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Wiebke Keim, Alexandre Kostka

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Wiebke Keim & Alexandre Kostka (eds.)



# Representing European Values

triglyph





with contributions by

TUSCANY BELL

MARTIN BOGDAN

MATHILDE BOISSE-DESPIAUX

TOBIAS HOFELICH

KATHRINE DYBDAHL JENSEN

NOÉMI KALOCSAY

INGE MATIONSCHER

AURA SAXÉN

MONA SEFEN

STEFAN STANKOVIC



VIRGINIA STUART-TAYLOR



## Impressum

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Editorial work by Ulrich Maximilian Schumann  
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Drawing by Zahra, 9 years, from Afghanistan [cf. Tuscany Bell, p. 21]  
Elliniko Workshop: Workshop organized at Elliniko (Greece) on Saturday, 18th  
of March 2017 and facilitated by the Afghan artist and teacher Azimi  
<https://coloursofajourney.eu/gallery/elliniko/>  
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# Representing European Values

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Selected Papers Presented at  
Cracow Euroculture Intensive Program  
2017



## Introduction

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WIEBKE KEIM and ALEXANDRE KOSTKA

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If you open this book with a sense of irritation about its cover, your reaction might be justified. “Europa Regina” whom we find in several editions of Sebastian Münster’s “Cosmographia” (1544ff) is an astonishing allegory. Standing tall, two parts of her body play prominent roles: her head represents Spain and wears the Imperial Crown, while the Empire’s “heartland”, Bohemia, literally forms her heart. At the time when Holy Roman Emperor Charles V of Habsburg (1500–1558) was hoping to establish universal monarchy and push back the Protestant heresy, everybody immediately understood the meaning of this breach with conventional geography.

The representation of Europe depends on the values that are attached to the European project, may it be the universal catholic rule or a post-modern vision like the one which architect Rem Koolhaas has put forward in 2006.<sup>1</sup> In a moment when the idea of European unity is challenged more than ever, the arts might play a role in the critical search for common symbols, representations, and cultural legacies. Long-standing transfers of images between Europe and the “outside” which have reached a historical high point<sup>2</sup> to the question of “multiple Europes” in the realm of representation. How can we symbolise a notion of “Europe” that is more attached to a specific set of “values” than to an essentialising set of “traits of character”?

Europe can be seen in many ways – as a geographical entity, as a political project, as shared cultural heritage, as an idea. In each case, the abstract notion is given a concrete meaning by a choice, a selection of what comes into the gaze of the beholder. Not surprisingly, the representations of what Europe is – or, ought to be – have changed according to the moment and the political and social forces which determine the viewpoint of those who are in charge of giving a definition. Radical choices of perspective do not only apply for “artistic freedom” – they also apply for historical and social scientific takes on the meaning of “Europe”.

From the outside, a variety of critics, variously called southern, subaltern, counterhegemonic, post- and decolonial, have called for the provincialisation of Europe<sup>3</sup> in global narratives of modernity. But even from within, we are faced with “multiple Europes”<sup>4</sup> and a variety

of voices that denounce hierarchies, inequalities, and imbalances between and within European countries.

The University of Strasbourg and the Jagiellonian University jointly invited the students of the Euroculture master Program to share a week of discussions and debates on the topic “Visions of Europe”, June 24 to July 1, 2017.<sup>5</sup> While Strasbourg was responsible for the content of this annual “Intensive Program” (IP) which is a standing part of the Master’s curriculum, Krakow planned and coordinated the events. Students were invited to share presentations from researchers of various disciplines, art historians and artists, and to actively intervene by participating in workshops supervised by professionals in the visual arts.

Students were asked to present papers on the common topic, “Visions of Europe”, and we are proud to present a selection of the best contributions on a broad array of questions, ranging from creative arts and robotics over mentalities to practical politics.

We would like to thank all those that played a vital role in making the IP 2017 a great success: foremost, Valentin Haumesser, the coordinator of the Strasbourg Euroculture programme, who spared no time or effort to work out all the little details that ‘make the difference’.

We also wish to thank the many distinguished researchers and artists who came to Krakow to share their experience and knowledge with us: Marie-Louise von Plessen (exhibition curator, Berlin/St. Firmin sur Loire), Timothy O. Benson (Senior exhibition curator, Los Angeles County Museum, Rifkind Center for German art), Omar Marques (photographer, Krakow), Catherine Hug (Curator Kunsthaus Zürich, Zurich), Manuela Boatcă (sociologist, University of Freiburg), Jocelyne Dakhli (historian, Ecole des Hautes Etudes en Sciences Sociales, Paris), Wendy Vogt (anthropologist, Indiana University and Purdue University Indiana), Hilal Alkan (anthropologist and sociologist, Leibniz-Zentrum Moderner Orient, Berlin), Véronique Dimier (political scientist, Université Libre de Bruxelles).

