

SPEAKING FOR, ACTING FOR AND STANDING FOR THE BEST INTEREST OF ‘THE PEOPLE’: A CROSS- CULTURAL ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE 2008 FINANCIAL CRISIS

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Abstract

Referring to the political contexts of the United States and the United Kingdom, this study explores how the effects of a rift in political representation triggered by the 2008 financial crisis (Baba *et al.* 2009; Inglehart and Norris 2016) forced national leaders to rethink their political agendas, each according to their own cultural context and background. By drawing on previous research concerning post-crisis partisan conflict, this study examines the extent to which government representatives adapt their political communication style to appeal to ‘the people’ at a time when resolute political action is needed the most. In particular, the study argues that the construct of ‘the people’ is the result of the political action planned by those who speak in their name. To this purpose, a corpus of speeches of US and UK leaders was collected and analysed through a combination of quantitative and qualitative approaches. By focusing on recurrent political themes and repertoires of political action that incorporate representational features of ‘the people’ across cultures, results point to the configuration of discursive representational models that contain traces of populist communication styles.

1. Introduction

The foundation of modern democracy is based on the well-acknowledged notion of popular representation (Morris 2000), or the right of the citizens to have a voice in their country’s political system through which a fiduciary relationship between ‘the people’ and their representatives is established (Miller and Stokes 1963; Simmons 1993).

A good starting point for this inquiry is the assumption that the concept of ‘the people’ is central to the understanding of political representation, but it is also “one of the more used and abused concepts in the history of politics” (Nastrom 2007: 324). Canovan (1999: 5) identifies at least three different conceptualizations of this term, though all three are representative of the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ polarization which is also a typical construct of populist rhetoric. Firstly, the concept of a ‘united’ people is used to mean a nation or country against some ‘other’ who aims to divide it; secondly, by using the possessive adjective ‘our’ with the noun ‘people’, the implication is that of an in-group

against a potential out-group, such as immigrants or other minority groups; thirdly, the notion of the 'ordinary' or 'common' or 'decent' people foregrounds those who resent the privileges of the arrogant elites or the corrupt politicians.

Going back in time, reclaimed in 1863 by Abraham Lincoln from the Preamble to the US Constitution, the proposition underlying the concept of 'the people' was used to exhort national unity in the Gettysburg Address at the time of the Civil War (Johnson 2014). In many ways, Lincoln's proposition is similar to that made by the political actors that are part of this study's corpus; they too are involved in keeping the nation united during a period of crisis. It is precisely in this respect that the study argues that the notion of 'the people' is first and foremost a discursive construct in the hands of politicians who regularly and expertly use it as a tool to influence public opinion (Burstein 2010). In particular, the construct not only refers to human social actors, but also to political action planned for the sake of 'the people'.

The idea that political action embodies an identifiable notion of 'the people' is perhaps easier to grasp when the fiduciary relationship between 'the people' and their representatives goes through a critical moment in political and economic history. Post-crisis party leaders tend to respond to profound economic insecurity by adapting their way of speaking to their electoral powerbase through a series of proposals, policy positions and strategies (Ezrow *et al.* 2011). This study, therefore, analyses the extent to which representative responsiveness, aimed at mitigating post-crisis recurrent patterns of gridlock and ineffectual policy making (Ryan 2012; Gervais 2014; Huddy *et al.* 2015), contributes to the construal of 'the-people-as-action' symbolic attributive (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996).

The study's groundwork builds on an already existing body of research regarding post-crisis politics (Morris and Abrams 2008; Morris and Levendusky 2006; Crespo-Tenorio *et al.* 2014), which generally points out that there have always been sharp divisions between and within political parties, but concludes that after a financial crisis political uncertainty rises strongly as government majorities shrink, polarization rises (Mian *et al.* 2014; Funke *et al.* 2016), and political discourse positions itself to confront these change-inducing events.

With this premise in mind, the study poses the following research questions:

1. How has political discourse adapted to the aftermath of the 2008 economic and financial crisis? Are there traces of populist rhetorical strategies?
2. What are the discourse features of peoplehood that can shed light on how 'the people' construct is identified and conveyed through political action?
3. What are the models of political representation that epitomize post-crisis political action? Do these models embody populist dimensions?

The study aims to provide answers to these questions by analysing a selection of speeches regarding four elected mainstream party leaders of liberal democracies. This corpus was subsequently divided into four subcorpora and investigated by implementing both quantitative and qualitative methods drawing from Corpus Linguistics (Baker *et al.* 2008), Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA) (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; van Dijk 2001; van Leeuwen 2008; Wodak and Meyer 2001; Wodak 2009), as supported by the transitivity system in the Systemic Functional Linguistics model (Halliday 1985;

Halliday and Matthiessen 2004), Appraisal theory (Martin and White 2005), and Social Actor Network (van Leeuwen 1996, 2008).

2. The 2008 Great Recession¹ and the interference of populism

Philip Stephens from *The Financial Times* stated that “historians will look back on the 2008 crisis as the moment when the world’s most powerful nations surrendered international leadership, and globalisation went into reverse”². Indeed, the process set in train by the September 2008 collapse of Lehman Brothers produced serious economic consequences that hurt large portions of the population, triggering increasing insurrections against the elite in representative democracies, thus preparing the ground for populist sentiment (Inglehart and Norris 2016).

