

POLITICAL LEADERSHIP: CHARACTER & PERFORMANCE.  
A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF BRITISH POLITICAL LEADERSHIP,  
1997-2010.

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Thesis summary**

Aston University.

Political Leadership: Character & Performance. A Comparative Analysis of British Political Leadership, 1997-2010.

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Doctor of Philosophy.  
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Classical and contemporary scholarship on leadership has referred to political performance and the ability of political actors to deploy the self to political purpose. Literature on contemporary British politics (Hennessy, 2001; Marquand, 2008; King, 2009) has highlighted the qualitative shift in political leadership from the mid-1990s towards a focus upon the image, style, celebrity and performance of political leaders, and the shift towards the presidentialisation or semi-presidentialisation of the prime minister (Foley, 2001). However, the literature has lacked a focus upon political performance and a methodology for assessing leadership performance within cultural and institutional contexts. This thesis assesses British political leadership performance from 1997-2010 through the proposal of a framework of political performance to suit comparative purpose. The framework consisting of culture, institutions and performance is used to assess the performance of the case studies (Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron, and Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg in the televised Leaders' Debates of 2010). The application of the framework to the case studies will allow us to a) analyse political performance within given cultural and institutional contexts; b) establish the character traits and other aspects of a politician's political persona; and c) appraise the role and effects of performance and persona upon the political process.

Keywords: Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron, Nick Clegg, Leaders' Debates.

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## **1 INTRODUCTION**

## 1a Overview of the thesis

The personalisation of politics, including, the role of political celebrity and the expansion of the institution of the modern media are two significant developments within the British polity which have facilitated an “actor-centred” trend (Shaw, 2007). Consequentially, the mediation of political performance, personalisation, symbolic leadership politics, discourse, image, character, and the role of the political ‘persona’ have become central to understanding contemporary British political leadership. Culture and institutions are contexts which frame political action and provide scope for the personal as political phenomena. This research undertakes a comparative analysis of party leadership performance in the public realm from 1997-2010. The case studies used in this research are Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg in the Leaders’ Debates. The research question addressed is:

- Are cultural and institutional configurations significant and consequential for contemporary British party leadership performance?

Three related sub-research questions are also addressed. How do political actors use the self to political purpose? What is the significance of political actors deploying their person and ‘persona’ to affect and structure political outcomes? What is the relationship between performance and mediation?

Chapter 2, literature review focuses upon selected classic and contemporary leadership theories. The literature contributes towards a framework not of political leadership *per se* but of political performance. This is developed and used to analyse the leadership performances of the case studies. The framework is a contribution to political science methodologies used in analysing leadership performance.

The framework of political performance is presented in chapter 3. Culture, institutions and performance are the three constituent parts of the framework and are theorised and reviewed in sub-chapters 3.1, 3.2 and 3.3.<sup>1</sup>

In sub-chapter 3.1, two characteristics which constitute part of contemporary political culture and structure leadership performance are reviewed and theorised: the development of personalisation of politics including celebrity, and shifts in Left/Right political ideology. Political leadership performance in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s is referred to in order to understand the relationship between political culture and leadership. The gradual breakdown of the post-war consensus provided a cultural context in which the strong and uncompromising leadership style of Margaret Thatcher gained political expression. Thatcher demonstrated that personalised as opposed to collective leadership did, at least for a time have performative significance, and, was considered as a response to the social, political and economic problems of the 1970s. This sub-chapter contextualises leadership performance, and identifies the significance of contemporary culture for the case studies in this research e.g. the impact of celebrity upon political actors, and the lack of Left/Right political distinction offering new opportunities for leaders to personalise the self to political purpose.

Sub-chapter 3.2 identifies political institutions as contexts of leadership performance. The purpose of this sub-chapter is to understand the role of institutions and the relationship between institutions and individual effects. Institutionalism as the theoretical approach to studying political institutions is referenced. Constructivist institutionalism is appraised as this approach stresses the role of language and

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<sup>1</sup> (Chapters 2 and 3 review the literature relevant to the thesis. In great part, however, many of the chapters include references to and analyses of the literature informing this thesis have case study relevance).

discourse in political life and is relevant to this research on leadership performance within institutional contexts. Thereafter, the institution of the political party and the cabinet are analysed as institutional contexts which offer performative opportunities and/or constraints for contemporary leadership performance.

Sub-chapter 3.3 describes leadership performance as taking place within and upon cultural and institutional configurations. Performance exists physically and discursively. Physical and discursive performance, both stresses style and image. These are not strictly speaking performance in the sense that, for example, gesture and discourse are. However, style and image have performative significance in that the image of a leader exists physically through comportment and/or discursively through utterances. We take image and style analytically to be part of performance. This sub-chapter outlines four performative categories which are significant to the analysis of the leadership performance of the case studies. The performative categories are discursive performances including speeches, responses to events, ideological/policy performances, and performance to the media e.g. interviews.

Chapter 4 describes the research methodology. As the main emphasis of the thesis is the analysis of leadership performance, the methods used to analyse the four performative categories are detailed. Two additional strands of the methodology are outlined: elite interviews conducted with senior practitioners who constitute the 'Westminster context' within which the case studies operate; and a comparative case study approach which allowed in-depth examination of the leadership case studies within the context of British Parliamentary institutions and their cultural conditions.

Chapter 5 analyses elite interviews conducted with senior practitioners who constitute part of British politics. Six groups of elites were interviewed: former party leaders and chiefs of staff, speechwriters, caricaturists, media practitioners, policy

makers, and leaders of quasi and non governmental organisations. The research participants illuminated the specific context within which contemporary British political leadership performance takes place and the insights derived from the interviewees are primary data. The data is used in the case study chapters as leadership contexts. Chapter 5 identifies the specific Westminster context which the case studies operate within and upon from the perspectives of the practitioners interviewed which subsequently affects and structures the character and persona of political leaders in the public realm.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 apply the framework of political performance as developed in chapter 2 to the three main case studies: Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and David Cameron.

Chapter 6 analyses the performance of Tony Blair as opposition leader (1994-1997) and as prime minister (1997-2007) and the effects of performance upon cultural and institutional contexts. Specific examples of performance are analysed in order to illustrate the effects of personalised leadership style and its operation within a personalised polity, the role of the media and portrayal of leadership actors, the role of symbolic leadership politics *vis-à-vis* the political party, and political institutions offering performative opportunities and constraints. Accounts from Peter Mandelson, Alastair Campbell, Philip Gould and Anthony Giddens – key actors who were central to the development and mediation of New Labour and the mediation of Tony Blair's public persona are referenced. This chapter uses primary data i.e. accounts from the Westminster interviewees, and secondary data in the form of speeches.

Chapter 7 analyses the premiership of Gordon Brown (2007-2010) which was characterised by a series of negative attacks upon the person and the 'persona' and relentless discussions about Brown's leadership qualities and suitability as prime

minister. Chapter 7 examines a central feature of the thesis i.e. the demonstration of the relationship between performance and persona.

In Chapter 8, David Cameron's leadership of the Conservative party from 2005-2007 is analysed. Context and tradition (the party and Conservatism) are conditions of Cameron's leadership performance. Cameron altered the appearance of the party by changing the appearance of 'New Right Conservatism'. He combined two traditions which already existed within the party e.g. 'One Nation' and 'New Right' Conservatism, to constitute modern 'Compassionate Conservatism'. This narrative revised the image of the Conservative party and was used to develop Cameron's political persona.

Chapter 9 has three sub-chapters: 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3 which correspond to each of the three televised Leaders' Debates which took place ahead of the 2010 General Election. The framework of political performance is used to analyse the performances of Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg in each of the Debates.

Chapter 10 concludes the thesis and stresses the significance of culture and institutions for contemporary political leadership performance. The conclusions are divided into theoretical and substantive points.

