

## Brexit And British Expatriates in The British Newspapers

Fathi Bourmeche<sup>1</sup>

*The University of Sfax, Tunisia*

**Abstract:** The aim of this paper is to explore the impact of Brexit on national identities. Particular focus is on British expatriates prior to and in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum held in June 2016 in the sense that Britain's withdrawal from the EU raised concern about their identities in Europe. The paper uses media framing as a methodological tool in order to gain a better understanding of the way British daily newspapers represented British expatriates' worries about Brexit. Corpus of the study, consisting in a selection of 200 articles from the Sun and the Daily Mail, is qualitatively analyzed in a bid to find out the way such newspapers framed Brexit in relation to British expatriates. Media frames are also juxtaposed to Ipsos Mori and YouGov polls dealing with Brexit and related issues to gain a better insight into media effects. Results of the study reveal that media frames seemed to have had a major impact on British expatriates, increasing their concern about their national identity to the extent that some of them decided to apply for another citizenship within the EU to keep their rights as EU citizens.

**Keywords:** Brexit, British expatriates, EU, frames, identities.

Brexit, the result of the June 2016 referendum, marked a turning point in the history of the two partners, putting an end to a long relationship between the EU and its reluctant partner. Gordon Brown, Labor Prime Minister from 2007 to 2010, blamed David Cameron, the incumbent Conservative Prime Minister, for losing the referendum. But Cameron believed that such a referendum was inevitable in the sense that Britons were dissatisfied with the whole institution, feeling that the EU was "heading in a direction that they never signed up to" (Wall, 2020, p. 279). Such feelings seemed to have contributed to an upsurge of Euroscepticism in Britain, presumably urging Cameron to call for the referendum to give British people a say about their future in Europe.

Adam (2020) emphasized Cameron's struggle to avoid the split among the Conservatives, leading to the desertion of his close friends, particularly Boris Johnson and Michael Gove who became active members of the Leave camp. Adam (2020) paid particular attention to the ensuing repercussions of the split, including the controversies over the Brexit deal negotiated under Theresa May, Cameron's successor. May's failure to reach a deal with the EU partners resulted in a large division in Britain, leading to two snap elections, one in 2017 under May and one in 2019 under Johnson. This was also confirmed by Stephens (2021) who argued that Britain was fractured and divided by leaving the EU. He emphasized the fact that Cameron's referendum not only led to Britain's exit from the EU but also stirred a call for a second referendum by Scottish nationalists.

---

<sup>1</sup> Corresponding Author: An Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Sfax, Tunisia, Faculty of Letters and Humanities. E-Mail: [Fathi.Bourmeche@flshs.usf.tn](mailto:Fathi.Bourmeche@flshs.usf.tn)

In *We're Doomed: Brexit Revisited*, Datta et al. (2020) provided a detailed account of the whole event, emphasizing the different controversies over the key issues used by Brexiteers and Remainers. Datta et al. (2020) pointed out that free movement was one of the main issues during the referendum, raising concern about the future of EU nationals in Britain as well as British expatriates living in the EU. The implication is that Brexit seemed to have created an identity crisis in Britain, driving a large number of British expatriates to look for new identities within the EU.

What should be noted is that there is a large number of Britons living in EU countries, with an estimated 285,000 living in Spain, 145,000 in France and 93,000 in Germany (Clark, 2020). Such a community seemed to have been threatened in their national identity due to Brexit, presumably moving from EU citizens to mere British citizens in the aftermath of Brexit. The intention of this study is therefore to contribute to the existing literature on the topic from a media studies perspective, examining the way the British daily newspapers framed Brexit and British expatriates prior to and in the aftermath of the referendum.

There are two main objectives behind this research. The first one is to gain a better understanding of media frames in relation to the most important issues facing the country, Brexit as a case study. The second objective is to shed light on the impact of such frames on British expatriates, particularly in terms of their British national identity. These objectives could be elaborated into two research questions. The first one is “How did the British daily newspapers frame Brexit?” The aim is to throw more light on the way such newspapers framed Brexit, presumably one of the most important issues during the period in focus. The second research question is “What is the impact of such frames on British expatriates?” By answering such a question, one would gain a better insight into the impact of media frames on the public in terms of their national identity.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The study is based on media framing as a methodological tool. This choice is based on the fact that media framing is among the main tools enabling researchers to gain a better insight into media effects. Focus is on the way the media could affect the public in relation to the most important issues facing the country. The main issue in this case study is Brexit and the public is British expatriates, presumably increasingly concerned about the results of the June 2016 referendum. In Entman's view, framing is based on the selection of some aspects of a ‘perceived reality’ and making them “more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation”; for Tankard et al., a frame is a “central organizing idea for news content that supplies a context and suggests what the issue is through the use of selection, emphasis, exclusion, and elaboration” (as cited in Reese, 2001, p.10).

According to Ben-Porath (2009), frames, which are “likely to shape the way people think about issues, persons, and events” (n. p.), are labelled into four types of frames: *value framing*, *attribute framing*, *responsibility framing* and *strategy and issue framing*. *Value framing* is linked to the effect of media coverage on people's moral, religious or social values applied when reading news events. *Attribute framing*, also known as second-level agenda setting, is concerned with the attitudinal effect of the news media through their emphasis on certain attributes pertaining to particular issues or electoral candidates. In other words, people's attitudes about the covered issue would be affected by the attributes related to such an issue. As for *responsibility*

*framing*, the way media frame news about issues such as homelessness or unemployment, would have an impact on people's attribution of responsibility.

