



“Brexit makes no sense if you’re gay”

a corpus-assisted critical discourse analysis
of two diverging notions of homonationalism
within the Brexit debate

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Research Inspiration & background



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graph TD; A[Research Inspiration & background] --> B[Methodology: Corpus-building]; B --> C[Quantitative & Qualitative Analyses]; C --> D[Conclusions];
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Methodology: Corpus-building

Quantitative & Qualitative Analyses

Conclusions

Overview

Research Inspiration

- Based on my overarching PhD project on the representation of female voters during the period of 'permaelection' in the UK: 2015-2017:
- Focus on queer female voters → noticed homonationalist discourses surrounding Brexit → differing homonationalist discourses

Homonationalism - definitions

Original: *Gay rights as a barometer for a right/capacity to national sovereignty.*

- Puar (2007) proposed the notion of homonationalism to understand “the complexities of how “acceptance” and “tolerance” for gay and lesbian subjects have become a barometer by which the right to and capacity for national sovereignty is evaluated” (Puar 2013, p. 336).
- Nations are seen as more “progressive” because of their supposed “acceptance” of gay men and lesbians, co-opting *some* gay men and lesbians into nation-building projects and reiterating self/other dichotomies that demonise “foreign” others. (Browne & Nash 2014, p. 323)

Homonationalism - definitions

Original: *Gay rights as a barometer for a right/capacity to national sovereignty.*

■ UK:

- Identified by ILGA (2017) as one of EU's most LGBT+-friendly states and positioned as more advanced than nations that have laws prohibiting homosexuality
- The government promotes LGBT+ rights at home and abroad (Hubbard & Wilkinson 2014).

■ EU:

- Boasts that it's the best place in the world to be lesbian, gay, bi or trans (Drucker 2016)
- Acceptance of LGBT+ people has become "the sign of the European Union's benevolence" and a sign of European superiority (Ferguson & Hong 2012)

Homonationalism - definitions

Common: *Right-wing co-opting gay rights as an argument for xeno/Islamophobia*

- Over the past decade that original definition has been warped into a new, now more common, or 'reductive' (Puar (2013), application as “another way to mark how gay and lesbian identities became available to conservative political imaginaries” (p. 337).
- In other words, right-wing nationalist voices co-opt gay rights as a means to promote a xeno/Islamophobia and/or anti-immigration stance.
- Gay rights are frequently positioned as conflicting with the religious rights and values embraced by certain Muslims. (Hubbard & Wilkinson 2014, p. 603)

Homonationalism - definitions

Common: *Right-wing co-opting gay rights as an argument for xeno/Islamophobia*

- EU:

No longer seen as progressive by some (e.g. Out & Proud (n.d.), a gay pro-Brexit group)

- Because of letting in Eastern-Europe and immigrants

- UK

Is/will be progressive out of the EU

- Despite a history of UK persecution of LGBT+ people in the 20th century, not being a frontrunner on same-sex marriage, and the EU being the catalyst of change in the UK (Danisi, Dustin and Ferreira 2019)

Heteronationalism

- The adoption of anti-LGBT+ attitudes as an expression of insurgent national, ethnic and/or religious identity (Drucker 2016).

Research Question(s)

- How were these perspectives on homonationalism reproduced and how did they shape the Brexit debate in the UK media leading up to the 2016 EU referendum?
- How did the national UK news media represent the ways in which the Remain and Leave camps made use of homonationalist (and heteronationalist) arguments to further their respective causes?

Methodology – Corpus-building

- Corpus-assisted CDA study of the UK news media discourse surrounding LGBT+ rights during the EU referendum campaign period.

