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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION	2
<hr/>	
CHAPTER 1: IMAGINATION AND POLITICS	
<hr/>	
CHAPTER 1.1 - Democracy and Electoral Systems	3
CHAPTER 1.2 – Locating the imagination within the political sphere	6
CHAPTER 1.3 - Nationalism and Imagined Communities	7
CHAPTER 1.4 - Charles Taylor and Social Imaginaries	9
CHAPTER 1.5 - Yaron Ezrahi and Political Imaginaries	11
CHAPTER 1.6 - Conclusion	14
CHAPTER 2: IMAGINATION AND THE BREXIT REFERENDUM	
<hr/>	
CHAPTER 2.1 – The case of the United Kingdom’s Referendum to exit the European Union	15
CHAPTER 2.3 – Evidential arguments for the imagination in Brexit Referendum	17
CHAPTER 2.3 – Conclusion	25
CHAPTER 3: ARE VOTERS RATIONAL?	
<hr/>	
CHAPTER 3.1 – Towards the motivation for action	26
CHAPTER 3.2 – Arguments towards a Humean conception of rationality	30
CHAPTER 3.3 – Conclusion	35
CHAPTER 4: POLITICS OF IMAGINATIONS	
<hr/>	
CHAPTER 4.1 – Political communication: from Imagination to action	35
5. CONCLUSION	41
<hr/>	
6. REFERENCES	42
<hr/>	
7. SUMMARY / ABSTRACT	43
<hr/>	

Introduction

In a democratic presidential or parliamentary election, elected politicians rely on receiving a mandate to govern by winning the required votes from the citizens. If the majority votes are the end goal of political parties and politicians, convincing and persuasive communication to gain the votes they need is essential for influencing individuals towards their cause. Moreover the political communication of parties and individuals has to be perfected and utilised effectively. One main assumption of commonly perceived and accepted methods of persuasion is based on the reliance on factual information on issues, appealing to the rational (reasoning) faculty of individuals. It is not uncommon to hear judgments that voters are making “irrational” choices, if they do not consider or accept the factual information provided by relevant experts or politicians.¹ What I am proposing in this thesis contains a descriptive and normative claim. First, if my argument is successful, it will establish the link and importance of considering that voters can be influenced through the engagement of their imagination, and that their voting behaviours are not solely dominated by factual information alone. If imagination is part and parcel of the political sphere, it is then possible for voting behaviour to be influenced through the imagination. The main case study that I will use to examine this line of argument is the 2016 referendum (direct democracy) in the United Kingdom on the citizens’ desires to continue in the European integration project or leave the European Union. Second, if voting behaviour can be influenced through the imagination, then the theory that will help us to understand voters’ behaviour should also include the faculty of imagination. Hence I argue for the adoption of a Humean perspective as a better conceptual framework for understanding the behaviour of voters as compared to the standard rational choice theory. It can also be observed that the judgement on voters being irrational is partly derived from the perspective of standard rational choice theory. The argument against adopting standard rational choice as a way for understanding voting behaviour will highlight that voters are not necessarily voting irrationally particularly when considered through the Humean perspective. Lastly, the politics of imagination demonstrates how politicians in their campaigns attempt to influence individuals towards their cause through calculated and

¹ The political events of 2016 have inspired Oxford dictionaries to coin “Post-truth” as the word of the year due to the seemingly increased usage following those political events. Post-truth is defined as “an adjective relating to circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than emotional appeals.” <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-37995600>, accessed 06-06-17.

crafted political communication that targets the imagination. Chapter 1 will begin with a brief explanation of my choice of the Brexit referendum as a case study among other political events. It deals with the concept of democracy, variants of modern democracies, voting and the implication of electoral systems. I will also examine how the imagination can be found in the political sphere through the important interrelated concepts that are the contributions of Benedict Anderson, Charles Taylor and Yaron Ezrahi. Chapter 2 will focus on the analysis of the Brexit referendum through empirical study done by the British Election Study to locate the concepts mentioned in chapter 1. Chapter 3 is where I argue for a Humean perspective in comparison with the standard rational choice theory in explaining and understanding voting behaviour as being rational. And finally, chapter 4 is an illustration of the political communication adopted by Brexit Leave and Remain campaigns that appeal to the imagination in an attempt to persuade, convince and motivate voting behaviour onto their side.

Chapter 1: Imagination and Politics

1.1 Democracy and Electoral Systems

Any individual that has been trained, informed, or concerned about the concept of democracy or the democratic practices of nation states should undoubtedly be aware of the differences in the conception and practices of democracy. Before discussing the politics of imagination, I will highlight two brief but important points connected to my argument. Firstly, there are two common forms of democracies that are currently in practice, direct and representative democracy. The former is largely (and ideally) based on the ancient Greek political model and understanding of the political realm. Legitimate (male) citizens of the city-state leave the private realm of their lives (*oikos*) to gather in the *polis*, discuss and persuade other qualified individuals on political matters concerning the city-state. Hannah Arendt notes that for the Greeks, to be political is to make decisions through words and persuasion rather than through violence or authoritarian commands; they consider the latter methods as pre-political, similar to the despotic powers used by the head of the household to rule, or reflective of what they consider to be the undesirable characteristics of barbarian empires in Asia.² Over many centuries since then, the Greek version of democracy has evolved into much of the current form of representative democracy, whereby candidates are elected into government to represent the citizens, and

² Arendt, Hannah, *The Human Condition*, pp. 26-27.

to make decisions on the affairs of the nation-state. Within representative democracy there are three further manifestations of such governance within the democratic system, which are respectively known as parliamentary, presidential and mixed systems. Within this variety of democratic systems, the legitimate power of the officials elected into government rests upon the votes of the citizens. In some mixed systems, those elected through their national election can further elect presidents or prime ministers. What complicates the process of choosing politicians in representative democracies is the different type of electoral systems, which is the second point I will briefly address.

In his book *Electoral Systems*, political scientist David M Farrell explains that “electoral systems determine the means by which votes are translated into seats in the process of electing politicians into office.”³ A free and fair election has been one selling point (among others) that modern democracies have used in order to advance the adoption of such a perceived ideal of governance among nation-states. In addition, the legitimacy of the elected members of parliament (or congress) acting on behalf of the nation is secured when citizens entrust the mandate of running the country to the winning party and politicians through their votes. The ways through which those votes translate into political power might contain some complexity depending on the electoral systems adopted. Based on the work of Blais and Massicotte, the three common structures that can be found in electoral systems can be separated into plurality, majority, and proportional representation.⁴

Democratic countries might however decide to adopt a mixed system of proportional representation with plurality or majority systems. The simplest variation of such a mixed system is where the voter is given only one vote. That one vote will be used twice, once to determine the constituency candidate and the second to add the total of each party’s win in the regional list.⁵ This example however is taken from the Federal Republic of Germany between 1949 and 1953. More complex systems exist in different varieties in current practices. I will mention one further elaboration on mixed systems that rely on both direct democracy and representative democracy.

The legislation of certain democratic countries allows for obligatory or mandatory referendums to occur alongside national elections focused on choosing representative government. Referendums require electorates to vote directly on certain specific issues in

³ Farrell, D, M, *Electoral systems: Comparative studies*, pp. 4.

⁴ Blais, Andre, & Massicotte, Louis, *Electoral Systems*, pp. 40.

⁵ Farrell, D, M, *Electoral systems: Comparative studies*, pp. 112.

order to legitimise the popular approval or disapproval of proposals. One such example can be found in Switzerland, where frequent referendum voting sessions are called upon to obtain the mandate from the majority of their citizens on domestic and international issues. This is reflective of an attempt to pursue the ideal of *demokratia*, “the rule of the people” (direct democracy).⁶ It can also be observed that some countries that do not have a mandatory referendum, yet are still able from time to time to call upon citizens to vote on referendums on specific issues for the citizens related to the national interest. Some recent examples are the 2014 Scottish referendum for independence, and the 2016 Brexit referendum to determine the UK’s position on leaving the European integration project.

It is within direct democracy or the referendum where the Greek conception of democracy, *the rule of the people*, is revealed in the clearest manner when voters cast their decision as a collective in deciding the outcome of a specific issue within the nation-state. Voting in direct democracy does not rely on a complex electoral system found in presidential or legislative elections employing majority, proportional representation or mixed systems. Furthermore, it is not as easily subjected to manipulation done by electoral engineers through the adjustment of electoral formulas, district sizes, and other alterable variables in order to achieve the best outcome for the dominant party. The outcome of a referendum reflects the sentiments of the people or of the “General Will”.⁷ Thus, my reason for focusing on the Brexit referendum is based on the following three points: Firstly, it is not under the influence of a complicated electoral system that might potentially change the outcome of the voting results based on variables (e.g. the list system involving the separation of districts, formulas, tiers, thresholds, and preferences for candidate) that can affect the final result of the election. Secondly, referendums are directed at specific issues that require the majority vote of the electorate to express the collective view on the adoption or rejection of a specific proposal. Politicians can then rely or use the outcome as a legitimate claim supporting or rejecting that proposal. Referendums are closer to the form of direct democracy expressing the “General Will” or an expression of the sentiment on the ground. Thirdly, the votes in a referendum weigh the same between a “yes” or “no” answer to the specific issue only, which is in contrast to how a vote might carry a different

⁶ Swiss Parliament / National elections are held once in four years.

⁷ In the introductory notes by Christopher Betts on Rousseau’s *General Will*, he notes that “what does concern Rousseau is the source of political authority, and here he is firm: it lies not with the government, of whatever kind, but with the people as a whole, expressing the general will, and therefore sovereign”, pp. xviii.

weight in proportional representation or mixed systems. In a referendum, the votes of each individual are counted and accumulated to reflect the total number of “yes” or “no”, so each vote cast by individuals weighs the same compared to elections dependant on list systems.

Does the focus on a referendum or direct democracy suggest that the politics of imagination is not applicable to presidential and parliamentary elections? The answer is a limited no and here’s why. Results from direct democracy are less susceptible to influence from the respective factors involved in certain electoral systems (e.g. list system) employed by each country. However, voting is still dependent fundamentally on the political behaviour of individuals. The more effective and successful the persuasion to influence voters to lean towards a candidate, a political-societal proposal, or electing representatives into parliament, the higher are the chances for the effects of certain electoral systems to be limited. Results will be less subjected to manipulation done by electoral engineers through the adjustments of electoral formulas, district sizes, and other alterable variables. In short, a desired election result depends on convincing individuals to vote specifically, and while it is possible that certain parameters can alter the final results, it can be limited if voters are successfully persuaded to support a candidate or political party.