Last but not least, we would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to Karolina Czerska-Shaw, Jagiellonian University: we do not know what we could have done without her enthusiastic and generous character and her problem-solving skills! Juan Sarabian put all his electronic and non-electronic communication skills at our disposal. Duszan Augustyn and Monika Nowak were also pivotal in assuring the smooth run of the event.

Finally, we wish to thank Ulrich Maximilian Schumann for his tremendous help in turning these papers into a full-fledged publication.



## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> “The Image of Europe”, Office for Metropolitan Architecture, accessed November 26, 2019, <https://oma.eu/projects/the-image-of-europe>.

<sup>2</sup> Hans Belting, *Florenz und Bagdad: eine westöstliche Geschichte des Blicks* (München: C.H.Beck, 2008).

<sup>3</sup> Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: postcolonial thought and historical difference* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000).

<sup>4</sup> Manuela Boatcă, “Multiple Europes and the politics of difference within”, in *The Study of Europe*, ed. Hauke Brunkhorst and Gerd Grözinger (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2010), 51–66.

<sup>5</sup> “IP 2017: Visions of Europe”, Erasmus Mundus Master of Arts Euroculture, <https://eurocultureip2017.wordpress.com>, accessed November 26, 2019.

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## An Island Drifting Away into the Atlantic: Understanding the Role of the Sea in the Tide of British Euroscepticism

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VIRGINIA STUART-TAYLOR

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“It would be hard to exaggerate the importance of the fact that they are islanders to the mentality of the English. The elderly John of Gaunt says it all in Shakespeare’s *Richard II* when he speaks of

‘This fortress built by Nature for herself  
Against infection and the hand of war,  
This happy breed of men, this little world,  
This precious stone set in the silver sea,  
Which serves it in the office of a wall  
Or as a moat defensive to a house’.<sup>1</sup>

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“It’s true that our geography has shaped our psychology. We have the character of an island nation: independent, forthright, passionate in defence of our sovereignty. We can no more change this British sensibility than we can drain the English Channel.”<sup>2</sup>

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### Introduction

After six decades of ever-closer union in European integration, the European Union now finds itself in deep water. The current wave of Euroscepticism has been most clearly exemplified by the United Kingdom citizens’ vote for Brexit in June 2016 and the UK government’s subsequent triggering of Article 50 in March 2017. But this wave has also lapped the shores of other European nations and produced predictions of a wider disintegration crisis in Europe, although elections in spring 2017 have shown the Dutch and French floodgates to better withstand the tide.

As the UK government commences formal negotiations to exit the EU, the British public is displaying heightened interest in the outcome of Brexit and, through the government’s current inclination for direct democracy, as shown by the 2014 and 2016 referendums

and the 2017 snap election, the public is also being apportioned an increasingly determinant role in that outcome. In this current context of increasing direct democracy in the UK, a deeper investigation into the drivers behind the entrenched Euroscepticism in British public opinion can help to inform hypotheses on Britain's future trajectory and relationship with mainland Europe.

Since the EU referendum, most analysis of the circumstances surrounding the result has focused on the Eurosceptic rhetoric of individual politicians and media discourse, specifically on the topics of immigration, sovereignty and the economy. While discourse no doubt played a significant role, the Brexit decision was not the product of a single brief campaign in 2016. Brexit was instead a result of decades of steadily building anti-EU sentiment and a symptom of Britain's time-old role as an "inside outsider" in Europe, as a member state with a population that never truly embraced the European project.<sup>3</sup>

In trying to understand the motives and drivers behind British Euroscepticism, commentators and academics often overlook the (literally) underlying factor of Britain's geographical formation, as an island nation surrounded by the sea. As one of the few island nations within the European Union, the sea becomes not only a physical barrier, but also a psychological one, between Britain and the rest of Europe. The sea accordingly impacts the country's national identity formation and can be held responsible for negatively influencing the British public's attitudes against the EU.

Now that Britain finds itself the first member state to be formally drifting away from Europe in the transitional phase from insider to outsider, this paper asks the following research questions: To what extent do geographical factors constitute a driver of high levels of Euroscepticism? What role does the sea play in reinforcing Britain's status as an "inside outsider" in Europe?

These two research questions are answered through deductive reasoning and an explanatory case study approach, based on evaluating existing theories from the field of political geography when applied to the case of Britain. This particular research methodology has been selected in order to generate a hypothesis that is grounded in existing scholarship, which can explain a potential contributing factor to British Euroscepticism. Conclusions have been reached by firstly applying prominent theories from the field of political geography to the case of Britain. Secondly, a deductive evaluation of the various theories discussed reveals the hypothesis that the sea has historically impeded Britain's integration into Europe, resulting in



stronger support for Euroscepticism than seen elsewhere among its continental neighbours. Thirdly, counter-arguments are addressed to account for other EU member states that meet similar geographical criteria as Britain (namely Ireland, Malta and Cyprus). Finally, we reach this study's conclusion that geographical factors do contribute to shaping national identity in Britain, that they strengthen the public's sentiments of exceptionalism and island mentality, and consequently slow down the pace of Europeanisation in Britain, compared to mainland EU member states. In relation to its European neighbours, the British population has historically framed itself as an "outsider" that does not quite belong in Europe – a narrative which over time has cultivated the high levels of Euroscepticism that culminated in the outcome of the 2016 referendum and Britain's actions to leave the EU.