The fourth type, namely *strategy and issue framing*, is revealed in politicians' speeches, generally during electoral campaigns, by issuing various position statements and offering a number of policies and promises (Ben-Porath, 2009). In this research paper, particular attention is paid to *value framing* and *responsibility framing*. The assumption is that media frames of Brexit and related issues would have a major impact on British expatriates, presumably affected by Britain's exit from the EU in a considerable way. Indeed, media frames, detected through headlines, leads, pictures and captions in this paper, correspond to Ben-Porath's *value framing* and *responsibility framing*, given that the British government was blamed for the outcome of the referendum to the extent that people felt insecure in a post-Brexit Britain. Such frames seemed to have had a major impact on public opinion, as reflected in opinion polls, evidence of media effects with respect to the most important issues facing the country.

Corpus of the study consists in newspaper articles downloaded from the official websites of two British popular newspapers, the Daily Mail and the Sun, along with 10 opinion polls downloaded from Ispos Mori and YouGov, two worldwide companies specialized in research on polls and surveys on a wide range of issues. Two keywords were used for data collection: *Brexit* and *British expatriates*. Research yielded hundreds of articles from the two websites, all of which were refined to keep the articles containing either both of the keywords or one of them. Thus, a total number of 200 articles were considered, with 111 articles from the Daily Mail and 89 articles from the Sun.

The choice of such newspapers is based on two main variables: political affiliation and net browsers. The Sun, launched as a popular Labor broadsheet and then given a tabloid format by Rupert Murdoch in 1969,<sup>2</sup> is affiliated as a left-of-center newspaper. The Sun was on top of the list of newspapers in terms of popularity, gaining 7,5% of readership in 2016. The Daily Mail, a middle market tabloid founded in 1896 by Alfred and Harold Harmsworth, is an extremely conservative newspaper, ranked second on the list, gaining 6,3% of readership in the same period. A close examination of the corpus revealed that Brexit was framed as a national crisis, increasing uncertainty, particularly among British expatriates, thus threatening their national identity.

## Review of the Existing Empirical Literature

A number of scholars have been concerned with the impact of Brexit on national identities, emphasizing its repercussions on EU nationals living in Britain as well as Britons living in EU member states. Burrell (2018) was particularly interested in the impact of Brexit on the Polish community living in Britain. It was argued that Brexit raised their concern about their status in Britain. Brexit was said to have affected EU migration significantly in the sense that free mobility, enjoyed by Poles as well as other EU nationals, would no longer be guaranteed after Britain's withdrawal from the EU. In this view, Poles would move from EU citizens living on a legal status in Britain to people who no longer felt at home, "being stuck 'in limbo'" (Burrell, 2018, p. 105).

---

<sup>2</sup> The Sun was originally launched by the Mirror Group as a replacement for the Daily Herald, a once popular Labor Party newspaper which failed to keep up with the need to attract consumer advertising. It flopped in its attempts to attract a working class and 'socially radical' middle class readership (Searle, 1989, p.18).

In the same vein, Gilmartin et al. (2018) claimed that Brexit “sent belonging and citizenship into a tailspin,” (p. 63) arguing that it would affect the status of millions of EU nationals living in the country as long-term residents. As they were not UK citizens, it would be difficult for them to remain in the country without the introduction of a new system to regulate their status. Equally important, UK nationals with permanent residence in other EU countries would potentially lose their status in the aftermath of Brexit. Given their strong attachment to their country of residence, these communities may experience a considerable cultural change if they relocate after Britain’s withdrawal from the EU.

Mindus (2017) pointed out that an estimated 690,000 Britons were living in the EU, with a majority in Spain and others scattered in countries such as Ireland, Germany, the Netherlands, Italy and Belgium. In Mindus’s (2017) view, such a community may turn into third country nationals in Europe if the two partners failed to reach a good deal, potentially losing their rights as EU citizens in the aftermath of Brexit. In contrast, Bourmeche (2020) argued that Brexit increased Britons’ sense of belonging to an ‘island race’, rekindling their Britishness at the expense of the EU identity. Yet, Bourmeche (2020) claimed that some British people decided to apply for an EU citizenship in order to keep the same benefits enjoyed by their European counterparts within the EU.

In view of this, the current study is an attempt to contribute to the existing literature on the subject, throwing more light on the impact of Brexit on national identities. Firstly, it will test the validity of Mindus’s (2017) claim revealing that British expatriates would become third country nationals. The assumption is that British expatriates would emerge as new others in Europe, potentially adopting hyphenated identities such as British-German and British-Irish to preserve their rights as EU citizens. Secondly, it will validate one of the main claims advanced by Bourmeche (2020) in his study on the BBC and CNN coverage of Brexit and EU migration, that is, British expatriates’ adoption of new EU identities. The intention of the current study is to prove, through a close examination of media frames, that British expatriates were increasingly applying for EU citizenships to keep the same rights they had enjoyed before Brexit.

