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Populism without 'the people':
A discourse analysis of the 2016 EU referendum

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Abstract

The EU referendum of 2016 is commonly defined as a populist event. This is a misinterpretation. Current scholarship conceptualises populism as a thin ideology, discourse, or performative repertoire that pits 'the people' against 'the elite'. This thesis argues that none of these features actually apply to the EU referendum. Brexit arose from an elite-defined process featuring an elite-controlled debate. Far from a populist irruption, the EU referendum endorsed a particular type of *anti-populism*.

Anti-populism can bluntly state its distaste of populism and attempt to dissolve 'the people'. Equally, though, it can manifest as a phenomenon this thesis terms *populism without 'the people'* – a discourse that employs a similar political *style* to authentic populism but follows the political *logic* of anti-populism. Discourse analysis of Vote Leave and Stronger In – the two official campaign organisations set up to contest the referendum – reveals that both engaged in anti-populist performances. Stronger In deployed anti-populist rhetoric that depicted leaving the EU as dangerous, oversimplified, and likely to inaugurate a crisis in British life. Vote Leave's discourse, however, while meeting all the stylistic criteria for populism, also aimed at dissolving 'the people' and further empowering the governing elites of the British state. This thesis therefore posits that Vote Leave played the role of a sophisticated anti-populist force.

The EU referendum demonstrates why populist theory needs to incorporate praxis into the definition of populism. The referendum was not a populist/anti-populist struggle, but an anti-populist broadcast presented in two different registers of sophistication. The voter's constituent power remained the same regardless which portion of the governing elite 'won'. This thesis concludes that populism needs to be reconceptualised as a discourse *that is committed to democratic augmentation*. Specifically, the solutions offered by populists must in some way enhance the constituent power of 'the people' in relation to 'the elite'. If a political movement is not proposing to enhance the constituent power of 'the people' then it is anti-populist regardless of the style it adopts.

Declaration

This is to certify that:

i. The thesis comprises only my original work toward the PhD except where indicated in the Preface,
ii. Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used,
iii. The thesis is fewer than 100,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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Contents

Introduction	6
1. Populist theory and Brexit	33
2. Populism in the British parliamentary system	73
3. Leave and the crisis of the EU	113
4. Remain and the crisis of populism	142
5. Polarisation and the illusion of control	172
6. Populist vulnerability or ‘Great Britain’	203
Conclusions	233
Bibliography	246

Introduction

January 23, 2013. British Prime Minister David Cameron stands at a podium in front of an electric blue screen. The words *Britain and Europe* hover over his right shoulder. The Prime Minister delivers a speech that initiates the long chain of events resulting in Brexit.

That speech is now referred to as the Bloomberg speech, in reference to the place of its delivery. Bloomberg London is an office complex owned by Michael Bloomberg, one of the richest men in the world whose fortune began with the invention of the Bloomberg Terminal, 'a modern icon of financial markets'.[1] In 2013 Europe was still embroiled in the economic aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis unleashed by the same financial markets. This thesis will analyse one of the ways in which Britain tried to deal with the aftereffects of this crisis.

In his Bloomberg speech Cameron announced a referendum on Britain's membership of the European Union, setting in motion the event we now call Brexit. 'It is time,' he proclaimed, 'for the British people to have their say. It is time to settle this European question in British politics.' He promised that his government, if re-elected, would rerun the 1975 referendum that Britain held on European membership. Cameron envisaged the public would endorse his own view that Britain should remain in the Union, thereby silencing the anti-EU members of his party and blunting the electoral appeal of the UK Independence Party (UKIP).[2] He was successful in the latter ambition but spectacularly ineffective regarding the former. At the time of writing, the UK is still trying to negotiate its exit from the EU. UKIP has been banished back to the periphery of British politics.

At its core, Brexit is a story of economic injustice and the parliamentary elite that attempted to sublimate its consequences. The EU referendum, which is the focus of this thesis, is the process through which sublimation was achieved and political

[1] Bloomberg Finance L.P. 2020, 'The Terminal: Bloomberg Professional Services', accessed 13 Feb 2020: <https://www.bloomberg.com/professional/solution/bloomberg-terminal/?utm_source=bloomberg-menu&utm_medium=blp&bbgsum=DG-WS-PROF-SOLU-TERMINAL-bbgmenu>.
[2] Tim Shipman 2017, *All Out War: The Full Story of Brexit*, London: William Collins, pp. 8-35.

responsibility diverted. Pundits and academics have typically described the verdict given in the EU referendum as unrepresentative, irrational, and unexpected. The term used to encapsulate all three connotations is 'populist'.[3] The EU referendum is seen as populist in the sense that it disrupted the status quo in a negative manner, provoking a rag-tag band of 'the people' into rebellion against an imagined 'elite'. This thesis seeks to explore and problematise these assumptions. In doing so it sets aside UKIP and its leader Nigel Farage at the outset. These are the embodied referents of the type of negative politics to which the term populism generally alludes. However, positing UKIP as the populist agent of Brexit overlooks their marginal position in the EU referendum itself.

UKIP has been lobbying since 1992 for the UK to leave the EU. They invoke a nostalgic fiction of cultural homogeneity and the kind of xenophobia displayed in their infamous 'Breaking Point' referendum billboard. Nonetheless, UKIP's popularity was premised on the failings of the major parties and the 'Eurosceptic' sentiments that are prevalent in British politics.[4] During the referendum itself, UKIP was corralled into the unofficial campaign organisation called 'Leave.EU'. 'Vote Leave' and 'Britain Stronger In Europe', the two official campaigning groups, were staffed by the major parties that control the British parliamentary system.

[3] For example: Thorsten Olesen 2019, 'Back to the 1960s or Further Back? Brexit as a European Dilemma between Past and Future', Contemporary European History 28(1), p. 40; Michael Freeden 2017, 'After the Brexit referendum: revisiting populism as an ideology', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 22(1), pp. 1-3; Simon Usherwood 2019 'Shooting the fox? UKIP's populism in the post-Brexit era', *West European Politics* 42(6), pp. 1209-29; Sina Blassnig, Florin Buchel, Nicole Ernst, and Sven Engesser. 2019, 'Populism and Informal Fallacies: An Analysis of Right-Wing Populist Rhetoric in Election Campaigns', *Argumentation* 1(1), pp. 107-36; Evgeniia Iakhnis, Brian Rathbun, Jason Reifler and Thomas Scotto 2018, 'Populist referendum: Was "Brexit" an expression of nativist and anti-elitist sentiment?', *Research & Politics* , DOI: 10.1177/2053168018773964; Valeri Modebadze 2019, 'The Refugee Crisis, Brexit and the Rise of Populism: Major Obstacles to the European Integration Process', *Journal of Liberty and International Affairs* 1(1), pp. 86-95; Steve Corbett 2016, 'The social consequences of Brexit for the UK and Europe: euroscepticism, populism, nationalism, and societal division', *International Journal of Social Quality* 6(1), pp. 11-31; Russell Berman 2016, 'Brexit, Immigration, and Populism', *Telos*, 2(176), p. 188; Andrea Pirro, Paul Taggart and Stijn van Kessel, 'The Populist Politics of Euroscepticism in Times of Crisis: Comparative Conclusions', *Politics* 38(3), p. 37890. N.b. The above is a small sample of those works that rigorously apply the concept of populism to Brexit. Many other articles use the term populism as either a keyword or a descriptor without explanation.

[4] Harold Clarke, Matthew Goodwin and Paul Whiteley 2017, *Breixt: Why Britain Voted To Leave The European Union*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 111-45.

UKIP behaves as one might *expect* a populist group to behave. They are crude like Donald Trump, unsettling like Marine Le Pen and exude an attitude of insurgency like Jair Bolsonaro. However, as this thesis argues, the everyday expectations that academia and popular culture attach to populism are overly simplistic. Populism is often disruptive and occasionally an insurgent force, but viewed in context contemporary populism is also wielded by electoral parties and political insiders. Political parties like UKIP are not alien invaders into an orderly democratic politics.[5] UKIP is a minor party seeking to ascend the electoral ladder. Moreover, as a phenomenon of electoral politics, populist parties like UKIP cannot rise to prominence without a modicum of public support. Populist stylings can often sound radical and populist agendas might entail 'anti-politics' and dangerous deformations of democracy.[6] However, populism only becomes a *popular* mode of politics when a plurality of citizens feel that ordinary representation has gone awry and some form of systemic reset is required.[7] Equally, during such times, populist rhetoric can be co-opted by established political forces in order to divert public anger away from the political establishment.

Populism is a multifaceted and paradoxical phenomenon that confounds an orderly application of theory to real politics. This thesis therefore approaches the 2016 EU referendum using a pluralistic array of contemporary populist theory. The literature on populism is vast. Cas Mudde observed that modern politics is undergoing a populist 'zeitgeist' that extends to every continent, and the volume of theory on the topic certainly reflects his observation.[8] This thesis primarily draws on the ideological, discursive, and performative approaches to populism although it acknowledges that there are many other ways of conceptualising the phenomenon. I do not believe that populism is exclusively an ideology, performance or discourse; these approaches are simply the most extensively developed literatures on the topic from which to build a composite framework. A composite of all three approaches is needed to unravel the

[5] C.f. Paul Howe 2017, 'Eroding Norms and Democratic Deconsolidation', *Journal of Democracy* 28(4), pp. 15-29; Roland Rich 2017, *Democracy in Crisis: Why, Where, How to Respond*, Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers; Roberto Foa and Yascha Mounk 2017, 'The Signs of Deconsolidation', *Journal of Democracy* 28(1), pp. 5-15.
[6] C.f. Nadia Urbinati 2013, 'The Populist Phenomenon', *Raisons politiques*, 51(3), p. 153; Catherine Fieschi and Paul Heywood 2004, 'Trust, Cynicism and Populist Anti-Politics', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(3), p. 299; Werner Müller. *What is Populism?*, p. vi.
[7] Ernesto Laclau 2005, *On Populist Reason*, London: Verso; Chantal Mouffe 2005, *The Democratic Paradox*, London: Verso; Chantal Mouffe 2019, *For a Left Populism*, London: Verso.
[8] Cas Mudde 2004, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', *Government and Opposition* 39, pp. 541-63.

complexities of Brexit and, this thesis argues, the complexities of Brexit also highlight several areas where populist theory can be improved.

This thesis will characterise the outcome of the EU referendum as a particular type of *anti-populism* that masks the elitist intentions behind the superficial performance of populism. David Cameron's Bloomberg speech was the beginning of a traditionally anti-populist effort and the Remain discourse was also traditionally anti-populist. Vote Leave, on the other hand, engaged in a performance of what I call *populism without 'the people'*, adopting the language of populism without ever intending to increase the political power of 'the people'. Anti-populism is an existing concept in populist theory but, this thesis will argue, the subtlety and effectiveness of Leave's *populism without 'the people'* requires a reconceptualisation of both populism and anti-populism that introduces the key categories of authenticity and constituent power.

This thesis uses discourse analysis to read the arguments given by both Leave and Remain during the EU referendum campaign. It considers these arguments through the theoretical models suggested by contemporary populist theory, breaking the competing discourses into the constituent parts of crisis, 'the people' and 'the elite'. As an intermediary step it contextualises this theory in the particular institutional history of Britain and Euroscepticism. Finally, it argues that the constructions of the people and the elite inherent in the campaign are equally counterproductive to the health of British politics. The faux populism of Leave and the anti-populism of Remain fail to empower the people, hold the elite accountable, or meaningfully engage with the crises that mobilised anti-EU sentiment in the first place.

The remainder of this Introduction is broken into three sections. The section immediately following provides some preliminary context regarding the EU referendum, what is already known about the events in question, and the gaps in the literature. The second section outlines the empirical and theoretical contribution this thesis makes, as well as the methodology employed. The final section maps the thesis argument across each chapter.

1. The baseline understanding of the EU referendum

A great deal has already been written about the EU referendum and its political ramifications. The literature that has amassed since the vote falls broadly into three disciplinary categories: works of political science that seek to provide empirical explanations of the electoral result, works of political economy that identify correlative structuring effects on the vote, and works of political theory which seek to generalise Brexit to trends in either the British, European or global zeitgeist. This thesis aims to make its primary contribution to the last category of literature, specifically to the notion that Brexit is a populist event. This section provides a survey of what is concretely known about the EU referendum to orient the reader. The information outlined in this section was central to forming the research question and methodology outlined in section 2.

1.1 Leave voters: The political science of Brexit

The great mystery of Brexit is the rapidity with which the Leave vote materialised into a plurality. Opposition to the EU – known colloquially as 'Euroscepticism' – is a decades-old and widespread sentiment in British politics that, until recently, has not played a determinate role in voting behavior.[9] Longitudinal surveys indicate that the EU is unpopular within Britain, but, despite that unpopularity, voters preferred remaining inside to the alternative of leaving. This was the case from the first membership referendum in 1975 – in which approximately two-thirds of British voters affirmed their place in European politics – through to June 23, 2016.

Support for leaving the EU increased steadily after the Bloomberg speech of 2013. The *Financial Times* 'poll of polls' shows Remain winning 58 per cent of 272 EU referendum surveys reaching as far back as September 2010.[10] However, the average margin by which voters preferred Remain narrowed from 7 per cent in 2015, to 3.4 per cent in the first three months of 2016, to 1.4 per cent over the period 22 March–22 June

[9] Vaughne Miller and Leonora Barclay 2012, *UK Public Opinion on the European Union*, London: House of Commons Library.
[10] Financial Times 2016, 'Brexit poll tracker', accessed 11 Sept 2016: <https://ig.ft.com/sites/brexit-polling/>.

2016. The 39 surveys covering the final month before the referendum reported the Leave vote edging 0.3 per cent ahead of Remain, and of course the result of 52 per cent in favor of Leave is now etched into history. This data indicates that the referendum itself – what was said and how it was received – was critical in shaping the outcome.

There is a comprehensive literature of psephology that explains the formation of the Leave vote. In the aftermath of the surprise result, numerous books and articles were released to provide various demographic breakdowns of the Leave constituency.[11] The overarching theme in these analyses is that the demographics of Leave voters are complex and contradictory, but the various sectional groups appear equivalent those that Goodwin and Heath describe as the 'losers' of globalisation.[12] Correlations can be drawn between age, ethnicity, economic class, education and voting direction. Older, poorer, English, non-tertiary educated citizens are more likely to have voted for Leave than Remain.[13] On average, these were the demographic markers most influenced by the referendum debate.

Despite the intriguing prospect of a powerful rhetoric that inspires the 'losers' of globalisation, there has not been a great deal of academic interest in the contents of the referendum debate itself. This gap is stranger still because the UK is home to a very activist and partisan news sector that is famously opposed to the EU.[14] A coalition of research centres published a compendium of opinion the day after the result that criticised newspapers for overt partisanship and television journalists for creating false equivalences between the two campaigns.[15] In addition, there were several articles

[11] Clarke et al., *Brexit*; Michael Ashcroft and Kevin Culwick 2016, *Well You Did Ask . . . Why the UK Voted to Leave the EU*, London: Biteback Publishing; Eleonora Alabrese, Sascha Becker, Thiemo Fetzer and Dennis Novy 2019, 'Who voted for Brexit? Individual and regional data combined', *European Journal of Political Economy* 56, pp. 132-150; Duncan Shaw, Chris Smith and Judy Scully 2017, 'Why did Brexit happen? Using causal mapping to analyse secondary, longitudinal data', *European Journal of Operational Research* 263, pp. 1019-1032; John Curtice 2017, 'Why Leave Won the UK's EU referendum', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 55, pp. 19-37; David Coleman 2016, 'A Demographic Rationale for Brexit', *Population and Development Review* 42(4), pp. 681-92.
[12] Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath 2016, 'The 2016 referendum, Brexit and the left behind: An aggregate-level analysis of the result', *Political Quarterly* 87(3), pp. 323-32.
[13] Sara Hobolt 2016, 'The Brexit vote: a divided nation, a divided continent', *Journal of European Public Policy* 23(9), pp. 1264-7.
[14] See, for example: Nicholas Startin 2015, 'Have we reached a tipping point? The mainstreaming of Euroscepticism in the UK', *International Political Science Review* 36(3), pp. 311-323; Justice Brian Leveson 2012, *An Inquiry into the Culture, Practices and Ethics of the Press*, accessed 12 Feb 2019: <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/229039/0779.pdf>.
[15] Daniel Jackson, Einar Thorsen and Dominic Wring (eds.) 2016, *EU Referendum Analysis 2016:*

published regarding the tenor and productivity of online debate.[16] Beyond these targeted interventions the academic literature on rhetoric and discourse focuses on the portrayal of specific issues. A handful of papers have been published using content analysis or ethnography to explore the representation of salient concepts in the referendum – particularly of migrants, the EU and ethnicity.[17] These articles attempt to provide qualitative layers to the result, serving as a kind of empirical proxy for what people might have been thinking when they voted the way they did.

In sum, one can form a clear picture as to how specific types of British voters might have voted and why certain issues might have affected them. However, there is no systematic account of the rhetoric that instigated Brexit. To fill the gap, this thesis will present a discourse analysis of the elite rhetoric that transpired in the EU referendum. This analysis will draw on the publications of the two official campaign organisations, which curate the arguments of politicians as well as economic, institutional and cultural figureheads. Leave's rapid gain in popularity during the lead-up to 23 June indicates that such language games were an extremely important influence on voters.

Media, Voters and the Campaign, The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community, Bournemouth University, accessed 10 Nov 2016: <http://www.referendumanalysis.eu>. On a similar theme, see Stephen Cushion and Justin Lewis 2017, 'Impartiality, statistical tit-for-tats and the construction of balance: UK television news reporting of the 2016 EU referendum campaign', *European Journal of Communication* 32(3), pp. 208-23; David Khabaz 2018, 'Framing Brexit: The role, and the impact, of the national newspapers on the EU Referendum', *Newspaper Research Journal* 39(4), pp. 496-508.

[16] Stuart Brown 2019, 'Britain's EU referendum: How did political science rise to the challenge? An assessment of online contributions during the campaign', *European Political Science* 18, pp. 97-111; Darren Lilleker and Duje Bonacci 2017, 'The structure of political e-expression: What the Brexit campaign can teach us about political talk on Facebook', *International Journal of Digital Television* 8(3), pp. 335-350.

[17] Stefanie Walter 2019, 'Better off without you? How the British Media Portrayed EU Citizens in Brexit News', *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 24(2), pp. 210-232; Alex Balch and Ekaterina Balabanova 2017, 'A deadly cocktail? The fusion of Europe and immigration in the UK press', *Critical Discourse Studies* 14(3), pp. 236-255; Lisa Mckenzie 2017, '"It's not ideal": Reconsidering "anger" and "apathy" in the Brexit vote among an invisible working class', *Competition & Change* 21(3), pp. 199-210; Satnam Virdee and Brendan McGeever 2018, 'Race, Crisis, Brexit', *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 41(10), pp. 1802-19; Eleni Andreouli and Cathy Nicholson 2018, 'Brexit and Everyday Politics: An Analysis of Focus-Group Data on the EU Referendum', *Political Psychology* 39(6), pp. 1323-35; Eleni Andreouli 2019, 'Constructions of Europe in the run-up to the EU referendum in the UK', *Identities* 26(2), pp. 241-59.

1.2 Austerity and immigration: The political economy of Brexit

The EU referendum is an intriguing and high-stakes case study in which to analyse language. However, discourse should not be separated from the material conditions that affect interlocutors and their audience. Hence, preliminary work for this thesis began with a review of works that approach the EU referendum from the perspective of political economy. These works collectively argue that increased migration and economic austerity were important structural influences on the referendum.

Change becomes more likely when the status quo is perceived to be unjust. Several authors identify austerity programs implemented since the Global Financial Crisis and the growing inequality that derives from a neoliberal paradigm of economic management as a key driver of the Leave vote.[18] According to this narrative, financial markets are deregulated until a market crash occurs, at which point the state protects those economic actors deemed 'too big to fail', thus ensuring inequality continues to grow under both favourable and unfavourable economic climates. In the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis, the poor suffered economically due to the excesses of the wealthy.[19] Experiencing such inequity inculcates a 'deep sense that there is one rule for the few and another for the many' in the citizen.[20] Bob Jessop, Matthew Wilson and Jacqueline O'Reilly, among others, argue that the same sense of disaffection translated into a rejection of the status quo during the EU referendum.

There is a great deal of circumstantial evidence supporting the conclusion that neoliberal economics were a key factor in the referendum. After the 2010 general election David Cameron's new government introduced an 'emergency budget' that aimed to decrease the national deficit by £128 billion over three years.[21] Budget cuts

[18] Bob Jessop 2017, 'The Organic Crisis of the British State: Putting Brexit in its Place', *Globalizations* 14(1), pp. 133-41; Jacqueline O'Reilly 2016, 'The Fault lines unveiled by Brexit', *Socio-Economic Review* 14(4), pp. 808-12; Partick Le Gales 2016, 'Brexit: UK as an exception or the banal avant garde of the disintegration of the EU?', *Socio-Economic Review* 14(4), pp. 848-54; Matthew Watson 2018, 'Brexit, the left behind and the let down: the political abstraction of 'the economy' and the UK's EU referendum, *British Politics* 13, pp. 17-30.
[19] Anthony Elson 2017, *The Global Financial Crisis in Retrospect*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 147-66.
[20] Jamie Morgan 2017,'Brexit: Be Careful What You Wish For?', *Globalizations* 14(1), p. 121.
[21] HM Treasury 2010, *Budget June 2010,* accessed 10 Apr 2019: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/budget-june-2010>.

were forecast to reduce public expenditure from 50 per cent of GDP in 2009 down to 43 per cent in 2014, with a longer-term target of 35 per cent. These measures, which affected almost all public services, were prompted by the debt burden created from the Global Financial Crisis, during which Gordon Brown's Labour government 'spent, lent, or otherwise guaranteed about 40 per cent of British GDP to save the banks and even more to stimulate the economy.'[22] It is notable that the imposition of economic austerity – itself an unjust remedy to the Global Financial Crisis – coincides with the term in which the Cameron government announced the EU referendum.

Harold Clarke, Matthew Goodwin and Paul Whiteley correlate the imposition of austerity in 2010 with an increase in support for UKIP from 2 to 20 per cent.[23] UKIP is a single-issue party and its sudden electoral rise strongly suggests the extent to which economic iniquity helped fuel the rise of anti-EU politics. Overlaying these circumstances with the demographic breakdown of the vote, Ann Pettifor concludes that:

> With the historic Brexit vote, the British people rejected this flawed brand of economics – and in particular the dominant [neo]liberal finance narrative. And they did so because the hardship they are experiencing – repressed wages, diminished public services, rising housing costs and shortages, and insecure employment – is indirectly a consequence of the theories and policies of the mainstream economics profession.[24]

Xenophobia and migration are also identified in the political economy literature as a driver of voter dissatisfaction. Again this assertion has a strong circumstantial basis. Over the past twenty-five years the UK has been experiencing 'historically high' levels of both immigration and emigration. Specifically, net inward migration to the UK exceeded '100,000 in every year since 1998'.[25] In contrast, prior to 1998, Britain's net

[22] Mark Blyth 2015, *Austerity: The History of a Dangerous Idea,* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 59.
[23] Clarke et al., *Brexit,* pp. 120-23.
[24] Ann Pettifor 2017, 'Brexit and its Consequences', *Globalizations* 14:1, p. 130.
[25] Georgina Sturge 2018, *Migration Statistics*, Briefing Paper Number SN06077, London: House of Commons Library, p. 3.

migration was approximately zero for much of the twentieth century. In the 2010 general election David Cameron and his Conservative Party promised to cap annual net immigration in the 'tens of thousands'.[26] Cameron subsequently demanded a reduction in migration from the EU whilst renegotiating the terms of British membership prior to the referendum. Even the architect of the referendum saw migration as central to the question of EU membership.

Austerity economics and increased migration are presented in the political economy literature as two mutually reinforcing impulses towards voter disaffection. For example, Stuart Gietel-Basten describes austerity as a contributor and an accelerant to xenophobia.[27] Austerity policies bolster the constituency that fears migration. That being said, there was indisputably a subset of Leave voters motivated by racist logic, as well as those who voted out of pride in a specific form of Anglo-Saxon identity that they felt was being diminished by multiculturalism.[28] The problem is that these differing motives are indistinguishable at the ballot box. Exit polling showed that a voter cautious of more people arriving under conditions of relative scarcity and another impelled by race discrimination were *both* more likely to cast their ballot for Leave.[29] The blunt instrument of a yes or no referendum makes it impossible to separate the various motivations voters had to fear new arrivals.

It should be noted that using political economy to interpret voter behavior is circumstantial at best. Socioeconomic classes are not monoliths; individuals are likely to respond heterogeneously to structural effects like austerity and migration. However, on the strength of the circumstantial evidence and parallel to the psephological findings, it is hard to disagree with many of the authors surveyed here who posit, with differing degrees of subtlety, that *if not* for the two structuring conditions of austerity and high

[26] Conservative Party 2010, *Invitation to Join the Government of Britain*: *The Conservative Manifesto 2010*, East Sussex: Pureprint Group, p. 21.
[27] Stuart Gietel-Basten 2016, 'Why Brexit? The Toxic Mix of Immigration and Austerity', *Population and Development Review* 42(4), pp. 673-80.
[28] Aida Hozić and Jacqui True 2017, 'Brexit as scandal: gender and global trumpism', *Review of International Political Economy* 24(2), pp. 270-87; Manuchehr Sanadjian 2019, 'Identification, the exercise of democracy and the fear of the Other – the June EU referendum in the UK', *Social Identities* 25:2, pp. 110-24; Owen Worth 2017, 'Reviving Hayek's Dream', *Globalizations* 14(1), pp. 104-19; Craig Calhoun 2016, 'Brexit Is a Mutiny Against the Cosmopolitan Elite', *New Perspectives Quarterly* 33(3), pp. 50-58; James Ker-Lindsay 2017, 'Turkey's EU accession as a factor in the 2016 Brexit referendum', *Turkish Studies* 19(1), pp. 1-22.
[29] Hobolt, 'The Brexit vote', pp. 1263-66; Clarke et al., *Brexit,* pp. 122-3.

migration, Britain would probably still be in the EU. Without the effects of economic injustice and increased migration, Britain might not even have reached the point of canvassing the people's opinion in the first place.

1.3 Populist theory: The common interpretation of Brexit

Populism is the phrase du jour for the kind of politics that responds to austerity and increased migration. The term populism is deployed across many of the aforementioned academic works and especially in media representations of Brexit. For all that, populism is a highly contested and ambivalent term. Despite its relatively lengthy history, populism is a divisive and vague concept.[30] Numerous attempts to define populism as a social movement have only reinforced its malleable nature.[31] More recently, populism is defined less as an empirical phenomenon than a set of ideas and a way of communicating them. The most widely cited contemporary definition defines populism as an ideology that contains 'the people' as a good actor, 'the elite' as a bad actor, and a nebulous concept of democracy that legitimates the demands of 'the people'.[32] Designating Brexit as populist seems to be an attempt at capturing the dynamic whereby ordinary voters – 'the people' – overturned a longstanding policy of successive British governments.

Populism is not a neutral term, however. There are strongly negative implications to its use.[33] For example, even Ernesto Laclau, who paints a sympathetic picture of populism, defines it as a radically simple mode of politics in which 'the common people' are constructed as a single, self-legitimising entity that is *antagonistically* opposed to 'the elites'.[34] Populism implies social breakdown and polarisation. Asserting the simple dichotomy of 'the people' and 'the elite' requires the erasure of established structures and nuances within the modern polity: 'populism has no referential unity because it is

[30] Ruth Wodak, Majid Khosravinik and Briggitte Mral (eds.) 2013, *Right-Wing Populism in Europe: Politics and Discourse,* London: Bloomsbury; Freeden, 'After the Brexit referendum'.
[31] Margaret Canovan 1981, *Populism*, London: Junction Books, p. 5; Peter Wiles 1969, 'A syndrome, not a doctrine: some elementary theses on populism', *Populism: Its Meanings and National Characteristics*, Ionescu G and Gellner E (eds), London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, pp. 166-79.
[32] Cas Mudde 2017, 'Populism: An Ideational Approach', *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[33] Yannis Stavrakakis 2017, 'Discourse theory in populism research: Three challenges and a dilemma', *Journal of Language & Politics*, 16(4), pp. 523-26.
[34] Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. xi.

ascribed not to a delimitable phenomenon but to a social logic whose effects cut across many phenomena.'[35] The term populism elevates a single division in society to the center of politics. It does so at the expense of nuance and precision.

Populism collapses political discourse into an accusatory 'us against them' dynamic. The consequences and logic of this simplification are largely unintelligible in terms of political economy and sociology, both of which take a more granular approach to society.[36] Consequently, scholars of ideas have taken to describing populism as a 'thin-centred ideology' that must borrow – often eclectically – from other, established ideological traditions to form a substantive policy agenda.[37] Equally, some sociologists use the term 'populist discourse' to indicate a 'ventriloqual repertoire in which the People come to see themselves being spoken'.[38] The term populism does not specify *what* is said to make 'the people' see themselves, only that they recognise themselves as a collective entity. The flexible and non-material nature of populism pose somewhat unique challenges for the empirical study of the phenomenon. It is because of these qualities that I will use a pluralistic approach to populism that combines different schools of thought. Populism is a slippery topic that combines elements of ideology, discourse and performance, each of which also contain elements of the socio-political environment in which populism occurs coded as part of the performance, language or articulation of ideas. Put another way, my approach to populism is holistic and pragmatic: each of the nominated schools of thought help to draw out important elements of the EU referendum and are consequently used in a mutually reinforcing fashion throughout the thesis.

In the case of the EU referendum, analysts tend to use the term 'right-wing' to thicken their definition of populism. For example, constitutional scholar Vernon Bogdanor concludes that 'the referendum is likely to presage a movement to the right – not to the traditional conservative Right, but to a populist and nationalist Right of the kind such

[35] *Ibid*. p. xi.
[36] Gino Germani 1978, *Authoritarianism, Fascism and National Populism,* New Brunswick: Transaction Books, p. 88.
[37] Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', pp. 541-63; Catherine Fieschi 2004, '"Introduction" to special issue on populism', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 9(1), pp. 235-40; Ben Stanley 2008, 'The thin ideology of populism', *Journal of Political Ideologies* 13(1), pp. 95-110.
[38] John Clarke and Janet Newman 2017, '"People in this country have had enough of experts": Brexit and the paradoxes of populism', *Critical Policy Studies* 11(1), p. 9.

as used to be represented by Enoch Powell and Margaret Thatcher'.[39] In language echoing these two politicians, 'the people' were urged to leave the EU to rescue their country from interfering 'Brussels bureaucrats', culturally other European migrants, and the 'cosmopolitan elite' who prefer Europe over Britain.[40] Voting to Leave is therefore interpreted as a rejection of these three elite groups and an assertion of 'the people' as a nationally, culturally and economically independent bloc.

The divisive political logic of populism and the exclusionary nature of nationalism are often cited as evidence that the referendum was damaging to British politics. This is true, but often the wrong lesson is drawn. Specifically, there is a tendency in some retrospectives to reject the notion of a referendum altogether and impugn the decision-making capabilities of the ordinary voter.[41] This is not a universal position but it is – anecdotally – often touted in print and everyday parlance when the topic of the referendum arises. Populism becomes a synonym for the anger and irrationality of the voter, a stand-in for a polity governed by a mob mentality.[42] Emphasis is placed on the assumed anger of voters while the conditions that might elicit such a response are downplayed. Certainly, some scholars are critical of British and European elites for fomenting Brexit through austerity economics, mass migration, and a failure to listen to the 'losers of globalisation'.[43] However, the research design employed by this thesis will show that even these critiques of 'the elite' do not go far enough.

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[39] Vernon Bogdanor 2016, 'Europe and the Sovereignty of the People', *The Political Quarterly*, 87(3), p. 350.

[40] Iakhhis et al., 'Populist referendum', pp. 1-7; Calhoun, 'Brexit Is a Mutiny', pp. 50-51; Glenn Morgan 2016, 'Brexit and the elites: the elite versus the people or the fracturing of the British business elites', *Socio-Economic Review* 14(4), pp. 825-28.

[41] See Jo Shaw 2017, 'The quintessentially democratic act? Democracy, political community and citizenship in and after the UK's EU referendum of June 2016', *Journal of European Integration* 39(5), pp. 559-74; Phil Parvin 2018, 'Democracy Without Participation: A New Politics for a Disengaded Era', *Res Publica* 24, pp. 31-52; Jason Brennan 2016, *Against Democracy*, New York: Princeton University Press; Erik Jones 2016, 'Brexit's Lessons for Democracy', *Survival* 58(3), pp. 41-3.

[42] And denunciations of populism take on a similar message to Edmund Burke's insistence that the 'passions' of the polity must be met with 'subjection'. See Edmund Burke [1790] 2004, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Oxford: Penguin Classics, p. 151.

[43] For a sample of those that blame the elite – variously construed – for the result, see Emma Bell 2017, 'Brexit and the Illusion of Democracy', *Socialism and Democracy* 31(3), pp. 52-73; Colin Copus 2018, 'The Brexit referendum: testing the support of *elites* and their allies for democracy; or, racists, bigots and xenophobes, oh my!', *British Politics* 13, pp. 90-104; Takis Fotopoulos 2016, 'Brexit, Globalization and the Bankruptcy of the Globalist "Left"', *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy* 12(2), pp. 26-58; A.C. Grayling 2018, *Democracy and its Crisis*, London: Oneworld; Anthony Barnett 2016, *Blimey in Could be Brexit*, accessed 5 Feb 2018: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/opendemocracyuk/blimey-it-could-be-brexit-book-so-far/>.

This thesis contends that the EU referendum was not borne of an elite failure to listen. Rather, Brexit was an elite *response* to signals of political unrest. Furthermore, the referendum was not populist but *anti*-populist in nature, in that both Remain and Leave attempted to dissolve 'the people' as an actor in British politics and shore up the electoral power of the actually existing political elite during a time of crisis.[44] This strategy backfired in the limited sense that the sitting Prime Minister was humiliated and his policy preference rejected. Nonetheless, the British political establishment controlled both sides of the EU referendum debate and Leave, in particular, cloaked their agenda in the political styling of populism. The nuance in this elite performance demands that populist theory grapple with the problem of authenticity. Populism is such a malleable phenomenon that it can be set to work for any political actor, regardless of whether that actor actually wishes to empower 'the people' and remediate systemic failure, or alternatively empower themselves and entrench the established order. In light of populist malleability, this thesis suggests that populist theory needs to distinguish between serious populists and mere opportunists, particularly in terms of how populist ideas, language and performances are used to change the balance of power between 'the elite' and 'the people'.

2. Thesis contribution and methodology

The preceding section reviewed the established view of the EU referendum and outlined several gaps in the record. Brexit transpired because elite discourse during the referendum was influential; socio-economic conditions in Britain created a groundswell of disquiet; and the highly stage-managed referendum itself has mistakenly been labeled as populist. This section outlines the three contributions this thesis makes to our understanding of Brexit, populism and anti-populism. This thesis develops a comprehensive account of the elite discourse that took place during the EU referendum, provides a case study of anti-populism in action, and suggests a reconceptualisation of populism. The section also details the general methodology and specific methods according to which the thesis substantiated these contributions.

[44] Yannis Stavrakakis and Giorgos Katsambekis 2019, 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Frontier and Its Mediation in Crisis-Ridden Greece: From Discursive Divide to Emerging Cleavage?', *European Political Science*, 18(1), pp. 37-45.

2.1 Empirical and theoretical contribution

This thesis adds a new empiric dataset to existing knowledge on the EU referendum and uses this data to support a novel application of populist theory. Applying populist theory to the referendum in turn suggests that populist theory has a blind spot regarding the potential for establishment forces to co-opt the logic of populism for their own ends. The research design that supports these conclusions entails, firstly, a quantitative content analysis of the referendum and, secondly, a discourse analysis structured according to the main components of populism.

The quantitative content analysis informs and to an extent grounds the discourse analysis portion of this thesis. The content analysis is limited to media releases disseminated by the official Remain and Leave campaigns. This sample was selected because of the scale of the topic in question. A focus group or survey would have been appropriate for a more discrete subject but populism is a high-level framework, one that transcends individual issues and weaves them into a larger narrative of 'the people' versus 'the elite'. It is, correspondingly, hard to secure a comprehensive empirical basis for inquiry. Other studies of populism have sourced data from particular clusters of language – particularly media representations[45] – but this thesis had access to a broader and also more granular sample contained in the media releases of the official campaign bodies. These releases constitute thousands of words pertaining to the most pressing issues in British politics. In aggregation, they form a snapshot of who 'the elite' and 'the people' were in each campaign discourse as well as the various issues affecting their relationship.

Naturally this dataset is limited in its general applicability due to the theoretical ends it is intended to support. Discourse analysis has already been completed on specific issues pertaining to Brexit, and this study complements those whilst focussing on the larger theme of 'the people' versus 'the elite'.[46] Nonetheless, the underlying findings do

[45] Ruth Wodak and Michal Krzyżanowski 2017, 'Right-wing populism in Europe and the USA', *Journal of Language and Politics*, 16(4), pp. 471-84.
[46] For other discourse analyses of Brexit, see: Veronika Koller, Susanne Kopf and Marlene Miglbauer (eds.) 2019, *Discourses of Brexit*, London: Routledge; Franco Zappettini 2019, 'The Brexit referendum: how trade and immigration in the discourses of the official campaigns have legitimised a toxic (inter)national logic', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 16:4, pp. 403-19.

constitute an empirical contribution through the comprehensive content analysis of the official messaging in the referendum. This analysis adds elite discourse to the set of structuring effects that can systematically be observed in the referendum. Chapters 3 to 6 present the results of the analysis parsed according to the logic of populism, which is to say separated into the various constructions of crisis, 'the elite' and 'the people'.

The first theoretical contribution that this thesis makes is to conceptualise anti-populism in action. Anti-populism is a comparatively new and under-explored concept in populist theory. It derives from the Greek context, in which it was used to describe the torrid politics associated with the imposition of economic austerity by the 'troika' of the European Commission, the International Monetary Fund, and the European Central Bank. [47] Greek anti-populism was characterised by the extreme rhetoric of 'demonisation', 'simplification' and dehumanisation whereby mainstream political parties attacked smaller populist parties demanding an end to austerity.[48] This thesis applies the concept of anti-populism to the British context and in so doing classifies a less direct and more sophisticated form of the same discourse that it terms *populism without 'the people'*. The discourse in question employs the same political *style* as authentic populism but it follows the political *logic* of anti-populism.

The second theoretical contribution made by this thesis relates to the definition of populism itself. At present, the three major approaches to populism define the phenomenon as a political style, ideology or discourse that has an ambiguous relationship to liberal democracy.[49] These approaches are less able to distinguish between authentic and insincere uses of populist rhetoric. In turn, this allows for the miscategorisation of events like Brexit and the unwarranted denigration of populist movements that genuinely seek to bring about positive change in their communities. This thesis suggests that existing models need also include the criterion that populism is committed to *democratic augmentation* in order to overcome the problem of authenticity. Democratic augmentation is a concept borrowed from republican theory that stipulates a democracy need always to strive towards maximising the political

[47] Giorgos Katsambekis 2014, 'The Place Of The People In Post-Democracy Researching "Antipopulism" And Post-Democracy In Crisis-Ridden Greece', *Postdata*, 19(2), pp. 555-82.
[48] Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Frontier', pp. 37-45.
[49] Manuela Caiani and Paolo Graziano 2019, 'Understanding varieties of populism in times of crises', *West European Politics*, 42(6), p. 1143.

freedom of action, or *constituent power*, of its citizens.[50] In practice, democratic augmentation should entail the maximisation of direct participation in the political process, be it through voting, petitioning, activism, or institutional agenda setting. All of these practices permanently institutionalise the capacity of citizens to act on their own volition in the public sphere.

I should stress that this suggested reconceptualisation is not an attempt to arrive at a normative theory of populism. I have a functional theorisation in mind.[51] Simply put, existing political theory provides excellent tools for analysing the content of populism but does not define populism according to what it aims to achieve. I contend that populism is more than ideational, stylistic or identity-based content; it is also a blueprint for redistributing power in a given political economy. If a political actor uses populist ideas, or engages in populist discourse, they are communicating a distinctive logic to their audience that 'the people' have been wronged and the best means of remedying this wrong is to increase their power relative to 'the elite'. Anti-populism can expropriate the ideas, mannerisms and subjectivities of populism but it always serves to diminish the constituent power of 'the people'. This thesis uses the EU referendum to demonstrate why constituent power is a useful litmus test when it comes to separating authentic populism and *populism without 'the people'*.

2.2 Scope and research design

The scope and specifics of this thesis' research design are defended in this section. The construction of the referendum used in this thesis is based on a discourse analysis of the public speech acts and documents originating from the official campaign organisations set up to contest the referendum. There are two such organisations: Britain Stronger In Europe, representing the Remain position, and Vote Leave, which spearheaded the official movement to take Britain out of the EU.[52] Both organisations

[50] Mark Wenman 2013, *Agonistic Democracy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 5-13.
[51] To further clarify, I believe this is a functional definition of populism that captures both the contents and the praxis of the phenomenon. How one defines democracy is another matter – one that I believe is inherently a normative exercise. As mentioned, I am employing a republican definition of democracy by suggesting the criteria of democratic augmentation and constituent power. I do so primarily because this definition of democracy seems to most closely align to what populists quo populists want to achieve.
[52] There were several unofficial groups involved in the referendum, notably Leave.EU, a parallel organisation that mustered the UKIP vote and campaigned on strictly anti-immigration and ethno-

were staffed and spearheaded by politicians from the main parliamentary parties in federal British politics. Throughout this thesis these organisations are referred to as 'Remain' and 'Leave'.

The official campaign period lasted from April 15 to June 22, 2016. Over that period, Leave and Remain produced 336 official media releases. Remain's portion of that sample comprised 217 releases, divided into 93 written messages, 80 video posts and 44 shareable images. Leave produced the remaining 119 releases, all of which were in text format. For reasons of comparability the 212 written messages produced during the official campaign period constituted the empirical sample upon which analysis was performed, while Remain's videos and images were excluded.

There are several limitations with regard to this sample. Firstly, unofficial campaigning began around November 2015, and the broader question of Europe has been politicised by various actors as far back as 1992. Secondly, the length and significance of the debate led to a proliferation of political organisation within British civil society. A range of unofficial groups ran political adverts in physical and digital arenas. Not all of this activity was domestic in nature, raising serious questions about electoral interference by foreign interests. Further, parliamentary inquiry subsequent to the result determined that Leave broke electoral laws by coordinating with an unofficial sister organisation in Leave.EU.[53] None of these activities are captured in the sample. Thirdly, this research design focuses only on the rhetoric of politicians. It does not canvas how the media re-contextualised these releases or seek to estimate public engagement with their message.

Noting all these limitations, I maintain that it is impossible for any single work to adequately summarise the complexity of the EU referendum. This thesis agrees with Clarke and Newman's assessment that the referendum is best approached as a 'conjuncture' of multiple trends.[54] Given the binary nature of the question, the

nationalist issues whilst the Conservative Party dominated Vote Leave and aimed for less hardline conservatives. However, for the purposes of scope management, this study will focus on Vote Leave as the official voice of the Leave campaign as designated by the British Electoral Commission.

[53] Emma Graham-Harrison 2018, 'Vote Leave broke electoral law and British democracy is shaken', *The Guardian*, accessed 20 Jul 2018: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/jul/17/vote-leave-broke-electoral-law-and-british-democracy-is-shaken>.

[54] Clarke and Newman, 'People in this country have had enough of experts', pp. 1-2.

multiplicity of structuring conditions, the plurality of the voting population, the long tail of Euroscepticism, and the ineffability of mass political behaviours, there cannot be a single definitive account of what happened on 23 June 2016 or why. This thesis instead aims to explain how the British political elite – arranged into their two official campaigns – presented arguments for and against the status quo, and to interpret that discourse in terms of a concept with which the event is commonly associated.

It should also be noted that the discourse analysis was not intended as a fact-checking exercise. My personal opinion, based on a close reading of each press release, is that almost every political communication in the referendum was misleading or stripped of some important context. A separate thesis would be required to assess the facticity of the EU referendum – this thesis focuses only on the effects created by discourse. The subject of this analysis is public communication – speech acts and the written word – and as such it might seem odd to draw theoretical conclusions about a system of government from mere language. I respond by pointing out that these conclusions are not intended to imply causation, correlation, or to somehow stand in for what British voters perceived in the campaign.

The EU referendum, like all electoral exercises, was an exercise in pure rhetoric. Language is slippery, subjective and experiential in nature. Interpreting it, as this thesis does, is never an objective exercise; something is unavoidably lost and added by the reader. The methodology stipulated below was designed to foreclose subjective transference as much as possible, by creating an empirical framework to act as a guide for interpretation.

2.3 Methods

This thesis presents the results gleaned from two overlapping methods. The more apparent of the two – constituting the bulk of chapters 3 through 6 – is discourse analysis heavily informed by the Essex School of discourse analysis.[55] Discourse is

[55] The Essex School is more broadly known as a distinct methodology that applies discourse theory to the analysis of political problems. In a strict sense, the strand of this approach relevant to this thesis should be termed 'the Essex School on populism' but I will shorten it to just Essex School due to repetition and for ease of use. The Essex School is also relevant to this thesis because populism has historically formed the primary object of study for the School, and consequently the Essex School has a

language that signifies a 'particular domain of social practice from a particular perspective'.[56] Discourse *analysis* is a broad term that has numerous methods of practice, the common thread of which can be summarised as a structured process for evaluating text, subtext and silence. As noted above, the particular perspective relevant to this study is populism and the distribution of power between 'the people' and 'the elite'. The Essex School is a method of analysing populism as if populism were a discourse. It is therefore a natural theoretical compliment to this thesis. However, as previously mentioned this thesis adopts a pluralistic and aggregative approach to populist theory. The discourse analysis showcased in this thesis is not an Essex School discourse analysis: it is heavily informed by the Essex School but also borrows from ideological and performative approaches as well as the sociological context of British politics.

The discourse analysis presented in this thesis was derived through an inductive process. Instead of applying populist literature in a deductive fashion to the case in question, I instead selected populist theory as the most suitable conceptual framework for interpreting the results of the preceding content analysis. Put another way, the discourse analysis is the product of a theory-agnostic study of the EU referendum and the ways in which the EU referendum has been interpreted by others. As Norman Fairclough observes, discourse analysis entails the 'process of constructing objects of research'.[57] Discourse analysis requires that the practitioner select an appropriate context for interpreting the text. Having reviewed the media releases from both campaigns in detail and compared what was said to the way in which Brexit has been framed in the previously mentioned academic literature, I decided that the populist categories of 'the people' and 'the elite' comprised the most productive objects of research to use when interpreting the EU referendum.

Before populism became the focus of this thesis, the media releases of Leave and Remain were codified via content analysis. The results of the content analysis play a

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rich literature of concepts and terms that interrogate populism from a critical perspective. The Essex School is outlined in greater detail in Chapter 1.

[56] Norman Fairclough 1995 quoted in Gilbert Weiss and Ruth Wodak (eds.) 2003 *Critical Discourse Analysis: Theory and Interdisciplinarity*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 22.

[57] Norman Fairclough 2013, *Critical Discourse Analysis: The Critical Study of Language* (2nd ed.), New York: Routledge, p. 5.

supporting role throughout chapters 3 through 6, illustrating the discourse analysis and adding textual detail to the discussion. Content analysis of the sample involved a relatively uncomplicated, manually performed, set of procedural steps. After capturing the metadata for each media release (see Figure 1), the text of the release was broken down into the referents it contained – that is, the actors, trends, institutions and structures that formed the subject matter (see Figure 2). The role that each referent played in the release was then described and key quotes transcribed to justify that role. Finally, I attempted to summarise the primary ideological connotation that the framing of the referent suggested as well as the overarching effect the media release seemed designed to impart on the reader. These last two steps are inherently subjective; they were intended to capture the experience created by readings each release.

Figure 1: Metadata for Remain Release #1

Release #	Date of analysis	Date of issue	Campaign wk	Length (pages)	Title	Attributions
1	15/1/18	18/4/16	1	2.5	"Treasury Analysis: UK families would be worse off if we left EU"	George Osbourne (Chancellor)

Figure 2: First two referents in Remain Release #1

Referent (list)	Referent role	Quotes	Ideological connotat	Sum effe	Comments
UK	**Worldly subject.** Britain's power a function of its success in intl engagement. The EU an extension of this, and succeptible to UK diplomacy	1. "The outcome will have profound consequences for our economy, for the living standards of every family, and for Britain's role in the world." 2. "The history I studied taught me that every time Britain has withdrawn from the affairs of our continent and thought that we could retreat to our island fortress it has been a disaster for us and a tragedy for Europe. It's precisely because **we've been an outward-looking, free- trading country that engages with the world that we've had a greater impact** in shaping our planet and its destiny than almost any other... That's why the case for Remain is a powerful and patriotic one." 3. **"I want Britain to be Great Britain: engaged in the world, championing free trade, attracting foreign investment, continuing to prosper**. We should not withdraw from Europe but shape Europe to our national interest. We are builders, not wreckers."	**Nationalist.** Strengths of the UK give it an advantage in the world; attempting to align Empire epoch with EU epoch	British greatness, prosperity, security is a function of engaged internationali sm. The EU is part of this and is configured for maximal realistic UK advantage.	1. Interesting attempt to counter-capture patriotic ground... I find this more believeable, in terms of aligning to history (UK power derives from 'internationalism' [if the Empire can be elided into this category].) **But that may be due to my own sense of not seeing the EU as an 'enemy', which is critical for the Leave side. If the EU can be shown to have negative or even alterior designs, the Leave case wins this one.** 2. The 'Great Britian' line is a good one: does this get lost later on, or is it that it doesn't encapsulate a counter to the immigration/evil EU line? 3. Exerpt from his Times article. (Or the full thing.) A
Trade	**Competitive law.** Fewer obstacles and greater connections equal more prosperity.	1. " It is a **well-established doctrine of economic thought** that **greater openness and interconnectedness boosts the productive potential of our economy**. The more we trade and invest the richer we become. That's because being an open economy increases **competition between our companies**, making them more efficient in the face of consumer choice, and creates incentives for business to innovate and adopt new technologies." 2. "does leaving the EU reduce our openness and interconnectedness? Because if it does, that will have an impact on prosperity and living standards."	**Free Trade.** Free trade is a law of international capitalism. Hence following it equals more money.		1. Note that Osbourne doesn't defend the doctrine of free trade. His explication hangs off 'competition between our companies'. Not a very favourable soundbite. Not very convincing either, although not inaccurate ... shows how hard it is to make free trade sound good beyond vague generalisations. 2. Presented as a law: but also an ideology.

Whilst performing the content analysis I tracked the primary topic to which each release referred – for example, migration, trade, the Labour Party. The frequency with which specific topics came up at certain points in the campaign created a topography of the central themes in the referendum (see Figure 3). The emerging topography of the EU referendum informed the concurrent review of Brexit literature and process of narrowing down the list of suitable theoretical candidates to inform the discourse

analysis. Upon completing the content analysis, these frequency tables indicated the issues that warranted the greatest attention and the most space in the chapters that follow. That being said, every single referent logged during content analysis appears at some point in the findings chapters. In that sense, this thesis presents a comprehensive analysis of the EU referendum discourse.

Figure 3: Primary topics in the official campaign discourse

Leave Discourse - Messages by primary topic

Topic	April	May	June	Total
EU	4	4	8	16
Migration	3	4	6	13
Risk		1	12	13
David Cameron			10	10
Security		3	5	8
Trade	2	4		6
Turkey			6	6
NHS	2		3	5
Economic Cost			5	5
Education	2		1	3
UK	2		1	3
Democracy		2	1	3
Remain		2	1	3
EU alternatives			3	3
USA	2			2
Farmers	1		1	2
Regulation	1	1		2
IMF		1	1	2
Treasury		2		2
Housing			2	2
Treasurer			2	2
Labour Party	1			1
Finance	1			1
Livestock		1		1
Business		1		1
Energy		1		1
Tony Blair			1	1
Cost of Living			1	1
Environment			1	1
	21	27	71	119

Remain Discourse - Messages by primary topic

Topic	April	May	June	Total
Risk		10	11	21
EU	2	3	8	13
UK	2	4	6	12
Internationalism	1	3	5	9
Business	1	4	2	7
Security		5	1	6
Trade		3	1	4
Worker	1		1	2
Enviornment		1	1	2
Vote Leave		1	1	2
Rights		2		2
The Referendum		1	1	2
Migration			2	2
Jobs			2	2
Cost of Living		1		1
Young People		1		1
Manufacturing			1	1
Housing			1	1
Labour Party			1	1
Economic Cost			1	1
Steel			1	1
	7	39	47	93

3. Thesis structure

The substantive component of this thesis is divided into three parts. Part 1 delves into the empirical and theoretical history of populism, disputes the commonly held assumption that it is corrosive to democracy, and contextualises populism in Britain. The second and third sections of this thesis present the results of discourse analysis and content analysis. Part 2 characterises the two competing narratives as populist and anti-populist based on how they created a sense of crisis. Part 3 makes the effect of these discourses on 'the people' and 'the elite' apparent by detailing their intended effects on

constituent power, leading to the conclusion that Remain and Leave were both anti-populist.

3.1 Part 1: Populism and British politics

The first third of this thesis, comprising chapters 1 and 2, outlines the history of populism, populist theory, and British politics. Chapter 1 surveys the various movements that have been identified as populist, categorising them as pre-modern, modern, and contemporary. It describes the American Populist Party, the Russian *narodnik* movement and the French *Boulangisme* as pre-modern populists from the turn of the nineteenth century, and then discusses the divergent European and Latin American experiences with modern populism during the twentieth century. Arriving at the present, the chapter notes that populism is widespread across contemporary Europe, and most commonly associated with 'exclusive' or nationalist ideologies and parties.

Chapter 1 establishes that populism is an extraordinarily diverse phenomenon. In the twentieth century, populist theory most often condemned the totalitarian tendencies that can arise in some populist movements and positioned the phenomenon as an enemy of democracy. However, contemporary theory takes a more nuanced view, defining populism in terms of its identifying features rather than specific effects on the host society. The chapter contrasts the ideological, stylistic and discursive approaches to populism and concludes that each approach has useful resources but the latter – which is referred to in this thesis as the 'Essex School' – has greatest capacity to grapple with the complex political environment in which contemporary populists attempt to foster change. The recently outlined concept of anti-populism – which arises within the Essex School tradition – is especially pertinent to the subject matter of this thesis. However, as previously mentioned, this thesis is heavily informed by the Essex School while still retaining a pluralistic theoretical approach to populism.

Chapter 2 provides a high-level re-reading of British Euroscepticism and the process of democratisation that defined the British political system. The first portion of the chapter traces Euroscepticism – either 'soft' or 'hard' rejection of Europe's political integration – from UKIP to the general population to the politicians of major political parties. Britain is a highly Eurosceptic community; attitudes towards the EU have been

hardening ever since the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht. Nigel Farage's populist railing against the EU is not far removed from the rhetoric employed by mainstream British politicians, the British press, and other public associations. However, 'elite Euroscepticism' is purely performative in nature. Since 1975 every single British government has deepened Britain's integration with Europe.

Chapter 2 compares the contemporary use of referendums to notable public movements from British history. It observes that the former, of which the EU referendum is a notable example, are an elite-controlled processes that are more likely to be motivated by electoral crisis than a genuine desire for change. By contrast, the social movements colloquially termed the Levellers, Chartists and Suffragettes were genuinely committed to enhancing the *constituent power*, or freedom of action, of ordinary British citizens. I argue that these movements are examples of *democratic augmentation*, in that they attempted to permanently enhance the power of 'the people' whom the movement represented. It is this praxis that populist theory needs to incorporate in order to separate authentic populism from elite attempts to co-opt and dismantle populist sentiment.

3.2 Part 2: Crisis, populism and anti-populism

The second third of this thesis compares the Leave and Remain discourses to existing understandings of populism. In particular, it focuses on the narration of failure into crisis, which is a central component of populism. Chapter 3 analyses the Leave discourse. It uses the results of content analysis to identify the failures in British public policy that Leave narrated into a crisis caused by the EU. The chapter argues that these failures are presented in a populist manner because Leave identified the EU bureaucrat and bureaucracy as the cause of failure. The 'Eurocrat' and EU institutions represent Leave's version of 'the elite' whose incompetence and opposition engender an ongoing crisis for the British people.

Leave presented the EU as the sole source of migration and economic risk for the UK. In their discourse, freedom of movement is portrayed as an eroding force on British quality of life through overcrowding and overpopulation, whilst the economic dimensions of the union undermine the British economy and self-sustainability. Adding urgency to this diagnosis, Leave presented the EU as an entity with fundamentally

ulterior motives, ensuring that the risk to Britain is ongoing – escalating – and leaving is the only safe option. Leave drew upon existing Eurosceptic narratives but also added some innovations to dramatise their narrative. Specifically, they focussed on the feckless 'Eurocrat' and the European Court of Justice as bad actors actively opposed to the wellbeing of the British citizen.

Chapter 4 applies the same treatment to the Remain case. The chapter argues that Remain presented a quintessentially anti-populist discourse by portraying a crisis-to-be rather than an existing crisis. Remain presented the Single Market as a critical enabler of prosperity and counselled against action on the basis that leaving the EU could precipitate an economic disaster including a financial market crash, recession, stalled job growth and losses to household finances. Their mode of argumentation was authoritative, based on the credibility of numerous experts and community leaders. In fact, Remain embodied the British elite – their discourse was a platform for the most influential members of British society. On the other hand, Remain failed to make a consistent case for Europe's merits because they were more focussed on delegitimising Leave's populist performance.

The crisis narration employed by Leave and Remain very closely fits the existing models of populism and anti-populism. Leave 'spectacularised' an ongoing crisis and accused the EU elite of causing harm to the British people. They portrayed a crisis of EU misgovernment. Remain outlined potential trade and investment failures as a way of reconfirming the status quo. In their discourse, recession represented a crisis in the British economy that was entirely avoidable. Leave portrayed 'the elite' as villains; Remain relied upon 'the elite' as experts and guarantors of prosperity.

3.3 Part 3: 'The people' and 'the elite'

Part 3 of this thesis introduces the notion of constituent power to highlight the shortcomings of a purely stylistic, ideational or discursive approach that omits praxis from the study of populism. Chapters 5 and 6 focus on the relationship each campaign described between 'the elite' and 'the people'. In combination, they argue that both Remain and Leave positioned 'the people' as a problem in British politics that needed to be eliminated. This is not a populist praxis, but an anti-populist agenda.

Chapter 5 argues that Leave's performance of crisis was grounded in conspiracy and xenophobia. Instead of portraying the citizen, the Leave narrative was dominated by the machinations of the 'establishment', a domestic version of 'the elite' that also conspires to harm the British citizen in collusion with the EU. The European migrant played several roles in the discourse, portrayed as an elemental force wrecking fragile local communities, as a violent criminal, and an alien agent that shares no similarity with the British voter. Leave presented 'taking back control' as the solution to these various crises. The act of leaving the EU was presented as an emancipatory act and also the end of 'the people', whom would leave their position of victimhood and meld back into a united nation. In the final analysis, Leave suggested a solution that would eliminate 'the people' and populist logic. In consequence the chapter categorises the Leave discourse as an example of *populism without 'the people'* – a sophisticated anti-populist discourse that creates an image of 'the elite' and a sense of crisis in order to give the superficial impression of populism.

Chapter 6 considers the British worker at the heart of the Remain narrative. Their role is passive, their quality of life contingent on the caprices of the economy and those that control it. In the Remain discourse, 'the people' are a potential subjectivity; 'the people' emerge from descriptions of precariousness, vulnerability and economic dependence. They are the victims of the portended economic crisis, distinct from the ordinary citizen of the present. Remain's definitively anti-populist discourse therefore ends in the same position as Leave. The constituent power and very identity of 'the people' are dissolved while the power of the parliamentary elite is comparatively enhanced. The EU referendum was not a contest between populism and anti-populism but two anti-populist messages delivered with different levels of concealment. The codification of *populism without 'the people'*, in particular, has significant ramifications for contemporary populist theory.

Part 1

Populism and British politics

Chapter 1

Populist theory and Brexit

Populism is a modern concept that taps into the perennial tension between the multitude and those who rule them. Populists call a political subjectivity into being in the form of 'the people' and empower them to challenge the pressures of modernisation, industrialisation, and the increasing systematisation of political life. 'The people' are both an embodied critique of the status quo and the intended vehicle for its improvement. When the concept is mentioned in scholarship, populism is most typically described as the dark side of modern sociality, 'the most devastating corruption of democracy', a form of 'anti-politics', and 'a degraded form of democracy that promises to make good on democracy's highest ideals'.[1] Part 1 of this thesis contests this condemnatory approach as well as the more contemporary tendency for populist theory to focus on the ambivalent effects that populism has on democracy. This thesis presents the contrary view that *authentic* populism aims at leveling the relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite', an impulse that I term *democratic augmentation*.

This chapter is comprised of three sections, which collectively attempt to demarcate the wide field of populism and evaluate which conceptual resources are most useful for analysing an event like the EU referendum. In turn, the application of these concepts to Brexit posits the aforementioned challenges to populist theory and its seeming inattentiveness to the ages-old maxim *cui bono*? – Who benefits the most? This is a key question in the EU referendum and, this thesis will suggest, more broadly for populist theory. This chapter provides a brief overview of populist practices throughout history and evaluates recent developments in populist theory. It argues that the Essex School, viewed as an ongoing intellectual tradition, provides the most useful framework for analysing populist events as they occur in the complex environment of real politics. However, studying populism in an empirical sense requires a pluralistic theoretical approach that is also deeply contextualised in the relevant political economy.

[1] Urbinati, 'The Populist Phenomenon', p. 153; Fieschi and Heywood, 'Trust, Cynicism and Populist Anti-Politics', p. 299; Müller. *What is Populism?*, p. vi.

