"Let me tell you how I see things"

The place of Brexit and the Entente Cordiale in Macron's strategic narrative of and for France on the international scene

Maud-Lily Lardenois-Macocco

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

This research project seeks to unpack Macron's overall strategic narrative regarding France's position on the international scene and in Europe by shedding light on the place of his narratives of Brexit and of Franco-British relations within it, between his election and April 2019. Drawing on a number of theories relating to political and strategic narratives and to the power and effects of communications in international relations, this interdisciplinary dissertation seeks to understand the extent to which and how Macron is positioning Brexit and France's relationship with the United Kingdom to advance his strategic narrative of and for France's position on the international scene. Narrative analysis was used as a methodological framework to operationalise the research question and analyse an important set of data chosen among Macron's statements, speeches and social media posts relating to or mentioning Brexit and UK-France relations in different contexts. The findings highlight the duality underpinning Macron's narrative towards the UK and Franco-British relations, more generally, in that both countries are middle powers which, as such, are necessarily in competition in certain areas on the international scene while dependent on each other's mutual empowerment in a number of areas of cooperation, such as defence. Therefore, although Brexit is used as an issue and policy narrative to (re)position France on the international scene, and, more specifically in Europe, Macron's overall strategic narrative is not as antagonistic and dichotomous as it seems to be framed and perceived as in the British media.

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1 INTRODUCTION

> *"Boris Johnson called the French 'turds' over Brexit in comment cut from BBC documentary" (Cowburn & Woodcock, 2019)*

> *"Emmanuel Macron, Brexiteers' best friend" (Gray, 2019)*

> *"Tony Blair's collusion with Macron is harmful, unpatriotic - and completely predictable" (Carswell, 2019)*

> *"Macron wants to avoid Brexit 'polluting' EU after 31 October" (Boffey, 2019)*

> *"UK-France summit: Emmanuel Macron says UK must pay for post-Brexit City deal" (Heffer, 2018)*

These are only a few examples of recent headlines from a number of different British news outlets ranging across the political spectrum. As a French citizen living in the United Kingdom, I have always payed particular attention to this topic and have observed a resurgence of Francophobia focused around Macron and his (perceived) approach to Brexit, its negotiations and the future of the European Union's – and of France's – relationship with the UK. This French-bashing not only feeds on Macron's statements over Brexit but also, more largely and interestingly, on Macron's strategic narrative for France and his positioning of France on the international scene. It is even more apparent seeing as Macron had been lauded after his election and hailed in the Western mainstream media as a beacon of "liberal hope" (Murray, 2017) in the midst of a wave of far-right extremism across the world.

Macron's agenda in the EU is often portrayed as being in direct opposition to Brexit and, by extension, to the United Kingdom. His approach to Brexit is perceived as a means to advance France's strategic interests – and thereby "strategic narrative" (Miskimmon, et al., 2013, 2017). This *de facto* leads to the perception, on all sides, that Macron seeks to take advantage of Brexit and of the UK's position on the international scene to push France's agenda, strategic narrative and interests. Primed and framed this way, his narrative of and for Brexit and the future of UK-EU/France relations seems undoubtedly damageable to longer-term relations between France and the UK.

Coming to the realisation that this rise of French bashing in the UK – and, to a certain extent, vice versa in France – was there to last, led me to initiate a reflection on its potential

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consequences and damages for the future of UK-France relations and, more largely, for the future of UK-EU relations. In this context, undertaking a closer examination of Macron's strategic narrative of/for France and the way his narrative of Brexit is embedded within it therefore seems necessary. I argue that it shall inform our understanding of Macron's agenda for France in that strategic narratives are "sense-making devices deployed by political actors, designed to capture the political centre ground, to shape our understanding of policies and emerging events" (Miskimmon, et al., 2017: viii). Therefore, understanding Macron's narrative of and for France and what it implies provides elements to find common grounds with friends, allies or foes – be they temporarily so or not – alike. Following on Miskimmon et al. when they write that former US President Obama "suggested that knowing and understanding Iran's narrative was an important aspect of finding an agreement with a hitherto sworn enemy" (2017: viii), with this study, I seek to understand the roots of this renewed French bashing – of which most is based on Macron's narrative – and to shed light on Macron's narrative(s). I argue that this shall bring elements to help quell the potential damage such a narrative – and its perception – could (or will?) have on the future of the Franco-British relationship.

This research therefore seeks to explore Macron's strategic narrative of/for France through the prism of his sub-narrative(s) of Brexit and of France's relationship with the UK as well as the extent to which these sub-narratives form part of Macron's strategy to advance France's strategic narrative (and interests) on the international and European scenes. In doing so, this research also seeks to unpack an important aspect of Macron's overall strategic narrative and its part in Macron's will to return to a French 'grand narrative': "For me, my office isn't first and foremost a political or technical one. Rather, it is symbolic. I am a strong believer that modern political life must rediscover a sense for symbolism. We need to develop a kind of political heroism. I don't mean that I want to play the hero. But we need to be amenable once again to creating grand narratives" (Macron, 2017). Understanding how Brexit and the Franco-British relations fit within his "grand narrative" shall therefore open a new perspective in unpacking it as a whole.

This dissertation is divided into three main parts. The first one positions this research within an interdisciplinary theoretical framework drawing on a number of varied academic traditions pertaining to UK-France relations and on communications theories applied to international relations. It also includes this research's objectives and questions and sets the theoretical grounds on which they are operationalised. The second part then lays out the methodological framework, that of narrative analysis, the rationale behind using it, the broader analytical framework and the choice and sampling of the data used to conduct the analysis – a compilation of carefully selected statements and speeches directly attributed to Macron. The third part eventually combines results and discussion and explores the ways in and the extent

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to which Macron's narrative(s) of Brexit and of the future of France/EU-UK relations are embedded within his narrative of/for Europe and within his strategic narrative of/for France on the international scene.

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2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Literature review: Drawing on a wide array of theories and academic traditions

2.1.1 The "Entente Cordiale", a "public relations genius idea" (Bell, 2004: p.292): A common strategic narrative reflecting a variety of cooperation areas

The history and academic literature pertaining to Franco-British relations is rich and goes back centuries. They have been studied from a wide variety of angles pertaining to their diverse area of diplomatic cooperation: cultural, scientific and, most notably, defence (Bonnaud, 2004; Boyer & Roper, 2013; Crouzet, 2004; Lellouche, Boyer, & Roper, 1988; Radice, et al., 2004; Tombs & Tombs, 2007). France and the UK as a duo on the international scene have had an important role to play, particularly regarding European defence and, more largely, in terms of defence cooperation across the world since the turn of the 20th century, with the 1998 Saint Malo Summit and the 2010 Lancaster House treaties most notably. Defence cooperation is therefore a constant feature of the Franco-British relationship and common strategic narrative, commonly and broadly referred to as this "*Entente Cordiale*".

The "*Entente Cordiale*" *topos* best exemplifies the strategic narratives surrounding Franco-British relations as well as their cooperation and common projection of soft power on the international scene. This *topos* dates back to the 19th century although it was concretely coined with the 1904 *Entente Cordiale* agreements and has become synonymous of Franco-British relations. The evolution of the phrase and its signification has been studied in several recent studies following the agreements' centenary in 2004 (Bell, 2014; Lardenois-Macocco, 2018; Malausséna, 2010). It has come to signify more than the original agreements and is used to refer to their ensuing (good?) relationship and cooperation as part of a longer-term common projection of soft power.

Soyez's "mutual empowerment" theory offers an interesting framework through which to look at Franco-British relations and understand this common strategic narrative. He explores, through a study of France-Australia relations, the ways in which middle powers reinforce their power and own interests on the international scene by developing common strategies and strategic narratives on specific topics, issues, conflicts or geographical areas (2019: 37). This may be applied to better understand the UK-France relationship and the place and evolution of the strategic narrative surrounding it as it is through cooperation – or the appearance of cooperation – that both countries, two (rather similar) middle powers in Europe, empower one another on the international scene. This leads me to reflect more thoroughly on the notions of

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strategic narratives, public diplomacy and soft power for they are at the heart of this research project.