## **2 POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND THE ELABORATION OF A FRAMEWORK OF POLITICAL PERFORMANCE**

## 2a Overview

Contemporary scholarship on political leadership has referred to the ways in which political actors use the self to political purpose but has lacked methodological emphasis for analysing political performance *per se*. This chapter refers first to the contributions of three classical theorists and one contemporary theorist of political leadership (2.1); our purpose is to retain the essential points from the four theorists relating to performance which contribute to the proposal of a framework of political performance to suit contemporary comparative purpose. Thereafter, four contemporary models of political performance are critically reviewed (2.2); their contributions and what we consider to be their shortcomings (in terms of our own analysis) are analysed, and consequences drawn for our own proposal of a framework of political performance (2.3). The four theorists reviewed are:

- (2.1.1) Aristotle. (2004). *The Art of Rhetoric*. Translated by H.C.Lawson-Tancred. St. Ives: Penguin Books.
- (2.1.2) Machiavelli, N. (2003). *The Prince*. Translated by George Bull. London: Penguin Books.
- (2.1.3) Weber, M. (1947) *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Translated by A. M. Henderson & Talcott Parsons. London: The Free Press of Glencoe. (The sociologist, Max Weber, although perhaps more of a modern than classical, is included in the overview of classic literature on leadership as his interest in authority, power and institutions and notions of 'charisma' position him as part of the canon of traditional political leadership studies).
- (2.1.4) Kane, J. (2001). *The Politics of Moral Capital*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

We then review the following four authors which elaborate frameworks for the analysis of leadership performance:

- (2.2.1) Greenstein, F. I. (2000). *The Presidential Difference*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- (2.2.2) Skowronek, S. (1993). *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush*. Cambridge: Belknap Press.
- (2.2.3) Bell, D. S., Hargrove, E. C. & Theakston, K. (1999). 'Skill in Context: a Comparison of Politicians'. *Presidential Studies Quarterly*. Vol, 23. No, 3. pp. 528-548.
- (2.2.4) Hennessy, P. (2000). *The Prime Minister*. London: Penguin Books.

## 2.1 Classic and contemporary leadership theories

### 2.1.1 Aristotle. (2004). *The Art of Rhetoric*

Aristotle's writings on politics are vast. *The Art of Rhetoric* which outlines three rhetorical techniques: *ethos* (the person), *pathos* (use of emotion) and *logos* (use of logic) is the text that makes a significant contribution towards our research on political performance. The three rhetorical proofs are pertinent to our analysis of contemporary political leadership as they stress the nature of communication, the role of discourse, and relationship between speaker and audience.

*Ethos* relates to the persuasive appeal of one's character. According to Aristotle

"proofs from character are produced, whenever a speech is given in such a way as to render the speaker worthy of credence – we more readily and sooner believe reasonable men on all matters in general and absolutely on questions where precision is impossible and two views can be maintained" (Aristotle, p. 74-5).

For Aristotle, there are two determinants of the character of the speaker; he favours middle-aged men and those who have an elite status e.g. positive ancestry, wealth and power. The moral credence of a speaker, for Aristotle, is determined by age and social status. We retain Aristotle's characterisation of *ethos*; however his description

will be adjusted to suit contemporary purpose e.g. age is a context of performance, as is the background of a speaker, and personal/political trajectory will be significant.

Aristotle's second rhetorical proof is *pathos* which refers to "the power of emotion to sway the mind when claims are accepted on the basis of how they make us feel without us fully analysing the claim itself" (ibid, p. 141). *Pathos* is the ability of the speaker to evoke and create, and control and skew the emotions of the audience to persuasive purpose. The use of *pathos* by political leaders today includes, though is not limited to the use of, metaphors, emotionally charged language, biblical references; and a whole range of other discursive/communicative techniques e.g. alliteration, rhetorical questions, use of opposites (such techniques are elaborated in chapter 4, methodology) all of which may or may not contribute towards positive political endorsements and followership.

*Logos* is the third rhetorical proof and appeals to reason and logic; it is thus the appeal to one's intellect through the argument itself. In this form "proof is achieved by the speech, when we demonstrate either a real or apparent persuasive aspect of each particular matter" (ibid, p. 75).

Aristotle's triptych of rhetorical proofs is relevant to our research on contemporary political leadership as it stresses:

- The use of rhetoric in the public realm and its deployment to persuasive political effect.
- The importance of moral credence which we refer to as persuasive character. Aristotle stresses age and social status as determinants of the moral credence of a speaker. We modernise Aristotle's concept of *ethos* by alluding to a series of specifically leadership orientated traits e.g. policy vision, judgement, articulation of vision, decisiveness and relationships with

colleagues. For our purposes, *ethos* includes the personal and political background of a speaker e.g. trajectory.

- The communicative event and its significance in terms of audience and followership.

### **2.1.2 Machiavelli, N. (2003). *The Prince***

Machiavelli's *The Prince* is the text that makes a contribution to this research on political leadership performance. *The Prince* was written in 1513 during the latter part of the Renaissance, a period in which Italy was characterised by civil war. Machiavelli outlines the ways in which leaders should govern principalities and maintain political power through the use of a varied repertoire of character traits referred to as *virtu*. Machiavellian *virtu* should be deployed as and when deemed necessary by circumstance; dispositions associated with *virtu* include: liberal (with money) and miserly; generous and rapacious; cruel and compassionate; faithless and faithful; affable and haughty; lascivious and chaste; selfish and caring; hard and easy; grave and frivolous; and religious and unbelieving (see Machiavelli, 2003, p. 50). Machiavelli also refers to *fortuna* which relates to events and circumstances that leaders face, both good and bad. The relationship between *virtu* and *fortuna* which exist as character/disposition and circumstance/events is considered as important to our research e.g. how do events/circumstances affect leadership performance? Or, how does the deployment of a range of character traits affect leadership performance in the public realm? And, can *fortuna* offer opportunities and/or constraints?

The main point that Machiavelli is making is that leadership and power (and circumstances) are inextricably linked; in order for a leader to remain in power he must "have a flexible disposition, varying as fortune and circumstances dictate" and that the "ends [retaining power] justify the means" (Machiavelli, 2003, p. 57). There is

another point that Machiavelli makes that is relevant to our thesis. He makes reference to the importance of image, perceived character traits, and alludes to the relationship between a leader's publicly perceived political persona and the audience:

“men in general judge by their eyes rather than their hands; because everyone is in a position to watch, few are in a position to come in close touch with you. Everyone sees what you appear to be, few experience what you really are... the common people are always impressed by appearances and results” (ibid, p. 58).

The contributions that *The Prince* makes to our enquiry of contemporary political leadership are his references to a series of political dispositions relating to the changing environment (*virtu* and *fortuna*). These are insightful regarding the relationship between personality, or the persona and institutions and events. Machiavelli's repertoire of contradictory dispositions highlights the role of character traits as constituent elements of the political persona in national consciousness as well as the cultural endorsement of leadership dispositions. Also, whether *virtu* (dispositions) can affect *fortuna* (circumstances) and vice-versa.

### **2.1.3 Weber, M. (1947). The Theory of Social and Economic Organization**

The sociologist Max Weber was primarily interested in forms of authority which characterised groups and society. He identified three types of legitimate authority: traditional, rational-legal and charismatic authority. Although Weber's triptych is rooted in the sociological tradition of analysing social structures, his reference to charismatic authority as existing with an individual has positioned Weber as part of the canon of traditional thinkers on political leadership. Weber defines charismatic authority as:

“a certain quality of an individual personality by virtue of which he is set apart from ordinary men and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities. These are such as are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as

exemplary, and on the basis of them the individual concerned is treated as a leader” (Weber, 1947, p.358-359).

In order to illuminate the concept of charismatic authority, Weber goes on to state:

“both rational and traditional authority are specifically forms of everyday routine control of action; while the charismatic type is the direct antithesis to this” and “charismatic authority is specifically irrational in the sense of being foreign to all rules’ and ‘charismatic authority repudiates the past, and is in this sense a specifically revolutionary force” (1947, p. 361-2).

Max Weber’s concept of ‘charisma’ suffers from two major deficiencies relevant to this analysis; first, his vocabulary of ‘ideal types’ is vague and difficult to apply. Second, Weber’s mythical and religious references highlight contradictions regarding the concept of charisma as semi-sacred or inherently religious or both. Methodologically, Weber does indicate that the relationship between leaders and followers is important:

“how the quality in question would be ultimately judged from any ethical, aesthetic, or other such point of view is naturally entirely indifferent for purposes of definition. What is alone important is how the individual is actually regarded by those subject to charismatic authority, by his ‘followers’ or disciples” (ibid, p. 359).

Given that followers are important in terms of endorsing leaders, it is difficult to measure the judgements and qualities that followers ascribe to leaders; this raises a third methodological problem in terms of conceptualising charisma. For charisma to exist and for leaders to be positively judged and endorsed by followers, the role of character, persuasive language and communication as well as performative actions are significant. Despite some definitional and methodological problems associated with ‘charismatic authority’, Weber does stress the relationship between institutions and personal authority, leadership performance and positive endorsement, and the perception of the audience as significant in terms of constituting the persona of leaders.

#### **2.1.4 Kane, J. (2001). The Politics of Moral Capital**

John Kane's concept of 'moral capital' has constituted part of the literature on contemporary political leadership. Kane makes reference to Robert Putnam's concept of social capital (Putnam, 1993) and postulates that moral capital is essentially the same concept, except that moral capital is located primarily in individuals as opposed to societies, as Putnam indicated.