While it is beyond the scope of this study to focus explicitly on the definition and the importance of populism, today’s political actors, including the mainstream politicians of this investigation, are undoubtedly confronted with the phenomenon as it has become a significant feature of contemporary politics. Particularly, as the dichotomy of ‘the elite’ vs. ‘the people’ is present in all dimensions of populism (Mudde 2004, 2013; Rooduijn 2013), the most widely cited definitions of the phenomenon are briefly mentioned below as they are more closely related to the discourse-analytical investigation of ‘the-people-as-political-action’ construct, articulated in the selected instantiations of the speech extracts that are part of the corpus.

Laclau (2005: 103) argues that populism is not an ideology, but rather a discursive and performative construction of ‘the people’ against the system, specifying that this construction is done “in the performative dimension of naming”, and is therefore grounded in discourse. In essence, Laclau’s dimension of populism is capable of articulating identities, interests, and needs that have been delegitimized by centre-right and centre-left parties, thus bringing together different demands of ‘the people’ in opposition to a common enemy (Laclau 1977, 2005). Mudde (2004: 543-544) offers an ideology-based conceptualization, viewing populism as a “thin-centred ideology” whose limited core value depicts society as divided into two antagonistic groups: ‘the people’, deprived of their rights, values and identity, and the usurping elite and dangerous ‘others’. This view is not in opposition with Laclau’s, but rather broadens its focus to include not only the contents of populism, but also how these are articulated in discourse. Moffitt’s (2016) proposal of populism is that of a political style that establishes a more interactive affiliation with wider categories of discourse and rhetoric, thus affording the opportunity to explore the field of action of political actors who adopt populist themes to varying degrees.

3. Corpus construction

The corpus comprises 138 inaugural, acceptance and special issue speeches delivered between January 2009 and December 2018 by US President Barack Obama and

¹ The National Bureau of Economic Research. The NBER’s Recession Dating Procedure. Retrieved from: <https://www.nber.org/cycles/sept2010.html>.

² Philip Stephens on Twitter @FinancialTimes, August 2nd, 2018. Retrieved from: <https://twitter.com/FinancialTimes/status/1035671761474539520>.

President Donald Trump, and British Prime Minister David Cameron and Prime Minister Theresa May. These leaders either felt the pressure of the 2008 economic crisis and had to deal with the aftermath of the critical event or exteriorize their country's response to this specific breaking point. The speeches of the US leaders were collected from the Miller Center online archive, while those delivered by the UK leaders were collected from the British Political Speech online archive³.

Labelled according to the leader's name (Table 1), the speeches were saved as four separate .txt documents, which constitute the study's four subcorpora.

Regarding the above leaders, it is this study's view that they mark a critical breaking point in the political systems following the 2008 crisis. In the US, for example, Barack Obama was the first African American president. Donald Trump represents the US response to the 2008 crisis. David Cameron, elected to the first coalition government since the Churchill war ministry, was the initiator of the 2016 EU Referendum; Theresa May was to lead the UK out of Europe. However, this deal and its definitive resolution did not occur during Theresa May's leadership, but under the new Prime Minister, Boris Johnson, whose Conservative government accompanied Great Britain out of the European Union on 31 January 2020.

Country	Leader	No. of speeches and tokens	Speech types
US	Barack Obama (BO_Corpus) (Democratic Party) 2009-2016	49 (196,112 tokens)	Inaugural address, State of the Union address, sessions of Congress address; remarks on special issues dealing with immigration, the economy, world economy, school shootings, gun control, space exploration, congressional gridlock, health care reform, etc.;
	Donald Trump (DT_Corpus) (Republican Party) 2016 to present day	21 (167,246 tokens)	
UK	David Cameron (DC_Corpus) (Conservative Party - coalition) 2010-2016	17 (98,653 tokens)	Party conferences; leader's speeches; remarks on special issues dealing with welfare, organized crime, fire reform, justice and home affairs, Brexit, human trafficking, terrorism, defence and security; Police Federation Conferences; Press statements released in UK and in other countries;
	Theresa May (TM_Corpus) (Conservative Party) 2016 to present day	51 (182,892 tokens)	

Table 1. Description of 'the people' corpus

³ <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches>. <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm>.

4. Methodology

The overall methodological structure of this study is based on the founding principles of the CDA framework, as in the seminal works of Fairclough (1989, 1998), Wodak (2009, 2015) and van Dijk (2001, 2006), which have guided both the quantitative and qualitative analysis, with specific reference to the crucial role of context and to the interdisciplinary nature of the CDA paradigm (Fairclough and Wodak 1997; Wodak 2009).

Drawing on a corpus-based approach (Baker *et al.* 2013; McEnery and Gabrielatos 2006; McEnery and Hardie 2012; Baker 2006, 2014), the quantitative analysis was carried out through *Sketch Engine* (Kilgarriff *et al.* 2014), which facilitated the description of the extracted lexical items and grammatical choices (Fairclough 1989; van Dijk 2006), thus yielding an overall view of the leader's notion of peoplehood. The Thesaurus application provided by *Sketch Engine* for this part of the investigation consisted in the extraction of peoplehood identifiers or close synonyms of people designated as groups or other collectives. Subsequently, by running the Word Sketch function, it was possible to detect how the noun 'people' behaved with modifiers and verbs.

The interdisciplinary nature of the qualitative component facilitated the interpretation and explanation of the observed phenomena (Fairclough 1989; van Dijk 2006) in terms of uncovering what is implicit, hidden or otherwise not immediately obvious in relations of discursively enacted dominance or their underlying ideologies (van Dijk 2001). This procedure began with the manual reading of the speech extracts. Guided by the quantitative results, this first reading not only enabled the interception of peoplehood references and verb processes expressing 'the-people-as-action' paradigm, but also facilitated the formulation of four parameters of decision-making processes (Table 1), which were then used to code the extracts analysed by implementing the resources of the qualitative approaches briefly described below.

