natural republic would contain, representing a rather accurate prediction of the future map of Europe that bred two global conflicts in the twentieth century (Deudney, 2007: 146-147).

Without common institutions the foundations for successful cooperation in Europe are supposed to reside in shared values amongst the peoples of Europe. British ministers have notably emphasized these intangible bonds, as when the then Secretary of State for Exiting the EU, David Davis (2018), sought to reassure that 'ending membership of the European Union institutions would not stop our shared European culture, values, civilisation'. Or, in the more grandiloquent language of Johnson (2018): 'we will continue to be Europeans both practically and psychologically, because our status as one of the great contributors to European culture and civilisation… is simply not dependent on the Treaty of Rome as amended at Maastricht or Amsterdam or Lisbon'. The resulting 'certain idea of Europe' of Euroscepticism is the reason it seems for assuming that borders – in their manifestation as state-imposed impediments to the movement of people, goods, or ideas – have ceased to be problematic within this distinctive political space. At least that is the best explanation for the repeated assertions that Brexit poses no problem for internationalism given that in leaving the

EU, dixit Johnson (2017), 'we can be ever more internationalist, and indeed we can be ever more European'.

Imagining Europe as a cultural community in this way entails overlooking the potential contribution of civic institutions to managing outstanding issues over sovereignty and borders. This kind of populist conception of a European people with a common culture thus involves a special act of forgetting about the history of intense economic and political competition between territorially bounded states, as found in the genealogy of Europe as a political expression examined in section one. This exercise in forgetting rests on an exclusive definition of Europeanness because it rejects identification with the EU and the benefits of its particular civic community. However, it is useful to juxtapose this kind of ahistoricism with the opposing claim that somehow the EU is the ideal expression of the overlapping cultural and civic communities that constitute Europe. That is because the spatio-cultural cleavage in European politics today is also characterized by attempts to make the EU system the sole legitimate expression of European solidarity. Such a move potentially limits the inclusiveness of this European identity both territoriality and in terms of how a European civic community ought to function.

The political conflation of the EU for Europe is a relative commonplace in media reporting and also in the lexicon of EU leaders, perhaps best exemplified by German Chancellor Angela Merkel's comment at the height of the sovereign debt crisis that if the Euro fails, Europe fails' (*Der Spiegel*, 2011). This is not a recent phenomenon; writing in 1992, just as the treaty creating the EU was being negotiated, the intellectual historian J.G.A. Pocock wrote that '"Europe" had come to be often used co-terminously with the "European Community"' (1991: 7). Similarly, the annual State of the Union speech by the President of the Commission habitually uses Europe as a synonym for the EU. In arguing that 'Europe is the guardian of peace' or that he 'spoke in Europe's name' abroad, Jean-Claude Juncker (2018) elided political contestation over the definition of Europe.

The risk inherently associated with speaking and acting on behalf of Europe in this fashion is twofold. The first is that the EU forgets its own imperial-like features, namely the ability to 'impose domestic constraints on other actors through various forms of economic and political domination' (Zielonka, 2008: 471). A notable instance where this risk became tangible was during the height of the crisis over whether Greece would be forced out of the Eurozone. In 2015, when Greeks voted in a referendum on a new bailout package, there was an evident breakdown of mutual recognition and respect in that EU actors and their Greek counterparts rejected the legitimacy of the other's political claim to be acting in Europe's best interest (Sternberg et al., 2018). The second risk is to limit the geographical inclusiveness of Europeanness by excluding those living in non-EU countries. Empirical evidence shows that individual identification with Europe is not limited to the population of EU member states. Prior to 2004 citizens in enlargement candidate countries in Central and Eastern Europe displayed higher levels of identification with a European identity than their counterparts in EU member states (Schilde, 2014). In a post-Brexit European context, this geographical exclusivity could prove particularly jarring.