Kane considers capital to be "wealth in action" and defines moral capital as "moral prestige – whether of an individual, an organisation or a cause – in useful service" (Kane, 2001, p. 6, 7). For Kane, political agents or institutions can achieve moral grounding by

"avowing their service to some set of fundamental values, principles and goals that find a resonant response in a significant number of people. When such people judge the agent or institution to be both faithful and effective in serving those values and goals, they are likely to bestow some quantum of respect and approval that is of great political benefit to the receiver. The quantum is the agent's moral capital" (ibid, p. 10).

The ability of an individual or institution to accrue moral capital depends upon positive judgements from the public. If positive endorsements are received, this can provide the basis for legitimating forthcoming actions of the individual or institution concerned without much scrutiny; he states that the disposition of morality by an individual can help in accruing moral capital. Kane also points out that possessing moral capital does not necessarily equate with an individual being moral and cites totalitarian movements of the twentieth century as an example. For Kane "if moral capital is a genuine political resource then it is one based more on an attractive than on a compulsive power" (ibid, p. 25). However, that is not to say that a compulsive power cannot accrue moral capital.

Kane's concept of 'moral capital' illuminates our understanding of political persuasion and the relationship between leaders and followers, though he does not fully explore the relationship between moral capital, institutions and circumstances. We use the following insights from Kane's work in our research:

- Kane's work highlights symbolic politics, in particular the symbolism of the leader *vis-à-vis* the audience.
- The relationship between leaders and followers is an important one which legitimates the activities, authority and status of political actors; according to Kane, the crux of this relationship is persuasion and the appearance of likeness with the audience. Leaders therefore have a responsibility to exercise power to positive political effect and not negatively.
- Kane's concept of moral capital emphasises the importance of character traits and political dispositions.
- Moral capital is a personal resource that is attributed to leaders through positive judgements by the audience. Moral capital thus incorporates issues relating to power, authority, legitimacy as well as the relationship between speaker and audience.

The following section reviews selected texts on political performance in order to provide a research focus which constitutes in the proposal of a framework of political performance.

## **2.2 Analysing leadership performance**

Much of the literature on political leadership performance emanates from the United States. The highly personalised role of the presidency lends itself well to analysis of the personal as political phenomena. Edinger (1976) *Political Leadership in*

*Industrialized Societies*; Barber's psychologically orientated work *The Presidential Character* (1972) identifies the relationship between presidential character and political careers through a framework of active-positive, active-negative, passive-positive and passive-negative; Paige (1972) *Political Leadership* and *The Scientific Study of Political Leadership* (1978); and MacGregor Burns (1978) *Leadership* were texts that were significant in investigating leadership and individual effects. Thereafter, the literature focused upon leadership techniques and political communication, the relationship between character, the office of the presidency, and political outcomes. Edelman's *The Symbolic Uses of Politics* (1985) identifies the use of referential and condensation symbols by political elites to achieve political quiescence. The nature of political communication and outcomes is highlighted by Edelman. *Humbuggery and Manipulation. The Art of Leadership* by Bailey (1988) uses a wide range of political and non-political case studies to demonstrate the use of chicanery in leadership. He goes on to describe the exercise of political power and inevitable use of manipulation. *Presidential Power* by Neustadt (1990) explains how persuasion and bargaining are essential to presidential power, and how the personal is used to political purpose. Skowronek (1993) *The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush* emphasises the ways in which contextual/situational factors offer presidents opportunities and restrictions. Greenstein (2000) *The Presidential Difference* proposes a six-point criterion which is used to measure the success of presidential case studies (political communication, organisational capacity, political skill, public policy vision, cognitive style and emotional intelligence). Greenstein's emphasis upon emotional intelligence highlights character traits as constituting a leader's public persona.

Our purpose is not to review each text, two texts from the literature on presidential performance are reviewed (Greenstein, 2000 and Skowronek, 1993) in order to constitute to the development of the framework of political performance. Thereafter,

two recent European texts on political leadership performance are similarly reviewed (Bell et al, 1999 and Hennessy, 2000).

### **2.2.1 Greenstein, F. I. (2000). The Presidential Difference**

Greenstein's work is exclusively about the American presidency. He assesses leaders from Roosevelt (FDR) to Clinton, against six categories which he refers to as measures of presidential success. Greenstein's first category is public communication e.g. the communicative strategies deployed by presidents such as the deployment of rhetoric and public presentations to produce tangible political outcomes. FDR is referred to as the benchmark for his successors "as a communicator, Roosevelt is to later presidents what Mozart and Beethoven have been to their successors – imitable but endlessly inspiring" (Greenstein, 2000, p. 22). Organisational capacity is the second category and relates to the ability to manage staff, which may include rivals and adversaries. The dynamics between leader and cabinet/inner circle are brought to the fore. Political skill is the third category which Greenstein relates to the fourth, public policy vision. Greenstein assumes a dialectical relationship between the two, and states that both relate to the operational (or mechanistic) side of the presidency and constitute the president's vision of public policy. The fifth measure of presidential success is cognitive style, defined as the way in which the president "processes the Niagara of advice and information that comes his way" (ibid, p. 6). Greenstein takes the view that intelligence and academic skills are determinants of cognitive style. In some ways this is in fact true, that academic qualifications/skills do in fact lend themselves well to cognitive style; however this is not true in all cases. John Kennedy's ability to overcome his 'presidential playboy' image as president was partly through his (being seen) spending weekends reading both official memoranda and other literature on politics. Kennedy's perceived mastery of politics whilst in office illustrates that cognitive style can be something that is

learned as opposed to something which is 'inherent'. The sixth and final category is emotional intelligence and refers to the president's "ability to manage his emotions and turn them to constructive purposes, rather than being dominated by them and allowing them to diminish his leadership" (ibid, p. 6).

Greenstein's six-point model against which the effectiveness of presidents can be measured (public communication, organisational capacity, political skill, public policy vision, cognitive style, and emotional intelligence) relies heavily upon the personal characteristics of presidents and takes into far less account situational, institutional and cultural factors and their impact upon the political process. Greenstein's emphasis upon the personal relates to high levels of personalisation evident in U.S. politics. His model is therefore constrained to polities in which emphasis is placed upon executive figures, polities such as America, France, and, arguably, Britain.

Two points from Greenstein's model are particularly relevant for our research. Greenstein's category on public communication highlights the relationship between discourse, performance and political outcomes. Secondly, the emphasis upon emotional intelligence can illuminate character traits as constituting a leader's political persona.

### **2.2.2 Skowronek, S. (1993). The Politics Presidents Make: Leadership from John Adams to George Bush**

Skowronek's model 'Recurrent Structures of Presidential Authority' (1993, p. 36) consists of four categories: reconstruction, disjunction, pre-emption and articulation which appropriate themselves to cyclical moments of presidential power:

<i>Previously established commitments</i>	<i>President's political identity</i>	
	Opposed	Affiliated
Vulnerable	Politics of reconstruction	Politics of disjunction
Resilient	Politics of pre-emption	Politics of articulation

Skowronek demonstrates that at each stage of the cycle there are different forms of presidential leadership and at each stage the leaders have different – but clearly identifiable – opportunities and restrictions. Central to Skowronek's model are two contexts associated with political authority: whether a leader is opposed to the pre-existing coalition or is affiliated with it. A president's position in this dichotomy (or the movement between the two) informs "cycles of political time", and "points to the qualitative differences of presidential leadership" (Skowronek, 1993, p. 35).

Skowronek's model can be seen as the reverse of Greenstein's. Skowronek's emphasis upon contextual/situational factors (reconstruction, disjunction, articulation, and pre-emption) expressed as cyclical moments of presidential power is a model in which contextual scenarios offer leaders opportunities and restrictions. The model does not take into account personal and cultural factors which are crucial to the understanding of political life in the U.S. as elsewhere. Skowronek illustrates that situational factors (albeit understated in the literature on U.S. leadership) are important when looking at the performance of U.S. presidential actors, and when understanding U.S. political discourse more generally.

The insight that we take from Skowronek's work is that context and institutions matter; political institutions are frames or contexts which condition leadership performance. For our enquiry on contemporary British politics, we would propose a set of institutions specific to the British prime minister e.g. formal political institutions

including the cabinet and political party and the institution of the media; we return to this point in section 2.3.

