

## **“Dancing with Doxa”: A ‘Rhetorical Political Analysis’ of David Cameron’s Britishness**

### **Introduction**

At the about the same time that researchers in languages and linguistics began to turn their attention to the systematic and critical study of political aspects of language (e.g. Fowler et. al., 1979) researchers in political theory were, in various ways, focusing on the language of politics. Some took their cue from the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein and also from J.L. Austin (e.g. Skinner, 1988; Pocock, 1971; Connolly, 1974) while others looked to continental structuralist and poststructuralist theories (e.g. Shapiro, 1981; Laclau and Mouffe, 1985; for an overview see Norval 2000). In political science, researchers from quite different traditions similarly began finding language a useful way into examining, understanding and assessing phenomena such as policy agendas, political deliberation and decision-making. There has since been an ever greater convergence between the work of politics specialists studying language and that of language specialists studying politics. In my own research – into the theory and history of ideologies – I have been very much influenced and inspired by the work of scholars such as Norman Fairclough, Teun Van Dijk and Ruth Wodak.

There is, without doubt, much to be gained from the sharing of ideas, methods and findings between Politics and Language specialists. However, there are also significant differences in the approaches, objects and goals of those coming from a background in language studies compared to those coming from political studies. If inter-

disciplinary research is to be as valuable as it might be then, I believe, these differences should not be minimised. We gain most when the distinctive flavours of our fields are retained and appreciated rather than lost through indiscriminate blending. Accordingly, in this chapter I want to emphasise what I think is specific about my approach to political language and perhaps different when compared to that of colleagues working in languages. In some respects such differences are to do with emphasis: scholars of language and linguistics might tend to see politics as providing good and especially important examples of some things that can be done with language; political theorists might tend to see language as a good and important example of politics. But this difference of emphasis can also be substantive.

I come to the study of language in politics not only because of an appreciation of the importance of the ways in which power is exercised through language. I come to it because I am trying to understand something about what it is we are doing when we think about and ‘do’ politics (and about how to do both well). My ‘research questions’ fundamentally concern ideology - in the broadest (and least pejorative) sense; I am interested in how people think their politics, what determines that thinking and what is determined by it. As Stuart Hall put it: ‘The problem of ideology...concerns the ways in which ideas of different kinds grip the minds of masses and thereby become a “material force”’. A goal of analysis is to understand ‘how a particular set of ideas comes to dominate the social thinking’ uniting particular economic and political groups, helping them to maintain their leadership of society as a whole. And in studying all this, Hall argued, we are especially concerned with ‘the concepts and the languages of practical thought...[and]...with the processes by which new forms of consciousness, new conceptions of the world arise...’ (Hall, 1996: 26). I am, then, inter-

ested first and foremost in ideas and in concepts - their histories, form, function and effects. And because these are formed from and made known by language I am interested in that too.

Study of the conceptual languages of politics and ideology can be purely scholastic; it is a history of ideas akin to a history of science or a history of art. But it also has its critical aspect. That may include exposure of the hidden power behind political language. But it is not only that. Politics almost always involves people drawing on, formulating, reformulating, expressing and assessing the languages of politics in order to make something happen - or to stop it from happening. In showing how this has taken place in some particular instance one hopes to make it available for judgement by others and to enable them to learn from it in ways which enhance their capacity to do it for themselves. I am, then, interested in the ways in which language may support systems of domination but also – importantly – in how language and ideology may be used as part of critique and resistance.

What I want to do in this chapter – before talking about Cameron’s Bloomberg speech – is to take the opportunity to explain to friends and colleagues in languages and linguistics a little more about this sort of approach. I will do that by outlining the background to the ways in which some of us in Political Studies look at language, emphasising interest in linguistic-conceptual novelty. I will then turn to ‘Rhetorical Political Analysis’ (RPA). This is not (yet) a ‘school’ or an established ‘method’ of the scale and sophistication of, say, Critical Discourse Analysis. It is a more general way of thinking about the words and associated performances of politics and political actors (see, for example, Atkins et.al., 2014; Atkins and Finlayson, 2016; Crines et. al.,

2016; Finlayson, 2007; 2014; Finlayson and Martin, 2008; Martin, 2015; 2016). While it has connections to research into policy discourse and also political theories of deliberation, RPA is best thought of as part of what Michael Freeden (2015) calls the ‘political theory of political thinking’ since it is especially interested in political concepts – with how they are formed in and through language, how they are disseminated, and the conditions under which they may ‘grip’ people and become part of a historically effective, transformative political force. Understanding that requires identification of the ways in which such concepts are parts of larger arguments, and of how they may be not only tools of politics but political forces themselves, driving political thinking, arguing and acting down particular tracks. Finally, I will turn to look – rather briefly – at Cameron’s speech in order to illustrate just some aspects of RPA. In my reading I will concentrate on the concept of “Britishness” and how it forms a premise within Cameron's arguments. Doubtless much of what I say will be familiar to those working within languages and linguistics but perhaps my presentation of things within the context of political theory will illuminate differences in ways that enable further edifying conversation between our fields.