1.2 Locating the imagination within the political sphere

The success of any election campaign does not just rely solely on factual information to convince voters. Persuasion directed toward the imagination of individuals should be deliberated and considered, but the task here is focused on locating the imagination within the political sphere. I will rely on the main arguments of Benedict Anderson, Charles Taylor and Yaron Ezrahi, to illustrate how imagination and politics are intricately intertwined and hence pertinent for considering voting behaviour. Firstly, individuals within a national context imagine themselves to belong to a singular, undivided and unified community. Secondly, within each community, certain ways and customs have framed the way that individuals imagine how each one should behave as fellow members living together in the same society. Lastly, individuals acquainted with the practices of democratic regimes have in their minds, the importance of their voices concerning matters in society. Elections and referendums are based on that expectation and are part and parcel of the ideas found within the democratic regime. Such ideas have to be acted upon by

individuals in various capacities for the existence of such regime. All three points represent the focus that the three authors have on a specific area involving the role of imagination in the political realm. Both Taylor and Ezrahi acknowledge the work of Anderson as an important point of reference for their respective work. How do all three authors contribute separately in locating the imagination within the political realm? Anderson's *Imagined Communities* deals specifically with the cultural origins, and the formation of the nation that communities claim to belong. The emphasis rests on collectives of individuals sharing and belonging to an imagined political community i.e. the nation. Following Anderson, Taylor's examination of the imaginary pertains similarly to the collective but highlights more elaborately how individuals live with each other and depend on the imaginaries to ensure that each person inhabiting a specific community fit, function, and have expectations of one another. Taylor is also concerned with how social practices can be introduced and adopted by the community and how that affects what he terms "social imaginaries". Lastly, Ezrahi contributes to the discussion by highlighting that political regimes rely on widely held and accepted political imaginaries inherent within each regime. The very existence of a political regime depends on individuals acting and endorsing prevalent metaphors, fiction, images, conceptions, or ideas. In the following sub-sections, I will present a more detailed account of their arguments.

1.3 Nationalism and Imagined Communities

Benedict Anderson offers a different perspective on nationalism and suggests that the cultural origins of modern nations should be examined instead of considering nationalism as merely an ideological construct. Anderson highlights three developments in history in which the cultural origins of the modern nation are located: the decline of the religious communities and of the dynastic realm, changes in the conception of time, and the emergence of print capitalism.⁸ I will elaborate briefly on these developments for a clearer perspective on Anderson's main claim. The first development is the decline of religious communities that is connected to 1) the rise of rationalist secularism during the Enlightenment period, 2) the diminished confidence of the sacredness of their language (a criteria for membership) and subsequent gradual demotion of such said language (e.g. Latin), 3) the widening of different human lives due to the exploration of foreign lands (the far east, India, America and the like), and lastly 4) the decline of the dynastic realm lies

⁸ Ozkirimli, Umut, *Theories of nationalism: A critical introduction*, pp. 148.

largely due to the loss of the legitimacy that monarchists have claimed as their right to rule. Their claim to divinity as a source of legitimacy lost its appeal and conviction among the populations (subjects) beneath them. The second development starts with Anderson's use of the term "Homogenous, Empty time" from Walter Benjamin to show the change in the perception of time from a "Messianic time, a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present."⁹ When communities were largely in the realm of religion or dynasty, historical events were divine providence and were neither linked temporally nor causally. The importance of the change to homogenous, empty time, according to Anderson, allows for the idea of a sociological organism, a solid community, a nation, moving steadily down or up calendrically, in history.¹⁰ This leads to the final development of print capitalism and its effect on the cultural origins of the modern state. The increase in literacy, the rise of print capitalism (in the form of books, novels and newspapers) and together with the change in conception of time, facilitates an avenue where individuals can go on "thinking" the nation. The ever increasing circulation of books and newspapers to an expanding number of the reading population over time made it possible for "people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways... the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is visibly rooted in everyday life."¹¹

Building on the summarised version of the premises above, Anderson proposed that a nation should be defined as an *imagined political community* that is imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign.¹² He elaborates that 1) A nation is imagined because "the members of the smallest nations will never know most of their fellow members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."¹³ 2) A nation is imagined as limited because each country has a "finite, elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations", and does not encompass all living human beings. 3) A nation is imagined as sovereign to guarantee the freedom of the citizen via the sovereign state and not with "divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm" common before the Enlightenment period. 4) A nation is imagined as a community

⁹ Anderson, Benedict, *Imagined Communities*, 1983, pp. 24.

¹⁰ Ibid, pp. 26.

¹¹ Ibid, pp. 35-36.

¹² Ibid, pp. 6.

¹³ Ibid, pp. 6.

because of its' conception as a "deep, horizontal comradeship... regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each nation."¹⁴

1.4 Charles Taylor and Social Imaginaries

Acknowledging Benedict Anderson and Jürgen Habermas as key influences in his work, Charles Taylor's *Modern Social Imaginaries* is concerned primarily with "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations."¹⁵ Taylor's examination starts with the contrast between the pre-modern and modern moral order because the importance of a moral order as Taylor asserts, is that it "tells us something about how we ought to live together in the society." Moreover, a moral order "is an identification of features of the world or divine action or human life that make certain norms both right and realisable."¹⁶ The more integrated the moral order in the daily lives of individuals, the more of a central role it occupies within society and politics. For Taylor, one example of a pre-modern moral order can be observed through societies arranged around the concept of hierarchy that corresponds to the hierarchy of the cosmos. In the Platonic-Aristotelian conception, hierarchy is based on the idea of the "form". In other societies, correspondence theories based on natural order are the basis of moral order: the lion is the king among animals, eagle among the birds and so the king is in his kingdom.¹⁷ Another type is based on hierarchical complementarity, where society is made up of different orders. They are however not mutual or equal in status. An example of such a moral order can be seen in the medieval idealisation of the society where individuals inhabit the three orders of orators, bellatores, labortores: those who pray, those who fight, and those who work. While they depend on each other, some positions are held to be more dignified and virtuous due to their function being accepted as more important.¹⁸ The acceptance of any form of moral order as the basis where the society (between individuals) is built on has an implication to what sort of function individuals are expected to fulfil in the societal order. Taylor argues that the modern moral order permeating our society is largely based on two separate assertions made by Grotius and Locke: Grotius maintains that the nature of the constitutive

¹⁴ Ibid, pp. 7.

¹⁵ Ibid, pp. 23.

¹⁶ Taylor, Charles, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, 2004, pp. 1 & 8.

¹⁷ Ibid, pp. 10.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 11.

members of a society are rational and peaceful, while Locke advocates the natural rights of the constitutive members, whereby the underlying idea of society is the mutual benefit of individuals and the defence of their natural rights.¹⁹ This view is consistent with Anderson's observation on the decline of the religious communities and dynastic realm, that asserted different forms of moral order dominant in each respective time period. The social imaginary of each group is not imaginary in the sense of fantasy whereby it is not grounded on reality, but rather is based on past and present experiences of individuals (social, economical, moral orders, historical developments), and the norms and accepted paradigms (social, cultural, political, economical) within groups of people or the entire society. The term *imaginary* is chosen by Taylor because 1) the focus is on the way ordinary people imagine their social surroundings, 2) the social imaginary is something shared among large groups of people, if not by the whole society and 3) it is the common understanding that common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy is made possible.²⁰

However, the social imaginary is not static or monolithic. Taylor points out rightly that "any social imaginary at any give time is complex. It incorporates a sense of the normal expectations we have of each other, the kind of common understanding that enables us to carry out the collective practices that make up our social life."²¹ He emphasises the importance of revolution in the imaginary over the centuries: from the period of Paleolithic, Neolithic, religious societies to the current contemporary western social world. The key shifts in the revolution of the imaginary are as follows. In earlier societies, the inseparable links between religious life and social life can be observed when the whole community is involved in ritualistic activities as a single body while they are lead by functionaries of priests, chief and the likes within the group. In this society, individuals are not able to imagine themselves outside the context of being members within its inherent hierarchical order. The shift away from imagining oneself as separate from his membership of a community begins with the disenchantment of religious practices, nudging the (embedded) personal moral responsibilities gradually into the social imaginary, promoting the inclination towards the contemporary modern view of individualism;²² 1) a self understanding individual embedded in society 2) influenced by the prevalent moral order

¹⁹ Ibid, pp. 3-5.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 23.

²¹ Ibid, pp. 24.

²² Ibid, pp. 51, 64.

(underlined by theories the likes of natural law theory etc.) 3) essential identity (as a father, a son, a sister etc.) and the membership of a community, 4) promoted virtues of discipline and personal devotion (through the influence of Christianity and the conception of civility), 5) personal flourishing guided by mutual benefits of other individuals and other prevalent moral order in the community.

The key reason why social imaginaries are not static and complex is how ideas have the ability to inform and influence the lives of individuals and the collective. Yet, at the same time, one has to acknowledge that certain prevalent common understanding (of moral order) can still operate in communities prior to the adoption of any proposed accepted theory. The revolution of the social imaginaries in the different periods mentioned above is one case in point; theory and practice are not a one-sided affair. Individuals residing within a collective are free agents endowed with reason, having an implicit grasp on the social spaces that they have to navigate on a daily basis. This understanding does not require an explicit social theory or theoretical description for the individual to function socially. Taylor gives a useful analogy to cement his observations: “the understanding implicit in practice stands to social theory in the same relation that my ability to get around a familiar environment stands to a (literal) map of this area. I am very well able to orient myself without ever having adopted the standpoint of overview the map offers.”²³

In conclusion, Taylor’s conception of social imaginaries traces the change in the roles of individuals, the expectations within a society, and the different moral social order to highlight how a social imaginary becomes dominant in a given community. These social imaginaries are useful for understanding the behaviour of individuals adopting such a stance while they navigate the social spaces of daily life. The implication of Taylor’s social imaginary will be further discussed in chapter 2. Here I turn to the last author in locating the imagination in the political sphere.

