

Constructing the Eastern European ‘Other’

The Horsemeat Scandal and the Migrant ‘Other’¹

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Introduction

The horsemeat controversy began when the Food Standards Agency (FSA) in Ireland discovered ‘undeclared’ horse DNA in beef burgers sold in Irish and British supermarkets in January 2013 (Hull 2013). British supermarkets withdrew millions of burgers from their shelves while the FSAs undertook its own investigations (Food Standards Agency 2013a). Both the Irish and UK FSA revealed that beef trimmings had been imported to Ireland, possibly from Poland via Spain, which comprised 75 per cent horsemeat. Further investigations ascertained 100 per cent horsemeat in Findus lasagne produced by the French company Comigel, 80–100 per cent in Aldi’s lasagne and spaghetti bolognese, and 60 per cent in Tesco’s spaghetti bolognese (Food Standards Agency 2013c; Food Standards Agency 2013b). The FSA in the UK concluded that while the adulteration had not posed any health risk to consumers, this was a ‘gross negligence or deliberate contamination’ of the food chain (Food Standards Agency 2013c).

This revelation of the presence of horsemeat in processed food produced by renowned manufacturers and suppliers such as Comigel and Findus meant that the scandal implicated a

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wider European context. With Comigel and Findus present in 15 European Union (EU) countries, the announcement led to the withdrawal of contaminated ready meals in Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, Belgium, and the Netherlands. The Europeanisation of the scandal sparked not only a ‘horsemeat summit’ of food ministers, but also the involvement of Interpol to investigate criminal activity in the meat supply chain in Europe. Amidst this intense scrutiny, the Spanish and Polish governments denied being sources of contamination in the Irish market. Romania became implicated in the scandal when a French minister subsequently blamed it as the source of contamination for Findus products (Lawrence 2013). A chain of blame unfolded from this accusation whereby Comigel, the supplier for Findus, pointed the finger at its meat supplier, the French firm Spanghero, while the latter asserted it would sue its Romanian suppliers.

The Romanian government and suppliers exonerated themselves from blame by providing documentation to confirm that the meat had left their abattoirs explicitly labelled as ‘horsemeat’, and that the deception had occurred outside their borders. The French minister conceded that Romania had acted in good faith and that the French company Spanghero may have substituted horsemeat (Lawrence 2013) for beef. The completion of the FSA audit in the UK showed further evidence of sizeable quantities of beef substituted by horsemeat in local markets, which led to the police making a number of arrests at various processing plants in Wales and England. A report prepared by a select committee of Parliament, published two and a half months after the scandal, concluded that the scale of the fraud on British consumers was ‘breathtaking’ and that the present control mechanisms across the European food industry had failed consumers (House of Commons Environment Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee 2013). Two men were convicted in the UK in 2013 for failing to keep adequate records that could trace the provenance of the horsemeat they sold as beef (CPS 2015). These records are

required under traceability regulations, which state that the source of meat must be traceable from field to fork (Schwägele 2015). There are still ongoing investigations into this scandal. A review of the integrity of the UK food network was commissioned in 2013, and the Elliot report published in 2014 made numerous observations and recommendations including the setting up of a food crime unit. It also observed that the evidence from other European countries highlights that there is a substantial problem with organised crime in the food sector and that the UK is not immune to it (Lawrence 2014).

Despite a wider European context to organised food crime, the horsemeat scandal, which had prominent media coverage from January to March 2013, enmeshed the Eastern Europeans, particularly Romanians, with the controversy in complex ways. Temporally it conjoined public anger over the deception of horsemeat labelling with the anticipated mass migration of Romanians into the UK from January 2014. When Romania and Bulgaria joined the EU in 2007, the British government imposed transitional controls intended to limit the access of low-skilled migrants from these countries to the labour market, restricting them to specific types of jobs in agriculture and food processing and limiting their access to benefits (Vicol and Allen 2014). These controls were set to expire on 1 January 2014, when the horsemeat scandal was still an issue of public debate and anxiety. Our analysis of the scandal revealed that many of the debates on horsemeat were intertextual. While both stories were unrelated, the migration issue configured in the horsemeat scandal through direct references and through associations built through dominant discourses. With the temporal convergence of media narratives of the food scandal and the impending influx of Romanians in 2014 with the relaxation of transitional controls, sustained associations were built between the two news stories through resonant themes of British victimhood and vulnerability juxtaposed with those of Romanians as antagonists due to the threats they presented to the British nation. Recurring themes of deviance

and criminality were accorded to Romanians in these discourses, which constructed discernible associations between the two media stories (see Adams, 2013b; Collins, 2013). The double articulation of contamination (i.e. both of borders and transgressions of the body through food) enmeshed much of the horsemeat scandal coverage in media discourses. In the process, these discourses – whether on immigration, the deception of British consumers or their bodily violations – hinged on discursive constructions of the Eastern European ‘other’. These essentialist discourses of the ‘other’ were further mediated by a degree of irrationality ignited by the food scandal, in the form of patriotism, disbelief in science, and a feeling of threat to fundamental belief systems.