2.1.2 "Strategic narratives" (Antoniades et al., 2010; De Graaf, 2015; Miskimmon et al., 2013, 2017a), public diplomacy and soft power (Nye, 2005, 2008): At the intersection of international relations and speech acts theories

This dissertation also draws on the literature around strategic narratives in international relations, public diplomacy, and the way strategic narratives are being created, projected and received (Antoniades et al., 2010; De Graaf, 2015; Miskimmon et al., 2013, 2017a). The notion itself is "a tool to understand how political actors seek to extend their influence, manage expectations and change the discursive environment in which they operate. These are narratives both about states and about the system itself – both about 'who we are' and about 'what kind of order we want'" (Hertner & Miskimmon, 2015: 45). This is what has been differentiated throughout this research as Macron's strategic narrative "*of*" and "*for*" France's position on the international scene. Strategic narratives are used to shape the international scene and the position of its different constitutive actors (Miskimmon et al., 2013). It is in that sense that the concept of strategic narratives may be theoretically linked to that of public diplomacy and of soft power (Nye, 2005, 2008).

Nye defines soft power, in broader terms, as the power stemming from a country's "culture", "political values" and "foreign policies" when they enable it to achieve its goals and to influence other countries and foreign public opinions (Nye, 2008: 97). Public diplomacy may be seen as a tool of soft – or rather "smart", the combination of hard and soft power – power (Nye, 2008). It refers to the means through which country and country leaders communicate with audience overseas so as to influence them, promote national interests and achieve foreign policy goals.

Public diplomacy, as a notion, was developed in the late 20th century. It encompasses a number of different activities and has several definitions (McNair, 2011; Melissen, 2011; Nye, 2008; Signitzer & Coombs, 1992; Snow & Taylor, 2009; USC Centre on Public Diplomacy, n.d.). Although public diplomacy tools and activities are not necessarily concerned with narratives *per se*, "all public diplomacy requires some sort of relationship and some sort of story about that relationship" (Miskimmon et al., 2017a: 169-170). Strategic narratives therefore tie into the notion of public diplomacy. They are increasingly necessary in an increasingly networked and saturated environment in that they are "a means for political actors to construct a shared

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meaning *of* the past, present and future of international politics[1] *to* shape the behaviour of domestic and international actors[2]" (Miskimmon et al., 2013: 105)[3].

This ties into a constructivist vision of international relations, one according to which actors of the international (dis)order "construct reality" by acting within it, and that these acts, these "deeds" (Zehfuss, 2002: 151) can take the form of "speech acts". Speech Acts theory, first developed by Austin (2009) and Searle (2012), posits that "language is both representative and performative", that "people use words to represent deeds and they can use words, and words alone, to perform deeds" (Onuf, 1989: 82). This theory, applied to the field of communications in international relations, sheds light on the importance, impact and reach of narratives in international politics. Strategic narratives are precisely at this intersection in that they are, at once, constitutive and representative of actors' "experience of international affairs": they are "tool[s] through which great powers can articulate their interests, values and aspirations for the international system in ways that offer the opportunity for power transitions that avoid violent struggle between status quo and challenger states" (Antoniades et al., 2010: 1).

2.1.3 Macron's strategic narrative for France's position in Europe and on the international scene: #ChooseFrance and a reviewed strategic approach to the international and European scenes (Macron, 2017, 2018)

Furthermore, it seems important to situate Macron's pro-European stance and the importance place of Europe in France's renewed strategic narrative through the lens of Mayer's "narrative theory of collective action" (2014: 126). As Mayer states: "certainly collective action can and does happen for many other reasons. But there is a good reason why stories are so often present at the scene; narrative is a powerful tool for those who would move collective action" (2014: 140). Narrating Europe and the EU from France's perspective is both reflective and constitutive of the European narrative. The University of Cologne's recent lecture series on "Narrative of Europe, Narratives for Europe" brings more insights into this and postulates that "to take notes of the variety of European narratives is a major step towards a common understanding" (Freimuth, 2019). I situate my research within this debate and seek to make a contribution to it by highlighting some elements of Macron's strategic narrative. This leads me

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[1] Represented by the "of" of the research question

[2] Represented by the "for" of the research question

[3] My emphasis

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to turn to lay out more clearly what, for the purpose of this research, shall be considered elements of Macron's strategic narrative for France.

Miskimmon et al. distinguishes three main types of narratives: "system narratives, identity narratives and issue narratives" (2013: 7). This dissertation is concerned with all three of them: with the way Macron conceives (and thereby constructs) his own vision of the international and, more specifically, European scene; with the way he conceives (and thereby constructs) France's position within it – and his own position as its leader; and, with the way he seeks to make sense of and shape the "Brexit" issue narrative thereby tying it *de facto* into Franco-British relations. State leaders, such as Macron, embed, within the strategic narrative they wish to deploy for their country on the international scene, a number of different narratives, of "brand differentiators" (Scammel, 2015) and of values, which may coexist independently and form, eventually, a cohesive and coherent (or not) overall strategic narrative of the state – what Macron refers to as "grand narrative" (Macron, 2017). It is also interesting to relate this to Ganz's work on leadership narratives and the ways in which narrative is not (merely) "talking 'about' values[4]; rather, narrative embodies and communicates those values" (2011: 288).

Moreover, this dissertation shall draw on what Drent et al. identifies as the three main aspects of Macron's narrative of/for Europe (2018: 57): "*L'Europe qui protège*" (a protective Europe), "*L'Europe qui doit changer*"(Europe in need of a change) "*L'Europe puissance*" (Europe-power[5]) – in line with former president Chirac's own narrative of/for Europe symbolised by the latter phrase he coined in a 2000 speech to the Bundestag. These three elements form part of Macron's "system narrative" (Miskimmon et al., 2013: 7) of Europe.

More generally, Macron has also renewed France's strategic narrative on a larger scale. The "Choose France" recent public diplomacy campaigns initiated by the president in 2018 and relaunched in Versailles in 2019 in the midst of the yellow vests protests exemplify the key attractiveness and influence messages Macron is trying to project for France's position on the international scene. These key messages are identified in the press kit published by the president's press office: "Economic and social transformation", "World Champions and Talents", "Make our Planet Great Again", "New opportunities in a post-Brexit environment", "Artificial Intelligence Global Actor", "The Tech Generation". These messages form, along with the new strategies and impulse given by Macron to France's diplomacy, part of France's strategic narrative. Indeed, although the French Republic is a semi-presidential regime, the

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[4] Through the re-telling of events, for instance

[5] My translations

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president, since De Gaulle's presidency[6], retains certain preserves in setting France's diplomatic and defence strategies and orientations. As the symbolical and representation function of the president (Fleurdorge, 2012) indicates that Macron is the main symbol and leader of France's strategic narrative, this research project therefore focuses solely on *his* vision of/for France. A larger research project could include further data from other French political actors and institutions, as shall be outlined in the second part.

It is mostly from Macron's position that France's positioning on the international scene stems: "state narratives are articulated by state leaders" (Miskimmon, et al., 2013: 34). He gets most of the coverage on France's strategic narrative in international mainstream media and is the main instrument of France's strategic narrative's "formation" and "projection" (Miskimmon, et al., 2013). Although it should be noted that there has been no thorough study of Macron's strategic narrative *per se*, literature is growing around his vision of the international (dis)order and his foreign policies (Askenazy, 2018; Bouza-García & Tuñón-Navarro, 2018; Drake, 2018). This dissertation is situated within this research debate (and gap).

For the purpose of this study[7], the main features that shall be considered part of Macron's strategic narrative for France have been extracted from the two traditional Ambassadors Conference speeches given by Macron in 2017 and 2018. At the end of August, every year, French presidents traditionally address ambassadors and give the great orientations of France's broader diplomatic goals. Since these conferences are traditionally setting the tone of France's public – or rather open – diplomacy for the year ahead, they may be, to a certain extent, considered as defining moments in setting the overall strategic narrative to be implemented. Both speeches have thus been used as parts of the theoretical background of this dissertation. The full speeches have also been included in the sampled data.