DATA

- Source
- Time periods
- Search terms
- (Sub-)corpora



Time period & other features

■ SOURCES

- National newspapers

■ TIME PERIOD: Start of campaigning till Referendum date

- 70 days: 15/04/2016 – 23/06/2016

■ ARTICLE LENGTH

- Excluded articles of less than 500 words

Search terms

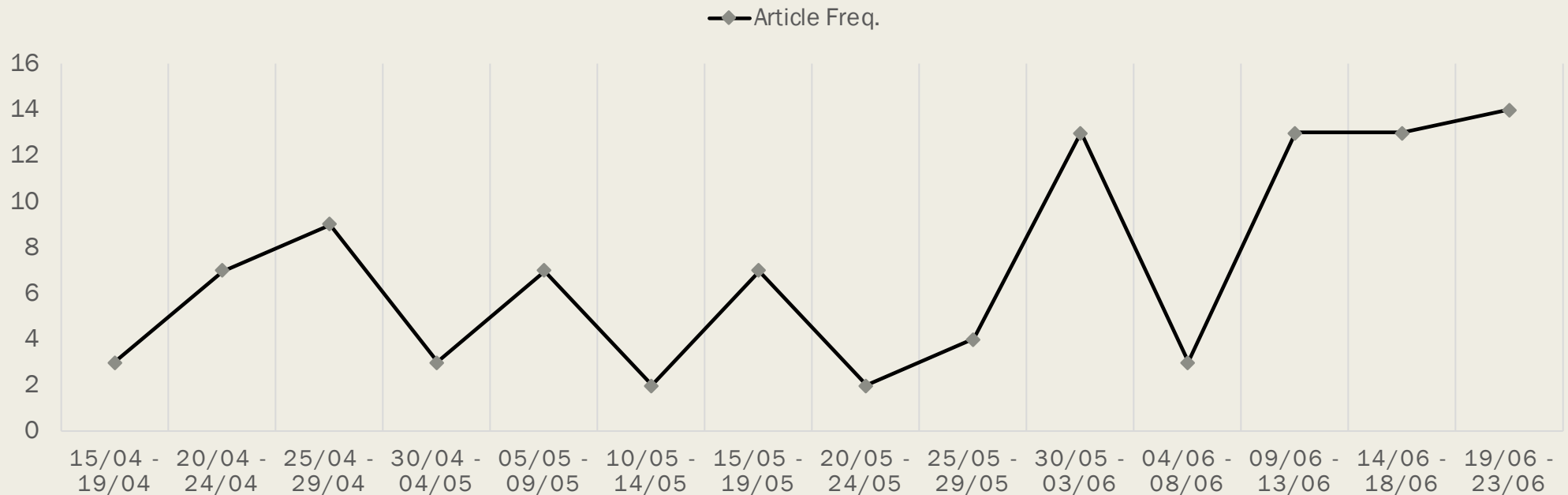
(lesbian) OR (gay) OR (homosexual!) OR (bisexual) OR
(queer) OR (transgender) OR (non-binary) OR (trans) OR
(intersex) OR (LGB!) OR (sexual orientation)

W/p (vot!) OR (EU) OR (Europe) OR (European union) OR
(brexit) OR (referendum)

Article frequency

- **PERIOD** 15/04/2016 – 23/06/2016
- 100 articles in 70 days

ARTICLE FREQ. 15 APRIL – 23 JUNE



Some Sub-Corpora

- **Political orientation:** Labour, Conservatives support or no party support
- **EU Referendum campaign support:** Remain vs. Leave vs. No support
 - Remain/Labour
 - Leave/Conservative
 - No support/no support
 - Except for *The Times*: Remain/Conservative

Corpus analyses

QUANTATIVE ANALYSES

- Term frequency
- Keywords
 - words that are significantly more frequent than other words when compared to a reference corpus → what is the corpus about?

QUALITATIVE ANALYSES

- Concordance lines
 - lines from the corpus that contain/surround the word you're analysing in order to study its context

TOOLS

- AntConc (Anthony 2018)



FREQUENCY ANALYSES



Party support – article freq.

2016: Political Orientation



Referendum stance



TERM	FREQ.
Lesbian(s)	17
<u>Gay(s)</u>	<u>159</u>
Bisexual(s)	7
Transgender(s)	32
Trans	5
Homosexual(s/ity)	10
Queer(s)	0
Intersex	2
<u>Non-binary</u>	<u>20</u>
<u>LGB(T/Q/I)</u>	<u>88</u>
Sexual orientation	5

Term Frequency

- *Gay*, *LGB(T/Q/I)*
- General terms most frequent, expected
- *Lesbian* predominantly refers to Ruth Davidson, Leader of the Conservative party in Scotland
- *Bisexual* only within explanations of LGB* acronyms
- No *queer*, but *non-binary* more frequent than expected?

2016 Keywords

1. EU (most key by far)

2. Brexit

3. Vote

4. Referendum

5. Europe

6. Livingstone

7. Leave

8. European

9. Labour

10. Britain

Gay at 16., LGBT at 25. (immigration at 21.)

Keywords

- INCLUDED: (Proper) nouns, main verbs
- EXCLUDED: Prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, determiners, particles conjunctions, *to have/be*
- Corpus tool: Antconc (Anthony 2018)
 - Log-likelihood 4 term
 - $p < .05$
- Reference corpus: BE06 - British newspapers (Baker 2009)
- *Immigration*, along with the economy, key topic during Brexit campaign (Jackson, Thorsen & Wring 2016)



CONCORDANCE ANALYSES



Homonationalism & EU stance

TYPES	LEAVE	REMAIN
Homonationalism	✓	✓
Original definition	✓ (only 2 ex.)	✓
EU-homonationalism	✗	✓
UK-homonationalism/ Gay imperialism	✓	✓
Common definition	✓	✓ (only 1 ex.)
Heteronationalism	✓	✗

ORIGINAL DEFINITION HOMONATIONALISM - REMAIN

- EU-HOMONATIONALISM: EU protects LGBT+ rights
 - by non-LGBT+ people
 - by LGBTQ+ people
- UK-HOMONATIONALISM / GAY IMPERIALISM:
 - UK can influence other, less “developed” countries within the EU. Colonial ‘rescue’ fantasy (Haritaworn, Tauqir, & Erdem 2009)
 - (non-LGBT+ & Ian McKellen)