Food and Food Scandals in our Sociological Imagination

There is a proliferation of research that discusses food as a form of communication, and its symbolic importance in meaning-making in our everyday lives through rituals, consumption practices, and discursive formations (Cramer, Greene, and Walters 2011; Appadurai 1981, 494). Food can denote belief systems that influence our negotiations and constructions of identities and nationhood (LeBesco and Naccarato 2008, 1). Food as an emotive and affective entity is capable of mobilising strong emotions and can demarcate the ‘systematic generation of difference and the separation of self from the other’ (Ashley et al. 2004, 9). Food can thus be a site of ‘tension and disruption’ in that it defines our identities through our consumption patterns (Cramer, Greene, and Walters 2011, 16).

Cultural studies on food have explored its identity and representation on a national level as well as from an everyday perspective. Roland Barthes (1972), for example, explored how steak is a ‘deeply nationalised foodstuff’ in France, where its cultural significance is understood through the historic context of France in the 1950s when it withdrew from the empire. DeSoucey’s (2010, 432) case study of foie gras explored how nationalist sentiments can shape the

production of food, particularly when our historic identities are threatened or at risk. Food is undoubtedly political, enmeshed in our everyday life and lifestyle choices, as well as in popular culture (Parasecoli 2013, 421).

A related topic of discussion is the topic of food taboos, where cultural contexts impose 'proscriptions on behaviour' such that what may be reviled in one culture may be sacred in another (see Allan and Burridge 2006, 1). Mary Douglas' extensive work on food taboos discerns the social and power relations embedded in food, particularly the 'different degrees of hierarchy, inclusion and exclusion, boundaries and transactions across boundaries' (Douglas 1972, 61). Taboos can say much about the 'casting of blame', but also about differentiation around food and between groups (Douglas 1966, 81). Classification or separation imposed through food provides a means not only to distinguish between 'us and them', 'insiders and outsiders', but also to sustain power relations (Ashley et al. 2004, 2). Taboos can bring cohesion to societies and a sense of belonging to groups (Douglas 1966), as well as a 'feeling of control over situations where ordinary mortals have little or none' (Allan and Burridge 2006, 9). Furthermore, when there is a risk of encroachment and danger, 'dietary rules controlling what goes into the body serve as an analogy of the corpus of their cultural categories of risk' (Douglas 1997, 52, cited Ashley et al 2008, 188).

Douglas notes that the notions of contamination and taboo often emerge out of a particular mythology around the animal. These myths may be based on a perceived affinity between humans and the animal, where the animal in earlier times may have been 'a strong or talented being' that 'rendered a service to the god, or in some prehistoric exchange a human and ancestor incurred a debt of gratitude' (Douglas 1999, 143). This 'pact of everlasting friendship'

meant that it would be ‘an act of gross ingratitude and impiety’ or a taboo to consume that animal (Douglas 1999, 158).

Food scandals, like food taboos, mirror the complexity of our relationship with food, and with the ‘other’ imagined through the migrant or through diasporic communities. Migrants have ‘always provided a gateway to new food’ (Tarulevicz 2012) in multiple ways. For example, the Polish migration into the UK saw the opening of Polish shops to sell Polish food to the diaspora living in the UK (Rabikowska and Burrell 2004). This has also happened with the arrival of other migrant communities. As Jon May (1996) observes, the ‘exotification of food’ amongst the new cultural class of young professionals became a means to impose distinctions of class and race. While food can provide a platform for imagining the ‘other’ as exotic, it can also be used to create social distinctions and categories of the ‘other’ through consumption. Cosmopolitan cities full of exotic offering in terms of food and eateries may present a veneer of acceptance without completely eradicating distrust or anxiety about the ‘other’.

Food scandals can exhibit our irrational fears, including the crude stereotypes we hold of the ‘other’ (see Jackson 2010), by framing these through risk discourses. The UK has a long history of national food scandals, particularly with relevance to meat and its potential threats to the corporeal body. The BSE/CJD scandal emerging from British farming and food production practices, dubbed ‘mad cow disease’ in the media, thrust the UK into pandemonium, full of fear and paranoia. By recasting meat as a source of disease and degeneration, the scandal was a potent threat to the British historical imagination, where meat played a centric role as a source of communion and pride. The 2001 foot-and-mouth epidemic provides an interesting comparison for the current horsemeat scandal, as although it was also attributed to contaminated imported meat, the place of origin of the meat remained undisclosed (Nerlich,

Hamilton, and Rowe 2002). In contrast, the horsemeat scandal was constructed primarily in relation to imported food, and thus implicated the foreigner as a figure of blame.