1.5 Yaron Ezrahi and Political Imaginaries

In a monarchy, the legitimacy of the ruler is dependent on the divine rights of kings. Such divinity is bestowed when the following ritualistic acts are conferred during the coronation ceremony: consecrated oil is dabbed on his forehead, verbal and figurative representations are displayed and proclaimed to link the “anointed” king to the figure of a human god resembling and mimicking the model of Christ, furthering the claim on divinity inherent in

²³ Ibid, pp. 26.

the position he is now adorning. The spoken and physical acts in the crowning of the king are performances that a monarchy as a regime, depend upon. The daily tasks performed by court officials, intellectuals, legal experts and other figures within the institutions support and reinforce the rationality of such a regime. The outer appearance of the monarchy displayed through the glamour of their garments, and splendiddness of their official residence further sustain the image of divinity and rights of the monarch regime. What does the description above on the monarchy have in connection to the imagination? In examining the period of time between the (peak of) monarchical rule in Western societies and democratic regimes, political scientist Yaron Ezrahi's book, entitled *Imagined democracies: Necessary political fictions*, demonstrates that all the elements cumulatively maintained the "widely believed imaginary, the collective fiction of the divine right of the kings... founded on an imaginary enacted in a host of versions by specific rituals, tropes, and institutions."²⁴ The erosion of the collectively believed imaginary of the monarch due to the rise of democracy gave way to a new perceived imaginary: the right of popular sovereignty, its principles and supporting practices. If we consider the historical events of the American and French revolutions, the challenge made to the divine right of the kings and their legitimacy to rule is one of the key aspects of democratic sovereignty. In the case of Britian, the Glorious Revolution of 1688-89 started the journey towards the transference of powers of the monarchy over to the parliament and the establishment of the supremacy of the parliament over the crown.²⁵

Throughout this historical development, Ezrahi argues for the following:

1) In order for a political regime to exist as a political world, it has to perform well just like a symphony orchestra. Any rendition of a musical masterpiece will not be properly delivered without the various members playing their part, with their expertise, the leadership of the conductor, quality of their instruments, the appreciation of the musical composition and so on. While the symphony plays to the tune of the written musical score, Ezrahi highlights that a democratic society precariously exists largely upon the dependence of mutually reinforcing democratic ideals, political culture, political imaginaries,

²⁴ Ezrahi, Yaron, *Imagined Democracies: Necessary political fictions*, pp. 2.

²⁵ However, another additional collective believed imaginary was going on in the same period, that which was termed as the "popery", where people believed that Catholics were actively plotting the overthrow of church and state. The causes of concerns were more than fear or hatred of Catholics but the widely believed theory that England would become a satellite state under the control of the Catholic Monarch identified with French King Louis XIV, http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/civil_war_revolution/glorious_revolution_01.shtml, accessed 20-03-17.

institutions, and practices. The existence of the democratic regime must be imagined and performed by multiple agencies, just as the performance is examined through the regime of the monarchy.²⁶

2) The political behaviour of individual agents is thereby important for the ideal performance in an ideal democratic regime. However, the highly anticipated and expected democratic piece usually falls short of its original score, due largely to the different ideals of governments, individuals, and groups who are the very agents constituting the performance. In addition to individualistic or collective desires, contentions on the different interpretation of the written constitutions affect the eventual performance of the regime. The political agencies and behaviour of individuals are the fundamental rhythm and the swaying of their actions can be influenced towards specific causes in the society they inhabit.

3) The faculty of imagination is commonly used in daily life and in politics. Ezrahi argues that one cannot think, reason, speak, act, or experience the world without engaging the imagination. The faculty of imagination has the ability to “transform(s) and fix in our mind past experiences, shape our present ones, structure and focus our orientations, postulate the theoretical entities we use to enjoy art, escape to utopias, or enter new worlds of meaning.”²⁷

4) Just as the collectively believed imaginary that gives the monarchical regime legitimacy, individuals navigating the social spaces of society can be positioned to act and behave politically through political imaginaries. Ezrahi defines political imaginaries as “fictions, metaphors, ideas, images, or conceptions that acquire the power to regulate and shape political behaviour and institutions in a particular society.”²⁸ Both democratic and monarchical regimes mentioned thus far are examples of such political imaginaries. However, the creation of political imaginaries to influence political behaviour does not just rest in the hands of individuals found in religion (religious communities), empires or kingdoms. Ezrahi highlights two further examples of how philosophers have relied on imaginaries in order to shape society. The first example involves Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz’s recognition that dazzling the public’s imagination was important in promoting and eliciting support for science, whereby exhibitions on scientific inventions could be

²⁶ Ezrahi, Yaron, *Imagined Democracies: Necessary political fictions*, pp. 1-2.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 5.

²⁸ Ibid, pp. 3.

conducted to evoke respect and support from the public, matching miracles in religious contextual.²⁹ The second example is that of Thomas Hobbes, who argued for imagination as an important part of the human faculties, attempted an effort to “enlist the popular imagination for the sake of a rational construction of the state”.³⁰ The popular imagination here involves the image of the *Leviathan*, the state being like an *Artificial Man* and the workings within the state as *Organs* similar to those of human body.³¹ Hobbes marks the beginning of a new conception of arranging society around the social contract: that individuals come into a “contract” with each other in order to determine how to live together peacefully. Among the philosophers (Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau) advocating such an agreement, each arriving at his own particular version of the social contract with differences in perspective of the “State of nature” and “Natural rights.” However, the forms of social contract theories advocated by each philosopher entails that individual engages the imagination of the self and his or her natural rights, and the collective in the state of nature. While implicit, imagination plays a part that is fundamental to the adoption of the social contract theories, which in turn, provides the foundation for a political regime that resembles the *Leviathan*, limited and representative government in the Lockean sense, and the prevailing power of the general will of the people in the community in Rousseau.

1.6 Conclusion

When a fair and free election is conducted in a democratic nation-state, the votes are translated into seats in parliament or positions in government. Depending on the type of democracy and electoral systems, the conception of the “rule of the people” might differ in degrees even though at its core, the results of the votes are perceived to be the legitimate source of elected officials, the will of the citizens, electing their preferred candidate. A referendum or direct democracy relies on citizens to vote on specific issues that require a majority of the electorate to express collective consent with the proposed policy, or major decision that needs undertaking as discussed on the national level. With this understanding, my thesis focus on the Brexit referendum (and not for example 2016 US presidential election) is selected largely due to the results representing the sentiments of the electorate, without the influence of electoral formulas or variables that might affect the same overall distribution of votes. I have also presented different examples of how respective philosophers have considered both aspects of imagination and politics in their writings.

²⁹ Ibid, pp. 21.

³⁰ Ibid, pp. 20.

³¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, pp. 9.

Starting with Benedict Anderson and his examination of the cultural origins of nations, he argues that nations are largely made up of imagined communities. Charles Taylor, through his examination of the move from the pre-modern to modern moral order, argues that individuals each going about their daily lives, are guided by social imaginaries. The different ways individuals imagine how they fit together with other people, the expectations they have of each other, the practices, normative ideas or images that helps them navigate their social spaces, guide their social existence. Yaron Ezrahi observes that if a community resides in a nation-state that is governed, for a significant time as a democratic society, such a regime supported by individuals, requires their performative action on the tenets of democracy for its continued existence. It is also mentioned that ideas, fictions, metaphors, images, or conceptions (termed as political imaginaries) on the components of the democratic regime would have existed and circulated for the lifespan of such regime. From the social contract theorists' perspectives, the imagining of the self and the collective is implicit in their conceptions. In the next chapter, the workings of the imagined communities, social imaginaries and political imaginaries will be the main factors used in analysing the Brexit referendum to substantiate my claim that the politics of imagination exist within the political sphere, and can indeed play a part in influencing the decision and political behaviour of individuals.

Chapter 2: Imagination and the Brexit Referendum

2.1 The case of the United Kingdom's Referendum to exit the European Union

Voting to remain and leave the European Union, if journalist Simon Kuper's view was to be considered, was an act where "anti-elitist revolt led by an elite, a coup by one set of public schoolboys against another".³² The 2016 Brexit referendum wasn't the first time that issues with the European project were played out in the UK. Margaret Thatcher's increasing anti-European views triggered her political downfall in the 1990s and her successor, John Major's failure to close the division of Euro-sceptics within his party ranks surrounding the Maastricht treaty on European integration also led to his eventual fall.³³ Domestic politics in Westminster has supporters on both sides of this issue: the EU friendly group favouring further collaboration with other European states and the naysayers wanting to avoid giving more power onto the supranational level of the

³² <https://www.ft.com/content/f4dedd92-43c7-11e6-b22f-79eb4891c97d>, accessed 26th December 2016.

³³ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jun/24/david-cameron-downfall-european-tragedy>, accessed 26th December 2016.

European community, thereby diluting national sovereignty to act when issues involves national interests. David Cameron's promise for a referendum during his campaign for re-election in 2015, had to rely on electoral support to remain as a member of the European union. He expected a win for the "Remain" campaign to provide a clear answer to the Euro-sceptics in his party regarding the public support for the EU. On June 23rd of 2016, the referendum was held and the result was: 52% of electoral voters (turnout was at 72.16%) chose to leave the European Union.

While it is worth considering the issue of European integration from the perspective of domestic politics within parties and political elites in Britain, the referendum has effectively transferred the decision to citizens, which makes public support towards such an enterprise an important consideration, especially since the process of European integration does not just happen when pushed by political elites but involves public opinions surrounding it.³⁴ There have been numerous attempts to understand the factors for the majority vote for "Leave" during the Brexit referendum that range from voters ignoring economical and political warnings as an attempt of revolting against the establishment and elites in Westminster, to the rise of nationalist sentiments that regard the EU as a significant (bad) other.³⁵

"Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?" This question posed on the ballot simplified the decision for the voters and separates the citizens and campaigners into two camps: the pro-Brexit "Leave" voters and the "Remain" voters. These two camps indicated a divide in how the UK's membership in the European Union is regarded, not necessarily just a recent development considering the years of UK's membership in the Union.³⁶ The task then for each side of the campaigners focussed on their attempts to get the larger share of the votes for their respective positions. The task thereby necessarily required communication from each campaign towards their electorates, the discussion revolving around the pros and cons of the UK's continual membership with the rest of the 27-nation blocs in the EU.

³⁴ Anderson, Christopher. "Economic Uncertainty and European Solidarity Revisited: Trends in public support for European Integration", pp. 113.

³⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36574526>, accessed 05-12-16.

³⁶ Public opinions have been measured over the years and graphic presentation of the survey can be found at the following web link, <http://theconversation.com/polling-history-40-years-of-british-views-on-in-or-out-of-europe-61250>, <https://www.ipsos-mori.com/researchpublications/researcharchive/2435/European-Union-membership-trends.aspx>, accessed 29-12-16.