The first section of this chapter defines three distinct periods of populism. Pre-modern populism occurred in the latter part of the nineteenth century and involved the American Populist Party, the Russian *narodnik* movement and the French *Boulangisme.* Modern populism occurred in the twentieth century and is often conflated with totalitarian movements in greater Europe. However, Latin America's experience shows the productive potential of populism, which acted as a means of decolonisation and charted an alternative mode of capitalist production for many countries in the region.[2] Contemporary populisms take place in the twenty-first century and are typically viewed as 'right-wing', 'nationalist' and 'anti-migrant', although there are also 'progressive' forms of populism evident in parts of Europe.[3] The section concludes that populism re-litigates the democratic balance between the *demos* – or as populists call them, 'the people' – and the few that are chosen to administer society on behalf of everyone. To the extent that populists genuinely intended on *democratising* political power by placing it in the hands of 'the people', then they are democrats by default.

The second and third sections of this chapter consider the various developments in populist theory. Contemporary populist theory has mostly moved away from viewing its subject in empirical or sociological terms, given its diverse instantiations. The most prominent schools of thought conceive of populism as a set of ideas, a performance, or a creative discourse that invokes a new political subjectivity.[4] This part of the chapter compares the discourse approach – or as I term it, the Essex School[5] – with Benjamin Moffitt's six-step performative model.[6] Chapters 3 and 4 will draw directly on Moffitt's model to identify specific rhetorical tactics in the EU referendum. The performative model also needs to be complemented, however, with new concepts from the Essex

[2] Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Kaltwasser 2013, 'Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism: Comparing Contemporary Europe and Latin America', *Government & Opposition*, 48(2), pp. 147-74.
[3] Cas Mudde 2010, 'The Populist Radical Right: A Pathological Normalcy', *West European Politics*, 33(6), pp.1167-1186. This thesis will not engage with the debate over 'left' and 'right' conceptions of populism primarily because – while a relevant consideration for populism in general – I view this debate as a secondary concern to the authenticity of a given populist movement. Whether or not the movement aims to empower 'the people' is a basal threshold for populism; what ends 'the people' should be empowered *for* is I believe a subsequent consideration that becomes relevant only for authentic populisms.
[4] Caiani and Graziano, 'Understanding varieties of populism', p. 1143.
[5] More fully, 'the Essex School on populism'.
[6] Benjamin Moffitt 2016, *The Global Rise of Populism: Performance, Political Style, Representation*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

School regarding the role of crisis, 'anti-populism' – the elite response to populist discourse – and the 'choreography' of political interests involved in any populist performance.

The chapter concludes by reconfirming the centrality of populism in the EU referendum literature and the narrow consideration of UKIP and Nigel Farage as the only populist performers involved in the event. Chapter 2 will discuss the existing literature on British populism in greater detail. It will seek to widen the definition of populism as it applies to the UK beyond the simple criteria of UKIP and Farage's populist affectations. Chapter 2 will also use the British example to further develop my novel definition of populism as a political discourse that is devoted to democratic augmentation.

1. The development of populist theory

Populism is commonly referred to as though it were the enemy of democracy. Throughout this section I will present the historical details of this controversy and argue that fears of contemporary populism are overblown. Firstly, populism is not primarily concerned with democracy; its perennial concern is injustice – an injustice that democracy-as-usual fails to address. Secondly, populism in the contemporary era is manifestly less revolutionary than its precedents. If anything, populists aim indirectly at what I shall call democratic augmentation, which is to say the increased decentralisation of power to 'the people' in the hopes that this might remedy perceived injustices. This theme of democratic augmentation will be further developed throughout the remainder of Part 1 and subsequently tested against the empirical case of the EU referendum in Parts 2 and 3.

This section also demonstrates the extreme diversity of populism. Populist demands have arisen in discrete cultures from every habituated continent since the late nineteenth century.[7] The range of empirical conditions involved in this sample stretches any neat

[7] Given the European and right-wing flavor of Brexit, this review will focus primarily on the right-wing European populisms, although it should be noted that American and left-wing European populisms are in evidence in the contemporary environment. In addition, Africa and the Asia-Pacific have also experienced recognisable cases of populism – in this sense populism is a truly global phenomenon. For regional case studies see Cristóbal Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy (eds.) 2017, *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

definition one might attempt to apply to the phenomenon. The following section outlines how contemporary populist theory has begun to reflect the plurality of populism via discursive, performative and ideological definitions that reduce populism to a 'thin' framework of social division.

1.1 Populism in history: The revolutionary origins of a concept

Populism was once a genuine movement-based politics, in which 'the people' were a literal entity embodied by the economically exploited. In this guise populism presented a threat to the established order. In the present day, however, populism in the global North is conceived of as mere rhetoric, 'thin' ideology or form of discourse.[8] With few exceptions to the rule, populism in European and Anglo-Saxon countries has retained the symbolic content of modern and pre-modern populisms without the associated impetus towards radical change.[9] Instead, the language of populism is put to work creating electoral movements *within* an existing political economy. Pre-modern and modern populism – whether from the global North or South – created an alternative body politic *outside* of the established order with the aim of forcing economic transformation. Pre-modern and modern iterations of populism mobilised 'the people' in the hopes of rebuilding society around alternative distributive and participatory principles. Contemporary populist theory has somewhat reflected the historical change in the scope of populism, but there is still some way still to go in recognising the extent to which populism has been domesticated.

Populism is commonly approached from the direction of democratic theory. This is because populism – regardless of the era of its articulation – derives from the ancient conflict between the many and the few. As Aristotle put it, the conflict inherent in any community is how to enable collective self-determination without falling into mob

[8] The terms global 'North' and 'South' are here used as a generalisation of highly developed countries clustered in the northern hemisphere and less developed countries predominantly clustered in the southern hemisphere. This demarcation is based on the 'Brandt Line' and is used, much like the – transcultural term 'Western' – as a linguistic shortcut rather than a truth applicable to all countries. See: Marcin Solarz 2012, 'North—South, Commemorating the First Brandt Report: searching for the contemporary spatial picture of the global rift', *Third World Quarterly*, 33(3), pp. 559-69.
[9] Two notable exceptions being the Occupy Wall Street movement and the 2011 'Movement of the Squares' in Spain and Greece.

rule.[10] Democracy requires a balance be struck between decentralisation to the masses and the administrative efficiency of central government. Populism attempts to renegotiate the balance in favour of the many. The term populism has its origins in the late nineteenth century, but the notion of popular self-rule that lies at its core has been associated with mass politics as far back as classical Greece and the Roman Empire.[11] Across this lengthy span 'the people' and their capacity for self-rulership has often been denigrated by those in power as the gateway to insurrection, violence, irrationality and danger.[12] In more recent times, the perennial struggle between the powerful and the multitude has found its expression in various 'populist' movements that contest the economic conditions of modernity.[13] Populists demand radical change on behalf of the many, whilst their critics tend to label them as demagogues and vandals.[14] In short, populism is a distinctly modern re-litigation of the democratic problem. It seeks to empower the masses as a response to the specific pressures of industrialisation, modernisation, and alienation.

There are three distinct eras of populism, each identifiable by a particular set of economic conditions and injustices arising from those conditions. Federico Finchelstein divides the history of populism into pre-modern and modern phases; the contemporary era, beginning at the turn of the twenty-first century, constitutes a third phase of populism.[15] The first phase of populism was demarcated by the development of industrial capitalism. The second phase emerged during the intersection of capitalism with colonialism and total war during the twentieth century, and the third is conditioned by the current globalisation of trade and finance. Pre-modern forms of populism rose to prominence in the last decade of the nineteenth century, typified by the American People's Party, the Russian *narodnik* and *Narodnaja volja* movements and the French *Boulangisme.*[16] These movements rejected modernity, idealised an agrarian and

[10] Aristotle 1992 [1962] *The Politics*, London: Penguin Books, pp. 263-94.
[11] Margaret Canovan 2005, *The People,* Cambridge: Polity; Cristóbal Kaltwasser 2014, 'Latin American Populism: Some Conceptual and Normative Lessons', *Constellations*, 21(4), p. 494-95.
[12] Benjamin Isakhan 2015, 'Introduction: The Complex and Contested History of Democracy', in Benjamin Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell (eds.), *The Edinburgh Companion to the History of Democracy: From Pre-history to Future Possibilities*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 5.
[13] Paul Taggart 2004, 'Populism and representative politics in contemporary Europe', *Journal of Political ideologies*, 9(3), pp. 271-73.
[14] Stavrakakis, 'Discourse theory in populism research', pp. 523-34.
[15] Federico Finchelstein 2014, 'Returning Populism to History', *Constellations*, 21(4), pp. 469-72.
[16] Kaltwasser et al., 'Populism: An Overview', pp. 3-5.

communal lifestyle, and highlighted the contradiction between the inequality of emergent capitalism and the egalitarian promise of democracy.[17] In short, the first populists are best described as economic revolutionaries.

Pre-modern populists responded in radical ways to centralised economic power. American populists were particularly active in the frontier states and rejected corporate power, cronyism, and the exploitative influence of monopolies.[18] They preached economic autonomy and cooperation amongst wage earners against the owners of capital.[19] As a diverse movement, their tactics ranged from electoral contestation through to agitating for the abolition of corporations, persecution of the 'Plutocrat', and a reconsideration of private property.[20] Russian populists employed militant, sometimes terrorist, tactics in order to topple Tsarist feudalism and replace it with an agrarian brand of socialism.[21] The charismatic and aggressively nationalist General Georges Boulanger channeled the anti-capitalist anxiety provoked by the rapid industrialisation of French society and a prolonged economic crisis.[22] Boulangism, the movement that solidified around and outlived Boulanger's attempts to gain power, was an eclectic 'revolutionary rabble' united in opposition to a parliament that had abandoned the working class.[23] Each of these movements rose against a political class that would not heed the economic pain of the disenfranchised.

Pre-modern populists were heterodox socialists who, unlike their Marxist peers, did not believe in the importance of class struggle. Provoked by economic injustice, they used divergent tactics in the hope of replacing crony capitalism with democratic and collectivist power structures. Each of these movements was defeated in its own time

[17] Nadia Urbinati 2019, *Me The People: How Populism Transforms Democracy*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, p. 8.
[18] Nathan Jessen 2017, *Populism and Imperialism: Politics, culture, and foreign policy in the American West, 1890-1900*, Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, pp. 13-15.
[19] *Ibid.* pp. 15-18.
[20] Norman Pollack 1962, 'The Myth of Populist Anti-Semitism', *The American Historical Review*, 68(1), pp. 76-80. As Pollack writes in this article, there is an ongoing historiographical controversy over the degree to which the American populist movement traded in anti-Semitic conspiracies. See: Robert Johnston 2007, '"The Age of Reform": A Defense of Richard Hofstadter Fifty Years On', *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era*, 6(2), pp. 127-37.
[21] Manuel Anselmi 2017, *Populism: An Introduction*, Abingdon: Routledge, pp. 53-54.
[22] Patrick Hutton 1976, 'Popular Boulangism and the Advent of Mass Politics in France, 1886–90', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 11(1), pp. 86-8.
[23] William Irvine 1988, *The Boulanger Affair Reconsidered: Royalism, Boulangism, and the Origins of the Radical Right in France*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 4-10.

and later excoriated by Western scholarship in the mid-twentieth century.[24] For example, Richard Hofstadter describes the leaders of the American People's Party as 'agitators with paranoid tendencies', and Seymour Lipset characterises its followers as 'the disgruntled and the psychologically homeless … the socially isolated, the economically insecure, the uneducated, unsophisticated, and authoritarian persons at every level of the society'.[25] These academics, writing with more than half a century of hindsight, illustrate an important historiographical truth about pre-modern populism. Their redistributive agenda has been supplanted by the old trope of the unruly mob. While scholars were debating modern populism, they were also rewriting the economic revolutionaries of the nineteenth century as agitators and authoritarians.

1.2 European populism: From totalitarianism to exclusionary nationalism

In the present era, nationalists and nativists are most often associated with the populist label. The right-wing populist agenda reduces to a narrowly defined version of 'the people', operating largely within the status quo. This association – and the condemnation that accompanies it – derives from the European experience with autocratic and nationalist movements in the twentieth century. For example, Lipset and Hofstadter's harsh retrospective on pre-modern populism coincided with the spread of totalitarian imaginaries of 'the people' in their own time. While there is a theoretical difference between populism and totalitarianism,[26] the association continues to frame the way in which contemporary populists are received. This subsection will discuss the modern European totalitarianisms that are often mistaken for populism, and the contemporary rise of European populist parties. The following subsection will outline some Latin American examples of modern populism and the paradox that populist diversity poses for theorists.

Populism deserves to be treated with wariness because of its close association with modern totalitarianism. Totalitarian movements that emerged in Western Europe and Russia during the first half of the twentieth century often entailed a punitive, anti-

[24] Stavrakakis, 'Discourse theory in populism research', pp. 523-34.
[25] Richard Hofstadter 1955, *The Age of Reform*, New York: Vintage Books, p. 71; Seymour Lipset 1960, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics*, New York: Doubleday, p. 175.
[26] Isaiah Berlin 1968, 'To Define Populism', *Government and Opposition*, 3(2), pp. 176-77.

democratic response to the pressures of modernisation.[27] National Socialism and Italian Fascism both used populist-sounding rhetoric to justify the erection of totalitarian regimes.[28] Much like the pre-modern populists, these movements also rejected *laissez faire* capitalism and offered more collectivist alternatives.[29] Isaiah Berlin and others have insisted that totalitarianism and populism are discrete phenomena but, unfortunately, this distinction relies upon *ex post facto* reasoning.[30] The critical difference between populism, fascism and vanguard communism is that the former, once in power, bases its legitimacy on electoral processes whereas the other two abolish such mechanisms.[31] Populists and would-be authoritarians use the language of 'the people' versus 'the elite' in very similar ways.[32] European history indicates how easily populist rhetoric can be deployed in the name of the marginalised without the intention of empowering them. In short, modern European autocrats were populist up until they were not; once in power, what appeared to be populist movements quickly exposed themselves as anti-democratic totalitarians.

If the middle of the twentieth century is any guide, critics of populism have a point about the dangers inherent in this form of politics. It is therefore no surprise that scholarly interest in populism rekindled a second time with the pernicious rise of right wing advocates of 'the people' across Europe in the closing decades of the same century.[33] Populist movements have made a notable return to Western politics since the end of the Cold War, and especially in the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis.[34] These movements have become features of almost every European polity and predominately couch their populist appeal in exclusionary, nativist or nationalistic

[27] Roger Eatwell 2017, 'Populism and Fascism' in Kaltwasser, Cristóbal, Paul Taggart, Paulina Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 364-80.
[28] *Ibid*, pp. 371-80.
[29] Luciano Pellicani 2012, 'Fascism, capitalism, modernity', *European Journal of Political Theory*, 11(4), pp. 394-409.
[30] Berlin, 'To Define Populism', pp. 176-77; Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner 1969, *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*, New York: Macmillan Co., page xxxx.
[31] Urbinati, *Me The* People, p. 20.
[32] Paul Taggart 1995, 'New Populist Parties in Western Europe', *West European Politics*, 18(1), pp. 34-51.
[33] Taggart, 'Populism and Representative Politics', p. 270; Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', p. 541; John Abromeit 2017, 'A Critical Review of Recent Literature on Populism', *Politics and Governance*, 1(4), pp. 177-85.
[34] Caiani and Graziano, 'Understanding varieties of populism', pp. 1141-47; Steve Corbett and Alan Walker 2019, 'Between Neoliberalism and Nationalist Populism: What Role for the "European Social Model" and Social Quality in Post-Brexit Europe?', *Social Policy and Society*, 18(1), p. 101.

rhetoric.[35] In this regard there are clear parallels with totalitarian invocations of 'the people', which often relied on ethnic or culturally exclusive imagery. However, unlike modern totalitarians, contemporary European populists work *within* established electoral systems and generally support free market capitalism contained by national borders.[36] Contemporary populists typically focus their ire against the European Union and the migrant, two opponents that weaken the national 'people' economically and culturally.[37] This message is divisive and often racially charged and it tends to focus on the identity of 'the people' and the alleged threats of regional institutions.

Contemporary European populism has garnered mixed electoral success. Several populist parties such as the French *Rassemblement National*[38], the Hungarian *Jobbik* party and the German *Alternative für Deutschland*, have grown to become the second-largest political party in their respective countries. However, most European populist parties – ranging from the Belgian *Vlaams Blok* to the British National Party (BNP) and UK Independence Party (UKIP) – are not contenders for government and exert influence as pressure groups that siphon support from the fringes of established political parties.[39] Due to the electoral and pro-capitalist nature of these movements, scholarship tends to explain their rise through the cult of personality, the 'tabloidization' of popular media, the pressures of economic globalisation, and the failure of mainstream representation.[40] These versions of populism have broadly accepted the institutional and economic norms of the present, and only wish to redefine which version of 'the people' deserves privilege within said system. This populism is not transformative it is merely exclusionary.

On the other hand, the exclusionary nature of Western populism tends to obscure the

[35] There are a handful of left wing or 'inclusive' European populist movements – notably Greece's SYRIZA and Spain's *Podemos* – but these instances are greatly outnumbered by right-wing and 'exclusive' movements. See: Mudde and Kaltwasser, 'Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism', pp. 147-74.
[36] Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell 2007, *Twenty-First Century Populism: The Spectre of Western European Democracy*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 4-8.
[37] Wodak et al., *Right Wing Populism in Europe*, p. xvii. It should be noted that by 'typically' I mean the majority of European cases, which are 'right wing' populisms that thicken their rhetoric with nationalistic and in some cases xenophobic ideologies.
[38] Formerly known as the National Front**.**
[39] Stijn van Kessel 2015, *Populist Parties in Europe: Agents of Discontent?*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 33-73.
[40] Albertazzi and McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism*, pp. 1-14; Ruth Wodak 2011, *The Discourse of Politics in Action: Politics as Usual*, Basingstoke: Palgrave.

transformative use of 'the people' in the global South. Latin American scholars point out that populist and non-totalitarian regimes were installed in Argentina, Brazil and Venezuela as an 'attempt to overcome the Cold War dichotomy between liberalism and communism'.[41] More generally, the identification and elevation of a post-colonial version of 'the people' is a key move in the emancipation of former imperial dominions.[42] Arguably every colonial struggle for independence – from Haiti to America to Argentina – drew upon a populist conception of the revolutionaries. These examples have inspired contemporary movements and scholars to promote progressive forms of populism as a solution to the current crises of democracy, ecology and capitalism.[43] Much of this scholarship draws on Latin America's long tradition of transformative modes of populism.

1.3 Latin America and attempts at tackling the populist paradox

The Latin American variant of populism is economically radical, presenting a stark contrast with Europe. It is a recurrent phenomenon that is embedded in the political culture of multiple nations in the region reaching back, Cristóbal Kaltwasser argues, to the colonial wars waged against the Spanish Empire. The wars of Latin American independence created a sense of pan-national solidarity called 'Americanismo' that is analogous to the emancipatory sentiment evident in the American Revolutionary War.[44] Americanismo is a latent cultural template for 'the people' that emerges throughout Latin American history during times of overt foreign intervention or when domestic contradictions become manifest. Its salience is aided by the highly unequal 'social structure' prevalent in many Latin American societies, which lends a concrete dimension to the populist discourse.[45] This populist template has been drawn upon in

[41] Finchelstein, 'Returning Populism to History', pp. 468-78; Carlos de la Torre 2014, 'The People, Democracy, and Authoritarianism in Rafael Correa's Ecuador', *Constellations*, 21(4), p. 463.
[42] Frantz Fanon [1963] 2001, *The Wretched of the Earth*, London: Penguin, pp. 166-99.
[43] See, for example, Muzaffer Kaya 2019, 'The potentials and challenges of left populism in Turkey: the case of the peoples' Democratic Party (HDP)', *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, 46(5), pp. 797-812; Priscilla Southwell, Eric Lindgren and Dustin Ellis 2016, 'A Case Study in Left Wing Neo-Populism: The Rise of the Syriza Party in Greece', *Review of European Studies*, 8(4), pp. 174-82; Íñigo Errejón and Chantal Mouffe 2016, *Podemos: In the Name of the People*, London: Lawrence & Wishart; Mouffe, *For a Left Populism*; Marco D'Eramo 2013, 'Populism and the New Oligarchy', *New Left Review,* 58(1), p. 8.
[44] Kaltwasser, 'Latin American Populism', p. 495; Rafael Sánchez 2016, *Dancing Jacobins: A Venezuelan Genealogy of Latin American Populism*, New York: Fordham University Press, pp. 1-38.
[45] *Ibid.* p. 496.

three distinct ways, each time reacting to the economic conditions prevalent in the affected country.

The first generation of Latin American populists emerged during the 1940s. Represented by leaders such as Juan Perón of Argentina, Getúlio Vargas of Brazil, and Jose Ibarra of Ecuador, these populist movements represented a challenge to both the capitalist paradigm and the socialist and fascist alternatives.[46] Much like pre-modern populism, these movements aimed for economic justice and a more distributed institutional model that places power in the hands of 'the people'. The second generation of Latin American populists, whom emerged during the 1990s, explicitly rejected this model. These movements, coalescing around Carlos Menem of Argentina, Fernando de Mello of Brazil and Alberto Fujimori of Peru, used populist discourse to support neoliberal programs aimed at remedying 'catastrophic economic management' that had resulted in hyperinflation and high unemployment.[47] Neoliberal populists defined 'the people' as the poor and impoverished, and 'the elite' as the corrupt political class whom strangle the economy for personal gain.[48] Finally, contemporary Latin American populism arose at the turn of the century in the form of radical leftist nationalism. This populism, championed by Hugo Chávez of Venezuela, Evo Morales of Bolivia, and Rafael Correa of Ecuador, is firmly rooted in Americanismo and draws upon the wealth created by resource exploitation to fund mass redistribution to the poor.[49] In three iterations, Latin American populism has come full circle.

The discrepancy between European and Latin American experiences with populism highlights the almost impossibly diverse range of phenomena that have been described as populist. Even within the Latin American tradition, populism has been used to support two diametrically opposed forms of political economy: a form of progressive nationalism and its antithesis in a neoliberal administrative state seeking greater

[46] Kaltwasser, 'Latin American Populism', pp. 497-98; Anselmi, *Populism: An Introduction*, pp. 55-70.
[47] Francisco Panizza 2009, *Contemporary Latin America: Development and Democracy Beyond the Washington Consensus*, London: Zed Books, pp. 51-5.
[48] Kurt Weyland 2003, 'Neopopulism and Neoliberalism: How Much Affinity?,' *Third World Quarterly*, 24(6), pp. 1095-115.
[49] Dani Filc 2015, 'Latin American Inclusive and European Exclusionary Populism: Colonialism as an Explanation', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 20(3): 263-83; Carlos de la Torre and Cynthia Arnson 2013, *Latin American Populism in the Twenty-First Century*, Washington: Woodrwo Wilson Center Press, pp. 1-32.

integration into the global economy. Beyond Latin America – when viewed as a global and historical phenomenon – populism presents a paradox. It is a political movement with no fixed organisational model; it is an insurgent force that increasingly works within electoral parameters; it is a protest movement with no permanent agenda; violent revolutionaries and moderate reformers have both made use of its symbolic content.[50] Numerous scholars have therefore concluded that the range of social movements labelled populist is simply too broad to support a consistent empirical definition.[51] The term serves no consistent empirical purpose.

In order to reflect the ambiguity of its subject, contemporary populist theory has become less concrete. Populism is today defined according to its immaterial features. Daniele Albertazzi and Duncan McDonnell note that 'this view deliberately avoids conceiving of populism in terms of specific social bases, economic programmes, issues and electorates'.[52] An example of this shift can be found in Paul Taggart's work, which took issue with Margaret Canovan's taxonomic approach to populism on the grounds that this approach renders a highly complex series of sub-categories based on material conditions and context. Taggart argued that focusing instead on ideological and attitudinal 'common features' enables us 'to build up a universally applicable approach to populism'.[53] Taggart defined populism via five features: hostility to 'representative politics'; an idealised view of the 'heartland'; a lack of core values; reactivity to crisis; and short-termism.[54] He described these as 'themes' and compared their content to 'other ideologies'. Since the early twenty-first century, the rejection of material and sociological metrics for populism in favor of themes, symbols, and ideas has become the norm. Three of the most popular contemporary approaches variously conceive of populism as an ideology, a discourse and a rhetorical style.[55] These definitions amount

[50] Benjamin De Cleen, Jason Glynos and Aurelien Mondon 2019, 'Critical Research on Populism: Nine Rules of Engagement', *Organization*, 25(5), pp. 649-61.
[51] Canovan, *Populism*, p. 7; Cristóbal Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Espejo and Pierre Ostiguy 2017, 'Populism: An Overview of the Concept and the State of the Art', *The Oxford Handbook of Populism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 2-3.
[52] Albertazzi and McDonnell, *Twenty-First Century Populism*, p. 3.
[53] Taggart, 'Populism and representative politics', pp. 271-73.
[54] *Ibid.*, pp. 273-76.
[55] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 11-26. A fourth approach views populism as a relational strategy between leaders and followers, and is mostly confined to the analysis of Latin American populisms. See Kurt Weyland 2001, 'Clarifying a Contested Concept: Populism in the Study of Latin American Politics', *Comparative Politics*, 34(1), pp. 1-22. This thesis considers this approach to broadly align with the 'political style' definition of populism, as both focus on the performative effects created by a populist leader, and will therefore refer to three main approaches to populism on the

to a virtual consensus expressed in different disciplinary terms. Surveying two seminal examples of contemporary populist theory will serve to show the consensus that exists beneath like terms.

Cas Mudde is one of the most-cited proponents of the ideological turn in populist theory, and Ernesto Laclau exemplifies the discourse approach. Mudde's article 'The Populist Zeitgeist' defines populism as '*an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elite", and which argues that politics should be an expression of the* volonté générale *(general will) of the people.*'[56] This ideology is deemed to be 'thin-centered' because populist rhetoric contains only enough ideological content to construct two homogenous blocs – to position 'the people' as homogenous and good and 'the elite' as bad.[57] Beyond this, populism has no fixed ideological substance. It requires 'thickening' content drawn strategically and contingently from the context. This perspective on populism was developed in a special 2004 edition of the *Journal of Ideologies* and has subsequently been expanded by a range of ideologists, most notably by Ben Stanley who developed the term 'thin ideology' as it relates to populism.[58] In this view, populism is an ideological framework that supports social polarisation but must draw on other host ideologies to formulate a more substantive program of action.

Ernesto Laclau also focused on populism as a hollow framework. His book *On Populist Reason* describes populism as the 'accumulation of unfulfilled demands' that the 'institutional system' is unable to absorb, thus creating 'a widening chasm separating the institutional system from the people'.[59] The unfulfilled demands legitimise 'the people' and delegitimise 'the elites' that are in charge of the malfunctioning institutional system. Laclau observed that, beyond this simple schema, 'populism has no referential unity'. Whether one uses the term ideology or discourse, populism expresses the division that has formed between the good, exploited, or deserving people and the bad, corrupt or incompetent elite. Populism is the logic of grievance. In Laclau's

understanding that the stylistic and the strategic approaches substantially overlap.
[56] Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', p. 541. Italics in original.
[57] Fieschi, '"Introduction"', pp. 235-40.
[58] Stanley, 'The thin ideology of populism', pp. 95-110.
[59] Laclau, *On Populist Reason,* p. 73-74.

theory, that grievance has grown to such an extent that it manifests as demands for systemic change.

This scholarship reflects the reality that populism is not a corruption of democracy so much as it is provoked by the incompletion of democracy. Although there is a significant amount of scholarship decrying modern populism as a 'spectre' haunting democracy and threatening its demise[60], the case studies previously mentioned demonstrate that contemporary populism overwhelmingly occurs *within* democracy. Contemporary populism expresses demands relating to perceived inequality and injustice, and the movements – be they Latin American or European – that coalesce around such demands seek redress through the ballot box. To this extent, populism is clearly not a threat to democracy, if democracy is viewed as one appendage of the status quo. Contemporary populism is an electoral phenomenon. Ergo, its anti-system tendencies are confined within a system; the pathway to redressing the grievances of 'the people' is already circumscribed. For this reason, both Mudde and Laclau positioned their analysis as a rejection of the reflexive condemnation that populism often receives.[61] Contemporary populists are not revolutionaries, they are electioneers. Contemporary populism is uniformly committed to an electoral strategy of change.

This thesis agrees that moving away from reflexive condemnation of populism is an important methodological step that opens the way for greater analytical precision. I recognise the empirical evidence that populism is no longer revolutionary or especially transformative. I also agree with Isaiah Berlin's supposition that populism is inherently democratic, as opposed to authoritarianism cloaked in the language of 'the people'.[62] This is one area the thesis will seek to expand upon. For the purposes of this thesis, populism is an expression of economic or social injustice – real or perceived – so powerful that it mobilises 'the people' in service of democratic augmentation. 'Democratic augmentation' is used to refer to the aim of populists: they seek to increase the relative power of 'the people' *within* an established electoral system. 'Democratic'

[60] Wiles, 'A Syndrome, not a Doctrine', p. 166; Margaret Canovan 1999, 'Trust the People! Populism and the Two Faces of Democracy', *Political Studies,* 47(1), p. 3; Benjamín Arditi 2004, 'Populism as a Spectre of Democracy: A Response to Canovan', *Political Studies*, 52(1), p. 141.
[61] Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 19; Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', p. 541-42.
[62] Although, as Benjamin Moffitt points out, democracy is itself an extremely contested term; evaluating populism against democracy opposes one subjective concept against another. See: Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 133-51.

stipulates the immemorial aspirations of the populist and 'augmentation' captures the comparative modesty of contemporary populists. However, as the remainder of this chapter and that following will outline, the real conceptual problem for populist theory lies in separating authentic populism from opportunistic uses of populist ideas.

2. Contemporary populist theory: Ideology, discourse, or political style?

The previous section outlined the messy terrain occupied by populism. It charted the evolution – or perhaps more accurately, the hollowing out – of populism from a radical project in the nineteenth century to an electoral vehicle for the airing of grievances in the twenty-first century. The previous section also presented examples from the ideological and the discursive approaches to contemporary populism, both of which were formulated in the first decade of the twenty-first century. This section provides a deeper view of the Essex School as an archetypical example of the new approach to populist theory. It outlines the Essex School as a body of work that grew out of Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*, and has subsequently been strengthened through critique and engagement with other contemporary theories such as Benjamin Moffitt's six-stage model of populism.

This section and the one following evaluate the strengths, weaknesses and development of the Essex School because it is this interpretation of populism that was most influential in the research design of this thesis. This thesis adopts many of the concepts and assumptions of the Essex School in the following discourse analysis and describes populism as a discourse but this is not intended to indicate an exclusively Essex School approach to the subject. While there are methodological differences between the ideological, discursive and stylistic approaches, this thesis holds that empirical events such as the EU referendum can best be tackled by aggregating the dominant approaches together to draw out the different aspects of the phenomenon. Besides this, the thesis takes the view that no single approach has a monopoly on populism as it manifests in the power-laden complexities of the social world. For instance, separating authentic and insincere usages of populism – discerning between those that want to empower 'the people' and those that only seek to empower themselves, as part of 'the elite' – is a pressing challenge that no extant approach can answer on its own. The recent theoretical developments outlined in this section perform some of that important work, but there

is still significant room for improvement.

2.1 The Essex School: The discourse theory of populism and society

Ernesto Laclau's book *On Populist Reason* is the central text that applies the Essex School of thought to populism. As previously mentioned, the Essex School applies to more than populism but for the purposes of this thesis I will use the term as a shorthand for the populist theory put forward in Laclau's book; the unique ontological assumptions that informed this specific study; and its subsequent expansion, contestation and application to contemporary populism.[63] What makes *On Populist Reason* particularly striking is its meta-textual role in the larger project that Laclau and Chantal Mouffe had been developing since the publication of their seminal post-structural and post-Marxist work *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*[64] Laclau drew on the conceptual resources of *Hegemony* when analysing populism, which imbued the Essex School with a particular language and set of assumptions. Along with the ideological and performative approach to populism, the Essex School identifies its subject through the referent of 'the people' and the opposition of this group to powerful and usually reprehensible 'elites'.[65] However, in a novel departure from other populist theories, Laclau stipulated that 'the people' 'is not something of the nature of an ideological expression'. [66] Nor is populism a political movement with definitive empirical features; it is instead a 'political logic … one way of constituting the unity of a group'.[67] 'The people', conceived of by the Essex School, is an invitation to join a new political subjectivity defined by its opposition to 'the elite'.

The Essex School approaches populism as a creative gesture. A populist movement seeks to unite different actors under the singular idea that they are all part of a shared,

[63] David Howarth 2018, 'Marx, discourse theory and political analysis: negotiating an ambiguous legacy', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 15(4), pp. 377-79; Lasse Thomassen 2016, 'Hegemony, populism and democracy: Laclau and Mouffe today', *Revista Española de Ciencia Política*, 1(40), pp. 161-76.
[64] Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe [1985] 2014, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, London: Verso. In describing this work, I mean post-structural in the sense that this work focuses primarily on language, meaning, and identity formation in human relations and post-Marxist in the sense that the authors self-describe as seeking to go beyond core Marxist assumptions whilst retaining the emancipatory aims of the tradition.
[65] Müller, *What is Populism?*
[66] Laclau, *On Populist Reason,* p. 73.
[67] *Ibid*. p. 73.

oppressed identity. Yannis Stavrakakis, a key contemporary of the Essex School, describes the hallmarks of Laclau's populism as 'retroactivity' and 'performativity'.[68] In more detail, 'the people' 'is always something retroactively constructed, an *empty signifier* that needs to be invoked, a call incarnated in a proper name that (partially) creates what it is supposed to be expressing'.[69] There is no objective, pre-existing entity that is or becomes 'the people'. Populist rhetoric produces 'the people' by convincing enough individuals that there is in fact something uniting its pluralistic members. As noted in the previous section, the overlap with Mudde's approach is extensive, but the mode of expression is unique. Instead of a 'thin ideology', the Essex School approaches populism as a 'logic' that creates a specific type of collective identity.

Populism employs a simple logic that, if it gains traction, creates a new political subjectivity. Laclau wrote that a populist discourse 'tries to operate performatively within a social reality which is to a large extent heterogeneous and fluctuating. I see this moment of vagueness and imprecision … as an essential component of any populist operation'.[70] Populism employs *ad hoc* tactics and symbols to constitute a group of people. The group does not exist, and, in an objective sense, there are too few shared interests uniting such a potentially large group for it to coalesce organically. Therefore, populism must link this group contingently and strategically. The vagueness of populism is a feature that enables the association of otherwise disparate political actors. It is a simplifying routine that reduces the complexity of politics down to a simple, binary opposition that simultaneously constitutes both 'the people' and 'the elite'.

The constitution of 'the elite' and 'the people' is not, however, a literal event. From the perspective of the Essex School, populism – and, indeed, any social identification – is primarily a symbolic creation. *On Populist Reason* stipulates that:

> Discourse is the primary terrain of the constitution of objectivity as such. By discourse, as I have attempted to make clear several times, I do not mean something that is essentially restricted to the areas of speech and writing, but

[68] Yannis Stavrakakis, Giorgos Katsambekis, Alexandros Kioupkiolis, Nikos Nikisianis and Thomas Siomos 2018, 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', *Contemporary Political Theory*, 17(1), p. 12.
[69] *Ibid*. p. 12.
[70] Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 118.

> any complex of elements in which *relations* play the constitutive role. This means that elements do not pre-exist the relational complex but are constituted through it.[71]

While Laclau makes the distinction that discourse is not merely restricted to speech and the written word, these are the primary vectors according to which relationships are established. Discourse is Laclau's response to the ontological rigidity in Marxist theory, a tradition with which all his work is in dialogue.[72] In the Essex School, relational identities replace class and economic structure as the theoretical units of society. From Laclau's perspective, theory should not view society as an object comprised of constituent objects. Society is, rather, the ongoing and open-ended construction of *objectivity*, that is to say it is experienced as if it were an object that fit neatly together in accordance with simple rules and an identity of features.[73] In the same way that 'the people' are retroactively and performatively invoked – willed into existence, constructed by the assumption of equivalence across its membership – so too is the society in which the populist effort takes place.

Discourse is the term that Laclau uses to describe the process of social identification. It is therefore also the medium through which the populist tries to erect the identity of 'the people'. Discourse operates across the full scale of social activity from the constitution of society itself, through the articulation of huge groups such as 'the people' and 'the elite', down to the creation, maintenance and evolution of an individual sense of self.[74] The Essex School is simultaneously a theory of populism and a post-structural theory of society and the political relations that occur within it. This ontology increases the terminological complexity of the Essex School but it also provides a broad array of conceptual resources for dealing with the empirical diversity of a subject like populism. In addition, the great strength of the Essex School as a multi-generational project has been its adaptability and engagement with both critiques and parallel research into populism.

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[71] *Ibid.* p. 68.
[72] Thomas Jacobs 2018, 'The Dislocated Universe of Laclau and Mouffe: An Introduction to Post-Structuralist Discourse Theory', *Critical Review* 30(3-4), p. 295; Kim Seongcheol 2017, 'The populism of the Alternative for Germany (AfD): an extended Essex School perspective', *Palgrave Communications*, 3(1), p. 2.
[73] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, pp. 97-98.
[74] *Ibid*. pp. 91-101.

2.2 'Emancipatory apriorism': Three critiques of the Essex School

On Populist Reason fashioned a novel and engaging reinterpretation of both populism and the societies that produce it. As the following subsection will illustrate, the richness of this theory has motivated other theorists to engage with, critique, and extend upon the Essex School. However, as this subsection will argue, the underlying normative agenda that motivates the Essex School reduces its utility as an explanatory theory. The short summary in the section above hinted at the contours of the larger venture towards which Laclau's work on populism contributed. Laclau and his intellectual partner Chantal Mouffe were engaged in a multi-decadal effort to invigorate the 'left-wing project' through the formulation of an 'anti-essentialist theoretical stand'.[75] The remainder of this section will argue that the explanatory power of the Essex School is strengthened when Laclau's normative project is replaced with a focus on crisis, actor agency, and the marginality of 'the people' in many instantiated forms of populism. These conceptual changes allow us to appraise populism as a product of the messy present rather than putting it on a pedestal as a vehicle to a better future.

Critique and engagement with *On Populist Reason* has substantially strengthened the Essex School in the fifteen or so years since publication. Three general lines of criticism aimed at the Essex School relate to its failure to identify totalitarian uses of 'the people', slippage in unit of analysis, and predisposition towards radical politics. These critiques can be traced back to the left-wing normative project that first motivated the Essex School. Considering each in turn, this section will outline why 'emancipatory apriorism', as Oliver Marchart terms it, needs to be modulated out of the Essex School in order for it to adequately apply to populism in practice.[76] That being said, some of these critiques highlight what this thesis takes to be advantages of the Essex School. It is the Essex School that comes closest to grasping contemporary populism as a movement committed to democratic augmentation, which is the novel definition I will seek to advance in later chapters. Where the Essex School falls short is its inability to

[75] Ernesto Laclau 1996, *Emancipation(s)*, London: Vero, before the title page.
[76] Oliver Marchart 2007, *Post-Foundational Political Thought: Political Difference in Nancy, Lefort, Badiou and Laclau*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, p. 186.

conceptualise the sophistication with which populism is opposed by those elites in power.

In the first instance, Laclau is often criticised for refusing to engage with the slippery slope inherent in populism. He expresses detached curiosity about the imprecision of the concept and constructs an explanation of its social function.[77] But he remains silent on the dangerous potential of such a simplistic and antagonistic mode of politics. Andrew Arato, for example, argues that Laclau 'secretly introduces' a 'theological structure' into politics via his theory of populism.[78] Arato's reasoning is based on Charles Lefort's argument that democracy constitutes an empty space that must be held open to enable mass participation in politics.[79] According to Arato, the decentralised nature of democracy fosters a danger of sliding back to totalitarianism through the natural human desire to create concreteness and certainty in public life.[80] He therefore disagrees with Laclau's refusal to pass normative judgement on different types of populism, even those that might posses the seeds of fascism. In a practical sense, Arato argues, refusing to stipulate potentially good and bad types of populism amounts to 'justification of dictatorship'.[81] Good populism must somehow hold open the empty space at the heard of democracy. This normative critique is premised on the overlap between modern history and totalitarianism and it adopts a similar general concept of democracy as the one I will later adopt. However, I think Arato is too insistent that Laclau's exploratory and stylistically cautious work should be deemed an accomplice to tyranny. The strength of the Essex School is its willingness to engage with political phenomena in an experimental manner. The adaptability of this school of thought is evidenced in Laclau's original work, which deliberately set out to rehabilitate populism despite its mainstream condemnation, and the subsequent work that Stavrakakis and others have done to apply the theory to contemporary politics.

A more immediately concerning critique relates to the Essex School's double definition of populism. The Essex School defines populism as *both* a discrete phenomenon and

[77] Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, pp. ix-xii, 223-51.
[78] Andrew Arato, 2013, 'Political Theory and Populism', *Social Research*, 80(1), p. 156.
[79] See Claude Lefort 1988, *Democracy and Political Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[80] *Ibid*. pp. 157-167.
[81] *Ibid.* p. 167.

the underpinning logic of society itself.[82] Within the space of several pages Laclau argues that populism is both a 'political logic' – simply one of a range of ways of conducting politics – and also a general theory of participation, 'the very condition of political action'.[83] Federico Finchelstein has described the Essex School's conflation of political phenomenon and social theory as a 'transcendental, sometimes circular explanation' that is 'often positioned outside history'.[84] His point being that *On Populist Reason* effectively renders all politics as populism and so transcends the specific historical phenomena that have been labeled as populism in the past. This is an important critique, although I believe the origin of the politics/populism conflation is located in Laclau's underlying normative agenda.

The express purpose of the Essex School, as mentioned, is the reformulation of the 'left-wing project' based on the adoption of anti-essentialism. Laclau and Mouffe adopted the ontology expressed in *On Populist Reason* because they saw it as a vehicle to the 'radical, libertarian and plural democracy' that is their replacement for a Marxian classless society.[85] They denied that society and indeed any identity has an objective or essential nature because they deemed these assumptions important for the furtherance of a partisan agenda.[86] The discourse theory in *On Populist Reason* aims at stipulating a blueprint for 'left-wing' action. Viewed from this perspective, it becomes clear that the ontological critique of slippage in the Essex School is connected to the third major critique, which is its proclivity towards progressive radicalism. Both derive from the meta-textual aims of *On Populist Reason.*

The Essex School is not alone in adopting post-structural insights in the hope they might facilitate political progress. Oliver Marchart describes the trend as 'emancipatory apriorism'.[87] The Essex School and intellectual movements like it are interested in the instability of social identity because this might suggest opportunities for emancipatory change that destabilises the imperfect present. Put another way, if the status quo is

[82] Benjamín Arditi 2010, 'Populism is Hegemony is Politics? On Ernesto Laclau's *On Populist Reason*', *Constellations*, 17(3), p. 491-93.
[83] Laclau, On Populist Reason, pp. 18, 117, 154
[84] Finchelstein, 'Returning Populism to History', p. 474. See also: Nadia Urbinati 2014, *Democracy Disfigured: Opinion, Truth and the People,* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 27.
[85] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* p. xxiv.
[86] *Ibid*. pp. 133-78.
[87] Marchart, *Post-Foundational Political Thought*, p. 186

revealed as entirely contingent, barriers to its alteration are lowered. The conflation of phenomenon and society in *On Populist Reason* is the product of Laclau's normative priorities being read back into his ontology. The emancipatory agenda that drew Laclau to populism directs his view of it such that he theorises only *insurrectionary* movements and parties.[88] This is evidenced in a parallel publication where he argues that populism is quintessentially 'a radical alternative' that presents 'a choice at the crossroads on which the future of a given society hinges'.[89] The conflation that appears in *On Populist Reason* is less a slippage and more a miscommunication of normative ends and theoretical means. The Essex School is a theory of populism but it is also a theory of change; it 'secretly introduces' the essentialist assumption that populism is an anti-system or irruptive discourse. As previously established, however, contemporary populism presents neither a radical nor transformative intervention in the status quo.

The Essex School expounded in *On Populist Reason* has a number of apparent flaws that relate back to its normative agenda. This agenda is largely unacknowledged in the text,[90] but reading the text back through a partisan lens clarifies each of these three critiques. Regarding the first critique, a leftist who is intent on avoiding the pitfalls of historical Marxism would clearly make a distinction between emancipatory and totalitarian uses of populism. Laclau and Mouffe very clearly stipulate their preference for 'radical and plural democracy' in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy.*[91] They are not seeking to fashion a vanguard philosophy: in fact quite the opposite. Regarding the second critique, a committed leftist has a stake in normalising and generalising populism as a practice that aims to construct a collective identity through which the marginal in society can change the status quo.[92] In terms of the Essex School's radical definition of politics, if progressive change is one's objective, then one would understandably seek to reduce barriers to change both in academia and in the civic space. Regarding the last critique, the Essex School accurately describes pre-modern and some Latin American instantiations of populism. However, its assumption that populism is insurrectionary presents an obstacle to dispassionate analysis in the

[88] Halil Gurhanli 2015, 'Playing the System: Laclau, Oakeshott, and Skeptical Populism', *Telos*, Winter (173), pp. 175-76.
[89] Ernesto Laclau 2005, 'Populism: What's in a Name?' in *Populism and the Mirror of Democracy*, Fransisco Panizza (ed.), London: Verso, p. 48.
[90] Excepting the final two pages. See Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, pp. 249-50.
[91] Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy,* p. 175.
[92] A case made explicitly by Chantal Mouffe in her 2019 book *For a Left Populism*, London: Verso.

contemporary era. In the current milieu, populism is most often reduced to the attainment of limited electoral and redistributive aims.

2.3 Crisis and performance: Adapting populist theory to contemporary populism

The 'emancipatory apriorism' originally written into the Essex School is unsuited to the incremental and systemic nature of contemporary populism. While it might present an ideal theory of what populism once was, the populist discourse outlined by the Essex School is today being used to agitate for far more modest changes in established power structures. Contemporary populists are less concerned with emancipation than they are with democratic augmentation – the incremental and targeted redistribution of power within existing democracies. This subsection presents several concepts from work by Benjamin Moffitt that fit this reality better than Laclau's emancipatory agenda. The following section will demonstrate how Stavrakakis et al. have built on Moffitt's emphasis on failure, crisis performance, and the agency of the populist as a performer – three concepts that better enable it to function as an explanatory theory of contemporary populism.

Populism employs the language of grievance, and for a sense of grievance to arise there first needs to be a deeply rooted sense that the status quo is both flawed and unfair. For that reason, several contemporary scholars emphasise the interrelation between crisis and populism. Benjamin Moffitt, in particular, anchors his approach to populism in Colin Hay's theoretical work on crisis and legitimacy. Hay defined crisis as 'a *moment of decisive intervention*' in which political actors highlight certain conditions and identify them as symptomatic of systemic breakdown, gross injustice, and cause for transformation.[93] For a crisis to be identified, there must first be evidence of '*failure*', which Hay describes as 'an accumulation or condensation of contradictions' between how things are and how things should be.[94] Failure is then arranged into a 'crisis narrative' by political activists intent on bringing about change.[95] Crisis is a product of

[93] Colin Hay 1999, 'Crisis and the structural transformation of the state: interrogating the process of change', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 1(3), p. 323.
[94] *Ibid.* p. 324.
[95] *Ibid.* p. 325.

discourse, in which latent contradictions are narrated and interrelated by certain political agents.

Moffitt characterises populism as a specific form of crisis narration. He notes that, previous to his own work, Laclau was the 'strongest advocate for linking crisis to populism' but notes that while crisis was an important precursor for the Essex School, his own theory is entirely centered on it.[96] Moffitt defines populism as a particular 'performance of crisis' in which 'populist actors actively participate in the "spectacularisation of failure" that underlies crisis, allowing them to pit "the people" against a dangerous other, radically simplify the terms and terrain of political debate and advocate strong leadership and quick political action to stave off or solve the impending crisis'.[97] In this reading, populism is a sub-genre of crisis, one concerned with the victims and the perpetrators of failure. Building on Hay's concept of crisis, Moffitt views populism as a particular '*moment of decisive intervention*' that is defined by the narrative creation of 'the people' who have been betrayed by 'the elite' who are ultimately responsible for the various failures.

In a book-length study of various empirical cases, Moffitt offers a six-step model of the particular way in which populists narrate failure.

> The model of the populist "performance" of crisis is as follows:
>
> 1. Identify failure.
> 2. Elevate to the level of crisis by linking into a wider framework and adding a temporal dimension.
> 3. Frame "the people" vs. those responsible for the crisis.
> 4. Use media to propagate performance.
> 5. Present simple solutions and strong leadership.
> 6. Continue to propagate crisis.[98]

[96] Benjamin Moffitt 2015, 'How to Perform Crisis: A Model for Understanding the Key Role of Crisis in Contemporary Populism', *Government and Opposition*, 50(2), 191. See also Ernesto Laclau 1977, *Politics and Ideology in Marxist Theory*, London: New Left Books, p. 175.
[97] Moffitt, 'How to Perform Crisis, p. 198. Formatting contained in original text.
[98] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 120-21.

Moffitt provides some additional commentary on the critically important second and third steps. Specifically, each of the populists included in his study make use of a 'temporal dimension' and a 'sense of impending doom' in their performance – if the populist solution is not adopted rapidly, the outcome will be catastrophic.[99] Regarding the third step, Moffitt notes that 'the people' 'often remains a vague signifier, reliant on identification of the enemy in order to give meaning to "the people's" identity'.[100] The second and third step, taken together, is the core of "spectacularising" failure: doom, urgency, personification and attribution of blame are key rhetorical strategies employed by the populist.

Moffitt's work is especially reflective of contemporary populism for three reasons. First, by focussing on the material failures that are central to populist discourse, Moffitt avoids the tendency towards symbolic reductionism that plagues some post-structural and post-modern theories. This thesis agrees with Laclau and Mudde and now Moffitt that populism is, at its core, a linguistic phenomenon rather than an empirically definable social movement. However, equally important is the effect created by material inequalities and perceived injustices. Neoliberal populists such as Carlos Menem and revolutionary populists like the Russian *narodniks* presented entirely different demands, but both were responding to systematic failures in their local political economies that gave *salience* to their agenda. Populism is a response to failure or, put another way, it is an epiphenomenon of systematic breakdown. By focusing on the relationship between failure and crisis, Moffitt reminds us that populism never presents baseless demands. For populist logic to work, there must be a widespread perception that the status quo is in urgent need of redress.

Secondly, Moffitt's six-step model emphasises the intentionality and actor agency of populism. This is a deliberate feature of his model and the methodology underpinning it. As Moffitt and Simon Tormey have pointed out, Laclau rejected an inductive approach to populism but 'his deductive account suffers from frustrating vagueness and ends up equating populism with politics, thus losing the analytical utility of the

[99] *Ibid*. pp. 122-23.
[100] Moffitt, 'How to Perform Crisis', pp. 200-201.

concept.'[101] Taking an alternative route, Moffitt's six-step model is based on an inductive analysis of contemporary examples that everyone seems to agree are populist. This inductive analysis focuses on the behavioral patterns of populists, rather than trying to fit populism into an assumed logic of general political action. Consequently, Moffitt and Tormey define their account of populism as a 'political style' rather than a discourse or ideology. A political style is '*the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations*' and the populist model aims to distill 'how *the performances* of those involved influence the relationship between the populist leader and "the people", and *vice versa*.'[102] By using an inductive model that defines populism as the sum total of several specific performance techniques, Moffitt and Tormey highlight the efficacy of this phenomenon.

When we refer to populism, we are really referring to a set of performance techniques that have proven, time and again, to be effective tools for political change.[103] Populists consciously employ these techniques because they work. The six steps that Moffitt describes are a proven method for narrating crisis and creating a sense of social division that precipitates some form of action. This second insight dovetails with the third, which is the recognition in Moffitt's model that 'the people' are an intended *effect*, not the primary subject, of the populist performance. In this regard, the third step in the model presents something of a contradiction. 'The people' are the 'central element that differentiates populism from other political styles'.[104] Yet, this central element is typically rendered in 'vague' terms and negatively rather than positively identified through its relationship with the culpable elite. Populism is a vehicle for the concerns of the performer, and 'the people' are a means to an end. Moffitt's six-step model makes the transactional element of this phenomenon transparent in a way that Laclau's emancipatory theorisation did not. However, as the following section will argue, there

[101] Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey 2014, 'Rethinking Populism: Politics, Mediatisation and Political Style', *Political Studies*, 1(2), p. 390.
[102] *Ibid*. p. 387.
[103] In parts of the thesis I deliberately use the various approaches to populism interchangeably because I do not see populism as just a discourse, ideology, or style. As a complex social phenomenon, it is these descriptors and more besides. For example, populism revolves around the discursive construction/elaboration of new collective identities but these identities are themselves ideas and they are given distinctiveness and a behavioural template for followers to emulate through the political style of the leader(ship). The redefinition of populism offered by this thesis makes reference to populism as a discourse, but this is for the sake of simplicity and also a reflection of the methods used to analyse the EU referendum.
[104] *Ibid*. p. 391.

is still a gap between Moffitt's transactional model and the manner in which contemporary populism has been used in real political economies like Greece and Britain.

3. Anti-populism and the EU referendum

The previous section outlined Laclau and Moffitt's novel theorisations of populism, which have respectively defined the phenomenon as 'discourse' or 'political logic', and a 'political style' or 'repertoire'. This section will outline the two most recent – and most valuable – additions to the Essex School and go on to use this model to identify the gap in existing theorisations of the EU referendum as a populist event. Work by Yannis Stavrakakis, Giorgos Katsambekis and a number of other scholars on the Greek experience with populism has afforded the Essex School the valuable concept of 'anti-populism' and produced a holistic 'choreography' of failure, crisis, populism, anti-populism, and the polarisation of political culture. In subsequent chapters I use this updated model to structure my analysis of the EU referendum.

Anti-populism in the Greek context is an explicit reaction against populist challenges to the received wisdom of the 'governing elites'.[105] If the Greek example is generalisable, anti-populism is an accompaniment to populism wherever it occurs but little work has been done to apply the concept to other, less obviously populist, political cultures. As later chapters will show, I believe anti-populism is generalisable and, at least in the case of the EU referendum, is the dominant component of the Brexit discourse. Moreover, anti-populism is one part of several adjacent concepts. Stavrakakis et al. have incorporated anti-populism and the distinction made by Ngai-Ling and Bob Jessop between 'crises of' and 'crises in' into a five-feature choreography that best captures this thesis's concerns about contemporary populist theory.[106] In focusing on ideology, performance, and discourse, contemporary populism is less concerned with the political reality within which populism takes place. The product of this focus can be seen in the Brexit literature, which focuses on the actions of UKIP and Nigel Farage whilst largely ignoring the discourses deployed by Vote Leave and

[105] Katsambekis, 'The Place Of The People', p. 577.
[106] Stavrakakis et al., 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', pp. 4-27.

Stronger In, the two official referendum organisations. By applying the populist 'choreography' to the EU referendum, this thesis expands on the concept of anti-populism and also makes a contribution to the Brexit literature.

3.1 The Greek division of populism and anti-populism

The previous section illustrated the various ways in which Moffitt has refined populist theory so that it more readily reflects the specific repertoire that contemporary populists use to pursue their comparatively modest demands. Moffitt's six-step model utilises an inductive methodology, highlights the material failures needed to make populism salient, and hints at the transactional motives that might underlie populist performances. Most importantly, his six-step model provides recognisable markers for the evaluation of emerging populist discourses. These are all features that this thesis incorporated into its analysis of the EU referendum – they can be seen applied in both chapters 3 and 4. Nonetheless, this section will argue that Moffitt's transactional model does not go quite far enough when it comes to the identity of the populist performer and their motives.

Moffitt's work focuses on the role of the populist leader as a performer, but not as a potential member of 'the elite'. This is odd because his work indicates the rhetorical power of the populist repertoire, which immediately raises the question: why would only those with a genuine change agenda make use of it? Chapter four of *The Global Rise of Populism* focuses on 'the leader' as 'the figures that ultimately "do" populism.'[107] His performative model also emphasises the 'skill' with which a populist leader needs to balance 'extraordinariness and ordinariness' in their performance, appearing simultaneously relatable and deserving of trust and power.[108] In terms of *realpolitik*, Moffitt notes that certain populist movements – particularly those attached to Italy's Silvio Berlusconi and Australia's Pauline Hanson – appear to serve the career ambitions of their leaders rather than the needs of 'the people'.[109] Lastly, he makes the observation that many populist leaders are 'objectively *not* outsiders when it comes to occupying the halls of power' and their performance is more important in establishing

[107] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 51-2.
[108] *Ibid.* pp. 55-68.
[109] *Ibid.* p. 53.

their outsider status than their personal, institutional, or economic power.[110] All of these allusions bring Moffitt very close to what this thesis sees as the central problem in contemporary populism: specifically, the linkage between the performers of populism and 'the elite'. If the EU referendum is any guide, those who employ the populist repertoire can be ranking members of the actually-existing 'elite', where 'the elite' are taken to be those who wield real institutional, social or economic power. While most populist theory focuses on the linkage between populism and democracy, this thesis is primarily concerned with the *authenticity* of populist demands. In short, do the performers of populism actually want to empower 'the people' whom they invoke?

By adapting and applying Ernesto Laclau's work, the Essex School comes closest to formulating a theoretical response to this concern. Yannis Stavrakakis, Giorgos Katsambekis and a number of other scholars have used Laclau's ideas as a frame for understanding contemporary Greek politics.[111] In order to translate populist theory to Greek event, this collective of authors found it necessary to introduce the category of 'anti-populism' as a placeholder.[112] Katsambekis began this process when he defined anti-populism as 'a distinct discursive repertoire, or even a "political weapon" aiming at the discrediting of disagreement and the marginalisation of "the people" and the democratic dissent'.[113] He added that, in the Greek context, anti-populism is a weapon 'for the governing elites; as a way to discipline a public sphere on the lookout for alternatives'.[114] This formulation uses a similar conceptualisation to Moffitt, viewing its subject as a 'repertoire' and emphasising its rhetorical effects on 'the people'. However, as Katsambekis makes clear, anti-populism is not aimed at creating 'the people', but at dissolving the collective that populists have articulated. Most importantly, the identity of the anti-populist performer is clearly demarcated. Anti-populism is a response to populism that is the exclusive preserve of 'governing elites'.

Anti-populism is an important development in contemporary populist theory because whilst there is no definitive link between identity and authenticity, rendering the former

[110] *Ibid*. p. 53.
[111] Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Frontier', pp. 37-45.
[112] Although it should be noted that the first mention of 'anti-populism' derives from Pierre Ostiguy's 2009 'The high and low in politics: A two-dimensional political space for comparative analysis and political studies' Working Paper # 360, Kellogg Institute.
[113] Katsambekis, 'The Place Of The People', p. 577.
[114] *Ibid.* p. 577.

transparent enhances the precision with which we can evaluate the intended effect of a set of demands. Specifically, anti-populist demands aim at dissolving 'the people' and so disempowering the individuals who mobilised beneath this collective banner. Katsambekis was able to identify this intent because he was drawing on the Greek experience. Greece is a comparatively new democracy, having emerged from dictatorship in 1974. Stavrakakis and Katsambekis charted the development of a two-party system between New Democracy (ND) and the Panhellenic Socialist Movement (PASOK) in the period after 1974 and the gradual convergence of their policy platforms, which triggered a 'latent crisis of representation' from the 1990s onwards.[115] Stavrakakis and Katsambekis argue that this 'crisis of representation' was contemporaneously evident in many other established democracies, but the Greek case is unique because the policy convergence of ND and PASOK was enabled via a 'gradual polarisation along the populism/anti-populism axis'.[116] ND and PASOK, allegedly parties of the centre-right and centre-left respectively, justified their convergence around a neoliberal model of government by defining anyone who opposed their plans as populist agitators and wreckers.

In the Greek context, anti-populism is a moral discourse explicitly introduced by members of the two most powerful political parties in order to quash dissent. PASOK began as a populist and anti-establishment party of government, most strikingly under the leadership of Andreas Papandreaou.[117] However, after a significant scandal and electoral defeat in 1989, the party reconstituted itself around an anti-populist agenda.[118] On the other hand, Costas Karamanlis, the head of ND and prime minister of Greece from 2004 to 2009, identified his agenda as the 'middle ground' and opposed it to the 'constitutive outside' of 'populism'.[119] Due to the efforts of PASOK and ND, the term populism has become a central referent in Greek political discourse. As a bogeyman, it justifies other policies that the political elite wishes to present as the 'middle ground' or continuance of the status quo. In the period since PASOK's internal reformation the term has been laden with exclusively negative connotations. Stavrakakis notes that Greek anti-populism 'generates its own caricature of the populist "enemy" in

[115] Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Frontier', p. 17.
[116] *Ibid.* p. 41.
[117] *Ibid.* p. 40.
[118] *Ibid.* p. 41.
[119] Katsambekis, 'The Place Of The People', pp. 562-63.

dehumanising terms' and brands the bearers of the caricature with the characteristics of '*abnormality, monstrosity, irrationality*, and even *paranoia'*.[120] Due to the concerted efforts of both PASOK and ND, Greek opposition to populism has reached extreme levels of antipathy.

The austerity politics inaugurated by the Global Financial Crisis further exacerbated Greek anti-populism. Ioannis Andreadis and Stavrakakis argue that the introduction of severe budget cutbacks from 2010 onwards re-activated the existing populist/anti-populist 'cleavage' in Greek politics.[121] During this period of 'failure' and 'dislocation', new populist movements rose up to contest ND and PASOK: the Coalition of the Radical Left (SYRIZA), Independent Greeks (ANEL) and the grassroots *aganaktismenoi* movement.[122] Stavrakakis identifies the re-emergence of populism as the point at which the 'normalising discourses' used by PASOK, ND, and the media to justify neoliberal and austerity policies were 'also radicalised'.[123] The followers of SYRIZA, ANEL and the *aganaktismenoi* were rendered as abnormal, villainous, and inhuman by those they critiqued. For example, the ND Minister of Development and Competitiveness declared that 'populism is the greatest enemy of Greece' and the ex-politician Anna Diamantopoulou described populism as a 'monster' that 'must be crushed for good'.[124] Other public figures described populists as 'cave men', 'Neanderthals', and the opponents of 'the forces of reason'.[125] To adequately describe Greek politics, therefore, one must introduce the concept of anti-populism. Virulent rejection of populism and 'the people' who are invoked by populist discourse is a leitmotif of Greek discourse and one of the primary ways in which the political establishment tries to contain crisis.