This research focuses on the attitudes and opinions of the British population itself, rather than the official governmental stance or the British media's position. It is also important to acknowledge that 48.1% of the British citizens polled in the EU referendum voted to remain in the EU, and that Euroscepticism does not pervade the entirety of the British population. The object of this study into British Euroscepticism therefore is rather the attitudes of the 51.9% of voters (17,410,742 people, representing 26.7% of the total UK population) who did vote to leave the EU in the 2016 referendum.<sup>4</sup>

## **Chapter 1: Theoretical Perspectives**

Academic literature on the subject of Euroscepticism has gradually grown since the term was first coined in mid-1980s Britain, as its position has shifted from the margins to the mainstream of domestic politics.<sup>5</sup> However, political scientists Simona Guerra, John FitzGibbon, Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak all assert that research within European Studies has so far predominantly concentrated on elite, party-based Euroscepticism and that there is need for detailed research into the drivers behind Euroscepticism in public opinion, which are currently "under-examined" and "not likely to be explained by party models".<sup>6</sup> It is therefore the aim of this research to address this identified gap through analysing the role of the sea as a driver of the British public's Euroscepticism.

When reviewing the existing literature surrounding drivers behind citizens' votes for Brexit, much attention is paid to political factors (the perceived democratic deficit and federalism in EU institutions), legal factors (the supremacy of the European Court of Justice), economic

factors (the Eurozone bailouts and Branko Milanovic's "elephant graph" showing globalisation's impact on the Western middle class, whose discontent over stagnating incomes provides a support base for right-wing nationalism), cultural factors (high monolingualism, low consumption of European popular culture, and nationalist bias in the national curriculum) and opposition to immigration and free movement of people.<sup>7</sup> Most of these factors are actually pan-EU issues.

The geographical factors of Britain as an island nation on the spatial periphery of Europe, historically dependent on its sea, are frequently referred to in journalism as Britain's "island mentality", but are largely overlooked in academia.<sup>8</sup> Changing tack from political science and heading into the relatively uncharted waters of political geography therefore offers a fresh line of investigation into British Euroscepticism. Recent political geography approaches to analysing Brexit have focused on reasons behind the clear regional split of citizens in London, Scotland and Northern Ireland who voted to remain, compared to citizens in the rest of England and Wales who voted to leave.<sup>9</sup> But there is relatively little research into the drivers of British Euroscepticism in comparative terms at the national level across Europe. Taggart and Szczerbiak state that while: "much of the research emphasises the exceptional nature of the UK case, it is clear that developments in other parts of Europe [...] mean that the UK is less exceptional than it was. We also need comparison to establish how exceptional the UK is or is not in the future".<sup>10</sup>

Hence this research addresses the aforementioned need for comparative study at the national level, through formulating a theoretical hypothesis on Britain's unique geographical factors that distinguish it from other EU member states, and enabling a theoretical comparison. Furthermore, this research in the framework of political geography is also complemented by an interdisciplinary approach that borrows from the fields of psychology, anthropology, geopolitics, international relations, identity studies, island studies, linguistics, history, geography, and sociology.

In terms of this study's second research question, concerning the "inside outsider" status of Britain, this concept has been acknowledged time and again in the political sphere on both sides of the Channel, ranging from Winston Churchill to Charles de Gaulle. In academia, political scientist Oliver Daddow has identified a coherent "outsider tradition" in British prime ministers' narratives on European policy.<sup>11</sup> Ruth Wodak and Salomi Boukala also emphasise the impact that "us" and "them" distinctions in British political discourse have on discursive

constructions of European identities.<sup>12</sup> At the level of public opinion and transnational identity formation, sociologist Gerard Delanty and political scientist Chris Rumford, as well as political scientists Copsy and Haughton, have theorised on the apparent incompatibility of a dual British and European identity in the minds of most British citizens, in contrast with those of other EU member states.<sup>13</sup>

The backdrop of these identified research gaps and broader theoretical perspectives, among others, informs my research into the specific case of the sea's role in British Euroscepticism.

## **Chapter 2: Background Context & Historical Overview**

The widespread presence of nautical idioms and maritime phrases in the English vocabulary is testament to the sea's long-held importance in the British mentality. The sea has historically been held in high esteem in the national psyche in two distinct capacities: firstly as a protector, and secondly as a passageway.