2.2 Evidential arguments for the imagination in Brexit Referendum

In this section, I will rely on a study released by the British Election Study as an attempt to demonstrate that imagination exists in the political sphere as described in chapter 1. Based on surveys done by the British Election Study prior to the Referendum, 30,895 respondents were asked in a survey the following open-ended question: “What matters most to you when deciding how to vote in the EU referendum?”³⁷ The responses collected in this survey were matched with the respondents who have indicated their intention of voting for “leave” or “remain”. The results were then presented as visual word clouds (visual display of answers) for the clear presentation and identification of the concerns from the respondents. As the word cloud below shows, the main concern of “Leave” voters was the issue of immigration and subsequently, issues of sovereignty, borders, control, and country feature predominantly in their responses to what they considered to be important issues regarding the Brexit referendum.



Figure 1. Visual word cloud of survey participants and their concerns on UK's membership in the EU, of those indicated that their vote would be for “Leave”.

The “Remain” voters, on the other hand, were mainly concerned with the national economy, with issues of rights, security, stability, and the future as important issues on why they would vote for remain.

³⁷ <http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/what-mattered-most-to-you-when-deciding-how-to-vote-in-the-eu-referendum/#.WIDWeLZ95E4>, accessed 19-01-17.



Figure 2. Visual word cloud of survey participants and their concerns on the UK's membership in the EU, of those indicated that their vote would be for "Remain".



Figure 3. Visual word cloud of survey participants and their concerns on the UK's membership in the EU, of those indicated that their vote would be for "Undecided".

The word clouds (figures 1 and 2) underscore the differences existing between the voters' inclinations, perspectives and concerns towards the idea of staying or leaving the European Union. In the following section, I will account for how those differences are found within the imagination.

a) Imagined Community

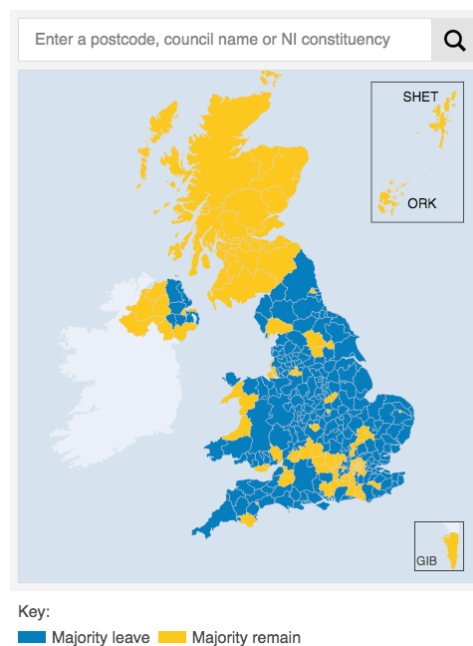
For an effective campaign to persuade the public to take sides to leave or remain in the European Union, each camp had to pick the concerns that would mobilise the intended voters to their cause. The issues that each side chose to focus on, did not happen in a

vacuum, but were largely dependent on the views predominantly held by groups of voters, each holding onto different perspectives and views regarding the European Union and the UK's continual participation in it. If no such disagreements existed within the UK, the call for a referendum might have easily been relegated to other pressing domestic concerns. Campaigners on each side found themselves having to pit for the pool of voters separated by political party partisanship, personal convictions on the matter of being in the EU, identity, socio-economic class, undecided voters, disinterested voters, and nationality (Welsh, Scottish & Northern Irish). It became clear quite quickly that the United Kingdom is less than united in the decision to remain or to leave the European Union. Research into the general sentiment of the public regarding a pro-Europe stance by the polling company "Populus", subsequently segmented the voting groups into three sides: the "ardent internationalists", "comfortable Europhiles", "Engaged metropolitans" on one side of the ring, the opposition comprising of "strong sceptics" and "EU hostiles" on the other end of the spectrum, and in between these two poles are the groups of "disengaged middle" and "heart vs. head". The last two groups mentioned were described as individuals who would never love the EU but could be won over if there was an emphasis on security issues for remaining in the Union.³⁸ Both polarised sides of the pro-Leave and pro-Remain did not need much convincing in order for them to cast votes for their respective views. What each campaign needed was to convince and mobilise the electorate who were undecided, to favour their campaign and voting for their cause accordingly.

This also points to the fact that the United Kingdom does not just mean one coherent community. The separate territories of the English, Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish are united through some form of social contract that had been arrived at during historical events centuries ago. The political progress of the United Kingdom at this current stage means that each of the respective states have varying political powers to determine their own affairs but limited influence on the affairs of the United Kingdom, the nation-state on the whole as an entity. On one level, the United Kingdom can be appealed to as a community, but only because it is foundationally built upon other communities that have been in union for generations. On another level, as the Brexit referendum has demonstrated effectively and visibly, the inherent communities within the United Kingdom reflect many imagined communities in line with Anderson's conception of the nation-state.

³⁸ <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2016/jul/05/how-remain-failed-inside-story-doomed-campaign>, accessed 18-01-17.

Find local results



Nation results

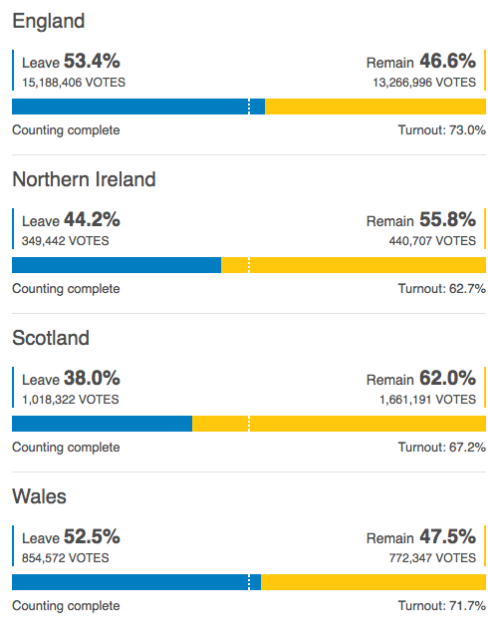


Figure 4. Visual representation of “Leave” and “Remain” voters with an overall turnout at 72.2%.³⁹

Taken into consideration the findings from Figures 1 to 3, certain distinct imagined communities appear in the foreground. Firstly, the voting results can be separated into various nationalities within the UK, demonstrating a separation of communities on the national level. Yet even within England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, the imagined community is not a single and unified collective when one’s nationality is taken into consideration. If anything, the results show a further split of the electorate within the respective nations. For example in the BBC report in figure 4, while England leads the charge towards the UK leaving European Membership, 46.6% or 13 million voters supported remaining in the European project. That is not to deny that the existence of the imagined community on a national level: state policies that benefit citizens of the nation without prejudices to the county or district they live in, holding a national passport recognised by other countries, and interaction with other nationalities with reference to their own, suggest that the imagined community at the national level does exist in some form. The British Election Study has also showed that some groups of voters were expressing nostalgia and longing for the return to the glory-days of Britain’s military might and substantial international influence at the height of the British Empire.

³⁹ http://www.bbc.com/news/politics/eu_referendum/results, accessed 09-04-17.

Another observation that might appear intuitive and hardly ground breaking will be to claim that different variety of communities or groups exist within a rather sizeable nation. If one adopts or accepts the view that in any nation, individuals gather and belong in different groups, a matter of fact due to different preferences, beliefs, religious, family and societal influence (or a combination of those factors) held by each person, this will strengthen a conception of the imagined community on the national level (the UK or individual states) that is less unified or homogenous.

The Brexit referendum however reveals the existence of smaller disparate imagined communities within the UK, when called upon to make a collective showcase, the general will of the electorate. The issues that surfaced in the word cloud for voters of “remain” or “leave” demonstrate the presence of an additional imagined community. The “Leave” voters appear to subscribe to the imagined community on the national level and they think of themselves as belonging to that community, needing to re-establish the sovereignty of that (national) imagined community, which is exclusive to members of that nationality. As illustrated in Figure 1., the voters’ concerns for being adamant about leaving the European Union rest primarily on the issues of Immigration, Sovereignty, Borders, Control, and Country. These key issues appears to tie these individuals into a collective group that suppose that European Union membership is detrimental to the Nation that they are part of, to the sovereignty and control that usually remain within the domain of the politics of the nation state, borders under the control of “kinsmen” who hold the right to determine the kind of individuals who are allowed to enter, exit or who should be forced out, and the unique identity of the people living in the land with their specific culture, history, and tradition comprising what they recognise as their own. In short, the “Leave” voters felt perturbed and unsettled by the dilution of the nationalism that occupied their social imaginary. It is interesting to note at this point through Figure 4., that Scottish, Northern Irish, Londoners and major English metropolitan urban areas voted mostly in favour for “Remain” as compared to Welsh and the English outside of London and urban areas in major cities.⁴⁰ Evidently, this sense of nationalism does not apply to everyone in the United Kingdom and seems more specific to the British identity that English and Welsh voters associated with themselves.⁴¹ In the case of “Leave” voters, the appeal to

⁴⁰ Zooming in on the map provided by BBC would show that in major metropolitan cities in England, the further away from the urban city center, the higher turnout of “Leave” voters.