[120] Yannis Stavrakakis 2018, 'Paradoxes of Polarization: Democracy's Inherent Division and the (Anti) Populist Challenge', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(1), p. 53.
[121] Ioannis Andreadis and Yannis Stavrakakis 2017, 'European Populist Parties in Government: How Well are Voters Represented? Evidence from Greece', *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), pp. 485–508.
[122] Stavrakakis et al. 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Frontier', pp. 42-7.
[123] Stavrakakis, 'Paradoxes of Polarization', p. 53.
[124] *Ibid*. p. 53.
[125] Yannis Stavrakakis 2014, 'The Return of "the People": Populism and Anti-Populism in the Shadow of the European Crisis, *Constellations*, 21(4), pp. 509-10.

3.2 The 'choreography' of populism and anti-populism

The anti-populism displayed in Greece is hard to generalise to other incidences of populism but it does provide a placeholder for the kind of discourse that might be used against populist mobilisations by 'the elite'. Contemporary Greece features a unique set of conditions for the study of populism that demanded the development of a concept like anti-populism. Populism is a prominent phenomenon in its recent history; the rejection of 'the people' is central to the self-legitimisation of its major political parties; and Greece experienced perhaps the worst of the Global Financial Crisis in Europe having, for many years, been effectively governed from Brussels via the 'troika' of the European Commission, the European Central Bank, and the International Monetary Fund.[126] Under these unique conditions, Stavrakakis, Katesmbakis and other Greek scholars found it necessary to postulate a five-feature[127] 'choreography' of populism that encompasses failure, crisis, populism, and anti-populism.

The five-feature 'choreography' reflects the Essex School's extended engagement with critique, Moffitt's performative model, and the Greek experience.

In formal terms, this choreography could be presented as follows:

> 1. A deep economic and/or social dislocation is the necessary and yet insufficient starting point.
> 2. When this dislocation is identified and highlighted as a "crisis", it is often narrated in ways blaming particular causes and their agents at the level of representation (populists typically blame the "establishment").
> 3. Simultaneously, a platform is articulated "in the name of the people" to defend the victims of the crisis (the excluded, the impoverished, the underdog, the many).
> 4. This articulation triggers an anti-populist reaction (which is, very often, the

[126] Joseph Lekakis and Maria Kousis 2013, 'Economic Crisis, Troika and the Environment in Greece', *South European Society & Politics*, 18(3), pp. 305-31; Anna Visvizi 2014, 'From Grexit to Grecovery: The Paradox of the Troika's Engagement with Greece', *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, 15(3), pp. 335-45.

[127] I use the term 'feature' for two reasons: firstly, to distinguish this 'choreography' from the steps of Moffitt's model; and, secondly, because the 'choreography' is not a linear series of events – Stavrakakis et al. present it as merely an assembly of elements rather than an ordered sequence.

one designating as 'populist' those claiming to speak on behalf of "the people").
5. Both discourses emerging (populist and anti-populist) can, in principle, acquire a left-wing (inclusionary, egalitarian, participatory) or right-wing profile (exclusionary, elitist) and both employ simplification and demonization, often leading to the establishment of a polarized political culture.[128]

As mentioned, this choreography is formulated from the overarching perspective of Laclau's work, albeit extensively altered in light of Greek politics and subsequent developments in populist theory. Moffitt's six-step model can be seen incorporated into the first three features of this choreography. Stavrakakis et al. broadly agreed with Moffitt's work and attempted to show that emphasis on crisis and performance was already present in *On Populist Reason*.[129] More substantively, they highlighted the need to expand the concept of crisis in light of the contested and antagonistic manner in which political discourse operates. They argued that wherever a populist discourse takes form there are always other political actors waiting to perform their own version of crisis and advance non-populist agendas.[130] In a society grappling with material failures, 'It is never only one political force that is engaged in the aforementioned hegemonic play, a single force performing – within a socio-political vacuum – its solipsistic staging of the crisis.'[131] Consequently, Colin Hay's definition of crisis requires some additional notations to reflect the fact that different actors will be seeking to make decisive interventions in service of different aims.

Stavrakakis et al. introduce work by Ngai-Ling Sum and Bob Jessop to describe two broad categories of crisis performance that can occur during periods of social upheaval. Sum and Jessop, in their book-length study of austerity and political economy, noticed that when dealing with a systemic breakdown, a 'useful distinction is that between crises *in* a given social configuration and crises *of* that configuration.'[132] They went on to stipulate that 'Crises "*in*" occur within the parameters of a given set of natural and social arrangements. They are typically associated with routine forms of crisis

[128] Stavrakakis et al.,'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 22.
[129] *Ibid.* pp. 9-13.
[130] *Ibid.* p. 5.
[131] *Ibid.* p. 13.
[132] Ngai-Ling Sum and Bob Jessop 2013, *Towards a Cultural Political Economy : Putting Culture in Its Place in Political Economy*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Pub. Ltd, p. 398.

management' whereas 'Crises "*of*" a system are less common. They occur when there is a crisis of crisis management (i.e., normal responses no longer work) and efforts to defer or displace crises encounter growing resistance'.[133] Whenever material failures occur, there are two paths that the performance of crisis can take. Either failure is the result of misalignment within an otherwise functional system or it is the result of a system that is no longer fit for purpose due to corruption, obsolescence, or poor leadership by 'the elite'.

Sum and Jessop acknowledged that the diagnosis of crisis *in* versus crisis *of* is not a predetermined or objective occurrence. Rather, 'crisis does not come pre-interpreted but is often profoundly disorienting, creating space for alternative, often contested, construals and crisis responses, with different subjects likely to adopt different stances'.[134] Stavrakakis et al. appropriate this definition directly into their 'choreography' of populism. They note that populist 'contenders usually portray the crisis as an internal "crisis of" the previously hegemonic status quo', whilst 'established forces can only represent the crisis as a "crisis in" the system, attributing the difficulties encountered in its management to predominantly "external" factors such as, for example, the kinds of people who are mobilised by populist discourse'.[135] In short, referring back to the 'choreography' of populism, the first feature – failure – introduces the second feature, a new site of political contest regarding its diagnosis and possible resolution. Multiple actors will seek to perform their own version of the crisis, each pointing at different causes and citing different authorities. Populist actors will engage in feature three, which is performing a crisis *of* the status quo so severe that 'the people' need to be empowered in order to reconstitute a functional system. Anti-populist actors will contribute feature four to the composition; they will seek to present the failures as a mere crisis *in* the status quo. In Greece, anti-populists presented austerity as the corrective and populists as those preventing its application.

The development of anti-populism and the fifth feature of the 'choreography' are especially important additions to the Essex School of populism. Anti-populism partially rectifies Laclau's focus on emancipatory performances of crisis, and brings his

[133] *Ibid.* p. 398.
[134] *Ibid.* p. 396.
[135] Stavrakakis et al., 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 14.

deductive theory more in line with the messy and ambiguous terrain in which everyday politics is negotiated. The fifth feature of the 'choreography' introduces the concepts of inclusionary and exclusionary – or for want of better words, good and bad – forms of populism, and also hints at the connection between a discrete period of crisis and the long-term effects it might have on a country's political culture. However, while these developments are both positive, there are still areas for improvement. In the first case, anti-populism remains an under-theorised phenomenon outside of Greece. This is an issue that Stavrakakis has raised repeatedly throughout his work, for example acknowledging that, beyond Greece's populist political culture, 'given that very few political forces self-identify as "populist", there is a huge need to also study anti-populism and incorporate this inquiry into the study of populism proper'.[136] Secondly, the effects of populism/anti-populism on *democratic* political culture have not been adequately explored. The emphasis on the relative inclusivity of populism, while useful, also avoids the interrelation between 'the demos' and 'the people'. In light of the historiography of populism this is understandable but, as the subsequent analysis of the EU referendum will illustrate, the inextricable connection between democracy and populism does not disappear through avoidance.

3.3 Applying populist theory to the EU referendum

This thesis contributes to closing the gap identified by Stavrakakis et al., using the different insights from the discursive, stylistic and ideological schools of populism. It also, necessarily, supplements this framework with the context and history that gave rise to the EU referendum. The following chapter will chart the populist/anti-populist divide in the context of Britain, a country with less obvious connections to populism than Greece. The notions of populism and anti-populism will be applied to the Brexit discourse in chapter 3 and 4. Finally, the thesis offers a reconceptualisation of populism that prevents misclassification of anti-populist performances as populist. These contributions will be outlined in greater detail in the following chapter. More immediately, this thesis also closes a gap in the academic literature specific to the EU referendum by applying the Essex School to Brexit.

[136] Yannis Stavrakakis 2018, 'Populism, Anti-Populism and Democracy', *Political Insight*. 9(3), p. 33. See also: Stavrakakis et al., 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Frontier', p. 39; Stavrakakis et al., 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 15.

As discussed in the Introduction, populism is both an indispensable descriptor for, and an under-theorised element of, the EU referendum. Scholarship frequently describes the EU referendum as populist in nature, but rarely analyses this attribution on its own terms. Populist theory is raised on occasion; these remarks hew to the ideological and rhetorical approaches to populism. The Essex School is absent from the emergent works on Brexit. This view is based on a survey of 120 academic works published in the past four years that are primarily concerned with the EU referendum itself.[137] 75 of these articles – 63 per cent – describe the EU referendum as populist. However, 61 of this number make only brief mention of populism, either as a synonym or to make analogies to other comparable phenomena. These articles link the EU referendum to populism through three general methods.

Firstly, Brexit is analogised to the Trump presidency and other European populist parties. Eleonora Alabrese et al., for example, argue that 'Populism has been on the rise across Europe and the United States in recent years, culminating in the election of Donald Trump as US President and the Brexit vote in the 2016 EU referendum.'[138] These analogies rely on pre-existing scholarship that characterises UKIP as a populist, right wing and anti-Europe party.[139] They also tend to position populism as a performance by focussing on the behaviour of contemporary populist leaders. Other scholars draw parallels between Nigel Farage, as the leader of the UKIP, and 'right-wing populist politicians across Europe (Le Pen, Wilders, Orban, Petry) and beyond (Trump) who inspire popular revolt by manipulating the media and appealing as much to emotion as to reason.'[140] Such references are reliant on UKIP and Nigel Farage in

[137] This sample includes those peer-reviewed sources that make use of or appear when the keywords 'Brexit' or 'EU referendum' are searched in university databases.
[138] Matthew Goodwin and Caitlin Milazzo 2017, 'Taking back control? Investigating the role of immigration in the 2016 vote for Brexit', *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 19(3) pp. 450-464. See also: Aida and True, 'Brexit as a scandal'; Nathan Gardels 2016, 'The Era of Post-Party Politics: New Institutions That Embrace Participation Without Populism', *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 4(2), pp. 2-7.
[139] Samuel Bennett 2020, '"Crisis" as a Discursive Strategy in Brexit Referendum Campaigns', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 16(4), pp. 449–64; Andreouli, 'Constructions of Europe', pp. 241-59; Bell, 'Brexit and the Illusion of Democracy', pp. 52-73.
[140] Neil Ewen, 'The age of Nigel: Farage, the media, and Brexit' in Daniel Jackson, Daniel, Einar Thorsen and Dominic Wring (eds.) 2016, *EU Referendum Analysis 2016: Media, Voters and the Campaign*, The Centre for the Study of Journalism, Culture and Community Bournemouth University. See also: Vivien Schmidt 2017, 'Britain-out and Trump-in: a discursive institutionalist analysis of the British referendum on the EU and the US presidential election', *Review of International Political Economy*, 24(2), pp. 248-69; Eleni Andreouli, Katy Greenland and Lia Figgou 2020, 'Lay Discourses

particular, repeating the fallacy that UKIP was the central player in the EU referendum itself.

Secondly and thirdly, populism is used in the literature as shorthand for angry rhetoric and the heated rejection of migration, neoliberalism, austerity, and multiculturalism. Jeremy Collins refers to the 'affective, populist news and information found in current media channels' during the EU referendum in contradistinction to 'truth' and measured discourse.[141] Other scholars use terms like 'growing chorus of disenchantment', 'anti-establishment rhetoric' and 'genuine popular grievances' to describe the medium of populism.[142] The content of this angry rhetoric is variously described as 'right-wing', 'nationalist', 'anti-immigration', 'illiberal', 'far right', 'protectionist' and motivated by a hatred of the 'elites', among a lexicon of similar terms.[143] These examples demonstrate how the academic literature on the EU referendum blends the ideological and the political style approaches to populism into something of a hybrid definition.[144] In short, the Brexit literature combines 'populism' as an ideology and 'discourse' as rhetoric so that populism becomes a specific language expressing anger against 'the elite'. These characterisations revolve around UKIP and its leader.

The problems in this consensus are twofold. Firstly, by focusing on UKIP as a populist political party and Farage as a populist performer the literature is fixating on actors that were critical precipitants to the EU referendum but not central participants. As the following chapter will point out, the Conservative and Labour parties were the chief orchestrators of the referendum. Secondly, by omitting the Essex School, the Brexit

about Brexit and Prejudice: "Ideological Creativity" and Its Limits in Brexit Debates', European Journal of Social Psychology, DOI: 10.1002/ejsp.2625.

[141] Jeremy Collins 2019, '"The Facts Don't Work": The EU Referendum Campaign and the Journalistic Construction of "Post-Truth Politics"', *Discourse, Context & Media* 27(March), pp. 15-21.

[142] Heikki Patomäki 2017, 'Will the EU Disintegrate? What Does the Likely Possibility of Disintegration Tell About the Future of the World?', *Globalizations*, 14(1), pp. 168-77; Liubomir Topaloff 2017, 'The Rise of Referendums: Elite Strategy or Populist Weapon?', *Journal of Democracy*, 3(1), pp. 127-29.

[143] Balch and Balabanova, 'A deadly cocktail?', pp. 236-255; Calhoun, 'Brexit Is a Mutiny Against the Cosmopolitan Elite', pp. 50-58; Walter, 'Better off without you?', pp. 210-232.

[144] Laurent Bernhard and Hans Kriesi 2019, 'Populism in election times: a comparative analysis of 11 countries in Western Europe', *West European Politics*, 42(6), p. 1189; Iakhnis et al., 'Populist Referendum', p. 5; Mark Elchardus and Bram Spruyt 2016, 'Populism, persistent republicanism and declinism: an empirical analysis of populism as a thin ideology', *Government and Opposition*, 51(1), pp. 111-33; Corbett and Walker, 'European Social Policy and Society after Brexit', p. 87; Kirk Hawkins 2009, 'Is Chávez populist? Measuring populist discourse in comparative perspective', *Comparative Political Studies*, 42(8), p. 1043.

literature forgoes the holism that was evident in Laclau' original work, which linked the populist discourse to the discursive construction of society, and has been rendered even more evident in the populist/anti-populist 'choreography'. The theory contained in Laclau's original work, whilst thought provoking, contained methodological flaws. But, viewed as an ongoing tradition of populist thought, the Essex School of today has much to offer the field. The Essex School in its current form is the only contemporary approach that captures the epiphenomenal nature of populism. Populism is a reaction that takes place within a society in trouble. The reactive populist speedily and inevitably triggers a counter-reaction from the most powerful members of society, and there is nothing to prevent that rejoinder from *appropriating the populist style* in service of the status quo. As the remainder of this thesis will make clear, that is precisely what happened in the EU referendum. However, any analysis of the EU referendum should not be restricted arbitrarily to the Essex School; as much as possible, this thesis supplements its analysis with concepts borrowed from the ideology and stylistic approaches, as well as the critically important contextualism outlined in Chapter 2.

Conclusion

Populism originated at the end of the nineteenth century as a bold, radical and potentially dangerous rejection of crony capitalism and limited democracy. Contemporary populists are less radical in their demands for resolution to perceived failures, injustices, and betrayals. This chapter outlined the empirical pluralism of the various movements we today call populist and the broad historical convergence of their ambitions.

The first section categorised movements from France, Russia, America, Latin America and Europe into the pre-modern, modern, and contemporary epochs of populism. The second section elaborated on the ideological, discursive, and performative 'turns' in populist theory. These three approaches reject the normative and empirical approaches of previous scholarship and instead focus on the linguistic and symbolic meanings that populists use to effect change. In particular, the section provided a deep-dive into the Essex School of populism, as the approach that most directly inform this thesis' analysis of the EU referendum. The third section outlined several new additions to the Essex School in the form of anti-populism, crisis, and an overarching 'choreography' of

populism, which, this thesis argues, has much to offer the academic literature on the EU referendum.

The updated Essex School provides a partial corrective to the trend in contemporary populist theory whereby the exclusive focus on rhetoric that embodies 'the people' simultaneously *disembodies* the phenomenon, such that performance and rhetoric replaces the material conditions and power relations underpinning the language. In part, this tendency in contemporary theory is a rejection of previous approaches to populism that reflexively condemned it as anti-democratic and destructive. It also reflects the plurality of contemporary populism and the historical reality that populism often speaks in an outraged and antagonistic manner in service of incremental and electoral aims. On the other hand, theorists like Cas Mudde and Benjamin Moffitt provide excellent models for appraising populism as a 'thin' set of ideas and a particular performative 'repertoire' that should be included in the scope of any populist study.

Populism is a multifaceted and embedded phenomenon. On paper it reacts to injustice and chases democracy, but in practice it can be made to serve other aims. The 'elite' of a given society have significant motivation to engage in populist performances either for career advancement or to counter genuinely grassroots insurrections. They also have the greatest institutional power to co-opt popular sentiment. This blind spot in contemporary populist theory can be seen in a body of literature that labels the EU referendum 'populist' based on the performances of a marginal single-issue party. The same blind spot was evident in Ernesto Laclau's original formulation of the Essex School. The emancipatory agenda evident in *On Populist Reason* introduced an inability to theorise populism as a phenomenon that occurs within an existing political system experiencing a high degree of failure and pressure. The actions of 'the elite' are silent in this theory, even though 'the elite' are the indispensible class in the construction of 'the people'. This is why the concepts of anti-populism, crisis 'in' and crisis 'of', and a multi-sided interplay of political forces are critical additions to the Essex School. They provide the conceptual resources necessary for grappling with an event as complex as the EU referendum, in which different parts of the same parliamentary elite performed as populists and anti-populists.

The following chapter will survey the existing literature on British populism and use

historical examples to expand upon the notions of ‘democratic augmentation’ and populism/anti-populism that this chapter has introduced. Chapters 3 and 4 will use Benjamin Moffitt’s six-step model to identify the populist and anti-populist elements of the EU referendum. Chapters 5 and 6 will then provide more evidence from the Brexit discourse to argue that populism is more than a political style or a thin ideology relating to good and bad identities. It is also, necessarily, committed to the democratisation of relations between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’. Otherwise, one runs the risk of mislabeling sophisticated anti-populist discourses as populist.

Chapter 2

Populism in the British parliamentary system

Populism is a simple idea that becomes exponentially more complex when applied to an existing political system. This is particularly so in a modern electoral system where 'the people' are already represented by an ecosystem of political parties that in theory balance diversity and mass self-rule, but more commonly create a professional cadre of politicians that has an incentive to minimise the role of the public in everyday politics.[1] Under these circumstances, authentic populists must compete with a political elite that can co-opt populist discourses for their own ends. In response to the problem of populist authenticity, this thesis proposes that populism is a specific type of discourse that is committed to democratic augmentation. Populists aim to increase the constituent power, or freedom of action, possessed by 'the people'. Any discourse that fails this test should not be considered an example of populism, regardless how populist it might appear.

The previous chapter described populism as an empirical phenomenon and a subject of political theory. This chapter applies that framework to the British context. In so doing, it uncovers some of the shortcomings in existing populist theory, which conceives of populism as a discourse, set of ideas or performative repertoire but omits mention of praxis. Put another way, this chapter argues that contemporary populist theory lacks a criterion for gauging whether populist rhetoric would actually translate into a populist outcome if put into practice. Populism is a flexible set of ideas, an effective method of communicating politically, and a discourse that arises during times of crisis. All of these qualities lend populism to opportunistic use and demand that political theory be able to differentiate "serious" populists from ventriloquists who have no interest in implementing the democratic vision of populism. In this chapter I suggest constituent power as an additional and previously untheorised component of populism that facilitates the identification of authentic populists. Populists aim to augment democracy by increasing the constituent power of 'the people'.

[1] Hannah Arendt 1965, *On Revolution*, New York: The Viking Press, p. 277.

The first section of this chapter traces British populism from UKIP to the major political parties and the general populous. UKIP is best understood as a 'Eurosceptic' party that gradually developed a populist presentation to aid in its electoral goals.[2] Euroscepticism is a regional phenomenon that ranges from a critical stance on the deepening integration of the EU through to an outright objection to membership of the EU. Britain, in particular, has a highly Eurosceptic 'political economy' in which a plurality of voters, political parties and civil society organisations express either hard or soft aversion to the EU.[3] The structural nature of British Euroscepticism also sustains a particular genre of 'elite Euroscepticism' in which various British Prime Ministers – from Labour's Harold Wilson and the Conservative's Margaret Thatcher to (more recently) Tony Blair and David Cameron – have voiced criticism towards Europe and initiated referendums on membership but done little else to translate their words into action.

The second section of this chapter compares the curious case of 'elite Euroscepticism' with Britain's history of parliamentary democratisation. Comparing the actions of contemporary politicians with populist movements such as the Levellers, Chartists and Suffragettes reveals the insincerity of the former group. The early populist movements were motivated by the injustices of disenfranchisement; British governments have acted pragmatically on the European question to win elections and maintain party cohesion. The third section proposes that a commitment to democratic augmentation should act as a criterion for differentiating between genuine and faux populist performances. Borrowing from Mark Wenman and Hannah Arendt, I define democratic augmentation as any reform that increases the *constituent power* – the freedom of action – of 'the people'.[4] Democratic augmentation is a fitting measure of authenticity because astute anti-populists can adopt the rhetoric of populism and use it to preserve their power and the status quo. True populists, on the other hand, deliver power to 'the people'.[5]

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[2] Tim Bale 2017, 'Who leads and who follows? The symbiotic relationship between UKIP and the Conservatives – and populism and Euroscepticism', *Politics*, 38(3), p. 267.
[3] Chris Gilford 2016, 'The United Kingdom's Eurosceptic political economy', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations,* 18(4), pp. 779-94.
[4] Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, pp. 5-13.
[5] Whether that power transference – the empowerment of 'the people' in an ongoing fashion – leads to good outcomes in society is a separate, secondary, issue. The primary issue is to ascertain whether that transfer would occur at all, or whether it is merely a simulacrum created by a discourse that is actually intended to secure or extend the power of 'the elite'.

The chapter concludes by noting that this reconceptualisation of populism is complementary with Moffitt's six-step model and the Essex School's 'choreography' of populism, two ways of thinking about populism that were introduced previously. Moffitt's model deals with the repertoire that identifies a populist performance. Part 2 of the thesis will use his six features alongside the populist 'choreography' to deconstruct the Vote Leave and Remain discourses, evaluating the similarities and differences that render one superficially populist and the other anti-populist. Part 3 will draw on constituent power and the relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite' to demonstrate why Vote Leave should be categorised as *populism without 'the people'* – a sophisticated form of anti-populism that serves 'the elite' rather than 'the people'.

1. Euroscepticism: Contemporary British populism

A general theme that emerged in the preceding chapter is the tendency for populist theory to focus on populism as a discrete phenomenon rather than the epiphenomenon of a wider political system that is undergoing severe crisis. This section reverses that tendency insofar as it applies to Brexit and populism by placing Euroscepticism into the context of British party politics. It outlines the transformation of UKIP from a single-issue party to a thoroughgoing 'populist' party under Nigel Farage's leadership. Farage broadened the policy platform of UKIP and encouraged the adoption of a more populist repertoire. However, the relative success of UKIP was contingent upon a series of domestic and regional policy failures and the structural nature of Euroscepticism in British politics.

Euroscepticism is the 'thickening' ideology that adds specific content to the populism of Brexit. Prior to the referendum, it was used to describe the central concern of UKIP as well as the general hostility expressed by British people and politicians towards Europe.[6] Oliver Daddow argues that 'Euroscepticism has become a permanent feature of the political landscape' in modern Britain, with a general 'hardening' in sentiment since the 1992 Treaty of Maastricht.[7] Shifting focus from UKIP to the wider British

[6] Menno Spiering 2015, *A Cultural History of British Euroscepticism*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 74-77.
[7] Oliver Daddow 2013, 'Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair and the Eurosceptic Tradition in Britain', *The*

antipathy towards Europe implicates the two major parties – Labour and Conservative – of the parliamentary system and highlights the populist logic that various politicians have employed in order to manage Euroscepticism without acting upon it. The section concludes that British Euroscepticism reinforces the need for discernment between populist performance and populist action because, whilst many a member of government has engaged in the former with regard to Europe, few have taken steps to implement their professed convictions.

1.1 The role of UKIP in British politics

UKIP is the ubiquitous referent of the populism that led to the EU referendum. It is either presented as the key agent precipitating Brexit or conflated with Vote Leave, the official campaign group arguing for British exit.[8] This tendency is especially apparent in media coverage and comparative studies that juxtapose the referendum with other anti-EU and illiberal movements. These comparisons paint UKIP as the proponent of a 'right-wing' and 'nationalist' populism that defines the people in opposition to the 'cosmopolitan' elite.[9] Associated rhetoric is denounced as 'xenophobic', 'uncivil', 'post-truth' and 'racist'.[10] This section argues that these statements are correct, but focussing on UKIP as the sole populist actor in Brexit – or in Britain – is misleading.

By treating UKIP – a small, single-issue party with minimal parliamentary impact and no official status in the referendum – as the touchstone of British populism, the existing literature sublimates the larger and more systemic role that populist performance played in Brexit and also in developing the Westminster system of government more broadly. As the remainder of this chapter will outline, it was the political elites at the heart of the Westminster system that traded in Euroscepticism, a popular 'thickening' ideology

British Journal of Politics & International Relation, 5(2), p. 217.

[8] Blassnig et al., 'Populism and Informal Fallacies', pp. 114-15; Kevin Durrheim, Mukadder Okuyan, Michelle Sinayobye Twali, Efrain Garcia-Sanchez, Adrienne Pereira, Jennie Sofia Portice, Tamar Gur, Ori Wiener-Blotner, and Tina F. Keil 2019, 'How Racism Discourse Can Mobilize Right-Wing Populism: The Construction of Identity and Alliance in Reactions to UKIP's Brexit 'Breaking Point' Campaign', *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology*, 28(6), pp. 385-405.

[9] Bogdanor, 'Europe and the Sovereignty of the People', p. 350; Freeden, 'After the Brexit Referendum', pp. 1-10; Corbett and Walker, 'European Social Policy and Society after Brexit', pp. 87-8; Idakhnis et al., 'Populist Referendum', p. 5.

[10] Berman, 'Brexit, Immigration, and Populism', p. 188; Schmidt, 'Britain-out and Trump-in', p. 249; Durrheim et al., 'How Racism Discourse Can Mobilize Right-Wing Populism', p. 401.

of populism in Britain. The same elites also set in motion the EU referendum to retain control over the House of Commons and then presented both sides of the official referendum discourse. They triggered Article 50 and tried to leverage the issue for electoral advantage in two general elections. The remainder of this sub-section will outline the role of UKIP within British politics, demarcating it as a party that grew from a single-issue lobby group into a 'populist' organisation with popular support.

At the risk of conflating two separate terms, UKIP has not always been a populist party or a particularly popular electoral contender. Simon Usherwood notes that the party is 'often rolled in with other European populist parties' but it has 'grown into that definition from its roots as a single-issue party'.[11] For instance, Paul Taggart's early work on right-wing populism in Europe make no mention whatsoever of UKIP.[12] At the time he was writing, UKIP, which was founded in 1993 as a reimagined form of the Anti-Federalist League, was a somewhat eccentric club lacking influence and cachet. As a strictly single-issue party, UKIP received limited domestic support at the polls and ironically needed to rely on the 'second-order' voting effect and resources of the EU's European Parliament to build its party base.[13] It polled a meager 1.5 per cent in the 2001 British general election and 3 per cent in 2010. In the intervening period, however, it consistently garnered 16 per cent of the vote in 2004 and 2009 for European Parliamentary elections.[14] In 2014, UKIP won the European Parliamentary elections outright, garnering 27.5 per cent of the vote.[15] The following year it gained 3.8 million votes in the British general election, retained one MP in Westminster, and received dues from a record 47,000 members.[16] UKIP's rise is a story of two cities, with Brussels being indispensable to their eventual success in London.

UKIP's ability to translate a second-order voting effect into influence over the primary forum of Westminster has been linked to two factors. Firstly, the party's political style adapted over time to incorporate more populist language. Nigel Farage was elected the

[11] Usherwood, 'Shooting the fox?', p. 1211.
[12] Taggart, 'New Populist Parties in Western Europe', p. 45.
[13] Henry Farrell and Abraham Newman 2017, 'Brexit, voice and loyalty: rethinking electoral politics in an age of interdependence, *Review of International Political Economy*, 24(2), p. 236.
[14] Clarke et al., *Brexit,* p. 87.
[15] Farrell and Newman, 'Brexit, voice and loyalty', pp. 2-3.
[16] Ceri Hughes 2019, 'It's the EU immigrants stupid! UKIP's core-issue and the populist rhetoric on the road to Brexit', *European Journal of Communication,* 34(3), pp. 249-51.

leader of UKIP in September 2006 and, Tim Bale writes, 'attempted simultaneously to move UKIP beyond its roots as a single-issue, anti-EU party and to make a deliberate populist play for voters alienated by [David] Cameron'.[17] Under Farage, UKIP adopted a suite of policy issues that appealed to traditional Conservative Party voters, including the contentious issue of migration controls that proved a pivotal issue for Leave voters in the EU referendum.[18] This platform was presented via 'an inclusive rhetorical approach, grounded in classic populist tropes of common sense and external threat'.[19] Bale traces this populist style in the language of UKIP's various election manifestos, particularly the 'straight talking' 2010 version titled *Empowering the People* and the hectoring *Believe in Britain* from 2015.[20] Farage added the populist mannerisms that Moffitt describes in his six-step model to the way UKIP sells its message.

Elite failure is the second factor affecting UKIP's style and popularity. The 2009 parliamentary expenses scandal significantly impacted public trust in the entire parliamentary class, and has been linked to UKIP's increased vote share in subsequent elections.[21] As mentioned in the Introduction of this thesis, Clarke et al. noticed a correlation between growing UKIP support amongst UK voters, the imposition of austerity policies, and the failure of the government to deliver on various immigration reduction promises.[22] Without historically high migration, the Eurozone crisis, the expenses scandal, and George Osbourne's 2010 austerity budget, UKIP might not have made inroads in domestic elections. Through a confluence of factors including deliberate performance and a series of policy issues that exacerbated the tension between mainstream politicians and their constituents, UKIP transitioned from a niche party to a populist party in the British electoral system. As Bale puts it, UKIP 'should

[17] Bale, 'Who leads and who follows?', p. 267.
[18] James Dennison and Matthew Goodwin 2015, 'Immigration, Issue Ownership and the Rise of UKIP', *Parliamentary Affairs* 68(1), pp. 168-187; Andrew Geddes 2014, 'The EU, UKIP and the Politics of Immigration in Britain', *The Political Quarterly*, 85(3), pp. 289-295; Hobolt 2016, 'The Brexit vote', pp. 1263-66.
[19] Usherwood, 'Shooting the fox?', p. 1213.
[20] Bale, 'Who leads and who follows?', p. 269. See also: Matthjis Rooduijn, Sarah de Lange and Wouter van der Brug 2012, 'A populist Zeitgeist: Programmatic contagion by populist parties in Western Europe', *Party Politics*, 20(4), pp. 563-75.
[21] Richard Whitaker and Philip Lynch 2011, 'Explaining support for the UK Independence Party at the 2009 European Parliament elections', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 21(3), pp. 359-380. The parliamentary expenses scandal, in brief, was based on systematic misuse of several parliamentary allowances by MPs between 2004 and 2008. This information was leaked to the press and ultimately led to a public inquiry, numerous resignations, and several criminal convictions for fraudulent behavior.
[22] Clarke et al, *Brexit'*, pp. 112-45.

be seen not as a populist party that turned anti-European but as an anti-European party that became increasingly populist.'[23] Perhaps more important than either of these factors, however, is the issue of anti-Europeanism itself. UKIP's central issue – the rejection of the European project – is a longstanding structural divide within British politics, and one that became increasingly salient among voters in the past three decades.

1.2 Euroscepticism: A perennial issue in Britain

Under Nigel Farage's leadership, UKIP adopted a deliberately populist style. Nevertheless, it is also a single-issue party that acquired popularity at a time when major political parties were only paying lip service to the 'hardening' of Euroscepticism in the UK. Paul Taggart, in his earlier work, defined Euroscepticism as 'the idea of contingent or qualified opposition, as well as incorporating outright and unqualified opposition to the process of European integration'.[24] In later work, he and Aleks Szczerbiak expanded on this definition by noting that 'soft' Euroscepticism 'involves contingent or qualified opposition to European integration', while 'hard' Euroscepticism 'implies outright rejection of the entire project of European political and economic integration, and opposition to one's country joining or remaining a member of the EU'.[25] Britain's general disposition towards Europe has always been troubled, but in recent decades British politics has increasingly tended towards 'hard' Euroscepticism.

Euroscepticism is a perennial feature of Britain's relationship with Europe, and one that has grown more prominent over time. Anthony Foster argues that there have been three sequential eras of British Euroscepticism: the period leading up to the 1975 EU referendum, Margaret Thatcher's time in office, and the period after the Maastricht Treaty of 1992.[26] In the latter period since Maastricht, there has been a general

[23] Bale, 'Who leads and who follows?', p. 269.
[24] Paul Taggart 1998, 'A touchstone of dissent: Euroscepticism in contemporary Western European party systems', *European Journal of Political Research*, 33(3), p. 366.
[25] Paul Taggart and Aleks Szczerbiak 2004, 'Contemporary Euroscepticism in the party systems of the European Union candidate states of Central and Eastern Europe', *European Journal of Political Research* 43(1), pp. 1-27.
[26] Anthony Foster 2002, *Euroscepticism in Contemporary British Politics: Opposition to Europe in the British Conservative and Labour Parties since 1945*, London: Routledge. The Maastricht Treaty

'hardening' in Euroscepticism across many European countries, as expressed by the spread of anti-EU political parties that aim at taking their country out of the EU.[27] The general increase in Euroscepticism across Europe coincides with EU's policy of ongoing and deepening political integration.[28] The UK, in particular, has been at the forefront of hardening Euroscepticism.[29] The prevalence of British Euroscepticism is the latest installment in a historical pattern of ambivalence and 'awkwardness' between the British Isles and mainland Europe.[30] The pattern of ambivalence predates parliamentary democracy; the intergenerational struggle between English monarchs and the royal families of Europe typifies the uneasy sense of closeness, separation, and competition that still exists today.[31] Euroscepticism is a modern concept but in Britain the underlying sentiment of distance and difference predates the political integration of the region.

Britain never saw itself, and was not considered by its neighbors, as a natural partner in Europe. International powers – America and France in particular – agree and have historically tried to encourage separation by denying Britain's entrance into the European community.[32] Both America and France contested Britain's admittance to the Western European Union in 1954.[33] Thereafter, the UK did not gain membership of the European Economic Community (EEC), which was founded in 1957, until 1973. In the intervening years, the British government applied to the EEC and was rebuffed by key members of the bloc in both 1963 and 1967.[34] The Conservative Prime Minister Edward Heath finally secured entry into the EEC in 1973, only to lose power to the Labour Party.

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founded the European Union, a supranational entity that is both institutionally more powerful and centralised than the European Economic Community that Britain originally joined in 1973.

[27] Pirro et al., 'The populist politics of Euroscepticism', pp. 378-90; Cécile Leconte 2010, *Understanding Euroscepticism*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

[28] European Commission, *The Five Presidents' Report: Completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union*, pp. 4-5, viewed 13/04/2019 at: <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/publications/five-presidents-report-completing-europes-economic-and-monetary-union_en>.

[29] Miller and Barclay, *UK Public Opinion on the European Union*; Corbett, 'The Social Consequences of Brexit', p. 12.

[30] Philomena Murray, Alex Warleigh-Lack and Baogang He 2014, 'Awkward states and regional organisations: The United Kingdom and Australia compared', *Comparative European Politics*, 12(3), p. 284.

[31] Brendan Simms, *Britain's Europe: A Thousand Years of Conflict and Cooperation*, Suffolk: Allen Lane.

[32] Murray et al., 'Awkward states', p. 284.

[33] Ralph Dietl 2009, 'The WEU: A Europe of the Seven, 1954-1969', *Journal of Transatlantic Studies*, 7(4), pp. 433-36.

[34] Simms, 'Britain's Europe', pp. 170-90.

Once in office, the Labour Party convened Britain's first-ever national referendum on the terms of European membership in 1975. It did so to resolve an unworkable division over the issue within its own cabinet, party room and membership.[35] The Labour Party, representing the class interests of organised workers, therefore takes the mantle as the original Eurosceptic party because its membership was suspicious of Europe's progressive credentials.[36] The general public was equally hesitant. In February 1975, several months before the referendum, Gallup polling found that 41 per cent of British respondents wanted to leave the EEC and 33 per cent wished to remain in the community they had just joined.[37] It was only after the Labour government renegotiated special terms of UK membership in March 1975, and following a concerted campaign by the business and political community, that the polity was convinced to vote 67 per cent in favor of remaining in the EEC. From the beginning, Euroscepticism has presented a risk to various governing elite in Britain. Whether via pressure from foreign powers or election-losing public scepticism, both Labour and the Conservatives have encountered difficulty in deepening Britain's relationship with Europe.

Entering into a formal political union with the mainland in 1975 did not improve an already ambivalent relationship. Rather, issues such as nationalism, immigration, the establishment of the Single Market, and divergent ideas about economic policy have helped to solidify a majority opposition to European membership.[38] The consistent trend towards deeper regional cooperation, in particular, has further strained British attitudes towards Europe. The introduction of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, for example, was a key moment on the path to Brexit. The Treaty created a single European currency and formalised the supranational institutions of the EEC into the 'three pillars'

[35] Denis Balsom 1996, 'The United Kingdom: Constitutional pragmatism and the adoption of the referendum', in Michael Gallagher and Pier Uleri (eds.), *The Referendum Experience in Europe.* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 215.
[36] Richard Davis 2017, 'Euroscepticism and Opposition to British Entry into the EEC, 1955-75', *Revue Française de Civilisation Britannique* 2(1), DOI: 10.4000/rfcb.1364.
[37] Roger Mortimore 2016, 'Polling history: 40 years of British views on "in or out" of Europe', *The Conversation*, viewed 17/01/2017 at: < http://theconversation.com/polling-history-40-years-of-british-views-on-in-or-out-of-europe-61250>.
[38] Simon Usherwood and Nick Startin 2013, 'Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 51(1), pp. 1-16.

of the European Union, which includes shared defence, monetary, and foreign policy.[39] Maastricht was the turning point for Euroscepticism, one that Nick Startin and Simon Usherwood describe as a 'new politicisation of European integration' in Britain.[40] From the early 1990s, through the 2000s and up to the present, a clear majority of surveyed British citizens have reported a desire to leave the EU.[41] By the year 2000 there were approximately 30 active anti-EU organisations in the UK, including grassroots movements, political parties, think tanks and trade unions.[42] These organisations ranged the ideological gamut of 'conservatives and socialists, greens and liberals, racists and libertarians'.[43] Although Britain secured an opt-out to the Euro, this spate of reforms is typically seen as an inflection point in EU-UK relations, a bridge too far for many parts of British society. It is also the period in which UKIP became an influential force in British politics.

In the period after Maastricht, Euroscepticism emerged as a defining and divisive feature of the British polity, which remains split between EU supporters and increasingly 'hard' pluralities. This sentiment is evident at all levels of British society. Chris Gifford observes that, ever since 1992, the rhetoric deployed by British political and economic 'elites', as a general class, against the EU has hardened. It has become normal for the media, politicians and some in the business community to position their country as 'outsiders, as neo-liberal pioneers' among their EU peers and the 'most business friendly members state' in the EU.[44] For those on the center-right, the EU was never neoliberal enough to satisfy their economic preferences.[45] At the same time it was

[39] Council of the European Communities 1992, *Treaty on European Union*, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities, pp. 7-9, 126, viewed 18/08/2019 at: < https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/docs/body/treaty_on_european_union_en.pdf>.
[40] Usherwood and Startin, 'Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon', p. 3.
[41] Chris Flood 2002, 'The Challenge of Euroscepticsim', in Jackie Gower (ed.) *The European Union Handbook* (2nd edition), London: Fitzroy Dearborn, p. 75; Clarke, et al., *Brexit*, p. 61.
[42] Simon Usherwood 2002, 'Opposition to the European Union in the UK: The Dilemma of Public Opinion and Party Management', *Government and Opposition*, 37(2), pp. 211-30.
[43] Simon Usherwood 2016, 'Is there still a point to UKIP? The future of British Euroscepticism post-Brexit', *British Politics and Policy blog, London School of Economics,* viewed 22/07/2017 at: <https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/08/17/is-there-still-a-point-to-ukip-the-future-of-british-euroscepticism-post-brexit/>.
[44] Gilford, 'The United Kingdom's Euroseptic political economy', p. 792; Andrew Geddes 2013, *Britain and the European Union*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 14.
[45] Peter Anderson 2004, 'A Flag of Convenience? Discourse and Motivations of the London-Based Eurosceptic Press', in Robert Harmsen and Menno Spiring (eds.), *Euroscepticism, Party Politics, National Identity and European Integration*, Amsterdam: Rodopi, pp. 54, 170; Startin, 'Have we reached a tipping point?', pp. 316-23.

too far to the economic right for the socialist wing of the Labour Party.[46] Citizens were evenly divided between supporters and hard Eurosceptics. The Spring 2016 Eurobarometer reported that 36 per cent of UK citizens have a 'totally negative image of the EU', while 31 per cent 'had entirely positive associations'.[47] 59 per cent agreed, however, that 'their voice had not counted in the EU'.[48] Euroscepticism is an organising feature, therefore, of contemporary British politics, which perhaps explains its recurrence in elite discourse.

1.3 The populist dimension of British politics?

Euroscepticism is a perennial feature in British politics in addition to the central issue championed by UKIP. Is it, therefore, too much of a leap to characterise British politics as populist? Euroscepticism is closely associated with populism in the academic literature. Taggart makes the point that 'Euroscepticism has often taken an anti-elite form, championing the mass demands for more representation and less integration' and, in his analysis, 'these three political forces [are] indicative of populism across Europe.'[49] The nature of the European project, in which a series of supranational bodies are created and staffed with bureaucrats and politicians, lends itself naturally to the binary division that populists invoke between 'the people' and 'the elite'. Moreover, because hard Eurosceptics advocate for the abandonment of such bodies, they invariably centre on the moral and administrative failures of the EU 'elite'. Consequently, as Pirro and Taggart recently concluded, 'there is no necessary convergence between populism and Euroscepticism', but Eurosceptic parties that are not also populist constitute 'a very small number of cases'.[50] In a functional sense, as well as in practice, Euroscepticism and populism overlap to a large extent.

Euroscepticism in Britain is also broadly considered to be populist. In the case of UKIP, Usherwood has argued that the party 'remains a collection of ideologies under the

[46] Nathaniel Copsey and Tim Haughton 2014, 'Farewell Britannia? "Issue Capture" and the Politics of David Cameron's 2013 EU Referendum Pledge', *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 74(1), p. 76; Shipman, 'All Out War', pp. 72-80.
[47] Eurobarometer 2016 as quoted in Carlo Ruzza and Milica Pejovic 2019, 'Populism at work: the language of the Brexiteers and the European Union', *Critical Discourse Studies*, 16:4, p. 435.
[48] *Ibid*, p. 435.
[49] Taggart, 'Populism and representative politics', p. 270.
[50] Pirro and Taggart, 'The Populist Politics of Euroscepticism', p. 256.

language of populism, rather than a cohesive ideological project'.[51] His point is that – much like the wider British Euroscepticism – animosity towards the EU creates a shared equivalence amongst differing viewpoints. Euroscepticism is not a particularly 'thick' ideology on its own; it is a disposition, an antipathy towards a specific political entity that might come from a number of sources. Without the subject of opposition, the populist performance vanishes. As Michael Freeden said of UKIP's agenda in the aftermath of Brexit, 'it is simply ideologically too scrawny even to be thin!' – a feature he ascribed to the 'truncated nature of populisms' that disappear once 'the elite' is vanquished.[52] But focusing only on the EU as 'the elite' overlooks the modern history of English nationalism and its populist performance by elements of the Conservative Party. If the EU represents 'the elite' in British Euroscepticism, then the English are 'the people' that have the largest sense of grievance against Brussels.

In English politics, Euroscepticism is one half of a populist undercurrent that defines 'the people' along ethnic and cultural lines. Ben Wellings links Euroscepticism to populism via the nationalistic sentiment that arose in 1950s England.[53] In his account, the diminution of imperial Britain forced those in the metropole – particularly the English – to reorient their social identity away from empire and towards narrower sources of character.[54] This manifested in a politics of ethnic particularism, claims of ownership over the British parliament and its institutions, and resistance to immigration. During the 1970s, while British parliamentarians were attempting to secure entry to the EEC, English nationalists re-articulated their views as a rejection of Europe. Wellings writes that 'populism which already pitted "the People" against the ruling elite over the issue of New Commonwealth immigration from the late 1960s was readily available to the opponents of European integration after the referendum of 1975.'[55] In this case English nationalism, populism and Euroscepticism are mutually reinforcing.

English nationalists construct an ethnocentric notion of 'the people' and mount a

[51] Usherwood, 'Shooting the fox?', pp. 1212-13.
[52] Freeden, 'After the Brexit referendum', p. 2.
[53] Ben Wellings 2012, *English Nationalism and Euroscepticism: Losing the Peace*, London: Peter Lang, pp. 25, 102.
[54] Krishan Kumar 2000, 'Nation and Empire: English and British national identity in comparative perspective', *Theory and Society*, 29(5), p. 588-94.
[55] Wellings, *English Nationalism and Euroscepticism,* p. 6.

Eurosceptic critique of migration policies that threaten their perceived national identity. Margaret Canovan identifies the Conservative politician Enoch Powell as a forerunner of this 'reactionary populism', noting that his infamous 1968 'Rivers of Blood' speech linked the two issues of cultural impurity and mass migration.[56] These racially charged issues are easily fitted into Euroscepticism as a critique of the EU's open border policy. Many on the right wing of British politics have voiced these concerns, including the British National Party, the English Defence League, and a number of Conservative Party backbenchers and supporters.[57] Mainstream party leaders, however, have painstakingly kept explicitly xenophobic rhetoric out of the Eurosceptic sentiments they express.

Margaret Thatcher, the Conservative Prime Minister and a contemporary of Powell, outlined the more respectable face of British Euroscepticism in her 1988 Speech to the College of Europe. Her speech, which became known colloquially as the 'Bruges Speech', critiqued European integration whilst also stressing the countervailing forces of free enterprise, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), and national sovereignty.[58] This troika of ideas has remained the ideological core of Euroscepticism ever since.[59] They appear in the platform of UKIP, the rhetoric of various Conservative politicians, and the writings of the Eurosceptic British press.[60] The Conservative Party, in particular, has also engaged a populist political style when articulating these ideas.

Various Conservative leaders incorporated populist language into their European policy, most notably between 1997 and 2005 when the party 'achieved [a] fusion of populism and Euroscepticism' that balanced community concerns against a general policy of reluctant compliance with the EU itself.[61] Indeed, Tim Bale argues that during this period 'the Conservatives, not UKIP' became 'the United Kingdom's first populist

[56] Canovan, *Populism*, p. 229.
[57] Philip Lynch and Richard Whitaker 2013, 'Rivalry on the right: The Conservatives, the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the EU issue', *British Politics*, 8(3), p. 294.
[58] Margaret Thatcher 1988, 'Speech to the College of Europe', *Margaret Thatcher Foundation*, viewed 27/02/2018 at: <https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>.
[59] Luke March 2019, 'Left and Right Populism Compared: The British Case', *British Journal of Politics & International Relations*, 19(2), pp. 292-303; Copsey and Haughton, 'Farewell Britannia?', pp. 75-87; Emma Vines 2014, 'Reframing *English Nationalism and Euroscepticism*: From populism to the British Political Tradition', *British Politics* 9(3), pp. 265-66.
[60] Christopher Grey 2016, 'The New Politics of Cosmopolitans and Locals', *Socio-Economic Review*, 14(4), p. 831.
[61] Bale, 'Who leads and who follows?', p. 264.

Eurosceptic party', pointing to 'nativist' and anti-immigration rhetoric from a string of Conservative Party leaders including William Hague, Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Howard.[62] A marked distinction needs to be made, however, between populist rhetoric towards Europe and action taken by the major parties. Every Prime Minister in office since 1975 has deepened the relationship between the UK and Europe while at the same time adopting a critical stance in public.[63] Even Tony Blair and David Cameron – two of the most pro-European Prime Ministers in British history – felt constrained to echo the Eurosceptic rhetoric of their predecessors to prevent party divisions, keep the media on side, and remain in touch with the public.[64]

Euroscepticism in British politics reinforces the need to distinguish between rhetoric, ideas, performance and concrete populist actions. Viewed purely as a repertoire, 'thin' ideology, or discursive creation, British Euroscepticism is both populist and systemic. Public attitudes have been growing increasingly Eurosceptic since 1992. Euroscepticism itself also has a number of ideological features that predispose it to populist logic. It extends far beyond the UKIP party, interacting with neoliberalism, socialism and nationalism, and has significant consequences for the way in which British governments address their constituency. In a practical sense, however, the two major parties have historically remained committed to the European project. Conservative Party leaders, in particular, cloak their cooperation in a populist language that steers away from virulent nationalism and instead focuses on institutional critique. While Euroscepticism conditions the political style of the governing elite, their actions suggest that there is little appetite within Westminster to actually act upon their rhetoric.

2. 'Elite Euroscepticism' versus parliamentary democratisation

The question of Europe is both divisive and destabilising for Britain's two major political parties. The Conservative Party, in particular, has experienced significant internal unrest among the membership, party room, and even the leadership team over

[62] *Ibid*, p. 265.
[63] Daddow, 'Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair', p. 217.
[64] Lynch and Whitaker, 'Rivalry on the right', p. 285; Daddow, 'Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair', p. 212.

their approach to the issue.[65] The Labour Party convened the first European referendum in 1975 and the Blair government adopted many of the Eurosceptic tropes of previous Conservative administrations in order to manage the public reception of their policies.[66] This section will argue that the entrenched nature of Euroscepticism in British politics has led the major parties to act in ways that are superficially populist but ultimately serve anti-populist aims.

The overriding priority of political parties – or the 'governing elite' – is to win elections and maintain internal cohesion. The crisis that motivates them is electoral in nature, and manifests in superficially populist rhetoric that follows an anti-populist logic. Referendums are also part of the faux populism that has been employed by the governing elites in order to manage the European question. The highly managed way in which they have been deployed by both the Labour and Conservative parties offers a stark contrast with the authentic and grassroots populism that can be traced through the history of Westminster democracy. Various instantiations of the general public had to demand their representation from parliamentary elites and it was the eventual success of these populist movements that facilitated a gradual transition from oligarchy to democracy. The contrast between 'elite Euroscepticism' [67] and parliamentary democratisation underscores the pressing need for a metric that can identify authentic populism, which is to say populist discourse that would actually empower 'the people' if put into practice.

2.1 Anti-populism and the EU referendum

Until 2016, the populist style adopted by several generations of the British political class had done little to extricate Britain from the EU. The EU referendum of 2016 was no different: by design, the referendum was an anti-populist manoeuvre that aimed at dissolving 'the people' who had assembled behind 'hard' Euroscepticism and UKIP. In Greece, anti-populists from mainstream institutions such as the parliament and the media explicitly and strongly disagree with populist forces. Stavrakakis observed that,

[65] Geoffrey Evans 1998, 'Euroscepticism and conservative electoral support: how an asset became a liability', *British Journal of Political Science*, 28(4), p. 589.
[66] Daddow, 'Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair', pp. 213-18.
[67] Vines, 'Reframing *English Nationalism and Euroscepticism'*, p. 266.

from the imposition of troika rule via the Greek loan package in May 2010, 'dominant narratives present[ed] the populist challenge as the most important if not the only danger for contemporary democracy'.[68] Any protest against the loan package and structural reform of the Greek economy was 'stigmatised as deviations from a reified and essentialised *normality*'.[69] Populists are cast as enemies of democracy and abnormal interlopers in Greek politics. Further, Greek anti-populism 'reduces politics to an administrative enterprise' in which there is 'no real choice between different alternatives'.[70] Katsambekis added to these observations by noting that anti-populists deployed both a 're-signification of patriotism' in which disagreement with the prescriptions of the elite constitutes de facto harm to the nation, and an epistemic challenge to populists, who were portrayed as the 'destructive' enemies of 'enlightened rationalism'.[71] Historically, British Prime Ministers have adopted the opposite approach towards Euroscepticism whilst achieving a similar effect.

In the case of Euroscepticism, British governing elites have offered vague agreement with popular opinion that they do not intend to act upon.[72] When pressured electorally or internally on the matter, they have engaged in populist performance and symbolic gestures, such as the Bruges speech or the Bloomberg speech. As a measure of last resort, modern British leaders will convene a referendum on problematic policy areas and, in Cameron's case, present an argument for the status quo. The aim of these tactics is the same: to mollify the aggrieved constituency, to re-absorb the issue into the party's agenda, and to maintain control of the parliament. The lead-up to Brexit typifies this pattern. When Cameron promised a referendum on Europe in his 2013 Bloomberg speech, he and his strategists did not even anticipate having to deliver it.[73] They were focussed on the upcoming 2015 general election.

At that point in the electoral cycle the Conservative Party was locked in an uneasy coalition with the pro-European Liberal Democrats and was not expected to return to

[68] Stavrakakis, 'Paradoxes of Polarization', p. 50.
[69] *Ibid*. p. 50.
[70] Stavrakakis, 'The Return of "the People"', p. 506.
[71] Katsambekis, 'The Place Of The People', pp. 566, 577.
[72] Daddow, 'Margaret Thatcher, Tony Blair', pp. 213-18.
[73] Shipman, 'All Out War', pp.12-13.

government.[74] During the 2010-2015 term of parliament the national electoral map had been roiled by the rapid rise of minor parties – particularly UKIP and the Scottish National Party – and the continued erosion of support for established parties.[75] Moreover, a significant minority of Cameron's MPs were petitioning for a referendum inside and outside the parliament, defeating government bills and lobbying in the media.[76] There is also testimony to Cameron's thought process, as recounted by his press secretary of the time. In his book *Unleashing Demons* Craig Oliver notes that David Cameron approached the referendum reluctantly, as tool for managing his backbench and UKIP.[77] Given that context, the decision to call a referendum on Europe is best interpreted as a strategy to shore up the Conservative Party base.

The EU referendum grew out of an electoral gambit that unexpectedly paid off and then became a bigger problem than it was worth. No one predicted a Conservative Party victory in 2015 but, as it turned out, polling trends significantly under-estimated their support.[78] On May 7 the Conservatives were returned to government in their own right with 37 per cent of the vote. Support for the Liberal Democrats collapsed and the Labour Party garnered only 31 per cent.[79] In his victory speech, Cameron hurriedly reconfirmed the referendum after a detailed enumeration of jobs, growth, tax and housing policies by saying: 'And yes, we will deliver that in-out referendum on our future in Europe.'[80] His phrasing in this soundbite is telling. The Prime Minister saw the referendum as a somewhat perfunctory affirmation of Britain's place *in* Europe.

After winning the election, the Conservative government secured a number of special conditions from the EU. The EU agreed that Britain would be immune from the new

[74] Jonathan Mellon and Edward Fieldhouse 2015, 'The British Election Study 2015 general election constituency forecast', *Electoral Studies*, DOI: 10.1016/j.electstud.2015.11.009.
[75] Lukas Audickas, Oliver Hawkins and Richard Cracknell 2017, *UK Election Statistics: 1918-2017*, House of Commons Library Briefing Paper No. CBP7529, viewed 06/03/2017 at: <https://researchbriefings.parliament.uk/ResearchBriefing/Summary/CBP-7529>; Lynch and Whitaker, 'Rivalry on the right', p. 285.
[76] Bale, 'Who leads and who follows?', p. 271.
[77] Shipman, 'All Out War', pp. 8-9.
[78] Patrick Sturgis, Jouni Kuha, Nick Baker, Mario Callegaro, Stephen Fisher, Jane Green, Will Jennings, Benjamin Lauderdale and Patten Smith 2018, 'An assessment of the causes of the errors in the 2015 UK general election opinion polls', *Journal of the Royal Statistical Society: Series A (Statistics in Society)*, 181(3), pp. 757–781.
[79] *Ibid.* p. 758.
[80] David Cameron 2015, 'Election 2015: David Cameron speech in fill', 9 May, viewed 13/04/2019 at: <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-32661073>.

'convergence process', committed to streamline its bureaucracy, introduce monetary protections for the British pound, and gave permission for Westminster to restrict the eligibility of EU citizens to British welfare benefits.[81] When these outcomes were shared with the British public in February 2016, they received what Craig Oliver, the Director of Politics and Communications for the Prime Minister, describes as 'an almost systematic trashing'.[82] The renegotiation went as well as it could have. But, as the government was in the process of finding out, 'there is almost nothing as formidable as the campaigning power of the right-wing press' intent on taking Britain out of Europe.[83] Worse still, in an effort to keep his political party unified, the Prime Minister allowed cabinet ministers the latitude to campaign for Leave. After the announcement of the renegotiation a significant number – including Michael Gove and Boris Johnson – declared in favour of Leave and began campaigning against their government.

The overriding concern of the government in the lead-up to the referendum was winning an election and maintaining friendly relationships with party members. Referring to the 'choreography' of populism discussed in the last chapter, Cameron's actions only came about when various perceived failures in contemporary Europe – whether it be too much integration, the Eurozone financial woes, or the mass migration spurred by the Syrian civil war – created an *electoral* crisis for the Conservative government at home.[84] The failures themselves were not the primary concern of the governing elite; avoiding a public backlash at the ballot box was. The motivations for the EU referendum and the manner in which it transpired exemplify the way in which the contemporary British political system interacts with populism. British politicians adopt a populist style when talking about Europe. Instead of characterising Euroscepticism as abnormal, impossible, unpatriotic or irrational, they normalise and even – by calling a referendum – institutionalise negative views towards Europe. On the other hand, there are very few instances short of cascading errors in which a governing party needs to follow through on the spirit of their rhetoric.

[81] Shipman, 'All Out War', pp. 125-6.
[82] Craig Oliver 2016, *Unleashing Demons: The Inside Story of Brexit*, London: Hodder & Stoughton, p. 71.
[83] *Ibid.* p. 74.
[84] Clarke et al. 2017, *Brexit,* pp. 120-23.

2.2 Referendums as a strategy of British government

Instead of virulent opposition to Euroscepticism, the 'governing elites' in Britain employed a strategy of co-option. While this might appear like a populist response to policy failure, the intent of the 2016 referendum can more accurately be described as anti-populist reaction to an electoral crisis. The deployment of a referendum as part of this strategy also calls into question the motives behind the modern innovation of British referendums. Referendums have traditionally been part of British local government since the mid-nineteenth century.[85] In this local role they served as an unofficial mechanism for expressing public discontent and making minor municipal decisions. In 1973 the Westminster parliament instituted its first referendum – in this case within the confines of Northern Ireland – to help defuse the thorny problem of Irish sovereignty. The 1975 EEC referendum was the first nation-wide exercise conducted in all four constituent parts of the UK. The EEC referendum inextricably tied the use of national referendums to the European question.

Referendums have become a frequent occurrence in British national politics in the past two decades. Since holding its first-ever referendum in 1973, the federal parliament has convened thirteen referendums: three nationally and ten within the constituent countries of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.[86] After the first two in the 1970s there was a significant lull. It was not until the election of Tony Blair's Labour government in 1997 that the concept remerged as a strategy of government. New Labour held referendums to devolve administrative powers to Wales, Ireland, Scotland, North East England and the Greater London Authority between 1998 and 2004. After defeating New Labour, Cameron's Conservative-led coalition held referendums on electoral reform and Scottish independence. The EU referendum was Cameron's third foray with a national referendum.

In total, two British prime ministers convened nine of Britain's eleven referendums between 1998 and 2016. The preeminent question is why. Before 1998, decision by

[85] Stanley Alderson 1975, *Yea or Nay? Referenda in the United Kingdom,* London: Cassell.
[86] Samantha Laycock 2013, 'Is referendum voting distinctive? Evidence from three UK cases', *Electoral Studies*, 32(2), p. 237.

referendum did not 'appear to have been taken seriously' in British politics.[87] The two held in the 1970s were measures of last recourse by a government struggling with Irish republicanism and European membership. There was no requirement that they be convened. In keeping with Britain's unwritten constitution, referendums have no stipulated or required role in British law.[88] Their use is contingent on the government of the day; referendums are a tool that has come into vogue because they suit the contemporary purposes of the major parties.[89] Used correctly, these events can increase public participation in politics and help to resolve intransient problems.[90] However, they can just as easily be instated to reduce electoral competition or reduce the responsibility of incumbent politicians.[91] Rephrased in terms of populism, a referendum can recognise the inherent tension between 'the elite' and 'the people' and defer to the latter's judgment. Alternatively, 'the elite' can use referendums in a disingenuous and symbolic fashion to dissolve a groundswell of opposition.