2.1.4   Of the multilayeredness of narratives

Narratives are therefore complex objects, they are constructed dynamically, in that they are always renegotiated and contested, and are multi-layered (Miskimmon et al., 2013, 2017a: 232). Shenhav provides two definition of political narratives: "one that emerges from a formal political forum, such as a parliament, a cabinet, party meetings or political demonstrations, or as narrative produced by politicians and public officials in the course of their duties" (Shenhav,

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[6] Macron has, in several instances, reaffirmed he was in line with what is commonly referred to as the "Gaullist-Mitterand tradition".

[7] The limitations of such restriction shall be taken into consideration and further research should be done on the broader French strategic narrative considering and identifying *all* of the sub-narratives encompassed within it.

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2006: 247). Drawing on this, it may be said that Macron embeds, within his strategic narrative of/for France, different sub-narratives on different topics which he frames in certain ways depending on the context, on the purpose or the reach of a speech, for instance. His narratives of/for Europe, of/for the international system, of/for his own political self, of/for France's position within Europe and within (his version of) the international system, his narrative of/for Brexit, his narrative of/for Franco-British relations, all come together. What this research is concerned with is precisely the way he frames "issue narratives" (Miskimmon et al., 2013) of/for Brexit and of/for Franco-British relations within this overall strategic narrative.

Framing – that is, "selecting and highlighting some facets of events or issues and making connections among them so as to promote a particular interpretation, valuation, and/or solution" (Entman, 2009: 5) – is also a part of our theoretical background as the way Macron frames and positions Brexit and Franco-British relations in regard to France's overall strategic narrative is precisely at its heart. The Brexit vote and the process which ensued thereafter has proved a strain, if not to the entire relationship, to the common narrative. As Askenazy (2018) points out, Brexit could have multiple benefits for France and its positioning on the international scene. Drawing more specifically on Schubert's four functions of narratives – "personalising", "integrating", "exemplifying" and "polarising" (2010) –, I shall aim to understand the place of Brexit and post-Brexit vote bilateral relations within Macron's strategic narrative.

2.2. Operating the gap in the research of Macron's strategic narrative for France in the context of Brexit and in regard to the Franco-British relationship

Unpacking Macron's strategic narrative for France's position on the international scene and in Europe requires identifying the different narratives which constitute this whole. This research is precisely concerned with identifying the place of the Brexit and the Franco-British relations narratives within it. The impact of Brexit on the position of the UK on the international scene and what it has changed in its relationship to other countries is still rather uncertain although some studies have already emerged (Faure, 2019; Karreth, 2018; Martill & Staiger, 2018; Martill & Sus, 2018; Schnapper, 2018). Martill and Sus explore what seems to be the future options of the UK after Brexit in terms of defence cooperation – reinforced NATO cooperation, an extended Common Security and Defence Policy or a deepening of the 'French connection' (2018: 1) – and what each would mean for Europe. Drake (2018) explores the ways in which France might (have) benefit(ed) from Brexit and the ways in which it may be said that Macron

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has benefited from a momentum of "disruptive change" created by Brexit to get elected and push forward the narrative of a "political Europe". Both articles point to an evident duality in terms of what Brexit means for France and its strategic narrative. This dissertation is situated within this debate.

There thus seems to be a duality underpinning Franco-British relations from the French – or rather Macron's – perspective in regard to Brexit. On the one hand, France's strategic narratives partly stems from its history and relationship with the UK in a number of varied areas of cooperation and, in this perspective, it seems only logical that the narrative of mutual empowerment should not be drastically disrupted. On the other hand, as Macron is seeking to renew France's strategic narrative and to position it in a post-Brexit world and Europe. He seeks to shape – and lead? – a new international order and position France in the "competition [which may arise] between Paris and London over military and diplomatic leadership[8] in Europe" (Martill & Sus, 2018: 854). Our research interests and objectives stem from this *apparent* dichotomy and ambivalence.

This dissertation therefore seeks to shed light on the way this ambivalence is – or not – reflected in Macron's strategic narrative of/for France. I question the extent to which Macron's narrative of/for France is built around (against?) Brexit and what could be the consequences of such narrative on the Franco-British relationship. It shall also, by extension, allow me to understand how the bilateral relationship is discursively shaped by Macron.

2.3. Research objectives

I operate the broader question of Macron's strategic narrative of/for France on the international scene in the context of a post-Brexit Europe and the impact this may have on the Franco-British relationship and narrative so as to understand the extent to which Macron's narratives of/for Brexit and of/for Franco-British relations are strategic and tactical. This may be summed up with the following research question:

RQ. To what extent and how is Macron positioning Brexit and France's relationship with the United Kingdom to advance his strategic narrative of and for France's position on the international and European scenes?

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[8] Amongst others

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The following sub-questions have also been addressed throughout this research project:

SQ1. What is Macron's narrative of Brexit? How is he using it as an issue narrative to push forward his own system narrative of Europe, and, to some extent, France's agenda and position on the international scene and in Europe?

SQ2. What is Macron's narrative of and for Franco-British relations? To what extent may it be said that Macron's statements on Brexit have a de facto effect on the strategic narrative being built around the Franco-British relationship? To what extent is the relationship peripheral to his broader European vision?

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3   RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this second part, I seek to explain how the aforementioned research objectives have been operationalised throughout this dissertation. I first discuss the research strategy and methodological approach before explaining the methodological procedures, the sampling strategy and the broader analytical framework applied to the data. The strengths and limitations of this research design, methodology, tools, and procedures are also pointed out throughout this part and opportunities for further research are identified.

3.1.   Research Strategy: Narrative analysis as a methodology

> *"Working with narrative material requires dialogical listening (Bakhtin, 1981) to three voices (at least): the voice of the narrator [...]; the theoretical framework [...]; and a reflexive monitoring of the act of reading and interpretation, that is, self-awareness [...]" (Lieblich, A., et al., 1998)*

This summarises quite clearly the methodological complexity of working on narratives. Using narrative analysis encompasses both theoretical *and* methodological implications which are strongly intertwined. Discourse analysis seeks to describe, understand, and analyse texts, to uncover their "hidden" meanings and explain their effects (Bull, 2012; Foucault, 1971; Pierce, 2008; van Dijk, 1985). Qualitative discourse analysis' "subcategory" of narrative analysis (Fetzer, 2010; Pierce, 2008) therefore offers a good methodological framework to operationalise the research question and its underlying sub-questions as they are precisely concerned with unpacking parts of Macron's strategic narrative.

There is a number of ways through which to approach narratives in social sciences, not only theoretically as was discussed in the first chapter, but also methodologically (Abbott, 2008; Labov & Waletzky, 1997; Lieblich *et al.*, 1998; Pierce, 2008). For instance, narrative codes were first discussed by Propp (1928). Narrative analysis as a methodology is also often used to analyse interviews and different types of narratives pertaining to the personal self (Labov & Waletzk, 1997). Scholars also deploy a number of varied methodological procedures to examine the formation, projection and reception of "strategic narratives" in international relations. This research is concerned with the formation and projection of Macron's strategic narrative for France and, as such, is concerned with "studying how speeches and other types of communications are constructed and disseminated" (Miskimmon, et al., 2017: 317). Therefore, this research project falls in line with the broader methodological guidelines developed by Miskimmon et al. to analyse the formation and projection of strategic narratives: "all of the authors identify narratives within these texts, distinguishing actors, setting, conflict

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or action, behaviour, and (desired) resolution or goals. In most cases this is not done in a rote or strict way. Interestingly, many of the authors suggest that phrases, images, or metaphors can stand in for, or trigger, narratives" (2017: 317).