The transitivity system draws on Halliday's (1985) work and specifies six different types of processes that deal with the content expressed in language. Material processes are processes of doing; mental processes express sensing; relational processes are those of being; verbal processes are those of saying; behavioural processes are those of physiological and psychological activities; existential processes relate to existence and typically have the verb *be*, or verbs that indicate existence.

Appraisal categories (Martin and White 2005) model the dialogic effects of meanings in three semantic regions which are instantiated by resources at all levels of the language system: attitude (resources for construing emotional responses and value judgements, both ethical and aesthetic), engagement (resources to adjust the speaker's commitment to his or her evaluations), and graduation (resources to quantify, intensify and compare these evaluations).

The socio-semantic inventory of the Social Actor Network (van Leeuwen 1996, 2008) draws on the ways in which social actors can be represented in discourses verbally or visually. The network consists of three main types of transformation: deletion, role allocation or rearrangement, and substitution. In other words, the network shows whether the social actors were excluded or included; whether through rearrangement different roles were assigned to different social actors; and whether any substitutions were used in their representation.

The combined synergy of the above methodological tools facilitated the coding of the extracts based on the most observable resources that best represented the processes contained in each parameter (Table 2). The first parameter involves responsibility-sharing actions which formulates a view of ‘the people’ as a participatory community; the second defines the negotiating abilities of the politician and how prepared he/she is in honouring bipartisan arrangements and electoral promises, thus revealing a comradery view of ‘the people’ supported by a conciliatory attitude; the third appraises the extent to which ‘the people’ are included or excluded from decision-making processes as social actors; the fourth parameter reveals aspects of ‘the people’ as exemplified through the communicative force of metaphors and frames.

1. policy-making processes and involvement (active, passive, top-down, bottom-up); commitment cause (long-term vs. short-term vision); sharing balance of power and responsibility
2. negotiating abilities and (un)willingness to come to terms (cooperation, bipartisanship)
3. issues of ‘clusivity’: inclusivity vs. exclusivity: pronoun reference (we); polarizing ‘us-vs-them’ paradigm (determination, genericization, assimilation, individualization, collectivization)
4. communication strategies; simplification processes by means of metaphors or frames (battle, motion, heroic myth, game, unity, friendships, numbers, etc.)

Table 2. Framework of parameters

5. Findings and discussion

The speech extracts in this study are only a sample of those actually collected and analysed. Nevertheless, the data sets have been selected from the larger corpus according to the level of representativity of the features coded under each parameter. The findings are presented in two separate sections. The first discusses the results from the quantitative investigations arranged in three tables followed by a commentary. The second section discusses findings from the qualitative analysis of a selection of linguistic instantiations extracted from the speeches likewise followed by commentary.

5.1. Quantitative analysis

Table 3 illustrates the results obtained from the Thesaurus application conducted through *Sketch Engine* software. Each of the four columns contains the first 20 occurrences from the total number retrieved within a similar lexico-grammatical context of the lemma ‘people’ selected from each subcorpus pertaining to the four leaders.

In order to obtain a wider view of ‘peoplehood’, the above list should be read in terms of who is included or ‘those who count’, and who is excluded or ‘those who have no part’ in the narrative told by each political leader.

Obama seems to favour communal and somewhat endearing terminology such as *family, community, folk, mother, kid, child, humanity, founder, neighborhood, homeowner*. Conversely, Trump’s list points towards social actors who are ready to attack or defend: *alien(s), military, protester(s)*, as well as those he is willing to defend: *company, employer, farmer, miner, immigrant*.

Obama (869x)	Trump (1,133x)	Cameron (612x)	May (716x)
American founder family woman community man child kid folk student humanity voter worker neighborhood homeowner	American country company alien employer military farmer man leader president politician protester miner immigrant Hispanic	child country Britain family parent woman citizen community party constituent bystander nation neighbour worker generation	country citizen family government Britain police victim system smuggler migrant constituent stakeholder party criminal union

Table 3. Peoplehood synonyms

Both May and Cameron use the terms *Britain* and *constituent* to establish leader affiliation. In fact, to strengthen this view they also mention *nation* (Cameron), *union* (May), *party* (May, Cameron), *system* (May); *country* (May, Cameron), *government* (May). In this community made up of *citizen(s)*, May seems to be worried about *migrant(s)* and *victim(s)*, while Cameron includes *worker(s)*, *neighbour(s)* and *generation(s)*. May also mentions *stakeholder(s)*, a noun which is usually attributed an active role, while Cameron mentions *bystander(s)* which, on the other hand, is credited with a more passive role.

With reference to the idea of peoplehood obtained from looking at the leaders' word choice across cultures rather than within the same country, Obama and Cameron both refer to those groups in society that need the most attention: *family*, *youth*, *child*, *folk* (Obama), *bystander*, *parent* (Cameron), and *community*. Trump's and May's references to collectivities seem to be pitted against each other: *alien*, *protester* (Trump), *criminal*, *smuggler* (May) vs. *military* (Trump), *police* (May).