## **Results**

Brexit and British expatriates were framed in relation to two major themes in the Sun and the Daily Mail. The first theme is Brexit and uncertainty: British expatriates and EU nationals as bargaining chips. The second theme is British expatriates as potential others in Europe with new hyphenated identities. In relation to the first theme, British expatriates were said to have expressed their fear of losing their rights as EU citizens, as they could potentially be prevented from full access to benefits in the EU countries, possibly requiring visas to enter member states. Likewise, EU nationals living in Britain showed the same concern, as they could potentially lose the privileges they had enjoyed in Britain prior to Brexit. In relation to the second theme, concern about post-Brexit Britain seemed to have created an identity crisis in the country, driving a significant number of expatriates to apply for an EU citizenship to preserve the privileges enjoyed prior to Brexit, thus turning them into other Europeans in the EU, potentially adopting new hyphenated identities such as British-German, British-Irish and so on.

## **Brexit and Uncertainty: British Expatriates and EU Nationals as Bargaining Chips**

Brexit was framed in relation to the growing uncertainty in Britain as a result of the decision to leave the EU. The outcome of such a referendum raised concern among British expatriates in particular, creating a feeling of uncertainty about their future post-Brexit. This community, along with EU nationals living in Britain, were framed as bargaining chips throughout the Brexit negotiations, given the ensuing repercussions on their status after Britain's final withdrawal. This argument was emphasized by Cameron who announced his resignation immediately after the Brexit referendum. Cameron claimed that British expatriates living in Europe would likely face serious problems after Brexit (Hawkes, 2016). This is quite obvious in the article's lead: "Future of ex-pats living in Europe 'could be in jeopardy' following Brexit bombshell." (Hawkes, 2016). Ambiguity about British expatriates' status seemed clear as Cameron was not able to give any clues about their right to stay in Europe after Brexit, thus increasing uncertainty about their future. Ironically, Gove, at that time Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice and one of the leading figures of the Leave Camp, was ridiculed by his brother-in-law, Ben Vine, on celebrating Britain's decision to leave the EU. Vine was one of the many British expatriates living in Spain whose life seemed to have been ruined by Brexit (Manning, 2016).

The same idea was reiterated later by Cameron's successor, May, when they were negotiating with their European counterparts to reach a Brexit deal. In November 2016, May was reported to have said that it was "absolutely right for us not to [...] give away the guarantee for rights of EU citizens here in the UK, because [...] that would have left UK citizens in Europe high and dry" (PM defends not 'giving away' guarantee for EU citizens). May's argument was also reinforced by her official spokesman who believed that Brexit was a major concern for both EU nationals in Britain as well as British expatriates in Europe.

Indeed, calls were raised before the beginning of the Brexit negotiations, urging May's government to guarantee the rights of EU nationals, as a sign of good will on the British side in the hope of gaining the same guarantees for British expatriates in Europe, an argument advanced by a group called *British Future*. In other words, securing EU nationals' rights was seen as a major step for reciprocity on the European side. This was also supported by another group, *UK-resident Europeans*, who moved to Downing Street, the British Prime Minister's headquarter, calling May to stop using them as 'bargaining chips' during the Brexit talks. Nicolas Hatton, the group's chair and a French citizen living in Britain for 21 years, refused the idea of negotiating people's lives.

Roger Casale, a former Labor MP and founder of *New Europeans*, an organization representing EU nationals, including British expatriates, joined Hatton in a bid to secure EU nationals' rights, thus paving the way for a deal securing British expatriates' rights after Brexit. Keir Starmer, currently Leader of the British Labor party and then Shadow Brexit secretary, also supported such calls, promising that Labor would push the Conservative government to avoid playing the EU nationals' card during the Brexit talks. Such reactions were further supported by MPs from the Conservative party, Labor,<sup>3</sup> UKIP (UK Independence Party), Liberal-Democrats, the Scottish National Party (SNP) and the Greens, signing a letter to ask for immediate action to protect the rights of EU nationals (Dathan, 2016b). Such efforts could possibly prevent an exodus of EU nationals, an asset for the National Health Service (NHS) and other sectors in the British economy, as health chiefs emphasized in an article entitled "Calls to guarantee permanent residence for EU nationals ahead of Brexit talks," published in the Daily Mail on December 13, 2016. Figures from

---

<sup>3</sup> Labor MPs included Sadiq Khan, a prominent politician and Mayor of London.

the House of Lords library, published in the article, revealed that EU nationals represented about 5% of the NHS staff and 5% of the social care workforce.

However, Davidson (2016) emphasized the fact that Britain could not be able to remove EU citizens from Britain before Brexit was put into effect. According to the Social Market Foundation (SMF), a think tank group, over 80% of EU citizens would have gained their right to stay in Britain by the time Britain exited the EU, scheduled in 2019, a right protected by British laws, offering an automatic right to stay for people with a five-year-continuous residency in the country. This meant, according to Emran Mian, SMF Director, that only around 600,000 EU nationals would not have been qualified for permanent residency by that time. It was reported that May promised the 800,000 Poles living in Britain to enjoy the right to remain in their host country, following her meeting with Beata Szydlo, her Polish counterpart in Warsaw, if a reciprocal measure was taken for British expatriates in Europe. In the same vein, Robert Fico, Slovakia's Prime Minister, pleaded May to protect the rights of his 90,000 expatriates working in Britain. May's promise was possibly an attempt to avoid Eastern European leaders' threats "to play hardball over free movement changes" (Woodhouse, 2016, para.1).