Eastern European as the non-European

The notion of horsemeat as taboo needs to be contextualised within the history of Europe, including the formation of the EU as well as the polar construction of ‘Western Europe versus Eastern Europe’ in historical and popular imagination. Edward Said’s (1978) concept of ‘orientalism’ as a critical category surveyed how the West perceived the East through a set of discursive practices. Said’s thesis inspired a panoply of writing that addressed Eastern Europe and the Balkans as the ‘Eastern other’ – situated in Europe but not quite European (see Bakić-Hayden and Hayden 1992; Bakić-Hayden 1995; Buchowski 2006; Hayden 1992; Todorova 1997; Wolff 1994). This strand of literature discusses the consumption and production of Eastern Europe as the stigmatized ‘other’ by Western Europe. Larry Wolff (1994), directly drawing on Said, argued that Eastern Europe was first perceived as the ‘other’ during the Enlightenment by Western intellectuals, as well as by writers who espoused views similar in nature to the Western gaze of the Middle East. Maria Todorova (1997, 17) writing on the Balkans, argued that the West perceived this region in terms of an ‘imputed ambiguity’, trapped in an ambivalent state of ‘neither fish, nor fowl, semi-oriental, not fully European but semi-developed, and semi-civilized’.

Instead of a binary opposition, Todorova’s Balkanism conveyed the region in terms of retardation with regard to humanity and civilization from the vantage point of the West. Both Wolff and Todorova emphasised the alterity of Eastern Europe and the ways it has been conceptualised as the ‘other’ by the West. For example, the Cold War was shaped by the semiotics of American foreign policy and the positioning of the USSR and communism as

Europe's 'external other'. The precursor of the EU (EEC) was also identified as Western Europe in contrast to Eastern Europe (Delanty 1995). Michal Buchowski (2006, 465), drawing on Said, Wolff, and Todorova, pointed out that orientalism and the process of creation of the 'other' were contiguous with the modernist condition of the world, in which the Berlin Wall signified an emblematic completion in terms of the incarceration of the 'other' within a space. With the collapse of the Berlin Wall, Western Europe's main threatening 'other' disappeared partly blurring the identity spaces of Europe. What did emerge, however, was a differentiation of Eastern Europe between the good (those nations becoming part of the European 'in-group) and the bad (their perceived characteristics of being backwards, violent, and extremely nationalistic) (see also Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen 2006).

Post 1990, the fluidity of space has not eradicated the topography of power nor the mindset of constructing social distinctions and retaining the 'other' (Buchowski 2006, 466). The West and its 'civilization values' have become the undisputed norm, and the relationship between Europe and its 'others' is 'monitored and regulated through a system of disciplinary discourses and techniques invoking the oriental East as Europe's threatening external' (Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen 2006, 174). What has also emerged is a 'resurgent Orientalism' present in Europe's relations to its external 'others' and in a 'growing hostility towards its internal others'. The re-emergence of an identity struggle based on the notions of Europe and the 'Orient' have given way to both a new orientalism in the politics of Europe towards its external 'others' and a re-emergence of aggressive nationalism directed against internal Muslim 'others' at a national level.

In redirecting these debates towards the politics of food, Haldrup, Koefoed, and Simonsen (2006, 173) argue that cultural and national identities are constituted and renegotiated through

concrete bodily encounters in everyday life, where food can play a significant role as a material artefact. In terms of the horsemeat scandal in the UK, media framings of the incident associated horsemeat with orientalist perspectives of Eastern Europeans. The scandal was often built through certain essentialist connotations of Eastern Europeans, encompassing crude cultural stereotypes and the 'other' as not possessing the genteel qualities of the British, who treat the horse as a noble creature that should not be destined for our dinner tables. The construction of the Eastern European as a cultural 'other' bound them with a pattern of differentiation that cast them as anything but European. The discourse on horsemeat as a bodily transgression was captured and mirrored by the event of Eastern Europeans entering the UK with the expansion of the EU, and as such the violation was both of the spatial territory as well as of the corporeal body. British identity through its food culture and British mythic imaginations of the horse were both at risk through the contamination of its food supply chain as well as its borders through uncontrolled immigration. The binding of the contentious political debate of immigration with the orientalist construction of Eastern Europe contemporised and renewed the differentiation of this European 'other'.

The horsemeat scandal also needs to be understood through Britain's conflicted and problematic relationship with the concept of the EU. On the one hand the EU stood for the free movement of people, trade, and the hospitality of the Western European world, and on the other hand it ignited deep-seated fears about the loss of sovereignty and identity (Sellar, Staddon, and Young 2009, 292; see also Darian-Smith 1999). Historically, the decision to join the EU was justified through an economic rationale that perceived Britain as being in danger of being marginalised in a globalising world, and the need to create new markets to compensate for the loss of the British empire. The public discourse on 'Europe' has also been shaped by a strong Eurosceptic tradition of thought that is hostile to closer ties to Europe (which are seen as threats

to British sovereignty), and an identity rooted in the notion of the ‘spatial separation of an island, psychologically distant from the European integration movement’, and of a historical and racial distinctiveness (Daddow 2013 pp. 212-213). This Eurosceptic view tends to be emotive, patriotic, and sometimes xenophobic (Wall 2012). Over the past 50 years an increasingly hostile imagining of Europe has been evident in newspaper discourses (Sparke 2000).

