CIRCULATIONS

SAKINA SHAKIL GRÖPPMAIER





This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 852205). This publication reflects only the author's view, and the Agency is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier: "Circulations", in: Pierre-Héli Monot, David Bebnowski, Sakina Shakil Gröppmaier (eds.): *Activist Writing: History, Politics, Rhetoric*, Zürich: intercom Verlag (2024), 51–64.

TEXT, EVENT, TEXT

Text plays a powerful role in sociopolitical relationships, particularly when concerted efforts for paradigmatic change are underway. This is evident in contemporary territorialist movements in the political West, which seek to transform geopolitical borders as we know them. These movements pursue change in places where democratic structures are foundational to political governance and in such places, the people have collective power. This power has various grades and limitations, but paradigmatic change can be induced by a single event if this collective power is effectively exercised. In the West, this often means in the form of a vote, organized by those in governing positions, campaigned for by interest-driven actors, and carried through by the collective public. This is where text serves as a crucial mediator.

This paper highlights the mediating role of text in contemporary territorialist movements – the kinds of text that are produced in efforts towards paradigmatic change and the discursive relationships they initiate. Herein, the focus lies on conditions and content: the conditions in which text-mediated relationships develop and the literary qualities that shape them. It is these qualities that determine the efficacy of political text and how productively it circulates in discursive arenas, and lay the foundation for how such discursive relationships ultimately function. I argue that efficacious political text takes on qualities of the pamphlet, and pamphletary claims allow political actors and engaged publics to construct discursive circulations that create potential for major paradigmatic change.

What I mean by the pamphletary is this: affective, politically partisan literature that seeks to persuade the reader in taking a definitive stance, and that is defined not just by its content but by the engagement it receives in the public sphere.[1] A text, thus, is not made pamphletary by its author; it is made pamphletary by the dialogical process it sets in motion.[2] To set such a process in motion, it's claims must affect its reader, eliciting emotions that motivate response,[3] and ultimately, generate forms of political participation that are fueled by discursive contributions. To be pamphletary is, as a text and its claims, to be alive and in circulations, and thus to hinge this life temporally. These circulations assign forms of agency to the texts themselves, and such texts can develop the potential to metamorphose into agents of major change. Political pamphletary text can be centered on a real-world event, making the circulations of the pamphletary an event in

1 In identifying the pamphletary in political literature, I rely (in part) on bringing together Brian Massumi's Spinozist notion of "affect as the power to 'affect and be affected'" and Sara Ahmed's ideas on how being emotional "is to have one's judgement affected," "to be reactive rather than active, and to be dependent rather than autonomous." See: Brian Massumi: *Politics of Affect*, Cambridge: Polity Press (2015), p. ix; Sarah Ahmed: *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press (2004), p. 3.

2 My concept of the pamphletary is based on the taxonomic criteria underlying Pierre-Héli Monot's redefinition of a pamphlet. See Pierre-Héli Monot: "Art, Autonomy, Philology: Research Parameters," in this volume.

3 Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, Francesca Poletta: "Why Emotions Matter", in: *Passionate Politics: Emotions and Social Movements*, ed. by Jeff Goodwin, James M. Jasper, Francesca Poletta, Chicago: Chicago University Press (2001), pp. 1–26, p. 8.

itself. Its pamphletary qualities are made most visible by the conditions of the digital public sphere, where dissemination and participation take on a visual, textual nature – writing, here, is a necessary precondition.

To explain these dimensions, I use the case of Brexit as my guiding example throughout this paper. Brexit is arguably the greatest territorialist success in the early 21st century in the West – Brexiteers managed sway the British public in voting to leave, and thus (re)installed a hard border between the United Kingdom (UK) and the European Union (EU). The Leave campaigns' pro-Brexit texts played a decisive role in the process of public persuasion, and their pamphletary qualities created affective, discursive bonds with engaged publics. Brexit is also nestled amongst a scattering of territorialist movements in the West, a phenomenon clashing with the growth of globalization which brings with it increasingly porous borders.

TERRITORIALITY AND THE PAMPHLETARY

What exactly is the relevance of territorialist movements in the relationships produced by the pamphletary? Territoriality is, broadly speaking, the desire for power over place, and plays an essential role in geographically ordering political, social, and cultural structures in the human world.[4] Territorial changes when concerning the bordering of places can be paradigmatic, changing the very structures that order our world. Territorial notions of power can be exercised in claiming contested forms of autonomy, sovereignty, secession, or independence; in the case of Brexit, these notions all overlapped.