I have therefore applied narrative analysis as a methodology drawing more particularly on the case studies developed by Miskimmon et al. (2013, 2017) as well as on different frameworks and guidelines developed by Abbott (2008), Lilleker (2014), Schubert (2010) and Shenhav (2005, 2006). Each provides tools which, combined, have proved helpful to answer the research question, and, more generally, to better understand the different narratives it is concerned with and then better understand how they are interwoven to form integral parts of Macron's strategic narrative of/for France.

Abbott defines narrative as the "representation of events, consisting of story and narrative discourse", story as "an event or sequence of events (the action) and narrative discourse as "those events as represented" (2008: 19). Understanding and unpacking Macron's account of Brexit and of Franco-British relations history through this lens is therefore particularly useful to answer the dissertation's research question. Lilleker's methodological framework applied to his analysis of Obama's political brand narrative also offers a useful framework through which to identify the different "appeals made within the texts". That is, namely: the "meta-codes", "issues of identity" and self-positioning of the narrator-president as well as "evaluative and explanatory narratives" (2014: 135) concerned with narrating events (such as the Brexit vote) to base new arguments and meanings on. Shenhav's particular attention to historical references also guided this dissertation's research strategy: "references to day-to-day politics are framed by historical perspectives in a way that creates ideological political narratives" (2005: 316). To a certain extent, Propp's narrative codes (1928) have also guided the overall analysis to inform our understanding of Macron's positioning of France in the world, of his political self (Duranti, 2006) as its leader, and of the others – friends, allies, or foes.

3.2. Methodological procedures

3.2.1. Sample data: Macron's perspective

To unpack Macron's narrative for Europe and for France's position and agenda in the world and understand how his narrative of Brexit and of the future of the UK-EU/France relationship is embedded within it, it seems necessary to start by precisely focusing on Macron's statements and speeches. As outlined in the first part, France's strategic narrative is primarily led by Macron's presence and positioning on the international scene. For the purpose of this dissertation and to fall in line with its constraints, the data sampled for this research project

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has been narrowed down to texts directly attributed[9] to him. Further research should incorporate texts from different bodies constitutive of France's strategic narrative, such as the Ministry of Europe and Foreign Affairs Ministers – Jean-Yves Le Drian, Marielle de Sarnez, Nathalie Loiseau, Amélie de Montchalin – as well as the main senior officials working on Franco-British cooperation, especially in terms of defence.

Therefore, for this dissertation, data has been narrowed down to sixty-three different texts – in the original sense of the term. Some overlapped, especially between texts retrieved from the presidential website and those re-framed and reused as social media content. They were precisely included in the data set to understand what seems to be stressed in Macron's strategic narrative. The sampled data may broadly be divided into three different main categories, outlined below:

- Macron's statements on Brexit in larger contexts not directly pertaining to it or to the Franco-British relationship (text 1-9). In the spirit of the reason behind my undertaking this research at this precise moment – that is the rise of Francophobia in the UK (and vice-versa?) – the texts chosen in this section were either: ones that had been widely picked up in the mainstream British media to cover (and negatively frame) Macron's approach to Brexit or ones which had been framed as having something to do with Brexit on the different presidential communications channels;
- Macron's statements on Brexit in contexts directly pertaining to it (text 10-13);
- Macron's narrative of Franco-British relations and for (the future of) the "Entente Cordiale" narrative in contexts directly pertaining to them (text 13-18).

A complete and numbered list of text 1 to text 18 may be found in the first part of the bibliography.

Social media posts were also included in our analysis. Twenty-nine [tweets] and thirteen [Facebook] posts were retrieved[10]. The five posts from Macron's official Instagram account relating to the UK or Brexit were also sampled. The chronological boundaries chosen for this research ran from Macon's election in May 2017 until mid-April 2019 which marked the latest developments in Brexit negotiations at the time this dissertation was undertaken.

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[9] That is: texts signed or spoken directly by him. One should nonetheless not be oblivious of the fact that politicians, especially at this level, work with teams dedicated to the writing of their speeches and statements.

[10] Using the following search string: "Brexit OR Franco-Britannique OR Franco-British OR UK-France OR UK OR Royaume-Uni OR Grande Bretagne from: Emmanuel Macron since: 2017-05-14".

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The important volume of texts is justified by the methodological and analytical framework used for this research. It is not as structured as other methodologies and requires flexibility and adaptability to understand the overall structure of the narrative and what each text brings to it, being both representative and constitutive of Macron's overall strategic narrative.

3.2.2. Access and translation considerations

Most texts were retrieved directly from official presidential communications channels: Macron's own social media channels (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, Dailymotion), the official presidential website – elysee.fr – and the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs' website – diplomatie.gouv.fr. Retrieving them through these official channels was key to study them as 'raw' data, to understand the 'official' frame and how it ties into the overall narrative, to understand what is *meant* to be part of Macron's strategic narrative.

The speeches were first analysed in French. They were also concurrently analysed in English when the texts were officially translated. This may be explained by the fact that the mere choice of translating certain texts in a certain way may be assumed to be in line with what was and is *meant* to be part of Macron's narrative. The way his speeches, declarations and statements have been translated may be assumed to be the most accurate depiction of the narrative pushed forward by Macron and the way he wants it to be projected on the international scene. I argue that the mere fact that some speeches or declarations were uploaded with – or without – an official translation to the presidential website is meaningful and partly reflects what the presidential communications team wants – or not – to be a proactive part of Macron's strategic narrative. However, in some instances, it may be assumed that some of the non-translated texts were so given that the context in which they took place (e.g. an international press conference) meant they were going to be instantaneously translated by a number of international news outlets by their own translators no matter the official translation issued thereafter.

Where the texts were not already translated, they were systematically translated to include quotes in the results and discussion chapter. This may be pointed out as a shortcoming since translating is (necessarily?) a subjective process (Hennink, 2008). Nevertheless, seeking to prevent my positionality from influencing the translations, I drew on my experience studying translation studies to convey Macron's narrative as accurately as possible. This leads me to address the question of ethics and of my own positionality below.

3.2.3. Ethics and reflexivity

The inherently arbitrary and subjective nature of qualitative research work (Lieblich *et al.*, 1998) shall not be overlooked. Although ethical approval has been sought and a copy of the

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signed ethics form may be made available upon request, such a project requires one to reflect on one's own positionality. Although not involved in Macron's party or any French political party, as a French citizen living in the UK, I feel mostly aligned with his pro-European stance. In addition, it may be argued that it would be in my own interest if Franco-British relations were to remain as *cordiale* as possible.

Furthermore, identifying, interpreting, analysing and explicating meta-codes and inter/intra-textual references is an inherently subjective process based on one's own discursive system and knowledge (Barthes, 1967), sociocultural codes and points of references – or lack thereof. Some references may therefore have been unintentionally extrapolated or overlooked in some instances.

While it should be recognised that this positionality may have influenced the presentation of this dissertation's conclusions, steps were taken to avoid value judgments and stay as politically neutral as possible. Drawing on a wide variety of different scholars' set frameworks, guidelines, and research tools contributes to quell the impact of one's positionality in one's research. This, precisely, leads me to outline the research tools and analytical framework which have been applied to the sample data.

3.2.4. Research tools and overarching analytical framework.

The analytical framework applied to the sample data echoes the main features of narratives identified throughout the first and second parts of this dissertation. Some analytical elements were systematically looked at to unpack the texts and see how, overall, they formed parts of Macron's strategic narrative for France on the international scene in regard to Brexit and the Franco-British relationship. They have been compiled in the following table (Fig. 1).