The idea of portraying British expatriates as bargaining chips and outsiders was emphasized even prior to the Brexit referendum, as they lost a legal bid to cast their vote on June 23, 2016. A British court ruled that Britons living abroad for more than 15 years would not be allowed to cast their vote. The case had been brought to the court by two British expatriates. The first one was Harry Shindler, a 94-year-old WWII veteran living in Italy. The second one was Jacquelyn MacLennan, a lawyer living in Brussels. Shindler and MacLennan were dissatisfied with the British law for not only preventing them from voting in polls but also hindering them from having a say on free movement under EU laws.<sup>4</sup>

Anecdotally, British expatriates were ineligible voters while EU citizens living in Britain were (wrongly) sent polling cards to take part in the referendum, revealing serious flaws in the British polling system. It was pointed out that EU nationals, although eligible to vote in council and European elections, could not vote for MPs or in the referendum whereas British and Irish citizens and citizens of Gibraltar were allowed to do so. Iain Duncan Smith, the former Work and Pensions Secretary and one of the leaders of the Leave camp, along with the Conservative MP Bernard Jenkin, texted Cameron to take action by investigating into such claims, as reported by a number of concerned voters.

Such a mistake was said to have been solved by a software patch, and any EU nationals who had been wrongly issued polling cards would be contacted to explain such a flaw. On registration, British polling rules would require voters to show their nationality through their National Insurance Numbers which could be checked against the official database. But critics argued that such checks would only reveal that voters' names and addresses were accurate but not their nationalities. The implication is that there could be some frauds on the ballot box, as hinted at by a local election official in Nottingham, England, admitting that if a voter lied during registration, it would not be possible to check her or his nationality.<sup>5</sup> Uncertainty over Brexit pushed British expatriates living in Spain to leave their host country by the hundreds on a daily basis, a few months ahead of the Brexit referendum, as an article published in the Daily Mail on March 29, 2016 revealed. This could usher in an upsurge in reverse migration of British expatriates out of fear

---

<sup>4</sup> For further details on this case, see British Court rejects bid from expats for voting rights (2016, April 28). [Associated Press]. The Daily Mail. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/ap/article-3563334/British-Court-rejects-bid-expats-voting-rights.html>

<sup>5</sup> See Sculthorpe, T. et al. (2016) for more details on this issue.

of victory of the Leave camp, which would end Britain's membership to the EU and thus expatriates' benefits, including free healthcare and the 2.5% increase in their state pensions. Figures presented in the article revealed that a total number of 72,000 British expatriates had left Spain in two years, in addition to 7,000 who left Italy.

Such an inflow could potentially widen the gap between the number of British expatriates living in Europe and EU nationals living in Britain, regarded by the Leave camp as an advantage to Britain during negotiations to reach a deal, securing British expatriates' rights in Europe in the aftermath of Brexit. In the words of Robert Oxley, a spokesman for the Leave camp, such figures would represent a huge incentive for the EU negotiators to agree on a Brexit deal favoring Britain. Oxley contended that despite "the scaremongering no British expats are going to be asked to leave the EU post Brexit" (Dathan, 2016a, para. 1). It was argued that – except for Spain, France and Luxembourg – all the other EU member states had more expatriates living in Britain than vice-versa. However, the Remain camp warned that British expatriates could lose their rights in the aftermath of Brexit. They also warned British students against losing some benefits in the aftermath of Britain's withdrawal from the EU, including free or cheap tuition fees at European universities and significant funds from the EU's Erasmus programs.<sup>6</sup>

Given the significance of the referendum's result in relation to British expatriates as well as EU nationals, a few days before the referendum, the Irish were reported to have flocked to Britain in order to convince their expatriates to vote remain, presumably preserving their rights enshrined in EU laws. An estimated 20,000 Irish workers moving to Britain on a yearly basis to join around 500,000 of their compatriots, knowing that Irish citizens, along with Maltese and Cypriots (being among Commonwealth people), were the only EU citizens who had the right to vote in British elections and referendums. Outstanding Irish figures, including Enda Kenny, then Prime Minister, and Bronagh McCloskey, an enthusiastic volunteer, along with other politicians and workers, were trying hard to support the Remain camp, thus avoiding the potential damage due to Brexit.

McCloskey, a 27-year-old public affairs worker, was handing leaflets at pubs, train stations and Gaelic football pitches on behalf of *Irish4Europe*, a civic group backing up the Remain camp. Her concern was that Brexit would have a major repercussion on both Britain and Ireland, particularly in terms of trade and the Irish border. Such an argument was also advanced by officials in Dublin who were more concerned about the status of Northern Ireland, historically known for military checkpoints before the 1998 peace deal, also known as the Good Friday Agreement, ending decades of violence in the area.<sup>7</sup> McCloskey was even thinking of leaving Britain if the Leave camp won the referendum,<sup>8</sup> which could possibly start another exodus to Ireland and possibly burdening the Irish society in terms of services and facilities that returnees would need.

British expatriates' concern about their future intensified with the referendum's result, as clearly stated by a 51-year-old Englishman who had lived in Spain for more than 20 years, admitting that Brexit frightened him a great deal. The Englishman's concern stemmed from the ambiguity over his status as well as his rights after Brexit, knowing that he owned a house and a bar in Spain; his children were Spanish by birth and went to a British-Spanish school. He was uncertain that he would enjoy the same benefits and entitlements that he had enjoyed prior to Brexit. A British expatriate who lived in Austria for 17 years also expressed his concern about the uncertainty ensuing from Brexit.