Table 4 illustrates the number of Word Sketch occurrences of the noun 'people' preceded by modifiers. With this list of collocates, it is possible to grasp at a glance the leaders' references to peoplehood. Obama's vision seems to coincide with that of a multicultural collective with the modifiers indicating nationalities such as *American*, *Cuban*, *Iraqi*, *Palestinian*, *Afghan*, *Pakistan*, *Jewish*. Trump's representation is closer to a polarized vision of *great*, *incredible*, *good*, *talented*, *smart*, *amazing*, *tremendous* vs. *bad*, *evil*, *crazy*, *rude*, *dishonest* individuals, thus emphasizing judgemental personality traits.

In the UK, May's worry is likewise judgemental in mentioning the *uncontrolled* people, most likely the *immigrants* from European countries, as well as the more *local*, *vulnerable*, *own*, and from the *Commonwealth*. Cameron's attention, like Obama's, seems to be focused on groups of people and specifically on those who are of *working-age*

or *hard-working*, *lowest-paid*, but also towards the more *worried*, *disabled*, *elderly* and *poor*.

Of particular interest among this list of terms is the use of US and UK terms, respectively, such as *voter/constituent*, *immigrant/migrant*, *neighbourhood/neighbour*. In the first case, country-specific voting systems are represented; the second set expresses current political worries, but obviously coming from different borders; in the third set, the first refers to a community setting, quite often used by US politicians, while the second example is once again a reference to Europe.

Obama (869x)	Trump (1,133x)	Cameron (612x)	May (716x)
young	American	young	young
American	great	immigrant	British
Cuban	terrific	working-age	immigrant
Iraqi	other	most	European
many	incredible	local	ordinary
Palestinian	bad	Libyan	vulnerable
own	good	more	local
more	talented	worried	honest
ordinary	evil	elderly	own
Afghan	smart	hard-working	working
Pakistan	crazy	disabled	other
Jewish	rude	lowest-paid	EU
innocent	dishonest	poor	uncontrolled
responsible	amazing	own	Commonwealth
good	tremendous	few	more

Table 4. The noun ‘people’ used with modifiers

With reference to the use of the noun ‘people’ as agent (Table 5), here too it is possible to grasp a vision of how this construct is realized through material, behavioural and relational processes. This Word Sketch function provides a minimum of context of use after the verb form. Obama’s people are *deserving* as they *want*, *expect*, *need*, *demand*, *ask* to be heard, but they also *work*, *make* and *struggle* to have a voice. Trump’s ‘people’ are moving around as they are allowed to *come* and *get*, with the consequences of actions that must be *govern(ed)* such as *run*, *shoot*, *forget*.

In the UK, Cameron’s vision of his ‘people’ seems to be very similar to Obama’s perception of people who are busy getting things done: they *vote*, *struggle*, *open*, *live*, *help*, *strive*, *volunteer*, but they also *need* and *want*. May’s ‘people’, on the other hand, express an urgency which is comparable to Trump’s as it seems to portray a frustrated collective in need of protection and safety with actions such as *murder*, *need*, *protect*, *kill*, *lose*.

Obama (869x)	Trump (1,133x)	Cameron (612x)	May (716x)
want: the American people want	come: people coming into the country	need: the people who need it most	vote: people voted for
be: people are people	get: the wrong people are getting	live: young people living with their parents	feel: the frustration people feel
expect: American people expect	run: decent people are running away	struggle: so many working people are struggling	tell: people told the party
deserve: the American people deserve	know: people know the truth	vote: the people do vote	work: people who work
say: the American people are saying	allow: wrong people are allowed into	pay: people who pay taxes	protect: our people are to be protected
struggle: people who were struggling	govern: people govern the people	volunteer: the number of people volunteering	keep: British people are kept safe
work: people have worked	die: people are dying on	open: local people opened a community hall	murder: people are murdered
make: people are making the best of it	require: our people require us to find	know: lots of people know	need: the British people need to know
need: people need to	call: the people who call	want: people want to know	be: people are worried
demand: the American people demand it	govern: the people govern	get: people get back into	lose: people who lose out
live: people live here	lose: the people lost confidence	understand: people understand that	kill: people are killed
agree: the American people agree	take: the people take ownership	pick: people picked up their brooms	hold: people are held back from
see: the people see leaders	make: people are making money	help: the very people who help out	prevent: people are prevented from
offer: the American people offer help	shoot: people are shot	strive: want to stop people striving	put: people are put
ask: the American people are asking	forget: people often forget	rise: people are rising	live: people live by

Table 5. Verbs with the noun 'people' as subject

5.2. Qualitative analysis

With reference to the procedure, the samples pertaining to each leader were 1) grouped together under each parameter, 2) reduced in length by using square brackets and ellipsis points, making sure to preserve a minimum of context, and 3) marked by bold font to signpost the expressions that indicate the parameter's intended meaning. It should be noted that the number provided at the end of each sample item refers to the speech number listed in Appendix 1. Each set of items is followed by a commentary.