⁴¹ In the Scottish case, a 2011 census for the residents of Scotland was conducted and found that 83 percent (3.2 million) of residents admitted to feeling Scottish when asked “What do you feel is your national

nationalism that leavers have adopted is consistent with Anderson's definition of the nation as a cultural artefact, an imagined political community, a community that consists of certain practices and expectations that keep it together, bringing us to the issues of the social imaginaries within imagined communities. This is relevant because Anderson's conception of the imagined community deals with a nationalistic perspective and it is clear that Leave and Remain voters do not share or belong to an identical imagined community. This difference in imagined communities also implies that Remain voters do not give as much attention to nationalism as compared to the Leave camp. One possible explanation might be that Remain voters are able to hold, accept, or consider themselves as belonging to the imagined community of the European community. If we are to have a better understanding as to why the imagined communities of the Remain voters hold a less ardent view of nationalism, the different social imaginaries should be examined.

b) Social Imaginaries

The existence of different imagined communities on various scales will lead us to consider the social imaginaries in each of these communities. It is clear now that different groups, when it comes down to their collective outlook, maintain certain clear position(s) and views towards European integration. These disparate standpoints suggest differences in the social imaginary between these individuals and groups: their differing practices, expectations, and their fittingness with each other within the communities that are based on past and continual personal experiences, individuals sharing similar imaginings of how things are among them as a collective, in the words of Taylor, "the social imaginary is the common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy."⁴² In a sense, the Brexit referendum is essentially the ground where different social imaginaries of groups are to be waged against each other. The results from the British Election Survey gives us an informed look at the differences in the social imaginaries of the pro-Brexit and pro-Remain camps, that also reflects the campaigning messages of both camps during the referendum. Included in the report is a final conclusion on the study by the British Election study that presented their findings that "the campaign was not a fight about which side had the best argument on the issues: very few people

identity?"⁴¹ The overwhelming number of individuals identifying as Scottish underscore a strong perception of the Scottish national identity that do not necessarily coincide perfectly with England, Wales, Northern Ireland or being truly British. <http://www.ethnicity.ac.uk/medialibrary/briefings/dynamicsofdiversity/code-census-briefing-national-identity-scotland.pdf>, accessed 19-03-17.

⁴² Taylor, Charles, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp. 23-24.

voted leave to improve the economy and very few voted remain to reduce immigration. Instead, the fight was about which of these issues was more important.”⁴³ Any political discourse hoping to sway voters towards voting for the cause of “Leave” or “Remain” required their spokesmen to be squarely centred on the primary issues of economy and immigration. In contrast to the “Leave” voters, the “Remain” voters’ concerns do not seem to immediately suggest that continual membership in the European Union might have the detrimental impact on immigration or the sovereignty of the United Kingdom. Instead, they are divided between material security that is connected to the economic effects of leaving the common market that they have been in for 43 years, and the civic and humanistic values of rights, underpinning the conception of the European Union after World War II. The social imaginary of the “Remain” group is one that perhaps understood that the benefits of the Union do not necessarily dictate the loss of sovereignty, border control or the national identity. Lastly, there remains another collective of undecided voters, which the word cloud gives the impression of being unsure on both issues that the “leave” and “remain” voters were concerned with, highlighting once more that the referendum was sharply divided between the issues of immigration and economy. The concerns of the undecided voters at the same time conveyed that they were inhabiting a social imaginary or community that was not as strongly connected to the polarised camps of leave or remain.

It also becomes apparent that since individuals inhabit different social imaginaries, each community consists of a demography of voters, and as such, it is not surprising that campaigners from each camp sought to clarify and identify the social, economic and educational background of individuals in each imagined community, who has an inclination towards “leave”, “remain” or being “undecided” based on the prevalent social imaginaries. The importance of identifying the cleavages and demographics of voters is in developing the right strategy to communicate, in tandem with the social imaginary of each group. Social imaginaries might also be more commonly identified or recognised as public sentiments, even though this public is diverse in nature. No political party or campaign wanting to win the election or referendum can ignore what the voters’ social imaginaries are, and therefore adjust the key pulse of their campaign accordingly. Once the social imaginaries of the groups of voters have been discerned, getting the desired political

⁴³ <http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/bes-findings/what-mattered-most-to-you-when-deciding-how-to-vote-in-the-eu-referendum/#.WIDWeLZ95E4>, accessed 19-01-17.

behaviour of the voters, boils down to appealing to the social imaginaries shared, through discourses that are crafted with the intention of mobilising citizens to vote for the desired outcome. However, as mentioned in chapter 1.4, Taylor recognises the complexity of social imaginaries among different imagined communities are affected by how their lives are lived on a day-to-day basis. What is not considered here are *all* the factors leading up to those very issues close to the minds of both “Remain” and “Leave” voters. Added with the fact that this current secular and technological age, global or domestic events are brought closer through media capitalism, economic conditions, religious beliefs, societal influences; all of which have an influence in shaping the social imaginaries of communities. The issues discussed in Figures 1 to 3 therefore are snapshots of the issues concerning individuals on their decision to vote, but the complex circumstances and social imaginaries leading to it is outside the scope of this thesis. Nevertheless, the social imaginaries in Taylor’s conception can be found in social communities and have an important role to play in the political sphere.

c) Political imaginaries

As established in chapter 1, a fair and free election is an important element within a democratic regime, providing legitimacy for further political action of elected individuals. This legitimacy is in part due to the political imaginaries involved in a democratic regime: the image, expectations, and conceptions that citizens have a say in matters in the country. In the case of the Brexit referendum, political imaginaries are essential to the very idea of a referendum: winning the popular backing of the public votes in order to determine the outcome of an issue that takes place within the domestic political sphere, a strategic political tool to achieve a result that relies on the political imaginaries surrounding direct democracy. The result, based on a common understanding that the referendum represents the voice of the people, will inherit a legitimacy that political elites cannot ignore or reverse. If the people have seemingly spoken, the social imaginary involving democratic practices cannot be disrupted, especially when legitimacy based on future democratic elections and referendums relies on the social and political imaginaries surrounding the democratic regimes. If the resulting majority vote carries the legitimacy and binding force in politics, the “General Will” expressed through the election must be upheld so as to not threaten the established practice and principles within a democratic regime. The “General Will”, the expressed will of the collective in the country is a political imaginary supporting democracy. The push from the Euro-sceptics for a referendum is targeted because firstly,

the political imaginary of the “General Will” is used as leverage for their desire to leave the European Union. Secondly, whatever support they are able to muster through the referendum will be a boost to their cause (unless their plea falls on deaf ears or fail to coincide with the social imaginaries) regardless whether they win the referendum. The results poised as a win for the “Leave” group gained the democratic legitimacy required for separation from the European Union.

The strength of the political imaginary (the idea of the general will) surrounding the referendum became a contest with another political imaginary found in the democratic regime. In chapter 1, I have brought to attention the mixed system as one variant of the democratic governance system. In the case of the United Kingdom, a representative democracy is in place with a mixed system that includes a largely symbolic monarchy (with royal prerogative), parliamentary system with the ability to call for referendums as determined by the Prime Minister. National elections are focused on electing members of parliaments into power, with the party that has the most elected members or seats in the House to form the government led by the leader of the winning party. The national election is based on the same political imaginary that the people vote for the politicians who will run the country on their behalf, with parliament holding the supremacy and sovereignty alongside the rule of law. Referendums conducted on a case-to-case basis only function as an advisory role, and are not legally binding according to the parliamentary act. Politicians championing for the cause of the United Kingdom to leave, recognise that even if they achieve a positive results, the referendum itself does not have a legal binding impact for the government. The call for the referendum is a political strategy, resting primarily on utilising the political imaginary centred on the “will” of the people, to pressure the government (who are voted in by the people) to take action towards leaving the European Union.⁴⁴

2.3 Conclusion

⁴⁴ As events continue to unfold at this point of writing, the Brexit referendum, although not legally binding (in contrast to the Swiss referendum for example) has achieved the effect hoped for by Eurosceptic politicians. The legal challenge mounted by a British citizen Gina Miller, focused on getting judicial support through a legal ruling that the Parliament (that is elected by the people as their representative) have to be consulted before the government triggers Article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty. This development is also an example that certain key political imaginaries within the democratic regime have been pit against each other around the Brexit Referendum: the general will of the people found in both the referendum and the member of parliaments vested power as representatives, parliamentary process and approval of article 50 versus governmental executive powers to trigger the separation process.

Utilising the results conducted by the British Election study, I have thus identified and located the importance of the imagination within the political sphere. The respective arguments put forth by Anderson, Taylor and Ezrahi should appear not to just represent a theoretical concept without practical implications. Together with chapter 1, I have developed a descriptive account that imagination is part and parcel of the political sphere, that political behaviour can be influenced through this faculty, in addition to persuasion employing factual information or self-interest. The next chapter will be focused on accounting for a possible reason for the expressed view that an individual is acting irrationally when not taking facts into account in their action towards something or in their voting behaviour.

Chapter 3: Are voters rational?

3.1 Towards the motivation for action

I have established in chapter 1 that elections are an integral part of democracies and that the results of any election transfer legitimacy and approval to politicians, candidates running for office, political parties, or a particular issue through a referendum. For the desired results in the Brexit Referendum, each campaign has to motivate voters towards the choice of “yes” or “no” respectively. For the campaigners, the most effective way to influence voters to their side is sought, and a theory is needed for those with an interest in predicting possible outcomes of the referendum. Concurrently with the rise of economics and of political science within academic studies, the turn towards studying human behaviour in economic and political sphere became increasingly important. Robert Sugden’s article “Rational choice: a Survey of Contributions from Economics and Philosophy” gives us some background towards the standard rational choice theory that is used to measure and predict human behaviour. This is pertinent for understanding how some individuals have judged that voting behaviour is irrational, a view more prevalently placed onto “Leave” voters.

Sugden identifies that methods used currently to study political behaviour are based on economists’ attempt to explain and predict human behaviour. The economists’ model is built on the assumption that individuals are economic agents and act based on making rational choices.⁴⁵ The positivist economists take the rationality of individuals as identical

⁴⁵ Sugden, R, Rational Choice: A Survey of Contributions from Economics and Philosophy, pp. 751.

to the consistency of their choices; that is if their choices are consistent with the behaviour already detected by economists, and their continual action is consistent with the data collected, then the individuals are behaving rationally. This account as Sugden notes is “a tautology: any theory of choice must postulate some consistent pattern that is to be found in people's choices, and then anyone who chooses as the theory predicts must be acting consistently with that pattern and therefore rationally.”⁴⁶ This account appears to be lacking for Sugden even though it’s a starting point towards defining the rationality of the choices made by individuals. What motivates an individual to action still needs to be addressed and the theories demonstrating that political behaviour is purposive and orientated towards the goals of individuals requires further explanation.⁴⁷ Sugden proceeds to highlight one basic question concerning how the rationality of human behaviour is to be conceived in the standard rational choice theory; namely, is reason *alone* enough to motivate action? The possibility of rational choice theory is based on the assumption that reason can influence action.⁴⁸ This assumption that reason alone can influence action is anchored within a Kantian concept of rationality and is central to the current standard of rational choice theory.⁴⁹

a) Reason alone is enough to act

The premises that Kant argues for are also an essential part that the standard rational choice theory rely on are as follows: firstly, for an individual to be autonomous, the ability to think and reason for oneself without being influenced by any other causes is fundamental for autonomy. This faculty of reasoning means that an individual can be motivated to action through reason alone guided by principles he has set for himself. These principles are based on Kant’s categorical imperatives.⁵⁰ Fellow autonomous agents that are endowed with reasoning will have the ability to recognise imposed laws or principles (categorical imperatives) because, as autonomous rational agents, they will arrive at the same laws through the use of reason alone. Since this faculty of reasoning is not tainted by desires, facts, human psychology or human society; it is thereby universally common

⁴⁶ Ibid, pp. 751-2.