Figure 1. Broader Analytical Framework	
Analytical Elements	**Key**
References to Brexit. For this research, Brexit is not considered an historical reference as it is taken both as an event and as a process (both before and after the referendum itself).	**Pink**
Historical references drawing on Shenhav's guidelines (2005, 2006).	**Green**

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References to Europe, the European Union or EU institutions and citizens.	**Yellow**
Traditional populist/nationalist discourse drawing on the "populism scales" identified by Bos & Brants: - criticism towards the "established political order", - repeated mention of the "people", - depiction of the "current or future situation as being critical", - repeated mention of the "issue of immigration and integration" (2014: 709). Elements of language pertaining to this allow for a better understanding of the positioning of France's strategic narrative in regard to Brexit and the populist discourse it is associated with (ideas of sovereignty, of "taking back control", for instance). Other features identified by Bos and Brants were also identified to understand the roles Macron seems to give himself and the others in his narrative: presentation of the self as "a manager or problem solver", presentation of the self as "being decisive" (2014: 709).	[Between brackets]
Personal pronouns used to refer to Macron, France and the "others". They point to the way Macron positions and differentiate himself within France's strategic narrative *vis-à-vis* the "others". Countries identified as potential partners are also highlighted to better understand the place of the UK in Macron's narrative of/for the international system and therefore for France's position within it in a post-Brexit (amongst other events) world.	Circled
Issues and problems identified as such by Macron in his narrative.	**Red**
Macron's ideas and concrete propositions for Europe, the EU, and for the international system in regard to Brexit and the role of France in a post-Brexit world.	**Blue**

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References to France and the French people as a proactive actor in the international system as well as references to the "France is back"/ "Choose France" (re)newed public diplomacy campaign. These references point to the "identity narrative" (Miskimmon, et al., 2013: 7) built by Macron around France and its position in the EU, in Europe and in the international system. In this category, have also been added Macron's own brand narrative "differentiators" (Scammel, 2014). They have been identified throughout previous essays and based on an ulterior analysis of Macron's overall brand narrative as references to: debate, dialogue, progress, newness, personalisation of politics, fluidity of the ideas. This analytical item shall inform our understanding of the ways in which Macron is shaping France's strategic narrative based on his own discursive and political self and narrative.	<u>double underlined</u>
Elements pertaining to the Franco-British traditional common narrative (defence cooperation, *Entente Cordiale*…).	<u>Underlined</u>
Personal stories.	<u>underlined with small dots</u>

Nonetheless, this framework is merely indicative and does not necessarily reflect the entirety of my analysis. Indeed, narrative analysis requires flexibility, I seek not to simplify the text but rather highlight its complexity. Narrative analysis is concerned with the overall structure, the overall tone, the way it is *meant* to change throughout the years while *de facto* leading to an overarching narrative, the different characters which are (or not) included in the narrative, the different versions of events, the overall vision for France's position in the international and European scenes in a post-Brexit vote world. Therefore, this broader analytical framework table is only the starting point of the analysis as the results and discussion shall highlight.

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4   FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The duality of France's position in regard to Brexit and both the past and present state of the Franco-British relationship, highlighted throughout the first parts of this dissertation, leads us to draw up two initial hypotheses to guide this chapter.

H1. On the one hand, Macron is using and antagonising Brexit and the UK's strategic narrative on the international scene to push forward his own narrative for France and for himself as a political leader.

H2. On the other hand, as France's strategic narrative partly stems *from* its relationship and positioning *with* the UK, this research shall seek to understand whether Macron's narrative is as antagonising as it seems to be and is portrayed on both sides of the Channel.

Bearing this in mind, this chapter was divided into six thematical and problematised sections – each combining results and discussion to bring elements to answer the research question.

4.1. "People have been sold lies": Narrating the referendum to position Macron's election, presidency and own brand narrative in its wake

To begin with, I shall highlight the way in which Brexit, as an event – the 2016 referendum – is narrated by Macron throughout our sample data. There are two dimensions to his account of Brexit: the campaign(s) leading up to the referendum and the reasons behind its outcome. Macron lays out two main reasons for the referendum's outcome: the "Leave" campaign(ers) and rhetoric, and a European "crisis". These two dimensions are strongly intertwined, and I shall touch on the former first to better highlight how Macron uses them as a symbol and symptom of the latter. First, he clearly identifies and singles out "villains" responsible for Brexit – the Brexiteers – in his account of the referendum and gives a rather detailed account of them:

> *"Unfortunately, <u>in a no-deal scenario</u>, it is the British people which will be the first concerned. Some of the Brexiteers of which we are talking will be, for some, already*

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> far away and most of them will be well protected because they are already set for life"
> (text 12 - 2019[11])

> "And this is the trap that threatens the whole of Europe, the anger mongers backed
> by fake news, promise anything and everything" (text 8 - 2019)

His version of the referendum is that of a campaign filled with lies and fake news. He gives a detailed account of the way Brexit came to be and refers indirectly to the various scandals, such as Cambridge Analytica, which surrounded the referendum. Although he is not clearly naming anyone in any of the texts analysed for this study, one can clearly identify references to several major figures of the Leave campaign who resigned or withdrew from main stage politics – at least for a little while – following the referendum's result, such as Nigel Farage, who resigned as UKIP leader, and Boris Johnson, who withdrew from the Conservative leadership contest after Cameron's resignation[12]:

> "And, so, you were talking about Donald Tusk's statement[13] on those who have
> pushed a lot for Brexit: everyone will have noticed that they did not rush to come
> and help deliver it" (text 12 - 2019)

There are two dimensions to this aspect of his narrative of Brexit. It is used as a motif to assert himself and his election as the direct opposites of it, to antagonise Brexiteers and, more largely, nationalists and isolationists across Western countries. Brexit and Trump's election are the two major moments in recent history which Macron refers to in order to position himself. It is most apparent in speeches in which Macron develops his vision for Europe in more details, such as his Sorbonne speech in 2017:

> "What did [the British people] say ahead of the Brexit vote? […] When you listen
> closely, what were [the American people] really saying? […] Isolationism is gaining

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[11] The year during which the statement was made has been included for every excerpt for the purpose of clarity and to highlight the evolution of the narrative.

[12] Although he was forced to do so and served as Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs between July 2016 and July 2018 before eventually becoming Prime Minister in July 2019

[13] "I've been wondering what that special place in hell looks like, for those who promoted Brexit, without even a sketch of a plan how to carry it out safely": Remarks by President Donald Tusk after his meeting with the Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, Brussels, 6th February 2019.

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> *ground, [wherever democracies have taken this <u>no-holds-barred approach to competition</u> as far as it can go]." (text 2 - 2017)*

He antagonises Brexit campaigners in a way which enables him to position himself as their direct opposite and his election as a French exception.

Whereas it first enables him to "polarise" (Schubert, 2010) his discourse and position himself, as a leader, as a counterexample of Brexit, and of nationalists, more generally, his Brexit issue narrative also later served – and serves – as an example of 'a referendum gone wrong', in a way. He is indeed re-using it more proactively in his discourse as he faces the yellow vests protests. Indeed, after December 2018-January 2019, Macron has used the Brexit referendum more proactively in his domestic narrative – which is *de facto* also part of France's strategic narrative – as an example of the reasons why he does not favour the citizens-initiated referendums advocated for by a growing number of people in France.

> *"But it also says a lot about the times in which we live, about <u>what those referendums – which all seem very nice – can create"</u> (text 7 - 2019)*

> *"What does [the British political crisis] show? It shows the deadlock situations in which we may find ourselves when, in a way, one opposes direct democracy to representative democracy and when one lets direct democracy happen in a game of lies and disinformation. And for all of our democracies there is an extremely concrete lesson to be drawn. As for me, I want a solution to be found. Hence the rules I have set for myself" (text 12 - 2019)*

Brexit therefore seems to also be used in Macron's narrative as a counter-example, to push forward the notions of debate and of dialogue which are integral parts of Macron's overall brand narrative and at the heart of many of his political proposals and initiatives both on the international scene and on the domestic front (2018 European Citizens' Consultations, 2019 French "Great National Debate", 2019 proposal of a Conference for Europe).