Matthew Hall is not sanguine about the sudden popularity of British referendums, arguing that faux change is part of the Westminster way. He contends that, 'when necessary, reform will be done for the purposes of protecting the status quo and preventing the need for further, and potentially more radical, reform'.[92] Hall sees referendums as a strategy of convenience for the two major parties. There is reason for this cynicism, although perhaps it is overstated in the case of New Labour. New Labour embarked on a wide-reaching set of constitutional reforms that, in Vernon Bogdanor's estimation, raised six substantive checks on the Westminster cabinet's power.[93] Tony Blair helped to establish functioning parliaments in Scotland, Ireland and Wales, thereby increasing the quantity of representation in the UK. His referendums were conducted with the intention of 'modernising' British administration – namely,

[87] A.H. Birch quoted in Matt Qvortrup 2006 'Democracy by Delegation: The Decision to Hold Referendums in the United Kingdom', *Representation* 42(1), p. 59.
[88] Robert Dahl 2015, *On Democracy* (second edition), New York: Yale University Press, pp. 119-20; Leonard Freedman 1996, *Politics and policy in Britain*, New York: Longman Publisher, p. 34.
[89] Matthew Flinders 2010, *Democratic Drift: Majoritarian Modification and Democratic Anomie in the United Kingdom*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.
[90] Mark Walker 2003, *The strategic use of referendums: Power, legitimacy, and democracy*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 117-133.
[91] Topaloff, 'The Rise of Referendums', pp. 127-29.
[92] Matthew Hall 2011, *Political Traditions and UK Politics* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 132.
[93] Vernon Bogdanor 2011, 'An Era of Constitutional Reform', *The Political Quarterly* 81(1), pp. 294-97.

increasing the levels and interrelations of government.[94] It is hard to see the creation of institutional checks on central government as a self-interested move. Notwithstanding, Blair's reforms were far from a revolution in the relationship between the parliament and the British people.[95] Bogdanor concludes that 'The real achievement of constitutional reform is to have redistributed power, but it has redistributed power between elites, not between elites and the people'.[96]

In the case of David Cameron's three referendums, electoral calculation was closer to the surface. The 2011 Alternative Vote (AV) referendum, 2014 Scottish referendum and 2016 EU referendum were convened by the Prime Minister explicitly to oppose change. In each one the government proposed constitutional reform and then ran against it. Based on that track record, and the longer history of Euroscepticism, Emma Vines analysed Cameron's Bloomberg speech in 2014 and downplayed its import. She described Cameron's message as 'elite Euroscepticism' – a euphemism for faux populism – and questioned the possibility that any referendum might 'present a significant challenge to the insularity of the British system'.[97] The British system, she argued, is based on a 'unitary state', a 'strong, centralised government and party system', and disposition towards 'stability'.[98] For these reasons, Vines discounted the potential for change via referendum.

Although events transpired differently, Vines was correct in her assumptions. The government is invested with extensive power due to Britain's unwritten constitution and the principle of parliamentary sovereignty. The complement of an unwritten constitution is parliamentary sovereignty. Parliamentary sovereignty means simply that the laws written by parliament are binding on all British citizens and entities and are alterable only by other parliamentary laws.[99] In combination, these two political institutions give the government of the day almost unmatched potential to alter the

[94] Stewart Davidson and Stephen Elstub 2014, 'Deliberative and Participatory Democracy in the UK', *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 16(1), pp. 370-71.
[95] Flinders, *Democratic Drift*, p.287.
[96] *Ibid.* p. 297.
[97] Vines, 'Reframing *English Nationalism and Euroscepticism'*, p. 266.
[98] *Ibid.* p. 263.
[99] Michael Gordon 2015, 'The UK's fundamental constitutional principle: why the UK Parliament is still sovereign and why it still matters', *King's Law Journal*, 26(2), pp. 229-32.

nature of British society.[100] Vines concluded that if the Cameron government or, indeed, any government before it had wished to remove the UK from the EU, then it could have without obstacle. Given the power afforded to government, the populist performance and referendum initiatives of contemporary governments are both hard to take at face value. Moreover, if one compares the two referendums over Europe and the speeches like Bloomberg and Bruges to the history of British democracy, one encounters the stark difference between the populism employed by those with power and the populism of those who are genuinely of 'the people'.

2.3 The parliament and the people

Authentic, grassroots populism was indispensable in creating a universal franchise in Britain. Parliament did not grant the franchise unilaterally; 'the people' pressured 'the elites' into extending representation to them. Parliamentary sovereignty was established in 1689 when the Parliament of England legislated a Bill of Rights. The passage of this Bill was a historic event that preceded both the US Declaration of Independence and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and the Citizen. Like these two other iconic texts the Bill of Rights stripped power away from an existing monarchical government, replacing autocratic power with a form of legislated equality.[101] Specifically, the Bill of Rights invested the Parliament of England with taxation powers, struck out the royal prerogative to suspend parliamentary laws, stipulated periodic parliamentary elections and provided for freedom of speech inside the parliament.[102] The Bill of Rights created a democratic infrastructure within Britain, but access to this infrastructure was highly restricted.

Over the following hundred years the parliament elaborated on this infrastructure without increasing popular access to it. Robert Dahl describes the situation as follows:

[100] Katherine Dommett, Muiris Maccarthaigh and Niamh Hardiman 2006 'Reforming the Westminster Model of Agency Governance: Britain and Ireland After the Crisis', *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration, and Institutions*, 29(4), p. 535; Anthony Birch 1986, *The British System of Government*, London: Allen & Unwin, p. 24; Robert Thomas 1999, 'Law and Politics' in Ian Holliday, Andrew Gamble and Geraint Parry (eds.) *Fundamentals in British Politics*, London: Macmillan Press, pp. 142-48.
[101] G.W. Jones 1990, 'The British Bill of Rights', *Parliamentary Affairs* 43(1), pp. 27-33.
[102] Birch, *The British System of Government*, pp. 30-1.

> Britain had a highly developed system of public contestation by the end of the eighteenth century, but only a miniscule fraction of the population was fully included in it until after the expansion of the suffrage in 1867 and 1884.[103]

Unlike the American and French emancipatory documents, the parliamentary Bill of Rights did not aim to empower individual citizens. The rights it gave were overwhelmingly rights to the parliament, which remained the preserve of the wealthy propertied class for many centuries to come.[104] The equality it codified was an equal freedom from the arbitrary rule of a monarch.[105] Beyond that thin equivalence, the body politic remained under the control of an unrepresentative political entity.

The early period of parliamentary rule was marked by a distinctly antagonistic relationship between the parliament and the people.[106] In fact, the pattern of populist agitation between the ordinary British citizen and the political elites predates parliamentary sovereignty. As with the French and American Revolutions, there were insurrectionaries in the English Civil War who were fighting, at least in part, on behalf of natural rights.[107] Rebel aristocrats joined forces with several groups of lower-class revolutionaries in opposition to the king. These lower-class rebels were known interchangeably as the Levellers, Independents, Diggers and Radicals. The Levellers stipulated a wider spread of equality than the aristocrats – as the name suggests, they claimed nothing less than a radical equalisation of political power in British society. Representatives of the Levellers outlined their beliefs in a debate with the officers of the New Model Army in 1647.[108] They based their claims on a doctrine of inalienable rights that would later become the hallmark of the American and French Revolutions.[109]

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[103] Robert Dahl 1971, *Polyarchy: participation and opposition*, New Haven: Yale University Press, pp. 4-5.
[104] Larry Siedentop 2001, *Democracy in Europe*, New York: Columbia University Press, pp. 66-71.
[105] Martin Kayman 2011, 'The Bill of Rights: "Icons" of Liberty and Law in the Early Twenty-First Century', *Law & Humanities* 5(2), pp. 323-25.
[106] Frank O'Gorman 1986, 'The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England: The Mid-Eighteenth Century to the Reform Act of 1832', *Social History* 11(1), pp. 33-52.
[107] Rachel Foxley 2013, *The Levellers: Radical political thought in the English* Revolution, Manchester: Manchester University Press, p. 28.
[108] Grayling, *Democracy and its Crisis*, pp. 33-48.
[109] Alan Houston 1993, '"A Way of Settlement": The Levellers, Monopolies and the Public Interest', *History of Political Thought*, 14(3), pp. 387-88.

The Levellers are amongst the first recorded proponents of political equality in modern Europe.

These harbingers were not successful in their goal. After the execution of Charles I in 1649, one of Oliver Cromwell's first actions was the arrest and imprisonment of the Leveller leaders.[110] After the English Civil War, the British political system remained oligopolistic for just shy of two centuries.[111] The only competition was between sub-sections of the elite over distribution of institutional power, rather than between 'the elite' and 'the people'.[112] Then, in less than a century 'the elite' democratised the parliament. The voting franchise was extended using several different gatekeeping criteria that gradually transitioned towards universal suffrage.[113] The transition away from oligarchy was completed through five signature packages of legislation known as the Reform Acts of 1832, 1867, 1884, and the Representation of the People Acts of 1918 and 1928. The first reform, by the admission of the then Prime Minister, was conditioned by the parliament's fear of revolution in Britain.[114] However, each subsequent reform came about after a protracted period of pressure from various populist movements separately representing working class men and British women.

The 1867 and 1884 electoral reforms extended voting to working class men after decades of lobbying from the Luddites and the Chartists. The Luddites were a militant group dedicated to the destruction of privately owned machinery. This covert and informal movement acted upon a well-founded fear that mechanisation would further degrade the livelihood of British laborers.[115] The parliament waged a lengthy military campaign against the Luddites, deploying an estimated 12,000 troops to the countryside

[110] Grayling, *Democracy and its Crisis*, p. 48; Richard Ollard 1989, *This War without an Enemy: A History of the English Civil Wars*, New York: Fontana, pp. 9-15.
[111] David Marquand 2009, *Britain Since 1918: The Strange Career of British Democracy*, London: Orion Books Ltd, pp. 67-78.
[112] O'Gorman, 'The Unreformed Electorate of Hanoverian England', pp. 35, 48.
[113] Ian Machin 2001, *The Rise of Democracy in Britain, 1830-1918*, New York: St. Martin's Press.
[114] Charles Tilly 2005, *Popular Contention in Great Britain 1758–1834,* Colorado: Routledge, p. 143; House of Lords 1830, *22 November 1830 Debate,* Vol. 1 Col 613, viewed 14/05/2019 at: <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/1830-11-22/debates/ea68006e-e4f4-4461-b81d-20bbaf66fa93/MinisterialDeclarations?highlight=am%20reforming%20preserve%20not%20overthrow#contribution-06f0f7ca-608f-487a-92ff-ec0d3f62e8bb>.
[115] Jeff Horn 2015, 'Machine-Breaking and the "Threat from Below" in Great Britain and France during the Early Industrial Revolution', in Michael Davis (ed.) *Crowd Actions in Britain and France from the Middle Ages to the Modern World,* London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 170.

as well as executing and deporting rioters.[116] On the other hand, the political establishment engaged – albeit grudgingly – with the peaceful Chartist movement. The Chartists, as they became known, took their name from their guiding document *The People's Charter*, a manifesto for democratic reform that was formalised in 1838. The Chartists prosecuted their agenda through mass petition writing, public marches and the deployment of rhetoric. Their intent was to engage the upper classes in a discourse of equality, impressing upon them the popular nature of their demands.[117] The success of this strategy was not immediately apparent, but without their mass demonstrations there would have been no impetus for parliament to act.

The Suffragettes found little practical support within the parliament in their campaign for female voting. In fact, the parliamentary enfranchisement of male laborers directly undermined women's equality; the passage of the first two Reform Acts gave legal form to the customary exclusion of women from political life.[118] Women's activism began as a disparate network of single-issue groups in the mid-1850s. After the first two Reform Acts this movement gradually coalesced around voting rights, finally forming a confederated National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies in 1897.[119] Despite sophisticated lobbying and propaganda campaigns, parliament made no substantive steps towards equality of sexual representation in the nineteenth century.[120] It was only when the Woman's Social and Political Union began a targeted campaign of civic disruption in 1906 – including tactics such as heckling parliamentary members, standing candidates in local by-elections, property destruction and breaking the law with the intent of arrest – that some attention was paid to the matter in the parliament.[121] The 1918 and 1928 Acts finally enshrined representative equality for all British women.

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[116] *Ibid*. p. 170; Adrian Randall 1986, 'The Philosophy of Luddism: The Case of the West of England Woolen Workers, ca. 1790–1809', *Technology and Culture*, 27(1), p. 15.
[117] Robert Saunders 2008, 'Chartism from above: British elites and the interpretation of Chartism', *Historical Research* 81(213), pp. 463-4.
[118] Keith Lance 1979, 'Strategy Choices of the British Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-18', *Social Science Quarterly* 60(1), p. 51.
[119] Martin Pugh 2000, *The March of the Women*, London: Oxford University Press, pp. 1-12.
[120] Lance, 'Strategy Choices', p. 51.
[121] Pugh, *The March of the Women*, pp. 29-32; George Dangerfield 1935, *The Strange Death of Liberal England, 1910-14*, New York: Capricorn Books, p. 387; June Pervis 2005, 'Introduction The suffragette and women's history', *Women's History Review* 14(3), p. 358.

Populism was a critical and productive element in the history of British politics. The British parliamentary system evolved from an oligopoly to an electoral democracy through populist encounters between the parliament and those citizens it omitted from its representation. The parliament played a reluctant but ultimately collaborative role in the populist choreography for a range of motives, which included a desire to stymie revolution, electoral competition between the two major parties, and a genuine desire to improve its franchise.[122] Yet for all the reasons why 'the elite' accommodated 'the people', without populist movements and activism that underlined the divide between the parliament and the general population there would have been no expansion of British democracy.[123] This view of British history suggests a symbiotic relationship between populism and parliamentary democracy. The disenfranchised elements of British society needed to employ populist logic to gain entry to the franchise, which, in itself, constitutes 'the people' whom the parliamentary 'elite' represent under various party configurations. This history of authentic populism presents a stark contrast with the referendums and rhetoric that the parliamentary 'elite' has used to manage the European question.

3. The problem of populist authenticity

The previous two sections in this chapter have outlined the problem of populist authenticity, a concept I use to capture the messy task of separating populism from the opportunistic borrowing of populist tropes. The contrast between democratisation and Euroscepticism in Britain illustrates the difficulty and importance of determining authenticity. The former involved a genuine struggle between 'the people' and 'the elite', forcing accommodation on behalf of the parliament. Euroscepticism, on the other hand, often provokes populist performances from the parliamentary elite yet these performances have not taken the form of accommodation. Instead, the way in which the parliamentary class has managed Euroscepticism – co-opting and deflecting public sentiment without action – has more in common with anti-populism than with populism. This section suggests a new definition of populism that addresses the

[122] Machin, *The Rise of Democracy,* pp. 24-37; Christopher Kam 2014, 'Enfranchisement, Malapportionment, and Institutional Change in Great Britain, 1832-1868', *Legislative Studies Quarterly* 4(1), pp. 506-26; Marquand, *Britain Since 1918,* p. 27.
[123] Adam Przeworski 2008, 'Conquered or Granted? A History of Suffrage Extensions', *British Journal of Political Science* 39(1), pp. 312-3.

empirical complexity of the phenomenon and especially the ease with which populist performance can be put to work for an anti-populist agenda.

The first part of this section outlines how contemporary theory defines the effects that populism is meant to have on the status quo. Proponents of the ideological, discourse and political style approaches each highlight the 'equalising' and 'illiberal' tendencies in populism.[124] They agree that populist movements can have either a positive or negative effect on existing democracies depending on how they define 'the people' and how their demands interact with the local milieu. In the second part of this section I suggest that the subject and object of this logic should be reversed. Instead of judging populism based on its relationship with democracy, the relationship should be reconceived such that democracy becomes the criterion for gauging the authenticity of populism. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's notions of augmentation and action, the section concludes by arguing that populism is a political discourse that seeks to enhance 'the people's' capacity for action. The problem of populist authenticity can be overcome by asking the simple question: would enacting this discourse actually increase the constituent power of those it claims to represent?

3.1 The contemporary debate regarding populism and democracy

The British electoral system is testament to the legacy of populism in British politics. The emblematic tactics of the various movements – soldiers debating their officers on the merits of universal enfranchisement, breaking machinery on behalf of the workingman, documenting the will of the people in massive petitions, shouting over powerful men to illustrate the political silencing of women – are archetypical examples of populist logic. In each case the parliament represents the apex of 'the elite', as the sovereign and most powerful body in the country. 'The people' exist in a literal fashion through their disenfranchisement, in much the same way as *le boulangisme*, the American Populists and the *narodniks* were constituted through a mixture of economic or political marginalisation. This legacy of authentic populism presents an awkward juxtaposition with the contemporary 'populist' performances of the parliamentary elite.

[124] Mudde, 'Populism: An Ideational Approach'; Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, p. 149; Stavrakakis, 'The Return of "the People"', p. 506.

It also highlights the difficulty that contemporary populist theory has in distinguishing between populism that increases democracy and populism that is designed to contain and diminish the agency of parts of the *demos*.

The three major contemporary approaches to populism – ideology, discourse and political style – are in general agreement on the relationship between populism and institutionalised politics. Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Kaltwasser, utilising the ideological approach, argue that 'populism can be both a corrective and a threat to democracy', depending on the type of democracy instituted in a particular country and the specific characteristics of the populism in question.[125] They further clarify that populism is 'essentially democratic' in terms of supporting popular self-government – or what Mudde has elsewhere termed the 'general will' – but 'ambivalent towards *liberal* democracy'.[126] Beyond this general relationship, however, they were unwilling to stipulate further, noting that 'little has been theorised about the circumstances under which populism can and is used for good rather than evil'.[127] In place of reaching for theoretical certainty on the matter, they instead stress the need for more empirical investigation and the adoption of a 'non-normative' approach to the question of populist praxis. This general pattern is also discernable in the political style and discourse approaches.

Benjamin Moffitt argues that there is no necessary relationship between populism and democracy but re-inscribes the same illiberalism and participation as 'tendencies' within the populist repertoire. Democracy, he notes, is not a discrete concept and much of the existing literature sets about 'exteriorising populism and fixing the meaning of democracy to a particular normative framework', so that assessments tend to follow the author's preferred version of democracy.[128] To use Mudde and Kaltwasser's distinction, a liberal democrat will critique populism whereas a direct democrat will praise its participatory ethos. Moffitt instead proposes to 'shift our viewpoint slightly and consider the democratic tendencies *within* populism.[129] However, he then goes on

[125] Cas Mudde and Cristóbal Kaltwasser 2012, *Populism in Europe and the Americas: Threat or Corrective for Democracy?* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, p. 16.
[126] *Ibid*. p. 16; Mudde, 'Populism: An Ideational Approach', pp. 1-20.
[127] *Ibid*. p. 20.
[128] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, p. 141.
[129] *Ibid.* p. 141-42.

to make many of the same observations others have made about the ambivalent nature of populism, only rearticulated as 'democratic and antidemocratic tendencies' within populism itself.[130] He concludes that 'populism does not offer any positive "content" regarding how democratic a political project should be, but rather only offers certain tendencies'.[131] These tendencies can be summarised using the same terms as Mudde and Kaltwasser: populism has illiberal tendencies, but can also be inclusive and empowering towards marginalised voices.

Thirdly, the Essex School has drifted away from Laclau's 'emancipatory apriorism' that celebrated the illiberal and participatory nature of populism. Contemporary proponents treat the relationship between democracy and populism with 'ambiguity', taking a broader view of populism as a phenomenon rather than just a means of progressive change.[132] Yannis Stavrakakis notes that populism 'facilitated and, to a certain extent, guaranteed the constant *democratisation of democracy*', giving the Chartists and the development of the welfare state as two examples of the way in which populism has historically forced regimes to accommodate their citizens.[133] He also describes populism as the 'egalitarian dynamic' in democracy.[134] However, he *also* agrees with Mudde and Kaltwasser that 'populism can operate as either a *corrective* or a *threat* for democracy, acquiring both *inclusionary* and *exclusionary* articulations'.[135] This is a nuanced view that has several conceptual layers.

By adopting the notions of inclusion and exclusion, Stavrakakis brings the discourse approach closer still to the messy reality of populism in practice. Mudde and Kaltwasser have argued that there are inclusionary forms of populism that seek to constitute a cosmopolitan version of 'the people' whereas exclusionary forms of populism mobilise a restrictive version of 'the people' in service of culturally and ethnically particular ideologies.[136] But, they also cautioned that exclusionary populism does not 'inevitably has a negative impact on democracy, while the latter exclusively embodies a positive force for democracy'.[137] Despite this caution, Stavrakakis argues that exclusionary

[130] *Ibid.* p. 142-50.
[131] *Ibid*. p. 149.
[132] Stavrakakis, 'The Return of "the People"', p. 506.
[133] *Ibid.* p. 506.
[134] *Ibid.* p. 508.
[135] *Ibid.* p. 513.
[136] Mudde and Kaltwasser, 'Exclusionary vs. Inclusionary Populism', p. 148.
[137] *Ibid*. p. 168.

populism is fodder for anti-populists, who can point to examples of it in order to delegitimise all forms of populism.[138] The fifth step in the populist 'choreography' reflects this view, noting that, during a time of crisis, 'discourses emerging (populist and anti-populist) can, in principle, acquire a left-wing (inclusionary, egalitarian, participatory) or right-wing profile (exclusionary, elitist) and both employ simplification and demonisation, often leading to the establishment of a polarised political culture.'[139] The Essex School maintains that populism is an essential dynamic in democracy. It supports 'inclusionary' forms of populism.[140] Lastly, it notes that both populist and anti-populist discourses can express inclusionary or exclusionary tendencies, and exclusionary populism in particular can strengthen the hand of anti-populist forces. This is a nuanced approach that acknowledges the complex interplay of populist and anti-populist forces, as well as the long-term effects that their choreography can have on broader society. Despite its sophistication, however, this model is lacking criteria that enable the sorting of populist and anti-populist forces in practice.

The three contemporary approaches to populism present a similar account of the relationship between populism and democracy, as the institutional environment within which populism takes place. Equally, though, they would be unable to distinguish between 'elite Euroscepticism' and the examples of authentic populism previously given because they are focussed on content of populism rather than who is performing it and what they wish to achieve. Each approach, directly or indirectly, agrees that populism is an integral component of democracy, if democracy is considered 'without adjectives', as popular self-rule.[141] Each approach then goes on to list a number of caveats that bring populism into conflict with the status quo in actually existing democracies. Having reviewed the British milieu, however, it seems that judging populism in terms of its effects on democracy takes for granted that all invocations of 'the people' and denigrations of 'the elite' are in fact genuine. In the case of

[138] Stavrakakis, 'Paradoxes of Polarization', p. 52.
[139] Stavrakakis et al.,'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 22.
[140] Giorgos Katsambekis 2016, 'Radical Left Populism in Contemporary Greece: Syriza's Trajectory from Minoritarian Opposition to Power', *Constellations*, 23(3), pp. 391-403; Alexandros Kioupkiolis and Francisco Perez 2019, 'Reflexive Technopopulism: Podemos and the Search for a New Left-Wing Hegemony', *European Political Science* 18(1), pp. 29-30; Joaquín Valdivielso 2017, 'The outraged people. Laclau, Mouffe and the Podemos hypothesis', *Constellations,* 24(3), pp. 296-309.
[141] Mudde and Kaltwasser, *Populism in Europe and the Americas*, p. 10.

Euroscepticism, many populist performances were calculated to have zero effect on British democracy or government policy. This thesis will argue that cases like the EU referendum point to a more pressing issue in the empirical study of populism. Instead of approaching populism as a component of democracy, it is more productive, when considering highly centralised and tightly managed democracies such as the Westminster system, to reframe the relationship such that *democracy is considered essential to authentic populism*.

3.2 Democratic augmentation and constituent power

Euroscepticism demonstrates how the 'governing elites' of established democracies can co-opt populist discourse. Performance notwithstanding, this co-option is anti-populist in nature because it aims at reducing the *constituent power* of 'the people'. I contend that authentic populists such as the Suffragettes and the Levellers aim towards *democratic augmentation*, which entails increasing the capacity of ordinary citizens to take action in public affairs. The remainder of this section will outline why any ideology, political style or discourse that cannot explain how it would achieve democratic augmentation should not be considered populist because it does not contain a praxis that indicates genuine commitment to the cause of populism.[142]

The previous chapter used the term *democratic augmentation* to describe the empirical status of populism as an electoral phenomenon. This term also reflects the more limited, less revolutionary aims of contemporary populists, whether they are inclusive or exclusive in orientation. That being said, this thesis cannot claim full originality for the use of this term. Mark Wenman's book *Agonistic Democracy* makes reference to augmentation as one of the two contradictory forces at play in any democratic society.[143] Specifically, Wenman's work identifies augmentation and revolution as the

[142] It is admittedly ontologically difficult to specify authenticity apriori, before action, which is a problem that arises wherever one is studying a political actor making promises about how they will use power if it happens to be given to them. This is a problem that extends beyond populism to encompass all modes of electoral competition or radical agitation. Considering populism as a discourse, ideology, or style does not, however, preclude some appraisal of the commitment of the political actor. As I outline in this section, discussing 'the people' and how the movement will empower them in a practical sense is a clear indication of praxis – of serious consideration given to the way in which promises can be made reality. By contrast, anti-populists omit such discussion entirely because their allegiance lies with 'the elite' and preserving the status quo on their behalf.

[143] Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, p. 5.

tension in and the essence of democracy. He draws this binary from Hannah Arendt, who wrote of the foundational conflict between the 'revolutionary spirit' required to inaugurate a democracy – by replacing a feudal or totalitarian state – and the prohibition of 'precisely those qualities that had been instrumental in building it' once democracy is established.[144] Arendt argued proper institutionalisation of democracy is critical so that the 'revolutionary spirit' of freedom can over time 'augment, increase and enlarge, the foundations as they had been laid down by the ancestors'.[145] In her view failure to accommodate augmentation through participatory institutions will ultimately undo democracy. Augmentation is not a simple or linear process; it is an ad hoc struggle against countervailing forces that seek to restrict the power of the *demos* and minimise the scope of freedom. Democratic augmentation, then, should *in theory* encapsulate the aims of contemporary populism. Populists work within established electoral systems and, to the extent that they disrupt the established ecosystem of parties within that system, they do so because they believe the status quo has drifted from the democratic 'spirit' of self-government.

The 'spirit' of democracy is most succinctly described as enabling the *constituent power* of the citizenry. Constituent power has several different interpretations as well as a significant role in legal theory.[146] However, following Wenman, this thesis will define the term as Arendt defined it – as 'action'.[147] Arendt described action as 'beginning something anew' and 'the political activity par excellence'; it is a category of behavior separate from 'labor', which entails subsistence, and 'work' or the production of material things.[148] The constituent power of the citizen refers not to their ability to survive or to produce, but to initiate action in both the private and public spheres. Democracy needs to create the space for such action, to give citizens the capacity for initiative. Nonetheless, action is an unpredictable force. The act of creation demarcates the identity of an individual and gives them presence in the world but, equally, action has the 'inherent tendency to force open all limitations and cut across all boundaries'.[149] For that reason there will always be a tension in democracy between

[144] Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 232.
[145] *Ibid*. pp. 202, 280.
[146] Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, p. 8.
[147] Hannah Arendt 1958, *The Human Condition*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, p. 9.
[148] *Ibid*. pp. 7-9.
[149] *Ibid*. pp. 179, 190.

the constituent powers of citizens – their individual capacity for action – and constitutional rules designed to cohere and protect society.

Populism aims at enhancing the constituent power of the citizenry. In is this capacity that Mudde and Kaltwasser describe as 'essentially democratic' and Stavrakakis calls the 'egalitarian dynamic' of populism. The linkage between populism and constituent power is also what places its proponents at odds with liberalism. Constituent power gives democracy an informal and unfixed quality.[150] A permanent and fixed constitution is antithetical to action; it limits the horizon of creativity. Given the close nexus between liberalism and constitutionalism, there will always be an opposition between the constituent power of democracy and the constitutional protections that liberals prescribe.[151] Liberalism and democracy are oppositional and, in the contemporary era, the pendulum is firmly swung in favour of liberalism over democracy. As Mark Wenman puts it, academic and legal efforts on the question of politics are mostly 'concerned with elaborating rational conditions of validity for the rightful expression of the constituent power, and to subsume the creative power of the *demos* under some set of determinant principles.'[152] There are many good reasons for limiting absolute constituent power but populists fervently disagree with the balance struck.

In contemporary politics, populists can be seen as the patron saints of a lost cause. Between liberalism and the professionalisation of politics, there is little room for constituent power. Hannah Arendt described how political parties and their monopolisation of the electoral system has created 'government of the people *by an elite sprung from the people'* as opposed to government of the people by the people.[153] This elite cadre of professional politicians in charge of modern democracies have 'nowhere enabled the people *qua* people to make their entrance into political life and to become participators in public affairs.'[154] It is this reduction of constituent power

[150] Sheldon Wolin 2004, *Politics and Vision: Continuity and Innovation in Western Political Thought*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 601-3.
[151] David Dyzenhaus 2007, 'The Politics of the Question of Constituent Power', in Martin Loughlin and Neil Walker (eds.), *The Paradox of Constitutionalism: Constituent Power and Constitutional Form*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 120-45.
[152] Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, pp. 76-77.
[153] Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 277.
[154] *Ibid*. p. 277.

that contemporary populism rejects, particularly in a period of crisis in which the flaws of the political elite become especially apparent, the need for popular action clear. Populists are not, however, merely angry democrats. 'The people' that populists champion are often dissimilar from the *demos*, which in the contemporary era includes all citizens under a universal franchise. Populism is more targeted in its constituency – their audience is the marginalised, the victimised – than democracy which is articulated as a general and universal appeal in contemporary politics. This is my conceptualisation of populism and particularly what it is that authentic populists aim to achieve. However, as the British history of Euroscepticism indicates, incorporating democratic augmentation into the definition of populism would exclude a large number of superficially populist performances given by political elites.

3.3 The dividing line between anti-populism and populism

The aims of populism are democratically augmentative. Populists aim at increasing the constituent power of 'the people', as a subsection of the general population. How this constituent power will be used is less important than the credible indication that it would, in some way, be increased. Any other intended outcome – be it neutral or an active decrease – can only be described as non-populist or anti-populist in nature because it does not affect the balance of power between 'the elite' and 'the people'.

Democratic augmentation needs to be adopted as a criterion for identifying populism simply because populist performance is flexible and effective. There is no prohibition on the adoption of populist performance by major political parties and – if deployed skilfully – there are significant electoral advantages to doing so. The pattern of mimicry between UKIP and the Conservative party is illustrative of this phenomenon.[155] UKIP embodied the illiberal and insurgent qualities one would expect to see from contemporary populism. However, from the Bloomberg speech on their action was subsumed by the Conservative party and institutionalised in a referendum that was intended to permanently defer action on Euroscepticism. For forty-three years – from EEC accession to 2016 referendum result – the political elite were able to re-articulate the public's rejection of Europe whilst affirming a consistent policy of membership.

[155] Bale, 'Who leads and who follows?', pp. 263-77.

European membership has been a consensus policy shared by Labour and the Conservatives as well as the vast majority of smaller parliamentary parties. During the forty-three years between the two European referendums, the UK parliament acted on EU matters without direct recourse to the electorate – including opting out of the Eurozone monetary union in 1992 and ratifying all subsequent treaty issues via parliamentary vote.[156] On the other hand, wherever British Euroscepticism posed a threat to their control of the parliament or offered a potential electoral advantage, British governments have endorsed Eurosceptic opinion.

The reconceptualisation that this thesis is proposing is not a radical departure from the theories already discussed. Moffitt's six-step model emphasises how failure triggers a populist division of the political space.[157] His inductive method centers on the behaviour of populist performers, and so grounds the model in the real-world development of populism. Moffitt's model also captures the strategic nature of populism and the marginality of 'the people' in most populist rhetoric.[158] Lastly, he is correct to be sceptical of the relationship between populism and normative models of democracy.[159] Moffitt's scepticism needs to extend a little father, however, in order to capture the capacity of an actually existing elite to co-opt the populist repertoire.

Moffitt's argument that there is no necessary relationship between populism and democracy is also in need of modification. Whilst it is true, in his words, that populism is neither a consistent 'savior' nor a perennial 'bogeyman' to democracy, democracy is nevertheless a litmus test of authentic populism.[160] That is because authentic populism, as demonstrated by the Levellers, Chartists and Suffragettes, operates in an augmentative fashion when there is an existing electoral system in place. Democracy is not synonymous with representation; increasing the constituent power of 'the people' can take on many different forms besides voting. For example, in the British context, augmentation might involve referendums set by a citizen's council, the use of binding

[156] Jones ,'Brexit's Lessons for Democracy', p. 44. N.b. The Blair government did schedule a referendum for the controversial EU Constitutional Treaty of 2005 but this vote was postponed indefinitely after referendums in France and the Netherlands rejected the same treaty. Ultimately, the Treaty of Lisbon superseded the Constitutional Treaty in 2008.
[157] Moffitt, 'How to Perform Crisis', pp. 120-22.
[158] *Ibid*, pp. 200-210.
[159] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, p. 142.
[160] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, p. 139.

plebiscites, devolution of parliamentary powers, participatory budgeting, reforms that equalise access to various public forums and, in a more punitive sense, changes that diminish the institutionalised or economic power of 'the elite' – in short, anything that gives the ordinary citizen relatively greater power and hence capacity for initiating action in public life. The logical conclusion of populist logic is a democratised relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite'. In order for the failures of the present to be resolved, 'the people's' constituent power must be increased relative to the power held by 'the elite'. Historically this entailed the expansion of the franchise; contemporarily, augmentation comes in any mode that economically or politically enhances the power of the enfranchised citizen.

Adding democratic augmentation into the mix also complements the populist 'choreography' offered by the Essex School. In the model, Stavrakakis et al. already make use of 'crisis in' and 'crisis of' as a way of distinguishing between populist and anti-populist performances.[161] This distinction captures the two different aims of 'established forces' and populists; the former wishes to preserve the status quo and the latter demands systemic change. In the current era, however, the systems that generate crisis are often transnational in nature. The failures that sustain Euroscepticism, for example, relate to regional governance, economics and migration. Exclusive, or 'right wing', populism is often motivated by the perceived corruption and inefficiency of such transnational systems.[162] Theirs is an anti-system, or more specifically, anti-elite message. It makes sense, then, to add to the dividing line between populism and anti-populism the desired effect that each discourse has for 'the people'. Populists desire systemic change that increases the constituent power of 'the people'; anti-populists resist systemic chance and take action to stymie or diminish the constituent power of populist movements. Enhancing the constituent power of the people is, of course, a subjective appraisal that must be made of each particular discourse in comparison to the context. It would be a mistake, for example, to label all referendums as automatically augmentative of democracy and hence a populistic act on the part of the referendum initiator. I contend, however, that it is necessary to make an appraisal of

[161] Stavrakakis et al., 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 14.
[162] Mudde, 'The Populist Radical Right', pp. 1167-86.

authenticity when dealing with a candidate for populism because of the particularly slippery nature of the phenomenon.

The Greek populist/anti-populist divide is explicit and can be identified solely through the performance of the relevant actors. But in other countries, such as Britain, the divide may be less clear. The 'choreography' that Stavrakakis et al. derived from Greece identifies populism as a 'platform' that is 'articulated "in the name of the people" to defend the victims of the crisis'.[163] Anti-populism, by contrast, designates 'as 'populist' those claiming to speak on behalf of "the people"'.[164] However, in the British case, the anti-populists claim to speak on behalf of 'the people', both to gain electoral advantage and because it is politically astute in a Eurosceptic 'political economy' to indulge in anti-EU rhetoric.[165] It was only after a significant number of misjudgments that these performances led to the 2016 referendum, and then to a result that the incumbent government did not want. Defining populism as a specific discourse that aims at democratic augmentation assists in categorising elite sleights of hand as a sophisticated form of anti-populism. This, in turn, allows us to preserve the conceptual integrity of populism as the patron saints of lost causes, which is to say as a voice raised on behalf of the marginalised.

Conclusion

If one labels a political movement 'democratic', then that is generally taken to mean it aims at increasing the power of the *demos*. A neoliberal movement aims to empower the market relative to the state. The same applies to every other modifier in the political lexicon: socialism, anarchism, conservatism each comes with an assumed praxis, an entity or idea that must be made more influential to achieve an agenda. But contemporary populist theory does not ascribe the transfer of power that a populist movement would enact if successful in its aims. This chapter has outlined the problem of populist authenticity – the difficulty in separating authentic and faux invocations of 'the people' due to the abovementioned lack of praxis in contemporary populist theory.

[163] Stavrakakis et al.,'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 22.
[164] *Ibid*. p. 22.
[165] Gilford, 'The United Kingdom's Euroseptic political economy', pp. 779-94.

The first section elaborated on UKIP's populist transformation and the systemic nature of Euroscepticism in British politics. Britain has been an 'awkward partner' to Europe since time immemorial; underwent a tortuous process of joining the formative political union; and a majority of its citizens have been growing increasingly more sceptical of the EU in response to deeper integration and regional policy failures.[166] The second section picked up the theme of 'elite Euroscepticism', a phrase Emma Vines uses to describe the faux populism of the major political parties on the question of Europe. It concluded that 'elite Euroscepticism' attempts to prevent the formation of a movement that would act on British Euroscepticism, but more importantly it aims at dissolving any challenge to the government's capacity to control the parliament. Both the Conservative and Labour parties have employed populist rhetoric towards Europe and made recourse to referendums to defray the political cost of Euroscepticism. These actions present a stark contrast with the authentic populism of the Levellers, Chartists and Suffragettes, each of which lobbied the political elite on behalf of their version of 'the people'. The third section argued that the difference between authentic populism and faux populism is a commitment to democratic augmentation.

The EU referendum of 2016 was not meant to augment British democracy. The referendum itself, as an institutional process, was carefully designed to serve Conservative Party interests, reimpose elite control over popular sentiment, and subvert any momentum for change. In this sense, the EU referendum is an exemplar of the sophisticated form of anti-populism that the British governing elite employ to maintain control of British politics. The British populist/anti-populist divide is less explicit than the Greek context due to the ingrained nature of Euroscepticism as a political dynamic. The 'hardening' of British Euroscepticism since 1992 poses a problem for the major parties, forcing them to tread a line between populist performance and a foreign policy that supports the European project. Despite their performances, however, elite Euroscepticism has been anti-populist in nature from inception up to the design of the referendum itself. Chapter 4 will demonstrate how this agenda finally became explicit in the Remain discourse.

On the other hand, contemporary populist theory is unsuited to the kind of 'elite

[166] Usherwood and Startin, 'Euroscepticism as a Persistent Phenomenon', pp. 1-16.

Euroscepticism' that performs one set of logic and enacts another. This chapter outlined various populist movements from the history of British democratisation. However, in the period after a universal franchise is established the authenticity of populist rhetoric becomes much less clear. As Hannah Arendt noted, 'the people' only emerge as a large constituency when the party system undercuts the democratic promise of the electoral system through elitism, insularity, and resistance to change.[167] Significant failures such as economic catastrophe in Greece or, in Britain, a combination of austerity, migration, nationalism and EU integration are needed to bring out the populist/anti-populist dynamic.

In this chapter I have argued that existing populist theory must be capable of quantifying authenticity. The remainder of this thesis will apply contemporary theory to the EU referendum in order to substantiate this claim. Part 2 of this thesis uses Benjamin Moffitt's six-step model in concert with the Essex School 'choreography' of populism to categorise the discourse of each side of the referendum. Part 3 will then demonstrate the need to 'augment' existing concepts of populism by adding the criterion that it be committed to democratic augmentation. Detailed analysis of the solutions proposed by Vote Leave reveal it to be an example of *populism without 'the people'*: a discourse that is stylistically populist but practically anti-populist because it denigrates 'the elites' without focussing on or enhancing the constituent power of 'the people'.

[167] Arendt, *On Revolution*, p. 277.

Part 2

Crisis, populism and anti-populism

Chapter 3

Leave and the crisis of the EU

Populism is a narrative based on failure. Populist discourse transforms failure into a crisis of legitimacy for the ruling class – or 'the elite' – by seeking to unify those who have been harmed by failure into a collective identity called 'the people'. 'The elite' are then held accountable for the injustices visited upon 'the people'. Part 2 of this thesis examines the populist narration of failure in the Leave discourse, and compares it to the anti-populist counter narrative deployed by Remain. Part 3 of the thesis will then introduce the notion of constituent power to highlight the shortcomings of a purely stylistic, ideational or discursive approach that omits praxis from the study of populism.

This chapter uses the results of content analysis to identify the failures in British public policy that Leave narrated into a crisis caused by the EU. It argues that these failures are presented in a populist manner because the EU bureaucrat is characterised as their source. The 'Eurocrat' represents Leave's version of 'the elite' whose incompetence and opposition creates an ongoing crisis for the British people. The chapter is comprised of three sections, each of which presents one element of the Leave discourse based on the underlying content analysis. In total, these sections discuss 175 of the total 375 referents that comprise the entire Leave discourse. These referents share the theme of diagnosing failure and attributing blame for them to the European elite. Chapter 5 provides analysis of the remainder of the Leave discourse, which relates specifically to the relationship between 'the people' and the cast of antagonists – from British parliamentarians to European migrants – that perpetrate injustice on them.

This chapter draws closely on Benjamin Moffitt's model of populism as a political style when interpreting the Leave discourse. The first section of this chapter describes the three major policy failures that Leave focussed upon. These were the degradation of British public goods such as public health and education; the uncontrollable nature and scale of European migration; and the weakening of British national security. In a way that does not deviate from Colin Hay's theory of populist change, Leave narrated these

separate failures into a single overarching portrayal of crisis stemming from the EU.[1] This fulfils the first two steps of Moffitt's model: the identification of failure and the linking of separate issues into an elevated framework of crisis. The second section of the chapter compares Leave's narration of crisis to Moffitt's remaining steps for a populist performance. On the strength of this comparison, I conclude that Leave's discourse was delivered in a populist style.

The third section of this chapter analyses what Moffitt would term the 'spectacularisation of failure'.[2] In this element of the discourse, Leave attributed underhanded and antagonistic motives to the EU bureaucracy and court system. This performance of crisis involved a conspiracy amongst EU elites whom, Leave alleged, were intent on further disempowering the UK and its citizenry. Such allegations created a temporal urgency and sense of shared oppression amongst the audience. Taken together, these stylistic features give the Leave discourse a textbook appearance of populism. Moreover, this was populism on a spectacular level, an emblematic example of the repertoire.

On the other hand, the narration of an antagonistic EU elite draws attention to the relative silence in Leave's discourse regarding 'the people'. Their performance of crisis was also short-term in nature; according to the Leave discourse, if the UK voted to leave the EU both the existing failures and the antagonistic EU elite would become irrelevant. Chapter 5 will return to these themes to argue that populism needs to be conceived of as more than narrating crisis and vilifying 'the elite'. The solutions offered by authentic populists also need to enhance the constituent power of 'the people'.

1. Redefining failures: Leave's decisive intervention

The Leave discourse centered on three major failures in British government. The first relates to the degradation of British public goods[3] through a combination of scarce

[1] Colin Hay 1999, 'Crisis and the structural transformation of the state: interrogating the process of change', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 1(3), pp. 323-24.
[2] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 120-21.
[3] The term 'public good' is used in this thesis to indicate essential public services – such as education and healthcare – or symbolic entities that elicit a sense of ownership and protection, such as livestock and the environment. Typically, public goods featured in the Remain and Leave discourse as criteria that should be used to guide voter decision-making.

funding and increased demand, the second to uncontrolled migration from Europe, and the third to the weakening of British national security. The following three subsections examine each of these elements of the Leave discourse in detail. In each case, Leave re-articulated a failure in domestic service provision as a crisis caused by EU membership. In keeping with Colin Hay's definition of crisis, this portion of Leave's discourse constitutes a '*moment of decisive intervention*' whereby disparate contradictions and failures are accumulated together into a single overarching narrative.[4] The following section will examine how Leave further deepened the sense of crisis and introduced a populist dimension by contrasting the harm caused by these failures with the inadequacy of the EU bureaucracy.

1.1 The threat posed to British public goods by EU membership

The widespread strain placed on British public goods is an important theme of Leave's discourse. The degradation of these public goods was presented as evidence of systemic failure. The National Health Service (NHS), public and private housing, education, the environment, energy provision, and agricultural livestock were mentioned by Leave publications a total of twenty-four times across the ten calendar weeks of the official campaign. These six referents were grouped together during content analysis because they were each used by Leave to dramatise the worsening condition of British society due to EU membership. This section will discuss Leave's treatment of the NHS as emblematic of the way they discussed other public goods[5] and indicative of the methods they used to narrate EU membership as a crisis.

The NHS is a cornerstone of the British welfare state and often functions in public discussion as a metaphor for social support and solidarity. Leave argued that it was in a state of near-failure and identified Britain's EU membership as the primary cause. The NHS's alleged lack of funding was mentioned eight times throughout the campaign and four mentions were made of the increasing demographic pressure on its services.

[4] Colin Hay 1999, 'Crisis and the structural transformation of the state: interrogating the process of change', *British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 1(3), pp. 323-24.
[5] Iain Duncan Smith MP, 10 May 2016, 'Iain Duncan Smith: Are we in this together?', *Vote Leave*, accessed 31 January 2018; Iain Duncan Smith MP and ICM Research, 1 May 2016, 'David Cameron has questions to answer on his deeply unpopular EU immigration policy', *Vote Leave*, accessed 2 June 2018.

These allegations were substantiated by factual evidence. Gisela Stuart MP, the chair of the Leave organisation, opened their campaign by quoting from the NHS five-year plan. The NHS was required to make £22 billion in government mandated 'efficiency savings' in 2020-21 and urgently needed a funding injection of £8 billion to remain operational.[6] Stuart translated these publicly available statistics into the campaign line: 'New Vote Leave research says that … the NHS will face a shortfall of £12.3 billion by 2020-2021.'[7] This quote encapsulates two important elements of self-portrayal in the Leave discourse. Firstly, Leave portrayed itself as legitimate and truthful – it is conducting 'research' into the causes of various problems in British public life. Secondly, Leave portrayed itself as speaking truth to power. Its research is 'new', serving to highlight the failures of the status quo. These themes are evident across the various demands that Leave raised in the context of the campaign.

Leave used facts to illustrate systemic failure and identified the EU as the key obstacle to addressing the NHS's challenges. Stuart compared the NHS's funding crisis to the alleged cost of EU membership, asserting that the dire straits of one came from prioritising the other.[8] Responding to a junior doctors' strike over a NHS pay dispute, Chris Grayling MP argued that 'Getting to a proper seven day NHS could make a real difference to this country. It would be so much easier to pay for that change if we took back control of our £350 million a week contribution to the EU and spent it on our priorities.'[9] Grayling meant that the current system was so overburdened it was unable to provide constant, seven-days-a-week care to British citizens. He was also suggesting that if the UK left the EU it would free up scarce resources that could alleviate the NHS shortage. Grayling went on to note that the cost of meeting the junior doctors' pay demands equated to 5 per cent of the UK's annual contribution to the EU budget. Stuart and Grayling each stated a desire to improve healthcare, observing that this would be 'easier' to do so outside of the EU, and then attached a large monetary figure to the cost of maintaining the status quo. There is a simple linear logic to this proposition.

[6] Gisela Stuart MP, 15 April 2016, 'A vote to leave could help fix the NHS funding crisis', *Vote Leave*, accessed 10 January 2018.
[7] Stuart, 'A vote to leave could help fix the NHS funding crisis'.
[8] Gisela Stuart MP, 25 April 2016, 'Junior doctors pay dispute could be settled with just over two weeks of our EU contributions', *Vote Leave*, accessed 18 January 2018; Gisela Stuart MP, 10 May 2016, 'Alan Johnson is out of touch if he thinks a hospital a week is a "drop in the ocean"', *Vote Leave*, accessed 30 January 2018.
[9] Chris Grayling MP, 25 April 2016, 'Junior doctors pay dispute could be settled with just over two weeks of our EU contributions', *Vote Leave*, accessed 18 January 2018.

Membership of the EU is a financial obstacle to investing in domestic services. On top of this, EU membership was alleged to also stretch NHS resources thinner and thinner.

The EU was presented by Leave as both a supply and demand threat for the NHS. While EU membership drained public funding, Leave argued that the high level of migration that it facilitated further stretched service capacity. Again, Leave drew on official government reports to establish the factual basis of this case. The addenda to one Leave press release quoted from the NHS Improvement plan when it stated that 'The NHS is in crisis – one of the reasons is higher demand due to migration. In 2015-2016, NHS providers in England recorded a deficit of £2.45 billion, caused in part by "increasing demand".'[10] As with the direct correlation drawn between NHS funding and EU contributions, Leave was making a 'new' claim here. Their discourse reformulated an existing crisis into a novel analysis. The NHS Improvement plan did not specify increased migration as a factor contributing to the increasing demand; Leave was introducing the comparison in order to problematise EU membership. In this way, Leave narrated domestic failures as part of a regional crisis.

The novel demands formulated by Leave were not without foundation. Maria Caulfield MP, a former nurse, put the most measured Leave case for linking the NHS and the EU, saying:

> Our NHS is being hit hard by population growth driven in large part by migration from other EU member states of 270,000 a year. This pressure will continue to mount if we remain members. To Vote Leave is a vote to protect the NHS.[11]

Each link in that argumentative chain was based on cited evidence. However, reasonable statements such as this are a rarity in the Leave discourse, which was primarily comprised of more hyperbolic claims. Iain Duncan Smith MP and Michael Gove MP, for example, presented a more typical portrayal of migration when they said:

[10] Matthew Elliot, 2 June 2016, 'Tonight showed that the public does not trust David Cameron on the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 May 2018.
[11] Maria Caulfield MP, 16 June 2016, 'Maria Caulfield MP - Vote Leave for the Nurses and NHS', *Vote Leave*, accessed 5 June 2018.

'If the EU expands as planned, 88 million citizens will be able to move to the UK, placing a burden on the NHS'.[12] Eighty-eight million citizens is the sum population of Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey, five countries that were in preliminary negotiations with the EU concerning future membership.

On one level, it is true that eighty-eight million people *could* move to the UK and thereby add to the NHS burden, but that is practically impossible. Leave's purpose was not to provide a realistic assessment of the EU and its effects on the NHS, but to simply articulate the two entities in competition with one another.[13] The NHS was under pressure and, they argued, the EU was responsible for compounding the present crisis as well as further exacerbating it in future. Amid a healthcare crisis, 'Rather than sending money abroad to countries that want to join the EU … we should be spending our money on our priorities here in the UK.'[14] Leave injected the EU into a debate about ongoing failure in public policy and presented membership as a major obstacle to improving essential public services. They often presented a hyperbolic or worst-case scenario to create a sense of crisis. When presenting this picture of looming existential threat, Leave most often referred to escalating migration and fragile national security.

1.2 Uncontrolled migration

For Leave, uncontrolled migration was argued to be the root of Britain's health crisis. Funding shortfalls were minor compared to the potentially millions of new service users that Smith and Gove touted. Migration also served as a metaphor for insecurity and danger due to the frequent associations Leave made with terrorism and people smuggling. This section will examine the migration element of the Leave discourse on its own terms, and the section following will discuss the related element of national security. Leave publications referred to uncontrolled migration and compromised national security a total of thirty-six times over the course of the referendum campaign. These references have been grouped together because they narrate a crisis of escalating

[12] Iain Duncan Smith MP and Michael Gove MP, 25 April 2016, 'Home Secretary admits that 5 new countries joining the EU is dangerous for the UK', *Vote Leave*, accessed 18 January 2018.
[13] Michael Gove MP, 20 May 2016, '"Paving the road from Ankara": The EU, immigration and the NH', *Vote Leave*, accessed 20 May 2018.
[14] Gisela Stuart MP and Iain Duncan Smith MP, 27 April 2016, 'UK pays £1.8 billion to help Albania and Turkey join the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 19 January 2018.

danger and national helplessness, two effects Leave attributed directly to EU membership.

Migration was the central theme of the Leave discourse. It encapsulated the negative effects of the EU and also intimated an ongoing crisis. As Matthew Elliot, the director of Vote Leave, put it: 'if we vote to stay, we will never be able to control the number of people coming here and putting more pressure on our public services'.[15] From Leave's perspective, the 'unsustainable pressures' from 'our lack of control on immigration' were the root cause of underfunded schools and a shortage of primary school places for children.[16] Rampant house price inflation and a deficit of liveable dwellings manifested the 'economic effect of the level of immigration'.[17] Often the linkage was asserted with stark simplicity verging on monomania. Chronic problems in British public life – particularly those exacerbated by austerity – could be resolved or significantly ameliorated by reducing migration. Liam Fox MP, for example, told 'the young and those with young families' that 'if we remain in the EU, if we have uncontrolled migration year after year after year after year, you will find it harder to get a home of your own.'[18] Instead of discussing the underlying domestic issues affecting public goods such as housing, Leave portrayed contributory factors such as migration as the overarching crisis.

The rhetoric used by Leave rendered migration tangible and threatening. Two rhetorical devices were deployed consistently. Firstly, Leave spokespeople referred to inward migration figures and projections. They quoted Office of National Statistics (ONS) figures to the effect that 69,000 EU citizens entered the UK 'looking for work' in September 2015.[19] In 2016 that ONS figure was 77,000, up from 63,000 in 2014.[20]

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[15] Matthew Elliot, 30 May 2016, 'Statement by Michael Gove, Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart for The Sun – Vote Leave to cut VAT on fuel', *Vote Leave*, accessed 22 April 2018.
[16] Gisela Stuart MP, 18 April 2016, 'Gisela Stuart says Government must come clean about the impact of migration on schools', *Vote Leave*, accessed 10 January 2018; Priti Patel MP, 18 April 2016, 'Priti Patel: Uncontrolled migration is putting unsustainable pressures on our public services', *Vote Leave*, accessed 11 January 2018; Smith, 'Are we in this together?'.
[17] Smith, 'Are we in this together?'; Michael Gove MP, 29 May 2016, 'Vote Leave to stop non-resident foreign buyers pushing up property prices', *Vote Leave*, accessed 21 April 2018.
[18] Liam Fox MP, 2 June 2016, 'Rt Hon Liam Fox MP: 'Memories of Green? The cost of uncontrolled migration', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 February 2018.
[19] Smith and Gove, 'Home Secretary admits that 5 new countries joining the EU'.
[20] Matthew Elliot, 1 May 2016, 'Gove makes optimistic case for taking back control of our borders, money and democracy', *Vote Leave*, accessed 3 June 2018.

Leave also cited net historical migration and forecasted migration from Treasury reports, the UK Statistics Authority and the International Passenger Survey.[21] Leave described such migration volumes as evidence of the 'dangers to the NHS of voting to stay in the European Union' and warned about 'huge strains' on public services.[22] Secondly, Leave translated these figures into physical comparisons. For example, Iain Duncan Smith and Michael Gove converted inward migration of 69,000 EU citizens into the notion that 'a city the size of Glasgow is added to the UK population'.[23] Other figures were translated into a city the size of Manchester, Newcastle, Oxford, Birmingham, Glasgow, Liverpool, Leeds, Sheffield, Bradford and Bristol.[24] Leave made every effort to portray migration as a huge and palpable national crisis.

Describing migration in terms of sheer numbers and moving cities dramatised the issue of migration. It also had the effect of dehumanising migrants and signalling their otherness without appearing to be overtly racist. Leave consistently emphasised that EU migration on this scale was 'uncontrolled and unlimited' due to freedom of movement.[25] Moreover, they argued that there was no way to avoid such major demographic changes within the EU: 'If we stay we will give away control of immigration permanently'.[26] The insecurity and danger posed by migration was central to the Leave message. Even Leave's discussion of the NHS alluded to danger. For example, Gisela Stuart argued that 'Instead of giving an extra 88 million people – more than our entire population – access to the NHS I believe it would be safer to take back

[21] Patel, 'Uncontrolled migration is putting unsustainable pressures on our public services'; Priti Patel MP and Robert Oxley, 27 April 2016, 'Pessimistic OECD report admits economy will grow and migration will be controlled if we Vote Leave', *Vote Leave*, accessed 19 January 2018; Priti Patel MP, 12 May 2016, 'Priti Patel: The scale and impact of immigration from Europe is even higher than previously admitted. It is out of control – and cannot be controlled as long as we stay in the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 31 January 2018.
[22] Smith and Gove, 'Home Secretary admits that 5 new countries joining the EU'; Patel, 'The scale and impact of immigration from Europe'.
[23] Smith and Gove, 'Home Secretary admits that 5 new countries joining the EU'.
[24] Patel and Oxley, 'Pessimistic OECD report admits economy will grow'; Patel, 'The scale and impact of immigration from Europe'; Gisela Stuart MP, Michael Gove MP and Boris Johnson MP, 29 May 2016, 'PM challenged to set out the facts on EU immigration', *Vote Leave*, accessed 21 April 2018; Michael Gove MP, Boris Johnson MP and Gisela Stuart MP, 1 May 2016, 'Statement by Michael Gove, Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart on NHS funding: A stronger NHS and more money for those in need – why leaving the EU helps protect working people', *Vote Leave*, accessed 3 June 2018; Fox, 'Memories of Green?'.
[25] Gove et al., 'Statement by Michael Gove, Boris Johnson and Gisela Stuart on NHS funding'.
[26] Gisela Stuart MP, Michael Gove MP and Boris Johnson MP, 6 June 2016, 'Voting to stay in the EU is the risky option', *Vote Leave*, accessed 7 May 2018.

control.'[27] Public healthcare is here presented in the language of safety, with millions of anonymous, culturally different people about to be given access to a prized domestic asset, a situation represented as unsafe and uncontrollable.

1.3 National insecurity and independence

Notions of insecurity and danger were central to Leave's discourse, the central aim of which was to reframe public policy failures into a narrative of crisis. As this section will outline, the Leave discourse also touched on topics traditionally considered security- or defence-related. These allusions related firstly to military preparedness and secondly to counter-terrorism services. In security matters, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) filled an equivalent role to the NHS as the essential public good threatened by the EU. Lord David Owen characterised Europe as 'sleepwalking in relation to security questions and the situation is not stable' because EU member states were not meeting their NATO obligations to spend two per cent of GDP investing in their respective defence forces.[28] He went on to argue that NATO needed a 'UK freed of EU pretension that openly and determinedly champions NATO to the exclusion of EU defence', thereby setting up the same competitive dynamic between NATO and the EU as between the NHS and the EU.[29] In the Leave discourse, NATO was the deserving recipient of resources, having proven itself in the Cold War, whilst the 'dysfunctional' EU could not be trusted with British security.[30]

Less subtle allusions were made throughout the campaign to other cultures presenting an intrinsic threat to the UK. One press release, for example, noted that 'due to the EU migrant crisis' there were 'just' two Border Force vessels patrolling British borders.[31] Leave once again concluded that UK assistance to the EU was impoverishing and imperilling its own public good, in this case by allowing foreign vessels access to

[27] Stuart and Smith, 'UK pays £1.8 billion to help Albania and Turkey'.
[28] Lord David Owen, 4 May 2016, 'Speech by Lord Owen – The UK, Canada and a United States of Europe', *Vote Leave*, accessed 25 January 2018.
[29] Lord David Owen, 13 June 2016, 'Speech by Lord Owen to the Bruges Group', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018.
[30] Owen, 'The UK, Canada and a United States of Europe'; Open letter from former defence officers, 25 May 2016, 'Senior military officers speak out about the dangers of remaining in the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 16 April 2018.
[31] Matthew Elliot, 4 May 2016, 'EU bends rules to create visa-free zone from Syria to English Channel', *Vote Leave*, accessed 25 January 2018.

British waters. The security threat that Leave posited also had a distinctly Eastern European inflection. One press release noted pointedly that Kosovo, which was then undergoing consideration for visa free access to the EU, had 'around 260,000 unregistered firearms' and was a major distribution point for the Balkan narcotics trade.[32] Leave implied that the eastern portions of Europe were lawless and presented a threat via the EU. The EU allegedly allowed 'free movement of criminals' and its residence cards could allegedly be 'systematically forged'.[33] At the same time, the European Commission was said to be negotiating possible membership for countries in this region, giving their citizens greater access to the UK.[34] Chapter 5 will provide a more detailed analysis of the various guises Leave applied to the anonymous face of the migrant in order to portray them as irretrievably antagonistic to 'the people'. Nonetheless it is also worth briefly noting at this point how terrorism was presented as a security issue.

Terrorism manifested in the Leave discourse as a product of cultural difference and the threat of the unknown. Iain Duncan Smith argued that, '[i]n an uncertain world, it is not sensible to extend our border to Syria and Iraq. We should Vote Leave to take back control over who we let into the UK'[35] Uncertainty was here attributed to those of eastern European and Middle Eastern ethnicity, whose origins made them a potential harbinger of terrorist acts. By contrast, someone travelling from other parts of the world provide more 'certainty' and hence security. Smith mentioned the borders of Syria and Iraq in order to obliquely reference the potential entry of Turkey into the EU. These plans would create 'a visa-free zone from Syria to the English Channel', which in the Leave narrative equated to removing all obstacles between ISIS and the British Isles.[36]

The solution that Leave offered to the threefold crisis of depleted public goods, uncontrolled migration and national insecurity was a return to national independence. Aside from the cultural exclusivity implied in the above extracts, leaving the EU would also entail an escape from a failed approach to security. In addition to the undermining of NATO, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) – which warrants its own separate

[32] *Ibid.*
[33] Elliot, 'Tonight showed that the public does not trust David Cameron'.
[34] Elliot, 'EU bends rules'.
[35] Stuart and Smith, 'UK pays £1.8 billion to help Albania and Turkey'.
[36] Elliot, 'EU bends rules'.

discussion several sections on – had 'already asserted control of our intelligence services' through its interpretation of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights.[37] This Charter, and EU law more generally, 'prevents us from removing persons our courts have concluded are terrorists.'[38] In summary, Leave portrayed the EU as, firstly, exacerbating the threat of terrorism through its migration policies and, secondly, legally preventing the UK from responding to such threats.[39] Within the EU 'we are completely unable to control the numbers of people coming to this country' and also unable to police whom specifically comes.[40] In these circumstances, reasserting national independence was represented as a retreat to certainty. It was also represented as a return to the natural level at which security concerns *should* be dealt; Leave rendered the nation-state as the correct the adjudicator of security issues.[41] In the collective voice of numerous retired defence and intelligence officers, 'Sovereignty and defence are indivisible'.[42]

2. The EU as a crisis of misgovernment

Leave argued that failures in public service provision could only be solved if the UK were to escape the EU and return to the safety implied in culturally homogenous and carefully policed nationhood. However, in isolation, these elements of the Leave discourse do not amount to a populist narration of crisis. As Benjamin Moffitt observes, the primary difference between everyday 'crisis politics' and 'populist performances of crisis' is the intent to 'divide "the people" from those ostensibly responsible for the crisis – whether that is the elite, some dangerous Other or a combination of both.'[43] The following three subsections outline how Leave divided Britain – both its citizens and its elected representatives – from the EU bureaucracy that it claimed was responsible for a series of crises.