Today, territoriality is a driving ideology behind a scattering of border-driven movements across the increasingly connected political West. Amidst the blurring of economic, security, and cultural borders and the growing porousness of national space exist territorialist movements rooted in the quest for sovereignty. Such movements take on various ideals, whether protectionist, nationalist, communalist, or an overlap of these and more. Such movements are also driven by campaigns that can be cohesive, collective, fringe, or loose in their make-up. The larger the movement, the larger the umbrella of interest groups driving associated campaigns using various ephemera to disseminate their claims, and such campaigns typically have an intended or realizable event in common. In democratic entities, this event is often a referendum.

There are several, notable examples of such movements. The Quebec sovereignty movement, for one, seeks autonomy for Quebec from Canada; it has resulted in multiple referendums, including one on seceding from Canada in 1995. The Venetist movement is a separatist movement in northern Italy and

4 For differentiated views on concepts and histories of territoriality in the human world, see: Charles Maier: *Once Within Borders: Territories of Power, Wealth, and Belonging since 1500*, Cambridge: Harvard University (2016); Stuart Elden: *The Birth of Territory*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press (2013); David Storey: *Territories: The Claiming of Space*, Oxon: Routledge (2001); Robert Sack: *Human Territoriality*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (1986).

its campaigns have resulted in unofficial referendums, including one seeking independence for its regions from Italy in 2014 and on autonomy in 2017. The California Exit movement, a non-cohesive collection of minoritarian campaigns, gained greater public attention through the Yes California independence initiative in 2016. The initiative submitted a request for a referendum to secede from the United States to the California state parliament in 2016, which never came to fruition. The Catalan Independence movement seeks sovereignty for Catalonia from Spain and held contested referendums on self-determination and independence in 2014 and 2017, respectively. Arguably the most successful of the last decades, however, is Brexit. The campaign for the UK to exit the EU has roots in Euroscepticism that long predated the UK's membership in the EU. Leading up to the EU referendum of June 23rd, 2016, in which Britons casted their vote on leaving or remaining in the EU, Brexit campaigners – also known as Brexiteers or Leavers – challenged core EU principles by disseminating affective claims that cast doubt on the EU's fiscal and mobility policies. The referendum resulted in a "Leave" vote, and the UK officially exited the EU in the years thereafter. Brexit, thus, is the movement I will be using to guide my arguments in this paper.

In the text to event to text relationship for Brexit, the EU referendum is the event at the nucleus. This referendum is the central motif of campaign claims and public engagement, and the core of the text-mediated relationship this paper focuses on. Texts distributed by the various interest groups that fell under the umbrella of the Leave campaign were of a hybrid nature – they were print, they were digital, and more often than not, they were both. The conditions created by the overlap of the real-world and the digital public sphere shaped the circulatory nature of this relationship, which was characterized by a form of content that is affective and partisan, and when most effective, agonistic in intent.[5] These qualities are what bind the discursive motions of campaign claims and responses in the public sphere. An example of this is the invocation of similar phrases – when it comes to Brexit, one of the most familiar is "take back control." The most common phrase in a relationship with a referendum at its nucleus is "vote", or "voted" post-event. These phrases tether the circulatory nature of the "text to event to text" relationship.

The invocation of specific or similar phrases is what keeps this relationship circulatory, but it is the affective and partisan qualities that characterize it as pamphletary – the texts mediating these relationships prompt affective engagement in forms of agreement and critique. Here, the way text is presented matters: the formatting, the punctuation, the visuals, and the way claims are placed – several techniques come together to further its efficaciousness. The text to event to text relationship creates circulatory discursive motions mediated by the pamphletary. Pamphletary text is meant to be interactive. It is intended to provoke agreement,

5 By agonistic, I mean the production of antagonisms and, often, hostilities in engaged publics and their respective public spheres. Here, I borrow from Chantal Mouffe's "agonistic model of democracy," in which she sees "'agonistic pluralism'", stemming from antagonisms "in human" and "social relations", as the "aim of democratic politics". See Chantal Mouffe: *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso (2000), p. 101.

disagreement, approval, critique, and above all, it is intended to produce a discursive response. It is intended to circulate, and in these circulations generate impetus for change. It is intended to get people talking, and in the case of the digital public sphere, to get people writing. It is intended for all this in the hope that the response generated by these circulations will develop into action, which will ultimately effect real-world change. In sum, pamphletary texts are produced with the intention of driving some specific political or social change. With regards to Brexit, the change was paradigmatic: it entailed a secession from the EU.