In the collective memory of Britain there exists the myth of the impenetrable "Fortress Britain", a country kept safe and sovereign from foreign invasions for almost a millennium by the natural defence of the English Channel.<sup>14</sup> The British Isles do of course have a history of occupation by foreign powers, with the widely acknowledged invasions of the Romans from 43–410 AD and the Norman Conquest of William the Conqueror in 1066, but the islands are otherwise believed to have been relatively well-protected by the sea. In reality, historian Ian Herson has identified 73 separate failed military invasions since 1066, but these are almost entirely absent from the official, popular narrative of British history.<sup>15</sup> So in the collective memory of the British, the coastline has historically represented the constant, fixed perimeter of the country, with the sea serving as a protector from Britain's continental neighbours, who in comparison have endured successive power struggles and continuously shifting borders throughout history.

Until the twentieth century, France was positioned as Britain's arch-enemy, until British animosity towards the French was deflected into opposition against Nazi Germany during World War I and II. The British Isles' natural sea defence prevented German territorial occupation and this vastly different experience of the two World Wars, resulting in Britain as a victorious, unoccupied island nation in contrast to France, Belgium and others as ravaged, occupied continental nations, has led to strongly divergent national attitudes

and narratives on either side of the Channel.<sup>16</sup> The British Eurosceptic obsession with preserving their “sovereignty”, a favourite keyword of the Brexit campaign, can be directly linked to the country’s national narrative as an independent, free and unoccupied nation for nearly a millennium, thanks to the sea as its protector.<sup>17</sup>

Secondly, the sea has been historically revered by the British as a passageway to the wider world and the mainstay upon which their overseas empire, prosperity and global power was built. Relieved by the sea of the need to maintain a strong territorial army, as continental European powers were obliged to do in order to protect their land borders, Britain was able to develop its navy, colonise 25% of the world and consolidate its position as the world’s greatest sea-power for over a century.<sup>18</sup> As the geopolitical significance of sea-power declined in the aftermath of World War II and was replaced by the race for nuclear capability during the Cold War, Britain gradually lost its empire between 1946 and 1997. But through the guise of the Commonwealth, Britain maintained several of the cultural and economic ties established during the colonial period. This has led to another of the British Eurosceptics’ favourite mantras, with David Davis (the Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union) proclaiming that Brexit “is an opportunity to renew [Britain’s] strong relationships with Commonwealth and Anglosphere countries”, once less emphasis is placed on Britain’s relationship with EU states.<sup>19</sup>

Britain’s initial reluctance to join the European Coal and Steel Community at its creation in 1952 can be attributed to a “residual imperial nostalgia and pride” at the heart of the British national identity, even despite the gradual decolonisation process that had already begun.<sup>20</sup> This sentiment is illustrated perfectly by Winston Churchill’s comment in 1950 on the Schuman Plan (that later led to the creation of the ECSC):

“Everyone knows that [...] in all our thoughts (f)irst, there is the Empire and Commonwealth; secondly, the fraternal association of the English-speaking world; and thirdly [...] the revival of united Europe [...]”.<sup>21</sup>

Britain’s eventual integration into the European market began with its accession to the European Community in 1973, however it has never committed to integration with the same fervour as other member states. The UK has opted out of both the Economic and Monetary Union (the Euro) and the Schengen Agreement, and in 1985 Margaret Thatcher negotiated a rebate of circa 66% of the UK’s net contribution.<sup>22</sup> Thanks to these opt-outs, the UK has often

been perceived on both sides of the Channel as a relative outsider compared to other more committed member states. Despite this “outsider” status and despite not being one of the six founding countries, the UK’s position as the third largest population and the second largest economy in the EU, combined with English as one of the EU’s three working languages, led commentators to perceive it as a crucial counterweight to the predominant Franco-German control over the European Union.<sup>23</sup>

Since joining the European Union, and as technology has concurrently advanced in the fields of international transport and communication since then, the sea has performed less and less of its former role as a “defensive moat”.<sup>24</sup> By entering the single market in 1973, by subscribing to the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht’s freedom of movement principle and by inaugurating the Channel Tunnel in 1994, combined with the boom in affordable international air travel (with 181m passengers passing through British airports on international flights in 2009) and the advent of unlimited, instant digital communication via the internet, the UK abandoned its time-old policy of “splendid isolation” and the sea ceased to be the moat that the British Eurosceptics perhaps wish it still were.<sup>25</sup> This bridging of the English Channel by the principle of freedom of movement proved to be another key complaint of the Eurosceptics in Britain, one of whose principal campaign messages was a rejection of intra-EU mobility and immigration.<sup>26</sup>

With the intention of putting to rest the internal conflict from hard-line Eurosceptics within the Conservative party, David Cameron returned to the EU negotiating table in January 2016 and succeeded in securing further concessions for the UK, on the basis of which he then announced the June 2016 referendum. Eurosceptics voting to leave the EU won the referendum by a slight majority of 3.8% and the process to leave the EU was subsequently officially commenced by the triggering of Article 50 of the Treaty of Lisbon on 29th March 2017, signalling the raising of the drawbridge once again.