### **Approaches and Schools**

There is a wide range of approaches to the study of political language within Political Studies. Some of these are quantitative, using the analysis of a large body of texts as a way of measuring some feature or aspect of politics. For example, Laver et. al. (2002) propose that words be used as pure data to enable the specification of policy positions. This approach has been particularly extensively applied as part of a large project collating and comparing party manifestos (see <https://manifestoproject.wzb.eu/>). Such

research tends to be concerned primarily with establishing underlying general principles or rules of politics (for example relating to changes in policy positions) and language is used as a proxy.

In contrast, the influential policy scientist Giandomenico Majone has stressed that ‘politicians know only too well but social scientists too often forget, public policy is made of language’ (1989: 1). Policy processes, he argues, are shaped not only by calculations of self-interest but also by the need to justify things to others, to explain and persuade. In studying such persuasion policy scientists have not been confined to quantitative analysis; they have drawn on a wider literature concerned with organisations and organisational culture as they have sought to explain and explore the paradigms that shape policy thinking, the narratives, performances and kinds of argumentation within and through which they are made and then articulated to others (see, for example, Bevir and Rhodes, 2007; Fischer and Gottweis, 2012; Hajer, 1997; Hall, 1993; Schmidt, 2008). Such research often draws on terms and tools found in CDA (see Fairclough, 2013) but also on Foucauldian scholarship (e.g. Bacchi, 2009).

A third example of Politics scholars’ interest in language comes from political theory. Here there is a very well established tradition of deliberative political theory concerned with normative assessments of the quality or justice of deliberation. The focus here may not be on the details of the actual language used but, rather, on the procedures and processes of argument and debate, with a view to devising rules and ways of evaluating their application so as to ensure that politics conforms to principles of fairness, reason and equality (e.g. Dryzek, 2002; 2010).

A different set of approaches comes from those influenced by Wittgensteinian thinking. A particularly important concept here is, unsurprisingly, that of ‘language games’. Its importance for political theory lies in the way in which it forces us to turn our attention away from what we might like to think are underlying laws of politics, or overarching ahistorical values governing it, and to look instead at what people are doing when they do the things we think of as politics or as political. That makes us see political statements and the use of political concepts as parts of wider and ongoing practical activities. Consequently the task of political theory, as James Tully argues, stops being that of ‘discovering a general and comprehensive rule and then applying it to particular cases’ but rather one of exploring a practical capacity to use terms in given circumstances - ‘to give reasons for and against this or that use...’ as well as to ‘go against customary uses, in actual cases’ (Tully, 2002: 543). Here, analysis might concern itself with the ‘grammar’ of politics – that which ‘delimits what may count as possible descriptions of how things are’ (Norval, 2007: 106) - and also with how those grammars change in and through their use, through rational argumentation and also through ‘showing’ by means of analogy, metaphor and other figurative language.

The concept of ‘language games’ thus enables the theoretical analysis of politics to ask a number of crucial questions: what are the varied language games of political action?; what are their ‘rules’ and characteristics?; when distinct games challenge or contradict each other how do they attempt to maintain integrity?; how are alternatives excluded or accommodated?; what affects capacity to exclude or accommodate? Crucially, these questions give rise to a concern with practices of contestation and decontestation of meaning (see Freeden, 1998; 2004).

## **Conceptual History**

How is it that complex and perhaps open concepts (say, ‘freedom’ or ‘justice’ or ‘Englishness’) come to have certain sorts of meanings, giving them potential for certain sorts of effects, and how is that meaning maintained or defended, challenged and changed? To put that another way, how are some meanings decontested, put seemingly beyond the reach of criticism, and how are those meanings contested and perhaps overturned? One important approach to answering such questions originated in methodological debates within the historical study of political thought.