Hence the deployment of a spatio-cultural critique of the EU, arguing that most of the economic advantages of a borderless European space can be recreated without

subscribing to the EU mechanism of sovereignty constraints, has not appeared in isolation. Its political resonance can also be attributed to frustration with the EU's attempt to monopolize, as well as fuse, civic and cultural definitions of Europe that exclude other modalities of European solidarity (Cotta, 2018) and potentially individuals who feel European but are not citizens of an EU country. As the constraints of EU membership, and especially Eurozone rules, have become more apparent, the appeal of a European identity centred around EU institutions risks becoming more contested. The result is a clash between a cultural understanding of Europe and a civic one, which each build upon diverging historical narratives surrounding sovereignty and the control of bordered spaces. All these tensions came to a head in the Brexit negotiations, in which supporters of the UK's withdrawal sought alternative border arrangements by appealing to a common European culture, at the same time as the EU felt compelled to defend the exclusivity of its civic identity.

3. The unbearable lightness of (forgotten) borders as a consequence of the spatio-cultural critique in the Brexit case

Sovereignty over borders was a crucial variable in the 2016 UK referendum on whether to leave the EU – voters favouring Brexit clearly remained attached to a sense of national identity expressed as the ability to govern a given territory (Clarke et al., 2017). Yet during the first 18 months of formally negotiating Brexit, the UK government expressed a highly ambivalent attitude towards political and economic borders as it sought to avoid a hard border in Ireland and maintain frictionless trade. The paradox that needs to be explained is why, although British Eurosceptics spent years impugning the EU for its restrictions on sovereignty, the UK's strategy for withdrawing from the EU is strangely relaxed about the enforcement and significance of both the UK's and Europe's borders after Brexit. Adding a further twist, why did the supposedly post-modern EU insist on clarifying the status of borders (economic and political) rather than accommodate UK demands via more flexible arrangements? The answer to this double paradox, this section argues, lies in the way the spatio-cultural critique of the EU deliberate neglects the enduring significance of borders. In this way, the inherent problems of negotiating Brexit are the culmination of an act of forgetting. One made possible by the idea that a Europe of shared values can replicate what the EU achieves, yet without the restrictions of its political-legal apparatus. The result is a face-off between the UK's insistence that a cultural community ought to be able to replicate the benefits of a civic one and the EU's defence of its civic identity.

Borders are a strangely neglected component of the populist Eurosceptic imagination, except when it comes to defence against an 'other' in the form of immigration. Outside the UK, this stance on managing the movement of people takes the form of restricting non-European migration, while the British variant is distinctive in being equally exercised by EU migration (Goodwin and Milazzo, 2017). One explanation for this difference is that the UK was the only major economy not to use transitional controls on migration from central and eastern Europe following the big EU enlargement of 2004 and, alongside Germany, was an 'employer of last resort' for citizens in countries affected by the Eurozone crisis (Thompson, 2017). But it is the role played by borders besides regulating flows of 'other' people that is specifically obscured in the spatio-cultural critique of the EU. There is a clear political logic to this process of forgetting – a process also essential to national narratives as Renan (1882) explained – because neglect of borders serves the overarching purpose of portraying cooperation as

independent of deep institutionalism associated with a corrupt elite acting against the people's best interests (Mudde, 2004). Nowhere is this deliberate forgetfulness more in evidence than in the British government's attempts to negotiate an alternative to EU membership.

The UK's relationship with European integration has always been an inherently bordered one, even if the importance of the processes of bordering and their consequences have been obscured. As a member state, the UK's opt-outs on Schengen and economic and monetary union created monetary and physical borders within the EU (Adler-Nissen, 2015). Less remembered is the way that the UK sought to lead a rival trade bloc – the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) – as a means of undermining the more politically oriented and essentially supranational EEC (Ludlow, 1997). Created in 1960, EFTA was designed to compete with the EEC, but without the common customs rules, supranational institutions and policy-making that made the Treaty of Rome the blueprint for a nascent political unit with a shared external trade border. The pre-history of the UK's EEC membership thus hinged on economic competition between differently bordered spaces reflecting rival visions of how deep a civic community was necessary to achieve desired ends. The failure of EFTA to satisfy UK economic needs outside the EEC's frontiers is not something that supporters of Brexit have sought to dwell on.