Parameter 1. policy-making processes and involvement (active, passive, top-down, bottom-up); commitment cause (long-term vs. short-term vision); sharing balance of power and responsibility

Barack Obama

[...] we have made progress in this nation [...] It actually happened **over the course of years** of advocacy, and **organizing, and alliance-building, and deal-making** [...] (s13)

[...] the system **isn't** as rigged as you think, and it certainly **is not** as hopeless as you think [...] And if you opt out, or stop paying attention, you won't. **It's** that simple. **It's** not that complicated. (s13)

[...] **how do we give** everyone a fair shot at opportunity and security in this new economy? **how do we make** technology work for us [...]? **how do we keep** America safe and lead the world? **how can we make** our politics reflect what's best in us, and not what's worst? (s18)

[...] **Will we respond** to the changes of our time with fear, turning inward as a nation, turning against each other **as a people**? (s18)

Obama plans for a long-term political project when he mentions the "course of the years" in example (1) and connotes it with participatory processes. In example (2), he uses relational processes to clarify what the system is or is not, not only to encourage participation but also to instill optimism in the government's doing. In example (3), he uses rhetorical questioning techniques with a predominant inclusive 'we' – thus encouraging the sharing of responsibility. Also in example (3) the aspect of agency is expressed through material processes: *do, give, make, keep, respond*. The actions featured in Obama's discursive strategies reveal a hands-on and inclusive vision of 'the people'.

Donald Trump

This is the United States Senate. This is the most important position that a **President can** give out [...] And after that, **Supreme Court Justice**. Right? (s17)

[...] **I want** safety and security, and low taxes. **I want** low taxes. **I want** borders (s1)

What people want now, they want jobs. They **want great jobs** with **good pay**, and when they have that, you watch [...]. (s16)

[...] We are lifting people from dependence to independence, because we know the best anti-poverty program is a very simple and **very beautiful paycheck**. (s8)

I think the country – look, you take a **look**. I've created over a million jobs since I'm President. (s12)

In example (1), with the use of appreciation and engagement, Trump goes straight to legitimization through authority, which he seems to value the most (*US Senate*,

President, Supreme Court Justice, can give out). In examples (2) and (3), he uses the mental state verb *want* which is very close to the deontic expression that expresses how the world ought to be. But while in (2), through the use of graduation and volition, it is the world according to Trump with *low taxes* and *borders*, in example (3), the world according to his people is one in which they can get *great jobs* and *great pay*. He is telling us what *he* thinks they want and need in the immediacy of the moment. The mental process *think* is also used in example (5) to address the entire country as he invites 'the people' to *look* (mental process) at what he has accomplished for them thanks to his own source of knowledge. Therefore, in these cases, Trump seems to view 'the people' as a collective of passive social actors whose needs are to be satisfied.

David Cameron

[...] real change is **when everyone pulls together**, comes together, works together [...]. (s16)

We will give our biggest cities the opportunity to elect executive **mayors**, powerful **local politicians** who know the area, **who have real clout** to drive **projects through**. And we will give much **more power to local councils** [...]. (s15)

It is not our power but yours that we exercise [...] **on your behalf – and we are accountable to you** for how we use it. (s11)

Clear instructions. Clear objectives. And from me: a **clear understanding** that in these difficult times, it is leadership we need. (s12)

That's what **our coalition strategy for growth** is all about. **First**, we will [...] **Second**, we will provide [...] **Third**, we will help [...]. (s15)

Cameron uses the *pulling together* metaphor to bring about change (1), meaning that his people should share the responsibility with his coalition government. But it is also a distributed responsibility (2) consisting of *mayors*, *local politicians* and *local councils* with *real authority* (appreciation terms in bold). Cameron makes sure that this responsibility is exercised through representation (3) and with a leadership that gives out *clear* instructions, objectives, understanding (4). His checklist of intentions (graduation) is a sort of legitimization strategy that proves the true intent of the government (5).

Theresa May

But **my job as Prime Minister** is to do what I believe to be in the **British national interest**. And that means two things. **First**, honouring the result of the referendum. **Second**, making Britain one of the places to do business. **Third**, making Britain a safe place. (s5)

Good for jobs, good for the **Union**. It delivers on the **referendum**. It keeps faith with the **British people**. (s41)

But **offering** someone a job; **creating** opportunity for other people – **making sure** they are well-paid – is one of the most socially-responsible things you can do. So, we in **this party**, we in this **hall**, we say thank you. (s1)

Our next challenge as a **Party** is to help working people with the cost of living. (s1)

We are not just a **party to clean up a mess**, we are **the party** to steer a course to a better future. That's **delivering on the referendum**. (s1)

May, very similarly to Trump, counts on legitimization through authority: linked to the modifier *national* (appreciation), the term *interest* conveys a vision of ‘the people’ (1) who are personified in Britain *first* (graduation). In the same example, she also uses a checklist of things (graduation) to accomplish for the national interest (1). In example (2), *national interest* is emphasized by using *union*, *referendum*, *British people*, and in example (3) she asks stakeholders, such as industry and company managers, to act (material processes) in the name of ‘the people’ by *offering* them jobs and *making sure* there is good pay (3).

In examples (3-5), it seems as if ‘her people’ need to be ‘looked after’, and this probably originates from the functionalized use of the reference to *the party*, (3-5) and ‘*in this hall*’. May’s preoccupations are material: to *clean up the mess* and *deliver on the referendum* as illustrated in example (5).

Parameter 2. negotiating abilities and (un)willingness to come to terms (cooperation, bi-partisanship).

Barack Obama

[...] But **the answer isn’t** to stop trading with other countries. In this global economy, **that’s** not even possible. The **answer is to do trade** the right way, by **negotiating** with other countries so that they raise their labor standards and their environmental standards. (s13)

[...] And **my hope is** that my Republican friends, but also Democrats, say to themselves, **let’s be practical** and **let’s do both**. Let’s not just **do** one or the other; let’s **do** both. (s3)

[...] **They [the people] don’t expect** those of us in this chamber to agree on every issue. But they do expect us to put the nation’s interests before the party. **They do expect us** to forge reasonable compromise. (s23)

Obama offers solutions that do not rule out compromise with other countries. He uses mostly material verb processes such as *do*, *negotiate* in examples (1, 2), supported by the term *practical* (appreciation). The use of relational processes, such as the answer *isn’t/is* in example (1) and expressions of inclusivity in examples (2) and (3), reinforce his willingness to negotiate for the well-being of ‘the people’. Yet, he also uses mental processes that look towards the future: *hope* (2); *expect/don’t expect* (3).