[37] Stuart et al., 'Voting to stay in the EU is the risky option'.
[38] Matthew Elliot, 30 May 2016, 'Vote Leave issues guarantees of what "IN" looks like', *Vote Leave*, accessed 30 May 2018; Smith and Gove, 'Home Secretary admits that 5 new countries joining the EU'.
[39] Michael Gove MP, 8 May 2016, 'After we Vote Leave we will act quickly to protect national security and save money', *Vote Leave*, accessed 30 January 2018.
[40] Priti Patel MP, 14 June 2016, 'School place statistics show we must take back control of our borders', *Vote Leave*, accessed 5 June 2018.
[41] Sir Richard Dearlove, 16 May 2016, 'Sir Richard Dearlove: Speech at BBC World on the Move day', *Vote Leave*, accessed 14 February 2018.
[42] Open letter, 'Senior military officers speak out'.
[43] Moffitt, 'How to Perform Crisis', p. 208.

In order to perform this crisis, Leave made recourse to the stylistic tactics Moffitt lays out as the second, third, fourth and fifth steps of his model. They elevated and linked the policy failures described previously into a wider and connected framework; framed the crisis as the EU's responsibility; used the media to propagate their economic narrative; and presented the simple message that leaving would solve the host of problems facing contemporary Britain.[44] These elements demarcate the Leave discourse as a populist performance.

2.1 The economic impost of EU membership

A complex picture of the EU lies at the centre of the Leave discourse. It was not a nuanced picture, but it did concern many aspects of public policy. One prominent element concerned the economic cost of EU membership and the ongoing threat of the Eurozone crisis. Leave made reference to the monetary impost of EU membership, downplayed the economic risks of leaving, and highlighted the intrinsic economic risk associated with the EU a total of thirty-seven times in the five weeks before the referendum. These references have been grouped together because they posit an economic division between the UK and the EU; in the Leave discourse, the latter was alleged to impose a serious financial risk on the former.

Leave's central argument relating to economic cost made headlines around the world and was written on the side of their campaign bus.[45] Leave claimed that Britain was sending £350 million to the EU every week in fulfilment of the budgetary commitments that attach to membership.[46] £350 million per week is an extrapolation from an annual gross contribution figure published by the Office of National Statistics, which does not deduct the various remunerations that flow back to the UK in the form of EU services, subsidies and grants.[47] As with the NHS and security, there is a factual basis underlying

[44] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 120-21.
[45] This is a somewhat flippant reference to the official Leave campaign bus used to transport spokespeople to pre-planned events. Written on the side of the bus, controversially, was the phrase: 'We send the EU £350 million a week let's fund our NHS instead… Vote Leave'.
[46] Thirteen government ministers, 14 June 2016, 'Leave Ministers commit to maintain EU funding', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018.
[47] Elliot, 'Vote Leave issues guarantees'.

these claims. These facts, however, were often misaligned with the claims that they appeared to substantiate in order to create a greater sense of magnitude or urgency.

Each press release from Leave came with a 'Notes to editors' section that cited government reports, independent research, and other authorities to support various claims. Releases pertaining to the economic cost of the EU and the risk of leaving it were particularly well cited. One 'Note', for example, cites the official 2014 Balance of Payments to support the claim that 'Voting to leave will allow for a £12.3 billion reduction in the current account deficit, stabilising the pound in the foreign exchange markets.[48] Without straying outside the contours of the discourse itself – as mentioned in the Introduction, fact-checking the campaign would entail another thesis – this claim appears to be a misrepresentation of basic economics.[49] The press release in question contained nine other similar economic claims, each citing a relevant authority. Checking and rebutting each would be a complex undertaking. In the same way that the campaign bus lent concreteness and a sense of reality to the £350 million figure, the data underlying each economic claim made by Leave served not to demonstrate a truth but to give the appearance of one to the editors that Leave was relying on to propagate its claims.

Alongside claims about the economic cost of membership, Leave mounted an *ad hoc* defence of the risks associated with leaving the EU. Their common refrain was that Remain was 'talking down' the British economy with 'alarmist rhetoric'.[50] These claims served to rebut the Remain narrative that leaving the EU – specifically the Single Market and customs union – would likely cause a recession and possibly economic depression. Leave downplayed this possibility by critiquing the underlying forecasts from government and independent analysts.[51] They also counter-claimed using various

[48] Matthew Elliot, 24 May 2016, 'Prime Minister Continues To Talk Down Country', *Vote Leave*, accessed 16 April 2018.
[49] The figure of £12.3 billion represents the total balance of payments deficit that the UK incurred with EU institutions in 2015. (Table 9.9 of the 2015 Pink Book shows a £9.8 billion deficit, but leaving this aside for the sake of argument.) This figure is the net total that the UK transfers to the EU as a member. Leaving the EU would remove these transfer obligations but in their place the UK would be liable for the customs and excise duties which a non-member incurs through trade with the EU. This figure cannot be treated as a potential saving and is likely to be less than non-member customs duties.
[50] John Redwood MP, 7 June 2016, 'This alarmist rhetoric is ill befitting of the Chancellor', *Vote Leave*, accessed 21 May 2018.
[51] Former Chancellors, 23 May 2016, 'Former Chancellors criticise Treasury forecasts', *Vote Leave*, accessed 10 April 2018; Elliot, 'Prime Minister Continues To Talk Down Country'; Matthew Elliot, 21

economic metrics such as the sterling, trade volumes, manufacturing and employment rates.[52] These economic metrics were used to support Leave's argument that 'after we Vote Leave, there won't be a sudden change that disrupts the economy.'[53] Statistics from the past were used as evidence that the future would be unremarkable. In Boris Johnson's words: 'Of course EU countries will continue trading with us on a tariff free basis – they would be damaging their own commercial interests if they didn't. That's why EU politicians would be banging down the door for a trade deal'.[54]

The third part of Leave's economic case derives from the Eurozone crisis. Whilst the referendum was unfolding, the EU was still dealing with the aftermath of the Global Financial Crisis. The Crisis triggered a smaller-scale yet significant period of turbulence in Europe, especially in those countries that utilise the euro. As previously mentioned, Britain opted out of the Eurozone in 1992 but as a member of the EU it was still exposed to the costs of stabilising the Single Market. Leave argued that the whole concept of the common currency is 'broken', the Eurozone was 'collapsing', and that this ongoing crisis provided impetus for migration to Britain.[55] Douglas Carswell MP argued that the 'greatest threat to the economy is the prospect of Eurozone collapse', and as long as it was a member, Britain must bear the cost of 'ad hoc bailouts' wherever the need arises.[56] Voting for continued membership of the EU was not 'a vote for the status quo' it was rather a vote for continued exposure to economic dysfunction.[57]

June 2016, 'The EU and the European Court increase the cost of living for consumers', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 June 2018; Steve Baker MP, 15 June 2016, 'Steve Baker: I could not support Osborne's plans to cut the NHS', *Vote Leave*, accessed 5 June 2018.

[52] Priti Patel MP, 15 June 2016, 'Employment statistics confound IN campaign's attempts to do down economy', *Vote Leave*, accessed 5 June 2018; Andrea Leadsom MP, 8 June 2016, 'Strong manufacturing stats are a rebuke to negative pro-EU campaign', *Vote Leave*, accessed 22 May 2018; Matthew Elliot, 13 June 2016, 'Record investment confounds IN campaign's attempts to talk down economy', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018; Steve Baker MP, 9 June 2016, 'Latest trade statistics show we are more likely than ever to get a free trade deal with the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 June 2018.

[53] Gisela Stuart MP, Michael Gove MP and Boris Johnson MP, 22 June 2016, 'Vote Leave For A Fairer Britain', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 June 2018.

[54] Boris Johnson MP, 22 June 2016, 'German industry calls for free trade deal if we Vote Leave tomorrow', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 June 2018.

[55] Stuart et al., 'Voting to stay in the EU is the risky option'; Matthew Elliot, 10 May 2016, 'Latest trade stats show UK more likely than ever to strike a free trade deal with EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 30 January 2018.

[56] Douglas Carswell MP, 30 May 2016, 'Carswell: You can't trust David Cameron', *Vote Leave*, accessed 21 April 2018; Boris Johnson MP, 6 June 2016, 'UK taxpayers face EU triple whammy: paying for euro bailouts, a higher EU budget, and an extra £2.4 billion bill', *Vote Leave*, accessed 7 May 2018.

[57] *Ibid.*

Worse still, according to Leave, as a wealthy country Britain was liable for the significant and open-ended costs of propping up the euro.

2.2 The EU's over-regulation and dysfunction

The economic impost element of the Leave discourse created a division between the EU and the UK. One entity was considered to generate financial liabilities and the other suffered the consequences. This portrayal also demonstrates several of the key techniques that Benjamin Moffitt associates with populism as a political style, including manipulating the media, presenting a simple solution and emphasising the temporal urgency of leaving the Eurozone. In this portion of the discourse, the Leave campaign aired traditionally Eurosceptic concerns that the EU is over-regulated and dysfunctional. These claims attributed blame to the European bureaucracy for erecting unworkable and harmful 'red-tape'. Leave claimed that the EU's trade policy underperformed what Britain could negotiate on its own; its business regulations 'shackled' commerce; and its migration system actively harmed member states of the EU. Moreover, Leave asserted, these failures derived from a dysfunctional approach to governance that precluded positive reform of the EU.

Leave drew upon the well-established British narrative that the EU is bad for business. Among many examples, they cited 2010 estimates from the British Chambers of Commerce that placed the 'total cost of EU regulation on British business at £80 billion per year' and unearthed a 2005 Treasury report that put the costs of the Single Market at 'over £125 billion per year, which is the equivalent of 7% of GDP, £4,639 per household, or £23,236 per company.'[58] These figures combine the gross cost of EU membership and the estimated cost of compliance with EU regulatory standards relative to the presumably less onerous set of business regulations that the UK would implement if it had the latitude. In short, these reports compared the current cost of EU compliance with an ideal, self-legislated system.

[58] Priti Patel MP, 28 April 2016, 'Priti Patel speech at the Spring Conference of the Association of Licensed Multiple Retailers', *Vote Leave*, accessed 22 January 2018.

As discussed in chapter 2, Euroscepticism is deeply ingrained in British politics and the Leave discourse thoroughly leveraged its popularity. The campaign solicited open letters from business owners who purported to represent the anti-EU opinion of British business.[59] Leave spokespeople argued that EU rules create a 'heavy burden' for small businesses, inflate the cost of grocery prices, delay public procurement vital to the provision of services, waste taxpayer dollars, and force all businesses to conform to standards that should only be required of exporters.[60] They located responsibility for these failures in the structure and philosophy of the EU. For example, Lord David Owen traced the 'various faults in European politics' back to an insistence on using a 'top down approach to solving complex, local problems'.[61] In Leave's view, a transnational bureaucracy was inherently unsuited to the challenges of national policymaking. If Britain could only free 'herself from the EU's regulatory shackles', Matthew Elliot contended, she would once again 'thrive'.[62]

The EU was represented as unfit for purpose in terms of local problems and also global negotiations such as trade deals. Leave depicted trade as a natural condition of the modern world.[63] They argued there was no chance that the UK could not create its own trade agreements designed to meet its own particular needs outside the EU.[64] By their logic, concluding trade deals is an easy task that the EU cannot execute properly due to its size and internal dynamics.[65] The EU's underperformance in matters of trade was also due to its 'protectionism', low productivity and stagnant growth, all of which hold

[59] Lord Michael Howard, 18 May 2016, 'Lord Howard to the CBI: The lack of democracy in the EU is hurting business', *Vote Leave*, accessed 26 March 2018.
[60] Smith, 'Are we in this together?'; Michael Gove MP and Matthew Elliot, 26 May 2016, 'EU public procurement legislation creates multibillion pound bill for taxpayer', *Vote Leave*, accessed 16 April 2018; Elliot, 'Vote Leave issues guarantees'.
[61] Lord David Owen, 6 June 2016, 'Speech by Owen Paterson – Re-establishing Local and National control of fishing policy will revive our fishing communities and restore our marine environment', *Vote Leave*, accessed 7 May 2018.
[62] Matthew Elliot, 29 April 2016, 'City leaders voice their support for Vote Leave', *Vote Leave*, accessed 22 January 2018.
[63] Patel and Oxley, 'Pessimistic OECD report admits economy will grow'; Matthew Elliot, 3 May 2016, 'Vote Leave responds to latest BSE attempt to do down the economy', *Vote Leave*, accessed 25 January 2018.
[64] Boris Johnson MP, 12 May 2016, 'Vote Leave to create 300,000 British jobs', *Vote Leave*, accessed 31 January 2018; Elliot, 'Latest trade stats show UK more likely than ever to strike a free trade deal'; Matthew Elliot, 16 May 2016, 'Osborne's event nose dives as fellow campaigner describes the EU as an "evil empire"', *Vote Leave*, accessed 14 February 2018.
[65] Michael Gove MP, 19 April 2016, 'Michael Gove: "The Facts of Life Say Leave"', *Vote Leave*, accessed 11 January 2018.

the UK back while Britain's global competitors prosper.[66] As Michael Gove put it, the EU has 'failed to secure trade deals with huge economies' such as America and China but 'outside the EU we can cut those deals.'[67] The EU's alleged failures were considered to be due to size, ineptitude, and governing philosophy.

In Leave's view, the Schengen area – which is the free travel zone for those bearing a EU passport or visa – is the apotheosis of the EU's managerial failures. As discussed in the Introduction, during 2016 the EU was undergoing an asylum seeker crisis due to the Syrian civil war and rise of ISIS. However, Leave narrated these regional crises in such a way as to support their conclusion that the EU was ultimately to blame. Leave cited European Commission documents noting that the current free travel zone was rendered unsuitable by these extraordinary conditions.[68] They then linked the asylum seeker crisis to the pre-existing narrative of regulatory dysfunction by arguing that the EU has an effectively 'open border', with more than 1.8 million illegal crossings as of 2015.[69] The asylum crisis was not a discrete event, Leave argued. The EU had a chronically porous border and poor control over passport forgery, meaning anyone could use the Schengen area once they had entered the EU.[70] Finally, EU rules stipulate that the UK could not turn away anyone bearing EU documentation.[71] Therefore, the UK was argued to be the victim of a series of cascading failures in EU regulation and enforcement.

2.3 EU membership as an ongoing crisis of governance

Leave stressed that, despite its obvious failings, the EU could not and would not reform. Although the EU had been beset by numerous crises, Leave argued that the EU was the greatest problem facing Britain because it represented a crisis of governance. Leave

[66] James Cleverly MP, 27 April 2016, 'Speech by James Cleverly MP: "How the EU's Common Agricultural Policy is making African farmers poorer"', *Vote Leave*, accessed 19 January 2018; Gisela Stuart MP, Michael Gove MP and Boris Johnson MP, 5 June 2016, 'Michael Gove, Boris Johnson, and Gisela Stuart on the Risks of Remain', *Vote Leave*, accessed 7 May 2018; John Longworth, 16 May 2016, 'The "single market" has failed British exporters', *Vote Leave*, accessed 14 February 2018.
[67] Michael Gove MP, 19 April 2016, 'Michael Gove's essay for Today programme – Why it is safer to take back control', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 January 2018.
[68] Elliot, 'EU bends rules'.
[69] Iain Duncan Smith MP, 22 April 2016, 'IDS exposes Obama's double standards', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 January 2018.
[70] Elliot, 'Tonight showed that the public does not trust David Cameron'.
[71] *Ibid.*

portrayed the EU as the epitome of bureaucratic incompetence and inflexibility.[72] In relation to the 'dangerous Schengen system', for example, 'The Commission refuses to address the root cause of the crisis'.[73] Sir Richard Dearlove claimed the EU's inability to 'control inward migration' presented a 'test more serious than in 1945' but that it would not respond properly or change its approach.[74] He concluded that the EU placed administrative purity over pragmatism. The Labour MP John Mann claimed that David Cameron's attempted renegotiations prior to the referendum demonstrated that freedom of movement was non-negotiable.[75] Regarding business, the EU's 'foolish rules' were alleged to strangle innovation and waste billions.[76] Leave portrayed these failures as a feature of the EU policymaking process. Boris Johnson described working with the EU as akin to 'trying to ride a vast pantomime horse, with 28 people blindly pulling in different directions.'[77]

In the Leave discourse, the scale and the competing agendas of its 28 member states rendered EU regulation absurd, unfit for their intended use, and incapable of revision once they were formulated. The EU was argued to be 'too introspective, too timid, too self obsessed to understand' the crises facing it or to embrace opportunities when they arose.[78] Leave portrayed the EU as the singular obstacle to a better economy, a realistic migration system, and practical policy formation. It was also a useful scapegoat upon which Leave blamed domestic problems and inactivity. As Priti Patel argued, 'there is a limit to what [British business] can do to cut red tape. And that limit is there because we are a member of the European Union… our hands are tied and we are powerless to act.[79] Chapter 5 will provide further analysis of the unifying role that opposition to the EU played in the Leave discourse. It bears noting at this point how easily Patel moved from absolving British business of blame for its inability to cut red tape to the assertion of solidarity between British business and herself, as a representative of the

[72] Lord David Owen, 22 April 2016, 'Lord Owen – People will be puzzled by Obama's intervention', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 January 2018.
[73] Elliot, 'EU bends rules'.
[74] Dearlove, 'Speech at BBC World on the Move day'.
[75] John Mann MP, 14 June 2016, 'Logic of IN campaign's claims is to Vote Leave', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018.
[76] Gove '"Paving the road from Ankara"'.
[77] Boris Johnson MP, 9 May 2016, 'Boris Johnson: The liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave', *Vote Leave*, accessed 30 January 2018.
[78] Cleverly, '"How the EU's Common Agricultural Policy is making African farmers poorer"'.
[79] *Ibid*.

Westminster elite. In the phrase 'our hands are tied and we are powerless to act' the politician is represented as equally absolved of blame for the current regulatory system because they share the powerlessness of business leaders. A more powerful EU elite was alleged to oppresses both groups.

Leave argued that the power invested in the EU prevented government Ministers from reflecting community will and helping the British citizen. Its power, real or imagined, was alleged to allow these politicians to perform solidarity with the concerned citizen without enacting their views. Gisela Stuart and George Eustice MP gave a clear example of this constructed oppression when discussing live lamb exports. 'Under EU law', they argued, 'we are powerless to stop live animals being exported abroad for slaughter.'[80] Allegedly the British parliament and well-meaning citizens could not prevent an unethical practice because the EU condoned it. 'This means that each year, tens of thousands of lambs have to endure journeys across the Channel to be slaughtered [in France], even though public opinion is strongly opposed to the practice.'[81] It is important to note that Stuart and Eustice did not propose lamb export restrictions. They were merely lamenting that the EU would prove to be an obstacle if they did. Eustice, the Minister for Animal Welfare, commented that:

> Some campaigners have argued that we should amend national legislation to introduce a targeted ban on some live exports from British ports. However, the EU has made clear that such a ban would be against EU law. If we were to leave the EU a future British government would be free to consider introducing targeted restrictions of this sort on ethical grounds.

Outside the EU, British elites would be 'free' to consider live export restrictions. They might reach the conclusion – in consultation with the farming and export industry – that restrictions were problematic or unwarranted. Or they might not, and thereby represent the views of animal rights activists. However, EU regulations were represented as proscribing even the consideration of a more ethical exportation protocol. Likewise, it was argued to forecloses the potential for what Leave deemed to be fairer, more suitable

[80] Gisela Stuart MP and George Eustice MP, 5 May 2016, 'Vote Leave to end the live transport of lambs to the slaughter', *Vote Leave*, accessed 25 January 2018.
[81] *Ibid.*

business and migration policies. In this discourse leaving the EU entailed possibility, which came with freedom from the controlling EU elite. In this way, the Leave discourse blamed the EU for the shortcomings of the present. Leaving the EU was portrayed as a simple solution to remedy economic, policymaking, and ethical failures, all of which Leave traced back to EU's inability to govern properly.

3. The antagonistic EU elite

The previous section demonstrated that the Leave discourse was a populist performance of crisis based on its conformance to key parts of Benjamin Moffitt's model. That collection of referents showed Leave criticising the EU bureaucracy as a system of government by re-articulating Eurosceptic tropes and the ongoing EU migrant and economic crises. The narration of these failures established a somewhat vague division between the EU as an ineffective union and the UK as a longsuffering member. This section is concerned with the elements of the Leave discourse that truly warrant the term 'spectacularisation of failure'.[82] These elements provide an identity and an adversarial agenda to the EU in the form of 'unelected bureaucracy' and a 'meddling court'. In Leave's discourse, the 'Eurocrat' and the allegedly self-aggrandising European Court of Justice (ECJ) were both represented as being committed to increasing the power of the EU at Britain's expense. With this cast of characters the EU was presented not only as an inept bureaucracy: it was seen as a dangerous entity populated by an antagonistic version of 'the elite'. The urgency and anti-elite hostility generated by these elements exemplifies populist performance.

3.1 The EU elite: 'Eurocrats' and 'unelected bureaucrats'

In Leave discourse the EU was not simply dysfunctional and absurd; there was also a sinister quality to its misgovernment. The construction of a controlling elite within the EU and the attribution of sinister motives to that group reinforced the narrative of ongoing and escalating risk. Leave alleged that the EU and its leaders were not concerned with Britain's safety and wellbeing because of the ulterior and self-serving motives that they are pursuing. Leave argued that the EU must further integrate in order

[82] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 120-21.

to survive and that the European Court of Justice (ECJ) is a key weapon in this effort. The ECJ, from Leave's perspective, is used by the EU to enforce inequitable and enfeebling laws against its member states. These referents have been grouped together because they emphasise the populist division that Leave narrated between the EU 'elite' and Britain.

This section will detail the ways in which Leave personified the EU elite. There were two components in this characterisation. The EU official as an individual was depicted as remote, incompetent, and callous. As an institution, the EU elite were portrayed as a conniving and self-interested class of people determined to accelerate EU integration. These 'unelected bureaucrats' were depicted as prioritising their class interests over the wellbeing of European citizens.

The representatives of the EU appeared in Leave discourse as incompetent caricatures. Leave characterised the staff of the EU as 'unelected bureaucrats' who engaged in 'meddling' and mismanagement.[83] The phrase 'bureaucrats' – often coupled with terms such as 'diktat', 'unelected', 'waste', 'interference' and 'impose' – was used repeatedly to draw on negative stereotypes associated with a distant and incompetent public servant.[84] Leave alleged that these individuals had little practical experience or credibility. In the first week of the campaign Priti Patel derided the 'unaccountable and unelected bureaucrats' of the EU as having 'no clue how to run a business and no local knowledge of this country'.[85] Over the course of the campaign the characterisation of this bureaucratic class became less sparing. In mid June, Patel outlined 'new research' that exposed 'outrageous and excessive expenses claims by EU officials'.[86] These claims were based on inspection of 2014 discretionary spending by EU officials. Leave itemised each of the most exorbitant work expenses, from accommodation to meal bills. 'Eurocrats think they can get away with living the high life at our expense', Leave

[83] Matthew Elliot, 28 April 2016, 'Britain faces £93 million bill from EU meddling over HGV levy', *Vote Leave*, accessed 19 January 2018.
[84] Elliot, 'Britain faces £93 million bill'; Patel, 'Priti Patel speech at the Spring Conference'; Matthew Elliot, 30 April 2016, 'Roaming charges won't go up if we Vote Leave', *Vote Leave*, accessed 22 January 2018; Elliot, 'Vote Leave responds to latest BSE attempt'; Gove and Elliot, 'EU public procurement legislation'; Stuart et al., 'Vote Leave to cut VAT on fuel'.
[85] Patel, 'Speech at the Spring Conference'.
[86] Priti Patel, 13 June 2016, 'How the EU spends your money – Scandalous expense claims by EU officials uncovered', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018.

concluded, juxtaposing a list of their 'jollies' to the reduced living standards British families experienced under austerity.[87]

The Leave discourse placed the 'Eurocrat' in an antagonistic relationship with the British citizen. They were depicted as insulated, wasteful, and indirectly callous. Moreover, they were collectively impugned with an agenda that would further harm the UK. Boris Johnson presented a particularly lurid example of this message in his first speech for the Leave cause. He began by opining that: 'To keep insisting that the EU is about economics is like saying the Italian Mafia is interested in olive oil and real estate. It is true, but profoundly uninformative about the real aims of that organisation.'[88] Johnson's Mafia speech implied a select inner circle working within the EU to pursue a power-grabbing agenda. According to Johnson, that agenda is laid out in the 2015 Five President's report, issued by the European Commission and entitled *Completing Europe's Economic and Monetary Union*. Johnson argued the Five Presidents' report makes it clear that: 'as soon as the UK referendum is out of the way, they will proceed with new structures of political and fiscal integration that this country should have no part in'.[89] Leave's Eurocrat is more than passively incompetent: 'they' are actively working against British interests and hiding their intent to extend the EU's power.

3.2 The conspiracy of EU integration

Populating the EU with an institutional intelligence was a repeated trope throughout Leave's campaign messages. The EU elite was represented as a cohesive political class whose interests directly contradicted those of the UK. According to Leave, the purpose of the clique was to perpetuate the EU from which they benefited. In order to perpetuate itself, however, the EU needed to tend towards wider and deeper administrative integration until it had eventually taken from its member states all the competencies of statehood. Chris Grayling MP, for example, argued that 'The Eurozone cannot be confident of its survival unless they follow down this road.'[90] The road in question was

[87] *Ibid.*; Matthew Elliot, 15 June 2016, 'Revealed: MEPs lavish private restaurants and bars – all paid for by us', *Vote Leave*, accessed 5 June 2018.
[88] Johnson, 'The liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave'.
[89] *Ibid.*
[90] Chris Grayling MP, 31 May 2016, 'Chris Grayling: We must Vote Leave to protect our sovereignty and democracy from further EU integration', *Vote Leave*, accessed 25 April 2018.

the road to deeper political integration and greater centralisation of power. He added: 'This is not a political flight of fancy. They have no choice.' The EU – 'they' – are compelled towards political integration because of economic integration:

> They tried to create a single economy in a geographic area where there was no single government, no common culture or commonality of performance, and where the traditional escape valves when things went wrong in underperforming nations simply disappeared. They have to make it work. And that means political union. There is no other way.[91]

According to Leave, the EU was compelled to replace the nation-state in order to survive. More importantly, the Eurocrats – 'they' – were aware that the European project had reached the point of no return and were dedicated to its continuance. Lord David Owen described them as 'Brussels believers', the 'powerful people who on a day-to-day basis run Europe and steer it towards that end result, a United States of Europe'.[92] Boris Johnson added a layer of eeriness to the process when he described EU integration as 'behavioural therapy', a governmental attempt at 'inducing a change in the underlying attitudes by forcing a change in behaviour'.[93] These allegations dramatically escalated the temporal nature of the crisis that Leave narrated. In their discourse, the 'unelected bureaucrats' of the EU were trying to replace the British nation-state and reprogram its citizens. The various regulations 'they' formulated were both economically harmful and politically sinister.

Leave presented the referendum as one last chance to thwart the Eurocrats. In their discourse the EU was represented as being committed to divesting Britain of its sovereign power and waiting for the referendum to pass before accelerating this process. Michael Gove warned that 'Once we've voted to stay then it will be open season' on the scale of the UK's financial contributions to the EU.[94] Gisela Stuart warned that 'The EU's official plan is … to take even more powers from Britain' and the 'next phase of the plan is another Treaty and another transfer of powers including

[91] *Ibid*.
[92] Owen, 'Speech by Lord Owen to the Bruges Group'.
[93] Johnson, 'The liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave'.
[94] Gove, '"The Facts of Life Say Leave"'.

over taxes.'[95] According to Leave, the EU was also planning on taking the UK's 'seat on the IMF [International Monetary Fund] if we vote to stay' and building a European army with 'shared military assets'.[96] Leave presented the referendum as the UK's once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to break free of its entrapment by the antagonistic EU elite. As Michael Gove put it, 'If we vote to stay we're not settling for a secure status quo. We're voting to be hostages locked in the back of the car and driven headlong towards deeper EU integration.'[97] The Eurocrats – the shadowy and powerful 'they' – were the Mafioso taking Britain hostage.

If the Eurocrats were a Mafia organisation in the Leave discourse, then the ECJ was their enforcer. Leave positioned the ECJ as the concrete manifestation of the EU elite's controlling nature. The ECJ was one of the few EU institutions that Leave could point to as a genuine example of a supranational entity overruling British parliament because its function within the EU is to adjudicate conflicts between national and regional laws. In Leave discourse, the 'rogue' ECJ manifested the worst excesses of the EU.[98] It was represented as an elitist and unelected body that undermined British sovereignty, security, and citizenship whilst upholding the EU's inequitable policy regimes.

3.3 The European Court of Justice as the EU's enforcer

Leave centred its case against the ECJ on the Charter of Fundamental Rights, a law drafted by the European Parliament in 2000 that took full legal effect after the Treaty of Lisbon in 2009. The Charter outlines a set of positive rights for EU citizens and grants the ECJ the power to enforce these rights if member states encroach upon them. Leave focussed on the Charter and the ECJ as proof of the EU's overreach. Michael Gove argued that the ECJ, via the Charter, 'can now control how we apply asylum rules; how our intelligence services monitor suspected terrorists and whom we can deport.'[99] By enforcing the rights of EU citizens, the ECJ was represented as undermining the absolute prerogative of the parliament to refuse asylum, deport

[95] Stuart et al., 'Voting to stay in the EU is the risky option'.
[96] Priti Patel MP, 13 May 2016, 'EU-funded IMF being used to bully the British people', *Vote Leave*, accessed 31 January 2018; Owen, 'The UK, Canada and a United States of Europe'.
[97] Gove, 'Why it is safer to take back control'.
[98] Boris Johnson MP, 26 May 2016, 'Boris Johnson: The only way to take back control of immigration is to Vote Leave on 23 June', *Vote Leave*, accessed 16 April 2018.
[99] Gove, '"The Facts of Life Say Leave"'.

Europeans and engage in whatever surveillance activities it deems fit.[100] Dominic Raab MP stated that the ECJ rulings 'threaten the integrity of our borders, and create serious risks for our security.'[101] Gove later opined that the Court 'could' seek in future to outlaw the Five Eyes Agreement underpinning British intelligence gathering.[102] Leave further argued that the 'European Court is taking control over British citizenship, declaring EU citizenship is the "fundamental status" of British citizens.'[103] Rather than overlapping EU and UK citizenships, Leave characterised one as the erasure of the other. The ECJ was argued to emblematise the loss of British autonomy.

The ECJ was also represented as responsible for the enforcement of dangerous migration policies. Gove, Stuart and Johnson wrote in a major press release that:

> If we remain in the EU the situation is only likely to get worse. The European Court of Justice can use the Charter of Fundamental Rights to overturn decisions of elected politicians on asylum policy … We need a new approach on refugees but the EU's institutions stand in the way.[104]

The ECJ was seen to manifest EU power in the Leave discourse. Leave portrayed the ECJ's actions as demonstrative of the EU's reckless pursuit of power. But, as Leave spokespeople continually reiterated, worse was still to come. Stuart, Gove and Johnson specified exactly what by concluding: 'These problems will only get worse when countries in the pipeline to join the EU become members in the near future.'[105] In this scenario, the ECJ would represent the rights of foreign citizens to the detriment of British citizens.

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[100] Howard, 'The lack of democracy in the EU is hurting business'; Stuart et al., 'PM challenged to set out the facts on EU immigration'.
[101] Dominic Raab MP, 7 June 2016, 'Rogue European Court is a threat to our borders', *Vote Leave*, accessed 21 May 2018.
[102] Gove, 'After we Vote Leave we will act quickly'.
[103] Matthew Elliot, 13 June 2016, 'Three-quarters of a million people gained right to come to UK in last year', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018.
[104] Gisela Stuart MP, Michael Gove MP and Boris Johnson MP, 1 June 2016, 'Restoring public trust in immigration policy – a points-based non-discriminatory immigration system', *Vote Leave*, accessed 25 April 2018.
[105] *Ibid*.

In the Leave discourse, the alleged threat posed by the ECJ unites British citizens and their nation-state. In early May, for example, Gove declared that 'EU judges are stopping us from deporting dangerous criminals and terrorist suspects. This makes us less safe – that's why we should take back control.'[106] The ECJ was argued to be placing 'us' in danger, simultaneously undermining both the nation and the individual. Thus, Leave concluded that taking back national autonomy was also taking back personal autonomy. As Gove put it: 'A vote to remain in the EU is a vote for the permanent supremacy of the European Court. If we Vote Leave on 23 June, by contrast, we take back control.'[107] The nation's capability was here presented as a proxy for the voter's capability; both were oppressed by the ECJ. The crisis that Leave performed for the voter was urgent, fundamental, and involved hostile takeover by an arm of the EU.

In addition to threatening safety and citizenship, Leave also portrayed the ECJ as the enforcer of inequitable and cruel EU policies. Leave alleged that the 'meddling court … put up prices and hurt our economic growth' by enforcing EU law in relation to products such as insurance, beer and solar panels.[108] According to Leave the ECJ was lawless like the Eurocrat, routinely disregarding international law and inconvenient EU Treaties.[109] Leave argued that the ECJ ruled in favour of 'big corporates instead of UK taxpayers', enabling tax avoidance by multinationals.[110] It was alleged that the ECJ ruled against the UK's 'voluntary porn filters' in favour of open communications.[111] It was also represented as complicit in the 'ruthless live export trade', the impoverishment of Africa through tariffs, and the inflation of British house prices through the free movement of capital.[112] Each of these claims was supported by reference to case law although – as with claims made about EU economics – the inferences Leave drew from precedent were often creative.

[106] Gove, 'After we Vote Leave we will act quickly'.
[107] *Ibid*.
[108] Elliot, 'The EU and the European Court increase the cost of living'.
[109] Gove, 'After we Vote Leave we will act quickly'.
[110] Gisela Stuart MP and Boris Johnson MP, 17 May 2016, 'We cannot counteract tax avoidance in the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 26 March 2018; Grayling, 'Wrong Then, Wrong Now'.
[111] Elliot, 'Roaming charges won't go up'.
[112] Stuart and Eustice, 'Vote Leave to end the live transport of lambs'; Cleverly, '"How the EU's Common Agricultural Policy is making African farmers poorer"'; Gove, 'Vote Leave to stop non-resident foreign buyers'.

The cumulative characterisation that Leave made of the ECJ positioned it as the enemy of British sovereignty and democracy. The ECJ exemplified Leave's populist narration of the EU as privileged, arrogant and antagonistic. In Leave's words, 'The Luxembourg Court's willingness to set aside agreements between nation states is … troubling … evidence of how an elitist institution at the heart of the EU seeks to override democratic principles.'[113] This representation of the ECJ embodies the 'spectacularisation' of crisis. Its status as a court of law with 'unelected' judges reinforced the portrayal of the EU as a political project that could only survive when it was insulated from popular opinion. It was the perfect metaphor for the EU as an artificial entity that must survive by expunging the nation-state – an agenda that, Leave argued, it was successfully implementing, with an estimated 61 per cent of British legislation 'made by Brussels' as of 2013.[114] Leave warned that soon a 'tipping point' would be reached, after which the UK would have no 'capacity to govern ourselves'.[115] Instead of self-government, the UK would then be at the mercy of the ECJ, the antagonistic vanguard of the EU elite.

Conclusion

The Leave discourse exhibited all the stylistic trappings of populism. It established a division between 'the people' and 'the elite' by narrating existing failures as the product of incompetence and antagonism on the part of European actors. This chapter has shown the three major elements of Leave's very elite-centric narration of crisis. The first section analysed Leave's '*moment of decisive intervention'* in which Leave linked together various policy failures – from public health to national security – into a simple narrative of crisis for which the EU is responsible. The second section concluded that this crisis narrative fulfils the second, third, fourth and fifth steps of Benjamin Moffitt's criteria for a populist performance: they elevated and linked policy failures into a wider framework of crisis; framed the crisis as the EU's responsibility; used the media to propagate their message; and presented the simple message that leaving would solve

[113] Michael Gove MP and Dominic Raab MP, 8 June 2016, 'Gove and Raab: EU membership makes us less safe', *Vote Leave*, accessed 25 May 2018.
[114] Matthew Elliot, 21 June 2016, 'IN campaign can't find a positive reason to stay in the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 June 2018.
[115] Owen, 'Speech by Lord Owen to the Bruges Group'.

the host of problems facing contemporary Britain.[116] Finally, the third section showed how parts of the Leave discourse 'spectacularised' the crisis of EU misgovernment. In this element of the discourse, Leave attributed adversarial motives and vaulting ambition to EU bureaucrats and judges. This narration added urgency, drama, and impetus to Leave's performance.

The Leave discourse as analysed in this chapter fits Moffitt's model of populist performance exactly except for two important distinctions. In keeping with the model, Leave identified three major failures in British public policy; elevated these failures to the level of crisis by linking them to EU misgovernment; attributed blame to the EU bureaucracy; attempted to propagate this performance through 'Notes to the Editor' and misrepresented statistics; and offered national sovereignty as a solution.[117] However, Leave's excessive focus on 'the elite' led to two important deviations from the model. Firstly, Leave's performance of crisis emphasised EU failure to such an extent that it created a division between 'the elite' and 'the people' almost by omission. There is very little mention of 'the people' or what they might look like in the elements of discourse analysed so far. This tendency is reflected in the remaining elements of the Leave discourse analysed in chapter 5, which leads to the conclusion that Leave engaged in a strange form of what this thesis will call *populism without 'the people'*. Leave's overwhelming emphasis on elite malpractice creates a simulacrum of populism that is stylistically complete except for the absence of the most important historical actor.

Secondly, Leave's specific performance of crisis does not allow for continued propagation. Moffitt notes that this sixth stage of the populist model is difficult to achieve, given that crisis by its definition is episodic and not prone to underpinning a fundamental change in political discourse.[118] The crisis Leave narrated was particularly unsuited to propagation because it revolved around a conspiratorial EU elite determined to strip away national autonomy and further integrate the UK into a failure-prone system. This crisis performance allowed Leave to position their cause as the safe option despite the scale of the change they were proposing. The decisive intervention that

[116] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 120-21.
[117] *Ibid.* pp. 121-130.
[118] *Ibid.* p. 128.

Leave made aggregates to a demand for safety and security. Radical change is not radical when it is also preservative. Michael Gove's first campaign speech laid out this appeal clearly when he said 'I want us to vote to Leave the EU before it's too late, because that's the safer choice for Britain.' Once achieved, however, the populist division Leave performed disappears from British political life. This is another clue pointing to the stylistic but insubstantial nature of Vote Leave's populism that will be taken up in chapter 5.

The following chapter will complete a similar analysis of the Remain discourse. Chapter 4 concludes that the same stylistic model can be applied to Remain to identify it as an anti-populist discourse. The third part of this thesis will then seek to go beyond the analysis of populism and anti-populism as political styles. In the EU referendum, at least, the populist dialectic has no long-term ramifications for the ongoing relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite'. This is because the referendum was an elite-controlled process that presented two discourses to the voter: Remain's anti-populism and Leave's *populism without 'the people'*, which amount to the same thing in terms of the constituent power of 'the people'.

Chapter 4

Remain and the crisis of populism

Anti-populism emphasises the danger of listening to populists. Anti-populist discourse resists the demands that populists put forward on behalf of 'the people' by narrating an alternative crisis. That alternative crisis is waiting to happen and will come to fruition if society capitulates to populism. This chapter identifies an anti-populist logic in Remain's crisis narrative. Remain argued that the Leave agenda would be the catalyst for systemic failures across British society. By contrast, Remainers portrayed 'the elite' as trustworthy, virtuous and the voice of reason that voters should obey. Based solely on the political styles employed by Remain and Leave, the EU referendum was exemplary of a contest between populism and anti-populism.

This chapter follows a similar structure to its predecessor by focussing on crisis, this time in the Remain discourse. Chapter 3 compared the 'model' provided by Benjamin Moffitt and to a lesser extent the 'choreography' suggested by Yannis Stavrakakis to elucidate the populist style of the Leave discourse. Anti-populism is a much less fully defined concept than populism. At best it is part of a dialectic inferred from the Greek context, but Greece has an embedded culture of populism that exacerbates the conflict between populist actors and those who oppose them.[1] In this chapter I find that the conceptual resources from Greece and the populist models are sufficient to the task of deconstructing anti-populism. This chapter concludes that the Remain discourse is anti-populist and, indeed, that it represents a textbook example of what anti-populist discourse looks like in practice. Once the referendum began, Remain spokespeople completely abandoned the faux populism of 'elite Euroscepticism' in favour of a clearly anti-populist discourse.

The content analysis presented in this chapter relates to 116 of the total 250 referents that comprise the Remain discourse. Chapter 6 analyses the remaining 134 Remain referents. The structure in this chapter mirrors that of Chapter 3: it is comprised of three sections, each of which presents one element of the Remain discourse based on the

[1] Stavrakakis et al., 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Frontier', pp. 39-41.

underlying content analysis. The referents analysed in this chapter show Remain's narration of crisis and the two positive cases that they made on behalf of the EU. The first section of this chapter explores the crisis element in detail. Remain portrayed an impending economic disaster in which the curtailment of free trade with Europe would cause eleven significant failures across Britain. In keeping with Sum and Jessop's typology of crisis, Remain narrated these potential failures as a crisis *in* the British economy in order to counter Leave's narration of a crisis *of* EU membership.[2] This element of the discourse was delivered by a combination of economic experts and the politicians who 'spectacularised' their predictions.[3]

The second section elaborates further on Remain's use of elite testimony. It analyses the portion of the discourse delivered by investors, business owners and entrepreneurs who described their discomfort with the 'market uncertainty' that would arise from Brexit and explained how the economic benefits of the Single Market flowed to them directly and the 'consumer' indirectly. This element of the discourse admitted that the benefits of free trade are unequally distributed and confirmed that the Remain discourse represents the voice of both the economic and political 'elite'. The third section of this chapter focuses on the partisan divisions within the Remain discourse. Spokespeople from the Labour Party, organised religion, the security community and the creative industries presented a case for the EU on the grounds that it represents progressive values and collective security. However, this element was marginalised within the discourse and undercut by competing narratives of crisis. This reflects the contradictions that arise when multiple instantiations of 'the elite' are brought together by the common threat of populism.

In combination, the three elements analysed in this chapter establish the anti-populist political style that Remain employed. Chapter 6 evaluates the effects of this style in terms of the relationship it establishes between 'the people' – conceived of as the ordinary British worker – and the various types of 'the elite' upon whose pronouncements their vulnerable livelihoods rely. It goes on to conclude that, in terms

[2] Sum and Jessop, *Towards a Cultural Political Economy*, pp. 398-99.
[3] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 120-21.

of constituent power, the Remain and Leave discourses arrive at the same conclusion, increasing the power of the British elite and dissolving 'the people' entirely.

1. Potential failures: Economic risk and certainty

The Remain discourse was based on eleven *potential* failures that they argued would occur if Britain were to leave the UK. The risk of recession was the most frequently referenced potential failure in this element of the discourse. Remain presented recession and ten other related systemic failures as the consequence of a crisis in free trade that would be caused by exiting the EU's Single Market. Taken together, this portion of Remain's discourse comprises a '*moment of decisive intervention*' akin to Leave's narration of crisis. However, whilst Leave presented the EU as a crisis *of* misgovernment, Remain presents the potential failures of leaving the EU as an avoidable crisis *in* the British economy. Leave narrated the EU as unredeemable; Remain narrated the consequences of leaving as a far larger economic failure than any burden created by membership. This crisis narration accords with Sum and Jessop's point that a crisis is 'a moment for contestation and struggle' in which some actors try and dramatise existing failures and others seek to displace failure by portraying systemic change as the harbinger of true crisis.[4]

1.1 Trade loss and economic consequences

Free trade is an underlying premise in Remain's discourse; it is the primary mechanism through which the potential failures they described would become manifest. Remain presented free trade as an undeniable economic fact and public good, appealing to the authority of experts and practitioners. This technique, of establishing proof through expert testimony, recurs throughout their arguments but is most obvious in relation to free trade. George Osborne MP, for example, argued in one of the campaign's first official press releases that it 'is a well-established doctrine of economic thought that greater openness and interconnectedness boosts the productive potential of our economy. The more we trade and invest the richer we become.'[5] Free trade was here

[4] Sum and Jessop, *Towards a Cultural Political Economy*, pp. 398-99.
[5] George Osborne MP, 18 April 2016, 'Treasury Analysis: UK families would be worse off if we left EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 15 January 2018.

presented as a scientific law, an unequivocal and natural social arrangement. Osborne implied that the more trade Britain participates in, the better off Britain will become. Remain cited a wide array of elites including economists, entrepreneurs and politicians to validate this position; this diverse group encompassed former US Treasury Secretaries, the Japanese Prime Minister, and even the founder of Carphone Warehouse.[6] The former Secretaries argued that 'UK exit is likely to disrupt and reduce trade flows at least for a while', which in itself constitutes 'a risky bet on the country's economic future'. [7] In the Remain discourse, free trade represented the social arrangements in which Brexit would cause a crisis.

In the Remain discourse, free trade is represented as an extremely fragile enabler of prosperity. The campaign claimed that reducing, renegotiating or in any way disturbing trade relations with the EU was synonymous with economic cost. The former Chancellor Alistair Darling argued that 'Those wanting to leave the EU want to pull Britain out of the Single Market, which would mean introducing tariffs and barriers to our trade and putting billions of vital trade at risk', thereby putting 'jobs, low prices and financial security at risk'.[8] In this view, change in the terms of free trade would create a crisis in Britain's economy. More importantly, the UK would forfeit its institutional power within the EU so that it could not renegotiate the same or better levels of free trade with its former peers.[9] For Remain, free trade was represented as a critical enabler of political and economic power that created a cycle whereby powerful countries become more prosperous. However, the campaign also warned that the cycle of national wealth creation is delicate. The entrepreneur Charles Dunstone asked of a possible Brexit: 'how will Britain continue to thrive in limbo?'[10] In this discourse, 'limbo' equated to a crisis in free trade caused by the UK leaving the EU.

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[6] US Treasury Secretaries dating back to 70s, 20 April 2016, 'US Treasury Secretaries: UK Economy And Influence Stronger In Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 15 January 2018; Shinzo Abe and Sir David Warren, 5 May 2016, 'Japanese Prime Minister Latest Of Britain's Allies To Back UK's EU Membership', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 29 January 2018; Charles Dunstone, 1 May 2016, 'Carphone Warehouse Founder On Why Britain Is Stronger In', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 22 January 2018.

[7] US Treasury Secretaries, 'UK Economy And Influence Stronger In Europe'.

[8] Alistair Darling, 3 May 2016, 'Darling: £250 Billion Of UK Trade At Risk If We Leave The EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 January 2018.

[9] Abe and Warren, 'Japanese Prime Minister Latest Of Britain's Allies'; Roberto Azevêdo, 7 June 2016, 'Exports Would Take Decades To Get Over Brexit, Says Trade Chief', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 1 May 2018; Angela Merkel, 2 June 2016, 'Angela Merkel On Brexit', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018.

[10] Dunstone, 'Carphone Warehouse Founder On Why Britain Is Stronger In'.

Remain presented an impressive volume of expert testimony to support their argument on free trade and the costs of jeopardising it. Their campaign cited an open letter from over two hundred economists attesting to the 'significant long-term costs' of disrupting trade.[11] They drew attention to the 'unprecedented support for Britain remaining in Europe' from 'economists, scientists and academic experts' and quoted work from the parliament's Treasury select committee, the OECD, Treasury and the London School of Economics seeking to place a pound figure on the economic cost of disrupted trade.[12] Remain relied on the Institute of Financial Studies' (IFS) claim that '"there is virtual unanimity among economists" that the hit to the public finances caused by leaving Europe would be "more than that £8 billion".'[13] Relying on a separate set of figures from the IFS, the Chancellor George Osborne MP outlined a hypothetical 'emergency budget' of '£30bn of spending cuts and tax rises that would be needed to preserve the public finances in the event of a vote to leave the EU'.[14] The voices speaking in favour of Remain ranged from business owners and economists to scientists, world leaders and cabinet members. These voices belong to 'the elite' however one chooses to define that group, whether that be in terms of institutional power, private wealth, or expert knowledge.

1.2 Translating expert opinion into voter consequences

The Remain discourse relied upon the authority of an extended network of intellectual and institutional elites. Remain averred that it was their word the voter should heed on matters of free trade and economic cost. Throughout the campaign, this authoritative elite tried to translate the effects of a crisis in free trade into concrete terms. George Osborne's emergency budget was the most exaggerated example, transposing loss of

[11] Open letter from 200 economists, 12 May 2016, 'Almost 200 Economists: It Would Be A "Major Mistake" To Leave The EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 1 February 2018.
[12] Open letter from academics, 20 June 2016, 'Unprecedented Support For Britain Remaining In Europe From Economists, Scientists And Academic Experts', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 June 2018; Andrew Tyrie MP, 13 June 2016, 'Sacrificing Influence And Control Is Not A Price Worth Paying', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 1 June 2018.
[13] Alistair Darling, 6 June 2016, 'IFS Slam Vote Leave For NHS Funding Claims', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 1 May 2018; John Major, 29 May 2016, 'John Major: Vote Leave's Campaign Is An Unforgivable Fraud On British People', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 21 April 2018.
[14] Alistair Darling and George Osborne MP, 15 June 2016, 'Leaving EU Would Spark Deep Spending Cuts & Sharp Tax Rises, Warn George Osborne & Alistair Darling', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 2 June 2018.

the Single Market into £30bn of austerity measures. Other attempts at translation involved job losses and lower wage growth. Harriet Harman, a former Labour Deputy Leader, outlined City Link and PriceWaterhouseCoopers 'estimates that around 50,000 women working in financial services would lose their jobs if we left the EU' and concluded that 'If we weren't in the EU, Frankfurt, Paris and Dublin would be looking to hoover up those jobs'.[15] A report by the private consultancy Frontier Economics concluded that the EU was responsible for 29 per cent of the average wage increases enjoyed by British workers over the past 30 years, which correlated with an average wage increase of £1800.[16] In Remain's discourse, free trade – an intangible 'doctrine', as the Chancellor called it – could have very negative effects on everyday life if its tenets were subverted.

Indeed, Remain portrayed free trade as affecting almost everything of value in British life. Tim Farron MP argued that leaving the EU would be tantamount to 'wrecking the economy' and such wreckage would 'destroy young people's hopes of getting on the housing ladder'.[17] Likewise, Chris Leslie MP argued that 'if we get an economic disruption this will filter through into revenue disruptions for our public services' resulting in 'very painful consequence for my constituents in Nottingham and for the services they use'.[18] Other Remain spokespeople indicated that the NHS, education, financial services and steel industry would be victims of the economic malaise that leaving would cause via trade disruption.[19] These arguments all relied upon the economic modelling performed by economic experts. Remain translated these general predictions into predictions of specific failures.

[15] Harriet Harman, 13 May 2016, 'Harriet Harman delivers speech on how women are stronger in Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 2 February 2018.
[16] Frontier Economics, 9 May 2016, 'EU Exit Would Damage Wages, Says New Research', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 29 January 2018.
[17] Tim Farron MP, 2 June 2016, 'Leaving Europe Will Destroy Young People's Hopes Of Getting On The Housing Ladder', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018.
[18] Chris Leslie MP, 17 May 2016, 'Remarks By Chris Leslie MP To IOD "Business & Brexit" Conference', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 20 March 2018.
[19] George Osborne MP, 3 June 2016, 'Service Sector Leaders Warn Leaving Europe Would "Put Jobs At Risk"', *Vote Leave*, accessed 24 April 2018; Trade union representatives, 14 June 2016, 'Trade Unions Warn Public Sector Jobs And Services Are At Risk From Brexit', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 June 2018; Stephen Kinnock MP, 15 June 2016, 'Tata Steel: Single Market Access "Fundamental To Our Business"', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 2 June 2018; Major, 'Vote Leave's Campaign Is An Unforgivable Fraud'.

To give their warnings of potential failure credibility, Remain presented economic forecasts as fact. In their discourse, expert consensus was akin to certainty. For example, the economist Vicky Price is quoted by Remain as saying:

> The OECD, IMF, IFS, and Bank of England have all highlighted the risks that leaving the EU could create. The likelihood is that prospects for the UK economy will worsen under any of the possible alternative scenarios and the economic case for staying in the EU is overwhelming.[20]

There are three elements in this brief message that exemplify the mode of argumentation Remain brought to the referendum. Firstly, an economist, someone with authority on the subject, cites reports from key national and international economic institutions. Secondly, they provide a rebuttal of the 'alternative scenarios' to the Single Market that Leave was proposing. Lastly, they conclude that the economic case for remaining in the EU was 'overwhelming'. In Remain's discourse, the aggregation of expert opinion was intended to pass for certainty.

Remain also used elite testimonies to highlight how leaving the EU would have an economic impact on other aspects of British life. For example, Remain published an open letter in which 'More than 200 Cambridge University professors, dames, knights and Nobel prize winners have expressed their "grave concern" at the impact on British universities of leaving the European Union'.[21] These concerns arose because the signatories did not trust the British government to fund the 'black hole' that Brexit would create for university funding.[22] A separate open letter attested that 'the interests of British universities and the knowledge economy they represent … are best served by staying In.'[23] Academia and research were argued to be reliant upon free trade and transnational funding agreements to operate at their current level. Similar arguments were made for wildlife conservation and resisting the growth of xenophobia.[24] In each

[20] Vicky Price and Moody's, 19 May 2016, 'Credit Agency Moody's Says A Vote To Leave Would Hit The UK Economy', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 26 March 2018.
[21] Open letter, ' It Would Be A "Major Mistake" To Leave The EU'.
[22] *Ibid.*
[23] Open letter, 'Unprecedented Support For Britain Remaining In Europe'.
[24] David Cameron MP, 2 June 2016, 'RSPB And WWF Say That The Environment Is Safer In Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018; The Economist, 19 June 2016, '"Divided We Fall" A Vote To Leave The European Union Would Diminish Both Britain And Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 10 June 2018.

case, Remain republished or reframed expert opinion to illustrate the central role that the Single Market played in supporting the domestic status quo. Remain's experts insisted that a crisis in free trade would trigger a cascade of failures across British society.

1.3 The risk and certainty of recession

Although experts were positioned to play a truth-telling role in Remain's discourse, in reality their pronouncements were estimates and guesswork. However, as the campaign progressed, politicians supporting Remain increasingly downplayed the flexible nature of opinion. Interventions by the political elite repositioned the risk of recession as a certainty, a self-fulfilling prophecy that could only be avoided by voting against Leave.

Risk was central to the Remain discourse. However, the discourse contained two different portrayals of risk: the opinion of experts, and the narration of economic crisis by politicians. The experts presented risk as a calculation of probable cost and reward. Hilary Devey, the CEO of Pall-Ex, speaking 'as an entrepreneur and investor' described Brexit as 'simply a risk we cannot afford to take.'[25] Charles Dunstone agreed that Brexit was one of the 'unnecessary and dangerous risks' that entrepreneurs learn to avoid.[26] The Seven Dragons of the television program *Dragons' Den* listed the probable economic consequences of reducing free trade and concluded 'That is not a manageable risk; it is a reckless risk to take'.[27] Richard Branson said he would not take the risk on Brexit 'as an investor, not as an entrepreneur and certainly not as a father'.[28] Other economic bodies, from the World Trade Organisation to the Chair of the US Federal Reserve also warned that Brexit 'could have significant economic repercussions'.[29]

[25] Hilary Devey, 27 May 2016, 'Hilary Devey – When It Comes To Europe: I'm In', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 16 April 2018.
[26] Dunstone, 'Carphone Warehouse Founder On Why Britain Is Stronger In'.
[27] Seven Dragons, 31 May 2016, 'Seven Dragons: For Business And For Jobs, Britain Is Better Off In', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 22 April 2018. Dragons' Den is a British television show that depicts entrepreneurs pitching to wealthy investors (the 'Dragons') for seed money. Quoting these television investors reflects Remain's strategy of appealing to a mixture of authority, celebrity and expertise during the referendum.
[28] Richard Branson, 19 June 2016, 'Richard Branson On Why He's Voting Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 10 June 2018.
[29] Will Straw, 3 June 2016, 'Top Investors Warn UK Start-Ups Would Be "Biggest Victim" Of EU Exit', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 24 April 2018.

Assessments of risk were presented as professional opinion, a calculation of probability positioned firmly in the realm of economic costs and benefits.

From the latter weeks of May 2016 onward, politicians advocating Remain began to take a more prominent role in narrating the economic costs of leaving the EU. They presented a less nuanced view than expert spokespeople. On 24 May the Labour MP Rachael Reeves resolved that 'The leave campaign have lost the economic argument and cannot tell us what out looks like. Working people all across the country would pay the price if we leave, through the risk of recession, increased unemployment and families worse off.'[30] In the latter half of the quote Reeves restated the central mantra of risk and economic consequences, but in the first half of the quote the line between potential and certainty has blurred: 'working people all across the country *would* pay the price if we leave' [italics added]. This is one of numerous examples in which Remain politicians translate economic risk into political certainty.

The following day Alistair Darling, a former Chancellor, announced that the 'economic case is now closed. The IFS has made clear that leaving Europe would decimate our public services through spending cuts, and heap tax rises on working families'.[31] The combination of emotive language and the projection of certainty distort the precise opinions of economic experts. Tim Farron MP later misrepresented the IMF and Bank of England by saying that their forecasts predicted Brexit 'will lead to a recession' and 'a wrecked economy'.[32] These reports only predicted the possibility of recession which, it bears noting, is defined as negative growth across as least six months and is considered a natural component of the business cycle of expansion and contraction. Nevertheless, the Chancellor presented this scenario as 'permanent damage to the economy'.[33] David Cameron made a similar misrepresentation, reframing the Bank of England's comment that Brexit 'could lead to a materially lower path for growth' as the 'Bank of England, paid to be independent, [is] saying to us … the pound will fall,

[30] Mark Carney and Rachael Reeves MP, 24 May 2016, 'Governor Of The Bank Of England Says Mortgage Rates Could Be Higher If We Leave EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 10 April 2018.
[31] Alistair Darling, 25 May 2016, 'Leaving Europe Will Create £40BN Black Hole', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 April 2018.
[32] Farron, 'Leaving Europe Will Destroy Young People's Hopes'.
[33] Osborne, 'Service Sector Leaders Warn'.

prices will rise, our economy will suffer, and families will suffer'.[34] In Remain's discourse economic and political modes of expression clashed and combined, with awkward effects. Possibility was narrated as certainty and macro-economic shifts became seismic tremors for ordinary families.

Remain politicians also used the apparatus of government to narrate the certainty of recession. On the 24th of May, David Cameron characterised the outcomes of a leave result as: 'less growth, it would mean fewer jobs, it would mean higher prices, it would mean as we set out yesterday, a recession for our economy'.[35] Cameron was referring to a Treasury report released the day prior titled *HM Treasury analysis: the immediate economic impact of leaving the EU*. This report, the third in a series of Treasury reports published to illustrate the effects of leaving – and, it should be noted, prefaced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne – purported to show 'the disruptive, short-term adjustment that would follow a vote to leave' over the two years following the referendum.[36] Osborne, in his dual roles as Remain spokesperson and Minister responsible for the Treasury, had effectively commissioned an official government report into the potential economic ramifications of his side losing a political argument. It was that report the Prime Minister was quoting from when he asserted the certainty of recession.

Remain politicians used expert opinion and the apparatus of government to *pre-empt* a recession. This tactic went beyond narrating a crisis; it was an attempt to bring a potential failure into fruition. On June 15, George Osborne and Alistair Darling presented their 'emergency budget'. The accompanying Remain press release outlined 'tens of billions of pounds of spending cuts and tax rises' that would be required 'if Britain votes to leave the EU next week.'[37] It included an itemised list of austerity measures, ranging from a 2 per cent raise in the basic income tax through to 'a £2.5 billion a year cut to the [national] health service'.[38] The clear intention was to shock

[34] David Cameron and Bank of England, 19 June 2016, 'Monetary Policy Committee Warns Possibility Of EU Exit Is Already Damaging Britain's Economy', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 10 June 2018.
[35] David Cameron MP, 24 May 2016, 'Your Family Holiday Could Cost £230 More If We Leave Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 April 2018.
[36] HM Treasury 2016, *HM Treasury analysis: the immediate economic impact of leaving the EU*, London: HM Government, Cm 9292, p. 5.
[37] Darling and Osborne, 'Leaving EU Would Spark Deep Spending Cuts'.
[38] *Ibid.*

and horrify voters. Osborne made history by deploying this strategy. As the name suggests, an emergency budget is a policy tool used by British governments in times of extremis where government intervention is needed to stabilise the national economy. Osborne had last used an 'emergency budget' in June 2010 – after his party secured government – in order to reduce the level of national debt, which he attributed to the outgoing Labour government. It is not unusual for the economic policy tools of cabinet to serve overtly politicised purposes in the British political system. However, a *pre-emptive* emergency budget is unprecedented in British politics, not to mention a logical fallacy.

In his remarks, the Chancellor justified his history-making move as an act of prudence. 'Rather than finding out the consequences for the nation's budget after we quit the EU,' he said, 'the public should know what they are before they take that choice – so they can avoid these hard consequences altogether.'[39] Despite these comments, it is hard to see the emergency budget as an exercise in voter inclusivity. The budget was not a plan for government action but an attempt to perform an economic crisis. The emergency budget demonstrated the duality of the Remain discourse. On one hand, Remain presented the conclusions of their experts, which were couched in the technocratic language of the business leaders and economic experts.[40] On the other, Remain rephrased opinion into transparently hyperbolic statements and actions perhaps best summed up in Alistair Downing's proclamation that the 'economic consequences of leaving Europe could well be worse than the damage done by the Great Recession of 2008. Workers, families and small businesspeople would all be hammered if we leave.'[41] In moments like this, Remain's anti-populist performance of crisis was every bit as 'spectacularised' as the Leave campaign.