With the expansion of the EU in 2004 and 2007 to include 10 Central and Eastern European states, the British government underestimated how many Poles would enter the UK after the restrictions on their movements were lifted in 2004. When Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, media scare stories warned of an ‘invasion’, and based their predictions on the combined population of both countries (Light and Young 2009). Research on the 2007 accession by Light and Young (2009) found considerable variations in the media treatment of Eastern Europeans, with Romanians being singled out for particularly hostile coverage and being categorised as a ‘recognizable and identifiable menace’ (2009, 288). In essence, the arrival of new member states in the EU in 2004 and 2007 raised questions about the notion of ‘Europe’ and about who has the right to speak about ‘what Europe is and should be’ (Feakins and Bialasiewicz 2006, 658).

Othering, Alterity and the Horsemeat Scandal

With the horsemeat scandal in the UK spanning from January to March 2013, we analysed the distinct discourses and techniques employed by the media to differentiate the ‘other’. Through critical discourse analysis (CDA) we discerned how social power, dominance, and inequalities were enacted in media discourse. In undertaking CDA there is an acknowledgement that media, as part of social structure and social interaction, can reproduce ideological positions and

notions of inequality. Our analyses focused on how discourse can enact, confirm, legitimate, or reproduce relations of power and dominance in a society (Van Dijk 1993, 250). The construction of Eastern Europe through an overarching orientalist paradigm during the horsemeat scandal became the primary conceptual framework from which we examined media texts. Our CDA focused on the discourses of alterity of Eastern Europe (particularly of Roma and Romanians) and the development of binaries between depictions of ‘us and them’ in media discourses. We also examined discourses that could be located between alterity and binaries, in what Jensen (2011) called a ‘third space’. For instance, the French may be portrayed as having different customs but they are presented as being socially evolved like the British in their attitudes to the horse. Our selection of media for analysis included the public service broadcasters, the BBC and ITV, and national newspapers.¹ Local newspapers were excluded from the sample as we were concerned with a national ‘imagined community’ and constructions of identity (or claims to this identity). In addition, the aim was to discern the media’s social imaginary of Britishness in comparison with the Eastern ‘other’ and how the discourses as a corpus yielded this imagination. The emphasis here was not to extrapolate the media’s ideological position of being left, right, or centre, but rather to identify what this totality of discourses yielded in terms of a sociological imagination of nationhood through the horsemeat scandal. While there is invariably a degree of difference between media sources in terms of ideological doctrines, our analysis focused on the thematic resonance that emerged from the corpus of texts that bound the horsemeat scandal with immigration debates or an impending crime wave in the UK due to the influx of the ‘other’. Our reference to media henceforth refers to the sample under scrutiny.

We identified relevant online articles through key term searches (‘horsemeat + scandal’ and ‘horsemeat’) between January 2013 (when the story emerged) and the end of March 2013

(when the horsemeat scandal had waned). Our media corpus included a variety of articles including news, features, analysis, video news clips, documentaries, and information graphics, as well as op-eds and editorial leaders. These generated a preliminary corpus of 192 items over the three-month period of study. Our focus was on texts as opposed to images, but we nevertheless included the text captions in the images, as these served to direct the reader's gaze to a preferred interpretation of the image.

Preliminary readings highlighted an association between the horsemeat scandal and Romanians from mid-February 2013. An additional key term search of 'Romania + migrants' was undertaken, generating an additional 71 texts, which yielded a combined total of 263 texts. Recurring discourses were discerned through an open reading of the texts and a secondary reading through a CDA, which highlighted distinctive techniques employed by the media to represent the 'other'. These included the recurrence of essentialist frames, which tended to consign negative attributes to the 'other' while generalising and interpreting their cultural customs, practices, and values through these stereotypes. The media also used distant-proximity framing on the one hand to create resonance with shared British values and morality, and on the other hand to create dissonance with the 'other' by portraying Eastern Europeans as culturally backwards and retarded. The horse became a cultural signifier to showcase the advanced morality and superiority of the British as animal lovers juxtaposed with the Eastern Europeans as nations of mafia gangs who abuse and butcher their horses. In addition, the parallel discourse of associating the horsemeat scandal with the imminent relaxing of the borders fused these events, suggesting and attributing blame through cultural stereotypes and discourses of risk to the body and the nation. The opening up of the UK's labour market to Romanians and Bulgarians in January 2014 often became an intertextual discourse that revealed fear and anxiety of the 'other' in complex ways.

Discourse of Essentialism and Construction of Cultural Stereotypes

Despite the expansion of the EU and the fluidity of its borders for several decades, essentialist discourses produce static frames that can manifest in our discursive practices. There has been much interest in the notion of psychological essentialism, where perceptions of the ‘other’ are anchored in the fixedness of traits and categories. As such, ‘people understand some attributes and social categories in terms of fixed underlying and identity-determining attributes’, which may then have implications for the formation of stereotypes and prejudices (Bastian and Haslam 2005, 229). Such essentialist perceptions can lead to the erroneous premise that these traits and attributes are deeply rooted and natural, thus contributing to the formation of prejudice and a schism between social groups (see Rothbart and Taylor 1992; Haslam et al. 2000). Haslam et al. (2000) argue that assuming something as naturally occurring or immutable combined with the reification of these traits produce uniformity in categorising groups but also in the social processing of information about others. Hence racial, ethnic, gender, and other social categories are naturalised and stigmatised through this misapprehension. Leyens et al. (2001) argue that essentialist perceptions can equally entail the denial of human attributes to out-groups. Such conceptualisations can make the ‘other’ less human, denoting the imagined retardation of their biological and cultural development.