Let us remark on the predominantly American models that we have reviewed. Both Greenstein and Skowronek's models have an insularity owing to the high levels of personalisation evident in American politics. The models therefore cannot be easily taken out of context, and when they are they prove very uncomfortable with their new context. Both David Bell and Kevin Theakston have attempted to redeploy such models to different contexts (Kevin Theakston redeployed Greenstein's model to post World War II British leaders; and David Bell redeployed Skowronek's model to the European context, more specifically to Fourth and Fifth Republic France) (see Theakston (2006) and Bell (2007)). We can make a few brief remarks on Theakston and Bell's redeployment. Firstly, can studies of the history of the American presidency (with its longevity of over 200 years, and the cultural implications of this) be transposed to different contexts? When such studies transcend political time and space do they lose their original emphasis? Or do they gain new a completely new emphasis? The question of what is lost and what is gained by conceptual redeployment is one which is important and reinforces the complex nature of studying political leadership as involving mutable relations between culture, institutions and performance and also possibly some constraints.

### **2.2.3 Bell, D. S., Hargrove, E. C. & Theakston, K. (1999). 'Skill in Context: A Comparison of Politicians'**

The model proposed by Bell, Hargrove and Theakston has been adapted from an earlier model by Hargrove (1998) which was exclusively about the U.S. presidency. The modification of the model means that it is not geographically constrained to

American political leadership and now serves comparative purpose. Bell et al's model entitled 'Skill in Context' (1999, p. 530) is as follows:

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1. Political skill	3. Strategic leadership
Bargaining and leadership of coalitions	Purpose
Heresthetics (maneuver) a	Discernment
Rhetoric	Prudence
Character as a skill	4. Teaching reality (or illusion)
Psychological health	Teaching
Moral purpose	Preaching
Personal integrity	Demagogy
2. Skill in context	Cultural traps
Historical situation	Short-run or long-run politics
and policy	
Electoral politics	
Dynamics of governments	
Policy problems	
Policy achievements and failures	
Assessment of skill in context	

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- a. the term *heresthetics* denotes clever maneuvers for putting the opponent on the defensive and was invented by Riker (1986).

The model proposed by Bell *et al* "permits the comparison and assessment of personal political skill in relation to contextual factors" (1999, p. 529). 'Skill in Context' therefore analyses the impact of personal leadership traits upon the institutions within which such leaders operate. Bell et al apply each of the four categories of the model to three case studies: George Bush (senior), John Major and Jacques Chirac. In so doing, character traits, the role of language and historic/institutional contexts permit analysis of the individual *vis-à-vis* political institutions. The authors note that each leader was a transactional leader; however, the operation of a transaction leader within a prime ministerial system clearly differs from a presidential system; however,

their analysis of the context within which their case studies operate provides the background for the characterisation of the leaders as transactional e.g. John Major's leadership of the Conservative party in 1992 was deeply contextualised by Thatcherism. Bell et al note that "transactional leaders [Bush, Major and Chirac] were appropriate for the Conservative politics of their time as previous policy themes had burned out and an ad hoc style of leadership matched the new situation" (1999, p. 546).

Bell et al make three contributions to this research. First, 'Skill in Context' assesses leaders according to political and personal skills and therefore is an appraisal of character traits. The character traits that constitute a political persona are important as is the performance of the persona within cultural and institutional contexts. The authors make reference to character and in the case of Chirac, to political persona. However, they place less emphasis upon the interaction of character within the institutional configurations of the office of the prime minister or president e.g. how did the image of John Major as a weak prime minister affect his premiership, policies and political outcomes? Second, the authors make reference to culture, specifically to 'cultural traps' e.g. "the American messianic impulse, the British ambivalence about being part of "Europe", and the search for grandeur in French foreign policy" (1999, p. 530); whilst the historic influence of culture is significant for leadership, perhaps more emphasis upon the immediate culture within each polity would help in the analysis of their case studies. Third, Bell et al make reference to the personal and political trajectory of the case studies but do not include trajectory in the model itself. For our purposes, the analysis of both personal and political trajectory is formative of character; more importantly, trajectory is a condition which conditions leadership performance and therefore can affect political outcomes.

#### **2.2.4 Hennessy, P. (2000). The Prime Minister**

Hennessy proposes not a model of political leadership *per se* but “the ingredients of assessment for premiership performance” (Hennessy, 2000, p. 542-3). Hennessy’s criteria for assessing the British prime minister come from a post-war historical-political perspective which is advantageous for our research as he includes reference to history and institutions and the current context within which leaders operate. Hennessy’s criteria for assessing post-war British political leadership are:

##### **1. Backdrop to the premiership**

- Condition of the economy and society
- Parliamentary arithmetic
- Internal condition of premier’s party
- Disposition of the media to the premier, his/her government, his/her party

##### **2. Management capacity**

- Premier’s skill at managing the status quo (i.e., the prosaic but necessary on-going functions of central government)
- Handling crises (including the media aspects of crisis management)

##### **3. Insight and perception**

- Personal (including self-awareness)
- Political (sensitivity towards colleagues, official and party)
- Policy (a capacity to see beyond the shibboleths of established or manifesto positions)

##### **4. Changes and innovation**

- Planned
- Improvised
- Contingent upon unforeseen events

##### **5. Constitutional and procedural**

- The running of No. 10 and the balance within it between the political and the administrative
- The handling of Cabinet and the apparatus of collegiality
- Managing Whitehall and the career Civil Service

- The personal handling of the House of Commons; the care and attention paid to the institutional of Parliament and the management of his/her party in both Commons and Lords
- Probity and decency of the system (Prime Minister as manager of codes, ministerial and Civil Service)

Hennessey's criteria are helpful as the basis for assessing the performance of the British prime minister as the balance between the personal attributes of a prime minister (political comportment: rule bound behaviour; disposition: handling of crises, attitude towards staff; policy decisions and the exercise of political arithmetic and judgement; vision and foresight); and institutions (internal condition of the political party, state of the economy, maintaining the day-to-day smooth running of parliament and Number 10). This provides a helpful methodology for the analysis of leadership performance, as it includes the ability of prime ministers to respond effectively the media. Hennessey does not use the criteria for assessing leadership; his work, which balances the personal and the institutional, is helpful to us methodologically; however, political trajectory is not included, and, as stated above, trajectory is considered as a context of leadership performance.

### **2.3 Proposal of a framework of political performance**

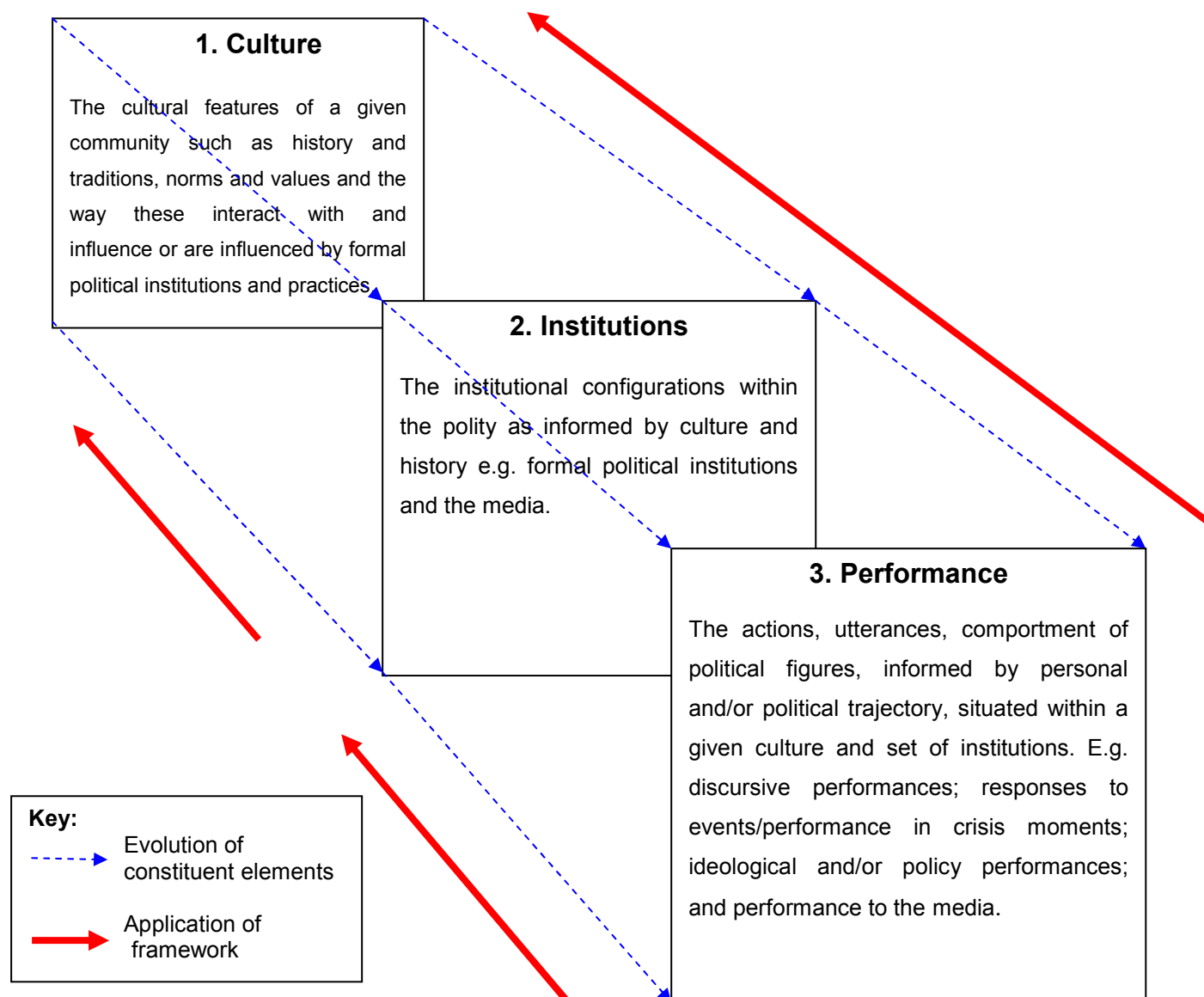
Taking into account the contributions (and for our purposes) shortcomings of the literature reviewed in this chapter, the following insights contribute towards the development of a framework of political performance:

- Aristotle stresses the role of language in the public realm and its deployment to political effect; the importance of the act of communication and its significance in terms of audience and followership and character.

- Machiavellian *virtu* and *fortuna* illuminate our understanding of the relationship between political performance and circumstances/contexts of leadership performance. Also, whether *virtu* (dispositions) can affect *fortuna* (circumstances) and vice-versa and impact upon leadership image.
- Weber highlights the relationship between institutions and personal authority; and the mythical relationship between leaders and followers.
- Kane's concept of 'moral capital' brings to the fore character traits and political dispositions. He highlights symbolic politics, in particular, the symbolism of the leader *vis-à-vis* the audience.
- Greenstein stresses the role of the personal and its use to political effect but does not acknowledge the institutional context within which the personal gains expression. Skowronek's model is the reverse of Greenstein and over-emphasises context and situation and not the personal. From Greenstein, we take the role of the personal and its use to political effect; from Skowronek, we acknowledge the institutional context of leadership performance.
- Bell et al refer to character traits, the role of language and historic/institutional contexts which permit analysis of the individual in relation to political institutions. For our purposes, we include the appraisal of character traits and emphasise the interaction of political persona, culture and institutions. We also place emphasis upon trajectory as a condition of leadership performance.
- Hennessy achieves a balance between the personal attributes of a prime minister and institutions, thus providing a helpful methodology for the analysis of leadership performance.

From this range of contributions we have drawn concepts which help us constitute the framework of political performance which relates performance to culture and institutions. As below, the framework is diagrammatically expressed.

Figure 2.1 A framework of political performance



Culture, institutions and performance constitute the framework of political performance.<sup>2</sup> The diagram represents the three elements in order of their evolution i.e. culture within a given polity influences institutional configurations which provide political protagonists with stages upon which performance (as forms of political action) takes place. This is expressed by the blue arrows which depict the primary

<sup>2</sup> The framework of political performance was developed with Professor John Gaffney; I have used it in this thesis and adapted it specifically to the analysis of British political leadership performance.

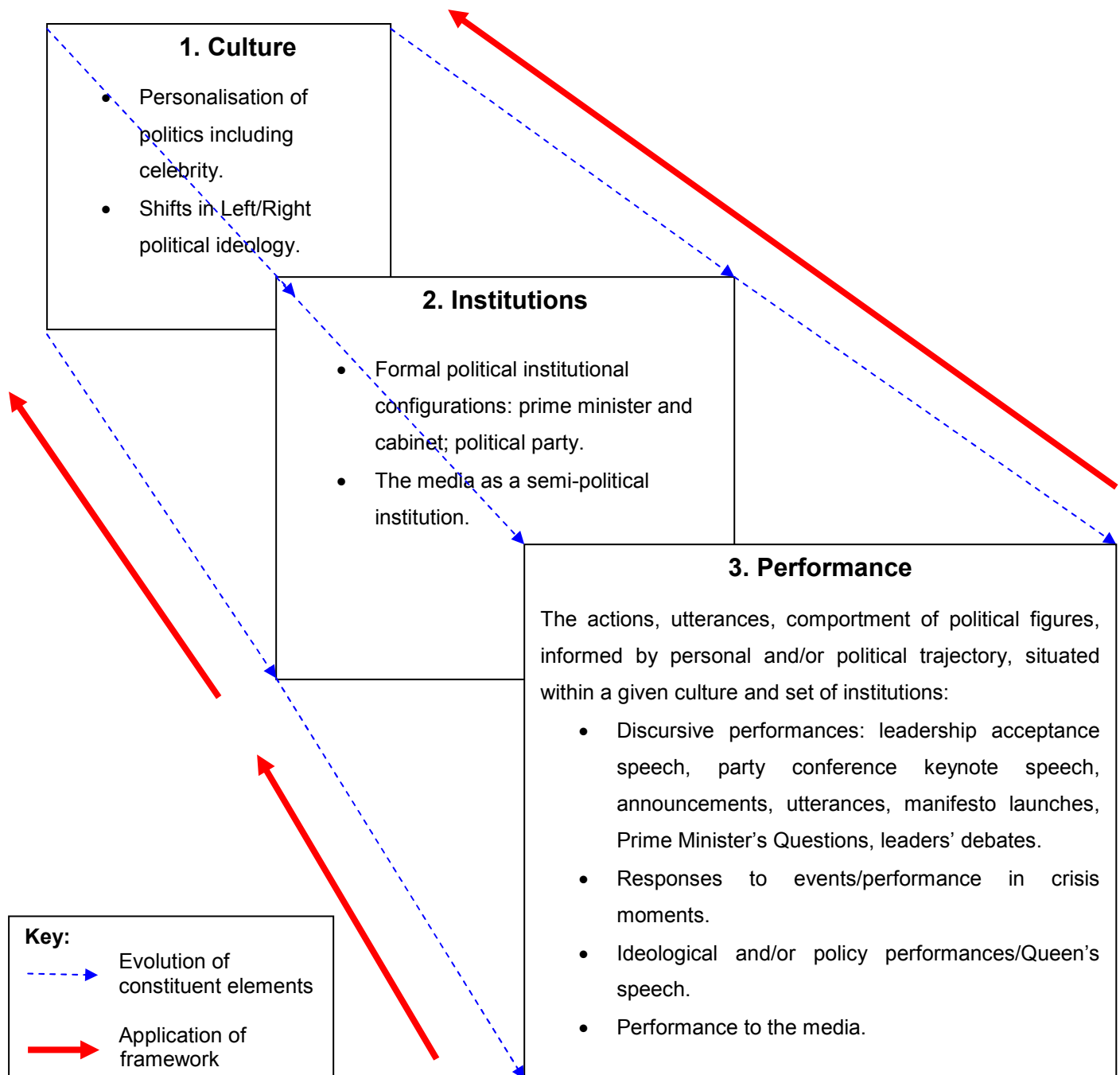
direction of influence. The framework is applied to the leadership case studies by analysing moments of political performance and then identifying their impact upon cultural and/or institutional contexts; as expressed by the red arrows.

The three-dimensional framework has a degree of political mutability; it is not confined to polities which place emphasis upon leaders, neither is its use framed only for polities which emphasise institutional contexts. It can be applied to political leaders and aspirant leaders who operate within different institutional and cultural configurations by changing the categories within culture and institutions so that they are relevant to the case study and polity in question. The framework provides an appreciation of the personal and the symbolic as crucial to the understanding of politics as such aspects are included in the framework.

The application of the framework to the case studies allows us to understand politics as performance, and character and persona as political phenomena, which are situated within broader cultural and institutional configurations. It is through analysing moments of political performance (as forms of political action) that take place within a set of institutions within a broader set of cultural norms that the perceived character, persona and image of a leader gains expression in the public realm. By looking at politics as performance, we are illustrating the role of the personal as formative of the development of political practice. The framework takes into account path-dependent cultural and institutional frameworks and the role of symbolic politics.

As this research focuses on contemporary British politics, the framework as applied to British political leadership performance is as follows:

Figure 2.2 A framework of British political performance



The following chapter (3) and sub-chapters (3.1, 3.2 and 3.3) elaborate each constituent part of the framework of political performance. Chapter 4 on methodology details the way in which each of the four performative categories (discursive,

responses to events/crisis moments, ideological/policy, and performances to the media) are analysed in this research.

## **2.4 Conclusion**

This chapter has reviewed the literature relevant to leadership performance; the contributions of the literature form the basis of a framework of political performance which we use in this research.