[39] *Ibid.*
[40] David Cameron, 22 June 2016, 'Leaders in all fields are clear Britain is Stronger if we Vote Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 June 2018.
[41] Alistair Darling, 21 June 2016, 'Retail giants warn families will face higher prices if we leave the EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 June 2018; Darling and Osborne, 'Leaving EU Would Spark Deep Spending Cuts'.

2. Elite confidence and the economic benefits of the EU

The previous section described the sense of danger that Remain narrated onto the possibility of leaving the EU. It also showed the dualism in the Remain discourse between the economic experts and the politicians who 'spectacularised' their predictions. In effect, this duality roughly outlined two different types of 'the elite' – the expert with authority and the politician who wields institutional and narrative power. This section explores the economic case Remain made for the EU and introduces the economic elite – another demographic of 'the elite' who contributed to the Remain discourse. The economic elite warned the voter about the dangers of market uncertainty. Market uncertainty was a euphemism for the uncertainty of the economic elite. Testimony from investors, executives and market analysts effectively stated that they and their peers would create a recession if Britain were to leave the Single Market.

Remain also featured testimony from the same class as to the direct benefits that they personally receive from the Single Market. Together with the elements discussed in the preceding section, this portion of the discourse demonstrates the anti-populist nature of the Remain argument and bears out Stavrakakis's observation that 'populism and anti-populism mutually constitute each other'.[42] The populist discourse deployed by Leave elicited an elitist retort from the 'established forces' that most benefited from the status quo.[43] The Remain discourse was literally narrated by 'the elite' of Britain's political, commercial, and cultural spheres.

2.1 Market uncertainty: Warnings from the investor class

The elements of Remain's discourse that focussed on risk, recession, and uncertainty had the effect of unifying the political and commercial elite in an anti-populist performance of crisis. The 'risk' that Remain was attempting to avoid is the effect that a political action taken by voters would have on investor and employer confidence. Throughout the campaign, Remain referred to the possibility that voters might prefer

[42] Stavrakakis et al., 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 15.
[43] *Ibid*. p. 14.

to leave the EU as 'uncertainty'.[44] For example, George Osborne released a press statement describing how the 'highly respected, independent OECD has significantly downgraded Britain's growth today because of uncertainty about the outcome of the referendum'.[45] The fact that the result was not foreknown was alleged to be causing uncertainty. This is not the neutral uncertainty of an unknown outcome, but the partisan uncertainty that a negative outcome could transpire. As Rachael Reeve argued, 'the uncertainty while the [Brexit] deal is negotiated will hit our economy hard'.[46] It was the possibility of Brexit that was causing uncertainty or 'fear' amongst the economic elite of Britain and Europe.[47]

In the context of the EU referendum, leaving the EU constituted the unknown and Remain wanted the voter to fear this potentiality. But why should voters associate a political unknown – the future state proceeding from a radical shift in Britain's relationship with the EU – with the fear of recession, unemployment and impoverishment? An open letter from economists provided the answer: 'uncertainty over precisely what kind of relationship the UK would find itself in with the EU and the rest of the world would also weigh heavily for many years' and, furthermore, 'there is a sizeable risk of a short-term shock to confidence if we were to see a Leave vote on June 23'.[48] The 'uncertainty', 'shock', 'fear' and 'confidence' that Remain described did not belong to the voter. Rather, it was investor's confidence that risk impacts.[49] Investor confidence was the mechanism that could realise a crisis in Britain's economy. Put another way, Remain intimated that the opinions of 'the elite' have a determinant effect on the livelihood of the everyday citizen, and the latter should therefore defer to the will of 'the elite'.

[44] Bill Gates, 19 June 2016, 'Europe Was Key To My $1BN Funding, Gates Warns', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 10 June 2018; Survey of business leaders, 31 May 2016, 'Brexit Fear Add Millions To Costs For Business', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 22 April 2018; Stephen Kinnock MP, 22 June 2016, 'TUC And EEF Unite To Say That British Manufacturing Is Stronger In Europe', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 June 2018; Open letter from 1200 business owners, 22 June 2016, 'British Business "Benefits Massively From EU"', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 June 2018.
[45] George Osborne MP, 2 June 2016, 'Chancellor – OECD Report Shows "Grim Economic Consequences" Of Leaving Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018.
[46] Rachael Reeves MP, 16 May 2016, 'Rachael Reeves: Vote Leave Are Guilty Of Deception, The Single Market Is Vital For Britain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 19 March 2018.
[47] Survey of business leaders, 'Brexit Fear Add Millions To Costs For Business'.
[48] Open letter, 'It Would Be A "Major Mistake" To Leave The EU'.
[49] Will Straw, 'Top Investors Warn UK Start-Ups Would Be "Biggest Victim"'.

The former Conservative Party leader William Hague explained the logic of investor confidence at length in a keynote Remain speech. He admitted that 'Precise forecasts of the damage that would be done [to the British economy] will vary greatly. But economics is more of an art than a science and a successful economy rests above all on confidence. The greatest risk is that confidence in the future would be seriously undermined.'[50] All of the expert opinion cited by Remain – and the concepts of risk, cost, uncertainty and confidence that they deployed – was intended to communicate the perceptions and alleged wisdom of the investor class to the voter. As Hague argued in his speech, economic forecasts are an art, and that art is largely based on projecting how capital will respond to specific scenarios. Throughout the campaign, Remain called upon the voices of numerous business owners to reinforce this point. Their argument effectively made the economic harm of leaving a reality, because the elites who spoke on Remain's behalf control the economy.

In the Remain discourse, the economic elite was represented as holding the fate of the British voter in their palm. Currency traders were alleged to have devalued the pound sterling in response to the mere possibility of a Leave result.[51] An open letter signed by the CEOs of fifteen companies, ranging from Bloomberg to Cisco to Mars, outlined how the economic elite would respond to Brexit. The letter began 'Sir, We are some of the thousands of companies that have chosen to invest in Britain. Our investments range from advanced manufacturing facilities to digital infrastructure, creating hundreds of thousands of jobs.'[52] This passage justified their contribution to the debate; the opinions of these employers had weight because it is they who *chose* to bring their capital to Britain, and so employ British people. But that choice was contingent. The fifteen CEOs go on to say:

> [I]f there is one thing we as investors don't like, it is economic uncertainty. As several important bodies have said — the International Monetary Fund, Bank of England, London School of Economics, the Treasury and others — leaving the EU

[50] William Hague, 8 June 2016, 'Hague: Leaving The EU Would Be "Downright Irresponsible" And Would Damage Britain's Economy', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 3 May 2018.
[51] Leslie, 'Remarks By Chris Leslie MP To IOD'; Richard Lloyd, 22 May 2016, 'Consumer Champion Says Leaving Europe Is A "Clear Risk To Household Budgets"', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 22 March 2018.
[52] Open letter from 15 business leaders, 19 May 2016, 'Brexit Would Hit UK Growth And Impede Foreign Investment', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 26 March 2018.

> would mean a shock to the UK economy, hurting growth, job creation and foreign investment. We are concerned [by] this uncertainty … As investors, it is therefore very much in our interests that Britain stays in the EU.[53]

By using the collective 'we' these fifteen major employers were speaking as a class entity. Their interests are aligned regarding the EU and the British economy. They also spoke about uncertainty it two ways. Firstly, they themselves do not like it, and by implication the uncertainty of Brexit would impact their choice to invest in the UK. Secondly, they homogenised the choice of all other investors with the referent 'foreign investment' and ascribed its general adversity to leaving the EU. In their words, economic disaster would become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Investment, as the lifeblood of prosperity, was contingent on confidence. Confidence is an abstract concept: it is the judgement made by each individual investor about the collective response capital will have to a given set of circumstances. Here fifteen significant investors argue that foreign investment would decline if the UK left the EU. Such proclamation of no confidence impacts the judgement of other investors, which in turn increases the likelihood that 'foreign investment' will indeed crash the British economy if Britain were to leave. The real risk that 'the people' faced was the consensus among the capital class – a subset of 'the elite' – that leaving the EU is bad.

2.2 An uneven distribution of economic benefits

This element of the Remain discourse was as textbook an example of anti-populism as one can conceive. It entailed representatives of 'the elite' literally warning 'the people' that they would, as a class, punish populist behaviour. Remain published numerous statements laying out these warnings. Juergen Maier, CEO of Siemens UK, argued that 'Being outside the EU will count against the UK when investment decisions are made and we would miss out on fantastic future opportunities and the jobs and economic prosperity that go with them.'[54] Microsoft, Hewlett Packard, supermarket operators, manufacturers, bankers, entrepreneurs and trade unions, echoed his sentiments.[55] In this

[53] *Ibid*.
[54] Centre for Economics and Business Research, 1 June 2016, 'Warning Over UK Manufacturing: Over 100,000 Future Jobs At Risk', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018.
[55] *Ibid.*, Lucy Thomas, 17 May 2016, 'Microsoft And Hewlett Packard Come Out For Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 March 2018; Sir Terry Leahy, Justin King, Marc Bolland and Sir Ian

discourse, less investment equals less opportunity, less activity, lower employment and less average wealth. On the other hand, Remain made it clear that the benefits of EU membership are not equally shared amongst the British population.

Access to the Single Market was the most frequently mentioned benefit of membership. George Osborne summarised this position in the opening week of the campaign by saying that 'we have the best of both worlds': 'quota-free, no-tariff access … to a single market of half a billion consumers' as well as 'our own currency and control of our borders'.[56] In short, EU membership was argued to provide the UK with unprecedented free trade and minimal effect on its autonomy. Remain's various experts echoed this sentiment. Rachael Reeves cited Office of National Statistics data that the UK's total exports to the EU grew 44 per cent between 2004 and 2014 and noted that this period included the Global Financial Crisis.[57] Remain contended that the current level of British growth and prosperity relied on membership of the Single Market. 'It is not a complicated argument to make' as David Carmeron said. 'It is because we are part of a market of 500 million people, the biggest single market anywhere in the world.'[58] The sheer size of Europe's Single Market causes significant investment, growth, and innovation. However, even in the Remain discourse, the distribution of these benefits was understood to be dramatically unequal.

The net economic gain of the Single Market was described from the perspective of business owners, the same economic elite whose confidence was alleged to be so critical in averting recession. Remain spokespeople repeated the phrase '500 million consumers' often when outlining the EU's benefits.[59] These 500 European consumers were relevant because they purchased the goods and services of British business owners. The phrase '500 million consumers' had a dehumanising effect on the EU. Describing it as a mass of consumers rather than a unity of states positioned EU membership as an opportunity for exploitation rather than partnership in a community.

Cheshire, 22 May 2016, 'Giants Of Retail Warn Against Brexit', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 27 March 2018; Richard Reed, 20 April 2016, 'Over 200 UK Entrepreneurs – From Start-Ups To Household Names – Say We Are Stronger In Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 15 January 2018.

[56] Osborne, 'UK families would be worse off if we left EU'.

[57] Reeves, 'Vote Leave Are Guilty Of Deception'.

[58] Cameron, 'Your Family Holiday Could Cost £230 More'.

[59] Kinnock, 'Tata Steel'; Open letter, 'British Business "Benefits Massively From EU"'; Reed, 'Over 200 UK Entrepreneurs'; Open letter, 'Brexit Would Hit UK Growth'.

As a corollary, those British people with greater capacity for exploiting economic opportunity were portrayed as having a proportionally greater stake in membership. Remain also used historical trade figures to make the argument that the Single Market underpinned current levels of prosperity.[60] The use of trade figures appealed to the status quo, seeking to convince those who were already benefitting from the extant political economy. Remain quoted innumerable businesses and surveys of business opinion to the effect that the Single Market benefited private enterprise 'massively' through trade and investment.[61] For example, a sample of more than 200 entrepreneurs argued that 'Every day, as we build our companies, we see the benefits of being able to do business within Europe's single market of 500 million consumers'.[62] They listed diverse recruitment, broad customer base, and networking 'opportunities' as primary positives. Another survey of 15 CEOs argued that 'we see Britain's EU membership as a win-win situation: the single market offers us seamless access to a market of 500m people, giving us instant possibility to scale up our investment. At the same time, foreign investment boosts innovation and job creation in Britain'.[63] The ordering of this quote is illustrative: the ordinary voter enters in last place, in the aggregate, as an abstract 'job' recipient whilst the CEOs – 'we' – receive the concrete benefits of a large market and investment opportunity. This element of the Remain discourse is obviously populist in its logic. 'The people' and 'the elite' emerge organically in such quotes, as those that benefit directly from the EU and those that do not.

2.3 Direct beneficiaries versus the British consumer

Remain portrayed Britain as a centralised system dictated by concentrations of capital. In this system, the subjective opinion of those who control capital and benefit directly from the Single Market becomes analogous with the wellbeing of all. In this element of the Remain discourse, the ordinary British citizen appeared twice, both times referred to as a passive 'consumer'.

[60] Darling and Osborne, 'Leaving EU Would Spark Deep Spending Cuts'.
[61] Open letter, 'British Business "Benefits Massively From EU"'; Kinnock, 'Tata Steel'.
[62] Reed, 'Over 200 UK Entrepreneurs'; Open letter, 'Brexit Would Hit UK Growth'.
[63] Open letter, 'Brexit Would Hit UK Growth'.

The direct beneficiaries of the EU were not just major corporations, however. Remain also sourced testimony from a wide range of collaborative industries and successful entrepreneurs. Hilary Devey noted that 'It is thanks to the UK's place in Europe that I've managed to grow my logistics business, Pall-Ex, into an international multi-million-pound company'.[64] The Creative Industries Federation lauded 'vital EU funding' and the importance of 'collaborating across borders' in the creative arts, concluding 'Britain is not just stronger in Europe, it is more imaginative and more creative'.[65] The Mayor of London argued that 'being part of Europe will mean more jobs and opportunities for all Londoners and more trade, business and exports for our city… international collaboration is in our city's DNA'.[66] The British Phonographic Industry, several notable artists and a collective of 'over 5,000 scientists' repeated these opinions.[67] The notable silence among all these testimonies was the voice of the ordinary citizen.

Sectors of the economy that benefit directly from the Single Market were placed foremost in the Remain discourse. Conversely, 'the consumer' who only passively benefits from the EU was marginalised in the discourse. As the 'Seven Dragons' put it: 'British membership of the European Union represents a good opportunity – for businesspeople who want to export to a 500 million-strong market; for consumers who benefit from the easy import of goods and services; and for investors who want to see their investments grow as firms seek new markets'.[68] The CEOs of several retail outlets concurred, arguing that due to the Single Market 'Consumers have never had such a large range of choice and quality. They can shop 24 hours a day, either in stores or online, at prices more affordable than ever.'[69] When discussing the economic benefits of the EU, Remain could not avoid the inference of an in-group and an out-group. The in-group, the economic elites, provided the testimony and directly reaped the rewards

[64] Devey, 'When It Comes To Europe: I'm In'.
[65] Creative Industries Federation, 20 May 2016, 'Hundreds Of Figures From Britain's Creative Industries Call For UK To Stay In The EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 27 March 2018.
[66] Sadiq Khan, 26 May 2016, 'Mayor Of London Sadiq Khan: We're Stronger In Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 16 April 2018.
[67] British Phonographic Industry, 2 June 2016, 'BPI Survey Reveals That 78% Of UK Music Labels Want Britain To Remain In The EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018; Open letter, 'Unprecedented Support For Britain Remaining In Europe'; Open letter from 14 British artists, 2 June 2016, 'Rankin, Antony Gormley and Axel Scheffer join leading artists in designing posters to support keeping Britain in the EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018.
[68] Seven Dragons, 'For Business And For Jobs, Britain Is Better Off In'.
[69] Leahy et al., 'Giants Of Retail Warn Against Brexit'.

of free trade. The out-group, the 'consumer', had no voice in the discourse and no significant evidence that they personally benefited from the Single Market. The consumer – the majority of the population – was mentioned twice as an afterthought.

The absence of the British citizen from the Remain discourse will be covered in greater detail in Chapter 6. However, it should be noted that even 'the elite' – those with the resources and the professional obligation to directly exploit the Single Market – were often circumspect in their praise for the EU.[70] The entrepreneurs formally backing Remain admitted that 'Of course the EU isn't perfect; but rather than cutting ourselves off from the opportunities it offers, it is better to be on the inside helping shape the rules of this market instead of just being subject to them'.[71] David Cameron and Brendan Barber, the former head of Britain's Trade Union Congress, claimed they were 'united in our conviction that Britain, and Britain's workers, will be better off in a reformed Europe than out on our own.'[72] A *reformed* Europe: despite the benefits of free trade and the Single Market, the Prime Minister and union leader could not unequivocally endorse the EU. William Hague, a former leader of the Conservative Party, gave the lukewarm affirmation 'I'm the first to say Europe isn't perfect. I've spent my political life standing up to it. But for all its imperfections, it protects jobs and boosts our standing and power in the world'.[73]

The effect of Remain's discourse was to create a monolithic economic elite. Investors, business owners, and entrepreneurs were represented as holding the same views. They were portrayed as responding to uncertainty in the same way, and that response was subjective: they had a relative level of confidence in the UK and they feared the variance that leaving the EU would bring to its economic activity. Remain wanted the voter to feel the same fear as the economic elites. The safest course for the voter would be to understand the expertise of those with real, material power and vote Remain. And yet, even the direct beneficiaries of the Single Market and the politicians defending the EU could not voice full endorsement of the status quo.

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[70] Bill Gates, 19 April 2016, 'Bill Gates Believes Benefits of Being in the EU "Greatly Exceed" Being out', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 15 January 2018; Dunstone, 'Carphone Warehouse Founder On Why Britain Is Stronger In'.
[71] Reed, 'Over 200 UK Entrepreneurs'.
[72] David Cameron MP and Brendan Barber, 28 April 2016, 'On Europe Even We Can Agree: For British Workers It's Better In', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 22 January 2018.
[73] Hague, 'Leaving The EU Would Be "Downright Irresponsible"'.

3. The collectivist case for the EU

The economic case Remain made for the EU assumed a populist division between the economic elite and the ordinary British voter. In their discourse, however, the division was represented as natural and productive. The economic elite benefited directly from the Single Market, while the ordinary 'consumer' benefited indirectly and marginally. Remain argued that disturbing this relationship would create a crisis in the British economy. This section explores the other element of the Remain discourse that attempted to position EU membership as beneficial. This portion of the Remain argument looked beyond Britain's internal politics and focussed instead on the importance of collaboration and solidarity in international relations.

When making the collectivist case for membership, Remain reflected on the EU's role as an organisation of peace, progress, regional cooperation and collective security. The collectivist case for the EU was clearly intended as a unifying argument, behind which the British people could rally regardless of their material interests. However, as this section will show, partisan divisions within the Remain discourse mediated and undercut what should have been a unifying appeal. This underlines Stavrakakis's argument that there is 'never only one political force' involved in the 'solipsistic staging of crisis'.[74] The EU referendum entailed a struggle between Leave's populist discourse and Remain's anti-populist response with Remain, representing an ad hoc coalition of 'the elite', comprised of many political forces that diluted its appeal.

3.1 Peace and progress: The origins of the EU

Economic benefit was not the only positive strand of Remain's case for the EU. Remain spokespeople also attempted to convince the voter of the EU's other virtues, specifically, its contributions to collaborative internationalism, environmentalism and progressive values. The Conservative chief architects of Remain, however, were silent on these issues. Throughout the campaign, Labour and Green politicians, religious leaders, artists and sportspeople made public statements in support of the EU's virtues

[74] Stavrakakis et al., 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 13.

but they were mostly marginal voices, with their message restricted to singular utterances. The majority of Remain's message comprised the economic case made by the commercial elite and the performance of crisis outlined by Conservative politicians.

Nevertheless, when they did engage in the collectivist element of the discourse, Remain spokespeople recalled the EU's origins as collaborative enterprise committed to peace and community. A collective of religious leaders praised the EU's positive influence, noting that the 'past 70 years have been the longest period of peace in Europe's history' and observed that institutions like the EU contributed to 'our increased security and sense of collective endeavour.'[75] Labour's Chris Leslie MP agreed, arguing that 'Perhaps the clearest proof of the value of the European Union has been the stability we have enjoyed since the Second World War across our continent.'[76] These comments reflect the initial impetus towards the EU: the hope that war might be avoided through deeper regional institutionalism. Such remarks remind the reader of the larger purpose served by the EU, and the significant success that is perhaps taken for granted by post-war generations. Labour MP Tom Watson quoted Winston Churchill on the need to 're-create the European Family ... and provide it with a structure under which it can dwell in peace, in safety and in freedom.'[77] His recollection of Churchill, one of the great Conservative figures, was an aide-mémoire that the European project used to be a bipartisan and pragmatic commitment.

The Archbishop of Canterbury also tried to reconceptualise the EU as a guarantor of safety and civilisation. 'The EU', he said, 'came together in a Europe broken beyond description by war, and has shaped a continent which until recently has contributed to more human flourishing, and more social care, than at any time in European history'.[78] In his view, the legacy of the EU made it worthy of value; to give up on it now would be to lose hope in what could be. The Archbishop's poetic language contrasted starkly with the instrumental logic used in Remain's overriding focus on risk and economics. Even the Archbishop, however, noted that 'the EU is no longer what it used to be. It

[75] Open letter from religious leaders, 29 May 2016, 'Think Of The Wider World And Vote To Stay In Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 16 April 2018.
[76] Leslie, 'Remarks By Chris Leslie MP To IOD'.
[77] Tom Watson MP, 15 June 2016, 'Tom Watson on Brexit', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 2 June 2018.
[78] Archbishop of Canterbury, 12 June 2016, 'Archbishop of Canterbury Says "I'm Voting In"', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 1 June 2018.

needs renewed vision; major reforms'.[79] His hopeful argument for the EU was based on past success and the possibility of its recreation. His doubt emblematises the half-hearted endorsement of the EU that Remain struggled to express.

Other Remain spokespeople linked the origins and the benefits of the EU more explicitly. Two former spymasters noted that 'for all its faults' the EU had 'helped to establish peaceful co-operation, respect for human rights and the rule of law as the normal way for Europe to conduct its affairs' and this legacy had ongoing significance for British security and wellbeing.[80] Andrew Tyrie MP cut a lonely figure as the only Conservative voice to praise the EU's 'crucial role' in overcoming communism and absorbing eastern European countries into a regional community after the fall of the Berlin Wall.[81] Others argued that the EU still exhibited progressive traits, for example through avoiding the Iraq war and promoting international aid.[82] Harriet Harman, a former Deputy Leader of the Labour Party, gave an extended defence of the EU on the grounds that 'It's easy to overlook, but it's impossible to overstate, how important the EU has been in our struggle for women's rights at work.' She went on to say that 'Some of our rights came directly from the EU, some rights were enhanced because of the EU and our rights as women at work can't be taken away, as they are guaranteed by our membership of the EU.'[83]

3.2 Partisan divisions within 'the elite'

Labour rights and women's empowerment are two of the most collectivist and politically progressive arguments one could make in favour of the EU.[84] Arguing that the EU engendered, encouraged and protected such rights characterised it as a force for

[79] *Ibid.*
[80] Lord David Evans and Sir Johns Sawers, 8 May 2016, 'The EU Can't Dictate To Us On Security But Staying In It Can Keep Us Safer', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 29 January 2018.
[81] Tyrie, 'Sacrificing Influence And Control'.
[82] Michael Eavis, 9 June 2016, 'Glastonbury Founder Urges Festival-Goers To Vote Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 3 May 2018; Simon Maxwell, 5 May 2016, 'Vote "In" For Africa', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 January 2018.
[83] Harman, 'Harriet Harman delivers speech on how women are stronger in Europe'.
[84] The term 'progressive' is used in this section in the everyday sense, to indicate political values that fall on the 'left' in a spatial model of politics. Values associated with 'progressive' or 'left' politics typically include egalitarianism, reformism, and pluralism. See: Erika van Elsas and Wouter van der Brug 2020, 'The Changing Relationship between Left-Right Ideology and Euroscepticism, 1973-2010', *European Union Politics*, 16(2), pp. 194-200.

both social reform and egalitarianism. In short, as the Labour spokespeople for Remain pointed out, the case for the EU as a virtuous organisation echoed the priorities typically associated with the British Labour Party.[85] Six former Labour leaders made such a case explicitly in a joint statement on June 4, arguing that 'Labour's values are inherent to Europe's virtues'. [86] Specifically, by 'strengthening working people's wellbeing through common endeavour, our Party's founding purpose is aligned with Europe.'[87] Up until this point – the last month in the referendum campaign – Remain had featured very few Labour voices. More importantly, arguments in favour of the EU on its own terms, as an organisation intrinsically worthy of support, had been equally scarce.

The only inference that can be drawn from this omission is that Remain was unwilling to defend the EU's progressive credentials at length. For example, the actor Sir Ian McKellen is credited with Remain's only mention of LGBTI issues, noting that 'The EU's guidelines for supporting human rights call for measures to end discrimination against all LGBT people. The EU funds local groups who are campaigning against homophobic and transphobic violence – many of them at great personal risk.'[88] No politicians or other campaign spokespeople highlighted this issue. To give another example, one of only two mentions that Remain made regarding the environment came when the Conservative MP Liz Truss made a joint statement with Labour, Green and Liberal Democrat representatives. In their joint statement these politicians argued that 'The EU is a major boost to the UK's green economy, supporting jobs and growth in Britain' and went on to list the various ways in which it improved the quality of British environs, including 'keeping our oceans clean', 'protect[ing] ocean wildlife', 'investing in renewable energy' and 'providing vital protections for Britain's nature and wildlife'.[89] It is notable that economic stability, the lynchpin of the Remain discourse, was also the framing device through which environmental action was valued and justified. Boosting the 'UK's green economy' was the first-mentioned benefit that these

[85] Six former Labour leaders, 4 June 2016, 'Former Labour Leaders Unite To Make The Progressive Case For British Membership Of The EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 24 April 2018; Gordon Brown, 25 May 2016, 'For Britain, It Should Be Clout Not Out', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 April 2018.
[86] Six former Labour leaders, 'Former Labour Leaders Unite'.
[87] *Ibid*.
[88] Sir Ian McKellen, 17 May 2016, 'Sir Ian McKellen On Why We're Stronger In', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 20 March 2018.
[89] Liz Truss MP, Ed Miliband, Caroline Lucas MP and Ed Davey, 2 May 2016, 'The Environmental Case For Staying In The EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 January 2018.

politicians ascribed to the EU. Such phrasing reduced the relevance of the environment to a subsystem of the economy.

Remain made only one other major announcement relating to the environment throughout the campaign. Considering the partisan division within the Remain discourse that has so far been elucidated, it seems Remain was either disinclined or unable to make the collectivist case for the EU's merits central to its campaign. The tension within the Remain discourse was so obvious that Remain felt compelled to convene an event in the second last week of the campaign to say that 'The Labour In team are concerned that far too many Labour supporters say they don't know what our position is on the referendum. That's why the entire Labour family came together this week to make it clear that we are united behind the Remain campaign'.[90] This was one of six times the Labour Party became a topic of the Remain discourse. The partisan division between the Conservative and the Labour politicians of Remain demonstrates the extent to which the populist Leave campaign forced disparate members of the British elite into an uneasy alliance. Remain embodied 'the elite' and the conflicting values held by such a broad coalition of interests.

3.3 Collective security: The importance of regional cooperation

In contrast to the progressive case for the EU, security and the importance of regional integration was the one genuinely inclusive element in the Remain discourse. Unlike trade benefits and progressive values, British security was framed as a regional issue that transcended domestic divisions. Security experts and international leaders dominated this element of the Remain discourse. The campaign quoted five former NATO Secretary Generals to the effect that the EU 'with its 500 million people and significant economic power, is a key partner for NATO'.[91] NATO relies on the size and solidarity of a united Europe and, as one former Secretary General said, 'Given the scale and range of challenges to peace and stability we collectively face, the Euro-Atlantic community needs an active and engaged United Kingdom.'[92] In the Remain

[90] Watson, 'Tom Watson On Brexit'.
[91] Five former Secretary Generals of NATO, 10 May 2016, 'Former Secretary Generals Of NATO Back Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 29 January 2018.
[92] *Ibid*.

discourse, security demanded a collective mindset and unified purpose. If Britain were to reduce its role in Europe, the security organisations that work with the EU would be proportionately impacted.

Remain outlined the transnational security challenges that necessitate regional cooperation. Two former officers from British spy agencies listed the range of geopolitical threats facing Europe, from 'Terrorist plots inspired by Isis in the Middle East' to a 'resurgent and unpredictable Russia'.[93] They went on to describe the present security environment as one of the most dangerous in a generation. 'For our own security we need to stay in the EU, continue to build collaboration with our EU partners against common threats'.[94] The term 'common threats' is noteworthy because it highlighted the contrast between the economic, progressive, and security strands of the case Remain made for Europe. As their own discourse demonstrated, free trade might have aggregative benefits but these are disproportionately shared, and progressive values only appeal to specific political communities. Security threats, however, do not discriminate. It is therefore curious that this element of the discourse was so reactive in nature. The preamble to a Remain press release summed up the impetus for their brief mention of security issues:

> The overwhelming consensus among British security experts that Britain is stronger and safer in Europe became clear today as Britain Stronger In Europe issues the roll call of veterans, security experts and military chiefs backing Britain remaining in Europe. It comes as Vote Leave gain a group of new members of its Veterans for Britain group.[95]

Remain discussed security issues in order to counter Leave's extensive critique of national security and the negative effects of EU integration. Both sides of the campaign set up advocacy groups in the last week of May to proselytise their particular views on the security.[96] While Leave made security a central component of its discourse from

[93] Evans and Sawers, 'The EU Can't Dictate To Us'.
[94] *Ibid.*
[95] Ten military leaders past and present, 25 May 2016, 'Veterans and Military Security Experts Line Up To Show Overwhelming Support For Britain Remaining In Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 April 2018.
[96] *Ibid.*

start to finish, Remain raised these topics in weeks four, five and six of the campaign – at the midpoint – and then mostly ignored them thereafter.

Alongside security issues, Remain also discussed the transnational nature of modern policing to counter Leave's claims that EU membership had made the UK 'less safe'.[97] Yvette Cooper, for example, argued that 'Being in the EU gives our police the tools they need to bring evil human trafficking gangs to justice, including vital cooperation through Europol'.[98] Remain claimed that Europe's regional policing force and pooled resources were indispensable in the fight against criminal activities that transcend national borders.[99] They highlighted crime statistics to emphasise how important the EU's various law enforcement agencies have been in capturing and deporting criminals from Britain.[100] Remain also quoted an open letter written by seven former senior police officers to rebut Leave's performance of crisis. The letter opined 'We do not believe that staying in Europe makes us more vulnerable, it is not credible to argue so, all the evidence is to the contrary. We can see no case for taking such a gamble with our security that leaving the EU would entail.' [101] Leaving the European security community was portrayed as another potential failure given the contemporary milieu and emergence of transnational challenges.

The final part of Remain's collectivist case for the EU featured a pragmatic argument for regional solidarity. As *The Economist* put it, 'Even if Britain can leave the EU it cannot leave Europe'.[102] Leaving the EU, Remain pointed out, would not insulate Britain from its geography or the challenges that Europe faces. Europe has always been Britain's foremost source of influence, and in an era of intensifying globalisation, that relationship must naturally deepen.[103] Gordon Brown argued that 'in an increasingly interdependent world, Britain has to balance the autonomy we desire with the co-

[97] Charles Clarke, James Brokenshire MP and seven former police chiefs, 5 June 2016, 'Seven Former Police Chiefs: "Leaving Europe Would Make Us Less Safe"', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 1 May 2018.
[98] Yvette Cooper MP, 19 May 2016, 'Yvette Cooper: EU Vital In Fight Against Human Trafficking', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 26 March 2018.
[99] Brown, 'For Britain, It Should Be Clout Not Out'.
[100] Sir Hugh Orde, 19 May 2016, 'European Arrest Warrant Used To Return Hundreds Of Fugitives To Face Justice In Britain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 26 March 2018; Cooper, 'EU Vital In Fight Against Human Trafficking'.
[101] Clarke et al., '"Leaving Europe Would Make Us Less Safe"'.
[102] The Economist, '"Divided We Fall"'.
[103] *Ibid.*

operation we need'.[104] If Britain were to leave the EU it would only weaken a community to which it is, inescapably, tied.[105] Many spokespeople tried to present these facts as a call to action. The former Conservative leader John Major argued that 'Our international prestige, our security and wellbeing are all enhanced inside Europe ... It is patriotic to work with others to ensure our security, improve our economic wellbeing and carry British influence around Europe and the world.'[106] Greens MP Caroline Lucas portrayed EU membership as a challenge to which Britain should rise: 'By staying in Europe we secure a chance to make the EU work better for British people'.[107] These spokespeople framed the EU as both an inescapable reality and an opportunity.

However, the collectivist strand of the discourse was undercut by the focus of Remain's leaders on risk and economic cost. George Osborne outlined the view of the dominant groups within 'the elite' at the outset of the campaign when he said 'we've kept our own currency and control of our borders' whilst securing access to Europe's huge consumer market.[108] By the Chancellor's logic, the EU should be appraised as a cost-benefit calculation. More accurately, EU membership was presented as a competitive struggle in which the UK tried maximise its economic upside whilst minimising the responsibilities imposed upon it. In his first speech during the referendum, David Cameron echoed this scepticism: 'Britain, and Britain's workers, will be better off in a reformed Europe than out on our own.'[109] From the beginning Remain – or more particularly, the Conservative Party core of Remain – was deeply ambivalent about the EU. So much so that Cameron, its chief spokesperson, could only endorse the EU with the qualification that it must fundamentally reform its institutions. The fragmented case that Remain put forward on behalf of the EU reflects the internal contradictions between the multiple political forces bound together in its anti-populist discourse.

[104] Brown, 'For Britain, It Should Be Clout Not Out'.
[105] Leslie, 'Remarks By Chris Leslie MP To IOD'; US Treasury Secretaries, 'UK Economy And Influence Stronger In Europe'; Justin Trudeau, 20 May 2016, 'The Prime Minister Of Canada, Justin Trudeau, Backs Britain Remaining In The EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 27 March 2018.
[106] Open letter from numerous 'leaders', 22 June 2016, 'Leaders in all fields are clear Britain is Stronger if we Vote Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 June 2018.
[107] *Ibid*.
[108] Osborne, 'UK families would be worse off if we left EU'.
[109] Cameron and Barber, 'On Europe Even We Can Agree'.

Conclusion

In the final analysis, the Remain discourse embodied anti-populism in action. 'The elite' that were forced together by the need to counter Leave's discourse were not homogenous, and in consequence the Remain discourse presented a contradictory narration of the crises they were hoping to avert. This chapter has shown the three major elements of Remain's somewhat haphazard anti-populist narration of crisis. The first section outlined Remain's '*moment of decisive intervention*', in which Remain argued that free trade is critical and leaving the trade arrangements of the Single Market had the potential to trigger eleven failures in the British economy. The second section presented the first of two positive cases Remain made for the EU. Remain published the testimony from investors and other members of the 'economic elite' describing how they benefited commercially from the EU and how they would adversely respond to losing those benefits. The politicians of Remain then 'spectacularised' those elite testimonies into the certainty of a recession and general crisis in the British economy. Finally, the third section detailed the collectivist case that some Labour Party politicians, cultural figures, and religious leaders made for the EU. This element of the discourse drew out the internal tensions within the Remain campaign, demonstrating how the plurality of 'the elite' undercut the delivery of a unified message to the voter.

The EU referendum demonstrates the stylistic mirroring that occurs between populist and anti-populist discourses. The analysis in this chapter shows that Remain used many of the same 'steps' that Benjamin Moffitt describes in the populist performance of crisis.[110] Remain identified eleven potential failures and elevated these into an overarching economic crisis with dramatic performances like the emergency budget. They used open letters and elite testimony to entice the media to propagate their performance, and they presented the simplest of solutions in affirming the status quo. However, there were two key differences in their performance that marks Remain as a quintessentially anti-populist discourse. In the first case, Remain narrated an eventual 'crisis in' rather than an existing 'crisis of'.[111] This narration admitted even fewer existing failures than Stavrakakis and his co-authors observed in the Greek case.[112]

[110] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 121-130.
[111] Stavrakakis et al., 'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', pp. 13-14.
[112] Stavrakakis et al. 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Frontier', pp. 41-47.

Unlike the Greek anti-populist forces, Remain expressed ambivalence about the EU rather than acknowledge any ongoing 'crisis in' the way it or the UK operated. The only crisis that they narrated arose from a possible truncation of free trade and the 'uncertainty' this would cause amongst the economic elite.

Secondly, Remain literally embodied 'the elite'. The discourse drew together various instantiations of 'the elite' from different spheres of public life and elevated their opinions to the forefront of national consciousness. Throughout the official campaign, their presentation of risk and benefit came from business leaders, financial commentators, academics, economic institutions, entrepreneurs, unions, luminaries of the creative industries, and of course politicians from across the political spectrum. To give an indication of the scale of this ant-populist effort, approximately 1,747 individuals are credited on Remain press releases in the role of corroborating experts, ranging from Richard Branson through the chief of the Bank of England, union leaders, and thousands of economist, small business, and institutional signatories of various statements of support. As discussed in the final section of this chapter, these disparate versions of 'the elite' struggled to present a unified message. As a collective Remain tended to avoid defending the progressive values of the EU. They urged *against* leaving rather than arguing *for* the EU and focussed on risk, investor confidence and economic shock as reasons why the voter should avoid a 'leap into the dark'.

In combination, chapters 3 and 4 have characterised the EU referendum as a struggle between populist and anti-populist performances. This has involved using the 'model' provided by Moffitt and Stavrakakis's 'choreography' in a mutually reinforcing fashion to analyse the two sides of the referendum. The third part of this thesis will seek to go beyond the performative element of the referendum by considering the long-term ramifications the Remain and Leave discourses would have on the relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite'. Chapter 5 will show why constituent power should be considered a necessary component of populist discourse. Genuinely populist discourses seek to democratise the relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite' by augmenting the constituent power of 'the people'. The Leave discourse fails this test, which reveals their arguments to be a sophisticated mode of anti-populism. Chapter 6 will argue that the Remain discourse also fails this test, for obvious reasons, although in the final analysis both Remain and Leave present surprisingly similar versions of anti-populism.

Part 3

‘The people’ and ‘the elite’

Chapter 5

Polarisation and the illusion of control

Populism is reducible to a set of ideas or a political style but it is *also* a plan that seeks to change the status quo. Like any political force, populism aims to affect the distribution of power in a given society. Contemporary theory, however, does not fully capture this dimension of the populist phenomenon. Part 3 of this thesis outlines why populism would benefit from the additional criterion that populism aims to engender democratic augmentation. I make this case by analysing the relationship established between 'the people' and 'the elite' in both Remain and Leave discourses. If one expands the scope of inquiry beyond the presentation of crisis to include the constituent power of 'the people', it becomes clear that there is little practical difference between the two referendum discourses.

This chapter focuses on the three-sided relationship of antagonism that Leave encouraged between: 'the people', British elites complicit in the EU's failures, and the threat posed by EU migrants. By process of elimination, I demonstrate how uninterested the Leave campaign was in 'the people'. Ordinary British citizens appeared in the Leave discourse in the position of those victimised by the status quo, or else sublimated into the vision of a unified country outside the EU and firmly under control of the political elite. Neither depiction imparts any specific, long-term agency to 'the people' or augments their capacity to act freely in public life.[1] On the other hand, Leave's desired outcome significantly enhances the constituent power of the domestic elite. For these reasons I conclude that Leave exhibited *populism without 'the people'*, a discourse that gives the appearance of populism whilst serving an anti-populist agenda.

The first section of this chapter examines the relationship Leave portrayed between the British people and the parliamentary elite. The Prime Minister, Chancellor, and the government they operate were identified as part of a larger 'establishment' that is in collusion with the EU due to self-interest. The allegations and personal attacks in this element of the discourse had the effect of severely undermining the credibility of the

[1] Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, pp. 5-9.

Westminster system, the politicians in charge of it, and the reliability of economic forecasting. The second section continues to analyse the relationship between 'the elite' and 'the people' by focussing on the various transnational leaders that drew Leave's ire and the Stronger In referendum campaign that they portrayed as the vanguard of the 'establishment'.[2] Lastly, Leave presented a caricature of the European migrant as an economic competitor, a dangerous criminal, and a cultural threat. These antagonistic entities define 'the people' indirectly, as the composite victim of various slights and sufferings.

The third section of the chapter finally arrives at Leave's positive image of 'the people'. The small portion of their discourse that dealt directly with the British people described workers, families, and citizens who were stripped of their constituent power, charged as taxpayers for their depredation, and lied to by both the EU and the UK parliament. Leave urged these people to 'take back control' by voting to leave the EU. This singular action was portrayed as the final act of 'the people'. Thereafter, 'the people' would be sublimated into 'our nation', the power of the state replacing the constituent power of 'the people'.[3] Leave failed to acknowledge that a post-Brexit state would be under the control of the same 'establishment' their discourse had done so much to demonise.

The components of the Leave discourse analysed in this chapter verify the importance of democratic augmentation. Examining Leave's performance of crisis in isolation would lead one to assume that they were engaged in a populist endeavour. However, populism is more than just a political style, discourse, or set of ideas; these identifiable components of the phenomenon *aim to achieve a specific effect in the public arena.* Authentic populism seeks to cohere 'the people' in perpetuity and enhance their freedom of action. Otherwise, the net result is polarisation without any measurable improvement in the self-rulership of those who have suffered injustice. Chapter 6 will illustrate how Remain's clearly anti-populist discourse arrived at a similar position to Leave, further reinforcing the point that both sides of the campaign were engaged in an anti-populist exercise.

[2] Gisela Stuart MP, 10 June 2016, 'Cameron and Osborne abusing honours system to keep Britain in EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 June 2018.
[3] Patel and Oxley, 'Pessimistic OECD report admits economy will grow'.

1. The establishment: UK elites and their duplicity

Leave's 'spectacularisation of crisis' was not limited to the EU or its 'Eurocrats'. This section outlines how Leave also narrated a crisis of British government that implicated the Prime Minister, the Chancellor, and the government they ran. It will show how Leave achieved this effect thought 'simplification' and 'demonisation', two tactics that Stavrakakis *et al.* outlined as the fifth feature of the populist 'choreography'.[4] Leave portrayed the British political class – particularly the Prime Minister and Chancellor – big business and a network of opinion makers as 'the establishment' that was in collusion with the EU.

Leave alleged that the 'establishment' uses false economic statements to insure the status quo from which they profit. Their logic homogenised the pluralistic motives of a host of actors spread across dozens of institutions into a simple edifice. In addition to accusing the government of 'collusion' with the EU, Leave also infantilised and insulted the Prime Minister and the Chancellor.[5] The credibility of their conspiracy theory was based on the delegitimisation of the incumbent government and its leaders. The 'establishment' element of the Leave discourse demonstrates how *populism without 'the people'* creates a populist performance without directly speaking to the agency of 'the people'. Leave created a sense of 'the people' through systematic elimination – 'the British people' were defined *in their absence* by shared victimisation at the hands of their own government.

1.1 A failed renegotiation and elite failure

Leave positioned the Prime Minister and his government as part of the EU elite. This was a radical departure from traditional Euroscepticism, in which British politicians are depicted – often autobiographically – as national champions resisting encroachment by Europe. In Leave discourse, the Prime Minister became the central figure in a national conspiracy to keep the UK exposed to EU integration, migration and dysfunction. David Cameron became increasingly central to their narrative in the last weeks of the

[4] Stavrakakis et al.,'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 22.
[5] Iain Duncan Smith MP, 22 June 2016, 'Turkish government and Major contradict Cameron – Turkey will join in a decade', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 June 2018.

campaign. He and his 'failed' renegotiation with the EU came to symbolise the complicity of the UK government in British oppression.

Leave was determined to delegitimise David Cameron's renegotiated terms of membership with the EU. This element of their discourse added to the 'spectacularisation of crisis': Leave alleged that the EU would not reform, and a domestic political leader was misleading 'the people' about their prospects within the EU. Contradicting Remain's portrayal of the renegotiated membership deal, Leave argued that 'The UK does not have a "special status" in a "reformed" EU. This is spin from David Cameron.'[6] In their view, the renegotiation produced a merely symbolic agreement, one that would not exempt the UK from integration or, most importantly, freedom of movement.[7] The government had failed to secure a 'treaty amendment' and was instead asking the British public to rely on 'assurances' from the EU elite.[8] Leave laid the blame for this failure at Cameron's feet: they constructed the renegotiation as a test of his 'resolve' and contended that he had 'shied away'.[9] Leave quoted assurances that David Cameron had made prior to the 2015 election regarding Britain's place in Europe and compared them to the results of the renegotiation.[10] They contended that Remain was 'in a blind panic' over the negotiated outcome, having failed to secure opt-outs to freedom of movement, future Eurozone bailouts, and further EU integration.[11] Boris Johnson concluded that 'If you look at what we were promised, and what we got, the Government should logically be campaigning on our side today.'[12] The picture Leave painted was stark. In their discourse the Prime Minister lacked the courage to

[6] Matthew Elliot, 19 June 2016, 'David Cameron repeatedly refused to answer basic questions on Turkey', *Vote Leave*, accessed 6 June 2018. The renegotiated membership deal – mentioned in more detail in chapter 2 – was a preliminary step taken by the Cameron government prior to the referendum. The renegotiations were intended to defuse several key demands of Eurosceptics and protect the UK from further EU integration.
[7] Matthew Elliot, 22 April 2016, 'Home Secretary admits the EU makes it harder to control immigration', *Vote Leave*, accessed 12 January 2018; Mann, 'Logic of IN campaign's claims'; Dominic Raab MP, 21 June 2016, 'EU law keeps killers in the UK', *Vote Leave*, accessed 6 June 2018; Elliot, 'IN campaign can't find a positive reason'.
[8] Lord David Owen, 6 June 2016, 'Lord Owen: Without treaty change UK still exposed to eurozone bailout', *Vote Leave*, accessed 6 June 2018.
[9] *Ibid*.
[10] Patel, 'The scale and impact of immigration from Europe'; Matthew Elliot, 7 June 2016, 'Cameron called for honesty then told five outright lies in 30 minutes', *Vote Leave*, accessed 21 May 2018; Iain Duncan Smith MP, 14 June 2016, 'European Court still in charge of our social security and borders', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018.
[11] Douglas Carswell MP, 7 June 2016, 'Cameron panics over flagging "In" campaign', *Vote Leave*, accessed 21 May 2018.
[12] Johnson, 'The liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave'.

protect his country; rather than confront the EU elite, his government and Remain had taken the easy path of misleading British voters.

In order to delegitimise the renegotiation, Leave delegitimised the Prime Minister and his government. Their campaign adopted the pattern of rhetorically questioning him in their media statements.[13] For example, a press release in early June listed five 'questions David Cameron must now answer', which included: 'Will you now admit that your EU renegotiation did nothing to limit the "free movement of people" which is what most voters want?' and 'Will you now admit that your EU renegotiation will do nothing to limit pressures on hospital waiting times, class sizes or the housing crisis in this country?'[14] Addressing the Prime Minister in such a patronising manner implied that he was not worthy of the respect or trust that typically accompanies the office of Prime Minister. The accusatory nature of Leave's questions also implied that Cameron had engaged in deception. In itself, this was quite an extraordinary tactic considering that the majority of Vote Leave's spokespeople came from Cameron's own political party. Nonetheless, as the campaign neared its conclusion Leave escalated their campaign against the British government even further.

1.2 Collusion with the EU: The Prime Minister and his government

Over the course of the campaign, Prime Minister Cameron became a figure of villainy in the Leave narrative equivalent to the EU elite. He was allegedly duplicitous, having 'told five outright lies' in a single interview.[15] Leave claimed that, in combination with the Chancellor George Osborne, he made 'ten objectively false statements' on topics including asylum, bailouts, the ECJ and national security.[16] In their view he was also out of touch with 'people's legitimate concerns' regarding the EU.[17] Douglas Carswell MP declared that 'David Cameron cannot be trusted' and 'he is not a man of principle

[13] Gisela Stuart MP, 19 June 2016, 'Turkish government and Major contradict Cameron – Turkey will join in a decade', *Vote Leave*, accessed 6 June 2018; Iain Duncan Smith MP, 2 June 2016, 'David Cameron has questions to answer on his deeply unpopular EU immigration policy', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 May 2018; Johnson, 'The liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave'; Smith and Gove, 'Home Secretary admits that 5 new countries joining'.
[14] Smith, 'David Cameron has questions to answer'.
[15] Elliot, 'Cameron called for honesty'.
[16] Unattributed, 19 June 2016, 'A note regarding factual errors repeated by the Prime Minister and Chancellor', *Vote Leave*, accessed 6 June 2018.
[17] Elliot, 'David Cameron repeatedly refused to answer'.

… He is only interested in saving his career not in what is best for the British people.'[18] Matthew Elliot characterised a BBC live debate as follows: 'David Cameron came face-to-face with real voters and tough questions for the first time in the campaign tonight and it wasn't pretty – his scaremongering was ridiculed by the audience in the studio and at home.'[19] In this quote Elliot drove a rhetorical wedge between the Prime Minister and 'real voters', indicating that he was – like the Eurocrats – separate from the general population and divergent from their interests. Secondly, Elliot suggested that, up until that point, there had been no proper scrutiny – 'tough questions' – of the Remain case. Elsewhere, Leave made more direct claims that Remain was receiving aid from the government and vested institutional power.

David Cameron, as the public figurehead of both Stronger In and the incumbent government, embodied the institutional power of Remain. From the outset Leave accused the apparatus of federal government of being partisan in favor of his cause. Their second press release during the official campaign claimed the government was suppressing a report regarding the impact of migration on the British school system.[20] Gisela Stuart argued that delay in the report's publication was 'yet another example of the Government seeking to sway the debate by hiding inconvenient facts from the people', behavior that 'is ill befitting of a Government that claims to want to have an open and honest debate.'[21] In this element of the discourse, Leave was further 'spectacularising' the crisis facing British voters. According to Leave, the Prime Minister and the government he leads were intent on maintaining EU membership despite the failures it had already caused and would continue to cause.

Leave accused the government of the same foibles as David Cameron. The bureaucracy had 'failed' to achieve reform in the EU and 'does not understand the nature of migrants who enter and leave the UK'.[22] Leave dismissed economic modeling from the public service as 'extremely questionable' due to partisan bias.[23] Patel, Johnson and Smith

[18] Carswell, 'You can't trust David Cameron'.
[19] Elliot, 'Tonight showed that the public does not trust David Cameron'.
[20] Stuart, 'Gisela Stuart says Government must come clean'.
[21] *Ibid.*
[22] Elliot, 'Home Secretary admits the EU makes it harder'; Patel, 'EU-funded IMF being used'; Johnson, 'The only way to take back control of immigration'.
[23] John Longworth, 31 May 2016, 'John Longworth: I agree with what Sajid Javid used to say about the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 25 April 2018.

separately characterised the government as duplicitous and even oppressive, 'planning to circumvent purdah rules' to influence the referendum, 'trying to kid the British people', and waging a 'campaign to intimidate the British people into voting to stay in the EU'.[24] These accusations play on the highly centralised nature of the Westminster system. The Prime Minister, as the leader of both the legislature and the executive, does represent and to an extent personify the civil service. Leave used the nature of the Prime Ministerial role to project Cameron's behaviour onto the Westminster system as a whole.

Leave's adversarial approach to the government escalated as the campaign progressed. By the middle of June, they were accusing both the Prime Minister and his government of colluding to bring Eastern European nations into the EU. A large number of Leave releases featured a sound bite from 2010 in which Cameron said he wished to 'pave the road from Ankara', the Turkish capital, to Brussels such that Turkey would enter the EU as a full member.[25] Leave directed rhetorical questions towards the topic, asking Cameron to clarify how much UK funding was being spent to prepare Turkey for accession and whether he would veto the union.[26] At the same time, they alleged the UK government had 'agreed to send [Turkey] a staggering £2 billion of UK taxpayers' money to help them join the EU as quickly as possible'.[27] Ostensibly, public servants were 'working to facilitate [Turkish and Serbian] entry into the European Union' and the 'machinery of Government is being used to accelerate the pace at which Turkey and other nations join the EU'.[28] Furthermore, Leave argued that 'the Government opposes giving the British people a say' on the issue of Turkish membership.[29] Leave concluded that 'David Cameron is colluding with the EU and lying to the British people'.[30] Given the antagonistic role Leave attributed to the EU elite, collusion with them implicated

[24] Patel, 'EU-funded IMF being used'; Johnson, 'The liberal cosmopolitan case'; Smith, 'IDS exposes Obama's double standards'.
[25] Smith and ICM Research, 'David Cameron has questions to answer'; Mathew Elliot, 12 June 2016, 'Cameron's Turkey claims are the height of duplicity', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018; Mathew Elliot, 14 June 2016, 'Britain clears path for Turkey's EU membership', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018; Mathew Elliot, 15 June 2016, 'IN campaign's claims on Turkey are falling apart', *Vote Leave*, accessed 5 June 2018; Elliot, 'David Cameron repeatedly refused to answer'.
[26] Smith and Gove, 'Home Secretary admits that 5 new countries joining'; Stuart, 'Turkish government and Major contradict Cameron'.
[27] Stuart and Smith, 'UK pays £1.8 billion to help Albania and Turkey'.
[28] Mathew Elliot, 20 June 2016, 'British embassies have dedicated teams to help Turkey, Serbia and others join the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 6 June 2018.
[29] Elliot, 'Cameron's Turkey claims'.
[30] Smith, 'Turkish government and Major contradict Cameron'.

both Cameron and his government in an effective conspiracy against the UK.

1.3 Establishment economics

The story of David Cameron, 'his' government, and Turkey is important because it underlines how conspiracy and the establishment of antagonistic relations between 'the people' and their government was central to Leave's case. Cameron was portrayed as a representative of the European elite rather than 'the British people'. Leave dissolved the division between the prime minister, the government, and the public service. At the same time, they argued that representatives from the public service and private sector were complicit in supporting and worsening the failures facing 'the people'. Leave portrayed a cross-sectional British 'establishment' of the wealthy and the powerful who were complicit in the crisis of EU membership because they benefited materially from the status quo. This collective included big business, the Treasury, the Chancellor, and a range of economic institutions.

George Osborne, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, was a key target of Leave's critique. Osborne was a leading figure in the Remain campaign, almost as prolific in appearances as David Cameron. He used economic forecasts from government entities and his ongoing position in cabinet to lend gravitas to the Remain argument. In response, Leave worked to delegitimise both the Chancellor and the authoritative network upon which he drew.[31] Matthew Elliot declared that 'George Osborne is panicking about his failing campaign so he is resorting to ever more lurid scare stories. His problem is that he's told so many tall tales that people no longer believe what he and David Cameron say on the EU any more.'[32] Cameron and Osborne's 'scare stories' took the form of economic reports, budgetary announcements, and examples of how the EU's Single Market benefited the UK. Elliot's tone towards the Chancellor was derisive, echoing the uncivil characterisations that Leave made of the Prime Minister.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Osborne's announcements were intended to warn the voter but Leave described his interventions as selfish rather than prudent. In mid

[31] Baker, 'I could not support Osborne's plans'.
[32] Elliot, 'Osborne's event nose dives'.

June, a collective of fifty-seven Conservative MPs labeled Osborne's campaigning style as a 'teenage temper tantrum'.[33] Their open letter accused the Chancellor of 'Threatening to vandalise the economy' and 'doing damage to the British economy in his bid to win this political campaign.'[34] In Leave's discourse, the occupants of the two highest political offices in Westminster were represented as immature and selfish, described in language more suited to juvenile delinquents than responsible office holders. The institutions Osborne and Cameron controlled received the same treatment in a form of guilt by association. Iain Duncan Smith dismissed a Treasury estimate on the probable effects of Brexit by saying 'The Treasury has previously admitted its economic forecasts are fixed by the Government of the day to suit its political policies. We cannot trust such forecasts today.'[35] The primary purpose of the Treasury is to form unbiased views on the national economy and manage it in accordance with these views. By highlighting that the Treasury is answerable to the cabinet, and the cabinet is not bound by any explicit rules, Leave undermined the premise of parliamentary government. If the public cannot trust the government, how can they trust the technocratic functions that the government oversees?

Leave implied that Treasury forecasts are fruit of a partisan tree. The Chancellor was one of the key witnesses Leave called in making their accusations against the Treasury. Smith observed that 'Osborne has himself admitted, the reason he created the independent forecaster, the OBR [the Office of Budget Responsibility], was because by 2010 the public simply did not believe the Government's own economic forecasts. The Treasury has consistently got its predictions wrong in the past.'[36] During the 2010 general election Osborne did indeed rail against what he described as an incompetent and opaque system of government forecasting, then under the responsibility of a Labour government. He created the OBR as part of a suite of changes designed to reign in the politicisation of the budgeting process. Osborne's earlier actions became fodder for Leave's attacks during the campaign. Leave also drew on those with experience in the institution in question. Lord Norman Lamont, a former Chancellor of the Exchequer,

[33] 57 Conservative MPs, 12 June 2016, '57 Conservative MPs reject Osborne's "absurd" Brexit budget', *Vote Leave*, accessed 15 June 2018.
[34] *Ibid*.
[35] Iain Duncan Smith MP, 23 May 2016, 'Duncan Smith: People will not believe Osborne's economic forecasts of doom', *Vote Leave*, accessed 10 April 2018.
[36] *Ibid*.

pointed out that economics is an inexact science and that Treasury in particular, given its unique institutional circumstances, 'has enough trouble with forecasts even when they are trying to get them right.'[37] Lamont's reading of the Treasury's Brexit forecast led him to conclude that 'they have simply assumed a disaster in order to scare the pants off the British people.'

Leave illustrated the politics inherent in economics and the potential for economics to be used by political actors as a technique of control. In making this case they also attacked the veracity of the economic discipline itself. As Lord Lamont stated, Treasury struggled to divine the truth even when 'trying' to be objective.[38] Leave made the same accusations of false certainty against other economists throughout the campaign. Regarding a forecast from the National Institute of Economic and Social Research (NIESR), Matthew Elliot scoffed 'yet another report from a former supporter of the Euro masquerading as new research … That means the same dodgy assumptions of Establishment economists and the Treasury underpin the findings'.[39] In this quote Elliot described an intellectual ecosystem, whereby a private economic institute recycled the work of a partisan Treasury under the control of the Chancellor. Leave further posited that NIESR was part of the 'establishment', or the network of influence that governs the UK.

A key feature of the 'establishment' in Leave's discourse was their wrong-headed support of the EU, the customs union and the single currency. The NIESR were depicted as 'the same people who predicted the world would end if we did not join the Euro'.[40] Other economic institutions including the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), private consultancies PriceWaterhouseCoopers and the Centre for Economics and Business Research, the Centre for Economic Performance at the London School of Economics, the industry peak body the Confederation of British Industry (CBI), and the Bank of England were also implicated by Leave as part of the economic establishment.[41] In this

[37] Former Chancellors, 'Former Chancellors criticise Treasury forecasts'.
[38] *Ibid*.
[39] Mathew Elliot, 9 June 2016, 'Vote Leave responds to NIESR claims on the economy', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 June 2018.
[40] *Ibid*.
[41] Patel, 'EU-funded IMF being used'; Patel and Oxley, 27, 'Pessimistic OECD report admits economy will grow'; Elliot, 'Vote Leave responds to NIESR claims'; Matthew Elliot, 15 June 2016, 'EU-funded

discourse, economics was represented as a mechanism of elite influence rather than an objective social science. The polarisation that Leave encouraged goes beyond what Stavrakakis et al. observed in Greece. In order to make their case, Leave simplified the entire political economy of Britain, demonised key public servants, and delegitimised private sector organisations.

Blurring the lines between economic and political power helped to solidify the conspiracy of elites against 'the people'. As Gisela Stuart said on 17 May, 'Big corporates are trying to scare people into staying in the EU because they do very well out of the status quo. They lobby in Brussels and use the EU's courts to shift profits around Europe and avoid paying their proper taxes in the UK.'[42] In the Leave discourse, large corporations were represented as acting in an identical fashion to the Prime Minister, Chancellor and Treasury: Cameron was 'scaremongering', Osborne was telling 'scare stories', Treasury forecasts were designed to 'scare the pants off the British people', and big business was 'trying to scare people'. Leave outlined a pattern of behaviour that linked the various elements of the 'establishment'. By their logic, similar behaviour implied common intent. Moreover, under Cameron's government the EU and 'multinational corporations' had prospered whilst the British people were gradually diminished.[43] Leave described economics as a propaganda tool that entrenches the status quo, a key technique used by 'the elite' to serve their own interests.

2. 'Shabby stitch-ups' and convicted criminals: The Remain campaign and the European migrant

Populism without 'the people' relies on the vilification and conspiracy theorising to create a populist effect without directly focussing on 'the people' or their demands. This section continues to detail the various ways in which the Leave discourse defined 'the people' through antagonism. It focuses on duplicitous public figures, Stronger In as the vanguard of 'the establishment', and the caricatured European migrant as

CBI does not represent British business', *Vote Leave*, accessed 5 June 2018; John Longworth, 1 June 2016, 'BSE republish fifteen year old, discredited research by pro-euro campaign', *Vote Leave*, accessed 25 April 2018.

[42] Stuart and Johnson, 'We cannot counteract tax avoidance in the EU'.

[43] Gove, 'After we Vote Leave we will act quickly'; Stuart, Gove and Johnson, 'On the Risks of Remain'.

examples that cumulatively define 'the people' as the absent victim of treachery, manipulation and danger. If this analysis seems repetitive, it is because a significant majority of the Leave discourse followed this pattern.