It might be thought that the purpose of historical research into political thought is to uncover, illuminate and celebrate a tradition, or to uncover the pure rational core of past thoughts, to strip them of the contingent features of their time, translate them into a more rigorous analytical form and then test their applicability in the present. In the late 1960s and into the 1970s an alternative proposition was made: that the history of political thought is a history of ideas and as such a history of ‘acts of speech’ and of ‘the condition or contexts in which these acts were performed’. For J.G.A. Pocock the goal of such research was to identify institutionalised modes of speech and their change over time. Political theory, he suggested, studies ‘sub-languages, rhetorics, ways of talking about politics, distinguishable language-games’, their ‘vocabulary, rules, preconditions, implications and style’ (1987: 21).

Studying this mattered for Politics, Pocock argued, because verbalizations are – of course – ‘acts of power’. By informing people of something we may alter their perceptions; by defining people we may alter how they are perceived by others or, in-

deed, by themselves (1973: 30). But such acts of power are themselves also acted on – to work they must make use of and be part of an already instituted world of speech acts. As Pocock put it: ‘Each of us speaks with many voices, like a tribal shaman in whom the ancestor ghosts are all talking at once; when we speak, we are not sure who is talking or what is being said, and our acts of power in communication are not wholly our own’. One of the purposes of political theory is to try and show ‘what power is being exercised over us when we seek to exercise it’ (1973: 31) but also to pursue the implications of the fact that the power we have in using language is a one we cannot fully control or keep from others; it opens a space within which disputation and contestation can take place.

The ambiguity and instability of language is – from this point of view – productive. As Pocock put it: ‘If I can discern unexpected possibilities in your language, you can discern others in mine; if I can perform in unexpected fashion the roles which language thrusts upon me, you can perform in ways I do not anticipate the roles which I am thrusting upon you’ (1973: 43). It is a point made more recently by Jacques Ranciere who finds in language an implication of equality in the form of a shared capacity to understand and to act in and on speech. That capacity might be obscured or suppressed by institutionalized and well-policed rules and orders of speaking. Ranciere coins the term ‘literarity’ to refer to the instability and malleability of language which makes it possible to resist such an ordering of speaking beings. Echoing but also critically extending Aristotle he claims that we are political animals ‘for two reasons...first, because we have the power to put into circulation more words, "useless" and unnecessary words, words that exceed the function of rigid designation; secondly, because this fundamental ability to proliferate words is unceasingly contested by



those who claim to "speak correctly" - that is, by the masters of designation and classification who, by virtue of wanting to retain their status and power, flat-out deny this capacity to speak' (see Panagia, 2009).

Within the History of Political Thought investigation into the relationship between institutionalised, generic forms of thinking and communication and the novel uses that change the game (adding to the vocabulary, employing new tones or styles) has been particularly well developed by Quentin Skinner. Locating works within their historical moment, including the available forms and genres, he has come to understand political thoughts 'through the uses they are put to in argument', examining concepts as 'tools and weapons of ideological debate' (Skinner, 2002a: 176). For example, he has been especially interested in the trope of *paradiastole* the redescription of an action, person or phenomenon so that it is shifted from one moral category to another – as when we say that someone is not thrifty but mean. Skinner is interested in the ways in which the evaluative force of terms is altered over time in part because of the work of those he calls 'innovating ideologists'.

Part of Skinner's achievement here has been to help us see political theorists as also a kind of political actor. Inspired by this insight the Finnish political theorist and conceptual historian Kari Palonen has argued that we should not only see political theorists as politicians but also see politicians as political theorists. We should, he argues, 'renounce our widespread academic contempt for politicians' and take seriously their acting, speaking and thinking. 'Politicians' here might mean all kinds of political actor – street activists, policy wonks or prime ministers. Palonen's proposition is not that we simply accept or unthinkingly admire what these people do but that we exam-

ine how they form and express their thinking, drawing on extant vocabularies and using them as part of ongoing political action. We should, says Palonen, make the performances of politicians a distinct object of investigation, examining how they interpret their situation, assessing their ‘contestational imagination’ and asking questions concerning ‘how they act when they act politically...how they take a stand, or justify or explicate a certain standpoint’ (Palonen, 2005: 8). A related approach has been pioneered by Michael Freeden (1998) who has made the history of contestation and decontestation within political ideologies into a distinct object of study. Drawing on Skinner, Palonen, Freeden and others I have elsewhere characterised this as a study of ‘political theory in the wild’ (Finlayson, 2012).