### **3 A FRAMEWORK OF POLITICAL PERFORMANCE: CULTURE, INSTITUTIONS AND PERFORMANCE**

### **3a Overview**

Three sub-chapters (3.1 culture, 3.2 institutions and 3.3 performance) theorise each constituent part of the framework of political performance and outlines how contemporary culture, institutions and performance affects leadership performance.

Sub-chapter 3.1 focuses on two elements which constitute part of contemporary political culture: 1). the personalisation of politics, including the development of political celebrity; 2). shifts in Left/Right political ideology, in particular, the ideological repositioning of the Labour party both in opposition and government (1994-1997 and 1997-2010). Leadership in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s demonstrates the cultural significance for leadership performance.

Sub-chapter 3.2 examines institutions as conditions of leadership performance. This sub-chapter describes the institutional complexities that political leaders operate within, and identifies the relationship between political actors, institutions and political outcomes. Institutionalism as the theoretical literature on political institutions is referenced. The political party and the cabinet are examined as significant political institutions which condition leadership performance. The media as a semi-political institution offering a range of opportunities and/or constraints is also a condition of leadership performance.

Sub-chapter 3.3 examines political performance in the context of contemporary British political discourse. We outline the ways in which culture and institutions provide scope for political performance e.g. a personalised political culture provides leaders with opportunities to use the self to political purpose; and the institutional shifts in the media, specifically the advancement of 24/7 news, has offered constant opportunities for – as well as altering the institutional conditions of – performance.

### **3.1 Culture**

### **3.1a Overview**

The personalisation of politics, including the development of political celebrity and shifts in Left/Right political ideology are two characteristics which constitute part of contemporary political culture. This sub-chapter analyses the ways in which personalisation of politics and changes in traditional Left/Right political ideology affect the leadership performance of the case studies. We begin by making reference to leadership in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s in order to demonstrate the relationship between culture and political actors and ways in which culture subsequently affects the leadership style of predecessors.

### **3.1b Leadership in the 1970s**

Four prime ministers governed in the 1970s: Edward Heath (1970-74); Harold Wilson (1974-76); James Callaghan (1976-79); and at the end of the 1970s, Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990). The changes in political orientation (Conservative-Labour-Labour-Conservative) highlighted the broader contradictions of this period while emphasising the two-party dichotomy between Labour and Conservative. The transitions in government reinforced the gradual breakdown of the post-war consensus and the social and political problems of the 1970s.

Marquand characterises Britain in 1979 as a “perplexed and discontented place”. He states that the “Conservative victory [in 1979] was as much about punishing Labour than to reward the Conservatives” (2008, p. 277). Thatcher’s victory in 1979 legitimated her pursuit of neoliberalism as a form of governance, which she alluded to in a lecture delivered to the Conservative Political Centre in October 1968 as shadow power minister at the party conference. Riddell notes that Thatcher’s pamphlet entitled *What’s wrong with politics?* (1968) explicitly referred to her distrust of government as well as her belief in neoliberalism as a form of governance:

“What we need now is a far greater degree of personal responsibility and decision, far more independence from the government, and a comparative reduction in the role of government” (Thatcher, 1986 cited in Riddell, 1991, p. 2).

Jessop states that the “initial rise of neoliberalism as a wide-ranging economic and political strategy was associated with the *neoliberal regime shift* in Britain and the US in the late 1970s” (2002, p. 458), as indicated in the following table:

*Table 3.1.1 Forms of neoliberalism*

<b>Table 1: Forms of Neoliberalism</b>	
<b>Policy Adjustment</b>	Modulation of policies to improve performance of an accumulation regime and mode of regulation
<b>Regime Shift</b>	Paradigm shift in accumulation and regulation, introducing new economic and political principles
<b>Radical System Transformation</b>	Neoliberalism as strategy for moving from state socialism to capitalist social formation

Changes in political leadership in the 1970s illustrated the gradual breakdown of the post-war consensus and the context in which the strong leadership of Margaret Thatcher gained expression. The latter part of the 1970s signified that strong uncompromising leadership in which Thatcher shifted political discourse in favour of neoliberalism was politically acceptable, and a proposed solution to the social, economic and political contradictions of this decade.

### **3.1c Leadership in the 1980s**

Margaret Thatcher’s administration governed throughout the 1980s. Jessop cites Thatcherism in the 1980s as the zenith of neoliberalism (see Jessop, 2002) in which deregulation, privatisation, less state dependency were promoted as, in some sense, moral from a Rightist perspective,

The perception of Margaret Thatcher, in particular as regards the 1984 Miners Strike was that of uncompromising leadership. Thatcher likened the Miners, and their union, the National Union of Mineworkers (NUM) led by Arthur Scargill, to the “enemy within” and the Argentine junta (Marquand, 2008). The defeat of the Miners and changes in occupational structure with the decline of manufacturing reinforced the dominance of neoliberalism and a market orientated discourse within the polity. The economic doctrine of the free market was pursued highly publicly, as was the celebration of individualism, consumption and less state dependency. Markets were argued as being moral by those who promoted them. Deregulation was promoted. Thatcher shifted the discourse of political leadership in favour of dominant and personalised as opposed to collective leadership.

Conservative policies throughout the 1980s had a significant effect upon the political culture within the polity. More specifically, the relationship of the individual to the state was reconfigured, re-imagined as it were. Morgan notes Thatcherism “penetrated the very substructure of national consciousness, with the message of traditional capitalism proclaimed in an unusually explicit and aggressive form” (2001, p. 438). The pursuit of neoliberalism under Thatcher and her style and approach were so dominant, they informed her successors, even to the point where they crossed party lines, dominating the administrations of Tony Blair and Gordon Brown; we identify the policy shift of a traditionally Left party to the centre-Right in section 3.1.2.

### **3.1d Leadership in the 1990s**

The boom of the late 1980s did not last. “1990 and 1991 were years of deepest recession, in which GDP declined and official unemployment figures went up over 3 million” (Marwick, 2003, p. 340). Protests against the unpopular ‘Poll Tax’ contributed

to Thatcher's resignation on 22 November 1990. In the wake of the first Gulf War, on 27 November 1990, Thatcher's then Chancellor, John Major, became "prime minister after barely twelve months experience of high office" (Morgan, 2001, p. 506). The thinness of Major's majority "of only twenty-one compared to the one hundred-plus majorities that had bolstered Thatcher in 1983 and 1983" (Bell et al, 1999, p. 538) coupled with internal divisions over Europe within the party contributed to an image of him as a weak prime minister, that is a weak prime minister who followed one of the strongest the country had known.

Within the first six months of Major's premiership, on 7 February 1991, the IRA launched a mortar attack on 10 Downing Street during a cabinet meeting. The attack – a direct attack upon the executive – was symbolically successful for the IRA as they had attacked the prime minister's residence. Major "gave an impression of calm imperturbability" (Morgan, 2001, p. 507); despite the illustration of strong leadership by Major, his image as a weak prime minister was not significantly revised.

At the beginning of Major's premiership, national finances were under huge strain, the Poll Tax was abolished and replaced with the Council Tax. Interest rates were in double figures and house prices fell, leaving many householders in negative equity. The Conservative party was deeply divided over Europe. The events of Black Wednesday (16 September 1992) in which the then chancellor, Norman Lamont, announced that Sterling was to be withdrawn from the European Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) meant that despite some economic recovery, Conservative party popularity was declining, and its image of financial soundness eroding fast. The ramifications of 'Black Wednesday' for Major's leadership were as follows:

- Despite Major's policy position and centre stage role as leading proponent of the Exchange Rate Mechanism (ERM) as chancellor, the impression of economic mis-management portrayed Major as an incompetent politician.
- Foley refers to Black Wednesday as "a political and personal disaster from which the Major administration never recovered" (2000, p. 147).
- Major's image as a weak prime minister contributed to his lack of political authority within the party (see Bell et al, 1999).

During the 1990s, economic recovery under Major was evident and standards of living were higher than those in many European countries. The recovery did not, however, have positive political consequences for Major; Europe was the issue that divided the party. Major's political image was still that of a weak prime minister who lacked political authority and was unable to unite the party. He was harassed by his own strident anti-Europeans (in fact because his majority was now so thin) and unable to stop the public squabbling. As regards leadership image, Major's position as prime minister was undermined even by his own core executive. Economic recovery continued throughout the 1990s and at the time of the 1997 General Election, the economy, which at the time was managed by chancellor Kenneth Clarke, was strong and not really a political issue, as had been the case in the 1980s. Mandelson notes that "especially since Black Wednesday, the government was seen as unfocused and incompetent. John Major looked weak and out of his depth. Labour was on the brink of a potentially redefining leadership election. The outpouring of goodwill towards John Smith had led to a surge in support for the [Labour] party" (2011, p. 173).