⁴⁷ Morris P. Fiorina, a professor of political science at Stanford describes this view of political scientists regarding individuals, <http://www.nytimes.com/2000/02/26/arts/making-a-science-of-looking-out-for-no-1.html> and <http://myweb.liu.edu/~uoy/eco54/histlist/pol-sci-rational.htm>, accessed on 30-04-17.

⁴⁸ Ibid, pp. 753.

⁴⁹ Ibid, pp. 755.

⁵⁰ Sugden separates the difference between categorical and hypothetical imperatives: Do X, regardless of your wants, and the latter, If you want to achieve Y, then do X.

among all other rational individuals, as compared with the hypothetical imperative. Adopting this position, economists (and later political scientists), in the quest for an account of the rational without interferences from other internal (psychological states such as beliefs, desires etc) and external factors (environment, human society etc) found a basis to build their theory on. Sugden states the following example as an example of rational choice:

“...a person prefers x to y is to say that he is committed to a set of reasons which imply that if he has to choose between x and y, he should choose x... To have all one's choices supported by reasons might be seen as an ideal of rationality, or perhaps of autonomy. (An autonomous agent acts in accordance with principles that he has chosen for himself. The person who has no reasons for his choices is not acting on any principles: in this sense, he is not fully autonomous.)”⁵¹

The standard rational choice theory can be understood then as: 1) there are preferences that a person holds, 2) the choice of the preferences should be determined by reason, and 3) the individual's autonomy is tied to reason. The emphasis on the autonomy of the individual is an important factor because if there's some doubt that an individual is not fully autonomous, his or her action might be considered as deterministic by some sort of natural laws, shedding off some burden or responsibility of their actions. Kant's categorical imperative emphasises that reason alone can motivate one to action:

“For the pure representation of duty and the moral law in general, mixed with no alien addition from empirical stimuli, has, by way of reason alone (which thereby for the first time becomes aware that it can for itself be practical), an influence on the human heart so much more powerful than all other incentives that might be summoned from the empirical field, that reason, in the consciousness of its dignity, despises the latter, and can gradually become their master”⁵²

If the rational choice theory based on a Kantian perspective is adopted as a position to understand the behaviour of voters in the Brexit Referendum, and in so far as a judgement is made about someone's voting behaviour situated within the standard of rational choice, there will be a high tendency to come to the conclusion that voters who are voting for “Leave” will be considered as behaving irrationally. Richard Thaler, a professor of behavioural economics at Chicago Booth Business School in an interview to online news Marketwatch.com (published by the Dow Jones & Company) makes the claim that “the people behind the leave campaign are voting with their guts...a vote to leave is highly risky move, most voters aren't really thinking about it in a very analytical way.”⁵³ A journalist who reported on Thaler's interview ran a news story with the headlines

⁵¹ Ibid, pp. 761.

⁵² Kant, Immanuel, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, pp. 27-28.

⁵³ <http://www.marketwatch.com/video/lesson-from-france-has-populism-peaked/91F54D28-603D-4EF4-ADF3-0EB19173AE17.html>, accessed on 09-05-17.

“ECONOMIST: Brexit is a perfect example of irrational behavior.”⁵⁴ In a BBC interview regarding the Brexit referendum, Ex-Bank of England Governor, Mervyn King reported that voters he spoke to “didn’t like to be told that if they were vote to leave, they’ll be idiots”.⁵⁵ Lord Michael Dobbs, in an interview recalled his personal experience where a colleague in the House of Lords judged that he is “totally mad” for voting for Brexit.⁵⁶

b) Reason alone is not enough to act

While I’ve highlighted Kant’s view first, Kant’s formulation that reason alone can motivate one to action is his counter-argument to David Hume’s theory that reason alone is not enough for action. Hume’s view that reason cannot motivate anyone to act is derived firstly from Hume’s explanation between the terms of ideas and impressions clearly established in his treatise on human nature. Both terms represent two distinct kinds of perception in the mind with one key difference between them; the degree of forcefulness and liveliness that occurs in the mind, proceeding towards our conscious thoughts. The perceptions carrying the most force, vividness, and liveliness are termed as impressions. Within impressions, Hume separates them into two further categories, namely the original (sensations) and secondary (reflective), where “*of the first kind are all the impressions of the senses, and all bodily pains and pleasures: Of the second are the passions, and other emotions resembling them.*”⁵⁷ Original impressions are derived from bodily sensations, as well as from the pain and pleasure that accompany them. Secondary impressions are termed as reflective impressions because emotions, passions, sentiments are formed from ideas that have copied bodily sensations, especially those of pleasure and pain. *Impressions* deals with sensations and *Ideas* are the copies of such *Impressions* that are presented in the mind. Hume expresses the workings as such:

*“The first kind (original impressions) arises in the soul originally, from unknown causes. The second (reflective impressions) is derived in a great measure from our ideas, and that in the following order. An impression first strikes upon the senses, and makes us perceive heat or cold, thirst or hunger, pleasure or pain of some kind or other. Of this impression there is a copy taken by the mind, which remains after the impression ceases; and this we call an idea. This idea of pleasure or pain, when it returns upon the soul, produces the new impressions of desire and aversion, hope and fear, which may properly be called impressions of reflexion, because derived from it.”*⁵⁸

⁵⁴ <http://www.businessinsider.com/thaler-brexit-shows-irrational-behavior-2016-6>, accessed on 30-04-17.

⁵⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/av/uk-politics-eu-referendum-36642662/king-remain-treated-voters-like-idiots>, accessed on 08-05-17.

⁵⁶ <http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/news/opinion/michael-dobbs-voting-to-leave-the-eu-is-not-stupid-it-is-simply-common-sense-1-7910974>, accessed on 08-05-17.

⁵⁷ Hume, David, *Treatise of Human Nature*, pp. 181 (2.1.1.1).

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, pp. 11 (1.1.1.2).

The claim that reason alone is not enough to act, as Hume observed, lies mainly on the fact that reason is situated within the category of ideas. In examining the psychological workings of the mind, he categorises the methods of understanding or reasoning into two respective terms: demonstrative reasoning (abstract reasoning) dealing with the relation of ideas (the likes of geometry, algebra and arithmetic) and probability reasoning that deals with experience (matter of fact). Both methods have the ability to discover the principles of association (resemblances, continuity, causation) between objects (ideas) that can lead further to the ideas of pleasure or pain and *direct* an individual towards an action with the prospect of experiencing pain and pleasure. Hume argues that the connection between ideas through the method of reasoning does not mean that it is capable of producing action. In fact, it proves that, as a faculty, it lacks the ability to prevent volition or counter any passion or emotion that is felt, because discovering the causal connection without any impressions (passions the likes of wants or desires) does not motivate any individual to act. The great discovery that exercising and dieting can help you stay healthy and lose weight does not motivate the will of anyone. It is then for Hume, that to oppose a passion it has to be with another passion, but “*reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will; and secondly, that it can never oppose passion in the direction of the will.*”⁵⁹ As such, reason can only serve and obey the passions, which is contrary to the Kantian’s perspective that reason alone is enough for producing actions.

3.2 Arguments towards a Humean perspective in explaining voter behaviour

Does the standard rational choice theory account for all factors that might have motivated voters in making their decision to vote for a certain candidate, political party, or a specific national issue through a referendum? Here I will make the case that a Humean conception is better for understanding and accounting for voting behaviour, highlighting that neither Leave nor Remain voters were acting irrationally.

First of all, the core of this thesis is concerned with locating imagination within the political sphere and I have examined how imagination is part and parcel of the political realm. If the underlying purpose of studying individual political behaviour is to understand the reasons or principles behind such behaviour, imagination should not be discounted from any theory wanting to have a good understanding of political behaviour. Hume first and foremost held that “memory, senses and understanding... all of them founded on

⁵⁹ Hume, David, “Treatise of Human Nature”, pp. 265 (2.3.3.1).

imagination, or the vivacity of our ideas”⁶⁰. He also emphasises “that the imagination and affections have a close union together and nothing that affects the former, can be entirely indifferent to the latter.”⁶¹ Formulating a theory that is designed largely on the wish to study actions not influenced by desires, facts, human psychology, human society, and imagination, means that such theory will be disconnected when applied to the political sphere. Such theory of choice however is not a waste of time, unhelpful or unrealistic per se, but should not be used as the dominant framework for studying political voting behaviour, and is further more undesirable as a benchmark set and used to judge one’s action as irrational. Since Hume’s enterprise within his treatises on human nature (and the enquiries) is based on discovering the principles of human nature and to “discover the proper province of human reason”, adopting a Humean perspective will illuminate voting behaviour in a more comprehensive way.⁶²

A second reason to adopt Hume’s observation on human nature is that it not only allows for the imagination, but also offers further explanation for the imagined community, social imaginaries and political imaginaries that play a particular role in influencing actions. Within Hume’s imagination, there are two separate process: fancy where simple ideas can be combined to form complex ideas freely and unrestrained by memory. The second operation is that of understanding, or methods of reasoning. The imagined community, social imaginaries and political imaginaries, as formulated by Anderson, Taylor, and Ezrahi can be situated as products of fancy and the operation of understanding in different measures. In an imagined community, even though an individual will never know or meet all of his fellow members, the idea of each (abstract) member presented in the mind as sharing this communion happens in the imagination. The fancy is able to place the simple idea of a single individual and combine those simple ideas into a complex idea of a coherent community.⁶³ The understanding of that communion between members relies on the respective experiences of such matters experienced in their life, taking its place as a matter of fact. For example, the experiences of being a member of a sports team, local parish and a church are some experiences involving the coming together of individuals. Ezrahi’s political imaginaries (fictions, metaphors, ideas, images, or conceptions) can be

⁶⁰ Ibid, pp. 174 (1.4.7.3).

⁶¹ Ibid, pp. 272 (2.3.6.1).

⁶² Hume, David, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 7.