THE PAMPHLETARY IN TEXT

Pamphletary texts are key drivers of the circulatory relationship between political actors and publics when it comes to territorialist campaigns and the events they center. In the case of Brexit, this event was the EU Referendum of 2016, in which citizens of the UK voted to either "remain" a member of the European Union or to "leave" it. The referendum was preceded by months of intense campaigning spearheaded by two main camps: Leave and Remain. With 51.9 % of the vote, Leave won.[6]

Various interest groups were involved under the umbrella of the Leave campaign. The leading organization and official Leave campaign, *Vote Leave*, involved major public figures and politicians, including United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP) party leader Nigel Farage and former London mayor and Conservative Party member (and future Prime Minister) Boris Johnson. Under the campaign umbrella, there were also associated Leave campaigns carried out by smaller interest groups like *Better Off Out*, and *Vote Leave's* primary partner and rival *Leave.EU*. *Leave.EU* had initially run against *Vote Leave* to become the official Leave campaign, but this title was awarded to *Vote Leave* by the Electoral Commission in April 2016. Both campaign groups engaged in similar forms of argumentation, incorporating affective, polemical, and sensationalist elements into their ephemera. Both *Vote Leave* and *Leave.EU* used the linchpin of migration control as a campaign claim for leaving the EU, linking it to abstract notions of sovereignty; for Leavers, exiting the EU would allow the UK to self-govern rather than be coerced into supranational policies. The migration claim would become pamphletary, the process of which would be initiated by the release of campaign materials in the public sphere.

Two campaign materials exemplify this, the first a foldout flyer produced and distributed by *Vote Leave* titled "The UK and the European Union: The Facts" and the second a double-sided flyer created by *Leave.EU* titled "It's Time to Leave!" While the aesthetic of each flyer is different, the content was analogous. *Vote Leave's* "The UK and the European Union: The Facts" comes across as a basic, neutrality-driven text. The colors are simple, a carton-light greyscale and

6 "Results and turnout at the EU referendum", in: *The Electoral Commission*, www . electoralcommission.org.uk/research-reports-and-data/our-reports-and-data-past-elections-and-referendums/results-and-turnout-eu-referendum (2024).

black and red text with a simple graphic of a ballot box on the flyer cover. The bait is "The Facts" in red – throughout the flyer, this is the color of the "facts" that are presented. The rest of the cover is bare, with the text above the main headline stating that this is "Information about the Referendum on 23 June 2016", signalling that the text is intended to be taken as an informational material rather than something conveying a politicized perspective, a campaign claim, or a partisan argument. This echoes the aesthetic throughout the flyer, signifying that it contains objective or verifiable "facts", yet providing no citation or sources as to where this data is from or how it has been collected. Although this flyer was printed and disseminated by the *Vote Leave* campaign, this is nowhere stated; it is only coded through the use of red, the most prominent color used in *Vote Leave* ephemera. The aesthetic is important, but what is essential to the pamphletary dimension are the claims made inside.



INFORMATION ABOUT THE REFERENDUM ON 23 JUNE 2016

The UK and the European Union:

THE FACTS

THE UK AND THE EUROPEAN UNION: THE FACTS

On 23 June, there will be a vote to decide whether the UK should remain a member of the European Union, or leave and take back control. It's a big decision – and there may not be another chance to vote for years. Here are the facts:

- **The UK joined the European Union in 1973.** Back then, it was known as the Common Market. But over the past 43 years, the EU has taken control over more and more areas which don't have anything to do with trade – such as our borders, our public services, and whether prisoners have the right to vote.
- **When we joined, there were just 9 member states.** Now there are 28, the most recent being Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia. Five more countries are being considered for membership: Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey. If they are let in, they will have the same rights as other member states.
- **More than half of net migration to the UK comes from the EU.** More than a quarter of a million people came to the UK from the EU in the 12 months to September 2015 – the equivalent of a city the size of Plymouth or Newcastle in just one year.
- **While we're in the EU, the UK can't make trade deals on our own.** This means we currently have no trade deals with key allies such as Australia, New Zealand or the USA – or important growing economies like India, China or Brazil. Instead of making a deal which is best for the UK, we have to wait for 27 other countries to agree it.
- **The EU costs us £350 million a week.** That's enough to build a new NHS hospital every week of the year. We get less than half of this money back, and we have no control over the way it's spent – that's decided by politicians and officials in Brussels, rather than the people we elect here.
- **You don't have to be a member of the EU to trade with it.** Switzerland is not in the EU and it exports more per person to the EU than we do. The big banks and multinationals might be lobbying to keep us in the EU, but small and medium-sized businesses feel differently. Only 6 per cent of UK firms export to the EU, yet all have to abide by EU regulations on their business.
- **EU law overrules UK law.** This stops the British public from being able to vote out the politicians who make our laws. EU judges have already overruled British laws on issues like counter-terrorism powers, immigration, VAT, and prisoner voting. Even the Government's proposed new deal can be overturned after the referendum: it is not legally binding.
- **There are risks in voting either way.** Experts, politicians, and businesses are divided. People have to weigh up the risks and potential benefits of each course of action for themselves.