References to leadership in the 1990s have demonstrated that cultural shifts and political developments from Margaret Thatcher to John Major meant inordinate

emphasis upon political leadership and performance. Moreover, we have demonstrated that the legacy of predecessors can have negative political consequences for leadership image; and events can dramatically affect the image of political actors.

The significance of leadership in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s for the performance of our case studies is that post-Thatcher, celebrity culture and the personalisation of politics accelerated and were demonstrably expressed throughout the Blair premiership (see chapter 6), with a whole series of political effects. Marr notes that “Tony Blair arrived in power in 1997 in a country spangled and sugar-coated by a revived fashion for celebrity. It offered a few politicians new opportunities but at a high cost” (2007, p. 514). We have also demonstrated that the legacy of predecessors can have adverse political effects e.g. party disunity in the case of John Major. The expansion of the media and 24 hour news which focused on leadership provided a cultural and institutional context in which political actors were given greater visibility in the public realm that was hitherto the case.

We now analyse the significance of personalisation of politics including the development of political celebrity and shifts in Left/Right political ideology for contemporary British political leadership performance.

### **3.1.2 Contemporary political culture**

#### **3.1.2.1 Personalisation of politics**

A body of literature refers to the personalisation of British politics, in particular, the personalisation of the prime minister and party leaders (see Shaw, 2007; Foley, 2000; Allen, 2003; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; Hennessy, 2000; Marquand, 2007; King, 2009). Foley, 2000; Poguntke & Webb, 2005; and Allen, 2003 use the Blair

premiership as a case study to demonstrate the presidentialisation of the British prime minister. Foley recognises the similarities between British and U.S styles of leadership and suggests that the British premiership and American presidency “have come to move along parallel paths. The comparability that has come to exist does so at a level that transcends the constitutional differences within the two systems” (2000, p. 331) Foley’s suggestion of the shift towards a presidential system has implications for leadership. If cultural and institutional configurations are shifting in favour of a presidential system, this makes it easier for prime ministers to comport themselves in a presidential manner and further the cultural institutional change.

Poguntke & Webb, 2005 examine presidentialisation across western democracies and refer to Britain as becoming increasingly presidential in practice, without changing the formal structures. They emphasise the changes in the presentation of British politics but not the procedure. Allen (2003) focuses specifically on institutional points of convergence between U.S. and British politics and considers the Blair premiership as constituting the modern U.K. presidency. Whilst there are key institutional differences between presidential and prime ministerial offices, the British prime ministerial system has, in recent times, offered leadership actors new opportunities and scope to personalise the self to political purpose than was hitherto the case.

Personalisation is part of British political culture and incorporates the development of ‘celebrity’. The modern mass media provide the basis for the mediation of personalised styles of leadership.

### **3.1.2.1a Personalisation and celebrity**

King states that “the connections between power and celebrity are tenuous to the point of non-existence” (2009, p. 320). He states that some previous British prime ministers have been celebrities, others not. King views celebrities as set apart from the masses; therefore, by virtue of the office of the prime minister, this in itself is an aspect of celebrity, as is the ability of politicians to attract large crowds. In this respect, King refers to previous prime ministers, Gladstone, Disraeli, Churchill, Eden or Heath as celebrities. Crucially, for King “celebrity and fame seem as likely to follow the acquisition of power as to lead to its acquisition” (2009, p. 320) and a politician’s adoption of “celebrity may create an image of power, it does little, if anything, to confer power” (2009, p. 320). For King, the office of the prime minister offers politicians opportunities to become celebrities e.g. Anthony Eden, Winston Churchill; however, some leaders choose not to be perceived as celebrities e.g. Clement Attlee. The perception of a politician as a celebrity therefore depends in part upon the leader in question and whether or not they choose to express aspects of celebrity and personalisation. Crucially, for King, power and celebrity are mutually exclusive. They do not exist together but celebrity can momentarily create the image of a powerful prime minister which might enhance political status and authority. The use of celebrity by politicians may create the perception of a powerful political actor, but King doubts the long term effects of celebrity. Our point is not to contradict King but to add that celebrity has become part of the condition of political performance, and however short-term its effects, it remains the condition of subsequent performance, and therefore becomes permanently, although not exclusively, formative.

We must stress that the institution of the media is the basis for the personalisation of politics and the inclusion of aspects of celebrity within political comportment. Various media provide leaders with stages upon which celebrity/personalised styles of

leadership gain expression in national consciousness. Gould notes that post-1997, the 'total news media' i.e. 24-hour news "tends to push coverage of politics towards the sensational and the extreme; it leads to a focus on personalities not policies" (Gould, 1998, preface). He refers to New Labour as the new incumbency operating within a new context of media whereby "the demands of modern government fuse together the act of delivery with the communication of delivery". Corner and Pels theorise Gould's point by referring to a shift in political communication; they state that

"the mass visibility that is afforded by modern mediated politics has foreground issues of 'style, appearance and personality', breaking down some of the forces that separate politics from entertainment and political leadership from media celebrity" (2003, p. 2).

The institution of the media can offer leaders opportunities to personalise the self to political effect as well as constraints. The British media's ability to import aspects of highly personalised U.S. and European politics e.g. Leader's Debates is significant in terms of increasing the personalisation of the prime minister and party leaders ahead of the 2010 General Election with a series of tangible effects. The Leaders' Debates are analysed in sub-chapters 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3; our point here in relation to the Debates is to stress the media's cultural endorsement of U.S. and European politics and the opportunities that this offered for British political leaders to use the self to new political purpose.

The head-to-head U.S. style Leaders' Debates between the three political protagonists (Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg) provided an un-edited stage upon which political action (e.g. discourse, comportment, utterances, gestures and body language) could be undertaken and mediated, independently of editorial value judgements. The televised Debates were significant in that the desire to outshine rivals would be intense and perhaps ferocious; The stage provided British political party leaders with three key opportunities rather than constraints. Firstly, the emphasis upon the ways in which individuals perform discursively and otherwise

(tone, utterance, gesture, pitch) offered party leaders scope to fashion their publicly perceived character and image and establish the self as a site of political authority (or not). Secondly, the ability to acknowledge and resonate with the concerns of the audience can create a certain dependency upon the speaker and consequentially generate high levels of followership. Thirdly, the live Debates provided a sense of intimacy between speaker and audience. The ability to talk directly to the audience can create a series of imagined relationships between speaker and audience. Imagined relationships can be a factor upon which personal capital is accrued and authority and legitimacy conferred. These three opportunities illustrate that the personal can be deployed as a political resource which can have tangible political outcomes.

The Debates were the first of their kind within a British prime ministerial polity. Their acceptance within mainstream political culture illustrated: a) the embeddedness of the personalised role of the executive and party leaders; b) the acceptance of performance and personalisation as part of mainstream political discourse; and, c) the influences of personalised politics and presidential styles of leadership.

Our analysis of personalisation as a part of contemporary political culture illustrates the following two points:

- The cultural acceptance and endorsement of celebrity and its extension to politics offers prime ministers and political elites more generally scope to deploy the self to political effect and therefore fashion one's publicly perceived character, persona and image.
- The influences of highly personalised politics as seen in U.S. and European polities e.g. presidential style Leaders' Debates and their acceptance within

the British polity places greater emphasis upon leadership performance, presentation and style.

### **3.1.2.2 Changes in Left/Right political ideology**

There are several factors within and outside the polity which have contributed to the lack of distinction between traditional Left/Right political ideology in contemporary Britain, for example, changes in occupational structure, the rise of post-industrial generations, globalisation, and expansion of the media and communications. We focus on the rebranding of the Labour Party, in particular, the abolition of Clause Four of the party's constitution (and the pursuit of neoliberalism and its adoption by New Labour, both in opposition and in government (1994-1997 and 1997-2010). We identify the effects of these upon ideology, leadership and contemporary political culture.

Domestically, the first major contemporary expression of the decline in the differences between Left/Right political ideology within the polity (we say contemporary, as we could go back to the 1950s for other versions of the decline of difference) was evident from 1983 onwards. Neil Kinnock's leadership of the Labour party. His attempts at party modernisation were a response to the dominant leadership and successes of Thatcher; he began the modernisation of the party which included aspects of individualism and personalisation of the self to political purpose. After Kinnock's election defeat in 1992, his successors John Smith (1992-1994) and Tony Blair as opposition leader (1994-1997) continued party modernisation with a whole series of demonstratable cultural and institutional effects. Under the leadership of Tony Blair, the then opposition party, Labour, had rebranded itself as New Labour and abolished Clause Four of the party's constitution (see chapter 6 for a discussion of the abolition of Clause Four as a form of political

performance). Clause Four had “committed the party to the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange” (Seldon, 2007, p. 35). Such a policy shift post-1994, and the public embracing of such a shift, marked a move to the Right and Right policies of a supposedly Left party. Symbolically, New Labour was broadening its appeal by rejecting the party’s policy assertion of – or rather lip service to, but ‘lip service’ has a major symbolic function –common ownership and state socialism.