The context of the horsemeat scandal revealed resonant essentialist discourses in our analysis. Negative essential traits were attributed to Eastern Europeans while juxtaposing British identity as being in contrast to these. One recurrent discourse that the media utilised to construct British identity was to invoke the mythic imagination of the horse in British history and folklore. This mythic imagination appropriated a moral tone in repudiating the horsemeat as a contaminant in British culture. The horse was portrayed as having made ‘huge sacrifices alongside riders in

historic battles’, thereby creating a sense of loyalty that set them apart from other working animals (BBC News Magazine 2013a). Hence Britishness was epitomised in imaginaries of a historically and culturally rooted relationship with the horse. The attribution of anthropomorphic qualities to the horse became the basis from which to argue for British exceptionalism with regard to eating horsemeat. This exceptionalism was cast through a moral position, where the British would eschew horsemeat as a food source other than in times of acute hardship and shortage such as rationing during World War II (see Lichfield, 2013). The visceral recoil towards horsemeat and the absence of a similar reaction among European and Asian counterparts was framed as a statement about Britishness and its moral superiority (Johnson 2013).

Media discourses repeatedly invoked historical memory to sustain the horsemeat taboo. The taboo was traced to a period before the Norman invasion, when Anglo-Saxons viewed horses as mythical warriors or legendary figures linked to royal dynasties (Prigg 2013). The reintroduction of Christianity in Britain by the 8th century had relegated horse-eating to a pagan tradition (Prigg 2013). This cultural and theological evolution differentiated the civilised, moral Briton who recognised the nobility of the horse, from others who were not evolved enough to make this discernment. The horse was seen as being akin to domesticated pets such as dogs or cats, which are named and ascribed ‘extra’ anthropomorphic qualities and values (BBC News Magazine 2013a). The association of the horse with noble sports such as horse racing imbued it with regal qualities. As such, the horse was evoked through elevated descriptions of being ‘majestic’ and ‘beautiful, magnificent and noble’ (BBC News Magazine 2013a; Rao 2013).

While the media invoked British historical memory, sports, literary classics, and popular culture to sustain an aversion to horsemeat, they depicted the French penchant for horsemeat

in romantic and contrastingly less pejorative terms. The French ‘other’ as a civilised society known for its gastronomical innovations was constructed as an entity closer to the British. Horsemeat consumption dating back to the 1700s emerged as a working-class food in France, characterised by periodic resurgences during times of famine (BBC News Magazine 2013a). The French consumption of horsemeat was not portrayed as morally backward, but in fact fashionable and acceptable in terms of their culinary and historic traditions. The French were constructed as having a tradition of artistry and craftsmanship in the form of specialist horse butchery (Chrisafis 2013). Media reported how prior to the scandal there had been a steady closure of shops as horse butchers retired in France. Running through this media coverage was a sense of nostalgia at a dying craft that was peculiarly French and seemed to epitomise an appreciation of gastronomical excellence and with it, ironically, a respect for the horse. Moral judgment was suspended for the French, and this was often justified through positive stereotypes of Gallic pragmatism and gastronomic pursuits. If ‘banquets of horse flesh were all the rage’ in Paris, then these were naturally in sync with the innovative and eccentric streak of the French and Parisians (BBC News Magazine 2013a).

Despite the British population’s aversion to horsemeat, the media presented the French as being closer to the British. It argued that the British experimentation with exotic foods, properly sourced and clearly labelled, brought them relatively closer to the French with their artisan horse butchers and appreciation of quality food. Both countries valued the importance of consumer choice and were equally outraged at the denial of consumer sovereignty through fraudulent labelling.

The Uncouth ‘Other’

When the horsemeat scandal unfolded with the discovery of horsemeat in beef and beef-related products, the initial reaction of French ministers and companies was to deflect attention away from themselves and ‘point the finger of blame’ at Romanian abattoirs, suggesting that changes to Romanian law ‘may be responsible’ for the food fraud (Kelly 2013; Charter and Sage 2013). As detailed investigations got under way, suspicion turned to French companies who it seemed had ‘at least’ failed to apply the strict traceability rules imposed in France during the BSE crisis in the 1990s (Lichfield, Randall, and Sanchez 2013). Prime Minister Victor Ponta claimed that a French ‘cover-up was responsible for the horsemeat scandal’ and that the accusers had ‘viewed his country as a soft target’ (Charter and Sage 2013). When it became clear that the Romanians had been exonerated of food fraud, the British media sought other ways of blaming and distancing the Romanians culturally instead of targeting the French, whom they portrayed as being closer to the British as a civilised nation.