Want to know more? Visit **www.eureferendumfacts.org** or text FACTS to **88802** (standard charges apply).*

1 *Vote Leave's* foldout flyer, "The UK and the European Union: The Facts" (2016), outlined and elaborated on what the group termed as "facts" pertaining to the UK's relationship as a member-state with the EU.

The content of the flyer claims to present "facts" that would inform the voter on what to consider when deciding on a remain or leave vote, or a vote to "take back control", as the flyer states at the outset. These "facts" are printed in red and accompanied by explanations implying some sort of threat to UK sovereignty. The first "fact", for example, is "The UK joined the European Union in 1973." Accompanying this is a brief explanation outlining the decline in sovereignty the UK has faced since that point: "Back then it was known as the Common Market. But over the past 43 years, the EU has taken control over more and more areas which don't have anything to do with trade." The rest of the facts are accompanied by explanations that have either to do with the lack of control the UK has over its policies or with the economic freedoms the UK would have if it was not part of the EU. Two of the non-explicit economic facts, and the second and third listed in the first column, have to do with population demographics – specifically, migration.

The first "fact" here is "When we joined, there were just 9 member states" and the second is "More than half of net migration to the UK comes from the EU."

Both of the explanations accompanying these facts, while brief, are loaded with the implication that the EU heavily increases migration into the UK and this migration is damaging. For the first "fact", the explanation states that "Now there are 28 ... Five more countries are being considered for membership ... if they are let in, they will have the same rights as other member states." For the second fact, the explanation is that "More than a quarter of a million people came to the UK from the EU in the 12 months to September 2015 – the equivalent of a city the size of Plymouth or Newcastle in just one year." These two "facts", along with "The UK has joined the European Union in 1973" flow together to present one subliminal argument through their accompanying explanations: national sovereignty is subjugated by EU membership and the growth of membership into Eastern Europe increases migration, likely uncontrolled, into the UK, and this is all damaging to the UK as a whole. This focus on migration reflects the media tone of 2016 – as the date of the referendum drew closer, newspapers friendly to the Leave campaign, such as the Daily Mail, featured more and more pieces on population control.

The campaign flyer from the *Leave.EU* campaign is more sensationalist, with the headline "It's Time to Leave!". The exclamation point expresses a strong emotion – here, it is deterministic. The choice of blue is a contrast to the *Vote Leave* campaigns materials' red, but also should be noted due to the prominence of blue in the Remain campaigns' ephemera. For the uninformed eye, a glance might confuse the color coding of the two choices. What makes the flyer cover most striking, however, is the use of political cartoons – previously published, but combined for sensationalist purposes. There is fearmongering on the left, with a caricature of Mario Draghi – the European Central Bank president at the time – offering up a deal of 50 pence for 1€, playing to the idea that the UK would be forced to join the common currency at a great loss if remaining. The center cartoon depicts a sinking ship tied to the Euro currency iceberg, and on the right is a crude representation of Angela Merkel front and center of an international trade cake with David Cameron shunted of to the side of the group. Each cartoon is a comment on the EU's fiscal policies, and they all transmit a similar message that is intended as a prophetic threat: the EU is damaging to the UK's economy, and remaining a member ascertains the UK's future as dwindling in economic sovereignty. Migration as an argument is not present in the cartoons, as they are dedicated to satirizing leading political figures of the UK-EU relationship. Yet, the claim is very present in the text on the back of the flyer, which presents a 5-point argument as to why "It's Time to Leave!"

While a first glance might deem it non-affective, the text itself incorporates the fearmongering tactics of the pointed allegations present in the cartoons on the front. Migration, the second from the top and the first specific claim, states that "1.5 million EU migrants moved to the UK in 2004-2010", that "Migration poses a threat to low-income workers in our country" (a key segment of voters for Leavers), and that "Migration accounts for 1/3 of the deficit in social housing."



2 The front of *Leave.EU* double-sided flyer "It's Time to Leave!" depicts a combination of political cartoons satirizing then-leading figures of the EU and the back presents decontextualized claims and speculative scenarios on why leaving the EU would improve the UK.

Freedom of movement is a core EU principle.[7] This is inextricable from migration as migration is a means of mobility – social, economic, cultural – for citizens of EU member states. While this, on its own, has not been historically framed as threatening, the media environment of 2016 was permeated with news of refugee migration into Europe. Mainstream media coverage of this topic in continental Europe was tinged and often explicit with xenophobic and racist overtones and exploited domestic fears of overpopulation, scarce resources, and income abatement. The Leave campaign played into this, using border protection from migrants, both European and non-European citizens, as a key claim for secession from the EU.