### **Chapter 3: Theories behind the Role of the Sea**

For nearly 150 years, geographers have debated the degree to which physical conditions direct human behaviour, psychology and activity.<sup>27</sup> One of the founding theories of classical geopolitics, a sub-field within the discipline of political geography that emerged in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, was “environmental determinism” (also called

“geodeterminism”) pioneered by Friedrich Ratzel. Environmental determinism is the theory that “key features of a society, culture or political community are attributed to prevailing environmental conditions” and it was originally inspired by evolutionary biology and the social Darwinism principle of the “survival of the fittest”.<sup>28</sup> The theory has subsequently been heavily criticised as designed to legitimise imperial conquest of non-Western societies and justify aggressive colonial foreign policy on the grounds of geographical location or the environment, thus removing blame from decision-makers.<sup>29</sup> But via German geographer Karl Haushofer, it also influenced Nazi Germany’s expansionist ambitions and was used to position Hitler’s actions as the outcome of “natural laws” conditioned by the earth.<sup>30</sup> This association with institutionalised racism and Nazi eugenics naturally lead to the theory’s controversy and dismissal, with geographers like Vidal de la Blache later proposing the softer theory of “environmental possibilism” in its place.

Environmental possibilism proposes that “cultural attributes are not ‘determined’ by physical geography, only shaped by such forces” and that it is instead the opportunities that humans decide to pursue, in response to their environmental limitations, that define culture.<sup>31</sup> The closely related theory of “cultural ecology” emanated from the discipline of anthropology and a further evolution of this theory was “environmental probabilism”, that effectively builds on possibilism by suggesting that environmental factors make some outcomes more likely than others.<sup>32</sup>

We can apply these geopolitical theories concerning the relationship between environment and human activity to the case of Britain. A determinist lens would postulate that Britain’s “islandness” triggers certain inevitable social characteristics such as a strong sense of commonality or what Winston Churchill even called an “island race”, that leads to an insular “maritime island nationalism” in the words of sociologist Alex Law, which could be one explanation for the country’s high levels of Euroscepticism.<sup>33</sup>

Likewise, international relations scientist Elisabetta Brighi suggests attributing Britain’s 19th century foreign policy of “splendid isolation” to its formation as an island nation, and a more recent example of this might be Britain’s 1997 decision to opt-out of the Schengen Agreement in order to retain its own border controls, almost uniquely in the EU.<sup>34</sup> This opt-out could be attributed to the country’s geography of naturally determined maritime borders along the coastline, the immutability of which has historically played a



strong role in the nation's self-imagining, stronger perhaps than in a continental country with moveable and historically contested borders.

A possibilist reading of British Euroscepticism might instead point out, as journalist Jeremy Paxman does, that before the 16<sup>th</sup> century Britain could “hardly be called a nation of natural seafarers” and that “all the great voyages of discovery up to then had been made by Continental mariners”, for example the Italian Christopher Columbus’ expedition to America in 1492.<sup>35</sup> He emphasises that it was only after the British realised that their maritime surroundings presented them with an opportunity to increase their own prosperity through the colonisation of foreign lands, that they felt the need to develop naval capabilities and go on to become the world’s strongest sea-power. Alex Law argues that “control of the sea allowed an insular national chauvinism, not to say racism, and an exaggerated national pride” to develop among this “island race”, from which we can conclude that global pre-eminence endowed them with the sense of self-importance and self-sufficiency that still fuels British nationalism (and therefore also Euroscepticism) to this day.<sup>36</sup> In this application of the environmental possibilism theory, Britain’s transformation into a global sea-power was certainly shaped and enabled by its access to the sea, but it was by no means a foregone conclusion determined solely by environmental factors, without any element of human decision-making. This research thus approaches British Euroscepticism through a lens of environmental possibilism.

The fact that British Eurosceptics still consider Britain to be self-important and self-sufficient enough to not need membership of the EU, is in itself a subject for further theories from the fields of psychology and island studies. Although the world has moved on from the rule of sea-power and Britain is no longer a global power, the insularity and ethnocentrism displayed by the British Eurosceptics demonstrate a historical sentiment of exceptionalism present within the national psyche. Winston Churchill’s concept of an “island race” conjured up notions of their inherent uniqueness, as distinct from other “races” living across the water from Britain.<sup>37</sup> While the idea of an exceptional “British race” is of course biologically unfounded (due to numerous Celtic, Roman, Viking, Norman and other invasions), historian John Gillis proposes that the geographical features of the British Isles provided a base for a psychological or mental construct of an “island race”:

“Nothing seemed to objectify the existence of territories better than so-called natural boundaries – rivers, seas, and mountains – so it

is not surprising that islands would emerge as the most clearly marked territories of all, with island nations like Britain making the strongest claims to being internally cohesive and racially pure.”<sup>38</sup>