The instinctive reaction in some media sources to the news that the horsemeat may have originated in Romania and Poland (Kelly 2013) was that ‘of course it had to be Romania’ and a ‘sense of relief’ that the blame could be placed on the Eastern Europeans rather than someone closer to home (BBC News Magazine 2013b). Embedded in these taken-for-granted assumptions of culpability were deeply held stereotypes and a predisposition to ignore cultural similarities between the British and the Romanians, where there was a shared aversion to consuming horsemeat. The long supply chains in meat production and processing also made it possible to insert the Romanians as culpable in the deception scandal.

The media reports had identified three main sources of the horsemeat in burgers and ready-meals available on supermarket shelves in Britain; abattoirs in Romania and in Poland and local slaughterhouses. Although some attention was paid to the latter, most media reports

focused on the Eastern European sources, particularly Romania. This enabled the media to associate the deception with Eastern Europe, particularly Romania and Poland. These defrauding discourses were often reported along with the imminent influx of low-skilled migrants from Romania and Bulgaria, thus entwining the deception with the British anxiety over the imminent immigration. Both events were constructed as potential threats to the British corporeal body and nationhood.

While the media presented the British as a moral and civilised society, it drew on historical-cultural stereotypes of Romania as economically backward to juxtapose it as the undeveloped and uncivilised 'other'. The discourse sought to portray Romania as backward in a multitude of ways. The articulations drew attention to a 2011 EU ban on the export of live horses from Romania to curb the spread of equine AIDs. This ban, the media claimed, had resulted in farmers 'exporting slaughtered' horses instead (Collins 2013). Furthermore, the ban on horse-drawn carts on roads in Romania (which had been a form of transport for centuries) was also put forth as a plausible link with the horsemeat scandal, as millions of animals were now surplus to requirements in Romania (Lichfield 2013; BBC News Magazine 2013b). In sharp contrast to the British romanticising of the horse, the discourses portrayed the Romanian psyche as having 'no room for sentimentality', and this 'harsh reality' meant that horses were destined for slaughter in abattoirs (Fagge 2013).

The harsh economic conditions of Romania became a backdrop for arguing that horses were not looked after and were vulnerable to gypsy gangs offering paltry sums of cash for them or making huge profits by selling them on to industrial-scale abattoirs. In comparison with the more evolved British and French, the Romanians had reduced the animal to the level of utility or a cut-price commodity for meat profiteering. Discourses of the economic backwardness of

Romania thus converged with a constructed cultural backwardness epitomised in the cruel treatment of the horse.

The discourse of criminality was another resonant strand in the depiction of Romania, which was portrayed as a ‘violent mafia state’, despite UN statistics that put violent crime in Bucharest at the lowest of any capital city in Europe (BBC News Magazine 2013b). The media interwove claims of ‘industrial-scale’ fraud with ‘organised crime’, ‘international criminal networks’, and abattoirs of ‘industrial’ scale (Lawrence 2013; Kelly 2013; Fagge and Robinson 2013). Media discourses also linked ‘mafia gangs’ and ‘mobsters’ in Italy, Poland, Russia, and Romania in an arch of criminality across Eastern Europe, through the Netherlands and Spain, and into Britain. This route of criminality was linked with global supply chains to invoke the unforeseen threats faced by modern Britain (Lawrence 2013; Collins 2013; Crampton 2013). The discourses claimed that ‘previous convictions’ and ‘intelligence’ suggested a link between the ‘horse trade, meat laundering and various forms of trafficking’ including drugs, people, and arms (Lawrence 2013). The Romanian gangs were nicknamed the ‘horse mafia’ and implicated in exploiting not just poor vulnerable framers, but also wild horses in the Danube delta, which had been culled and sold as meat by bribing and intimidating professionals to provide documentation to make it legitimate produce (Collins, 2013; Lichfield, 2013; Kelly 2013). This discourse of gangs and unbreakable chains of criminality in Europe situated the horsemeat scandal through the cultural norms and practices of the Romanians, constructing it as a risk that is not containable within its own boundaries.

The pejorative constructions of Romania as a backward and violent nation often coalesced with discourses about the mistreatment of horses. While the British and French elevated these animals to the status of nobility or artistry, the Eastern Europeans had reduced them to beasts

of burden, carrying out ‘demanding work’ as draught horses hauling heavy equipment (Fagge 2013; Lucas and Buckley 2013). On their one day off a week, the horses were left untended and neglected, ‘caked in mud’ and tethered in a yard full of pigs and poultry (Fagge 2013). When worn out and ‘too old to work’, they joined the ranks of other farm animals under the ‘butcher’s knife’ (Fagge 2013) ending up ultimately as Italian salami or fraudulent ready-meals (Lucas and Buckley 2013). The media depicted them as suffering ‘appalling cruelty’, often ‘beaten, whipped and transported’ in overcrowded and illegal lorries on their way to the abattoir (Collins 2013). Such accounts of animal cruelty and abuse contrasted powerfully with the mythic imagination of the horse in British culture and society. In doing so, the media constructed the Romanian as an uncouth, barbaric, and savage ‘other’.