Performance of crisis comprised 77 per cent (286 referents) of the Leave discourse. The remainder dealt with the future after Brexit, the referendum, and the identity of 'the people'. This imbalance demonstrates the degree of negativity that infused the Leave portion of the campaign. Benjamin Moffitt and Simon Tormey observed that the contemporary populist style tends to marginalise 'the people', treating them as the effect rather than the subject of discourse.[44] The Leave discourse is an extreme example of this pattern. The success of the Leave case hinged on poisoning British political culture. They applied 'simplification' and 'demonisation' to the relationship between 'the people' and every single entity that has a significant role in British life. This included undermining the two underpinning principles of the Westminster system and inspiring fear about every European migrant.

2.1 Patronage and quid pro quo: The symbolic construction of the elite

In Leave's discourse, economics does not offer a neutral account of the relationship between the EU and the UK; its deployment revealed the antagonistic relationship between 'the people' and a transnational elite that includes the British government. Rather than engaging in a detailed economic debate on such issues, Leave focused on the extent to which economics was a tool of influence that is wielded by the influential. They also implicated other Labour and international politicians in the EU conspiracy, further reinforcing their view of the establishment as an elite class with the power to twist how reality is perceived. This section highlights the use of innuendo, guilt by association, and accusations of patronage bordering on corruption that Leave used to construct its image of 'the elite'. These are further examples of the polarising effect that the Leave discourse attempted to create within the British polity.

Leave attempted to implicate non-government institutions in the web of the establishment by exaggerating financial ties. For example, the 'series of extremely

[44] Moffitt and Tormey, 'Rethinking Populism', p. 387.

pessimistic and unrealistic assumptions' that the OECD made about Brexit were explained simply because it was 'EU-funded'.[45] Likewise, Leave alleged that the CBI had a client relationship with the EU: they were 'not even being straight over who they speak for', and represented 'the voice of Brussels'.[46] The IMF received the same treatment from Leave. Priti Patel claimed it was 'taxpayer funded … According to the [European] Commission's own transparency system, the IMF has only received €168,138 from the European Commission since 2007.'[47] For context, the net administrative budget for the IMF in 2017 was $1.07 billion USD, which would make the contribution from the EU to the IMF a fraction of one per cent for one operating year, let alone over the span 2007-2016. The IMF received an insignificant contribution from the EU, from which Leave implied impropriety and bias sufficient to dismiss all of their reports. The same is true of the OECD, and regarding the CBI there were no direct financial linkages so Leave had to resort to innuendo. These examples illustrate the ambition of Leave's performance of crisis. In effect, Leave's narration extended to the entire apparatus of domestic and regional government.

Leave's discourse relied on moral judgments and symbolic associations that sustained the grand narrative of a transnational elite working against the ordinary citizen. Osborne and Cameron, as figureheads of this elite, were depicted as figures of derision, representatives fearful of their constituents, emperors without clothing. Christine Lagarde, the Chairwoman of the IMF, was presented as an 'employee of Osborne' because her institution, as an allegedly taxpayer funded entity, received a fraction of its funding from the British government.[48] In Leave's performance of crisis, Osborne was head of the Treasury that made Britain's contributions to the IMF. Therefore, Leave argued that Osborne effectively employed Christine Lagarde.[49] Patel concluded that 'Christine Lagarde is facing serious criminal allegations … Christine Lagarde is a long-standing pro-EU campaigner, who believes the law should not be followed when it is inconvenient.'[50] Leave applied the same strategy with the Treasury and the government: the flaws and missteps of the Chancellor and the Prime Minister were used

[45] Patel and Oxley, 'Pessimistic OECD report admits economy will grow'.
[46] Elliot, 'EU-funded CBI does not represent British business'.
[47] Patel, 'EU-funded IMF being used'.
[48] *Ibid*.
[49] By the same logic, every British citizen would be Osborne's 'employee' via their consumption of publicly financed goods such as roads, healthcare, and collective defence.
[50] Patel, 'EU-funded IMF being used'.

to implicate the institutions they led in questionable conduct. In Leave's discourse, Lagarde's personal legal problems were a metaphor for the IMF and, through her publicly stated views, the EU as a whole. Lagarde's legal problems were represented as indicating the same mentality Leave elsewhere ascribed to the ECJ and the EU: above the law, self-interested, out of touch with 'the people'.

Leave's construction of a sprawling conspiracy of 'the elite' was based on normative assumption rather than logic. Leave emphasised the moral failings of key public figures and used these flaws to personify the institutions they led. The insinuations of patronage and guilt by association, considered in isolation, were far from impressive but cumulatively presented a picture of dubious leadership and questionable governance. Barack Obama, Gordon Brown and Tony Blair served as peripheral actors in this discourse whom nevertheless reinforce Leave's pattern. Then US President Obama, who made an early intervention in the campaign in favour of Remain, was accused of 'stark double standards' for advocating that the UK remain under the purview of the ECJ and the European parliament, when he would presumably never expose the US to similar circumstances.[51] Lord Owen argued that 'many British people are puzzled' by the President's intervention, especially 'in light of his and our failure to reform the Eurozone' and 'despite an impending collapse of the Eurozone'.[52] Speaking on behalf of a theoretical citizenry, Owen insinuated that Obama was either incompetent or serving ulterior motives.

Former British prime ministers Gordon Brown and Tony Blair received more direct condemnations from Leave. Brown's 'EU policies when he was in office were a disaster', littered with largesse towards the EU and dishonest manipulation of the British voter.[53] Chris Grayling accused Brown of having 'repeatedly talked Britain down', a practice allegedly used by 'the establishment' to belittle the British public and cause them to acquiesce to EU membership.[54] Leave found Blair guilty of numerous deceits and examples of EU favouritism, including advocating for the single currency

[51] Smith, 'IDS exposes Obama's double standards'.
[52] Owen, 'People will be puzzled by Obama's intervention'.
[53] Grayling, 'Gordon Brown: Wrong Then, Wrong Now'.
[54] *Ibid*.

and failing to control migration.[55] His role as a 'part time adviser to [the investment bank] JPMorgan … a major donor to the IN campaign which caused the financial crisis' cemented his ongoing membership of the establishment.[56] Leave made these examples of Obama, Brown and Blair after each offered support for Remain. Each was accused of duplicity towards the British voter and, less directly, either incompetence or self-interest.

2.2 Stronger In as the vanguard of the elite

The Labour Party, its leader Jeremy Corbyn MP and Conservative Theresa May MP – then the Home Secretary – appeared briefly in the Leave discourse in a similar light, albeit, all three were positioned as reluctant Remainers co-opted by 'the establishment' of which they are a part. Labour MP Frank Field described Jeremy Corbyn's remarks on the EU as 'the second longest suicide note in Labour's history' because his pro-EU stance emphasised how the party had 'fallen increasingly out of love with representing traditional Labour voters'.[57] According to Field, remaining in the EU is a cause of the 'upper-middle class', not the working class that previously supported Labour. Field's comments – and Gisela Stuart's leadership of the Vote Leave campaign – reflect the division within the Labour Party over EU membership. In the last month of the campaign Jeremy Corbyn and his deputy leader Tom Watson MP questioned some of Cameron and Osborne's statements, a situation which was reported by Leave as follows: 'Leading members of the IN campaign are now calling for restrictions on free movement and admitting David Cameron's deal was a sham.'[58] Likewise, Theresa May made statements critical of free movement and the accession of countries in Eastern Europe.[59] Leave portrayed these interlocutors as truth-tellers, the few establishment figures without motive sufficient to mislead 'the British people'. Figures like Corbyn

[55] Priti Patel MP, 29 May 2016, 'Priti Patel: Blair calls on UK to stay in EU even if migration hits one million', *Vote Leave*, accessed 21 April 2018.
[56] *Ibid*.
[57] Frank Field MP, 26 April 2016, 'Frank Field: This referendum will determine the future of the EU and the Labour Party', *Vote Leave*, accessed 18 January 2018. The longest suicide note in history is a phrase that the Labour MP Gerald Kaufman infamously used to describe the Labour Party's manifesto for the 1983 general election.
[58] Mann, 'Logic of IN campaign's claims'; Gisela Stuart MP, 19 June 2016, 'IN campaign acknowledge there is no way of controlling migration if we stay in the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 6 June 2018.
[59] Smith and Gove, 'Home Secretary admits that 5 new countries joining'; Smith and Stuart, 'UK pays £1.8 billion to help Albania and Turkey'.

and May provided fleeting contrast to the monolith of Stronger In, the official Remain body that Leave portrayed as the spearhead of 'the establishment'.

Stronger In was the figure at the centre of Leave's conspiracy of 'the elite'. This campaign organisation was portrayed as the government in another guise, using the establishment's resources to win the referendum on behalf of 'the elite'. Leave argued this hybrid body was relying solely on its influence and patronage networks to win the argument through fear rather than truth.[60] On behalf of Stronger In, 'the Chancellor is cashing in favours to Ms Lagarde in order to encourage the IMF to bully the British people'.[61] On behalf of Stronger In, 'the Prime Minister [is] talking down our country and our economy day after day', causing other politicians to plead 'with the government to stop the negative campaigning.'[62] In the Leave discourse, the government and Remain were synonymous. Stronger In and the government were alleged to have orchestrated the release of economic reports that relied on faulty assumptions and inflated the value of EU membership.[63] Somewhat outlandishly, Leave even characterised the 2016 Queen's Birthday Honours List – which comprises individuals nominated by the government for a peerage of some form – as part of Stronger In's campaign of intimidation and leverage.

Commenting on the Honours List, Gisela Stuart said 'David Cameron and George Osborne have used every single ounce of their power to try to bully and frighten the British people into backing their campaign to keep us in the EU. But abusing our honours system to reward campaign cronies and donors is a new low.'[64] Stuart claimed the 2016 list was part of an entrenched pattern of 'the establishment doing these shabby stitch ups'.[65] 'Enough is enough,' she proclaimed. 'This clique of over-privileged and out of touch men need to wake up'.[66] According to Stuart, the use of peerages as a bribe is part of the status quo. Leave's performance of crisis saw them critiquing many of the institutional pathways through which the British parliament exerts its influence. Leave

[60] Iain Duncan Smith MP, 11 June 2016, 'PM vindictive and desperate on pensions and public spending', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 June 2018; Elliot, 'IN campaign can't find a positive reason'; Stuart, Gove and Johnson, 'Vote Leave For A Fairer Britain'.
[61] Patel, 'EU-funded IMF being used'.
[62] Elliot, 'Prime Minister Continues To Talk Down Country'.
[63] Longworth, 'BSE republish fifteen year old, discredited research'.
[64] Stuart, 'Cameron and Osborne abusing honours system'.
[65] *Ibid.*
[66] *Ibid.*

alleged that parliamentary sovereignty is open to abuse by those that wield its sovereignty; the unwritten constitution gives political elites the flexibility to work against the commonweal and in support of their own interests. Constitutional flexibility and centralised government, two features that have for generations been hailed as the strengths of British democracy, were recast by Leave as its Achilles heel. Instead, Leave argued that the parliament serves the establishment, whose methods of control were epitomised in the presentation of honours to those who support the elite agenda. These are revolutionary ideas and yet, as I will show, they were not intended to achieve revolution or even reformation. Leave created a sense of existential crisis but they did not advocate for the empowerment of 'the people'.

2.3 The migrant: A caricature antithetical to British citizens

In Leave discourse, a venal establishment that prioritises elite interests was only one of several antagonisms ranged against 'the people'. Leave also described the European migrant in individual terms that are antithetical to the British citizen. Chapter 3 demonstrated how Leave represented migration as an embodiment of crisis. Leave's language emphasised the scale of migration in a physical and temporal sense, relying on aggregate figures and the metaphor of moving cities. This section deals with the other component of Leave's migration crisis. Leave caricatured the individual migrant as an economic competitor, cultural alien and criminal perpetrator.

Leave personalised the effects of mass migration, rendering the migrant as a direct competitor with the British citizen. Sir Richard Dearlove gave a particularly striking example when he described the era as one of 'mass movement of people from poverty towards relative wealth' but cautioned that 'Making the distinction between a refugee and economic migrant can be difficult. In a world connected by the Internet and mobile telephony, the have-nots understand graphically what they have not got and what they might have if they move to a rich country'.[67] Dearlove was asking the audience to see migration simultaneously as a mass movement and also as an aggregation of 'have-nots' that come to Britain out of individual self-interest. This quote outlines the prejudicial template that Leave applied to the migrant. Migrants were simultaneously

[67] Dearlove, 'Speech at BBC World on the Move day'.

portrayed as a factotum in a city-sized phenomenon *and* individuals whose motives must be questioned.

By pursuing their economic self-interest, EU migrants represent a class-based threat to British workers. Leave emphasised ONS statistics to the effect that 69,000 EU citizens entered the UK 'looking for work' in the 2015 fiscal year, and 42.3 per cent of EU migrants immigrated to Britain in 2012 for 'work-related reasons'.[68] They argued that 'EU nationals' were able to draw on government resources to aid them in their job search and were fleeing EU countries affected by the Eurozone crisis in order to secure British jobs.[69] In this element of the discourse, the EU migrant was represented as an adversary to the British worker. Individually, it was argued, they come to Britain to compete for employment, rendering domestic opportunity scarcer. Economic migrants were also portrayed, crudely, as a distinct class that did not assimilate into the British population: as Andrew Murrison MP observed, 'Between 2005 and 2014, there were 475,935 live births to mothers who were EU citizens'.[70] By implication, Murrison was arguing that the EU migrant was a member of a distinct class that perpetuates across generations and remains segregated from the "native" population. In Leave's discourse, a migrant was a direct competitor with the British worker and their offspring were potential competitors for the children of British workers.

The migrant, as a collective identity, was also represented by the most egregious crimes of specific offenders. In the last month of the campaign, Leave took the dramatic step of 'publishing a dossier of 50 criminals which the European Court prevented us from deporting'.[71] The dossier included graphic details of individual criminal cases. For example, one press release described the case of 'Theresa Rafacz, a Polish national, who killed her husband, including by kicking him in the face with a shod foot while he lay on the ground drunk.'[72] The cases listed included rape, robbery, and drug trafficking. The details of these cases were repeated in the 'Notes to Editors' postscript of Leave press releases during the closing weeks of the campaign. The 2015 case of

[68] Elliot, 'Home Secretary admits the EU makes it harder'.
[69] Carswell, 'You can't trust David Cameron'; Stuart, Gove and Johnson, 'On the Risks of Remain'.
[70] Andrew Murrison MP, 9 June 2016, 'Latest NHS waiting time statistics show we must Vote Leave', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 June 2018.
[71] Dominic Raab MP, 7 June 2016, 'Vote Leave reveals 50 criminals the EU stopped us deporting', *Vote Leave*, accessed 22 May 2018.
[72] *Ibid.*

'French national ZZ' was a fixture because EU law prevented his deportation 'despite the fact that he was a suspected terrorist'.[73] Other releases featured lists of specific people who were EU nationals, for example:

> Killers. In 1995, Chindamo, who is an Italian citizen, murdered the headteacher Philip Lawrence who went to help a 13-year-old boy who was being attacked. He was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1996. Chindamo was released in 2010 but recalled to prison due to accusations he intimidated and robbed a man at a cash machine, charges of which he was later acquitted.[74]

The purpose of this tactic was to personalise the migrant as a criminal. Leave only described individual 'nationals' in the worst ways possible: as violent criminals and economic competitors. In their discourse, the migrant was represented as either a faceless mass of people or a specific embodied threat. Leave encouraged their audience to see all migrants through these negative stereotypes, pointing out that EU passports can be forged and 'Once people buy these EU passports and with it citizenship of an EU member state, they have the automatic right to come to the UK'.[75] Dominic Raab MP described this situation as a 'clear and present danger to our security', a statement reliant on the implication that migrants were not security vetted and could be as dangerous as the criminals previously listed.[76] Michael Gove reinforced this message by saying that 'Inside the EU we have to accept that anyone with an EU passport – even if they have a criminal record – can breeze into this country'.[77] Leave argued that until proven otherwise the migrant was a physical and economic threat. It was only by imposing a 'points-based system like Australia' and leaving the EU's legal system that Britain could 'block those whose presence here isn't in our interests'.[78] The 'British people' were the unacknowledged antithesis to the criminal migrant; they are the subjects that need migration controls to protect their hard working and law-abiding communities.

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[73] Dominic Raab MP, 3 June 2016, 'Foreign criminals cause pro-EU campaigners to "question the point of the UK remaining a member of the EU"', *Vote Leave*, accessed 1 May 2018.
[74] Elliot, 'Cameron called for honesty'.
[75] Gove and Raab, 'EU membership makes us less safe'.
[76] *Ibid.*
[77] Gove, 'Why it is safer to take back control'.
[78] *Ibid*.

3. Taking back control: The singular act of the people

Leave's fearful caricature of the individual migrant completes their performance of the manifold crises that face the British voter. This last section outlines the references that Leave made to 'the people' directly, as opposed to an assumed entity that suffers the various antagonisms of the Eurocrat, the establishment, and the migrant. The first portion of the section outlines the negative way in which Leave identified 'the people' as workers, families, and citizens who are stripped of constituent power, charged as taxpayers for their depredation, and lied to by the EU and the UK parliament.

Leave urged the downtrodden British people to 'take back control' and it is this slogan that reveals the anti-populist nature of their discourse. Voting to leave the EU was presented as an act of constituent power, a quintessentially populist act of rebellion. However, Leave's depiction of the future after Brexit reveals that taking back control is a transitory act of freedom. Prior to the referendum, 'the people' were unable to exercise their constituent power; after voting leave, Leave argued, the elite would use their enhanced parliamentary power to act on the popular will. In the final analysis, the referendum was presented as a means by which 'the people' could redeem their domestic elite and make them work for the national interest once more. After that singular act of freedom, which would primarily enhance the power of the Westminster elite, 'the people' would become defunct.

3.1 The negative definition of the citizen

In Leave's discourse, the antagonisms of a self-serving elite and threatening migrant defined the British citizen as a victim. Equivalence was created amongst the citizenry through shared danger and economic precariousness. In particular, Leave emphasised that freedom of movement was driving average wages down, repeatedly referencing precariously employed and low-income workers.[79] Frank Field MP, a Labour politician, defined 'the people' in socio-economic terms, noting that 'Our open door

[79] Mann, 'Logic of IN campaign's claims'; Elliot, 'David Cameron repeatedly refused to answer basic questions'.

policy, which began under Tony Blair, has pushed down wages at the bottom of the labour market. It has increased the queues for health services and even more so for homes. And it prevents ever more parents from gaining a school of their choice for their children.'[80] 'The people' were understood to be the bottom of the labour market, those deprived of housing, those lacking public services, those anxious about their children's future.

Broadening the demographics of the people, Leave also included families, taxpayers, and finally the collective citizenry who were suffering because of EU regulation. Iain Duncan Smith described 'families' as part of 'the people': those who 'are suffering the consequences of uncontrolled migration', including stagnant wages, derelict housing, limited school resources, and scarce GP appointments.[81] Gisela Stuart echoed these sentiments, placing the family at the intersection of public services and private enterprise; as a service recipient, economic producer and critical determinant in the health of society.[82] Michael Gove noted that 'the UK taxpayer is paying nearly £2 billion to help [Albania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Turkey] join the EU.'[83] Spreading 'the people' to the entire nation, Douglas Carswell cited various economic reports to argue that 'Uncontrolled migration is already eroding living standards for Brits'.[84] All families, all taxpayers, and all British citizens were represented as being negatively affected by the status quo that 'the elite' support. In these references, Leave defined 'the people' directly as the specific victims of EU membership.

In Leave's discourse, this exploited collective were referred to as 'we' and 'our', merging 'the people' with the constituent power of the state. For example, Boris Johnson argued that 'We cannot control the terms on which people come and how we remove those who abuse our hospitality'.[85] 'We' in this sense encompasses the apparatus of the state – which can deport emigrants – as well as the society that extends its hospitality to the migrant.[86] Leave argued that 'the people' should exercise

[80] Field, 'This referendum will determine the future of the EU'.
[81] Smith, 'Turkish government and Major contradict Cameron'.
[82] Gisela Stuart MP, 19 June 2016, 'Stuart: PM has questions to answer on Turkey', *Vote Leave*, accessed 6 June 2018.
[83] Gove, '"Paving the road from Ankara"'.
[84] Carswell, 'You can't trust David Cameron'.
[85] Johnson, 'The only way to take back control of immigration'.
[86] *Ibid.*

ownership over 'our borders', 'our invaluable public services', 'our democratic system' and 'our ability to deport criminals and others whose presence here is not conducive to the public good'.[87] In each case, the EU is presented as the reason why 'the people' have lost control over their borders, services, democracy, and migration prerogatives.[88] In this regard 'the people' were defined in Leave's discourse as the rightful directors of the state. The constituent power of the people should be equivalent to the state's power yet, Leave argued, the EU elites and the British establishment conspire to prevent such popular action.

The spectre of Turkish accession was a feature of the Leave campaign from the beginning, but it came to dominate the last month of the referendum as illustrative of all the forces that prevent 'the people' from exercising their constituent power.[89] At the midway point in the campaign, Gove, Johnson and Stuart issued a joint statement that argued 'The EU is already opening visa-free travel to Turkey. That would create a borderless travel zone from the frontiers of Syria and Iraq to the English Channel.'[90] They were commenting on a European Commission memo released the same day, which detailed interim steps to prepare Turkey for its anticipated future application for EU membership. By the last weeks of the campaign, Leave was linking Turkey's accession to statements like 'The EU has stopped us removing dangerous individuals' implying that the British people could expect more 'dangerous individuals' if Turkey were to join the EU.[91] Priti Patel made the association obvious, saying of Turkish accession: 'Aside from the security threat that this poses, we now we have a report showing what the consequences will be in terms of population pressures.'[92] Smith characterised Turkey, Serbia and Albania as 'countries with poor populations and serious problems with organised crime, corruption, and sometimes even terrorism'.[93] In Leave's discourse, Turkey emblematised the escalating danger and scarcity facing 'the people'. Its accession to the EU would only add to the existing pool of economic

[87] Elliot, 'Three-quarters of a million people gained right'; Stuart, Gove and Johnson, 'Restoring public trust in immigration policy'.
[88] Raab, 'Foreign criminals cause pro-EU campaigners'; Raab, 'Vote Leave reveals 50 criminals'; Raab, 'EU law keeps killers in the UK'; Johnson, 'The only way to take back control of immigration'.
[89] Gove and Raab, 'EU membership makes us less safe'.
[90] Gove Johnson and Stuart, 'A stronger NHS and more money for those in need'.
[91] Elliot, 'IN campaign can't find a positive reason'.
[92] Priti Patel MP, 13 June 2016, 'Danger of Turkish accession clearer by the day', *Vote Leave*, accessed 4 June 2018.
[93] Smith, 'Turkish government and Major contradict Cameron'.

competitors and violent criminals and the inability of the British people to prevent this occurrence demonstrated their disenfranchisement.

Turkish accession exemplified Leave's narrative of elite antagonism. This issue was used to represent how 'the elite' have deprived the people of constituent power in 'our' nation. Talk of integrating Turkey into the EU had been ongoing for many years and David Cameron had previously made numerous favourable remarks on the topic, which Leave spokespeople quoted repeatedly.[94] During the campaign the Remain campaign denied that Turkey would ever gain entry but Leave cited credible reportage that, on the contrary, the accession talks were 'quickening' with British acquiescence, that it was 'Government policy that Turkey should join', and 'the Government is planning to grant visa-free access to Turkey'.[95] These claims and the evidence supporting them reinforced the image of the EU, the government, and the migrant ranged against the ordinary people of Britain. Leave also pointed to 2010 polling that indicated that 61 per cent of surveyed voters believed it would be 'bad, rather than good' if Turkey and other eastern European countries were to join the EU.[96] However, Leave intimated, 'the elite' deny the will of 'the people' and use the apparatus of government to achieve ulterior motives. Leave claimed repeatedly that, via programs like EU Pre-Accession Assistance, the UK 'will pay Turkey £250 million in bilateral assistance and will pay a further £97 million as part of EU payments to Turkey'.[97] In the Leave discourse, a domestic and transnational elite were represented as forcing 'the people' to pay, against their will, for policy changes that would harm their physical and economic wellbeing. The same elites were portrayed as stymying the constituent power of 'the people' to control 'our' borders, democracy, and public services.

[94] Elliot, 'David Cameron repeatedly refused to answer basic questions'; Elliot, 'Tonight showed that the public does not trust David'.
[95] Elliot, 'IN campaign's claims on Turkey are falling apart'; Gisela Stuart MP, Michael Gove MP and Boris Johnson MP, 16 June 2016, 'Letter to the Prime Minister and Foreign Secretary – Getting the facts clear on Turkey', *Vote Leave*, accessed 5 June 2018; Elliot, 'Britain clears path for Turkey's EU membership'; Elliot, 'Cameron's Turkey claims are the height of duplicity'; Elliot, 'EU bends rules to create visa-free zone'.
[96] Smith and ICM Research, 'David Cameron has questions to answer'.
[97] Stuart and Smith, 'UK pays £1.8 billion to help Albania and Turkey'.

3.2 'Take back control': The emancipatory act

Faced with all these antagonisms, Leave portrayed the referendum as a chance for 'the people' to exercise their agency and, in a single act, resolve the crisis of British misgovernment. Leave mentioned the referendum consistently throughout the campaign as an opportunity to return to ordinary democratic relations between 'the people' and 'the elite'. The alternative vision that they laid out removed all injustices ranged against 'the people' simply by removing the EU from the equation. It did not, however, empower 'the people' in an ongoing and substantive fashion.

Leave argued that Brexit would instantaneously resolve the various crises facing the British people. Chris Grayling summed up this position when he said this 'referendum is about us regaining our independence as a nation and taking back control of our economy, our borders and the £350 million we hand to Brussels each week'.[98] Leave portrayed the referendum as a singular choice that would remove all the economic, social and cultural antagonisms faced by 'the people'. Voting to leave was presented as a momentous occasion: the 'only way we can liberate ourselves from these burdens'; the 'only option' to support British prosperity; the 'only way to save the NHS'; a 'fork in the road'; a chance to 'make history'; and the mechanism by which we 'liberate ourselves from the shackles of Brussels'.[99] There was no shortage of grandiose phrases deployed to emphasise the definitive importance of voting leave. This language drew on Arendt's notion that constituent power is freedom of action. Free of the EU, Leave claimed, 'we' could 'save' 'our' country and administer the common good in line with the people's will.

Leave made such claims because, in their discourse, the referendum was the only means of defence that 'the people' possessed. Domestic and EU elite were driving the overlapping crises facing 'the people'. As Gove phrased it, 'The status quo is not on

[98] Chris Grayling MP, 22 April 2016, 'Obama's trade claims not backed up by reality of US trade deals', *Vote Leave*, accessed 18 January 2018.
[99] Patel, 'Speech at the Spring Conference'; Johnson, 'Vote Leave to create 300,000 British jobs'; John Longworth, 10 May 2016, 'Business opinion moving against the EU', *Vote Leave*, accessed 30 February 2018; Stuart, 'Alan Johnson is out of touch'; Owen Paterson, 8 June 2016, 'Speech by Owen Paterson – Why the UK environment would be improved by leaving the EU and restoring management at National and Local level', *Vote Leave*, accessed 22 May 2018; Stuart, Gove and Johnson, 'Vote Leave For A Fairer Britain'.

the ballot paper'.[100] The choice was, rather, between a 'freer, fairer, and better off country', or 'more Europe – more power ceded to Brussels'.[101] Leave used the rarity of the referendum in British politics to create a sense of urgency. Given 'the people' were opposed by an EU elite and a domestic government that favoured – as Leave alleged – high migration, high regulation, and EU expansion, then this was the last chance 'the people' had to reverse those trends. Voting to remain entailed 'kissing goodbye permanently to control over immigration' for at least 'another twenty years'.[102] Leave channelled the urgency, finality, and potentially transformative nature of the referendum into the ubiquitous catchphrase 'take back control'.

Taking back control was portrayed as an emancipating moment for the nation as well as a courageous act for the individual voter. Leave's entire discourse positioned taking back control 'of our economy, our borders and our democracy' as the 'safer' option, but they also lionised the magnitude of a Brexit result.[103] Leave presented the campaign itself as an 'almighty battle' between the people and the 'Establishment who would stop at nothing to frighten voters into submission'.[104] They urged the people to ignore these doubts, muster their 'self-belief', and 'be brave enough to leave'.[105] Johnson, perhaps a little too invested in the discourse, proclaimed that 'we will win for exactly the same reason that the Greeks beat the Persians at Marathon – because they are fighting for an outdated absolutist ideology, and we are fighting for freedom'.[106] He, Gove and Stuart elsewhere urged 'the people' to strike a blow on behalf of the most disenfranchised against the 'undeserving rich, the investment banks that crashed the world economy in 2008'.[107] In the Leave discourse 'The people', who had righteousness on their side, must face down the institutional power of 'the elite'.

[100] Gove, '"Paving the road from Ankara"'.
[101] *Ibid.*
[102] Elliot, 'Vote Leave to cut VAT on fuel'; Johnson, 'The only way to take back control of immigration'.
[103] Patel and Oxley, 'Pessimistic OECD report admits economy will grow'.
[104] Andrea Leadsom MP, 17 May 2016, 'Andrea Leadsom: The choice the UK now faces is to accept a largely unreformed EU, or choose the route of freedom and democracy', *Vote Leave*, accessed 14 February 2018.
[105] Owen, 'The UK, Canada and a United States of Europe'; Howard, 'The lack of democracy in the EU is hurting business'.
[106] Johnson, 'The liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave'.
[107] Gove, Johnson and Stuart, 'A stronger NHS and more money for those in need'.

Taking back control was presented at the quintessential populist action. It was expressed as the reclamation of constituent power, the moment when the British people would reassert their freedom and self-determination. However, as the phrase 'take back' implies, voting to leave was a single act with a logical end point. When describing the choice facing voters, Matthew Elliot argued that leaving the EU would merely be a 'return to what we were: an independent country in which our Parliament is elected by us, and answerable to us as the lawmaker'.[108] The radical action of voting to leave would end with the pedestrian return of the status quo ante. Once the EU had been left behind, 'the people' that it had oppressed would dissolve back into a nation united under democratic government.[109] Democracy is the desired relation that leaving the EU would restore between the elite and the governed. Leave stressed the 'basic lack of democratic consent' that underpinned the economic and migration crises they portrayed.[110] In their analysis, the EU was based on anti-democratic principles and as long as it dictated domestic policy the 'public cannot trust EU or Government promises'.[111] This leads to the unresolved tension in the Leave discourse. Somehow the domestic 'establishment' that is complicit in manifold crises and against which 'the people' were struggling could instantly be redeemed by leaving the EU.

3.3 Our nation: The end of populism

In truth, Leave suggested a populist act to return to a state without populism. In Leave's discourse, the EU acted as a wedge between the British elite and 'the people': Eurocrats compelled the government to act against the national interest; when their influence was removed, the UK would emerge as a unified national entity. The final element of their discourse depicted the harmonious future that could be realised if the antagonism of the EU was removed from public life. In this future, however, Leave clearly depicted 'the people' melding back into the national collective. 'The people' were not empowered but rather dissolved, exactly as one would expect of an anti-populist discourse.

[108] Open letter from former defence officers, 'Senior military officers speak out'.
[109] Stuart, 'Alan Johnson is out of touch'.
[110] Stuart, Gove and Johnson, 'Restoring public trust in immigration policy'.
[111] Stuart, Gove and Johnson, 'On the Risks of Remain'; Stuart, Gove and Johnson, 'Voting to stay in the EU is the risky option'; Gove and Raab, 'EU membership makes us less safe'.

‘The people’ in Leave’s discourse were a transitory entity defined purely through antagonisms – when these antagonisms are removed, ‘the people’ miraculously disappear into an orderly, safe, fair and prosperous society. In the few moments when Leave spoke about the various constituencies that comprise ‘the people’, they did so only in terms of their suffering at the hands of the EU.[112] At rare intervals during the campaign Leave made direct reference to the ‘people who live in the shadow’ of globalisation; ‘over regulated small businesses and lower-paid and lower-skilled Britons’; citizens who ‘have been misled for years over our lack of control on immigration’; ‘farmers’ whose ‘every problem’ derives from the EU; and ‘businesses [who] want this situation to change’.[113] According to Leave, these discrete figures would vanish back into the nation under a Brexit scenario. Once Britain had left the EU, the populist logic would come to an end.

Leave’s version of ‘the people’ is not empowered over the long term. The referendum is ultimately about rescuing *the elite* from EU influence. As for ‘the people’, Leave claimed that ‘the lever which gives our people control doesn’t work’ so long as the UK remains a members of the EU.[114] Removing EU interference in domestic politics would allegedly restore that lever. Stuart described the Leave future as ‘the people [being] able to choose the governments that make their laws and to throw them out when they fail’.[115] Given these electoral conditions were already in place in Britain, nothing domestically needed to change. Outside the EU, the establishment that Leave denigrated with such vitriol could apparently be trusted to negotiate new trade deals, set immigration and spend taxpayer dollars according to ‘our priorities’.[116] Leave argued that Brexit would somehow redeem the establishment and compel it to completely reverse its previous positions. The same political elites that were

[112] Stuart, Gove and Johnson, ‘Voting to stay in the EU is the risky option’; Owen, ‘Re-establishing Local and National control of fishing policy’; Patel, ‘The scale and impact of immigration from Europe is even higher’; Carswel, ‘You can’t trust David Cameron’; Stuart, ‘Stuart says Government must come clean’.
[113] Smith, ‘Are we in this together?’; Stuart, ‘Stuart says Government must come clean’; George Eustice MP, 29 April 2016, ‘Poll shows farmers will Vote Leave’, *Vote Leave*, accessed 22 January 2018; Longworth, ‘Business opinion moving against the EU’; Johnson, ‘Vote Leave to create 300,000 British jobs’.
[114] Howard, ‘The lack of democracy in the EU is hurting business’.
[115] Gisela Stuart MP, 18 June 2016, ‘Gisela Stuart, Labour MP & Chair of Vote Leave, pays tribute to Jo Cox’, *Vote Leave*, accessed 6 June 2018.
[116] Elliot, ‘EU bends rules to create visa-free zone’; Gove, Johnson and Stuart, ‘A stronger NHS and more money for those in need’.

represented as complicit in the various crises facing 'the people' would manage the transition process effectively; scrap the value-added tax; introduce a new border control program; oversee wage increases; devise more efficient environmental regulations; and massively invest in public services.[117] In the Leave discourse, it was suggested that taking back control would instantly erase the antagonisms between elite and people. The Leave discourse possessed all the stylistic features of populism except that it did not seek to further empower 'the people'; if anything, the constituent power of the parliament would be increased.

After voting to leave, 'the elite' and 'the people' were depicted as melding together into a harmonious national entity. As Gove said, referencing William Pitt the Younger and the Napoleonic Wars, 'If we vote to leave we will have – in the words of a former British Prime Minister – saved our country by our exertions and Europe by our example. We will have confirmed that we believe our best days lie ahead'.[118] In this quote it is suggested that 'the people' and 'the elite' would merge into, and be morally uplifted by, the unifying referent of the country. As in times of war, the national interest would subsume and harmonise the various factions of society. When Leave used the terms 'we' and 'our' they were referring to the power of 'the elite' aligned to the will of 'the people'. For example, Gove elsewhere outlined how 'We are first in the world for soft power thanks to our language, culture and creativity … We're a uniquely inventive nation.'[119] In the Leave discourse the UK was *already* a great unity that was traduced by EU membership. Outside the EU, 'We will recapture or secure our voice – for the 5th biggest economy in the world – in international bodies such as the WTO or the IMF or the CITES'.[120] In this future state 'the elite' would 'recapture' institutional power on behalf of 'our voice'. It was assumed that 'the elite' would align naturally with and champion the interests of the country as a whole when they were not party to a regional membership. In short, Leave's discourse laid out a distinctly anti-populist vision in which 'the people' vote to leave in order to give the Westminster elite more power and dissolve the polarisation between voter and establishment.

[117] Elliot, 'Vote Leave responds to latest BSE'; Gove, 'After we Vote Leave we will act quickly'; Elliot, 'Vote Leave responds to NIESR claims'; Caulfield, 'Vote Leave for the Nurses and NHS'; Paterson, 'Why the UK environment would be improved by leaving'; Leadsom, 'The choice the UK now faces'.
[118] Gove, 'The Facts of Life Say Leave'.
[119] Gove, 'Why it is safer to take back control'.
[120] Johnson, 'The liberal cosmopolitan case to Vote Leave'.

In Leave's discourse, both 'the elite' and 'the people' should aspire to be subsumed into the nation. When the UK is an autonomous entity, they argued, its population would become the united source of its achievements and virtues. The new 'global trading arrangements' that 'the elite' would negotiate would improve 'our competitiveness'.[121] The economic potential of 'the people' unified with the negotiation power of 'the elite' meant that 'As the fifth largest economy in the world we will get a good trade deal'.[122] Moreover, under conditions of autonomy, 'Our country cares about the developing world. Our country wants to trade with the world. To tear down the trade barriers which damage global fair trade.'[123] Leave portrayed an independent UK as both rich and compassionate. By 'getting rid of some of the EU rules … we could deliver a £4.3 billion boost to our economy and 60,000 new jobs.'[124] This transformation would be possible because 'we' are 'a proud nation of entrepreneurs'; 'We speak the world's international business language'; 'our contract law is world class and our judicial system is one of the least corrupt in the world'; and 'Our history and our trading links give us global interests, global links and friends on every continent'.[125] 'The people' was a transitory category in Leave's discourse – a symptom of the EU's influence, which divided a virtuous, entrepreneurial 'us' into antagonistic constituencies.

Conclusion

The populist performance that Vote Leave delivered is a worrying contradiction. It encouraged an extreme form of polarisation within the British body politic, defining 'the people' as the only virtuous actors hemmed in on all sides by a corrupt and self-serving 'establishment' that was complicit in the EU's failures and uncaring of the damage it caused to 'the people'. On the other hand, 'the people' were not a concrete or enduring entity. They were the product of the EU's mismanagement; if the UK left

[121] Owen, 'People will be puzzled by Obama's intervention'; Grayling, 'Obama's trade claims not backed up'.
[122] Patel and Oxley, 'Pessimistic OECD report admits economy will grow'.
[123] Cleverly, 'How the EU's Common Agricultural Policy is making African farmers poorer'.
[124] Patel, 'Speech at the Spring Conference'.
[125] *Ibid*.; Leadsom, 'The choice the UK now faces'; Open letter from former defence officers, 'Senior military officers speak out'.

the EU then ‘the people’ would cease to exist. Their constituent power resided in the apparatus of the state, which in a post-Brexit world would be controlled by an empowered parliamentary elite. By analysing the relationship between ‘the people’ and ‘the elite’ in the Leave discourse, this chapter demonstrated the contradiction and division that are its logical conclusion.

The first section analysed the portion of the discourse in which Leave accused the Prime Minister, Treasurer, and wider parliamentary government of collusion and duplicity. This is a novel evolution of British Euroscepticism, effectively importing the division between Britain and the EU into the domestic sphere. The second section expanded on the notion of a transnational ‘establishment’ that extended beyond the government and Stronger In to encompass nearly all members of the political class and economic elite. Together, these two elements of the discourse set out to poison British political culture with egregious, often personalised claims against various critical institutions, their individual leaders, and European migrants who were stereotyped as criminals, competitors, and alien interlopers in British communities. The final section noted how Leave portrayed the referendum as a singular act of constituent power. Thereafter, ‘the people’ would purportedly be absorbed into a unified nation under the control of a redeemed version of ‘the elite’.

The Leave discourse was not committed to populism or democratic augmentation. There was no intimation from Leave that the constituent power of ‘the people’ would be increased in a permanent or institutional fashion. Rather, taking back control was offered as a way of removing the populist dynamic from Britain entirely, subsuming ‘the people’ under the same set of domestic institutions that Leave had accused of complicity, corruption and gross negligence towards the national interest. There is a clear overlap here with the pattern established in the chapter 3 analysis of Leave’s discourse. Chapter 3 concluded that the Leave discourse matched Benjamin Moffitt’s model exactly except for two minor departures. Firstly, Leave almost entirely marginalised ‘the people’ whom populists profess to care about. Secondly, there was no opportunity for continued propagation of crisis after voting for leave. The same tendencies can be seen in the discourse analysed in this chapter. However, the anti-populist nature of the Leave discourse only comes to light when one considers the power relations that precede the discourse and which the discourse aims to effect.

Populism is more than a performance of crisis; it is also a blueprint for redistributing power in a given political economy.

Leave affected a populist style by focussing almost exclusively on the failures of 'the elite' and the victims of their misgovernment. In this discourse 'the people' are created by the crisis itself; once the EU and the UK part ways, 'the people cease to exist. The only constituent power attributed to 'the people' in this narrative is limited to a single act that is contained within a referendum framework entirely controlled by 'the elite'. Taking back control is one outcome in a binary choice that has been framed entirely by elite discourse. These realities emphasise the importance of constituent power and democratic augmentation. As this chapter and Chapter 3 have demonstrated, the populist style is comprised of divisive and polarising rhetoric. Populism is inherently divisive and corrosive to social harmony; it is a retributive and self-righteous political performance. If that production of social friction is not channeled towards the long-term empowerment of the ordinary citizen and an increase in their capacity for taking public action, then populist discourse is worse than useless – it is wantonly destructive.

This chapter has concluded that Vote Leave indulged in *populism without 'the people'*. This mode of discourse, as it manifested in the EU referendum, is a sophisticated form of anti-populism in which 'the elite' proffer a simple solution that will not fundamentally change the distribution of power between 'the people' and 'the elite'. Chapter 6 will provide a parallel analysis of the Remain discourse. It will argue that the two discourses arrive at an identical position by dissolving 'the people' back into a collective under the control of the parliamentary elite.

Chapter 6

Populist vulnerability or 'Great Britain'

Anti-populism is a simpler concept than populism, because the anti-populist merely has to resist the populist. There is no need to formulate a new vision for society, or cohere a new political subjectivity to achieve these ends. Nonetheless, there are a myriad of ways that anti-populist forces can set about achieving their simple aim. Part 3 of this thesis uses the overlap between the Remain and Leave discourses to argue that anti-populism comes in different levels of sophistication. The previous chapter illustrated how the Leave discourse, for all its stylistic similarities with populism, was a well-disguised form of anti-populism that enhanced the power of the parliamentary elite and dissolved 'the people'. This chapter will highlight the same pattern in the Remain discourse and conclude that the EU referendum featured two anti-populist discourses.

This chapter focuses on the identification Remain encouraged between the British citizen and 'the elite'. It demonstrates how the Remain campaign conceptualised 'the people' as the victims of a self-inflicted recession and voters who empathise with their elite as participants in 'Great Britain'. Comparatively, 'the people' played a larger role in the Remain discourse, but they did so as a cautionary tale. In keeping with anti-populist logic, Remain denigrated the hypothetical subjectivity of 'the people' as the authors of their own misfortune, retrograde 'Little Englanders'[1], and lacking all form of constituent power. On the other hand, citizens that affirmed Britain's place in Europe were endorsing the status quo and the competence of 'the elite' whom act on their behalf.

The first section of this chapter outlines how Remain wished the referendum to be adjudicated. Remain portrayed the British political class and 'the establishment' – to use Leave's term – as the source of truth and responsibility in the referendum. Remain also dismissed Leave's claims as fanciful, foolhardy and amusing attempts to deceive the public. This diminution of Leave was less vitriolic than the anti-populist dynamic

[1] Major, 'Vote Leave's Campaign Is An Unforgivable Fraud'. Little Englander is a derogatory phrase that was used in the context of the referendum to identify English voters who wish to leave the EU; these voters were described by Remain as parochial and narrow-minded.

Stavrakakis observed in Greece, but Remain still presented politics as an administrative exercise governed by reason and pragmatism.[2] Remain encouraged voters to adopt their approach to the referendum and, as shown in section 2 of this chapter, warned them that if they did not they ran the risk of permanent impoverishment and the diminishment of the country.[3] 'The people' were portrayed as vulnerable workers whose family and livelihood were threatened by any change in EU membership. Their rights and the affordability of their lifestyles were presented as contingent on the Single Market and they had no practical alternative to voting to Remain.

The third section of this chapter analyses the final element of the Remain discourse, which outlined their view of what would come after the referendum. The voter was offered a choice between increasing vulnerability and the localised effects of a recession or inclusion in 'Great Britain', a powerful country that represents their hopes and aspirations. Remain employed a transcendental logic to counter the populist logic of division and grievance. They counselled the voter that domestic politics are less important than international cooperation, trade, and security. The referendum, in Remain's telling, was an opportunity to surpass division and endorse Britain's current leadership and direction.

This chapter concludes that, in the final analysis, Remain and Leave discourses achieved the same effect: the dissolution of 'the people'. This referent plays different roles in the two competing discourses, but nevertheless Leave and Remain both presented a future vision in which the populist subjectivity is no more and has been sublimated into a unified national edifice. Remain presented a bluntly anti-populist discourse but Leave also aimed to rejuvenate existing power structures and treated populism as a problem for 'the elite' rather than an invitation to augment the power of 'the people'.

[2] Stavrakakis, 'The Return of "the People"', p. 506.
[3] Cameron and Barber, 'On Europe Even We Can Agree'.

1. Administration and elite responsibility

Democratic augmentation helps to separate populist and anti-populist performances, however convincing the latter may be at mimicking the former. In the case of the EU referendum, Leave's performance was very convincing. The virulence of Leave's attacks on 'the establishment' also found a natural contrast in Remain's technocratic counter-attacks. Remain defended the status quo by narrating potential failure and insisting on expert-approved facts, statistics, and credibility as the arbiters of the referendum. They dismissed Leave as frantic and confused demagogues who had strayed from the truth. Furthermore, Remain insisted that there was only one correct way to view the question of membership, which is a tactic highly reminiscent of Greek anti-populism.[4] Leave rhetorically questioned public figures in order to imply duplicity; Remain used the same technique to reinforce Leave's lack of credibility.

Leave broadcast righteous anger against 'the elite'. Remain countered that the elite had a 'responsibility to the British people', to inform them of the facts so they could vote correctly.[5] In Remain's discourse, 'the people' were encouraged to trust, think, and act like 'the elite'. They were asked to affirm the status quo for fear of what would happen to their country if they did not. Where Leave offered the voter a fleeting moment of action, Remain tried to convince them that their *country as a whole* lacks freedom. In the contemporary era, Remain intimated, no one and no institutions are free from the exigencies of trade, administration and interdependency. And yet – as the remainder of the chapter will make clear – for all the stylistic differences between Remain and Leave, both arrived at the same anti-populist conclusion.

1.1 'Credibility': Debating the facts with Vote Leave

Remain directly mentioned Vote Leave seventeen times over the course of the campaign and they critiqued their alternative plans to the EU on thirteen occurrences. These critiques tended to focus on fact checking, disputing economic claims and ridiculing Leave's accusations of government corruption. Remain's approach to their

[4] Stavrakakis, 'The Return of "the People"', p. 506.
[5] Major, 'Vote Leave's Campaign Is An Unforgivable Fraud'.

opponents elucidated their general approach to the referendum, which, they intimated, should be understood as a question of public policy and decided on the economic facts alone.

Remain provided a critique of Leave's economic credibility as a means of rebutting their crisis performance. In making this critique Remain was assisted by various economic authorities and institutions. Remain quoted extensively from the Chairman of the UK Statistics Authority Sir Andrew Dilnot, who described Leave's claim that EU membership costs £350 million a week as 'potentially misleading'.[6] Norman Lamb MP, a Liberal Democrat, declared himself 'disappointed but hardly surprised' that Leave continued to use 'such absurd and discredited statistics'.[7] He concluded that the campaign was making 'desperate attempts to mislead people' and their 'already-shaky credibility is in tatters'. Quotes like this reveal the mentality with which Remain approached the referendum. Facts and statistics were presented as the arbiter of the debate, and misuse of them was argued to erode the 'credibility' of the arguments they support.[8] From Remain's perspective, there was only one correct answer to the debate and because Leave's answer was incorrect they must resort to misleading tactics. Lucy Thomas, the Deputy Director of the Remain campaign, confirmed this position by saying 'The fact that Vote Leave are reduced to using dodgy statistics speaks volumes about the appalling weakness of their argument'.[9] She concluded that 'It is now clear that Vote Leave cannot be trusted with the future security of our economy.'

Economic credibility was the sole metric according to which Remain believed the referendum should be judged. Their insistence on the singularity of the truth had clear parallels with the Greek anti-populists who attempted to narrow politics to an 'administrative enterprise' in which there was 'no real choice between different alternatives'.[10] Regarding another set of figures, Alistair Darling commented 'This unprecedented intervention from one of the country's most respected economic experts [the IFS] shows that the Leave campaign do not have a credible economic plan for

[6] Sir Andrew Dilnot, Norman Lamb MP and Lucy Thomas, 10 May 2016, 'UK Statistics Authority "Disappointed" That Vote Leave Continues To Use "Potentially Misleading" Figure', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 1 February 2018.
[7] *Ibid.*
[8] Darling, 'Leaving Europe Will Create £40BN Black Hole'.
[9] *Ibid.*
[10] Stavrakakis, 'The Return of "the People"', p. 506.

Britain's future'.[11] Remain wanted to use economic experts to umpire the referendum. Experts should endorse the credible argument, which would be based on accurate use of statistics, realism and intelligibility. Remain used words like 'vague sentiments', 'heroic assumptions', 'confused' and 'distorted' to describe their opponents and their case for leaving.[12] They treated economics as an objective discipline, condemning what they saw as deviations from proper practice. Leave's promise to spend any 'windfall' from exiting the EU amounted to 'electoral bribery'.[13] Leave's case for the future was 'fantasy economics' and 'a deceit' perpetrated on the British public.[14] These critiques reinforce the anti-populist tone of the Remain discourse. In the Remain discourse, 'the elite' identify the correct reading of political situations and thereby render a debate moot. From Remain's perspective, the case that Leave put forward was simply illegitimate.

However, the whole purpose of the Leave argument was to challenge the legitimacy of elite opinion. The remarks that Remain made about Leave indicate an awareness of their opponent's strategy. Yet, instead of fully engaging this performance of crisis, key figures in Remain made recourse to ridicule. George Osborne described Leave's behaviour as follows: 'Every time there is a serious intervention … the Leave campaigners can't answer the substance so they claim that it's all part of an international conspiracy called "Project Fear".'[15] Here Osborne correctly identifies the conspiracy theory upon which the Leave narrative is based. Nonetheless, as he describes it, Leave indulges in conspiracy to deflect 'serious interventions' in the referendum debate. By 'serious interventions' Osborne means contributions from economic institutions such as the OECD, IMF, IFS, and Bank of England. Treating Leave's mode of argumentation as a diversionary tactic failed to engage with the substance of their critique. Osborne addressed his counterparts in Leave directly, saying 'This is too important a question for Britain for you to pass on the answers. Every time you cry wolf about Project Fear, you only expose how weak and friendless your case

[11] Darling, 'IFS Slam Vote Leave For NHS Funding Claims'.
[12] Major, 'Vote Leave's Campaign Is An Unforgivable Fraud'.
[13] Tyrie, 'Sacrificing Influence And Control'; Dunstone 'Carphone Warehouse Founder On Why Britain Is Stronger In'.
[14] Darling and Osborne, 'Leaving EU Would Spark Deep Spending Cuts'.
[15] Osborne, 'Treasury Analysis: UK families would be worse off'.

is.'[16] Osborne, in a way emblematic of Remain's discourse, narrowed the context of the referendum to economic cost and demanded technocratic 'answers' of Leave.

David Cameron was similarly dismissive in an open letter he penned with Brendan Barber, the former head of the Trade Unions Congress. Their joint prose read: 'Of course, the leavers say this must be some sort of conspiracy masterminded by shadowy international elites. All we have to say is: to have been able to bring even the two of us together today, these evil geniuses must be very good.' [17] This comment made light of the elitist conspiracy theory put around by Leave and thereby avoided engaging with its substance. Conservative MP Ruth Davidson took a similar approach, saying:

> I do not accuse my colleagues in the Out campaign of matching Alex Salmond's egregious fantasy economics. However, there are similarities. Outers offer trenchant criticisms of the status quo. Less persuasive are the arguments for showing how Brexit would be better, or even an agreed position of what it might look like.[18]

Here Davidson blunted her criticism with a partisan remark at the expense of Alex Salmond, the leader of the Scottish National Party, and his plans for Scottish independence. Nonetheless, Davidson was treating the entire Leave argument flippantly – as closer to 'fantasy' than fact. She went on to make the prescient remark that the Leave campaign 'fail[s] the certainty test' because 'it makes no attempt to meet it.' Remain was aware that Leave's performance of crisis relied upon the dismissal of expert opinion and 'the elite' who used it to buttress the status quo. They simply refused to engage with that narrative intervention.

1.2 A leap in the dark: Critiquing the practicality of Brexit

Remain answered Leave's case for change by demanding they outline a believable and pragmatic alternative. Remain spokespeople with commercial backgrounds and

[16] *Ibid*.
[17] Cameron and Barber, 'On Europe Even We Can Agree'.
[18] Ruth Davidson MP, 16 May 2016, 'Ruth Davidson: This Cussed And Messy Nation Should Not Leave', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 19 March 2018.

Conservative Party affiliations were most prominent in this critique, attacking Leave on the grounds of realism. The phrase most commonly used in this regard was 'a leap in the dark'.[19] For example, at the beginning of the official campaign George Osborne said of the Leave argument: 'None of the campaigners for exit can agree on what the alternative to EU membership looks like. They ask us to make a leap in the dark.'[20] Osborne was highlighting a particularly farcical dimension of the Leave discourse whereby different spokespeople cited different countries as examples of what a Britain outside the EU might look like.

At different points, Leave offered Norway, Canada, Switzerland Albania and Australia as models for Britain's future relationship with the EU. These were stylistic embellishments. By offering so many possibilities, Leave underscored the extent to which their performance of crisis was based on current failures. Potential failures were less pressing than the conspiracy of 'the elite' and the threat of the migrant. Remain's response demonstrated that their campaign saw the referendum as a purely technical exercise. At the beginning of the campaign, Remain offered a detailed critique of the Norway model that Leave had passingly suggested.[21] They also commissioned a report from Treasury investigating the trade losses that could arise if Britain opted for the Swiss model.[22] As the number of options Leave cited increased, Remain moved away from specific rebuttal into the realm of general critique. They asked rhetorical questions like 'What is the detailed alternative to the UK's membership of the EU?' and 'What about the 53 trade deals we have with other countries through the EU?'[23] This questioning was an attempt to reframe the debate. Instead of freedom from the EU elite, Remain wanted to discuss the practicality of change. Their performance of crisis was oriented towards the future.

Remain discourse highlighted the technical difficulties associated with leaving the EU. The Director-General of the World Trade Organisation warned that there would be 'complex and drawn out' negotiations involving all the member states of the EU and

[19] Cameron, 'Leaders in all fields are clear'.
[20] Osborne, 'Treasury Analysis: UK families would be worse off'.
[21] *Ibid*.
[22] Leslie, 'Remarks By Chris Leslie MP To IOD'.
[23] Dunstone, 'Carphone Warehouse Founder On Why Britain Is Stronger In'.

the countries with whom the EU had trade agreements.[24] Richard Branson echoed these concerns.[25] Edi Rama, the Prime Minister of Albania, pointed out that his country was 'outside the EU's customs union, meaning that we face costly red tape and rules of origin for exporting businesses'; from his perspective EU membership was a coveted prize that provided great practical advantages.[26] Through these testimonies, Remain emphasised that free trade – for all its benefits – was the result of an intricate balancing act. Institutional power and negotiation was critical to securing favourable trade conditions.

Remain argued that leaving the EU was not just a matter of deciding the EU's relative merits – it was also an exercise in appraising what was possible. They cautioned that a future outside the EU would be much more constrained than Leave would admit. As the *Financial Times* opined, 'In the real world, Britain would have to redefine fundamentally its relationship with the EU' and would end up defaulting back to many of the same conditions it currently enjoyed, except as a 'rule-taker, not a rule-maker.'[27] Remain published an anonymous letter from a lawyer outlining the administrative work entailed in leaving. The author concluded that the scale of this work would 'jeopardise the efficient governance of the UK for a period of years to come'.[28] Terms like 'complex', 'drawn out', 'efficient governance' and especially 'real world' were attempts by Leave to reposition the debate away from possibility and towards practicality. Remain tried to portray the impracticality of Brexit as a potential crisis for British government.

Labour politicians, as a subset of the Remain discourse, gave the most direct critique of Leave. They discredited Leave's vision for the future by pointing out the insincerity of its spokespeople. Rachael Reeve argued that Leave was 'guilty of deception'.[29] Her Labour colleague Yvette Cooper said Leave 'can't be trusted on the economy, can't be

[24] Azevêdo, 'Exports Would Take Decades To Get Over Brexit'.
[25] Branson, 'On Why He's Voting Remain'.
[26] Edi Rama, 26 April 2016, 'PM Of Albania: It's Absurd To Drag Albania Into The Battle For Brexit', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 22 January 2018.
[27] The Financial Times, 15 June 2016, 'Britain Should Vote To Stay In The EU – The FT', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 2 June 2018.
[28] Anonymous, 16 June 2016, 'Post Brexit Legal Tangle Would Be A Lawyers' Bonanza', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 2 June 2018.
[29] Reeves, 'Vote Leave Are Guilty Of Deception'.

trusted on the NHS and certainly can't be trusted when it comes to women's rights'.[30] Cooper was providing a comment on the party-political composition of Vote Leave, which was almost entirely spearheaded by Conservative politicians. She noted that 'many of them have campaigned vigorously and doggedly against legislation that has helped put women on an even kilter with men' whilst in parliament and were now only pretending that leaving the EU would further sexual equality in the workplace.[31] A cross-party environmental report listing Ed Miliband as the lead signatory pointed out that 'senior figures in the Leave campaign have a track record of opposing environmental measures' as well as a 'cavalier ignorance about climate matters'.[32] Ed Miliband went on to directly accuse Leave of pretending to adopt progressive stances in order to appeal to Labour voters. The entire case for Brexit, in his view, was 'a fraud on the British people' intended to unwind regulations and worker protections.[33] These claims of falsity painted Leave as reckless and untrustworthy. Remain argued that voters could not believe Leave's alternative vision for Britain's future because they were devoid of economic credibility and personal sincerity.

1.3 Winning on the evidence, losing at the ballot box

In summation, Remain wanted voters to view the referendum as a question of public policy. The voter needed to view Brexit from the perspective of a public administrator, using the standard of truth applied in administration and adhering to the dictates of practicality. Leave's failure to adopt the same paradigm was presented as irresponsible. Remain's discourse was not just concerned with the interests and opinions of the elite: it also asked the ordinary voter to endorse them.

John Major, the Prime Minster from 1990 to 1997, delivered the most aggressively worded critique of Leave because they 'have a responsibility to the British people to ensure all facts are before them' and they were failing to discharge that responsibility.[34]

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[30] Yvette Cooper MP, 24 May 2016, 'Leaving The EU Risks Women's Rights', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 10 April 2018.
[31] *Ibid.*
[32] Truss, Miliband, Lucas and Davey, 'The Environmental Case For Staying In The EU'.
[33] Ed Miliband, 28 May 2016, 'Miliband: We Could Lose This Referendum Unless Young People Turn Out To Vote', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 16 April 2018; Ed Miliband, 10 June 2016, 'Ed Miliband Speech On Why Labour Voters Must Vote Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 3 May 2018.
[34] Major, 'Vote Leave's Campaign Is An Unforgivable Fraud'.

He described Leave's tactics as 'shameless', their use of figures 'wholly false' and concluded that 'Their refusal to [engage in economic debate] is simply breathtaking.'[35] As discussed in the preceding chapters, economic projection and analysis is not an exact science, nor are the accounting figures upon which economic analysis is based literal truth. The strength of language deployed by Major illustrates the disproportionate weight that Remain placed on economics and pragmatism as the ultimate arbiters of the referendum. It is not 'breathtaking' that questions of public policy are subjectively interpreted when there is a larger issue at stake. In general elections and even federal budgets, governments routinely make full use of the flexibility that can be accommodated by economics and finance.[36] Indeed, the existence of competing political parties is premised on there being multiple ways of understanding and prioritising issues of public administration.

Remain assembled a staggering amount of verification for their arguments. This verification amounted to virtual consensus amongst the economic and political elites of Britain and the international community. Almost every major business in the UK offered testimony that backed Remain.[37] Surveys of business sentiment showed consistent support for the Single Market.[38] As previously mentioned, the Chairman for the UK Statistics Authority agreed that Leave had misled voters over the cost of EU membership; the Bank of England, IMF, OECD and Treasury produced economic analyses that supported the Remain case; and hundreds of university academics wrote open letters in support of Remain. Finally, the Chairman of the Treasury Select Committee, Andrew Tyrie, provided some measured words of support. Tyrie, whose committee had been conducting independent hearings on the likely impact of leaving the EU, qualified his remarks by noting that 'There are no "killer facts" in this

[35] *Ibid*.
[36] Former Chancellors, 'Former Chancellors criticise Treasury forecasts'.
[37] Seven multinational engineering firm CEOs, 25 April 2016, 'Top Engineering Firms Warn: Brexit Would Hit UK Engineering', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 22 January 2018; Thomas, 'Microsoft And Hewlett Packard Come Out For Remain'; Frances O'Grady, 1 June 2016, 'Wages Would Be £38 A Week Lower Outside The EU, Says TUC Report', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018; Centre for Economics and Business Research, 'Warning Over UK Manufacturing'; Straw, 'Top Investors Warn UK Start-Ups Would Be "Biggest Victim"'.
[38] Guy Rigby, 3 May 2016, '81% Of Small Businesses Wary Of Brexit', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 January 2018; Deloitte and Lucy Rigby, 11 May 2016, 'Deloitte Survey Finds Leaving EU Biggest Risk Facing UK Businesses', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 1 February 2018; Survey of business leaders, 'Brexit Fear Add Millions To Costs'; British Phonographic Industry, 'BPI Survey Reveals That 78% Of UK Music Labels'.

referendum. It will be down to people's judgment on a balance of arguments'.[39] This assertion ran contrary to the Remain narrative of experts and overwhelming compulsion. However, Tyrie went on to say that:

> The evidence [reviewed by the Committee] suggested that a vote to leave would probably bring a short-term shock, reducing economic activity, and with it, a lowering of living standards. Over the longer term, the picture is less clear. But the balance of the committee's evidence strongly suggests that the downside risks from diminished access to the single market would outweigh any upside opportunities from trade with the rest of the world for an extended period.[40]

This conclusion is perhaps the fairest account one could give of leaving the EU. The economic evidence that Remain based its performance of crisis upon was convincing to an independent Committee. Britain would experience a potential short-term shock depending on investor reaction. That reaction would then be followed not by economic oblivion, but probably less national wealth that might otherwise have been the case, all things being equal. Remain managed to turn this overwhelming consensus amongst experts into a rhetorical disadvantage. The following section will suggest one key reason this occurred. Remain's anti-populist discourse was bluntly elitist and constructed a version of 'the people' that was wholly dependent on the status quo. Both Remain and Leave portrayed 'the people' as deprived of constituent power. Leave, however, characterised this vulnerability as an outrage while Remain endorsed it as the most acceptable outcome.