Research into the historical languages of political thought, then, demonstrates how change in the use of political concepts is a fundamental dimension of political action and political history. This links it to a third important set of ideas associated with Gramscian Marxism and post-Marxism. In addition to Stuart Hall, Ernesto Laclau has been extremely important here. His thinking is explicitly indebted to Wittgenstein and is similarly concerned with uses of language in political life, with how meanings are formed, decontested and then contested and reformed. Stabilisation in meaning is understood by Laclau in terms of ‘hegemony’, the establishment and maintenance of discourses particularly through the operations of ‘articulation’ – the combining of concepts in ways that modify the meanings of each – and ‘antagonism’, the constitution of an ‘outside’ or ‘other’ against which a discourse defines itself. In his later works Laclau became especially interested in the rhetorical (in the sense of figurative) aspects of political discourse and especially the trope of catachresis - the imposition of a ‘proper’ name onto something that does not have one. This is often associated

with 'impropriety', because it involves giving a name with no grounds for doing so. The name does not follow from a linguistic, philosophical or poetic necessity and cannot be 'converted' back into a literal term yet it is necessary since without it there is no name. It is contingent (non-necessary) but once present is an element necessary for the structuring of a particular argumentative discourse. Indeed, Laclau claims that the trope of catachresis is the 'common denominator of rhetoricity as such' (2005: 71).

The different approaches I have looked at here, from conceptual history to discourse theory, converge at the point where they are concerned with conceptual contestation and decontestation. In differing ways they suggest that a fundamental if not exclusive dimension of political action is conceptual; the production of claims and names in the process of affirming or subverting an institutionalised structure of political discourse and political thinking. The way in which they approach research into this has, I think, an important emphasis different from that found in some other critical analyses of political language and discourse. Political analysts and theorists are, as we have seen, aware of the ways in which governments and bureaucracies and media systems are conditioned by explicit and implicit social rules that sometimes work behind the backs of subjects. And we are all interested in the ways in which social forces are unified, contained, legitimated and naturalised. However, where, some analysts might emphasise the successful reproduction of these systems the tendency in the kinds of political theory I am describing is to focus on failure: on the incapacity of a discourse to reproduce itself be it due to the absence of a name for something, the possibility for a new name or the way in which a name may be construed in unexpected ways. With this clear focus on how institutionalised and dominant discourses are forced to defend

or repair themselves, and on how novelty or interruption comes about and the conditions in which it succeeds, we can now turn to Rhetoric.

### **Rhetorical Political Analysis**

Rhetorical Political Analysis draws on concepts and terms from the rhetorical tradition in order to identify and interpret how actors employ concepts in making various kinds of argument. It is interested in how actors seek to repair ideological discourses, or defend them from the counterclaims of others. It is also – and perhaps especially – interested in how they try to adapt or rearticulate vocabularies and repertoires of commonplaces, developing new kinds of claim or subverting and redescribing old ones. That includes the creative ways in which actors might communicate across language games or ideological discourses.

In outline such analysis might begin with the theoretical as well as empirical investigation of the historically evolved (and evolving) ‘platforms’ on and through which political actors make their case. Particular polities constitute such stages sometimes informally and sometimes through constitutional rules. The Parliamentary despatch box, the conference speech, the monarchical address, the press conference, the TV interview, the televised debate (and the mass demonstration) are all particular ways of bringing together a speaker and an audience. Each of these stages is connected with more or less rigid generic rules, implicit and explicit, which shape what audiences expect and what speakers must do. Such occasions certainly are an opportunity for speakers to exercise power over others but they are also tests of competence; occa-

sions at which political actors are obliged to present themselves and be available for public judgement (see also Finlayson, 2015; Green, 2009).

What happens on that platform is always a specific speech action linked to what Lloyd Bitzer ((1999[1968]) called an ‘exigence’: a problem or issue, a thing to be done or changed. That exigence does not fully determine what is attempted – let alone what is achieved – and part of any political or rhetorical situation is what those involved construe the situation to be. Consequently the situation may include within it parts of the history of ways of thinking about the issues under consideration – past debates about welfare or warfare, traditions of thinking and arguing about equality or fairness. The concept of ‘rhetorical situation’ and of ‘exigence’ thus focuses our attention on the particularity of the moments in which rhetoric occurs; it reminds us to hesitate before subsuming such situations within more general categories. From the rhetorical perspective such situations are always unique and temporary configurations; skilled rhetoricians are aware that their action is bound to its moment and alert to the brief opportunities when one might reorder things and open up a new situation. In this respect the central ‘research question’ of RPA draws directly from Aristotle; we ask what were the available means of persuasion in particular situations, and how were they put to use (why and with what outcomes?).