⁶³ The necessary number of simple ideas to be combined to form this complex idea of a community might varies based on individuals inclination for the right amount of individuals needed to form a community in their mind.

found to reside in the faculty of imagination and similarly, are a product of both fancy and understanding. When the objects of political imaginaries are first conceived, they can be products of abstract or probability reasoning, of fancy, or a combination of both fancy and understanding, found within the faculty of imagination. As mentioned in chapter 1.5, the examples of political imaginaries used to shape society can be observed with Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and their respective conceptions of the social contract. For the political imaginaries to be able to shape society, it has to be widely held and accepted. The invention of political imaginaries can appeal to and build on certain instincts of human nature or general appetites towards good and evil, but by itself without being accepted by the individual, it does not have the forcefulness in the mind as compared to impressions. When considering Anderson's conception of the imagined community, the individuals' ability to utilise the power of persuasion, calling individuals to action on behalf of the nation, is dependent on the idea of a deep and horizontal comradeship among the individuals. There is an important point that needs addressing: How can we then account that any of these objects of the imagination has the ability to motivate people to act, if such ideas do not have the same forcefulness as impressions? If impressions are needed as the motivation to act, what can explain the usefulness of these ideas proposed by Anderson and Ezrahi?

Increasing the liveliness of these ideas can be achieved when individuals hold the belief of such ideas. Hume states that the nature of belief consists of a lively idea related to or associated with a present impression and it is a way to vary the manner how one conceives of any object (idea) and add additional force and vivacity on that object (idea).⁶⁴ Belief however does not form because one uses the faculty of fancy to combine (simple or complex) ideas and subsequently expect any individual to seemingly accept the created item as if it's a matter of fact. Secondly, belief is dependent on the association of causation, the main operation for probability reasoning where the connection of cause and effect is located. Custom comes with the consistent results between a cause and its effect posits the ideal situation for the forming of belief. Hume explains:

"All belief of matter of fact or real existence is derived merely from some object, present to the memory or sense, and a customary conjunction between that and some other objects... having found in many instances, that any two kinds of objects – flame and heat, snow and cold – have always been conjoined together; if flame or snow be presented anew to the senses, the mind is carried by custom to expect heat or cold, and to believe that such a quality does exist and will discover itself upon a nearer approach. This belief is the necessary result of placing the mind in such

⁶⁴ Ibid, pp. 67 (1.3.7.5).

*circumstances. It is an operation of the soul, when we are so situated, as unavoidable as to feel the passion of love, when we receive benefits; or hatred, when we meet with injuries. All these operations are a species of natural instincts, which no reasoning or process of the thought and understanding is able to either to produce or prevent.”*⁶⁵

Belief, as a lively idea, has the ability to raise a simple idea and cause it to be almost equal to an impression.⁶⁶ Even though just an idea, together with belief, it can be an influence for action that is similar to the influence of the passions. Belief causes an idea to imitate the vivid, forceful and lively effects of impressions, resembling them in those qualities.⁶⁷ Belief as such is a crucial element for the concepts of Anderson and Ezrahi to carry some force for influencing the behaviour of voters. Without individuals believing in the nation as an imagined community or political imaginary, the ideas will merely be perceptions in the mind but lack the force to move any individual towards actions.

Taylor's account of the social imaginaries also lies within Hume's imagination, but is strongly connected to the operation of understanding, more specifically to probability reasoning. Taylor's social imaginaries is primarily about how people imagine their existence together, the way individuals in this social setting fit and operate between themselves based on the expectations that are normally met, the deep normative notions and images that furnish those expectations.⁶⁸ Taylor's account of normally met expectations in a social imaginary strongly suggests that past repetition plays a large part in how individuals imagine their existence together. The met expectations suggest that customs or habits have been established in the social imaginaries. Hume states that established customs do not require new reasoning or conclusions to be accepted as certain truth precisely because of the repetition of such practices.⁶⁹

Third, Hume while claiming that, “*reason alone can never be a motive to any action of the will*” does not mean that actions or choices are not accompanied or arrived at without any reasoning. While it is not the pure and uninfluenced form of reasoning that rational choice theorists wish to adopt, (Humean) reasoning is able to help the individual gather information by the methods of demonstrative (abstract concepts) and probability (experience), identifying a course of action to a desired end, or draw up important

⁶⁵ Hume, David, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 49.

⁶⁶ There's three other way to enlivened ideas and they are through the mechanism of sympathy, eloquence, and the bare opinion of other enforced with passion. Treatise (2.1.11), *Enquiry (concerning Human Understanding* pp. 130), and Treatise (2.3.6.8) respectively.

⁶⁷ Hume, David, *Treatise of Human Nature*, pp. 82 (1.3.10.3).

⁶⁸ Taylor, Charles, *Modern Social Imaginaries*, pp 23.

⁶⁹ Hume, David, *Treatise of Human Nature*, pp. 72 (1.3.8.10).

conclusions about certain circumstances that one might be in. These judgements are what the passions depend on, leading further to the ideas of pleasure or pain, and the motivation for the will of an individual towards a choice or action on the prospect of experiencing pain and pleasure. Even though reason is a slave to the passions, Hume states that “the moment we perceive the falshood of any supposition, or the insufficiency of any means our passions yield to our reason without any opposition.”⁷⁰ While passions are needed for action, reason plays an important role in the larger scheme of things. Individuals are not blindly governed by emotions only. Sugden also notes that the operation of reasoning again is something that Kant would fully endorse, which validates this form of reasoning, even though he acknowledges that it is only one form of reasoning (hypothetical).⁷¹

Lastly, I will like to raise some concerns that perhaps basing the standard rational choice theory on a Kantian conception of rationality is not ideal for a full understanding of voting behaviour. As it now stands, the Kantian concept of rationality is highly demanding by denying that an individual can make choices with full freedom, although they might be bound by different sorts of influences. One might also wonder if Kant arrives at the categorical imperative through reasoning without any influences? Is there no desire (however slight) on his part to demand reason to be pure and rid of passions so as to argue that reason alone is able to motivate action? If all individuals are able to recognise or come to the same categorical imperatives through the untainted faculty of reason, what can account for the lack of such imperatives within the political sphere or in a human society in general? Different cultures, nations and communities adopt a variety of laws even though they might have access to the faculty of reason. If Hume’s theory of reason is limited, who is able to account or measure for someone having more of an untainted faculty of reason than another? Can we also confidently say that the faculty of reason is completely untainted from the brain structure governing the boundary of thinking itself?

The political sphere exists in a state of complexity where multiple agents, institutions, social imaginaries, imagined communities, political imaginaries, interests and practices, exist within a (complex) society filled with individuals that hold different beliefs and interests. Adopting the Humean conception allows for clarity in how psychological states

⁷⁰ Ibid, pp. 267 (2.3.3.7).

⁷¹ Hume, on the other hand, allows for a Kantian conception of rationality but limits it only when it occurs within abstract concepts. It might be possible to assume that the appeal of abstract reasoning is what the Kantian conception of rationality wants to uphold, as what autonomous individuals should use to make choices.

play a part in interpreting and understanding political behaviour that is lacking in the standard rational choice theory. Hume's awareness that individuals coexist in mutual dependence and through association, observes that custom is created and therefore "so necessary to the subsistence of our species, and the regulation of our conduct, in every circumstance and occurrence of human life."⁷² As such, Hume's theory gives us a better understanding for how individuals made choices in the political sphere and is more insightful than adopting a Kantian based rational choice theory.

3.3 Conclusion

Since imagination is part and parcel of the political sphere, it means that any theory that wishes to account for voting behaviour must account for it, if comprehensive understanding is the final goal. Rational choice theory, based on the view that reason is alone to motivate action, is one reason why judgement about voters being irrational is made. I have argued that standard rational choice theory is not ideal to account for voting behaviour because it does not account for the imagination in the political sphere, adopts a high standard of reasoning being pure from influences so as to guarantee that a person has the autonomy to act freely. Rather, I argue for a Humean account that is able to give a better account of how the imagination as ideas can influence action, the functioning of the faculty of reason in the imagination and a more realistic outlook in understanding voting behaviour in contrast to the standard rational choice theory: the fact that reason alone is not enough for action does not make voting behaviour irrational as held by any individuals making such judgements while holding on to the standard rational choice theory.

Chapter 4: Politics of imagination

4.1 Political communications: From Imagination to Action

Having examined the relations of the imagined communities, social imaginaries and political imaginaries at play in the case of the Brexit referendum, this section will now focus on how political discourses are used to influence individual actions towards the required votes for the "Remain" or "Leave" decision. How does Hume's conception come into play with the discussion so far situated in the Brexit referendum? In order for the campaigners of each side to achieve their goal, voters have to be mobilised to vote for each respective choice. It is established that the "Leave" and "Remain" voters have different

⁷² Hume, David, *Enquiry concerning Human Understanding*, pp. 58.

key issues that they are concerned with when considering UK's membership in the EU. If they hold resolute to their belief in those causes based on their experiences (social imaginaries), the communicative messages from each campaign must seek to enliven the voters' belief with vivacity so that they correspond to the emotional response they have towards further membership in the European Union.

The dissemination of those political discourses relies on utilising communicative means ranging from the public sphere of the printed press, to their private space in their bedrooms via the television and radio set, and social media platforms on their computer and mobile smart phones. Each of the campaigns has to rely on as much mass communicative platforms in order to inspire their voters and gather the media attention they need for each debate, event and outreach. This is especially important to the group of individuals who are undecided on the issue of UK membership in the European Union. Since "Leave" campaigners have achieved the majority, I will first focus on the discourses employed in their campaign.



Picture 1. Nigel Farage's press conference featuring a poster of Syrian refugees with the heading "Breaking Point".⁷³

⁷³ <http://www.itv.com/news/2016-06-20/nigel-farage-its-wrong-to-link-motives-behind-jo-cox-death-to-brexit-campaign/>, accessed 12-04-17.