COMMON DEFINITION HOMONATIONALISM - LEAVE

- A few LGBT+ people

HETERONATIONALISM:

- covert homophobia
- overt homophobia

EU Homonationalism – Remain

The EU is portrayed as having come to the ‘rescue’ of LGBT+ minorities in the UK, and they rely on the EU to “protect” them

- For want of remedies at home, vulnerable minorities needed the convention and Strasbourg to come to their rescue - which it did, again and again. European judicial oversight protected the right of gay men and lesbians to love at a time when this was still criminal in Northern Ireland. (*The Guardian*, 16 May)

UK government demonised, at risk of reverting back to less progressive times. EU has right to sovereignty because of its dedication to LGBT+ rights

- “Voting to leave would mean voting against racial equality and gay marriage and in favour of confining women to the kitchen and bedroom.” (*The Observer*, 31 May 2016)
- What's true about the values that the LGBT community take for granted is true for the rest of us. We don't realise the fragility of our liberal societies and the need to protect them. The European project has been a conscious effort to spread its core values, from democracy to human rights. It has worked. (*The Times*, 16 June)

UK Homonationalism / Gay imperialism - Remain

UK is positioned as 'world-leading' in terms of LGBT+ equality. Other nations are depicted as less 'developed' and in need of being taught the importance of LGBT+ acceptance → achieved by remaining in the EU

- Grimes also cares about gay rights and says it would be a shame for Britain, which allows gay marriage and adoption, to lose the possibility of influencing less progressive EU nations. (*MailOnline*, 21 June)

Despite this the EU's role as a catalyst for change in the UK is also recognised, thus weakening the impression of gay imperialist views.

- 'Brexit makes no sense if you're gay' [...] It is because of this issue that he hopes Britain will vote to remain in the EU on June 23. Conscious of how European legislation helped to enshrine gay equality during the Blair years, he says: "Now is the time to be backing Europe and giving back that sense of empowerment to countries in the European Union that are still very backward in this regard. (*The Daily Telegraph*, 10 June / *telegraph.co.uk*, 10 June)

Common Homonationalism - Leave

Projecting anti-gay views on Muslims and fears of 'Muslim domination' are common themes.

- "THE fact more than half of UK Muslims want gay sex outlawed and almost a quarter want Sharia law shows how little they are willing to integrate." (*The Sun*, 15 April 2016)
- Leave.EU campaign slammed for 'shameful' claim Brexit would stop an Orlando-style attack in Britain; Leave.EU, backed by Nigel Farage, sprang into action a day after an Islamist extremist gunned down 50 people in Florida gay nightclub Pulse. (*mirror.co.uk*, 13 June)

UK sovereignty is the basis for LGBT+ rights, not EU influence and therefore the UK will remain a champion LGBT+ equality when it leaves the EU.

- No one, least of all the PM, had mentioned Europe, but I asked the gay couple whether they were out, or in. Out of course, they said, scandalised. Independence, proud nation, stand on our own two feet. And me? In. Why? they asked. (*The Times*, 16 June)

Covert Heteronationalism - Leave

A non-binary audience member was singled out, dehumanised and portrayed as being un-British by the right-wing, Leave-supporting press

- The day Britain gave US a lecture on 'diversity' (and how the luvvies lapped it up too): Obama's town hall-style meeting sees debate on ethnic profiling, gender questions by a 'non-binary'... and even an intro from a Jungle volunteer (*MailOnline*, 24 April)

Since the non-binary audience member also identified as Muslim, there is a clear link evident between these anti-LGBT+ attitudes and Islamophobia. 'Briton' does not appear to equal someone from the LGBT+ community, nor a Muslim, and certainly not a non-binary Muslim.

- 'Ordinary Britons?' Obama crowd includes refugee, Calais volunteer and non-binary Muslim (*ExpressOnline*, 25 April)

Overt Heteronationalism - Leave

Aside from the more covert 'Othering', explicit heteronationalist statements were also part and parcel of Leave rhetoric. The explicit homophobia, being also often goes hand in hand with Islamophobic and xenophobic views.

- No dissent allowed. None. If you are opposed to any more immigration to the EU and are a bit worried about Islam - that's your voting rights gone. Against gay marriage? Ditto. Europe will be a sort of gigantic safe space where only approved opinions are allowed. (*The Sunday Times*, 12 June)

Conclusions: LEAVE VS. REMAIN

Leave	Remain
Primarily common definition homonationalism	Primarily original definition homonationalism
	More prevalent in the corpus
	More LGBTQI+ proponents
UK-based	UK & EU-based
Fear-based	Fear and hope-based
Fear of the future	Fear of the past
	Hope for the future
	Gay imperialism
Heteronationalism	

- More Remain articles in this corpus, more Leave in general: EU Homonationalism most prevalent
- *Immigration* a keyword → presence of ‘common homonationalism’

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