Having identified this sort of context (the stage, the problem, the sedimented discourse about a particular issue) RPA attends – in classical vein – to the proofs or appeals within a discourse. The appeal to ethos involves the construction and performance of an identity or persona as a way of securing grounds for being attended to and perhaps also authority for certain claims. That may involve appeals to formal au-

thorities, respected sources, admired people and texts; it also – very importantly – includes the implied character of the audience for the discourse. Rhetorical appeals often involve a ‘promise’ as to who we will be when whatever course of action the rhetorician proposes has been undertaken; they are always a kind of invitation to agree and in so doing to become the sort of people who would agree. Here agreement is also assumption of an identity and of an orientation to the issues at hand. Such appeals connect directly with emotions. Through subject matter, choice of words, ways of narrating or describing events as well as through tone and style, rhetoric can respond to or induce the affective context within which we apprehend the things around us – be it with sympathy, pity, love, horror, loathing or anger (see Martin, 2016).

Finally, and very importantly, rhetoric also involves all sorts of rational or quasi-rational appeals. That includes claims about reality: to facts and to what we all accept as given. It also includes forms of deduction such as the way examples or descriptions of the situation (including figurative descriptions) are made premises in some chain of reasoning: that the presence of one thing implies another; that if X happens then Y will surely follow; that various phenomena are linked in some way be it within a situation or across time.

Of importance here is the concept of *doxa*: common or accepted opinion the use of which is, for Aristotle, a definitive feature of rhetoric. *Doxa* is often considered a wholly bad thing. Bourdieu, for example, uses it to name what is taken as granted and so put beyond question; it is a manifestation of social power and thus an object of critique. From the rhetorical point of view that is too rigid a conception of *doxa*. *Doxa* is not ‘true reason’ although it may contain truths. It is a specific, local and historically

developing collection of claims and references, assumptions and cognitive shortcuts, ways of thinking and arguing. It is not free of contradiction but at any one moment not all of doxa is in play. It is a kind of reservoir of general concepts, claims, explanations and justifications from which people draw when articulating a specific case. It is the location of extant relations between ethos and affect as well as modes of deduction and, because their interplay is variable and unstable, doxa is not simply an enclosed horizon (conservative though it may be). As Linda Zerilli has written ‘when we appeal to the *sensus communis*, we are not appealing to a fixed set of opinions but to what is communicable. Far from guaranteeing agreement in advance, *sensus communis* allows differences of perspective to emerge and become visible’ (173: 2005). Consequently, rhetoric can involve the exercise of an imaginative power, reworking the common sense ways in which we apprehend something. Rhetorical moments are a chance for audiences to make judgements not only of those making arguments but also of the arguments themselves. When these draw on the common sense of that audience it is, in a sense, exercising a judgement over itself, its shared beliefs, expectations, uses of concepts, and ways in which these might be applied to a present situation (see also Farrell, 1993).

I think that this draws out some important differences of emphasis in RPA when compared to other ways of analysing political discourse. For example, some kinds of argumentation theory are primarily concerned to identify forms of reasoning in order to assess them with reference to more general criteria of rationality or fairness. There is nothing necessarily wrong with that but RPA tends to stress that from the point of view of political action the criteria for assessing arguments are always *within* a rhetorical situation (perhaps even part of what is in dispute). They are never apart from it.

Sometimes in order to act politically one has to adapt to whatever those criteria are (bearing in mind that uses of argument may and often do become part of future rhetorical situations). One key task of analysis is to identify the shape and structure of such reasoning, to trace out its development seeing how concepts enter into and shape political moments, but this can be forestalled by too great an emphasis on adjudicating argument against abstract criteria (on this see the debate between Fairclough and Fairclough, 2013; Finlayson, 2013; Hay, 2013; Coleman, 2013).

In a related way Ruth Wodak characterises Critical Discourse Studies with reference to ‘common interests in de-mystifying ideologies and power’ (2001: 3). I sympathise with the motivations here but worry that too quick a rush to ‘demystify’ ideologies and power hinders consideration of their use in transformative political action, privileging a place outside of politics. Wodak says that she aims in her work to ‘produce and convey critical knowledge that enables human beings to emancipate themselves from forms of domination through self-reflection...producing enlightenment and emancipation...to root out particular kinds of delusion...’ (2001: 7) I would rather emphasise the identification of particular sorts of ideological thought-action as a way of understanding political moments, increasing ones capacity to act upon them, and also of identifying possibilities for rhetorical counter-action (through which people may emancipate themselves and each other). For me the important act of critique is not the one that takes place in our research - incredibly important as that is - but the one which takes place in and as rhetorical political action, intervening into and transforming doxa.