Donald Trump

The reason **they, the Democratic party, don’t want** me is because **they want** to run the show. **They want it**. It’s power. It’s whatever **you want** to call it. But what **they’ve** done here is a **disgrace**. (s2)

[...] If you look at some of **those people** [US companies] that **you’re talking** about **they’re outside** of the country, **they’re having** a lot of their product made outside [...]. (s12)

[...] **it’s a con job by the Democrats**. They know it [...] They tried to convince people that I had something to do with Russia [...]. (s2)

We believe in two simple rules: **Buy American and hire American**. On trade, I’ve kept my promise to the **American people** [...]. (s5)

I have to deal with a lot of politicians, don’t forget, and **I have to convince them** that **what I’m saying** is right. (s18)

Trump insists on the *us vs. them* polarization of discourse. Nearly all of the examples contain instantiations of polarization in pronoun or noun forms such as *I/you/me/they/those/them*, and *American vs Democratic* (1, 3, 4). The verb *want* in example (1) conveys, once again, Trump's view of what others want. In many instances he refers to the *Democratic Party* by using the adjectives *disgrace* and *con* (judgement) in examples 1 and 3. In (4), the mental verb *believe* is used to establish his law, masked as 'the people's law, and in (5), the use of the first person *I* and the *have to* structure to emphasize, once again, 'the world according to Trump' frame.

David Cameron

But we have **shared** interests. **We want** the Eurozone to deal with its problems. **We want** it to be prosperous. (s15)

There are **difficult choices** ahead. But they are unavoidable – and it's the same for our international partners. (s15)

But I **recognise** that achieving the full deal is a **huge challenge** [...]. (s1)

This is going to be **hard and difficult work**. A coalition will throw up **all sorts of challenges** [...]. Let's all turn this **time of challenge** into a time of opportunity.

It is an honour and a privilege to stand here, **before the party I lead, before the country I love**, as the Conservative Prime Minister **of the United Kingdom**. [...]. (s12)

In wanting things to work out (1), Cameron reveals his hope of moving forward (1, 3) with *shared* interests (appraisal), but he also *recognizes* that there are *difficult* (appraisal) choices and *huge* (appraisal) challenges to be dealt with (2, 3, 4). In example (5), his personalized support of Conservative values and the use of mental processes are legitimating discursive strategies that serve the purpose of endearing his constituents and ensuring their endorsement.

Theresa May

Their latest plan is to hold a second referendum. They call it a '**People's Vote**'. But we had the **people's vote**. **The people voted to leave**. (s1)

I have treated the EU with nothing but respect. **The UK expects** the same. (s3)

We need to **look beyond** the precedents and find a **new balance**. (s21)

We **will not betray** the result of the referendum. And **we will never break up** our country. (s2)

That **pledge**, to the people of our United Kingdom is what guides me in our negotiations with the EU. (s38)

May's negotiation strategies build on the Brexit 'we leavers – they remainers' polarization. In example (1), she instrumentally states that it is a '*people's vote*' to mean all of 'the people', but one can easily assume that this is shorthand for the 'leavers'. In example (2), by using a material process in the statement '*I have treated* with the EU', May speaks in the name of the British people and in doing so she claims a mythical and indissoluble bond. She focuses on finding a *new* (appraisal) *balance* (3); she – in the name of her people – *will not betray* or *break up* (4) the *pledge* (5), clearly referring to the Brexit referendum results.

Parameter 3 specifically draws on the resources afforded by the Social Actor Network (van Leeuwen 1996, 2008). It should be noted that for this parameter there is only one combined commentary to facilitate a more immediate comparative view of people categories.

Parameter 3. issues of ‘clusivity’: inclusivity vs. exclusivity: pronoun reference (we); polarizing the ‘us-vs-them’ paradigm (determination, genericization, assimilation, individualization, collectivization).

Barack Obama

But democracy is the way that we solve problems. That’s how we got health care for more of **our people**. [...] Because **workers** can organize, **and ordinary people** have a voice [...]. (s14)

We can’t just think about “**us**” – we’ve got to think about “**we, the people.**” So, let’s do the right thing. Let’s do right by **our kids**. Let’s do right by these **families**. Let’s get this done. (s25)

[...] It [the spirit] lives on in the struggling **small-business owners** [...] It lives on in **the woman who** said she and her neighbors have felt the pain of recession, but we are strong [...] It lives on in **the 8-year-old boy in Louisiana** who just sent me his allowance and asked if I would give it to the people of Haiti. (s39)

[...] And I sign this bill for **my daughters**, and all **those who will come after us** [...]. (s47)

Donald Trump

It’s **a lot of people**. A lot of **media**. (s2)

It means a lot of business for our **farmers**. We’re opening up for **farmers**. We’re opening up for a lot of **different groups**. **Different businesses**. (s1)

They [foreign companies] dump massive amounts of steel. They want to put our **steel companies** out of business [...]. (s4)

Look at the very **dishonest people** [...] these are **con artists** [foreign companies] and the press know it, but they won’t write about it. (s1)

[...] we are also working to reform the international trading system so that it promotes [...] and rewards to **those who play by the rules**. (s9)

[...] **some people are great fighters** and **some people aren’t**. **The Kurds** are great fighters [...]. (s1)

In the examples above, both Obama and Trump use a generic representation of the people. Obama uses down-to-earth or inclusive references such as *ordinary people*, *our people*, *we the people* (1, 2). Trump chooses to use quantity (graduation) in *a lot of people* or emphasizes dissimilarity and negative judgement such as *different groups*, *different businesses*, *dishonest people* (2, 3, 4).