Economic borders do not sit well with the loudest cheerleaders for a hard Brexit that entails leaving the single market and the customs union. Patrick Minford, the leading figure in 'Economists for Brexit' whose work has been influential among Conservative MPs pushing for a clean break with the EU, put forward a unilateral tariff abolition proposal as a radical alternative to pursuing new trade deals with the EU or others (Minford, 2017). This is a vision of the UK as a pioneer of borderless trade that the supposedly protectionist interests of the EU forbid, to the detriment of British citizens' economic wellbeing. It is also historically unprecedented in the modern global economy. The radicalism of this kind of borderless proposal for the UK after withdrawing from the EU is matched by the maximalist nature of the terms of trade the UK government seeks to achieve with Brussels. The starting position since invoking Article 50 was to lobby for what Theresa May called 'a special economic partnership' to replace the EU's four fundamental freedoms (free movement of capital, goods, people, and services) with a bespoke trade deal unlike any previous arrangement between the EU and a third country (Bulmer and Quaglia, 2018). That gambit is designed to suit the UK's preferred border regime to minimize migration while affording frictionless trade, but without regard for the ramifications of such a deal for the EU's own economic borders.

Under the terms of 'most favoured nation' clauses designed to maximize market liberalization contained in, for instance, the EU-South Korea free trade agreement, the offer of greater market access to another country needs to be reciprocated. That is, the EU would need to adjust its trade relationship with South Korea should the UK gain better terms for trade in services and e-commerce (as per the commitments in Chapter Seven of the EU-Korea free trade treaty), and others benefiting from the same protection, accordingly. For Brexiters, therefore, the contours of the EU's trade borders with other partners are unimportant considerations in the context of finessing a new settlement with the UK, established and sustained through shared interests and mutual trust but without recourse to the EU rules-based order. What does matter,

conversely, is the need to ensure continuity during the period it takes for the UK to implement its own trade deals, which is not possible according to the government by the departure date of 30 March 2019. That is why the official negotiating position during the Article 50 talks was to win EU support for having the UK treated as part of the EU for the purposes of benefiting from existing free trade deals with third countries such as South Korea, Japan, or Canada, after the formal date of departure. Indeed, the fallback option the UK considered in the event of not being able to agree a customs arrangement after Brexit is an official erasure of the border with the EU: non-enforcement, which it hopes would be reciprocal and temporary until a settled solution for frictionless trade is established (*Sky News*, 2018).

The nexus of economic and political border issues is at its most complex and sensitive when it comes to the post-Brexit status of Northern Ireland. It is also the site where the problem of delineating relationships between countries on the basis of sovereignty, unsupported by the supranational architecture of EU law, has been at times most neglected or forgotten. Campaigners for leaving the EU, which included the then Northern Ireland secretary Theresa de Villiers, promised that such a move would neither create a hard border nor jeopardise the all-island and UK-Ireland arrangements on which peace in the province rests (*BBC News*, 2016). Taking back control of borders on matters such as trade or immigration would thus not impact everyday life in Northern Ireland because there was no political desire in London to create new sources of friction – shared values and interests can thus make up for any change in the legal-political status of the Irish border. The logic of this pledge meant ignoring any potential for disruption to the flow of goods and services between a porous land border hitherto made possible by shared UK-Irish membership of the customs union and single market (Hayward, 2018).