There is, however, nothing necessarily antithetical between CDS and RPA. The differences between them are the effect (but also the cause) of interest in slightly different political moments. CDS is often interested in the routine reproduction of discursive and ideological power which it wants to expose and make available for critique. RPA is more interested in the actions made possible by moments of crisis within which critique can be enacted. Of course, like politics in general, rhetoric can be put to very destructive uses. When that happens the problem is not unscrupulous orators but too few skilled ones to challenge them. In combination, CDS and RPA can help each other understand present situations and good orators to act within them so as to bring about change.

### **Cameron's Speech**

Let us turn then, all too briefly, to Cameron's Bloomberg speech which from my point of view affords us a way of seeing inside a kind of political thinking. Like all speeches it is a complex condensation or crystallisation formed from the flows of many different levels and kinds of institutional, historical and conceptual forces and tendencies. That includes the overlapping histories of the Conservative Party and of British Conservative political thinking and also, at a more specific level, a history of British concepts and arguments about the EU. It is also, more broadly, made from a history of British political speech styles, genres and platforms. But we must not forget that it is a very specific moment of action: an attempt to intervene into these histories of which it is also a product. At this sharp end the speech is an element of a particular moment. Cameron's position within the Conservative Party was weak because he had failed to win an election in 2010, leading to the formation of an unwelcome coalition

with the Liberal Democrat Party. Some on his own side thought Cameron too close to his coalition partners and too socially liberal in outlook. In May of 2012 the United Kingdom Independence Party experienced a record success in local elections, threatening some marginal Conservative seats. Like many previous Conservative leaders without a strong Parliamentary majority Cameron found himself under pressure from those in his party hostile to the EU. In June of 2012 he had addressed the issue and ruled out an immediate in/out referendum suggesting that there needed to be a clearer choice to put to the public. He was hoping to win concessions from the EU and so to put something new to them. One-hundred of his MPs called for a referendum. With pressure building a policy shift had been expected. Indeed, this speech had been much delayed while Cameron and his allies tried to prepare the context.

These are some of the complexities of the exigency: Cameron wanted to counter the perception that he was a weak leader; he needed also to reposition himself and his party in order to reduce the perceived threat from UKIP; he wanted to shift the context of current British debates about the EU by convincing other EU leaders to grant concessions. But – problematically as we shall see – this meant that the speech was addressing different audiences to whom it was saying different things: the EU leaders to whom it was directly addressed; Eurosceptics and Europhiles within the Conservative Party; a wider audience within the country including UKIP supporters and others. It was an intervention into multiple debates. In developing his strategy Cameron was not entirely free to decide how to go about things. He was constrained by the established Tory EU ‘language game’ which centred on themes of theft (of sovereignty), betrayal (of the nation) and especially of hard-headed, unsentimental and untheoretical British ‘scepticism’. He had to work with that discourse at the same time as trying

to motivate EU leaders to be sympathetic to his cause. A skilled politician and orator would be challenged to find a way to achieve all this and might well have sought to avoid such a situation. Cameron was not a skilled politician or orator.

The staging of the speech is designed to give Cameron the chance to perform the authority he lacks. This is reflected stylistically in the absence of jokes or ‘grand’ rhetoric; the speech does not have a very rousing and emotive peroration to leave the crowd applauding. It is primarily concerned with definitions and positioning in relation to them. But Cameron tries to create a sense of the decisive importance of the moment and of his intervention into it, specifically referring to a need for ‘urgency and frankness’. He starts the speech by locating it in historical time (seventy years since World War Two) and in relation to a number of major political moments and processes (war, the establishment of peace, a changing global economy, crises in the Eurozone, popular unrest and new challenges to prosperity). But he cannot escape the Conservative tradition and, as we shall see, Thatcher haunts the speech very directly.