> *"I will launch the [2018 European Citizens'] consultations in <u>France</u> this afternoon thus opening the way to a <u>debate</u> which will be honest, open, hard and difficult but so necessary to know what unites us and what separates us, to get away from <u>the simplistic alternative of answering "yes" or "no" to a general question whose presuppositions and subtexts are left unexamined</u>, and have a <u>democratic and critical debate</u> on our Europe" (text 3 - 2018)*

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Here again, the Brexit referendum is used to directly polarise the discourse between what would be a wrong way of engaging with and listening to the people (Brexit) and a right way of doing it (debate and dialogue). The alternative use of pronouns may be seen as a means to build a seemingly dichotomic narrative – which shall be qualified later. This example is taken from a 2018 speech at a time when Macron was still building and asserting his leadership by proactively renewing France's strategic narrative. Thus, it may be argued that Macron incorporates the Brexit referendum and its consequences in his narrative to put forward a French alternative of "debate". Brexit is used, as a sub-narrative, to fulfil parts of the "polarising" and "exemplifying" functions (Schubert, 2010) of Macron's strategic narrative of/for France.

4.2. Brexit as the symbol of a European "crisis": A means to reshape a political narrative for Europe and (re)position France within it

Macron's retelling of the Brexit referendum is also always directly linked to what he perceives and frames as European issues: a disconnection with, a misunderstanding of, the European people(s). Macron's narrative of Brexit often overlaps with his identifying Europe's issues and is often the entry point for him to outline policy proposals. Throughout his narrative, Brexit stands as a "symbol" (for instance, in text 8), as a "symptom" of what he identifies as a European "crisis":

> "*Brexit stands as the symbol of that. It symbolises the crisis of a Europe that has failed to respond to its [peoples' need for protection] from the major shocks of the modern world.*"
> (text 8 - 2019)

Emmanuel Macron ✔ @EmmanuelMacron · 26 Oct 2018
For me the Brexit is a symptom of the current failures of Europe The answer is a stronger Europe.
💬 1.2K ⟲ 2.0K ♡ 8.1K

Moreover, the "crisis" theme lies at the heart of his overall strategic narrative of/for France and Brexit provides an opportunity to present France and himself as a leader; to give France a stronger role in

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the overall collective narrative (Mayer, 2014) of a political Europe. Brexit is clearly identified as a momentum for "disruptive change" (Drake, 2018) and it is in line with this that Macron puts forward his narrative and vision of/for Europe in which he positions France as a force of propositions. To some extent, it may be said that Brexit is used as a hook to make new proposals, as a frame against which any policy proposal to prevent another EU exit and to restore trust within Europe may seem more appealing and effective. Opposing Brexit with concrete proposals, creating an apparently dichotomous narrative enables Macron to justify his proposals and position France as leading the way to a more progressive Europe – that is, more progressive than a post-Brexit Europe?

Macron's "policy narrative" (Miskimmon, et al., 2017: 8) for Europe is mostly shaped by his issue narrative of Brexit. The mere fact that he uses Brexit as a hook to state his proposals ahead of the 2019 European elections in an open letter to Europe (text 8) exemplifies this. Macron's statements after each European Council on the matter of Brexit also exemplifies the extent to which Macron is "personalising" the issue of Brexit:

> "Listen, we are gathering today for an extraordinary European Council which requires a lot of calm, a lot of determination and cold-blood on the situation we have been in for months and, as for myself, I enter this exceptional council with some simple principles. […] But as for myself, I shall stick to the principles I have just outlined: clarity, unity of the European project, respect of the British vote." (text 13 - 2019)

> "From where I stand, my role is to make proposals" (text 12 - 2019)

Brexit is used to make a point: the EU needs reforms. This directly echoes Macron's strategic narrative for France in that he wants to project the image of a reforming France – reformed internally to lead by the example internationally. It is most exemplified by this statement during a 2018 interview with Andrew Marr after the Franco-British summit:

> "The job we make in France is good for France. We will I'm sure in the coming years improve our figures in terms of employment, reduce our deficit, and so on, that's it. It allows me to be more credible at European level and convince especially Germany to work together to

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> relaunch this new Europe. And third, it allows us to be more credible at an international scale on different subjects, on different topics." (text 18 - 2018)

> "This European summit on Brexit must be marked by dignity and unity in a grave time. We must draw consequences from it. It shows that our Europe needs to be reformed."

The two following tweets, each posted one day apart, also show the way in which Macron seeks to make out of his strategic narrative of France, a narrative for Europe: through his handling of and narrative of Brexit:

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> "On *Brexit*, I have a message of <u>confidence and urgency</u>. Progress has been made but we are not there yet. It needs to be decided now."
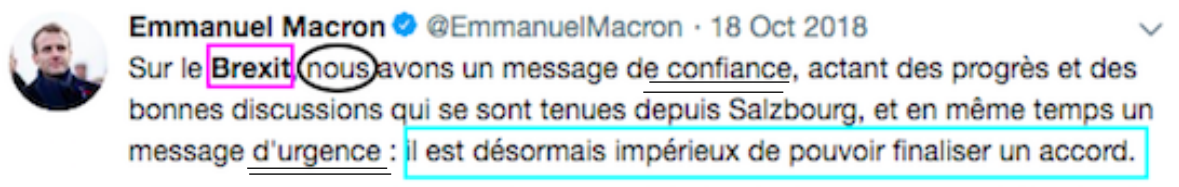
> "On *Brexit*, we have a message of <u>confidence</u>, noting the progress and good discussions which have taken place since Salzburg, and at the same time, a message of <u>urgency</u>: it is now urgent that an agreement be finalised."

Brexit offers a discursive (and strategic) means for Macron to push forward his own narrative of/for Europe as *the* European narrative of Brexit. Even though the "unity of the 27" remains the official motto of the EU member states, institutions, and officials, it is interesting to note what the apparent discourse tells us and to see that Macron's narrative of/for Europe seems to stand apart in this discursive struggle to shape a European narrative – and thereby to shape the EU itself.

4.3.   "Let me tell you how I see things": Dealing with Brexit as an example of leadership to shape the 'after' narrative

Macron's narrative and handling of the Brexit negotiations – which is indeed part of his narrative – provides him with an opportunity to show strength and decisiveness on the international scene, to gain and retain momentum, especially at times when his position in France is somewhat – at least collectively perceived as – diminished. He appears to be discursively in control of the narrative of Brexit and displays an image of leadership on the topic at home. This is best exemplified when Macron , after answering a question about the consequences of Brexit for French fishermen at a town hall meeting in January 2019, says: "Let me tell you how I see things" and proceeds to give a detailed analysis of what he believes is going to happen.

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Brexit also provides an opportunity to put forward what France and the UK have in common in a way which might suggest that, with the UK's departure, France would have the (discursive) advantage. This is reflected throughout the narrative. The following tweet is one of the many instances in which Macron puts France's position on the international scene in direct perspective with Brexit:
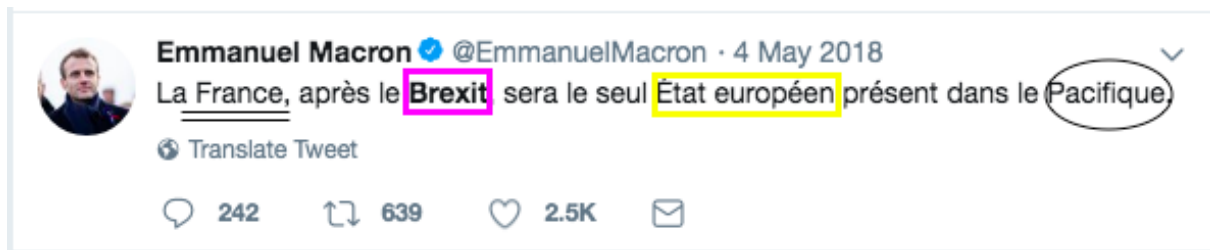
"*France, after Brexit, will be the only European state present in the Pacific*"

Furthermore, in this regard, the two Ambassadors conferences setting out France's overall strategies on the international are very telling. Indeed, a number of countries other than the UK are identified in areas where the UK would have traditionally been identified as the main partner, such as in terms of defence cooperation. Germany seems, to a certain extent, to take over the UK's place within France's traditional strategic narrative on defence cooperation. It is especially visible in the two speeches given a year apart by Macron to the French ambassadors:

> "*Lastly, the development of Defence Europe, an idea that we have been discussing for so many years, but regarding which, at the instigation of the European commission, and supported by the Franco-German alliance, concrete progress was made at the most recent European Council with the creation of a fund, a Permanent Structured Cooperation, which we started to make a reality at the summit and the subsequent Franco-German Council of Ministers on 13 July.*" (text 1 - 2017).