THE PAMPHLETARY LIVES

Engagement with the migration claim was evident in the digital public sphere, where media played a cogent role in disseminating claims and where public engagement was measurable in digital spaces that served as forums. Such spaces are typically text-based, encouraging short-form writing as a means to engage in public debate. Such spaces can range from social media platforms like Twitter to the comment pages on television and newspaper websites. In the digital public

7 "Free movement – EU nationals", in: *European Commission*, https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=457.

sphere, the textual nature of dissemination and engagement makes the pamphletary visible, and to an extent, preservable. It was the combination of media and public engagement in the digital public sphere that brought the migration claim to life.

In the case of Brexit, a prominent media actor was the Daily Mail. The Daily Mail is one of Britain's highest circulating papers and sustains a highly visited website. From the tone of its Brexit content in 2016 and beyond, it was a Leave campaign advocate. An example of this is an article published on May 29, 2016, titled "David Cameron 'lives in too much luxury' to care about mass migration: Eurosceptic Priti Patel says Remain leaders are too rich to care about real people's concerns."[8] The title of the article is hyperbolic, paraphrasing the first sentence of a paywall-controlled article that previously appeared on the Telegraph.[9] The Daily Mail article, however, is fully accessible to the website-visitor, and elaborates on how migration as a claim plays into the Leave campaign and how Leave campaigners criticize Remain campaigners as being removed from the interests of the UK's "'wider public'":

> Employment minister Priti Patel said the Prime Minister and other top Remain campaigners who went to public schools were 'insulated' from how working people felt about immigration. ...Net EU migration to the UK reached a record 184,000 during 2015 – against a government target of 'tens of thousands'. A total of 333,000 more people arrived in the country than left, when also including migrants from outside the EU. Many in the Leave side think migration is the key to winning the referendum as they look for an advantage to overcome consistent polling which places them behind Remain.[10]

The article places the migration claim as central to Brexit campaigns, with Brexiteers having shifted it to the center of their arguments. As was common practice for the Daily Mail, it is also peppered with quotes of criticism targeted at David Cameron, a Remainer. While the article may masquerade as appearing or attempting to be informative, the headline, the tags and description, and the imbalanced inclusion of Cameron-critical quotes give it a pro-Leave, anti-migration tinge.

Readers, however, tend to read into what they want to read, and the most engaged readers read into the claim. In the heated discussion in the comments section, readers affirmed their disdain for "elites" and emphatically played into the migration "threat." These comments are public – visible and accessible without

8 Matt Hunter: "David Cameron 'lives in too much luxury' to care about mass migration: Eurosceptic Priti Patel says Remain leaders are too rich to care about real people's concerns", in: *The Daily Mail*, https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3614567/Torys-Brexit-civil-war-escalates-Leave-campaigners-target-PM.html (May 29, 2016).

9 Tim Ross: "David Cameron and George Osborne too Rich to Care about Migration", in: *The Telegraph*, https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/05/28/david-cameron-and-george-osborne-too-rich-to-care-about-migratio (May 29, 2016).

10 Hunter: "David Cameron 'lives in too much luxury' to care about mass migration: Eurosceptic Priti Patel says Remain leaders are too rich to care about real people's concerns" (2016).

a firewall and displayed at the bottom of the page in three categories: "Newest", "Oldest", "Best rated", and "Worst rated." The comments affirming these claims are prevalent in the first three sections, while comments negating or criticizing the views presented in this article are visible in the "Worst rated" section. In this way, the Daily Mail and similar media outlets make their segment of public sphere active and observable – they make it easy, and more likely, for relevant publics to engage. The 912 comments on this article demonstrate this.

Publics' engagement, of course, is not just limited to those in different scales of agreement, but of course, the visibility of these tendencies is exacerbated by digital conditions such as echo chambers or filter bubbles.[11] However, when campaigns become mass movements and enter the mainstream and seek to shape opinion and decision on national borders, a larger segment of the public is engaged: in agreement, disagreement, and the various shades in between. Such was the reaction of British academia, as in the lead-up to the referendum, several UK universities established blogs to engage in the conversation in longer form. One example is the University of London's European Institute blog, which published a piece by Ann White, Professor of Polish Studies, about the lives of Polish Britons. White wrote:

> Recent research into civic participation among Poles in the UK, conducted for the Warsaw-based Institute of Public Affairs, suggests that many others take part in leisure activities alongside non-Polish people living in Britain. Travelling by bus from Warsaw to Podlasie region last summer, I happened to sit next to a post-accession migrant (like myself, on holiday in Poland) who entertained us during the ride by showing me her photos of walking holidays in the Peak District and mid-Wales.[12]

The Peak District and mid-Wales are common holiday locations in the UK for Britons, and with the migration claim, notions of who belonged to and in the UK were being challenged. In the blog, White emphasized the "home" element of the UK for Polish migrants, positioning Polish residents (citizens or not) as everyday Britons, enjoying similar experiences as those who had a generational history in the UK. The textual connection here was not agreement or echo-based, but a strategic contribution to add a contrasting, experiential perspective to the circulating conversation.