The historical references (mostly to war and military action) are an attempt to insert Cameron and his arguments into a grand sequence of canonical events. They also support a claim that the EU is a historical achievement rather than a natural outcome. Peace ‘did not happen like a change in the weather’ but because of ‘determined work over the generations’ (a point further secured by a quotation from Churchill with whom Cameron thus aligns himself). In naming the EU as a historical achievement, the work of generations, the point is not, however, to celebrate collective effort but to locate the EU in the category of things which can be changed if we want to change them. And this is connected to the next claim Cameron makes: that the EU faces a

new challenge in the form of competitors in the ‘global race’ for economic development and so must change through more determined work.

In the next section Cameron announces the character, ‘the spirit’, with which he approaches the matters at hand. In so doing he makes an ethos – that of the UK - an explicit object of consideration, something to be explained to the EU. His own ethos, then, is that of both advocate and representative of the British character and perhaps also that of an honest broker simply explaining to the EU how it is. For the character of the UK is – in contrast to the EU – not a man-made and changeable thing. It is a fixed point. It is a fact. It is a necessary premise. Because Britain is as it is, certain things simply must follow. The UK, he says is seen as ‘argumentative, rather strong-minded’ and this can be ascribed to the facts of geography shaping facts of psychology: ‘We have the character of an island nation - independent, forthright, passionate in defence of our sovereignty’. To make the point unambiguous he adds: ‘we can no more change this British sensibility than we can drain the English Channel’. Britishness is immovable. It cannot be changed so don’t try. The EU can be changed and it must. These claims are then filled out and Britishness is (catachrestically) made into the name of certain virtues: ‘a frame of mind that is more practical than emotional’, seeing the EU as a means to an end, always asking down-to-earth empirical questions ‘How? Why? To what end?’. The UK is declared a ‘European power’ - but that is not the same as being European.

The evidence provided to substantiate these claims about Britishness is very striking: ‘From Caesar’s legions to the Napoleonic Wars. From the Reformation, the Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution to the defeat of Nazism. We have helped to

write European history, and Europe has helped write ours'. These are military events, listed in a way which distinguishes between a monolithic Europe and a singular UK. The latter has made a 'unique contribution' to the former. It has been '...a haven to those fleeing tyranny and persecution'. In wartime 'we helped keep the flame of liberty alight. Across the continent, in silent cemeteries, lie the hundreds of thousands of British servicemen who gave their lives for Europe's freedom'. There are further references to the end of Communism and British advocacy of expansion into Eastern Europe. This list forms part of a premise to a conclusion about 'our national character, our attitude to Europe': that 'Britain is characterised not just by its independence but, above all, by its openness'. The implication that this is in contrast with the rest of the EU is made explicit by reference to a Britain which reaches out and which (more military metaphors) 'leads the charge in the fight' for global trade and against protectionism.

In these passages, then, Cameron defines an ethos of Britishness to which his auditors in the EU ought to defer given how uniquely placed Britain is, by nature and as evidenced by history, to ask the 'difficult questions' and to show the EU how to change itself and embrace openness. This is – it surely goes without saying – an extraordinary way to construct an appeal intended to win over the audience of those within the EU. It is unashamedly arrogant and disrespectful towards its audience. Why, then, does he do it? There are, I think, three things going on here.

In the first place, this is in fact the ethos of a certain ideology of British Conservatism; that is to say, the arrogance is real and the British-centrism of the analysis indicative of a way of thinking. Sometimes political figures make misjudgements and this may

be evidence of one of them. However, and in the second place, these aspects of the speech are also demonstrations of that ethos in action and aimed at others in the Conservative Party so as to cultivate Cameron's own authority and legitimacy to act as their representative. He is invoking a series of commonplaces from within the doxa of British Conservative Euroscepticism. Indeed, the passages are in fact a clear echo of Margaret Thatcher's definitive 'Bruges Speech' – the urtext of Conservative Euroscepticism. She began that speech by declaring Britain just as much an heir to European culture as any other European nation and, as Cameron did twenty-five years later, with a list of historical references: 'For three hundred years, we were part of the Roman Empire and our maps still trace the straight lines of the roads the Romans built. Our ancestors—Celts, Saxons, Danes—came from the Continent'. She went on to mention Norman and Angevin rule, the glorious revolution and William of Orange. Here too historical events were connected to a proof of British virtues. Thatcher described Britain as 'pioneering' representative government and expressed pride for 'the way in which for centuries Britain was a home for people from the rest of Europe who sought sanctuary from tyranny'. She also eulogized Britain's 'very special way' of contributing to Europe: 'Over the centuries we have fought to prevent Europe from falling under the dominance of a single power. We have fought and we have died for her freedom'. She went on to speak of British support for resistance movements, the mounting of the liberation of Europe 'from our island fortress' and of the need to defend the freedom of those in Eastern Europe (at that time, of course, still part of the Warsaw Pact). Cameron's list of historic events is not exactly the same as Thatcher's - the resonance of hers is far richer and subtler. But the presence of such a list and its connection to claims about virtuous national character are clearly part of a common-

place. Perhaps by so conforming to Tory common sense Cameron hoped also to demonstrate his Tory credentials.