Article 50 negotiations quickly gave the lie to this "no disruption" narrative by placing the Irish border question at the heart of bargaining over the terms of UK withdrawal. Prior to formal talks commencing, Enda Kenny, the Irish Taoiseach, succeeded in getting the European Council to declare that in the event of a successful referendum on Irish unity, Northern Ireland would – following the East German precedent – automatically be part of the EU, with no need for accession talks (Irish Times 2017). This sudden politicization of the neglected land border, an irrelevance in practice to the foreign affairs of British and Irish governments since the Good Friday Agreement (GFA) of 1988, revealed once again how peripheries can be of such paradoxical importance to political identities at the core of state- or empire-building projects (cf. Gardner 2017). Avoiding a "hard border" – one characterized by physical infrastructure harking back to the military checkpoints and customs borders of another era – became the official negotiating stance of both the UK government and the EU.

Yet in the months following the publication of the joint report on phase I of Article 50 talks in December 2017 it was clear that the British government became torn over the compromises involved in preventing a hard border. Watering down the UK's sovereignty by maintaining regulatory alignment in Northern Ireland after Brexit appeared less attractive to some than diluting the commitments contained in the GFA. Both Daniel Hannan MEP and Owen Paterson, a former Northern Ireland Secretary, voiced their doubts over the political validity of this settlement when compared with enforcing a maximalist interpretation of Brexit. There was also high-level criticism of Ireland's supposed intransigence (reflecting British surprise that the EU 27 should lend

its full weight to Irish concerns) over the status of Northern Ireland. What these critics overlook is the fact that the constitutional position of Northern Ireland following the GFA ceased to be a sovereign prerogative of Westminster. The terms of the peace agreed in 1998 were laid down in an international treaty specifying that the issue of self-determination was a matter to be decided by "the people of the island of Ireland alone". In turn, this agreement necessitated a change in the Irish constitution to end the territorial claim to the whole of Ireland (Tonge 2000).

What therefore unites the different positions the UK has adopted towards economic and political borders within the framework of EU withdrawal negotiations is a failure to respect the nature of the EU's civic community. The approach taken by Westminster constitutes a unilateral rejection of the EU's legal-political architecture, while seeking specific accommodation that can be justified in terms of common values and interests. Hence this strategy is best understood as a product of the historical claim that Europe is a special place, underpinned by a cultural community whereby, even in the absence of the EU, borders are no longer the subject of problematic contestation. Equally, the insistence by the EU that it cannot be indifferent to how its borders with the UK function is a sign that Brussels appreciates the need to avoid ambiguity over sovereignty when tested in this fashion. That is why EU negotiators consistently opposed British attempts to negotiate a way to decouple comprehensive trade relations from free movement and from jurisdiction of the European Court of Justice. In the case of Northern Ireland, moreover, the EU position implied using the Irish Sea as the dividing line for regulating flows of goods, as already occurs for checks on animals and meat (Hayward, 2018).

Reversing membership of the EU in the name of UK sovereignty thus set off a chain reaction that destabilized the UK's bordered relationship with its European neighbours. Article 50 negotiations risked becoming a zero-sum game between a civic and a cultural understanding of Europe. This was most evident in the case of the Irish border, where EU membership had previously reduced possible contestation over borders or a clash of sovereignty claims by creating a regime of enforceable rights independent of the political preferences of governing parties in London, Belfast, or Dublin. What made this unprecedented situation possible was the selective historical imagination deployed as part of the populists' spatio-cultural critique of the EU that delivered Brexit (Clarke et al., 2017). Their moralizing narrative of a Europeanness founded on common values that are traduced by the 'inflexible' legal-political apparatus of Brussels sprang from the belief that a cultural community can replicate the benefits of a civic one and without its sovereignty constraints. This stand-off, conversely, strengthened the EU's defence of its civic identity to the point potentially of excluding the UK from this space of legal-political cooperation. Consequently, this cleavage and the role historical imagination plays within it may cast a long shadow over the future of European integration.