> '*We have made unprecedented progress, including strengthening our common defence policy since summer 2017, creating a defence fund to finance tangible initiatives, concluding two strategic agreements concerning tanks and combat aircraft with Germany,*

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> and concluding with eight other *Member States* the *European Intervention Initiative that I proposed in September 2017 to promote the idea of defence between Europeans*. *Europe* has never progressed as quickly when it comes to defence" (text 6 – 2018).

This shift in the narrative is significant in that, with the UK leaving the EU, no detail over what will concretely happen to its contribution to European defence and security efforts and cooperation has yet been released or officially agreed. In positioning Germany in the UK's traditional place in France's strategic narrative and mutual empowerment strategy, Macron seeks to discursively – and therefore, I argue, very concretely – put pressure towards a quicker resolution and settlement of these questions and seeks to shape the European defence narrative post-Brexit. Brexit may thus be seen as being framed as an *opportunity* both for France and for Europe within Macron's narrative. It is interesting to relate that to Kassim and Shout's take on Macron's narrative of the EU when they write that "symbolic defence cooperation has served the purpose to transmit the message that France's greatness and prestige depend on European cooperation (Europe as *multiplicateur de puissance*)" (2018: 57).

The way Macron tells the story of Brexit is part of his strategic narrative for France in that he positions France and his own electoral victory as the counter-example(s) of Brexit, as an exception yet as a logical reaction to a European need for "change" in the same way as Brexit was the expression of a call for change, a call for the people(s) to be heard. This leads me to explore the ways in which this rhetoric, this narrative is not as antagonistic as it would seem at first glance, and that it needs to be qualified even though Macron is indeed using Brexit to create and maintain a narrative for himself as a leader and for France's position on the international scene and within Europe.

4.4. "A powerful Europe": The ambiguity of narratives in face of populism

Although Macron is, in a way, antagonising Brexiteers, "nationalists" and "isolationists" to position himself as their opposite, to position his narrative of and for Europe as the European narrative, parts of his narrative echo, to a certain extent, the latter's own narrative "for the people". This is even more

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visible when it comes to his statements in contexts during which the future of the Franco-British relationship is directly addressed, such as during the 2018 Franco-British summit:

> *"But as – as for the Brexit vote, my understanding is that [middle classes and working classes], and especially the oldest in your country, decided that the recent decades were not in their favour. And that the adjustments made by both EU and globalisation, because for me it was a mix of both of them was not in their favour. Which means what? First, it's not sustainable to have an unbalanced organisation." (text 18 - 2018)*

Throughout Macron's strategic narrative for France, both in contexts directly pertaining to Brexit or not, Macron re-uses some motifs of the Brexit discourse which may be identified as such based on Crines' article on the Leave campaign's arguments and "assumptions about how the UK was being mistreated by the EU" using the themes of: "immigration, loss of sovereignty, expense of membership, and a growing sense of a detached liberal intelligentsia that failed to understand the plight faced by the poorest in society or the issues of a cultural shift in the UK" (2016). It may therefore be said that, to some extent, Brexit also serves as a bridge within Macron's narrative, a bridge between the British people's demands – and, by extension, the European peoples' – and what he proposes to *reform* Europe and better meet their needs even though Macron's proposals do not involve leaving the EU but rather strengthening it. Kassim and Schout describe Macron's narrative for Europe as combining both "emotional and nationalistic arguments" to feed into three trans-European themes: "L'Europe-puissance"[14], "L'Europe qui protège"[15] and "L'Europe qui doit changer"[16] (2018: 57).

Brexit has reactivated and catalysed decades-old themes and Macron's strategic narrative is no exception even though the aim is not Frexit but rather a strengthening of Europe, deeper integration. Yet, Macron consistently re-uses and re-frames some of the phrases used by the UK Leave campaign:

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[14] "A powerful Europe"

[15] "A protective Europe"

[16] "A Europe which must change"

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> 'We can't let *nationalists exploit public anger*. I want an *ambitious project* that [lets the people really take back control]" (text 8 – 2019)

It should also be noted that Macron does not use the word "populist" to describe Brexiteers but rather "nationalists" and "isolationists". This may be related to the fact that, broadly speaking, Macron's strategic narrative incorporates a large number of elements which may be identified on Bos and Brant's scales of populism (2014).

It should therefore also be noted that one of Macron's recurrent short narratives embedded within his narrative of Brexit concerns the fishing industry – an issue deriving from Brexit and the July 2017 announcement of the future UK's withdrawal from the 1964 London Fisheries Convention. It is therefore interesting to note that most of the social media content surrounding Macron's speech during his visit to Brittany in June 2018 was centred around Brexit although it was not directly the main theme of the speech (i.e. French agriculture). The way he frames the issues encountered by farmers and fishermen with Brexit and, more generally, the way he incorporates his Brexit narrative in contexts which have no immediately apparent link to Brexit point to the way it is tied into his overall policy narrative.

> "The turmoils of *history* have direct consequences on the fishermen's daily lives who fear the impact of *Brexit*. They will be [protected]. I am with them at the Guilvinec Fish Market"

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Although this may also exemplify how Macron may seek to advance France's agenda on this area at the expense of a Brexit UK, I argue this also exemplifies the discursive similarities there are between Macron's narrative and the Leave's on areas related to populist discourse – of the national interests of the "working class", of the "the people" versus an "out of touch elite".

4.5. Between rivalry and cooperation, differences and similarities: Towards a conciliatory narrative?

In none of the sampled texts does Macron really point the finger to the outcome of Brexit itself – that is the leaving – although he insists he "regrets" it, he insists on "respecting" the outcome of the referendum. "Respect" and "regrets" are the two key words being consistently employed to refer to the British vote:

> "Before you even ask the question, I would like to say something about Brexit which has not – far from it – taken up all of our discussions. I respect the choice of the British people, even if I regret it, as you know." (Text 17 - 2018)

Emmanuel Macron ✔ @EmmanuelMacron · 25 Nov 2018
Dans toutes nos démocraties, notre devoir est de réussir à redonner aux classes populaires et aux classes moyennes des perspectives et une capacité à construire le progrès. C'est aussi cela la leçon du Brexit.

○ 2.5K   ⟲ 1.4K   ♡ 6.4K

> "In all of our democracies, our duty is to renew the perspectives and their capacity to build progress to the [working and middle classes]. That is also the Brexit lesson"

This pattern and repetition of these two aspects – respect and regret – may be seen as a way for Macron to position his narrative itself as a narrative "for the people". This may also be seen as a way for Macron not to antagonise too harshly the British decision. In this sense, it may also be argued that, in doing so, Macron is trying not to antagonise the French Eurosceptic voices.