2. The people: Addressing the British citizen

The previous section outlined the anti-populist manner in which Remain approached the referendum. It concluded that Leave's emphasis on freedom gave the appearance of populism, which perhaps gave them an electoral edge. This section delves deeper into the construction of 'the people' to outline how similar Remain and Leave were when

[39] Tyrie, 'Sacrificing Influence And Control'.
[40] *Ibid.*

directly addressing the ordinary British voter. Leave described 'the people' as victims of conspiracy and treachery; Remain depicted them as potential casualties of recession.

Remain defined 'the people' of Britain primarily as dependent workers, members of vulnerable families, the poor, and the young whose futures were at risk. In keeping with the Leave discourse, 'the people' featured in the Remain discourse as the target of performed crisis. The only difference arose from the nature of the crisis, which in Remain's narration was a function of the elite's displeasure.[41] Constituent power was characterised as 'a risk that working people and the poorest in our country simply cannot afford.'[42] In their narration of crisis, Remain described an economy rather than a political economy – and certainly not a democracy in which there was some semblance of political equality between 'the people' and 'the elite'. Remain's discourse outlined a vision of 'the people' that had no practical alternative to voting Remain, and no credible chance of exercising their constituent power under any circumstances that 'the elite' did not agree with.

2.1 The dependence of the worker

In keeping with their anti-populist approach, Remain portrayed change as the largest potential crisis facing 'the people'. They used a range of referents to identify specific parts of 'the people' and imbued each one with a sense of vulnerability and dependence on the status quo.

Workers provide an excellent example of the anti-populist dynamic in Remain's discourse. Remain described workers' livelihoods as tied to the success and expansion of free trade. They deployed their economic experts to make points like 'we mustn't ignore the crucial link between EU exports and employment here in Britain – and there are around three million jobs that are bound up in that relationship.'[43] In their analysis, British jobs were dependent on free trade with the EU. Throughout the campaign Remain used various reports and testimonies to make this point in different ways. The 'heads of leading services companies' spoke out to 'warn that jobs in their booming

[41] Cameron and Barber, 'On Europe Even We Can Agree'.
[42] *Ibid*.
[43] Leslie, 'Remarks By Chris Leslie MP To IOD'.

sector would be put at risk by a vote to Leave the EU on June 23.'[44] In the same press statement, George Osborne hypothesised that '400,000 jobs in the services sector are forecast to be lost over the next two years if there is a vote to Leave, compared to what is otherwise expected'.[45] Likewise, the Centre for Economics and Business Research released a report projecting that 'over 100,000 UK manufacturing jobs will be created by the EU's single market and would be at risk if we left'.[46] This report assumed these manufacturing jobs would be created between 2016 and 2030 'due to the deepening of the single market'.[47] In other words, Remain portrayed British workers as reliant on both the continuation and expansion of free trade to secure their livelihood.

In addition to job security, Remain also argued that free trade delivers wage increases. David Cameron and the trade unionist Brendan Barber, for example, maintained that 'Less open trading leads to lower productivity. And we must be equally clear about what that means for working people: even if they keep their jobs, their wages will be lower than they would otherwise have been. That would be a disaster for working people'.[48] In this view, trade increases productivity the benefits of which trickle down to 'working people' in the form of job security and wage increases. Francis O'Grady, the Trade Union Congress General Secretary, argued that 'Wages will be £38 a week lower and manufacturing will fall into steep decline if Britain votes to leave the EU', concluding that 'At a time of continuing hardship, Brexit would be a disaster for working people'.[49] Remain's message to 'the people' was, simply, not to make things worse for themselves by risking a recession, layoffs and wage stagnation.[50] While some industries – such as the creative arts – were cited as having much to gain directly from the EU, Remain's appeal to most workers was indirect and vaguely threatening in its affect.[51]

Portraying the worker as dependent on the status quo was an inherent weakness in the Remain discourse. By their own admission, the same economic model had already

[44] Osborne, 'Service Sector Leaders Warn Leaving Europe'.
[45] *Ibid.*
[46] Centre for Economics and Business Research, 'Warning Over UK Manufacturing'.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] Cameron and Barber, 'On Europe Even We Can Agree'.
[49] O'Grady, 'Wages Would Be £38 A Week Lower'.
[50] Trade union representatives, 'Trade Unions Warn Public Sector Jobs'.
[51] Creative Industries Federation, 'Hundreds Of Figures From Britain's Creative Industries'.

rendered workers more vulnerable than any short-term shock or medium-term adjustment in growth. Francis O'Grady admitted that 'for many working people – whose wages have not yet recovered since the 2007 crash – [leaving the EU] would be a high price to pay'.[52] British industries and employees had already been debilitated by the Global Financial Crisis, which was a product of the kind of global and deregulated economy that free trade promotes. Even if the net outcome of this arrangement were positive for the worker, Remain presented their role in the process as entirely passive. Taking Remain's argument at face value, all working people should vote for more free trade and deeper EU integration. This conclusion undermined the pro-worker narrative that some Labour spokespeople tried to advance. Tom Watson quoted a former colleague as follows: '"Economic forces … must be brought under popular control". That was his argument then. It is our argument today.'[53] Unfortunately, the majority of Remain's discourse reinforced the opposite view. Remain's argument assumed that 'popular control', or the constituent power of the worker, must be subordinated to 'economic forces'.

2.2 The vulnerability of 'the people'

Remain's argument for passivity extended beyond the workplace and into the private sphere. Chris Leslie argued that 'the second core economic point [after employment conditions] is to weigh up the impact on consumers and households of what that environment outside the European Union could mean'.[54] In his estimation, a reduction in free trade would create an economic crisis for the people: 'In a world of new tariff barriers to our industry, where inflationary pressures are created by the higher cost of imports yet with hampered access to export opportunities – this all adds up to a substantial financial hit to households.'[55] Remain portrayed 'the people' as dependent on free trade with the EU in both the workplace and their own homes. Alistair Darling outlined the logic of this argument, in which Remain assumed that leaving the EU would increase inflation by 2.7 per cent and then gave examples of what that might look like for everyday people. Darling gave the specific example of 'higher rail fares'

[52] O'Grady, 'Wages Would Be £38 A Week Lower'.
[53] Watson, 'Tom Watson on Brexit'.
[54] Leslie, 'Remarks By Chris Leslie MP To IOD'.
[55] *Ibid.*

as ‘yet another crippling cost’ of leaving the EU and ‘devastating for working people who cannot afford a rise in the cost of living.’[56] This was part of a general strategy whereby Remain personalised and localised their overarching argument that leaving the EU would create an economic crisis in the form of recession or even depression.

Families were the ultimate victims of the economic crisis that Remain performed. The suffering ‘the people’ could expect was a centrepiece of Osborne’s recession argument. He claimed that ‘Britain would be worse off, permanently so, and to the tune of £4,300 a year for every household … Britain’s families would be permanently poorer’.[57] In this phrase Osborne was, firstly, averaging Remain’s worst-case scenario for recession over all of Britain’s households and, secondly, reasoning that the difference between two separate economic scenarios would amount to a permanent loss. Effectively, the Remain discourse *democratises* a hypothetical economic crisis. Their narration assumed that ‘the people’ are equal participants in the status quo with as much to lose as the investor class whose opinion the elites hold to be fact.

The Remain discourse both distributed the effects of an economic crisis and made a possibility seem like a certainty. In their discourse, uncertainty amongst the economic elite translates into certain pain for ‘the people’: ‘Moody’s have warned that the uncertainty caused by a leap in the dark out of Europe would damage our economy and make families worse off’.[58] Rephrasing what Remain said, elite uncertainty was certain to create suffering for ‘the people’. The worker and their family are made poorer through the exchange rate and investor confidence, which flows through the economic system to create an affordability crisis for the ordinary person. As Cameron and Barber put it, ‘A weak pound means more expensive goods and higher inflation, pushing up the prices of the weekly shop, clothes, petrol … that is the threat for families already struggling to make ends meet – and a risk that working people and the poorest in our country simply cannot afford.’[59] The political economy that they described entirely erased the constituent power of the voter. There were no circumstances in their discourse where ‘the people’ could contravene the wishes of ‘the elite’ without ‘the

[56] Darling, ‘Retail giants warn families’.
[57] Osborne, ‘Treasury Analysis: UK families would be worse off’.
[58] Price and Moody’s, ‘Credit Agency Moody’s Says A Vote To Leave’.
[59] Cameron and Barber, ‘On Europe Even We Can Agree’.

elite' punishing them. In truth, though, Remain was not describing a political economy, merely an economy. Their view of society did not allow for constituent power, because freedom of action causes market uncertainty that hurts 'the people'.

In Remain's discourse, 'the people' were defined as the dependent worker, the family, and the impoverished. These referents created a sense of vulnerability and a bias towards the status quo. Change that 'the elite' disagreed with was presented as something that these vulnerable representatives of the population 'simply cannot afford'.[60] The family was referenced repeatedly as a fragile, valued and critical component of society. Remain's economic performance of crisis would be 'catastrophic for millions of ordinary families'.[61] Furthermore, 'a British exit from the EU could push the annual shopping bill of the average British family up by £220'.[62] Remain argued that the 'economic havoc' of leaving posed an existential threat to the 'financial security for British families'.[63] In some cases, however, Remain over-emphasised the cruelty of the economy they described. For example, Rachael Reeve stated that 'those hit hardest would be working families on low and modest incomes – as was the case in the last recession, from which we are only just recovering.'[64] The sense of precariousness that Remain was trying to instil in 'the people' simply reinforced what the existing system had already done to them.

Lastly, Remain made reference to young people as another vulnerable group representative of 'the people'. These references were fleeting, but reinforced the sense that Brexit would usher in a dramatically worse epoch, one from which there would be no recovery. Ed Miliband said 'Be in no doubt: if young people don't exercise their vote, this referendum will be lost and so will many of their futures'.[65] Much like the family, Remain imbued the young with symbolic importance and value. Their future represented the future of the nation and its capacity for positive change. In Miliband's rhetoric, Brexit was such an existential threat that the promise of the young would be 'lost'. Remaining in the EU was, in his words, the way to ensure 'a better chance of a

[60] *Ibid*.
[61] Leahy et al., 'Giants Of Retail Warn Against Brexit'.
[62] Lloyd, 'Consumer Champion Says Leaving Europe'.
[63] Deloitte and Rigby, 'Deloitte Survey Finds Leaving EU Biggest Risk'.
[64] Reeves, 'Vote Leave Are Guilty Of Deception'.
[65] Miliband, 'We Could Lose This Referendum'.

better future'.[66] A collective of British artists made a similar point, arguing that the 'decision should not be made by those who will not live very long with the consequences'.[67] This quote in particular underlines the permanency that the Remain discourse imparted on Brexit. Not only would leaving inflict short-term pain: Remain narrated Brexit as such a significant crisis that it would have a severe intergenerational effect on 'the people'.

2.3 Rights, regulation, and migration: The case for the EU as a protector of 'the people'

Remain's discourse focussed on the potential crisis of leaving. This crisis was framed in terms of the economic vulnerability and dependency of 'the people', variously represented as workers, families, and the young. However, there was also a component of the discourse that made a positive case for the EU as a regulative structure that protects the British citizen. The positive and negative side of this discourse can be observed in the following quote from Osborne and Darling: 'Quitting the EU would hit investment, hurt families and harm the British economy. Workers' rights are protected too. Maternity and paternity pay, paid holidays, the right not to be discriminated against at work – all these stemmed from EU law.'[68] The first portion of the quote outlines the familiar economic crisis component of Remain's discourse. The latter half, points out that EU regulations provide important protections for working people and for families.

The protective case Remain made for EU regulation was a deliberate repudiation of Leave's anti-regulation argument. As Alistair Darling said, the people's wellbeing would be 'threatened by the Leave campaigners who talk euphemistically about wanting to scrap "red tape" but actually don't believe workers deserve any rights at all'.[69] In a strange class reversal, a number of retail executives agreed: 'We need regulation to protect consumers and, if we want to continue to trade with Europe, the rules still apply. If we left, there is the risk that Westminster would continue to build additional regulation on top of the European laws, making it more onerous rather than

[66] *Ibid.*
[67] Fourteen British artists, 2 June 2016, 'Rankin, Antony Gormley and Axel Scheffer join leading artists in designing posters to support keeping Britain in the EU', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018.
[68] Darling and Osborne, 'Leaving EU Would Spark Deep Spending Cuts'.
[69] *Ibid*.

less.'[70] By Remain's own admission, the backbone of deep trade integration is extensive regulation and harmonisation of rules and standards. But, they argued, this convergence of regulation was also inescapable. If Britain were to leave the EU it would still trade with them, and consequently 'we would have to abide by the EU regulations and laws governing that market'.[71] In this regard, Remain's positive case for EU regulation was ultimately based on the fallacy that free trade is really free. From their perspective, free trade entails extensive regulation and the UK would effectively be a part of the EU's regulatory apparatus insofar as it continued to trade with the Single Market.

The Labour politicians advocating for Remain used women's work rights as a case study of the ways in which EU regulation protects 'the people'. Harriet Harman reflected that 'I would rather we got all of our rights from our own government … It feels odd to get legal rights handed to us from Brussels rather than from Westminster.'[72] Nevertheless, 'though few [British politicians] will say they oppose women's rights, given half the chance, the covert hostility to these rights would soon rear its ugly head. They argue that it's about saving government money or cutting red tape on business, but women's rights would be sacrificed.'[73] Harman went on to say that 'The rights that we now have at work did not just arrive out of thin air. They came from a combination of what our governments have done and what the EU has made them do.'[74] To present the EU as a protector of 'the people', Remain undermined the efficacy of Westminster. By pointing to the elitist tendencies of British lawmakers, they positioned the EU as the people's champion.

Yvette Cooper described the EU as 'a powerful force for women's rights', listing maternity pay, part-time work rights, health and safety and medical access as key EU reforms.[75] She cited a Trade Unions Commission report to claim that 'leaving the European Union could turn the clock back on women's rights'.[76] Francis O'Grady

[70] Leahy et al., 'Giants Of Retail Warn Against Brexit'.
[71] Anonymous, 'Post Brexit Legal Tangle'.
[72] Harman, 'How women are stronger in Europe'.
[73] *Ibid.*
[74] *Ibid.*
[75] Cooper, 'Leaving The EU Risks Women's Rights'.
[76] *Ibid.*

agreed, saying that 'Brexit would put all of these rights and more at risk.'[77] Ed Miliband explained that the 'EU's [positive] record on worker protection' through their founding principle that 'a single market in goods and services must have a social dimension'.[78] By arguing that the EU protected 'the people' and leaving it would constitute a crisis, the Labour members of Remain implied that the British political class were the real threat to 'the people'. The progressive advocate Michael Eavis said as much: 'All the most comforting human rights and working conditions of the last twenty years have been introduced by the European politicians'.[79] Accordingly, 'the people' could not trust their own politicians. Yet it is precisely these politicians – both individual MPs and the leaders of the incumbent government – that Remain was asking the voter to trust in the referendum.

Migration is another example of the conflicting signals that Remain sent regarding 'the people', what they should fear, and who they should trust. On this topic Remain presented a fragmented argument with no clear repetition or narrative thread. They quoted the Spanish Prime Minister to the effect that 'a vote to leave the EU would mean British citizens would lose the right to move freely around Europe'.[80] This inverted Leave's characterisation of the migrant as culturally other and threatening. Remain correctly suggested that British people are migrants also. Lord Evans and Sir John Sawers, two retired intelligence chiefs, pointed out that under 'existing border controls, every person entering the UK has their passport checked, often before they depart for this country'.[81] This statement was meant to inspire confidence in border security. The campaign republished an essay from the murdered MP Jo Cox, which observed that 'Brexit doesn't guarantee that migration will come down'.[82] They also republished an article from *The Economist* that decried the 'shameless' 'pandering' on immigration which 'suggests that Britain cannot keep out murderers, rapists and terrorists when, in fact, it can'.[83] Tom Watson took issue with Leave's 'bogus claim that all the problems of immigration can be solved by leaving the EU'.[84] As these quotes indicate, only

[77] O'Grady, 'Wages Would Be £38 A Week Lower'.
[78] Miliband, 'Speech On Why Labour Voters Must Vote Remain'.
[79] Eavis, 'Glastonbury Founder Urges Festival-Goers'.
[80] Mariano Rajoy, 2 June 2016, 'Spanish PM Warns Leaving EU Would Mean Brits Lose Right To Free Movement', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018.
[81] Evans and Sawers, 'The EU Can't Dictate To Us On Security'.
[82] Jo Cox MP, 19 June 2016, 'Jo Cox', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 10 June 2018.
[83] The Economist, '"Divided We Fall"'.
[84] Watson, 'Tom Watson on Brexit'.

foreign leaders, public servants and Labour spokespeople were willing to offer a defence of migration. Speaking subjectively, these scattered rebuttals were also quite unpersuasive and failed to mount a detailed case for how current migration settings protect 'the people'.

3. After the referendum: Transcending populist logic

Remain offered a somewhat confused account of whether the parliament protects 'the people', free trade actually increases freedom or migration is risk free. The Remain discourse was absolutely clear, however, that 'the people' are most safe and secure when they have a reliable elite administering affairs on their behalf. This final section surveys how Remain encouraged the voter to adopt the role of the parliamentary elite during the referendum. They invited the voter to transcend their own grievances and domestic disputes and instead consider the global context when voting in the referendum. This invitation was at odds with their performance of crisis, which functioned from localising the effects of a national recession. This and other contradictions indicate that the Remain discourse was a less sophisticated form of anti-populism than Leave, perhaps stemming from the fact that Remain embodied different versions of 'the elite' with different imaginaries of 'the people' and their relationship with institutional power. Moreover, unlike Leave, Remain did not try and hide their anti-populist agenda.

The Remain discourse may have been less sophisticated than the Leave discourse but ultimately both arrived at the same conclusion that national unity should sublimate populist division. Both sides of the campaign envisioned the domestic elite retaining their position of power. Both conceived of the parliamentary elite as the champions of 'the people' and the agents of the nation. Neither side of the referendum proposed democratic augmentation of the Westminster system, or even posited 'the people' as an ongoing phenomenon in British politics. The EU referendum offered no plausible option for enhancing the constituent power of 'the people'.

3.1 The national identity and its erasure of populist logic

Much like the Leave discourse, Remain erased 'the people' in the final analysis. Unlike Leave, however, this erasure is not a future state, achieved after removing the antagonisms of the EU. Remain depicted a nation united in the present and bereft of any antagonisms between 'the elite' and 'the people'. The national collective that Remain described was powerful, influential in Europe, and imbued with a virtuous character. Harriet Harman made the case most succinctly, saying 'we make a big impact in the EU. Why wouldn't we want to continue to do that when they are our nearest neighbours and our biggest trading partners? Our history has been about being a leading country in Europe, not cutting and running'.[85] In this quote Harman used a collective appeal that identifies the audience directly with the nation. The audience was also flattered that they wield power and are a courageous force dedicated to leadership on the international stage. Remain erased the division between 'the people' and 'the elite' by citing a single, shared nationality. This avoidance of populist logic is identical to the conclusion of Leave's discourse.

In the Remain discourse the collective entity of the nation replaces divisions like owner and employee or 'the people' and 'the elite'. For example, one Remain press release outlined how the 'economic shock of a vote to leave the EU would also be hugely damaging to our businesses' and 'undermine the ability of Britain's entrepreneurs to start-up, innovate, and grow'.[86] Even though the majority of the population are not entrepreneurs or business owners, through the collective identity of 'Britain' they were vicariously implicated in the success or failure of these ventures. The entrepreneur Charles Dunstone used the collective address when discussing the national economy: 'Through serious hard work we have pulled our country out of the mire of recession – it's unthinkable to risk all this now, and plunge ourselves into an uncertain and unpredictable future.'[87] Describing the economy at a national level invoked a sense of solidarity and shared endeavour, which is the opposite of Remain's parallel attempt to narrate the local effects of economic crisis. David Cameron made a similar appeal when he said 'this is an amazing country, we are the fifth biggest economy in the world … I

[85] Harman, 'How women are stronger in Europe'.
[86] Reed, 'Over 200 UK Entrepreneurs'.
[87] Dunstone, 'Carphone Warehouse Founder On Why Britain Is Stronger In'.

think the big bold patriotic case is to stay in a reformed Europe, to fight for the world we want, rather than to stand back, and be on the outside.'[88] The audience was portrayed as a part of the country, which was personified as 'we'. In Remain's discourse, the UK's fifth biggest economy and global reach was an extension of one's self.

Remain depicted the collective self of the nation as a virtuous and courageous entity. As the former Prime Minister John Major argued, 'We British are an open-hearted, open-minded, generous-spirited, compassionate people … We have been an outward-looking, internationalist nation for centuries'.[89] The national character was represented as uniting 'the people' and 'the elites' – indeed, as a cultural and behavioural construct, it transcended such material distinctions. Depending on the Remain spokesperson, the specific content of the national character varied. The Archbishop of Canterbury described the national character as part of 'Britain's Christian heritage', which had produced a society motivated by 'a vision of peace and reconciliation, of being builders of bridges, not barriers'.[90] The entrepreneur Richard Branson stated that 'Britain has always stood for democracy, compassion, justice and inclusion'.[91] Entertainer Bear Grylls stated how, in his international travels, he had observed that 'many of the most vulnerable people look to the UK for character and leadership, as if we are like beacons of good manners and fortitude'.[92] It is perhaps notable that the clearest statements on national character throughout the referendum came from cultural and business figures rather than politicians.

Politicians, on the other hand, tended to emphasise the power that Britain wields. During one of his keynote speeches, Osborne argued that 'It's precisely because we've been an outward-looking, free-trading country that engages with the world that we've had a greater impact in shaping our planet and its destiny than almost any other'.[93] On these grounds he described Remain as the 'patriotic' choice because the EU – and international engagement more generally – best enhanced national power. On one hand Remain described 'the people' as vulnerable and dependent, but on the other it invited

[88] Cameron, 'Your Family Holiday Could Cost £230 More'.
[89] Major, 'Vote Leave's Campaign Is An Unforgivable Fraud'.
[90] Archbishop of Canterbury, 'Archbishop of Canterbury Says "I'm Voting In"'.
[91] Branson, 'Richard Branson On Why He's Voting Remain'.
[92] Bear Grylls, 21 June 2016, 'A Personal View From Bear Grylls', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 June 2018.
[93] Osborne, 'Treasury Analysis: UK families would be worse off'.

them to be part of a powerful and influential national conglomerate. Leave employed 'the people' as a temporary category. Remain's version was contingent: if the British people made the wrong choice they would become the victims of economic crisis. Alternatively, they could realise their current good fortune and reaffirm the status quo.

A coalition of Remain figureheads including Liz Truss and Caroline Lucas argued that 'Being in Europe magnifies Britain's voice in the world on the issues that will define our future'; for example, through the 'added clout' of the EU 'we can tackle environmental problems'.[94] This statement characterised the nation as a powerful entity that deserved to wield power because of its virtuous character. Remain portrayed Britain and British people as actors that do the right thing. Remarks by the Conservative MP Ruth Davidson followed a similar theme. She argued that 'Staying in offers us a double win. We remain a proud, principled, liberal, democratic, (sometimes idiosyncratic) sovereign trading nation.'[95] In addition, the collective 'we' 'retain the ability to benefit from and reform a more flexible EU'.[96] Membership of the EU was offered as a way of preserving national character, empowering the unified corporate identity of 'us', and affording the power to make the world more reflective of 'our' values. In short, Remain portrayed EU membership as a forum that unites 'the people' and 'the elite', or rather supersedes their division. On the regional and international stage, there is no room for the populist logic that might otherwise divide a domestic audience.

3.2 The referendum: Transcending local grievances

In addition to national unity, the manner in which Remain framed the referendum also reflected its denial of populist logic. Remain described the referendum as the single most important choice a voter could make. Leave portrayed the choice as a moment of emancipation; Remain described it in terms of deductive reasoning. That reasoning encompassed factors such as geopolitics, national character, generational legacies, and macroeconomics: four transcendental settings in which the immediate grievance of 'the people' fades into irrelevancy. For example, an open letter from historians argued that

[94] Truss et al., 'The Environmental Case For Staying In The EU'.
[95] Davidson, 'This Cussed And Messy Nation Should Not Leave'.
[96] *Ibid.*

'On 23 June, we face a choice: to cast ourselves adrift, condemning ourselves to irrelevance … or to reaffirm our commitment to the EU and stiffen the cohesion of our continent in a dangerous world.'[97] Remain asked the voter to cast their ballot not on their interests or even the national interest, but rather *as if they were* the collective, a geopolitical entity operating in an international realm. Likewise, a range of US foreign policy experts described the vote as one of 'critical importance', saying 'All involved must weigh carefully the consequences of the decision not solely from the perspective of domestic economic interests, but also from the broader perspective of the impact on the European and international geopolitical landscape.'[98] Leave portrayed the EU elite as the cause of domestic antagonism; Remain used regional and global politics to completely overlook the separation of 'the people' and 'the elite'.

The referendum was monumental in Remain's discourse not because of the change that could come about, but because of the threat change posed to the country and its future. Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, described the vote as 'One of the first challenges we face together as a city … one of the most important decisions of our lifetimes.'[99] The 'challenge' that Khan cited is the challenge of avoiding change. The logic of heroically resisting change prompted some bizarre language from Remain. Chris Leslie, for example, described the 'patriotic course' as 'opting for an engaging, outward-looking internationalist Britain, fighting for our values worldwide'.[100] This quote begs the question: whose values? And how would spreading these values abroad be of any benefit to the individual voter? Reiterating this message, the Creative Industries Federation described the referendum as 'the biggest democratic decision of our time', saying it 'forces us to look in the mirror and ask ourselves: what kind of nation do we want to be? Are we outward-looking and open to working with others to achieve more? Or do we close ourselves off from our friends and neighbours at a time of increasing global uncertainty?'[101] What exactly would be achieved is left to the imagination. The voter is asked to conceptualise the international as they would the

[97] Open letter from historians, 25 May 2016, 'Historians Back Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 12 April 2018.
[98] Thirteen former foreign policy experts from US government, 10 May 2016, 'Former US Secretaries of State and Defence and NSA Advisers Back Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 1 February 2018.
[99] Khan, 'We're Stronger In Europe'.
[100] Leslie, 'Remarks By Chris Leslie MP To IOD'.
[101] Creative Industries Federation, 'Hundreds Of Figures From Britain's Creative Industries'.

local, transposing their interpersonal behaviours onto the relationship between Britain, the EU, and the world. Remain attempted to transcend the populist relationship between the voter and their political representatives. They argued that the voter should approach the referendum with the same mentality as the political elite.

If Britain failed to act in an open and neighbourly fashion, Remain argued, that would harm its future and future generations. CEO Hilary Devey made the case in terms of responsibility: 'Our generation has a duty to provide the same opportunities for our children that we enjoyed … this choice is the biggest investment Britain will ever make, and it is our nation's future generations which will be most affected.'[102] Devey portrayed the referendum as the 'biggest investment', which is an investment in the status quo. To reject that investment and withdraw from the EU would, in Remain's argument, harm those who could not yet vote. The *Daily Mirror* invoked the themes of patriotism, heroism, and the sweep of time when it editorialised 'Where you put your X on the ballot paper is about making our own history. It is not about our past, but how we forge our future. And it is a once in a lifetime opportunity. This is truly the battle for Britain.'[103] The former prime minister Tony Blair posited that 'Britain faces a historic choice between prosperity, influence and security as part of Europe, or a reckless leap in the dark and years of damaging uncertainty'.[104] In short, Remain positioned the referendum as a question of monumental importance on behalf of which the voters should set aside their own view in favour of global, national, and inter-generational concerns.

Asking voters to role-play as a national entity is a novel approach to politics. It is also an approach at odds with the specifically class-based paradigm that Remain used to single out the potential losers of Brexit. The tensions in this message emerged at certain points in the Remain discourse. A survey of British business leaders quoted one respondent who 'argued that Brussels needed "massive reform" and called for a "very close result" to wake up EU leaders'.[105] Accordingly, the voter should view the referendum as a means of securing geopolitical leverage for the nation. The

[102] Devey, 'When It Comes To Europe: I'm In'.
[103] 4 newspaper editorials, 19 June 2016, 'Newspapers from across the political divide say: Vote Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 10 June 2018.
[104] Open letter from numerous 'leaders', 'Leaders in all fields are clear'.
[105] Survey of business leaders, 'Brexit Fear Add Millions To Costs'.

Conservative MP Andrew Tyrie acknowledged that 'Politicians have handed the electorate a tough job. They are not being helped by absurd claims and distortions of the truth in the campaign. Many voters are sick of it, and almost everyone is weary and confused.' [106] Remain – which included the most senior members of the serving government – had called a referendum only to urge voters to think and act according *as a government.* Effectively they were asking 'the people' to take the responsibilities of 'the elite' and discharge them as instructed by 'the elite'.

3.3. Great Britons or Little Englanders

Remain replaced populist logic with transcendental logic. They tried to convince the voter that Britain's place in the world was more significant than whatever domestic divisions and policy failures might exist. The Remain discourse featured a significant number of foreign leaders and policy experts who substantiated this case. The British diplomat Sir David Warren said that 'Japan very clearly wishes the UK to remain in the EU. It's better for the world to have a strong EU. The UK has a voice because it is in the EU'. [107] These proclamations from foreign leaders and experts tended to be somewhat blunt about Britain's importance. Nonetheless, their message was clear: without the EU, the UK would be a lesser entity. The Albanian Prime Minister Edi Rama commented that 'Brexiteers want out, most countries on the edges of Europe want in, because we know the remarkable benefits there have been to EU countries such as Britain'.[108] He also warned that, in his experience, the EU was a tough entity to negotiate with 'from the outside'.[109] Remain assembled a range of leaders, including Justin Trudeau, Kofi Annnan, Malcolm Turnbull and numerous high-ranking military officers to endorse the international perspective.[110] In Remain's discourse, whatever divisions existed at a domestic level were less significant than those that existed internationally between the powerful and less powerful.

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[106] Tyrie, 'Sacrificing Influence And Control'.
[107] Abe and Warren, 'Japanese Prime Minister Latest Of Britain's Allies'.
[108] Rama, 'It's Absurd To Drag Albania Into The Battle For Brexit'.
[109] *Ibid*.
[110] Trudeau, 'The Prime Minister Of Canada, Justin Trudeau, Backs Britain'; Ten military leaders, 'Veterans and Military Security Experts Line Up'; Various political leaders, 9 June 2016, 'Kofi Annan And Tim Berners-Lee Among Latest Experts Urging Voters To Back Remain', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 3 May 2018.

Remain outlined global challenges, which, they implied, superseded the tensions between 'the elite' and 'the people'. Five former Secretary Generals of NATO issued a joint statement saying that 'At a time of such global instability, and when NATO is trying to reinforce its role in Eastern Europe, it would be very troubling if the UK ended its membership of the European Union'.[111] They went on to clarify that 'While the decision is one for the British people, Brexit would undoubtedly lead to a loss of British influence, undermine NATO and give succour to the West's enemies'.[112] By attempting to extend the stakes beyond the border, Remain pitted the interests of the voter against the global balance of power. Withdrawing from the EU would jeopardise other international efforts as well, 'from Islamist extremism, migration, Russian aggrandisement and climate change. These can only be tackled collectively.'[113] Other spokespeople raised global poverty, epidemics, discrimination and corporate tax avoidance as critical challenges.[114] The scale of these challenges was intended to overshadow local concerns and build shared purpose between 'the people' and 'the elite'. The efforts of 'the elite' on an international level would protect 'the people' from the fallout of climate change, terrorism, and so on. In Remain's discourse – as with Leave's discourse – 'the elite' were ultimately the champions of 'the people'. The only difference was that Remain's elite did not need 'the people' to save them from the EU.

Using the phenomenon of globalisation, Remain argued that international engagement must become the norm. As a corollary, populist logic needed to be permanently erased from British politics. Tom Watson argued that 'Our world is changing faster than our politics, institutions and imaginations can cope with' and in order to 'protect our country in an age of deepening globalisation … this objective cannot be met in any other way. This is not a time for isolationism.'[115] The uncertain and fluid international environment demanded a united national front.[116] As a number of academics in an open letter opined, 'Our future will depend on our ability to collaborate and share beyond

[111] Five former Secretary Generals, 'Former Secretary Generals Of NATO Back Remain'.
[112] *Ibid*.
[113] The Financial Times, 'Britain Should Vote To Stay In The EU'.
[114] Religious leaders, 29 May 2016, 'Think Of The Wider World And Vote To Stay In Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 16 April 2018; Miliband, 'Speech On Why Labour Voters Must Vote Remain'; Gates, 'Europe Was Key To My $1BN Funding'; Mckellen, 'Sir Ian Mckellen On Why We're Stronger In'.
[115] Watson, 'Tom Watson on Brexit'.
[116] Thirteen former foreign policy experts, 'Former US Secretaries of State and Defence and NSA Advisers Back Remain'.

our own borders.'[117] In their reasoning, the EU was a critical enabler of international competition, allowing British researchers to compete with 'rising academic centres in American and Asia'.[118] Instead of 'the people' and 'the elites', Remain focussed on the conflict between Britain and other nationalities. To compete effectively, the British people needed to vote for a 'strong and resilient Europe, with Britain at the core' amplifying their power.[119]

Remain summarised their vision for the future in the phrase 'Great Britain'. This phrase invited the voter to set aside petty grievances and unify behind the international status of their country. As the plutocrat Richard Branson put it, 'If you vote Leave you are not kicking the establishment in the b***s – you are shooting yourself in the foot … June 23 will determine if voters would rather live in Little England or in Great Britain.'[120] The *Financial Times* concurred, editorialising that 'This is no time to revert to Little England. We are Great Britain. We have a contribution to make to a more prosperous, safer world. The vote must be "Remain".'[121] These two quotes encapsulated the Remain discourse. Remain's discourse comprised of 'the elite' – the coalition of the most politically, economically, and culturally powerful individuals and institutions – appealing to the everyday voter for unity. The voter, who may have perceived themselves as disenfranchised by EU regulations or the domestic political economy, 'must' put aside their desire to kick the establishment. They 'must' realise that the establishment they despise is actually part of a 'we' and 'we are Great Britain'. The unified Great Britain is loved by Europe; it is influential, powerful, and virtuous.[122] The voter could either adopt those characteristics as 'Great Britons' by voting to Remain, or they could opt to be small-minded, weak, ineffectual 'Little Englanders' by refusing to heed the advice of 'the elite'.[123] Remain presented a much less sophisticated form of

[117] Open letter from 200 academics, 31 May 2016, 'EU Referendum: 200 Cambridge University Academics Express "Grave Concern" Over Impact Of Brexit', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 22 April 2018.
[118] *Ibid.*
[119] US Treasury Secretaries, 'UK Economy And Influence Stronger In Europe'.
[120] Branson, 'On Why He's Voting Remain'.
[121] The Financial Times, 'Britain Should Vote To Stay In The EU'.
[122] Philippe Auclair, Apostolos Doxiadis and Robert Rotifer, 2 June 2016, 'A Love Letter To The British People, From Europe', *Britain Stronger In Europe*, accessed 23 April 2018; Religious leaders, 'Think Of The Wider World'; Six former Labour leaders, 'Former Labour Leaders Unite To Make The Progressive Case'; 4 newspaper editorials, 'Newspapers from across the political divide say: Vote Remain'.
[123] Major, 'Vote Leave's Campaign Is An Unforgivable Fraud'.

anti-populism than Leave but, ultimately, it arrived at the same position of national unification behind a domestic elite and the elimination of 'the people'.

Conclusion

Neither the Remain nor the Leave campaign was intent on augmenting British democracy, which is to say increasing the power of 'the people' in a permanent and meaningful way. Rather, the EU referendum was an exercise in portraying EU membership as either the cause of or the antidote to populist logic. The EU referendum offered the British people a choice between *populism without 'the people'* and an austere form of anti-populism that presented 'the people' as a vulnerable and helpless subject-to-be, one that would materialise during a recession as the victims of Brexit. This chapter has outlined the repertoire that Remain used to construct this image of 'the people' and concluded that, stylistic features aside, both campaigns advocated for the dissolution of 'the people' and portrayed this as a favourable outcome.

The first section of this chapter outlined Remain's approach to truth in the referendum. Remain wished for the European question to be decided based on economic credibility, pragmatism, and awareness of the limitations imposed on policymaking by structures such as trade, market sentiment and regulation. Their discourse rendered constituent power as a 'risk' that had no place in a highly systematised country such as Britain. The second section explored Remain's view of 'the people' as a contingent identity that would fully emerge if Britain left the EU and recession eventuated. 'The people' was an identity that the voter should actively avoid becoming a part of. Instead, as section three showed, Remain urged the voter to identify with 'Great Britain', a collective whose virtues were amplified and directed by the responsible elite. If the voter failed to endorse this argument, they attracted the chastising epithet of 'Little Englander'.

The pattern that emerged between Remain and Leave discourses suggests that the longevity of 'the people' should be considered a key component of populist performance. Both sides of the campaign used 'the people' as an expedient way of making their argument but clearly saw the presence of such an entity in British politics as undesirable. Remain depicted 'the people' as a contingent category, one that would emerge as the victims of recession. Leave illustrated 'the people' as a symptom of the

EU's corrupting effect on British politics. Neither discourse increased the constituent power of 'the people' precisely because their message ultimately hinged on the need to dissolve any populist logic in British politics in favour of national unity.

Based on the discourses analysed, I would guess that both campaigns would disagree with my conclusion. Remain argued that remaining in Europe would maximise the power that the British citizen can access. They showed how free trade, international cooperation, EU regulation, and collective security bolster the British prestige and prosperity of which the voter partakes. On the other hand, Leave argued that freeing parliament from the EU would make it more accountable to the citizen. In the Leave discourse, parliament without EU oversight is almost synonymous with the voter's constituent power. Ultimately, however, these two discourses did not envision 'the people' of populist logic, whose constituent power could be acted upon in new, creative, and disruptive ways. Instead of the constituent power of the people, the EU referendum focussed on the power of the British elite to properly administer an undifferentiated and compliant constituency.

The referendum was not a populist dialectic of the kind Stavrakakis suggested, but rather an anti-populist broadcast presented in two different registers of sophistication. Remain and Leave both portrayed 'the people' – the central actor in populism – as a problem to be solved rather than a manifestation of constituent power to be augmented. Remain demonstrated its lack of sophistication through obvious contradictions: between Conservative and Labour; between the localised performance of crisis and the transcendent appeal to the voter; and through clumsy attempts to deny agency to voters specifically assembled to exercise agency over a matter of national policy. Leave deployed a more sophisticated performance of *populism without 'the people'*. It should nonetheless be recognised as anti-populist by virtue of the fact that the entire discourse aimed at eliminating 'the people' from British politics.

Conclusions

July 13, 2016. British Prime Minister Theresa May stands at a podium in front of the jet-black door of 10 Downing Street, having just won the party contest to replace David Cameron. The words *Theresa May takes office as Prime Minister* flash along the BBC News chyron. The new Prime Minister delivers a speech in which she vows to fight the 'burning injustice' of poverty, racial and sexual discrimination, and inequality.[1] She commits to taking the UK out of the EU, framing it as a constitutive moment from which 'we will make Britain a country that works not for a privileged few, but for every one of us.'[2]

Theresa May's first speech has no colloquial name. It has been subsumed by an endless procession of speeches punctuating the negotiation between the EU and the UK, ongoing leadership tensions, two general elections, and the replacement of Theresa May with Boris Johnson. The hopeful air that Theresa May adopted when appropriating the unexpected referendum result into her new government's agenda has since been misplaced. The logistics of Brexit are still not resolved at the time of writing. Whatever promise Brexit once possessed has been overtaken by events, issue fatigue, and the bureaucratic magnitude of dissolving a decades-old union.

May's promise of a better country has been replaced with Johnson's white-knuckled assertions that he will 'get Brexit done'.[3] The only concrete outcomes that Brexit has delivered so far are party-political in nature. The 2017 general election dramatically undermined the electoral share of minor parties such as UKIP and the Liberal Democrats.[4] The 2019 general election saw the Conservative Party win a record number of seats and an overwhelming majority in the House of Commons. David

[1] Theresa May 2016, 'Statement from the new Prime Minister Theresa May', Prime Minister's Office, accessed 23 June 2020: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/statement-from-the-new-prime-minister-theresa-may>.
[2] *Ibid.*
[3] Jon Henley 2019, 'Boris Johnson wins huge majority on promise to "get Brexit done"', *The Guardian*, accessed 23 June 2020: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2019/dec/13/bombastic-boris-johnson-wis-huge-majority-on-promise-to-get-brexit-done>.
[4] Lukas Audickas, Philip Loft and Richard Cracknell 2020, 'UK Election Statistics: 1918-2019 – A century of elections', House of Commons Library Briefing Paper No. CBP7529, accessed 23 June 2020: <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7529/>.

Cameron's EU referendum ultimately succeeded at solidifying his party's hold on office.

If the EU referendum and its aftermath are any guide, populist performances by those in power are risky but effective. As this thesis has shown, these performances need not be sincere; they can be wholly self-serving, so long as their recital is believable. Moreover, as Vote Leave's victory indicates, faux populism can stem from the heart of political power – from the lips of former cabinet members – and suggest that the solution to crisis is the enhancement of elite power. This *populism without 'the people'* can not only be successful, but it can be easily misinterpreted as a genuinely insurgent moment in politics. This last chapter of the thesis will summarise what has been found, learnt, and suggested by considering the EU referendum from the vantage of populist theory. It will conclude that Brexit was never intended to enhance the constituent power of the British people, and its misinterpretation as populist says much more about the norms prevalent in contemporary democracy than it does about the nature of populism.

1. Findings

This thesis set out to test how populist the EU referendum was. The results of the preceding discourse analysis indicate that it was neither populist nor authentic. The following sections recapitulate what has been found in previous chapters and the puzzle that they pose for our current understanding of populism.

1.1 Brexit and populism without 'the people'

The scope of this thesis omitted UKIP, the *enfant terrible* of organised British politics. While UKIP is a central player in the history of British Euroscepticism, it was a marginal force in the EU referendum and the unfolding process of 'getting Brexit done'. This thesis suggested that focusing on UKIP reduces visibility of the larger system that conditioned the referendum result. Instead, the research design of this thesis targeted the official campaign organisations and analysed their public pronouncements in a systematic fashion.

Discourse analysis of the EU referendum revealed that neither Remain nor Leave

engaged in an authentic populist performance, measured in terms of whether the discourse made credible proposals for the practical empowerment of 'the people'. However, making such an inference was not straightforward. To gauge the authenticity of these organisations, the findings chapters of this thesis had to separate their respective crisis narrations from the relationship each established between 'the elite' and 'the people'. In combination, chapters 3 and 4 characterised the EU referendum as a struggle between populist and anti-populist political styles on the strength of their crisis narrations. Leave outlined a series of failures that it related back to the Brussels-based 'Eurocrat'. They described the EU as a failed project that impoverished Britain, increased the rate of migration to unsustainable levels, and undermined the security of British citizens. Leave's antagonistic portrayal of the 'Eurocrat' and European institutions created a populist conception of 'the elite'. On the other hand, Remain presented a clearly anti-populist narration of crisis. They described Brexit as a crisis in the making; leaving the Single Market, Remain argued, would cause recession and widespread uncertainty. This message was delivered by the actually existing elites of British society.

Part three of the thesis dug deeper into the logic and outcomes of the competing discourses. Reorienting from crisis to the subjectivities of 'the people' and 'the elite' revealed more similarities between Remain and Leave than differences. Chapter 5 analysed the intense fixation in Leave's discourse on anti-elitist critique. Their construction of 'the elite' went beyond the EU and encompassed the British government, public service, business community, and a network of international figures. This conglomerate 'establishment' took up so much of Leave's discourse that 'the people' were marginalised, present only as the victims of 'the elite'. Leave urged 'the people' to vote leave, an act that would terminate their corporate identity and produce a country unified under the parliament. Chapter 6 performed a similar analysis of Remain and noticed an identical pattern. In the Remain discourse, 'the people' are also the victim of crisis. Because Remain depicted a crisis in the future, 'the people' was a future subject. Remain reminded the British voter of their precariousness and warned them that they did not want to become one of 'the people', an impoverished and disempowered subject in a chaotic society.

The findings of this study indicate that the EU referendum was not a populist event. It was an elite-controlled discourse that took place within an elite-initiated referendum. More substantively, the referendum discourse offered two variations of the same prescription to the voter. Remain and Leave both treated the category of 'the people' as a problem to be eliminated from British politics. They described different crises and timelines, but suggested a similar outcome: the sublimation of 'the people' back into the nation and the maintenance of parliamentary control over the country. In fact, Leave argued for an expansion of elite power through the removal of EU oversight.

1.2 A solution to the problem of authenticity

Remain and Leave both delivered an anti-populist performance. The Leave discourse hid their agenda better through their focus on 'the elite' and their narration of an ongoing crisis, but neither outlined a credible plan to enhance the power of 'the people'. In this thesis I have been advocating the view that popular empowerment is the central task of populism. For example, capitalism seeks to empower the owners of capital; socialism seeks to empower a centralised state; populism seeks to empower 'the people'. However, as this thesis has shown, it is possible to *simulate* populism through crisis narration and denigration of 'the elite' while also outlining a praxis that disempowers and even dissolves 'the people'.

The malleable nature of populist discourse and the high stakes of its performance engender what I have called the problem of authenticity. The Leave discourse possessed all the stylistic features of populism detailed in Benjamin Moffitt's inductive model.[5] It was opposed by a clearly anti-populist discourse. Brexit has been interpreted in the literature and in everyday usage as a populist event, which by transference implies arguments for Brexit were populist in nature. And yet the EU referendum did not follow the choreography described by Stavrakakis et al. in the Greek context.[6] Instead of a populist platform articulated 'in the name of the people', Leave presented a sophisticated brand of anti-populism that substituted meaningful domestic reform for one single populist act. The EU referendum was not a populist choreography but an

[5] Moffitt, *The Global Rise of Populism*, pp. 120-21.
[6] Stavrakakis et al.,'Populism, anti-populism and crisis', p. 22.

anti-populist broadcast presented in two different registers of sophistication. For all that, it very much *looks* like a populist choreography and required extensive analysis to unravel.

Consequently, this thesis suggested democratic augmentation as a criterion for assessing populist authenticity. Authentic populism is more than crisis performance; it also aims to redistribute power towards 'the people'.[7] The EU referendum was not a populist choreography but it does pinpoint the singular element of populism that counts: a genuine intent to empower 'the people' in an ongoing and meaningful capacity. The EU referendum was primarily centred on 'the elite': Remain embodied Britain's elite in a literal sense and relied on their authority; Leave fixated on a transnational conspiracy of 'the elite'. My introduction of democratic augmentation is an attempt to reorient populist study around the supposed central actor of phenomenon. My study of the EU referendum leads me to suggest that the effect a discourse would have on 'the people' must be a key category in identifying and interpreting populist events.

The British voter was marginalised in both referendum discourses, featuring either as a victim of circumstance or an economic hostage. Marginalisation of 'the people' and a praxis that dissolves 'the people' is the key indicator of anti-populism in all registers of sophistication. The effect on the relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite' is of paramount importance when it comes to identifying an authentic populist discourse. Democratic augmentation, as the tendency to expand the freedom of action among citizens, is an appropriate summation of the quality that separates authentic populism from sophisticated anti-populism.

2. Theoretical implications

Populism without 'the people' demonstrates the flexible nature of a populism and its capacity for co-option. This section details the suggested changes needed to mould existing theory to the EU referendum and events like it. It also appraises the likely effect

[7] Making a determination of authenticity based on rhetoric is naturally a subjective judgement. Yet these judgements are made routinely in politics: we assume, based on the linguistic and textual cues given to us, how serious a political contender is about their proposed agenda.

that *populism without 'the people'* – once finally put into effect – will have on British democracy.

2.1 For populist theory

This thesis found contemporary populist theory a great aid for the deconstruction and analysis of populist discourse. Throughout the thesis, the term discourse has been used consistently but the term relates to the method of discourse analysis rather than to an absolute preference for the discourse approach to populism. Chapter 1 acknowledged that the contemporary Essex School was a key encounter in the development of this thesis, and maintained that the literature from this school of thought presents a dynamic theory of society and can conceive of its subject as both an insurgent and systematic phenomenon.[8] That being said, the field of populism has undergone a significant degree of ontological convergence in the last decade.[9] The ideational, discursive, performative and even strategic approaches effectively describe the same basic features of the phenomenon using different disciplinary idiolects. In this spirit of harmony, this thesis found success applying models from the discourse and performative approaches in a complementary fashion.

The most obvious gap in the populist literature relates to authenticity. As mentioned, contemporary populism provides excellent resources for analysing political discourse and determining its populist – or anti-populist – style. However, there seems to be a prevalent assumption in the literature that because populism is a comparatively simple phenomenon – the ideological equivalent of a single cell organism – then its identification should be relatively straightforward in empirical cases.[10] The EU referendum demonstrates that this is not reflective of populism in practice. Populism is an efficacious mode of communication that often takes place within societies undergoing a high degree of stress. The EU referendum was precipitated by austerity economics, the Eurozone crisis, and a migration crisis instigated by the Syrian civil war. Greece was experiencing an even greater series of challenges when the populist dynamic came to the forefront of its political culture. Populist theory, therefore, needs

[8] Laclau, *On Populist Reason*, p. 19.
[9] Mudde, 'Populism: An Ideational Approach', pp. 14-15.
[10] Freeden, 'After the Brexit Referendum', pp. 1-10.

to avail itself of conceptual resources that can differentiate between sophisticated attempts at regaining control and genuine attempts at democratising a failing political culture.

This thesis has suggested an *augmented* definition of populism as a remedy. I have argued that populism is a particular political discourse *that is committed to democratic augmentation*. Specifically, the solutions offered by populists must in some way enhance the constituent power of 'the people' in relation to 'the elite'. Practical ways in which this can be achieved will necessarily vary depending on the political economy in question, but an authentic populist could generally be said to favour the dis-empowerment of 'the elite', the equalisation of public forums, and increased use of direct and delegatory modes of citizen participation. If a political movement is not proposing to enhance the constituent power of 'the people' then it is not populist regardless of the style it adopts. The literature captures the crisis narrative of populism and anti-populism; the addition of democratic augmentation allows it to also capture the solutions offered and the relative positioning of the key categories of 'the elite' and 'the people'.

The current gap in populist theory has serious ramifications. Chapter 1 outlined the controversy surrounding populism and its historical associations. This thesis agrees that populism is an inherently dangerous political phenomenon. Populist logic is divisive and corrosive to social harmony – it is a retributive and self-righteous political dynamic. But it is important to note that populism is also a *response* to division, corrosion and events that, in the eyes of populists, necessitate such an approach to the social world. Moreover, populism is the quintessential vehicle for progressive change and a natural recourse of the marginalised. Those without voice or standing in established power structures can only challenge an inequitable status quo by fostering solidarity with their fellow exploited.[11] For these reasons, it is imperative that populist theory values the integrity of the concept and devises strategies for differentiating between opportunism and progressivism.[12]

[11] Martin Luther King, Jr. 2000 [1963], *Why We Can't Wait*, London: Signet Classics, pp. 154-99.
[12] I do not mean to suggest by these remarks that authentic populism is a *purely* progressive phenomenon. I have deliberately avoided mention of 'left' and 'right' populism throughout this thesis firstly because populism can aim to serve an exclusionary subset of the demos and secondly because it is not necessarily clear how leftism interacts with populism. The interactions between, for example,

2.2 For British politics

There is already a significant and growing literature on Brexit and its likely effects on British politics. This thesis took a contrarian position in relation to this literature by casting backwards rather than forwards in its assessments. I did so in keeping with my hypothesis that the long and gradual democratisation of the Westminster system is the most instructive vantage point from which to view the EU referendum. Specifically, the system of government in Britain is the product of three hundred year's worth of tension between populist forces and those powerful few who opposed the investiture of power in the common people. This vantage is instructive because it provides a clear contrast with the electoral populism of UKIP, the 'elite Euroscepticism' employed by major political parties, and the questionable deployment of referendums in contemporary British politics.

The Levellers, Chartists and Suffragettes are examples of authentic populists who effected significant and lasting change in British politics. They did so through massed political action that made 'the people' visible and exerted moral pressure on the parliamentary elite. By contrast, Euroscepticism, as the modern analogue of British populism, is a discourse that has been monopolised by the parliamentary elite.[13] Successive governments have adopted a sceptical rhetoric towards Europe whilst accepting – even in some cases pursuing – a policy of political integration. The British political system has historically been very hostile to notions of popular sovereignty and the constituent power of the *demos*.[14] While the contemporary innovation of referendums has the potential to augment a highly centralised democracy, the parliament's historical record and the Cameron government's use of referendums suggest caution rather than optimism.

Certainly, the EU referendum was not designed to effect change. An insurgent group of political elites 'won' this contest but the anti-populist nature of their argument

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populism and capitalism or environmentalism or social conservatism are outside the scope of this thesis.

[13] Vines, 'Reframing *English Nationalism and Euroscepticism'*, p. 266.

[14] Ben Wellings and Emma Vines 2016, 'Populism and Sovereignty: The EU Act and the In-Out Referendum, 2010-2015', *Parliamentary Affairs* 69, p. 324.

suggests that this specific event is unlikely to have significant ramifications for the ongoing relationship between 'the people' and 'the elite' of Britain. Leave won on a platform of parliamentary independence, not a platform intended to expand the constituent power of the citizenry. It is possible that the referendum discourse will add to the growing distrust of parliament.[15] Leave and Remain exposed the British voter to two dystopian visions of how their society operates. The former outlined the British people purely in terms of antagonistic relations with the parliament, the EU, the commercial sector and the migrant. The latter tried to eliminate any semblance of agency from the relationship between the citizen and the parliament. Ultimately, though, the loss of Euroscepticism will have a much more profound effect on British politics than the conduct of the referendum itself. As discussed, Euroscepticism has been a structural feature in British politics for generations and an effective pressure valve for antagonism between the general public and the political class. In this sense, leaving the EU and returning to a simpler relationship of government might be the first step in the torturous process of addressing a range of domestic injustices – many of which Theresa May mentioned in her first prime ministerial speech – that have been accruing in British politics.

3. Future possibilities

In this final section, I will discuss several new directions in the intertwined fields of populist and democratic theory that are suggested by the EU referendum. These directions can be summarised into three key questions. How anti-populist is contemporary democracy? Is democratic augmentation the right criterion for populism? And, why was Brexit misinterpreted as populist?

3.1 Anti-populism and electoral democracy

This thesis coined the term *populism without 'the people'* to describe the EU referendum. This concept and other findings enumerated in the thesis are based on a single case study with unique features and limited generalisability. Context and sample size aside, it seems that the EU referendum is not so dissimilar to everyday politics in

[15] Whitaker and Lynch, 'Explaining support for the UK Independence Party', pp. 359-380.

a given contemporary democracy. Britain is more than an established democracy: its two-party system of parliamentary rule is the template for the majority of existing democracies around the world.[16] In such systems, the constituent power of the citizen is dramatically constrained by a lack of electoral choice. The economic and demographic pressures implicated in Brexit also affect many comparable polities. The preconditions of Brexit extend far beyond Britain.

Populism also extends far beyond Britain. Cas Mudde observes that modern politics is undergoing a 'populist zeitgeist' that extends to every continent and Paul Taggart notes that populism expresses the inadequacy of the representative model of democracy.[17] Populism is part of the zeitgeist because it suggests a vehicle for achieving change in a tightly controlled political environment. This thesis posits that anti-populism is also part of the zeitgeist, and indeed describes the ordinary functioning of a Westminster-style democracy. The ease with which the British political class adapted to the EU referendum and the deployment of anti-populism at least invites suspicion regarding the ordinary operation of parliament. I intended the concept of *populism without 'the people'* to explain specifically how Vote Leave conducted their side of the referendum, but the concept could just as easily explain the underpinning logic of electoral democracy.

This thesis is one of very few applications of the concept of anti-populism, and certainly the most systematic. Stavrakakis et al. noted the emergence of a populist choreography in Greece at the same time as the electoral field consolidated into a two-party system.[18] The Greek populist dynamic took on a visceral dimension as the financial crisis deepened. This suggests two lines of inquiry. Firstly, is the emergence of populism and anti-populism linked to the concentration of the electoral field? Are populist dynamics ameliorated by a multi-polar party system? Secondly, further study of anti-populism as a sliding scale might prove rewarding. The populist choreography appears to intensify in proportion to the magnitude of the crisis facing democracy. Vote Leave performed a much more subtle anti-populism than mainstream Greek parties. One therefore wonders

[16] Arend Lijphart 2012, *Patterns of Democracy* (2nd edn.), Michigan: Yale University Press, pp. 9-29.
[17] Mudde, 'The Populist Zeitgeist', pp. 541-63; Taggart, 'Populism and representative politics', pp. 271-73.
[18] Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 'The Populism/Anti-Populism Frontier', p. 17.

whether the same discourse applies in more subtle forms during times when the stakes are lower. What I am hypothesising is a sliding scale of anti-populism that ranges from existential crisis (Greece) to managed referendum (Brexit) to two-party electoral contestation, with multi-polar party systems the most populistic and therefore the closest proxy for a set of institutions that maximises the constituent power of the *demos.*

Lastly, a great deal of theory points to the illiberalism of populism, but it is also important to highlight the anti-democratic nature of liberalism. After all, the historical record appears to indicate that the British parliament could be considered 'liberal' far before populist movements forced extensions in the franchise. This is a heterodox rereading of British history but if there is a silver lining in Brexit it is the opportunity to reconsider what is considered ordinary in light of the extraordinary. Pre-modern and modern populism stand as a reminder that the 'real' examples of populist logic are a matter of history. Contrasting UKIP and the Chartists, or the contemporary Tea Party and the American Populist Party are exercises in disillusionment. Disillusionment, however, is productive if it can suggest possibilities for reform. In short, this thesis suggests that populism offers a productive entry point from which to deconstruct the calcified norms of contemporary democracy.

3.2 Democratic augmentation and democratic theory

The other set of questions that hover on the periphery of this thesis involve democratic theory and how change should be conceptualised. This thesis has referred to democratic augmentation throughout but has done so in a largely negative sense, in order to outline a crucial lack in the EU referendum. As such, and also due to space constraints, this thesis did not apply the concept in great detail to an authentic example of populism to prove the positive as well as the negative. The question therefore remains as to whether this term is the right one to describe populism in general, less still contemporary events that have been called populist.

In practice, democratic augmentation should entail the maximisation of direct participation in the political process, be it through voting, petitioning, activism, or institutional agenda setting. In keeping with Hannah Arendt's nomination of free action and creativity, the less prescribed the mode of participation is, the more accurately it

reflects the democratic ethos.[19] However, in the modern era – as Hannah Arendt herself observed – the administration of society has moved so far away from the original ethos of the French and American Revolutions that the concept might fall flat. Democratic augmentation perhaps wrongly assumes that there is something of a 'foundation' left to augment. Defining populism as a political discourse that is committed to democratic augmentation might be holding the phenomenon to a higher standard than actually existing democracy must meet. Whether this is the case is an open question that depends on how one defines democracy.

I have used a republican but not overly radical definition of democracy in this thesis, one with which Mark Wenman would probably disagree. In his book *Agonistic Democracy* he claims that democratic augmentation is a diversion from the more radical change that is needed to fix modern society. Specifically, he takes issue with the school of agonistic democrats who support augmentation within the parameters of liberalism and electoral democracy.[20] Agonism is one branch of democratic theory known for its radicalism and celebration of politics as conflict. Wenman finds a lack of ambition in the field, arguing that a purely augmentative approach does not rise to the interlocking crises of environmental catastrophe, neoliberal exploitation, and a political system that deliberately limits constituent power in almost every conceivable way. He takes issue with several key agonistic thinkers on the grounds that they do not adequately grasp the need for revolutionary action.[21] The agonistic connection reinforces the underlying theme of this thesis that the fortunes of populism and democracy are intrinsically tied. The subtext I have tried to convey within the specific scope of this thesis is that the relationship between these two concepts is not antagonistic. Populism and democracy are symbiotic, and our response to the former when it enters the political discourse – often in response to systemic failure – is instructive of our disposition towards the latter.

Populism is not a revolutionary praxis. In its modern and contemporary guises, populism is reformist in nature and methodologically electoral. It is very telling, then, that such an uncontroversial interloper in politics is typically met with opprobrium. Why is populism a dirty word in everyday usage? It is little more than a provocative

[19] Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 9.
[20] Wenman, *Agonistic Democracy*, pp. 264.
[21] *Ibid.* pp. 16, 264.

and polarising style of electioneering. The EU referendum signifies how uncomfortable contemporary sensibilities are to even the *appearance* of populism: as this thesis has shown, Leave's winning argument can best be described as *populism without 'the people'*. Anecdotally, the Brexit result was met with shock and derision, indicating a low tolerance for even faux performances of populism in this day and age.

More than anything, condemnatory reactions to populism – and to the pretence of populism – speak to the rapid and almost total systematisation that modern politics has undergone. The EU referendum is disenchanting not because a demagogic rabble upset the orderly administration of society. Brexit is a tragedy because an administrative exercise was successfully marketed as a revolution. To quote Theresa May, 'Brexit is Brexit' and Brexit was never intended to increase the constituent power of the British people.

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