Conclusions

It is not a coincidence that Brexit has brought new attention and meaning to economic and political borders whose existence was starting to become a diplomatic afterthought. European borders matter much less in the context of a system of pooled sovereignty that precludes discrimination against individuals or firms based on national origin. What McNamara (2015) calls the EU's 'banal authority', a cultural and political architecture that straddles national and supranational symbols, constitutes the perfect

setting for a certain type of historical amnesia by fusing civic and cultural components of European identity. The Brexit process is a direct challenge to that authority because it pits a cultural definition of Europe, expressed in the moralizing idiom of populists, against a civic identity associated with institutions populated by elites and representative of their interests.

However, the genealogical exploration pursued in this article demonstrated that the emergence of this spatio-cultural cleavage rests on a historical narrative that deliberately seeks to underplay the contribution of civic institutions to stabilizing European inter-state relations. Indeed, section one showed that the political definition of Europe first emerged in a setting whereby an essential feature of Europe's commonality was the dysfunctionality of its civic institutions. Central to the spatio-cultural critique of the EU is the assumption that the politics surrounding sovereignty are now easy to set aside without an institutional structure designed for that very purpose – thereby ignoring the messy history of competition between European states. In other words, the success of everyday EU integration makes it seem as if sovereignty and associated issues of border control are no longer controversial; historical legacies do not pose a problem given Eurosceptics' belief that Europe's common values and interests can facilitate the forgetting of borders where there are mutual gains to be had.

Brexit illustrates the way that wanting the benefits of integration without the constraints of its institutional structure rests on a certain, ahistorical understanding of European history. Hence the historical narratives surrounding European identity explored in this article are more nuanced than those suggested by the traditional model, which pits an open and modern Europe against a closed and nationalist version (Risse, 2010). At the heart of the populist Eurosceptic historical imagination, as demonstrated by the Brexit negotiations, is the unimportance of European borders, except for controlling undesired migration. This unimportance is grounded in a cultural conception of Europeanness that can supposedly transcend contestation over economic and political borders without requiring a civic apparatus constraining national sovereignty.

The fact that such ahistoricism is possible is highly revealing and highlights the merits of the genealogical analysis pursued here for understanding the relationship between populism, historical imagination, and competing ideas of Europe. By showing the use and abuse of history by populist Eurosceptics this article demonstrated the importance of analysing the moralizing story of European history used to separate a positive cultural community from a negative civic one. In addition, the focus on a spatio-cultural critique of the EU opens up a space for understanding the EU's own potential contribution to the emerging civic/cultural cleavage. That is, the way EU leaders and institutions seek to fuse civic and cultural conceptions of Europe needs to be explored further to appreciate how far this desire to 'speak for Europe' fuels the populist narrative of elite-serving institutions out-of-touch with the people of Europe.

Finally, the very ability to tell an ahistorical story of European cooperation without the EU, as manifested in the promise of Brexit and the subsequent UK-EU divorce talks, is suggestive of a failure to communicate the rationale behind its unique institutional architecture. Brexit is perhaps an opportunity to remedy this failure; the lack of a domino-effect in the aftermath of the UK referendum and public support in the EU27 to preserve the integrity of the single market (Walter, 2018) certainly can be

understood in this light. However, it is not clear that a defence of the EU as a civic community necessary to solve inter-state rivalry is by itself sufficient to overcome the spatio-cultural critique deployed by populists. Rather, the EU may have to harness the powerful appeal of rival cultural understandings of Europe that entail a different sense of solidarity or geography. Instead of simply refuting competing historical narratives at work in rival cultural conceptions of Europe, the EU might be better off learning from these to reshape its civic community in a way that allows for multiple forms of attachment representing different levels of market integration or territorial reach. How the UK-EU relationship pans out will thus shape the plausibility of the spatio-cultural critique of the EU and its associated historical imagination across the continent.

Note

1. Available at http://ukipshop.mybigcommerce.com/products/Sweatshirt--I-LOVE-EUROPE-HATE-THE-EU.html (accessed 4 March 2019)

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