---

<sup>6</sup> See Dathan (2016a) for further details on the exodus and related issues.

<sup>7</sup>For more details on this agreement, see Good Friday Agreement/British-Irish history on <https://www.britannica.com>.

<sup>8</sup> See Dathan (2016a) for details on such attitudes and reactions.

## **British Expatriates: Potential Others in Europe with New Hyphenated Identities**

British expatriates were framed not only as bargaining chips, along with EU nationals, but also as potential others adopting new hyphenated identities in the hope of keeping the same rights they had enjoyed prior to Brexit. Prior to the referendum, some British expatriates in Belgium, for instance, intended to keep their ties with Europe, very likely by applying for a Belgian citizenship as a precaution before Britons' decision to leave on June 23, 2016. The assumption was that they may subsequently lose their jobs, presumably for becoming mere British citizens in case of a win for the Leave camp.

According to one of the British expatriates working for one of the EU institutions in Brussels, Brexit would raise "a very weird feeling, like your parent leaving the family home" (Macdonald, 2016, para. 2). For another expatriate, a senior EU civil service clerk, Brexit would mean the end of his career, given that an EU citizenship would be a prerequisite for one to keep such a position. He would very likely choose, along with his other British colleagues, the private sector, joining a number of lawyers, consultants and lobbyists near such EU institutions.

Out of concern about their future in the EU, some of these expatriates were thinking of applying for Belgian passports; others were opting for "switching allegiance to the countries of European spouses or, for the many who were born with dual nationality, of swapping loyalties to that of their other, non-British parent" (Macdonald, 2016, para. 4). One of them, named Joyce, living in Belgium for 30 years, was delighted that she was eligible to gain a Belgian citizenship, though considering it as a shame because her home country was behind such a decision. She insisted that her compatriots were applying for a Belgian citizenship in droves, arguing that many of them had long identified themselves as more European than British.

Dale Carr, an expatriate living in Berlin, who was anxious about Brexit, was planning, along with her Scottish husband and British-passport holding children, to apply for a German citizenship to keep their rights as EU citizens.<sup>9</sup> Such concerns would likely enhance the emergence of new hyphenated identities for some British expatriates, British-German, in this case. Another case included a 63-year-old English living in Germany since 1978 who showed the same concern about his status. He complained that his British passport would subsequently be useless. Ian Tilling, another expatriate living in Bucharest, showed more concern about Britain's position post-Brexit.

Similar concerns were expressed by a British expatriate living in Portugal on her British pension, worrying about the status of the British currency, as the pound fell considerably in the aftermath of Brexit, thus affecting her income's exchange rate. However, British expatriates in the United Arab Emirates, making one of the largest community of Britons living abroad, were not concerned about currency issues. These expatriates were paid in foreign currency and a fall in the pound would make it cheaper to buy.

Just a few days after the Brexit referendum, the estimated 24,000 British expatriates in Belgium, a third of who living in Brussels, particularly working for EU institutions and NATO, were said to have rushed in the hundreds to apply for a Belgian citizenship. According to Belgian laws, to be eligible for citizenship, one should have lived and resided in the country for more than five years, in addition to a basic knowledge of one of the three official languages: Dutch, French and German. These laws also state that people who have not been working in Belgium would require a ten-year-period residency to be eligible for citizenship, providing they show some degree of integrity in their host society. One example of these expatriates was Dennis Landsbert-Noon

---

<sup>9</sup> For further details on these points, see British expatriates fear for their future after UK vote. (2016, June 26). [Associated Press]. The Daily Mail. <http://www.dailymail.com>.



living in Tervuren, not very far from Brussels, who decided to apply for a Belgian citizenship for himself, his wife and their four children. He assumed that the impact of Brexit would be catastrophic for Britain in the short-term as well as the in the long run. His application was meant to protect his family, refusing to “condemn [his] children to belong solely to a nation that is on the road to ruin,” (Kagubare, 2016, para. 13).

Similarly, it was reported that British expatriates in France, who had once moved there for rural idyll, were extremely worried, rushing to apply for a French citizenship to avoid any bad scenarios. Nick and Allison Feeley were among these expatriates who decided to protect their future by applying for a French citizenship. They had already sat for a language and knowledge test, in addition to an in-depth interview, as a preparation to become French citizens, without losing their ties with their homeland, that is, choosing a dual nationality. Thus, this couple – neither old nor retired as is the case of a large number of British expatriates – would also be among new others in Europe in the aftermath of Brexit, gaining a new hyphenated identity, British-French. It was expected that the French government could possibly ask Britain for compensating the bills paid by British pensioners over the years prior to Brexit through National Insurance for Health Service, thus pushing them “to take out hefty insurance policies to cover the expensive, though excellent, provision in many parts of the EU” (Cook, 2016, para. 9). Such a measure could force British expatriates living on fixed incomes and thus unable to afford for insurances, to resort to the NHS, further burdening such an ailing British health system. This could also be the case for the French nationals working in the London financial sector (Cook, 2016). France was said to have eased its tax regime not only for attracting its expatriates in London but also other foreign companies in the finance sector. Manuel Valls, then French Prime Minister, declared that such measures were among their preparations to turn Paris into Europe’s financial hub (Thomas & Nikolaeva, 2016).