As sensitivity around race arose in the latter decades of the 20th century, this right-wing concept of a biologically British “island race” has thankfully fallen into disuse and instead been replaced by the more neutral and politically correct “island nation”. This less disputable phrase was even used in a 2013 speech by former Prime Minister David Cameron, in which he first pledged to hold an in/out referendum on the EU if he won the 2015 election, when he famously said that “We have the character of an island nation”.<sup>39</sup>

As John Gillis illustrated above, the absence of ambiguous borderlands provided by the indisputable physical border of the UK’s 12,429 km jagged coastline clearly delineates who belongs in the “us” and the “them” camps.<sup>40</sup> Political historian Benedict Anderson’s famous concept of an “imagined community” is constructed upon a sense of shared national identity and loyalty to that national community.<sup>41</sup> In a country with so many conflicting national and regional identities (among which are found Scottish, English, Welsh, Northern Irish, Irish, Cornish, northern, southern, urban and rural identities, as well as British) the only clear distinction that can be agreed upon by all is the incontestable physical border of the coastline.<sup>42</sup> The coast is therefore central to the country’s self-imagining and this is clearly visible from the linguistic mechanisms of exclusion that native Britons often use which, either consciously or subconsciously, “other” the rest of Europe, with phrases such as: “on the continent” and “over in Europe”, whereby Britain is framed as geographically outside of Europe.<sup>43</sup> While odd phrases like these might be thought innocuous and used unwittingly by British Eurosceptics and Euro-optimists alike, the Sapir–Whorf theory of linguistic relativity states that language has a powerful influence on a speaker’s worldview, with this infamous newspaper headline from the 1930s serving as a prime example of language’s role in British island mentality:

“FOG IN CHANNEL – CONTINENT CUT OFF”<sup>44</sup>

The British mental construct of exceptionalism and ethnocentric superiority to other European nations is further demonstrated by the British population’s long-standing difficulty in identifying with the EU’s transnational, or even post-national, concept of a European identity, more so than other member states.<sup>45</sup> This is supported by Copsey and

Haughton's research into British public opinion on EU membership, which deduces that: "In contrast to Germans who have tended to see 'Europe' as an integral part of national identity and the French who see European integration as a chance to further national identity [...], Britons – or perhaps more accurately the English – tend to see Europe as a threat to national identity. They have difficulty reconciling themselves to the idea of being both British and European."<sup>46</sup>

Thomas Risse's analysis of Eurobarometer data on dual and multiple identities in Europe demonstrates a convincing statistical correlation between what he terms "inclusive or exclusive nationalism" and support for or opposition against European integration. According to Risse's interpretation of the data, Britain reveals itself as more Eurosceptic than most other member states, with 64.7% of the population conforming to "exclusive nationalism", whereby an individual identifies solely with their nation state and feels no sense of connection or belonging to a European identity.<sup>47</sup> He highlights the UK as an exception to the region's general trend of gradual Europeanisation of EU citizens' identities.

By acknowledging the sea's psychological impact on British national identity and adopting political scientists Hooghe and Marks' assertion that "exclusive identification with the nation-state is a more powerful predictor of opposition to European integration than calculations about economic costs and benefits", we can hypothesise that there is a relationship of cause and effect between the sea and levels of Euroscepticism.<sup>48</sup> Further support for Hooghe and Marks' claim that an exclusive national identity strongly influences Eurosceptic voting decisions is found in the field of electoral psychology, with Michael Bruter and Simona Guerra both arguing the important role of emotions in determining identities and the way that "emotions work as mediators to affect political behavior", such as the voting decision that British individuals made in the 2016 EU referendum.<sup>49</sup>

This theoretical discussion on geographic factors that influence public opinion has travelled from the field of political geography, through an evaluation of environmental possibilism, into a broad exploration of exceptionalism, linguistics, identity studies and psychology, among other fields. One further important theory from the field of political geography that we can test on the "inside outsider" case of Britain is the core-periphery theory, which is concerned with geographical location and spatial variation.

In Johan Galtung's 1971 structural economic theory of imperialism, he conceptualises a hierarchical system in which the centre has

power over the periphery, prompting inequality and a disharmony of interests.<sup>50</sup> The supposed core of Europe is identified by Angelos Sepos as the rich “Franco-German, Benelux and Nordic” Europe in contrast with the poorer peripheral “Mediterranean, Central, Baltic and wider” Europe.<sup>51</sup> Sepos states that centre-periphery division theories, built upon Galtung’s structural theory of imperialism, are integral to Eurosceptic arguments that the EU is a neo-empire that wishes to centralise power away from the periphery towards the imperial centre in Brussels.<sup>52</sup> In fact, British Eurosceptics frequently argue that Britain is an exploited “outsider” on the periphery of Europe and Oliver Daddow has also found evidence of an “outsider tradition” in British politicians’ narratives in European policy discourse.<sup>53</sup>