Regarding the resource of collectivization, for Obama it is discursively represented as *families*, *kids*, *small business owners*, *workers* (2, 3), or people-relatable references. Trump also makes a relatable reference to *farmers* (2), but then he mentions less relatable ones such as *dishonest people* and *con artists* (judgement) (4).

The next resource is personalization by determination. Obama employs it by including people-relatable participants such as *my daughters*, an *eight-year old boy in*

Louisiana and a woman who (3, 4). Trump, on the other hand, seems to refer mostly to groups of people such as *companies, fighters, Kurds* (3, 6).

As far as indetermination of references to people, Obama plans to leave a better world for *our kids, families* and for *those who will come after us* (2, 6). Trump seems to live in a world where people *play by the rules*; it is a world in which *some people are and some people aren't* (5, 6).

David Cameron

[...] I want us to build a society with **stronger families** and stronger **communities**. And I want a political system that **people can trust** and look up to once again. (s16)

Today, government is saying to **the people of Eden Valley**, to the **people of Windsor and Maidenhead**, to the **people of Sutton**, to the **people of Liverpool**: What is it that we're doing that's stopping you from doing what you want to do? (s14)

[...] **the people of Britain – the people of the world** – want to know: can we turn this around? (s14)

Our responsibility is to **our family, to our neighbourhood, our country, our institutions** [...]. (s12)

[...] so we've put a cap on the numbers of **non-EU immigrants** allowed to come into our country to work, but we mustn't lock out talent - I want **the best and brightest entrepreneurs, scientists and students** from around the world to get the red carpet treatment [...]. (s12)

Theresa May

It gives **every man, woman and child** the absolute security of knowing that whenever you are sick, care will be there. (s1)

We should not forget what's behind those numbers. **The parent** who swaps a benefit cheque for a regular wage. **The youngster** leaving school and never having to sign on. **The children** growing up with an example of hard work.

The free movement **of people** will end, once and for all. (s1)

Migrants have made a huge contribution to our country – and they will continue to in the future. **Those with the skills we need**, who want to come here and work hard, will find a welcome. (s22)

Our next challenge is to help **working people** with the cost of living. (s49)

[...] it must be consistent with the kind of country we want to be as we leave: a modern, open, outward-looking, tolerant, European democracy. **A nation of pioneers, innovators, explorers and creators**. (s21)

Part of Cameron's vision of 'the people' includes *stronger* (graduation) social actors belonging to general collectivities such as *families, communities, people of the world*, people from *different parts of Britain* (1, 2). May is even more general when she uses the proverbial every man, woman and child (1). Cameron also classifies people by using indetermination reference and appreciation: *non-EU immigrants, best and brightest people, scientists and students* (5).

May's collectivities comprise those who are *skilled and talented* (judgement), pioneers, innovators, explorers and creators. Cameron also makes use of representation by personalization such as *our family, our neighbourhood, our country, our institutions* (3). Regarding the personalization of references, both Cameron and May use individualization. As

exemplified in (2), rather than referring to people he actually knows or family members, as in the case of Obama, Cameron uses a place attribute to refer to country affiliation and belongingness (*the people of Eden Valley, of Windsor, of Maidenhead, of Sutton, of Liverpool*). May refers to people roles such as *the parent, the youngster, the student* (2).

Parameter 4. communication strategies; simplification processes by means of metaphors or frames (battle, motion, heroic myth, game, unity, friendships, numbers, etc.).

Barack Obama

[...] there are a whole **lot of folks** who are **book smart** and have no common sense [...] they've got a **fancy degree** [...] "**We the People**." Our Constitution begins with those three simple words, words we've come to recognize mean all the people, not just some; words that insist **we rise and fall together** [...]. (s18)

[...] but qualities **like kindness and compassion, honesty, hard work** -- they often matter more than know-how. (s13)

Let's **flip that equation**. Let's work together to close those **loopholes** [...]. (s20)

And we're also going to have to do more for the long-term unemployed [...] **life is a catch-22**. (s8)

[...] Seven years ago, **Rebekah and Ben Erler** of Minneapolis were newlyweds [...] **Here's another example**. During World War II, when men like **my grandfather** [...]. (s18)

Obama's general turn of phrase includes references that are easily relatable to the everyday citizen such as *folks* (1), but also adjectives that evoke who he is targeting, namely people who are *book smart* and have a *fancy degree* (1). His frequent use of idioms is also very effective in terms of creating relatable mental images supported by engagement resources such as *rise and fall together*; *flip the equation*; *close those loopholes*; *catch 22* (1, 2, 3, 4). The representation of people passes also through qualities such as *kindness* and *compassion, honesty, hard work* (2), as well as personalized examples as in mentioning *Rebekah and Ben Erler, men like my grandfather* (5).

Donald Trump.