Equally important, a few weeks after Brexit, British people contributed to the upsurge in the number of applications for new passports, flocking to various European embassies in London to enquire about the necessary documents to obtain such passports. According to the Polish embassy in London, for instance, there were about 200 emails and 600 phone calls received from Britons, mainly with Polish ancestors or a Polish spouse, to enquire about such documents. Such figures were also confirmed by the Italian embassy, according to which its two consulates in London and Edinburgh received about 500 emails from British nationals with Italian ancestry to enquire about the same thing (Dathan, 2016b).

The Canadian embassy also reported a 325% increase in Britons’ access to its Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada website, just one day after the Brexit referendum. This could similarly contribute to the emergence of new Britons living abroad if they decided to become British-Canadian. As for Ireland, there were calls to open its passport offices both in Belfast and Londonderry to allow British citizens from Northern Ireland, 56% of who had been against Brexit, to apply for an Irish citizenship. More recently, with the historic victory for Sinn Fein in the Northern Ireland Assembly, this could be more than certain, given the party’s allegiance to Ireland rather than the UK. Such a victory could also increase nationalist feelings among Northern Irelanders who may follow the Scottish in their desire to split from the UK in order to join the Republic of Ireland.

Ironically, the British expatriates, those living in Spain in particular, started suffering from their own government even before reaching a deal with Europe. It was reported that the elderly had their winter fuel payment – worth £200 for expatriates over 60 and £300 for over 80 – cut by more than two thirds. The measure was taken by Duncan Smith to stop ‘sunshine benefits.’ He believed that such a payment was a scandal after imposing a new ‘temperature test’ on beneficiaries, thus affecting countries whose annual average temperature exceeds the warmest region in Britain, the

South West at 42F (less than 6°C.). Such a measure applied to France, Greece, Portugal, Malta, Cyprus and Gibraltar, depriving the British expatriates living there of this fuel payment (Martin, 2016).

## **Discussion**

Findings of the study could be significant in terms of their contribution to the existing literature on the impact of Brexit on national identities. Brexit seemed to have contributed to the emergence of new hyphenated identities adopted by British expatriates, particularly for their dissatisfaction with the split between their home country and the EU. As Brexit would decouple Britons living abroad from the larger European community, a significant number of British expatriates, as well as some Britons at home, opted for keeping the same privileges they had enjoyed prior to the referendum by applying for a new citizenship within the EU. As such, they would emerge as other Europeans, adopting new hyphenated identities, possibly relieving themselves from a divided nation, particularly characterized by uncertainty due to Brexit.

Thus, the study validated some of the arguments advanced by Mindus (2017) and Bourmeche (2020) pertaining to the impact of Brexit on national identities. Firstly, it reinforced the idea advanced by Mindus (2017), claiming that British expatriates would appear as third country nationals after Brexit. Secondly, it confirmed Bourmeche's (2020) claim that Brexit contributed to the emergence of new identities in Europe. Equally important, the study expanded Mindus's (2017) argument about the emergence of British expatriates as third world communities after Brexit. In other words, the study showed that British expatriates would potentially adopt new hyphenated identities such as British-German and British-Irish. This in turn refuted Bourmeche's (2020) argument in relation to Britishness. Bourmeche (2020) pointed out that Brexit rekindled Britons' belonging to an 'island race', as shown in the literature whereas the current study proved that British expatriates rushed to apply for EU citizenships to avoid becoming outsiders in EU member states post-Brexit. In this study, Britishness seemed to be no longer a source of proud for this community because of the impact of Brexit. This was already elaborated in the section on findings in relation to Joyce, living in Belgium for 30 years, along with her compatriots, who had long identified themselves as more European than British.

In theoretical terms, the study validated the impact of media frames of the most important issues, Brexit in this case study, on British expatriates. Media framing of uncertainty among EU nationals and British expatriates, as well as the potential emergence of new hyphenated identities in Europe, were also reflected in opinion polls dealing with related themes. For example, uncertainty and concern associated with the future of Britain as well as Europe in the British newspapers was reflected in opinion polls prior to Brexit. A YouGov poll revealed that more countries would likely leave the EU, based on a study on seven countries, including Sweden, Denmark, France and Germany. The poll showed that 69% of Swedes believed that more countries would leave the EU, compared to 66% of Danes, 55% of French and 54% of Germans (If Britain leaves others will follow, 2016).

Such concerns grew later, making Brexit one of the most important issues facing the country, as an Ipsos Mori poll published in December 2016 revealed. EU/Brexit emerged as the most important issue facing the country with 39%. The second issue was immigration/immigrants with 35% of the votes. The third issue was NHS/Hospitals/ Healthcare with 32% (Ipsos MORI Research Highlights, 2016). What should be pointed out is that these three issues are interconnected in one way or another, particularly in terms of the contribution of immigrants in general, and that of EU nationals in particular, to the NHS and other sectors in the British

economy. With Brexit, however, more concern was raised on the potential exodus of EU nationals, presumably leading to a shortage in workforce, as already mentioned.