The media’s scene-setting of Romania as a backward nation also focused on the Roma community in the country. The Roma or gypsy community was presented as untouched by modernisation, living with a scarcity of paved roads and electricity, a ‘virtually non-existent’ sewage system, and with a ‘whiff of raw sewage’ hanging in the air (Adams 2013a; Taylor 2013). Gypsy neighbourhoods were depicted as not fit for human habitation, overrun by crime, drug dealers, prostitutes, and gangs. Saddled with poverty, families with 10–12 children struggle to survive on money sent back from family members working in Britain or Germany, or through begging (Charter 2013). Thus, much as horses had been untended and neglected by their owners, so too were the Roma population by the Romanian government.

The media capitalised on a powerful trope of the communism, abandonment, and neglect of gypsies to suggest that the government’s policies towards them were driving the push for their migration to Britain. The ‘dismantling of Communist era industries’, the closure of the factories, and the failure to provide alternative sources of work meant there was ‘no

employment' for many of the Roma (Charter 2013). The associations of decay and dereliction were resonant in the depictions of Romania as an ex-Communist state where everyday life is a struggle without proper accommodation or heating. The 'Communist era' evoked the sense of a time warp, with the Roma locked into a brutish, un-modernised past. Romania's Communist past provided a means to imagine the nation as the backward 'other': uncivilised politically, socially, and economically (Gladdis 2013; Adams 2013a). For example, 'images of children abandoned in Soviet-era orphanages are the first thing they associate with Romania' (BBC News Magazine 2013b).

Influx of the Eastern Europeans – Risk and Threat to the British Nation

The discourses about meat contamination overlapped with the media narratives of the UK being flooded with Eastern European migrants. Discourses about “‘deep pockets” of poverty’ in Romania's gypsy communities (Adams 2013c) were reported along with accounts of large numbers of young men from these communities who were 'already career beggars' in Britain (Charter 2013) or 'mafia bosses who can't wait to flood Britain with beggars' (Kelly 2013). Reports warned that Romanian and Bulgarian 'immigrants could flood into Britain' once restrictions on the right to live and work here were lifted on 1 January 2014, and a major broadcaster ran a documentary entitled *The Romanians Are Coming* (Channel 4 2014). The media cautioned that just as the horsemeat fraud was unknown, so would the scale of immigration into the UK.

Britain and British borders were depicted as being at the cusp of a multitude of threats with the impending influx of Romanians. The horsemeat scandal symbolised the imminence of weightier social threats to the British environment, including a Romanian crime wave where

gangs of criminals would ‘terrorise our streets’ (Giannangelli 2013; Dawar 2013). Begging gangs and cashpoint scams were presented as typically Romanian (BBC News 2012; BBC News Magazine 2013b). The horsemeat scandal converged with discourses of an imminent Romanian crime epidemic to include murder, rape, sexual assault, and armed robbery, citing police figures and often backed by statistics. Media reports ranked Romanians as second only to Poles in the list of perpetrators of such crimes (O’Neill 2013; Hartley-Parkinson 2013) and the Metropolitan police described Romanian crime as a ‘matter of concern’ (O’Neill 2013). The discourses about the violation of the body through eating processed horsemeat were paralleled with violations of British borders and streets, where the latter evoked an imminent danger and violence to British identity and nationhood.

The horsemeat scandal revealed many xenophobic stereotypes about Romanians. Stereotypes of criminality and anxiety over mass migration and drains on the benefit system were particularly heightened with the looming deadline to relax restrictions for employment for Romanians in 2014. The discourse of politicians about Romanians and their associations with criminality entrapped the Romanian identity with an essentialist discourse of overtly negative portrayals. With immigration being such an emotional and controversial issue in the British public sphere, political discourses tapped into this anxiety, often evoking typical stereotypes about Romanian migration into the UK. Euro MP Gerard Batten was quoted as saying that ‘what an open-door immigration policy delivers ... [is a] complete inability to protect ourselves from foreign criminals’ (Dawar 2013). Similarly, during the Eastleigh by-election in mid February 2013, the UK Independence Party’s (UKIP) candidate, Diane James, suggested that areas with large numbers of Romanian immigrants have high crime rates (Kember 2013). She subsequently apologised for presenting all Romanians as criminals but reiterated claims of

‘evidence’ that ‘where high numbers of Romanians have settled, there has been an increase in crime’.

The leader of UKIP, Nigel Farage, warned that the relaxation of rules in January 2014 will mean ‘the floodgates will open’ for Eastern European immigrants and this would not only put ‘pressure on services’ such as schools but it would also increase pressure on the police because of the ‘crime associated with Romanians’ (Kember 2013). He added that one of the issues with the Olympics in 2012 was the Metropolitan Police having to deal with Romanian criminal gangs who were pick-pocketing. The comments were condemned by Dr Ion Jinga, the Romanian ambassador to the UK, as ‘extremist’, warning that this sort of rhetoric could incite racist behaviour. He also branded Diane James’s remarks as ‘aggressive, rude and unfounded’ and insisted that there were ‘no particular crime issues involving Romanian nationals during the Olympics and Paralympics’ (Kember 2013). Cameron’s response to this shift in immigration discourse was to pledge to tighten residency tests for migrants from the EU in order to prevent ‘benefit tourism’.