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Furthermore, it may be argued that Macron's apparent insistence on "regretting" yet almost pressing for Brexit or at a least for a concrete solution hints at two hypotheses. On the one hand, it may be put forward that Macron wants Brexit to happen as soon as possible to advance France's agenda as a middle power in direct opposition or competition to the UK's similar status on the international scene (and enable the EU to function normally again). On the other hand, it may also be put forward that Macron, by pushing for a shorter Brexit deadline, aims at pushing, in a way, Remain voices in the UK to gather forces more quickly, at putting them under pressure to actually do something about Brexit (that is, call for a second referendum, a general election or/and revoke Article 50). The fact that he deems Brexit a "lesson" throughout his narrative also connotes an acknowledgement of the failures of the EU and an apparent political will to alleviate them, to bring new assurances to the "working and middle classes", to "reform". I argue this acknowledgement of an "EU crisis" may also be seen as a call for the UK to remain within the EU or at least plan for a deep relationship. The following excerpt from Macron's interview with Andrew Marr particularly exemplifies this:

> "EM: I mean it is on your own. It depends on you, I mean, I do respect this vote, I do regret this vote, and I would love to welcome you again. I can say, but my vision –
>
> […]
>
> EM: So my – my vision. On the very short run, be much more concrete, less bureaucracy and more concrete and so [to protect people and address their issues]. And our collective future. […]" (text 18 - 2018)

One can only argue for now and only time will tell but both hypotheses are already subject to criticism on the two sides of the Channel. I argue they are not as antithetical as they seem. Indeed, although Macron, as France's *president*, is seeking to protect (and advance) France's strategic interests and narrative, it may be argued that addressing Europe's issues and reforming it by calling for the UK to, if not reintegrate it, maintain a close relationship with it may also be seen as being in the interest of France. France's interests and narrative partly stems from the narrative it forms with the UK on different areas of cooperation. Seeing that both France and the UK need each other to advance both their common and their own strategic narrative and interests on the international scene following on

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theories of "mutual empowerment" (Soyez, 2019), this is what the final subpart of this dissertation shall address.

4.6. "Shared solutions, Shared futures": What future for the official narrative of the *Entente Cordiale*?

The results and discussion so far have indicated that Macron's narrative seeks to expand France's horizons and to further partnership and common narratives with other countries in areas which had previously been dominated by the Franco-British narrative, such as defence with Germany. Nonetheless, several elements indicate that efforts are or have been made to maintain a common narrative, as much as is feasible in light of France's renewed strategic narrative and of the broader circumstances.

First, the mere fact that a Franco-British summit was held in January 2018 indicates that both countries seek not to strain too significantly the core bilateral relationship and to somehow contain the discursive (and concrete) damages done to this *cordiale*(?) entente. In addition, although this should be further investigated in a larger research project, the French Minister for European Affairs' visit to London and the Franco-British Mayors summit in London in March 2019 also indicate a political will to proactively maintain a common Franco-British narrative. Publicised bilateral talks and summits are necessary public diplomacy tools (Snow, 2009) to create, sustain and maintain a close relationship between two countries whether in times of crisis (Olsson, 2013) or to (re)launch new projects, especially in terms of defence, education and cultural cooperation. It is, in that sense, particularly interesting to note that Macron's narrative *of* Franco-British relations often ties into his narrative *of* Europe and of its history, and sometimes even ties into his own personal narrative. This is present all throughout his narrative and particularly highlighted, as expected, during the Franco-British summit press conference:

> *"I have to say that as for myself, in my family history, it[17] can be traced back not only to the war but also to the Franco-British links dating back to this time. […] Our relationship relies*

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[17] [The traces of Franco-British historical relationship]

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> on this unique *History I just discussed – which particularly resonates as 2018 marks the centenary of the first world war during which so many French and British people lost their lives together*" […] "*But I wish, like I had announced in Athens during the Pnyx speech, that we continue to support this European culture and cultural heritage*" (text 17 - 2018)

The many historical references disseminated throughout the sample data of Macron's narrative may be seen as a means to integrate the UK in Macron's vision and narrative of and for the EU, and for "Europe", more generally.

> "*Europe is not an island*" (text 2 - 2017)

> "*we¹⁸ are both very committed to working together and to enable the whole of Europe to work together*" (text 17 - 2018)

> "*Citizens of Europe*" (in The Guardian) / "*[Protecting our continent]*" (text 8 - 2019

Additionally, the traditional motif of mutual empowerment, that of defence cooperation, still remains a recurrent feature of Macron's narrative despite the fact that other partnerships have been made prevalent in the narrative. It denotes a political will to continue acting as a duo, as a driver of and for European defence:

> "*We have also discussed European defence. […] These propositions will prosper within the framework of the EU. But it seems to me it is vital that the strong relationship between our two countries continue to contribute to the development of European defence, according to modalities to be defined by our Union partners.*" (text 17 - 2018)

Indeed, apart from the times when he issues concrete recommendations and proposals for the European Union itself – especially regarding its handling of Brexit negotiations –, Macron builds his

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[18] France and the UK

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overall narrative for Europe precisely as this: a narrative for the European continent and region, for Europe rather than specifically the EU.

This broader term is especially meaningful as he points out several times throughout his speeches that the UK is indeed not leaving Europe itself but rather the EU. References to "Europe" as a whole are more prominent in Macron's narrative of and around Brexit than specific references to the "EU". A quantitative content analysis of all of Macron's speeches and statements could complement this argument but, based on this qualitative study, it is the overall sentiment transpiring from the sample data. It may therefore be argued that, to a certain extent, Macron's overall narrative of and for a "renewed" Europe – a heavily historicized[19] and symbolic 'grand' narrative – also serves the purpose of "integrating" (Schubert, 2010) the United Kingdom within it, now and for the future.

Moreover, when there are fundamental political issues (Brexit, immigration, the future of Franco-British defence cooperation in the aftermath/uncertainty of the Brexit context), cultural and scientific relations and cooperation – soft power resources – tend to be emphasized or relaunched in the official common narrative. Therefore, the fact that Macron incorporates in his narratives mentions of bilateral cultural and scientific cooperation indicates a certain degree of continuity of the common traditional narrative of the "*Entente Cordiale*":

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19 In French, Macron uses the word "Renaissance" which both means a "renewal" and is a clear reference to the Renaissance period in European history (14th-16th century) during which emerged first tangible European (political) projects with Henri IV and Sully's "Grand Design" (c. end of the 15th century - beginning of the 16th century).

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> *"Start of the #UKFR Summit. We don't just share our rainy weather: beyond Brexit, we have a lot to build in terms of security, economy, or culture"*

Nonetheless, a lot has happened since this summit took place and, although cultural and scientific bilateral projects are still ongoing, the arrival of a new British Prime Minister has signalled a significant turn, if not complete, at least already discursively speaking. Macron's strategic narrative for France and the future of the relationship has and will therefore necessarily adapt and change with this new factor.

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5 CONCLUSION

Only further research, further down in time, will tell us the extent to which Brexit, both as a political event happening outside of the Franco-British relationship itself and as a sub-narrative embedded within Macron's strategic narrative of/for France, will (or not) effectively damage Franco-British relations. Such a larger research project would need to draw from a larger set of data and use a mixed methods approach to fully explore the extent of the consequences of Macron's narrative – the "reception" aspect of strategic narratives studies which was left out in this dissertation to fully focus on unpacking its formation, dissemination and meaning.

This dissertation has, nevertheless, already highlighted the way Macron's narratives of Brexit and of the Franco-British relationship have evolved between May 2017 and April 2019, in line with his overall strategic narrative of France and of its position in the world. Through an interdisciplinary theoretical approach and a thorough narrative discourse analysis of the sample data, several conclusions were drawn.

The data has revealed that Brexit is indeed an integral part of Macron's overall strategic narrative of and for France to a larger extent than had first been assumed when this project started. As an 'issue' and policy narrative, Macron's narrative of Brexit and of the "Entente Cordiale" enables him to position his 'identity' narrative of France and of himself, as *a* leader and as its leader, in the wake, within his 'system' narrative of Europe and of the international system[20]. This research has also highlighted the way certain elements of Macron's strategic narrative are, in some ways, similar to the Brexiteers' narrative(s) itself. It may be argued that these discursive similarities, combined with the – few yet sustained and present as has been demonstrated – efforts to maintain a common narrative for Franco-British relations, may be leading towards a conciliatory narrative in a post-Brexit world.

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[20] The terminology used here refers to the three main types of narratives identified by Miskimmon et al.: "system narratives, identity narratives and issue narratives" (2013: 7)

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6.1. Macron's statements on Brexit in larger contexts not directly pertaining to it or to the Franco-British relationship (text 1-9).

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Text 14. Declaration during the Press conference – May's visit to Paris – 13th June 2017

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