11 There is an extensive field of literature examining such digital conditions. For more on filter bubbles, echo chambers, and related digital conditions, see: Axel Bruns: *Are Filter Bubbles Real*, Cambridge: Polity Press (2019); Jessica Clark, Tracy Slyke: *Beyond the Echo Chamber: Reshaping Politics Through Networked Progressive Media*, New York: The New Press (2010); Nathan Rambukkana (ed.): *Hashtag Publics: The Power and Politics of Discursive Networks*, New York: Peter Lang Publishing (2015); Cristian Vaccari, Augusto Valeriani: *Outside the Bubble: Social Media and Political Participation in Western Democracies*, New York: Oxford University Press (2021).

12 Anne White: "Unsettling times for a settled population? Polish perspectives on Brexit",

THE PAMPHLETARY IN MOTION

What makes a pamphlet unique amongst literary genre is that it is living and non-static. A pamphlet becomes a pamphlet not just by the intent of the author, but by its uses and reception in the public sphere. A pamphlet is always political literature, but what was once a pamphlet can later be a historical document, and what is a pamphlet can simultaneously be a flyer or a poster. The pamphlet can be seen a genre, but what I discuss in this paper is a practice.[13] What makes a text and its claims pamphletary, thus, is the life they gain in the public sphere – this is the practice of the pamphlet. This life is not only in the form of public engagement with a text and its claims, but also in the generation of responsive pamphletary material.

The migration claim picked up remarkable traction in the public sphere, making it the cornerstone argument for Brexiteers as the referendum drew closer. From subtle and implicit fearmongering in earlier campaign materials, it quickly developed into rhetoric ripe with xenophobic tropes.



3 Brexit group *Better Off Out*'s foldout flyer "Is Britain Getting Too Crowded" detailed the cons of being a member-state of the EU and the pros of leaving it.

"Is Britain Getting Too Crowded?" was the bold question splashed across the foldout flyer disseminated by *Better Off Out*, a Eurosceptic group that predated Cameron's promise of an In/Out referendum. The cover of their flyer

in: *UCL European Institute*, www.ucl.ac.uk/european-institute/news/2016/apr/unsettling-times-settled-population-polish-perspectives-brexit (April 14, 2016).

13 I discuss political text and pamphletary practice in digital conditions, but popular definitions of the pamphlet itself tend to be of material texts. The Oxford English Dictionary defines it as a "short" bound "work of several pages," or a "work of polemical or political nature issued in this form." These "polemical" and "political" qualities are also assigned by George Orwell, who described the pamphlet as "written either 'for' or 'against' somebody or something," and as "always a form of protest." See: "Pamphlet", in: *Oxford English Dictionary*, www.oed.com/dictionary/pamphlet_n, (December 2023); George Orwell: "Introduction", in: *British Pamphleteers, Vol. 1: From the Sixteenth Century to the French Revolution*, ed. by George Orwell, Reginald Reynolds, London: Wingate (1948), pp. 7–18, p. 7.

superimposed the question on a generic picture of a large crowd and the foldout page elaborated on the EU's freedom of movement policy – what they directly linked to subtopics titled "Unfair Immigration", "Fall in wages", "Restore British Control", "Impact on lower earners", and "Rise in foreign born employment." All of these were described as negative aspects of having to adhere to the EU's freedom of movement policy. As with other campaign materials, this content was distributed both in person and online, and these arguments were notable elements of their website and referenced by media outlets both for and against secession. The intended fluidity between print and digital was explicit; on the back of the print version of the flyer were both email and post addresses as well as information about where to connect with *Better Off Out* on Facebook and Twitter.