Picture 2. Nigel Farage's press conference prior to the television debate with PM David Cameron".⁷⁴

The "Leave" campaign chose to work under the slogan banner of "Vote Leave, Take Back Control", clearly in sync with the imagined community and social imaginaries of the voters in support for "Leave". Nigel Farage (a UKIP and member of parliament in the European parliament) as one of the main campaigners and the main politician fronting the "Leave" campaign has an apparent insatiable appetite in creating posters the likes of Picture 1 and 2 above. In the manifesto for the "Leave" campaign, one of their arguments emphasised the expansion of the EU and alluded to the population size of Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Turkey (total of 80 million) when admitted into the EU means that there will be no way to control their borders, which ties into the immigration concern fittingly. Even though the first image does not represent the immigration coming into the UK directly or the specific groups of nationals in the manifesto, Farage's decision to use that image falls on the claims that he "didn't invent the picture. It was real."⁷⁵ One might not be able to fault him for lying on a technicality. The photo indeed is real but the intention in using that picture is to present to the mind (primary impression) of the specific imagined community holding strongly to the issue on immigration; however far it is from representing the truth of the matter. The second image ties in next with the campaign's manifesto arguing that firstly, trade deals were governed by the EU thus restricting the UK

⁷⁴ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/uk/brexit-debate-cameron-frets-over-scottish-independence-vote-1.2676139>, accessed 14-04-17.

⁷⁵ <http://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-36574254>, accessed 14-04-17.

from making trade deals with other countries on their own accord for their own benefits. Secondly, the courts in the EU having the final say about laws which the UK could do nothing about besides following the direction sets in Brussels. And finally, the “Leave” campaign insists that the UK is sending too much money to the EU, without getting any sort of benefit from those contributions, resources that could be put to better use for national institutions, like the National Health Service that underlie the public healthcare of the citizens, and has been touted to be in a less than healthy financial state. The visceral images and speeches from the press conferences serve a primarily purpose: to enliven the imaginations of the electoral concerns on those very issues, to the level of impressions, of passions and emotions. As mentioned in chapter 3, impressions are forceful, lively and with vivacity, and an integral part in the quest of mobilising any form of action. The images and speeches present to the senses and targeting specifically to the social imaginaries of the imagined communities of “Leave” voters. The quest to mobilise voters however does not happen in a vacuum as I have argued in this thesis. Each group of voters going about their lives within their respective social imaginaries forming customs, habits and beliefs, imagines themselves to belong to specific imagined communities, and to hold political imaginaries that their votes represent their voice and wishes in a democratic regime. One other possible factor for Farage utilising images as mentioned can be understood as an effective communicative strategy when considering Hume’s observation that “that the imagination, when set into any train of thinking, is apt to continue, even when its object fails it, and like a galley put in motion by the oars, carries on its course without any new impulse”.⁷⁶ Through presenting provocative images, it sets the stage for placing impressionable ideas in the minds of voters, invoking their imaginations and directing the individual to infer to other matters, images or beliefs by association.

The messages communicated from both camps are then crafted to involve, coincide, and reinforce the beliefs of the voters concerned regarding membership in the EU, enlivening those ideas that they hold to correspond to passions and emotions so as to mobilise individuals to their respective cause. Once the emotions have been influenced through the reinforcing of already held beliefs or freshly accepted beliefs via the respective discourse, any form of persuasion by reasoning alone can never oppose the excited passions due to it being less lively and vivid. Nigel Farage’s speech at 4am celebrating the victory of the “Leave” campaign with euphoric supporters highlights his appeal to the imaginations,

⁷⁶ Hume, David, “Treatise of Human Nature”, pp. 132 (1.4.2.22).

beliefs and emotions regarding EU membership towards a specific imagined community (italics my emphasis).

“Dare to dream, the dawn is breaking on the independence, UK. If the prediction is right, this will be *a victory for real people, a victory of ordinary people, a victory for decent people*. We have fought against the multi-nationals, we have fought against the big merchant banks, we have fought against big politics, we have fought against lies, corruption and deceit, and today *honesty, decency, and the belief in nation*, I think now is going to win... And we will have done it without having to fight, without a single bullet being fired, we'd have done it by damned hard work on the ground. And we'll have done it not just for ourselves. We'll have done it for the whole of Europe. I hope this victory brings down this failed project and leads us to a Europe of sovereign nation states, trading together, being friends together, cooperating together, and *let's get rid of the flag, the anthem, Brussels, and all that has gone wrong*. Let June 23 go down in our history as our independence day.”⁷⁷

The “remain” campaign rallied under the banner of “Britain Stronger in Europe”, emphasising the economic benefits that being in the common market will bring to each individuals. More jobs, lower prices, and worker rights were the three main points in a bid to convince the voters to remain in the EU. Along the way towards the referendum, experts and politicians argued for the economical benefits that remaining in the EU would have for the UK, for businesses, and for the individuals in the job market. For added measure, the occasional focus on the negative impact of leaving the EU were mentioned from time to time in order to generate a outlook of economical uncertainty in the future. The latter caution acting as an attempt to generate an unfavourable sensation among those who were undecided on their vote, but would vote for security and stability.

One other reason to explain the tendency of “Remain” voters rationalising “Leave” voters’ decision as irrational or emotionally driven rests primarily in that they do not belong to the same imagined community, sharing similar social imaginaries and thus have different beliefs on the issues that pertain to the issue of remaining in the European Union. In the case of undecided voters, the effectiveness of the messages that each of the campaigns put out to influence their belief, enlivening them on the key issues on the emotional, passionate realm might just have been the key factor for securing the votes that they needed.

My account of the politics of imagination thus far is an attempt to understand the sort of campaign messages from both sides and the motive for the specific focus on issues that they each espoused throughout their respective media release, debates, promotional events and other mass communication media; seen most particularly through MP Nigel Farage’s speeches, debates and media coverage of his official statements (including the infamous

⁷⁷ <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eu-referendum-nigel-farage-4am-victory-speech-the-text-in-full-a7099156.html>, accessed on 11-04-17.

poster with the picture of migrants crossing the Croatia-Slovenia border in 2015). The mobilisation of individuals towards action (voting in this context) relies on Hume's conception highlighting why reasoning alone does not seem to influence the "Leave" voters, but requires enlivened ideas and impressions. Does this necessarily point to a possible tyranny of the majority lead by false information and having their emotions corresponding to those factual discrepancies? Are we witnessing a transition moving from a political imaginary from truth-based, reason-dominated political practices in garnering support of the public to an era of post-truth politics? I have not discussed at length the implications involved with politicians and campaigners making, in various degrees, falsity in the claims they espouse in their speeches, discourses, opinions or visual representations, while attempting to persuade individuals towards their cause. This is an important ethical, moral issue as the underlying assumption to all election campaign speeches remains that the politicians are not lying when proclaiming their positions on issues. While it remains largely outside the scope of my thesis, I will briefly attempt to answer this charge.

The politics of imagination having been built on Hume's account of the imagination means that understanding (consisting two forms of reasoning) is part and parcel of the operation involving an individual's imagination. The political discourses adopted to appeal to voters however cannot be built relying only on the operation of fancy, done on a whim or reflect something that is purely fantasy. While appealing to the passions of individuals as a motive for action, Hume acknowledges that passions that are accompanied by judgment and opinions can be seen as unreasonable in two ways.⁷⁸ Firstly, it is unreasonable if a passion is founded upon the supposition of the existence of objects that do not have a physical existence. Second, when putting the passion to action in light of a cause and effect (as a desired end), there is a supposition of how the causes will guarantee the effects desired. However, it is possible that the actions chosen are insufficient and we deceive ourselves that those causes are achieving the effects (ends), which the passion in action is supposed on. As such, Hume states that such a condition can be properly understood, that the judgment itself (together with the passion) is unreasonable and not the passion itself that is unreasonable. Emotional responses to issues (such as immigration) do not arise solely from the concept of immigration, but from the cause and effects that they have experienced or imagined to be the case. It is also through this perspective that promises made during election campaigns are an attempt to convince voters of the good and bad effects of their

⁷⁸ Hume, David, "Treatise of Human Nature", pp. 267 (2.3.3.6).

promise towards certain action in making policies. In the absence of a strict legal framework or document on how politicians can persuade voters, the nature of politics rest primarily on gaining support and in motivating voting behaviour towards certain causes. The politics of imagination is, as such, a pertinent issue to account and perhaps educate voters on their own political behaviour. This is also a double-edged sword because such an account can be used as a political tool for politicians to use to their own benefit.

5. Conclusion

I have thus far argued through this thesis that when considering the political behaviour of individuals in the realm of politics, it is pertinent to take into account how imagination is part and parcel of the political sphere. While the discussion is mainly situated within a democratic regime, it is also a useful perspective when analysing political events or behaviours in other political regimes. Paying particular attention to the Brexit Referendum, I have narrowed the view away from a complicated electoral system to an election where individuals are called upon, under a model of direct democracy, to express their collective view on the United Kingdom's continual membership in the European Union. The "Leave" and "Remain" campaigns' political communication to their voters used crafted messages to address the respective imagined communities and the social imaginaries of the two sides. The two political imaginaries within the democratic regime (the general will of the people and legitimacy) have been astutely utilised to pit both ideas against each other, arriving at a junction where the agendas of the "Leave" camp can be met, even though the results of the referendum do not legally bind the government to action. Since elections are won with the majority of the electorate, convincing them to action requires not just the right communicative messages, but also those that engage the ideas so as to make it impressionable enough to motivate individuals to action. In this thesis, I have also highlighted how the judgement of voters being irrational can be arrived at through a standard rational choice theory that does not account for the imagination, thus lacking in giving a more comprehensive look into voting behaviours. Enlisting Hume's observation, the appeal to the imagination or presentation of ideas to the minds of individuals has to be coupled with enlivening those thoughts into impressions (or sentiments) that can be achieved through the three factors of beliefs, sympathy and eloquence. The politics of imagination as such involves appealing to the imagination of individuals through constructed political communication, bringing to mind those ideas they hold in connection

to their imagined communities, social imaginaries and political imaginaries, making those very ideas lively so as to resemble impressions needed for the actions of voters: to cast their respective votes, that as a member of the collective might very well change and affect the nation-state in a drastic manner.

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Summary / Abstract

In a democratic society where elections are held to decide the holders of political office or referendums formulated to get a majority vote on national issues, the ability to get the most votes from eligible citizens remains a primary concern of politicians. I put forward the view that factual information alone is not enough to motivate voters. There is a need to consider the influence of the imagination on voting behaviour. This thesis is first an attempt to locate the imagination within the political sphere, and examine how political behaviour can be influenced through the imagination. The 2016 Brexit Referendum will be the example used to analyse how the imagination plays an important part in politics. If one desires to have a good understanding on voting behaviour, a theory that includes the imagination should be considered. Thus I argue for adopting the conceptual framework of David Hume over the standard rational choice theory in providing a framework of how imagination can influence voter behaviour, and at the same time, provide a framework towards my conception of the politics of imagination.

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