However, beyond discourse alone, this core-periphery theory is not valid in the case of Britain for three main reasons. Firstly in terms of geographical location, Britain is one of the closest countries to Brussels and other EU member states that constitute the supposed core. Secondly from an economic perspective, as the EU’s second largest economy, Britain should theoretically qualify to form part of the “rich” core. Thirdly from a political angle, Britain’s large proportional representation in the European Parliament and its history of successful opt-outs and financial rebates points to its considerable sway in EU decision-making. These three factors prevent Britain from being classified with the periphery, which is typically characterised as member states that are spatially more distant, economically weaker, smaller or newer. Furthermore, sociologist Manuela Boatcă’s theory also refutes this Eurosceptic argument of Britain as an “outsider” on the periphery of a neo-imperial project, as she classifies Britain as part of the core hegemonic “heroic” Europe (along with France and Germany), in contrast with the semi-peripheral “decadent” and “epigonal” Europes in the south and east.<sup>54</sup> Therefore this core-periphery theory is not applicable to the case of British Euroscepticism, nor can it explain Britain’s “inside outsider” status.

#### **Chapter 4: Evaluation of the Sea’s Role in British Euroscepticism and Britain’s “Inside Outsider” Status**

A deductive evaluation of various political geography theories was conducted in the preceding chapter, specifically in relation to the case study of Euroscepticism in Britain. Combined with the historical

overview in Chapter 2, the theoretical evaluation in Chapter 3 enables a hypothesis to be formulated that provides explanatory answers for my two initial research questions.

Firstly, regarding the extent to which geographical factors constitute a driver of high levels of Euroscepticism, the sea can be said to have a considerable impact in the case of Britain. Due to the phenomenon of environmental possibilism, the sea has acted historically as a physical barrier and later as a psychological barrier between the UK and mainland Europe, consequently hindering the Europeanisation of the British population. This has occurred principally through the sea's impact on national identity formation, by strengthening the public's sentiments of exceptionalism and island mentality, which subsequently provokes a form of "exclusive nationalism" which correlates with Eurosceptic electoral behaviour at polling stations, as demonstrated by the result of the June 2016 EU referendum.

Secondly, regarding the sea's role in reinforcing Britain's status as an "inside outsider" in Europe, the sea has clearly shaped the country's "outsider" identity and narrative, but it cannot explain this phenomenon alone. Nor does the core-periphery theory adequately explain Britain's status as a "semi-detached" and "awkward partner" in Europe.<sup>55</sup> While the sea historically served as a protective moat, prompting British ethnocentrism and exclusion from mainland European affairs for centuries, that is no longer the case, since globalising factors such as the evolution of digital technologies and international transport have physically bridged the Channel in the last few decades.

Political scientist Helen Wallace has argued that the two processes of Europeanisation and globalisation are complementary and that the former can even act as a filter for the latter, demonstrating the importance of considering both processes in parallel, as belonging to the same broader phenomenon.<sup>56</sup> Britain is no longer cut off in "splendid isolation" from Europe by its "silver sea", and its "defensive moat" is becoming ever more redundant thanks to the effects of globalisation, such as technological advancements, increasing international travel and full integration into the global supply chain. In the context of rapid globalisation in these other aspects of British society, this remnant island mentality and exclusive nationalism appears out-dated and stubbornly impervious to change. This leads me to the hypothesis that the British public's openness to Europeanisation is hindered by the lagging pace of change in its national identity, which is a result of environmental possibilism. Geographical factors such as

the sea impede long-overdue updates to the national identity, leading Britain to experience a much slower process towards Europeanisation than other EU member states, due to its unique island formation.

## Chapter 5: Counter-Arguments

### Ireland, Malta, and Cyprus

There are three other island nations within the European Union that share the UK's geographical characteristic of having no land border with the continental landmass: Ireland, Malta and Cyprus, and it is important to address these cases as well. Coincidentally they are all former British territories, they all now use the Euro as their currency, two of them have English as an official language and two of them also share a land border with another country, similar to the UK.

The first two of these populations display significantly lower levels of Euroscepticism than in Britain, with 84% of both Irish and Maltese citizens believing that EU membership has benefitted their countries, compared to just 56% of British citizens.<sup>57</sup> Such positive attitudes towards the EU in Ireland and Malta discount the theory of environmental determinism in British Euroscepticism (in accordance with this paper's findings) and would also seem to undermine this paper's hypothesis of environmental possibilism. However, such a superficial analysis would ignore the nuance of possibilism that places emphasis on the element of human opportunity. As has been discussed in Chapter 3, it is Britain's status as a former global sea-power (made possible by its island formation) that inhibits its integration into Europe and results in its high levels of Euroscepticism, not its intrinsic fact of being an island. Neither Ireland nor Malta had the political independence to historically develop into an imperial naval power, as they were both under the rule of Britain, and as comparatively less powerful countries with much smaller populations than Britain, they had fewer barriers to overcome and more to gain from EU membership, so they have thus embraced Europeanisation more readily.