As forms of the migration claim got more sensational, a Leave campaign undertaken by UKIP exploited the migration argument in a melodramatic fashion with its Breaking Point poster. The Breaking Point poster, with the subtitle "The EU has failed us all" and the byline "We must break free of the EU and take back control of our borders", placed an image of a group of refugees in Slovenia at its fore. UKIP leader Nigel Farage held an official unveiling of the poster on June 16, 2016 in London as UKIP launched the image on Twitter the same day, barely a week before the referendum was to take place. The poster suggested that as an EU member, it was inevitable that refugee migration into Eastern European regions would continue onwards to the UK, and as an EU member, the UK would be forced to accept it. This, the title alleged, would either push the UK to a "breaking point" when it came to national population, or was the "breaking point" of the UK-EU relationship. The Breaking Point poster took it too far – it received criticism from several notable Leave campaigners as well as vehement denunciation from critical publics. A tweet quoted in the Guardian, a leading Remain-favoring media outlet, compared the poster to Nazi propaganda, and it was one of many.[14] The images in this and other tweets depicted refugees in Europe after the first world war who Nazi propaganda at the time described as "parasites, undermining their host countries"; the images were screenshots from a BBC documentary called *Auschwitz: The Nazis and The Final Solution*. The tweets were published on June 16 as well, the same day the article was published on the Guardian, demonstrating the acceleration in visible pamphletary circulations enabled by the digital public sphere.

While the attention to Breaking Point was certainly viral, the criticism didn't completely die down immediately. In March 2019, nearly 3 years after the referendum, the critical attention generated by the Breaking Point poster led to the launch of a parody poster by the anti-Brexit group *Led By Donkeys*. The parody poster kept the original "Breaking Point" title, but adapted it with the subtitle "The Brexit elites have failed us all" and the phrase "The UK is being swamped by a tide of incompetents" across the bottom. Instead of refugees, *Led By Donkeys*' parody depicted prominent figures associated with the Leave

14 Heather Stewart, Rowena Mason: "Nigel Farage's anti-migrant poster reported to police", in: *The Guardian*, www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/16/nigel-farage-defends-ukip-breaking-point-poster-queue-of-migrants (June 16, 2016).



4 UKIP Leader Nigel Farage unveils the Breaking Point Poster on a the side of a van which is subsequently driven around London on June 16, 2016 (top), and *Led By Donkeys* brings out their parody of UKIP's Breaking Point poster by plastering on the side of a van and driving it around London on March 7, 2019 (bottom).

campaign: Boris Johnson appeared at the bottom far left and Nigel Farage was pictured at the bottom far right holding up the original Breaking Point poster. In similar fashion to UKIP, the poster was launched on March 7th at Westminster Square during a protest demanding a second referendum on staying in the EU while simultaneously being disseminated by the group online. The trajectory of the migration claim was powerful and lasted years. This was made possible by

hybrid real-world/digital conditions, demonstrating the circulatory life of the pamphletary that is set in motion by the discursive relationship between text, its disseminators, and engaged publics.

FULL CIRCLE

The examination of political text through a literary lens brings novel insights into the ways in which movements and publics interact. By identifying and describing the pamphletary qualities of mass-disseminated political text, it becomes evident why certain political claims gain traction over others. It is in their circulations – in the public engagement they generate and in the forms of agreement, critique, and responsive they produce – that text and the claims it makes becomes pamphletary. And it is this pamphletary dimension that renders the text politically or socially efficacious – or not.

What makes this dimension more measurable than ever are the conditions produced by the digital public sphere. This sphere enables a relationship most dominantly encapsulated in writing and reading. It also produces the potential of unscalable mass dissemenation and participation; political materials and public engagement in these conditions becomes increasingly democratized, but also dangerous. Along with a massive change in accessibility are risky politics of information, where sensationalist claims can persuade as well as polarize and radicalize, and have real-world results or implications depending on a matter of perspective.

The conditions of the digital public sphere also enable a shapeshifting of concepts. Sensationalized issues can be connected to simplified ideas of freedom and sovereignty, but these also generate criticism that is then reported, and when strong enough, produces reciprocal political material. The circulations of the pamphletary exemplify this; the Guardian's reference of tweets in their coverage and *Led By Donkeys*' production of a parody poster are demonstrative of this textual life in motion. It is thus imperative to understand the literary value of political text – it serves a powerful purpose: to shape opinion, to instrumentalize citizen power, and to induce major change. But most importantly, it diffuses an ideological bond between movements and publics – a circulatory relationship that is best represented by text in the digital public sphere. In the case of territorialist movements today, it can be a potent strategy to actualize democratic real-world change and redirect the future of the places these movements and publics inhibit.

PICTURE CREDITS

POSTURES

1 *Traité sur la tolérance* (1763), title page, München: Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, J.can.p. 1106 w, urn:nbn:de:bvb:12-bsb10547162-5. Online: https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/de/view/bsb10547162?page=6,7. © BSB Munich.
2 *Projet de l'impôt patriotique, donné par Mad. de Gouges, dans le mois de sept.re 1788*, [Paris] ([1789]), Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, collection Hennin, 10181, http://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb40257593r. © Bibliothèque nationale de France.