But there is a third dimension to what Cameron is doing with all this. In the speech his self-declared ethos is that of one who does not want to ‘pull up the drawbridge’, is not ‘a British isolationist’ and who has a vision. That vision again involves seeing the things which can be changed and which aren’t natural. For example, ‘labour market regulations are not some naturally occurring phenomenon’. In the closing sections of the speech the British people are described as a single and unified object on the field of political calculation: ‘People feel that the EU is heading in a direction that they never signed up to. They resent the interference in our national life by what they see as unnecessary rules and regulation. And they wonder what the point of it all is. Put simply, many ask “why can’t we just have what we voted to join – a common market?”’ Here the British – with their character as natural as the English channel – are a limit on Cameron’s own action and so the source of an obligation for the EU to act. They are a premise around which reasoning must be organised. We may think that Britain’s position creates uncertainty ‘But the question mark is already there and ignoring it won’t make it go away’. This becomes a justification for Cameron’s position and a reason why the EU needs to change. Danger to the EU, Cameron has earlier said, comes not from those who believe in change but from ‘those who denounce new thinking as heresy. In its long history Europe has experience of heretics who turned out to have a point’. This is rather dramatic – but that Cameron is casting himself and his country in that role is clear. He goes on to articulate his ideas with a marked increase in uses of personal pronouns: ‘my vision’, ‘I want us’, ‘I would ask’ and so on. Cameron’s vision, then, is born of his unique perspicacity which is a product of his

Britishness but also consists of the fact that he can see the fixed nature of Britishness and thus instruct the rest of the EU to wise-up and start thinking about how to adapt to a new and changed world.

There are other parts to this speech which are extremely interesting. In particular a section at the end addresses the British people, urging rejection of a no vote in a putative referendum using the classic forms of reactionary argument identified by Hirschmann (1991) - futility, perversity and jeopardy: we are so intertwined we can't really leave; the UK would end up with less power and subject to EU rules anyway; there is a risk of losing power. In this way Cameron developed a conservative case for remaining in the EU: to leave would be a rash disruption of the status quo. Similar arguments would be used in the actual referendum campaign in 2016. The failure of that campaign is, I think, foreshadowed in this speech (although, of course, the perspicacity of hindsight is easy to demonstrate). Before Cameron could make his Conservative case for Remain he decided he had to develop the ethos of a credible Eurosceptic and in this speech gave centre stage to fundamentally Eurosceptic premises: that Britain is distinct from its European partners, uniquely hard-headed and concerned with its own interests – naturally so in fact. In constituting that attitude as a given, as natural and unchangeable, something the EU really ought to just recognize and accept, Cameron was dancing with doxa but, following rather than leading the steps, he was always dancing to someone else's tune. When the music stopped it was Cameron who found he no longer had a seat.

## **Conclusion**



In this chapter I have tried to explain as best I can the context out of which people like me think about language in politics. In doing so I have emphasised what is specific to that thinking, contrasting RPA with schools such as CDA and CDS. I have left to one side the many and important things which are shared in common. In particular I have stressed a focus upon contestation of political language as well as decontestation, with a particular emphasis on the ways in which the use of concepts can be constrained by historical context or tradition (although the space for new actions is never entirely circumscribed). In looking at instances of rhetoric we are looking at moves in ongoing debates and looking for the ways in which thinking is being manifested, shaped and reshaped. In a brief discussion of Cameron's Bloomberg speech we saw that a central concept within it was that of Britishness. At times this was deployed catachrestically as a name for an ethos, a set of virtues and capacities and a way of thinking. Cameron tried to use that name as a premise in a deduction the conclusions of which were at once that Europe should change and that the UK should stay in the EU. But he could not make that argument hold in part because he subordinated it to his short-term need to keep his party opponents quiet. In promoting a concept of Britishness central to the doxa of his opponents he failed to challenge or rework that doxa and found himself trapped within it. When the actual referendum came around that idea of Britain belonged to the Leave camp and Cameron found himself – unsurprisingly – on the losing side. He made his opponents' argument for them.

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