The case of Cyprus is historically somewhat similar to the prior two examples and in the years preceding the country's financial crisis in 2013, Cypriots did also display higher levels of approval of the EU than Britons.<sup>58</sup> However the country currently displays even higher levels of Euroscepticism than Britain, with only 44% of citizens believing



that Cyprus has benefitted from membership of the EU. This very low figure in the most recent Parlemeter survey can be attributed to the strict conditions attached to the EU's bailout, combined with the ongoing failure to resolve the territorial dispute with Turkey.

It is important to recognise that, to a certain extent, these three island nations' varying situations regarding Euroscepticism contest this paper's hypothesis on the geographical drivers behind British Euroscepticism. But evaluating the hypothesis against examples such as Ireland, Malta and Cyprus actually serves to refine it and better inform the conclusions that can be drawn.

### Other Factors besides Geography

In Chapter 1 of this paper, brief reference was made to the myriad other factors frequently attributed to influencing British public opinion on the EU, such as political, legal, economic, cultural and immigration factors. This research does not disregard the impact of these significant issues on the British public's tendency to be Eurosceptic. It instead hypothesises that most of these issues are shared with many, if not all, other EU member states as well, and that these factors do not therefore constitute an independent variable that can explain the high levels of Euroscepticism in Britain in comparison to other EU states. As one of the key objectives of this research into British Euroscepticism was to provide a comparative analysis, as called for by Taggart and Szczerbiak, it has instead focused on the variable of geographical factors, which in the case of Britain do differ significantly from the majority of other EU member states (with the exception of the three aforementioned states of Ireland, Malta and Cyprus).<sup>59</sup>

Minimal analysis was conducted in selecting the arbitrary examples attributed to each of these groups of factors in chapter 1. However, one grouping that would ostensibly appear to display a great difference from other EU member states is the grouping of cultural factors, including examples such as high monolingualism, low consumption of European popular culture, and nationalist bias in the national curriculum. This research has hypothesised on the environmental possibilism of certain aspects of Britain's cultural identity, such as concepts like island mentality and island race, but there are further cultural factors that could also be analysed. Without thorough comparative analysis, it is impossible to draw conclusions, but it might be fruitful for a future study to correlate the geographic

factors of Britain's island formation to other features of its unique cultural identity, such as those suggested here, to establish whether these too support a hypothesis of environmental possibilism.

## Conclusion

This theoretical discussion thus concludes with the hypothesis that Britain has historically progressed at a slower pace in its process of Europeanisation than other EU member states, caused by the sea's significant role in shaping the British national identity. The country's high levels of Euroscepticism, which became apparent in the unexpected result of the UK's 2016 EU referendum, are a demonstrable outcome of the theory of environmental possibilism.

The question now is what will happen to the British process of Europeanisation (which Helen Wallace argues is not solely attached to EU membership) once Britain departs the EU.<sup>60</sup> Will the sea slow it to a complete standstill or in fact force it into reverse, now that British Euroscepticism has been legitimised by the introduction of Brexit into the mainstream political agenda? Or will the process of Europeanisation simply pause for a time, until globalising factors succeed in overcoming the influence of the sea, and then resume at a faster pace in future?

There are various potential future directions for this research into the role of the sea in British Euroscepticism. One useful extension of this study would be to test this theoretical hypothesis against empirical data, such as quantitative statistics on international interactions and surveys on identity and attitudes toward European integration, in order to triangulate and corroborate the theory.

Another further avenue for investigation is the link between Euroscepticism and anti-globalisation sentiment in Britain. While this research has focused on British attitudes toward Europe, the rising tide of British Euroscepticism could very likely reveal further insights into the public opinion on globalisation and inform hypotheses on Britain's future participation in the broad phenomenon of globalisation.

## Notes

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## Appendix

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## **Authors' Biographies**

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birth year and place

studies (universities)

Master thesis

present position

fields of interest and research

## STEFAN STANKOVIĆ

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1992 Vršac, Serbia

BA Political Science (Belgrade);  
MA Euroculture (Groningen,  
Uppsala)

“Becoming European: The Reception of EU Norms in Serbia”, 2018

Trainee at the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg

Democratisation, good governance, strategic communication, europeanisation, enlargement policy, use of AI in public administration

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## VIRGINIA STUART-TAYLOR

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1989 Salisbury, United Kingdom

BA Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese (Exeter); Erasmus study (Córdoba); MA Euroculture (Groningen, Uppsala)

“Amidst uncertainty and othering, EU citizens in search of belonging: The impact of Brexit on migrant identity and significant life-course decisions” (2019)

EU Exit Negotiations & Strategy Advisor (UK Government)

Social / national / migrant identity,

UK-EU relations, intra-EU migration, UK foreign policy

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as a geographical entity,  
as a political project,  
as shared cultural heritage,  
as an idea.

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a concrete meaning by a choice, a selection of  
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