We're getting another **\$1.6 billion in borders**. I want borders. We've spent **\$3.2 [billion]** and we're getting another **\$1.6 [billion]**. (s1)

And **millions** of people – not – you know, I – they say, "Oh, **thousands** of people..." No, no, no, not thousands. **Millions** of people would have been killed at the border [...]. (s1)

You know, I got **52 percent** with women. Everyone said, "This couldn't happen □ 52 percent." [...]. (s1)

We've **massively** cut taxes for the middle class and small businesses [...] I've created over **a million jobs** since I'm President [...]. (s12)

One by one, we are keeping the promises I made to the American people [...]. (s15)

Trump achieves simplification through graduation in numbers and figures as exemplified in all of the above five quotes. He clearly reports unreal figures, intending to add to the hyperbole that he creates in order to dramatize the scenario. In (5), the mental image is no longer that of large numbers, but that of counting, *one by one*, the promises made to each single American person.

David Cameron

...where people, in their **everyday lives**, in their **homes**, in their **neighborhoods**, in their **workplace** [...]. (s15)

Politics is **a trust**. (s11)

Can we **re-open Britain for business?**

Vanguard Communities. (s15)

Personal **responsibility**. Professional **responsibility**. Civic **responsibility**. Corporate **responsibility**. (s6)

We, **the Conservatives**, we are **the ones who** will bring you together [...] A more prosperous Britain. But we must not stop there as we build **a Greater Britain**. (s4)

And my great passion is building the **Big Society**. (s15)

Cameron's vision of 'the people' in parameter 4 seems to rely on graduation by comparison to represent a familiar working collectivity (1), made up of simple folks going about their *everyday lives*, asked to *trust politics* (2), and ready to *do business* (3). It is a responsible collectivity that moves forward (4, 5) towards building a *Greater Britain* (6). Indeed, the final hope that conservatives have is substantiated in the metaphoric expression of creating a *Big Society* (7), possibly one that includes those that so far have been excluded from it.

Theresa May

Above all **a party of Unionism** [...] (2) Let us fulfil our duty to the **British people**. (s31)

Let us fulfil our duty to **our country**. Let us fulfil our duty to **Britain**. Let us renew the **British Dream**. (s31)

[...] And we will do all this as a **sovereign nation** in which the **British people** are in control. (s32)

So existing models do not provide the best way forward for either the UK or the EU [...] I want to be straight with people – because **the reality is** that we **all need to face up** to some **hard facts**. (s21)

First, we need to make markets...the **second** challenge is [...]. **Third**, after a decade of austerity, [...]. (s1)

Fighting against the **burning injustice**; We will build a **better Britain**; To shape a **brighter** future [...]. (s1)

In examples (1-3), May's vision of 'the people' seems to be construed as that of a *sovereign* (appreciation) *nation* (3), reiterated by other terms such as *Unionism*, *British* people, *our* country (1, 2, 3). May's people are encouraged to look after the *British Dream* (2), thus echoing the American Dream, but it is a Britain that counts on reality by facing *hard facts* (4), probably implying that Brexit will not be easy. May, like Cameron, counts on graduation of adjectives to project the Dream into the future, knowing that this can only be accomplished by fighting *injustice* (6). Claiming the centrality of 'the nation', Cameron and May invoke one of the most familiar concepts in populist rhetoric albeit in different ways. May's representation of 'the nation' is quite similar to that of the 'nation-state' metaphor which portrays a more exclusionary vision of nationalism, and therefore conveys the populist sovereign idea of protecting the interests of one's own people. Cameron's use of 'the nation' insists on a more inclusive conceptu-

alization, expressed as a big community, a social group, a neighbourhood, and, in this case, it is not characterized by a strong sovereigntist streak (Gellner 2006, Smith 2010, Norris and Inglehart 2019).

6. Conclusion

The aim of this study has been to argue that the complex notion of ‘the people’ is not only represented by human social actors, but also resounds in the nature of political action conducted in their name, especially during a post-crisis scenario.

The study’s first and second research questions focus on the discursive features of ‘the people’ construct embedded in political action. Results show that Obama and Cameron generally evoke *alliance-building* and *big society realizations*, suggesting that their appeal to ‘the people’ is an appeal to inclusivity and to communal goals, valuing diversity and individual responsibility and effort (Rosanvallon 2006). By frequently referring to forms of *nationalism* and *repatriation of powers*, such as when the appeal to ‘the people’ is an appeal to *national interest*, or to a *hard border*, or to *sovereignty*, or to *deliver on the referendum*, Trump’s and May’s rendition of ‘the people’ is often articulated in the ‘us’ vs. ‘them’ polarization.

The study also analysed the impact of populist rhetoric on mainstream political discourse. The findings indicate that Obama and Cameron adopt a series of populist strategies that insist on narratives of political participation (Bang 2009). Therefore, it can be assumed that their individual approaches, in answer to the third research question, seem to articulate a representational model of peoplehood based on the notion of empowerment, with a clear emphasis on virtuous actions of citizens actively reaching out to their elected leaders (Norris 2007).

Findings also indicate that Trump’s and May’s political approaches incorporate populist strategies essentially driven by ‘nationalistic narratives embodying a discursive representation’ of peoplehood based on the central role of the leader in guiding the nation out of hard times.

As much as it is fair to state that the study offers a different conceptualizing of ‘the people’ construct through political action, further research is needed in order to provide additional evidence that could validate this study’s perspective, and perhaps even suggest how we should interact with our political representatives in order to actively and knowingly participate in a more functional and dynamic representational relationship.

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