The coalescing of immigration discourses with the horsemeat scandal in newspapers, renewed through politicians’ negative remarks about Romanian migration into the UK, entrapped the Eastern European ‘other’ in a narrow essentialist frame: the Romanian became a figure of social deviance, construed as an opportunist in the expanding EU. Despite the exoneration of Romania in the horsemeat scandal, the media portrayals of the horse as a mythic symbol of history, its mistreatment in Romania, and the objectification of the gypsy community through popular culture and television programmes such as *My Big Fat Gypsy Wedding*, foregrounded an alterity where Romanians were social and economic pariahs in civilised Europe. Horsemeat

became a metaphor for Eastern Europeans as contaminants of the food supply chain and transgressors of other physical and geographical boundaries.

Our findings concur with the Migration Observatory's study (Vicol and Allen 2014, 2) of Romanians and Bulgarians in 19 major national newspapers in 2013, which concluded that while the horsemeat scandal was unrelated to migration, the focus of these media stories was on migration and the migrant. As our analysis also found, the stories were reported to have strongly associated Romanians with criminality and antisocial behaviour. The study also confirmed the 'link with criminality' (13), with 'crime and settlement' (20), and with 'gangs, crime and economic hardship' (20), and agreed that Romanians in comparison with Bulgarians tended to 'appear more in connection with criminality and economic poverty (15). The period leading up to the removal of transitional controls for Bulgarians and Romanians was crucial, as it provided a temporal context for the horsemeat scandal as part of the body politic with reference to the post-accession period from 2004. The media discourses capture the anxieties over mass migration with the lifting of these controls and the need to curb migration thereafter. As such the migration issue became a gravitational pull that created connections between the two events when they were in fact unrelated. The converging of the two events led to claims such as: 'just as our social fabric has been torn apart by uncontrolled immigration and our economy has been undermined by the EU, so our food supplies are hit by foreign groups that are indifferent to the needs of the British public' (McKinstry 2013). The alleged victimhood of the British people through the expansion of the EU became a palimpsest for inscribing stories of Romanians, no matter how unrelated.

The Migration Observatory's study (Vicol and Allen 2014), like that of Light and Young (2009), confirmed that Romanians are ranked lower than Bulgarians in media discourses in

terms of negative portrayals. The Balkanist framings discerned by Light and Young (2009) were also evident in our analysis, and were confirmed in the Migration Observatory study. The lack of sophistication in newspaper discourses, where news coverage tended to lapse into crude cultural stereotypes, is located within the temporal frames of post-accession. Our analysis shows how the horsemeat scandal functioned to accentuate these anxieties, enabling a proximity to food, the body and through consumption or ingesting a 'foreign substance'. The threat of the Romanians could be imagined as an intimate and urgent issue that was threatening Britain's food security and violating its cultural sensitivities through people's bodies and through its geography. Where British streets had been under attack from gangs and criminals, the horsemeat scandal made the Romanian threat more urgent and intimate by entering households. British cultural sanctity and sensitivity constructed around the mythical qualities of the horse was under siege, as was the meat on British dinner tables. In the face of such relentless invasion, the British were seen as vulnerable victims through the loss of control over their borders.

Conclusion

By initially implicating the Romanians, the horsemeat scandal was foregrounded in the wider political context of the expansion of EU, the porousness of its borders, and British anxiety over the imminent migration of Romanians and Bulgarians with the lifting of their restrictions to work in January 2014. The constructions of alterity of the Romanians were discerned through a multitude of strategies from the mythic imagination of the horse, the ascribing of noble qualities to the horse, the association of Romanians with animal abuse, and Romania's impoverished conditions that render it an uncouth 'other' and not civilised enough to be accepted as European. Horsemeat presented both a cultural taboo and a violation by the Eastern European 'other'. Our analysis of the horsemeat scandal is contextualised through the temporal

frames of the expansion of EU and the UK's anxiety over Romanian and Bulgarian migration. The media frames, through recurrent and resonant discourses of the 'other', not only portrayed crude stereotypes of the 'other' but also exhibited their anxieties by seeking to rationalise these through what were seen to be valid discourses yet essentialised the Romanians in terms of criminality, violation and risk. The expected Romanian 'invasion' on 1 January 2014 never materialised, but the rancour over Britain being forced to allow the free movement of Eastern Europeans has continued, and was encapsulated in David Cameron's claim ahead of the new referendum on membership of the EU that 'we'll quit ... over migrants' and that Britain 'never signed up for ever closer union' (Bennett 2014).

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ⁱ These comprised upmarket titles (the *Telegraph*, the *Times*, the *Financial Times*, the *Guardian*, and the *Independent*), mid-market titles (the *Express* and the *Daily Mail*), and mass-market or tabloid titles (the *Mirror* and the *Sun*).