Similarly, concern about the impact of Brexit was reflected in opinion polls. A YouGov poll, for instance, revealed that 52% of British voters were not satisfied with Britain's handling of Brexit, presumably affecting their views about Britain's position after withdrawing from the EU. Yet, 68% of the voters did not regret Britain's decision to leave, which could possibly be explained by the impact of the rise in Euroscepticism during the Brexit campaign orchestrated by right-wing politicians, including Nigel Farage, then Leader of UKIP and one of the most prominent figures in the Leave camp (Brexit briefing, 2016).

A survey by Ipsos Mori was more revealing about the negative impact of Brexit on Britain, which could substantially affect the status of both Britons and British expatriates. The survey, conducted on a total number of 40,000 people (18-34 year-olds) across G20, was focused on four themes: UK attractiveness, doing business with UK, trust in UK Government and studying in UK. The results showed that 36% of the voters believed that Brexit had a negative impact on UK attractiveness, implying that Britain could possibly lose its shine in the future. There were 41% of the voters who believed that Brexit was negative in terms of trust in the British government. Brexit also impacted Britain as an epicenter for international students, with 30% of the voters who believed that it badly affected studying in the country (New survey shows Brexit vote slightly dents UK's reputation, 2016).

Equally important, 32% of the voters believed that Brexit had a considerable impact on business in the UK, presumably affecting London as a hub for various international businesses. In fact, many businesses would later leave London, choosing to resettle in Frankfurt, Germany or Paris, France, for instance. Concern about the impact of Brexit on businesses had been revealed in a previous study conducted by YouGov focused on the turmoil engendered by Britain's decision to leave the EU. It was found out that confidence slumped considerably as a result of Brexit (Referendum result has panicked UK businesses, 2016).

Although the current study could be considered an asset to the existing empirical literature on the impact of Brexit on national identities as well as media effects, it is limited in scope and objectives. It could have been based on a larger corpus collected from other online newspapers and over a longer span of time. One way to broaden the scope of the study would be achieved by including a corpus from social media, for instance, collecting the different reactions and posts related to Brexit. The intention would be to gauge more attitudes on Brexit and its impact on expatriates as well as Britain's position on the international scene after its final withdrawal. Interestingly, an Englishman who turned the garden outside his German home into a quirky tribute to Britain – complete with a 52-ton tank – caused uproar in his host country and was asked to remove it, implying that this British expatriate could possibly be subject to more restrictions.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

The study argued that Brexit had a major impact on national identities, thus contributing to the existing literature on the subject in a number of respects. Through a close examination of a corpus selected from the British daily newspapers, it revealed that Brexit was portrayed as a national crisis, putting British expatriates' lives, as well as that of EU nationals, at stake. The two communities were represented as bargaining chips and potential outsiders prior to and in the aftermath of Brexit, raising more concern about their status after Britain's withdrawal from the

---

<sup>10</sup> For more details on this event see Gordon et al. (2018).

EU. This situation pushed British expatriates to apply for an EU citizenship in order to keep the same rights they had enjoyed prior to Brexit. In this sense, the study implies two things:

- The impact of Brexit on national identities is considerable, particularly on British expatriates, as revealed in the selected corpus, partly extending and partly confirming some of the arguments advanced by previous scholars.
- Media framing of Brexit and British expatriates correspond to Ben-Porath's *value framing* and *responsibility framing*, validating media effects on the public, as reflected in opinion polls dealing with the same issues.

## References

- Adam, R. G. (2020). *Brexit: Causes and consequences*. Springer.
- Ben-Porath, E. N. (2009). Framing. In Sterling, C. (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Journalism*. Sage.
- Bourmeche, F. (2020). Brexit and EU migration on the BBC and CNN: Britishness versus EU identity. In D'Silva, M. U. & Atay, A. (Eds.), *Intercultural communication, identity, and social movements in a digital age* (pp. 66-81). Routledge.
- Brexit briefing: fewer than one in five think the government is handling Brexit well. (2016, November 17). <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2016/11/17/brexit-briefing>
- Burrell, K. (2018). *Brexit Mobilities: Anticipating a new Polish mobility regime*. In M. Fleming (Ed.), *Brexit and Polonia: Challenges facing the Polish community during the process of Britain leaving the European Union* (pp. 105-118). Puno Press.
- Calls to guarantee permanent residence for EU nationals ahead of Brexit talks. (2016, December 13). [Press Association]. The Daily Mail. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/pa/article-4023304/EU-nationals-living-UK-given-permanent-residence.html>
- Clark, D. (2020). *Number of UK citizens living in EU countries 2018*. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1059795/uk-expats-in-europe>
- Cook, F. (2016, June 24). *'I'm shocked and fearful': Brexit forces British expats to become FRENCH because they are so scared of being sent home*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3658450/I-m-shocked-fearful-Brexit-forces-British-ex-pats-FRENCH-scared-sent-home.html>
- Dathan, M. (2016a, March 29). *Every day 100 British expats quit Spain as uncertainty over June's EU vote triggers exodus from Europe*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3513626/Every-day-100-British-expats-quit-Spain-uncertainty-June-s-EU-vote-triggers-exodus-Europe.html>
- Dathan, M. (2016b, July 6). *Let them stay! MPs from all parties unite to demand three million EU citizens in the UK are guaranteed right to remain in the UK after Brexit*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3676983/Let-stay-MPs-parties-unite-demand-three-million-EU-citizens-UK-guaranteed-right-remain-UK-Brexit.html>
- Dathan, M. (2017, August 31). *British expats WILL be able to get free healthcare with EHIC cards after Brexit, David Davis confirms*. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/4363792/british-expats-will-be-able-to-get-free-healthcare-with-ehic-cards-after-brexit-david-davis-confirms/>
- Datta, P. R., Dasgupta, M., & Jones, M. T. (2020). *We're doomed! Brexit revisited*. CBER.