CIRCULATIONS

1 "Vote Leave", in: *The UK and the European Union: The Facts* (2016), LSE Digital Library, https://lse-atom.arkivum.net/uklse-dl1er010020010028-uklse-dl1-er01-002-001-0028-0001-pdf.
2 Leave.EU: "It's Time to Leave!" (2016), LSE Digital Library, https://lse-atom.arkivum.net/uklse-dl1er010020010061-uklse-dl1-er01-002-001-0061-0001-pdf.
3 Better Off Out: "Is Britain Getting Too Crowded?" (2016), LSE Digital Library, https://lse-atom.arkivum.net/uklse-dl1er010020010152-uklse-dl1-er01-002-001-0152-0001-pdf.
4 @epkaufm, https://twitter.com/epkaufm/status/869474176641511424/photo/1 (20 May 2017); @ByDonkeys, https://twitter.com/ByDonkeys/status/1103728300403363843/photo/1 (7 March 2019).

PRETTY PAMPHLETS

1 Unknown, *Wha wants me* (26 December 1792), Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Online: https://loc.gov/pictures/resource/cph.3j00005/.
2 Robert Seymour, *The March of Intellect* (ca. 1828), London: British Museum. © The Trustees of the British Museum

REPRODUCING FREDERICK DOUGLASS

1 Unknown, *Frederick Douglass* (ca. 1877), Washington, D.C.: Brady-Handy photograph collection, Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division. Online: https://loc.gov/item/2017895330/.
2 Unknown, *Howard Univ., Washington, D.C., ca. 1900 – Law library* (ca. 1900), Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. Online: https://loc.gov/pictures/collection/anedub/item/2001705791/.
3 Frances Benjamin Johnston, *African American Schoolgirls in Classroom, Learning to Sew* (ca. 1899), Washington, D.C.: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division.
4 Unknown, *Hon. Fred. Douglass on platform in [the] Pavilion* (26 March 1892), Washington, D.C.: Booker T. Washington Collection, Library of Congress. Online: https://loc.gov/item/98500648/.

BORN-TRANSLATED MANIFESTO

1 Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: *The Communist Manifesto*, adapted by Martin Rowson [Graphic Novel], London: SelfMadeHero (2018), pp. 13–14. Reproduced by permission of selfmadehero. Artwork © Martin Rowson.
2 Stefanie Kremmel, *Der Lebenslauf der Übersetzung. Die Transkulturalität des Kommunistischen Manifests*, Vienna: University of Vienna (2022), p. 325. © Stefanie Kremmel.
3 [Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels:] *The Communist Manifesto*, published by the International Workingmen's Association, New York: Schaerr & Frantz (1883), pp. 30, p.3–4. Reproduction by Biblioteca Fondazione Giangiacomo Feltrinelli, Milan.

MATERIAL FOR AGITATION

1 *Gegen Young-Plan, Massenelend und Faschismus: Für ein freies, sozialistisches Deutschland (Richtlinien für den Wahlkampf 1930)* (= Instruktionen für die Wahlarbeit), Heft 1, Zentralkomitee der KPD: Berlin (1930), frontmatter.

2 *Rote Fahne* (1 May 1920), Berlin: Zeitungsinformationssystem, Staatsbibliothek Berlin, p. 2. Online: https://zefys.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/list/title/zdb/24352111/.

MASS VIOLENCE IN PAMPHLETS

1 2014 propaganda poster urging Crimeans to vote in the Crimean status referendum. Source: Andrew Lubimov, AP images.
2 Eugène Atget, *Rue de la Montagne – Sainte Geneviève*, Paris (n.d.). Source: ImageZeno.org, ID-no. 20001850032, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=64881668.
3 Unknown, propaganda poster (1944), Digital Center, Institute for Contemporary History Belgrade.
4 Unknown, Serbian anti-NATO poster, https://www.reddit.com/r/Hasan_Piker/comments/17slihf/nato_serbian_antinato_poster_1990s/.
5 Juliane Prade-Weiss, Mural in front of bombarded Serbian state TV headquarters, Belgrade (15 August 2021). © Juliane Prade-Weiss.
6 Juliane Prade-Weiss, Monument commemorating the death of employees during a 1999 NATO air raid (15 August 2021). © Juliane Prade-Weiss.
7 Unknown, *Querdenker* protesting anti-COVID-19 policies. © picture alliance / SULUPRESS.

IDA WELLS'S PRINT ACTIVISM

1 Miss Ida B. Wells: *Southern Horrors: Lynch Law In All Its Phases*, New York: The New York Age Print (1892), cover, in: Ida B. Wells, *The Light of Truth: Writings of an Anti-Lynching Crusader*, ed. by Mia Bay, New York: Penguin (2014), p. 57.