- Davidson, I. (2016, August 2) *Hands Tied: Britain will be 'powerless to remove 3 million migrants before Brexit happens'*. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1537611/britain-will-be-powerless-to-remove-3million-migrants-before-brexit-happens/>
- Gilmartin, M., Wood, P. B., & O'Callaghan, C. (2018). *Borders, mobility and belonging in the Era of Brexit and Trump*. Polity Press.
- Gordon, A., Hall, A., & Malm, S. (2018, September 3). *Thanks, but no tanks: Expat who filled his German garden with UK memorabilia including a tank, phone boxes and double decker buses is ordered to scrap his Little Britain museum*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6126069/Expat-filled-German-garden-UK-memorabilia-ordered-scrap-Little-Britain-museum.html>
- Hawkes, S. (2016, June 30). *Brit immigrant fear*. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1365983/future-of-ex-pats-living-in-europe-could-be-in-jeopardy-following-brexit-bombshell/>
- If Britain leaves others will follow (2016, June 2). <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articlesreports/2016/06/02/europe-if-britain-leaves-others-will-follow>
- Ipsos MORI Research Highlights (2016, December 22). <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk>
- Kagubare, I. (2016, June 29). *British expats flock to Brussels city halls to become Belgian*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-3666134/British-expats-flock-Brussels-city-halls-Belgian.html>
- Macdonald, A. (2016, June 20). *Brussels Brits eye going Belgian as EU referendum looms*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/wires/reuters/article-3650543/Brussels-Brits-eye-going-Belgian-EU-referendum-looms.html>
- Manning, S. (2016, June 26). *Thanks for ruining my idyllic life in Spain, says Gove's fearful brother-in-law as Tory Minister celebrates Brexit vote*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3660268/Gove-s-fearful-brother-law-fears-life-Spain-ruined-Tory-Minister-celebrates-Brexit-vote.html>
- Martin, D. (2016, September 22). *Costa fortune! Number of elderly British expats receiving winter fuel payments fell by more than two-thirds after crackdown on 'sunshine benefits'*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3801150/Costa-fortune-Number-elderly-British-expats-receiving-winter-fuel-payments-fell-two-thirds-crackdown-sunshine-benefits.html>
- Mindus, P. (2017). *European citizenship after Brexit: Freedom of movement and rights of residence*. Palgrave.
- New survey shows Brexit vote slightly dents UK's reputation among EU nations. (2016, December 20). <https://www.ipsos.com/ipsos-mori/en-uk>
- PM defends not 'giving away' guarantee for EU citizens before Brexit talks. (2016, November 30). <https://www.scotsman.com/news/politics/brexit-may-right-not-give-away-rights-eu-citizens-1461260>
- Reese, Stephen D., Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., & August E. Grant (Eds.) (2001). *Framing public life: Perspectives on media and our understanding of the social world*. Lawrence Erlbaum.
- Referendum result has panicked UK businesses that are in need of reassurance. <https://yougov.co.uk/topics/politics/articles-reports/2016/07/05/brexit-vote-sees-business-confidence-plummet>
- Sculthorpe, T., Stevens, J., & Doyle, J. (2016, June 2). *Foreign voters HAVE been wrongly sent polling cards for the referendum but will be stopped from taking part, election watchdog admits as IDS demands Cameron probe the 'deeply disturbing' claims*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3621700/Foreigners-stopped-voting-illegally->

- referendum-IDS-demands-gives-Cameron-24-hours-investigate-deeply-disturbing-claims-EU-citizens-sent-polling-cards.html
- Searle, C. (1989). *Your daily dose: Racism and the Sun*. Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom.
- Stephens, P. (2021). *Britain alone: The path from Suez to Brexit*. Faber.
- Thomas, L., & Nikolaeva, M. (2016, July 6). *France offers expats tax relief to attract London bankers*. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3677097/France-lures-London-bankers-extra-expat-tax-break.html>
- Wall, S. (2020). *Reluctant European: Britain and the European Union from 1945 to Brexit*. OUP.
- Woodhouse, C. (2016, July 28). *PM's promise: Theresa May says all 800,000 Poles living in the UK can stay after Brexit... as long as Brits can stay in EU*. <https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/1518707/theresa-may-says-all-800000-poles-living-in-the-uk-can-stay-after-brexit-as-long-as-brits-can-stay-in-eu/>

### Notes on Contributor

**Fathi Bourmeche** is Member of the Laboratory on Approaches to Discourse and Assistant Professor of Cultural Studies at the University of Sfax, Tunisia, Faculty of Letters and Humanities. His major field of research is Media and Migration Studies. He has been working on recent migration trends and their impact on host societies, particularly in the US and Britain. One of his major concerns is the changing nature of host societies, touching upon various themes, including multiculturalism, integration, and ethnicity. His recent publications include *Shaping Public Opinion*.

### ORCID

**Fathi Bourmeche**, <http://orcid.org/0000-0001-5595-3878>