New Labour’s embracing of the market and a version of capitalism under the leadership of Tony Blair was theorised by ‘Third Way’ analyses, Professor Anthony Giddens being the main proponent of this approach. Giddens notes that

“the overall aim of third way politics should be to help citizens pilot their way through the major revolutions of our time: globalization, transformations in personal life and our relationship to nature” (1998, p. 64).

Giddens cites the following as values of the Third Way: “equality, protection of the vulnerable, freedom as autonomy, no rights without responsibilities, no authority without democracy, cosmopolitan pluralism, philosophical conservatism” (1998, p. 66). Such values sought to provide a middle ground between state socialism and neoliberal conservatism and re-position a traditionally Left party in or towards the middle of the ideological terrain.

The move towards centre-Right politics reconfigured and reflected the already changing Left/Right ideological terrain in Britain, and meant that the policies of the two main political parties, Labour and Conservative, were more similar to than distinct from one another. In this respect, Tony Blair’s persona was mediated as the ‘human face of Thatcherism’ in that his adoption of Third Way politics sought to humanise capitalism and make it more responsible, but only within the boundaries of the broad thrust of neoliberalism.

The radical and public way in which Tony Blair reconfigured traditional political ideology through personalisation enabled him to fashion his perceived character and persona as the embodiment of change. In terms of symbolic politics, Blair represented change, renewal and modernisation. The opposite is even more important, that changes to neoliberalism were made through the self. Jessop (2002), cited in our overview of the 1980s defines the pursuit of neoliberalism under Thatcher as 'regime shift' i.e. "paradigm shift in accumulation and regulation, introducing new economic and political principles" (2002, p. 458). He characterises New Labour's version of neoliberalism not as regime shift but as a form of policy adjustment within the polity: "modulation of policies to improve performance of an accumulation regime and mode of regulation" (ibid). Internationally, the collapse of communism in 1989 gave way to the dominance of neoliberalism as an ideology.

New Labour's adoption of a version of neoliberalism both in opposition and in government was a major expression within the British polity of the decline in the difference between Left and Right ideology since the 1980s. The convergence of ideology can be seen to affect contemporary culture in the following ways:

- The policies of traditionally Left and Right parties were more similar to than distinct from one another; thus loosening traditional forms of party affiliation which were based upon social class and occupational structure. The nature of party affiliation had been reconfigured and gave rise to issue voting.
- Changes in ideology created 'space' for the personalisation and for leaders to deploy the self to political effect; and more importantly, it saw personalised leadership become the vehicle for ideological shifts.

In this sub-chapter, we have discussed two aspects which constitute part of contemporary British political culture. The following working definition of culture is

used in this research: the features of a given community such as history and traditions, norms and values and the way these interact with, influence (and are influenced by) formal political institutions and practices. Political culture is an expression of public sentiment towards politics and a matrix of dispositions, attitudes, beliefs and understandings which evolve and develop over time, for example, whether or not there is a high degree of personalisation of executive figures or the concentration or dispersal of political power. Over time, these have an influence upon the institutional configurations within the polity. Culture, institutions and political action are inherently linked.

### **3.1.3 Conclusion**

Two conclusions are made on culture as offering opportunities and/or constraints for the leadership performance of the case studies. First, the conjuncture of personalisation, celebrity and the expansion of the media have offered greater scope for political performance and the expression of one's perceived character and persona within and outside the polity. The rise of celebrity culture in the late 1980s and its extension to mainstream political discourse thereafter meant that the culture itself has become increasingly personalised to the point that the personal and political exist as more similar to than distinct from one another. For Marquand, the personalisation of political discourse in Britain and its mediation has had a negative impact upon culture; he states "the British media's obsession with fame and charisma tells us more about the degradation of our public culture than about the outside world" (2009).

Second, changes in political ideology and party affiliation have given rise to individualism and have reconfigured the perceived relationship between the individual and the state. The lack of ideological distinction between the two main

political parties has created greater emphasis upon political leadership and the symbolism of leadership.

The following sub-chapter (3.2) sets out the second part of the framework of political performance, institutions.

### **3.2 Institutions**

### **3.2a Overview**

“The study of political institutions is central to the identity of the discipline of political science” (Rhodes et al, 2008, preface). The relationship between political institutions, political actors and political outcomes is central to understanding contemporary British political leadership and performance. Political institutions are viewed as contexts of leadership performance, as indicated in the framework of political performance. In order to understand institutions as contexts to leadership performance, we refer to the academic literature on political institutions. ‘New institutionalism’ is the approach to studying political institutions which gained currency in Anglo-Saxon debates from the 1980s onwards. The ‘new institutionalism’ literature (3.2.1) is a range of different theories of the role of the state in politics; constructivist institutionalism is the theory that is significant for our research as it stresses the role of discourse and ideas in political life. Thereafter, McAnulla’s (2006) research on British political institutions is referenced in order to describe the institutional complexities that the case studies operate within and upon. The political party and cabinet government are analysed as two significant institutions that affect and structure performance. The media operates as an institution and is a major context of leadership performance; the relationship between the media and political performance is described.

The purpose of this sub-chapter is to understand the role of institutions and the relationship between institutions and individual effects. Central to our analysis are two points. First, institutions exist not as separate entities, but within and alongside social, political and economic contexts which they are in some sense a part of; context and political culture both have a formative role in the configuration or reconfiguration of political institutions and institutional actors. Second, related to ‘new institutionalism’ is the structure/agency debate which refers to the relationship

between structures, in our case political institutions, and agency which refers to actors and how they shape or are shaped by political institutions which they are a part of, or in a relationship to. The structure/agency debate and its origins are appraised in section 3.2.1.1, constructivist institutionalism.

### **3.2.1 New Institutionalism**

March and Olsen's 'The New Institutionalism: Organizational Factors in Political Life' (1984) and *Rediscovering Institutions* (1989) has drawn the most attention to institutions over the last 25 years. Central to their approach to institutions is the idea that norms and values are institutionally significant and influence behaviour and political outcomes, hence their approach being characterised as 'normative institutionalism'. They define 'New Institutionalism' as

"a narrow collection of challenges to contemporary theoretical thinking in political science... the ideas deemphasize the dependence of the polity on society in favour of an interdependence between relatively autonomous social and political institutions" (March and Olsen, 1984, p. 738).

Rational choice, historical, sociological and constructivist institutionalism are forms of new institutionalism which proceeded (and departed) from March and Olsen's neoinstitutionalist approach to theorising political institutions. New institutionalism is characterised by its attempts to illuminate how political institutions affect political outcomes and behaviour. Rational choice institutionalism is informed by rational choice theory. Actors are viewed as rational and as having fixed preferences; preferences are maximised by strategic calculation and action. Institutions are thus explained in terms of effects and functions (see Homans (1961); Peters (1999); Scott, 2000, p. 127). Historical institutionalism emphasises history and path dependency. Institutions are viewed as structuring individual behaviour and political outcomes. This approach explains political institutions via the importance of the state

and how it structures political action (see Evans et al (1985), Skocpol (1992), Steinmo (1992), Thelen (1999), Hall (1986); Hall and Taylor (1996); and Schmidt (2006)). Sociological institutionalism is linked to organisational theory (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991), and identifies forms of organisational life stemming from culturally specific practices (Schmidt, 2005) as well as norms, values, culture and ideas (Dobbin, 1994), thus showing similarities with March and Olsen's normative institutionalism. Institutions are explained through culture, cognitions and norms which frame action and outcomes. Constructivist institutionalism assumes the centrality of ideas in political life and the way in which they are communicated through discourse (see Hay, 2001, 2006). The role of language and discursive performance is central to this approach as is the structure/agency debate. The focus on incorporating the behaviour of actors within institutions has led to the neoinstitutionalist project being branded as part of the behavioural revolution in political science, which "tended to reverse completely the emphasis on formal institutions of government, instead it concentrated on the inputs from society into the 'political system'" (Easton, 1953, p. 112). The focus on behaviour has allowed for the structure/agency debate to be explored within new institutionalism. According to Peters "new institutionalism is not a single animal but rather is a genus with a number of specific species within it" (1999, p. 2). For Judge, the variants of new institutionalism share "a common concern to locate institutions at the centre of political analysis. What differentiates them is why they believe institutions play this central role" (2005, p. 6).

Our purpose is not to review each type of institutional theory but to appraise constructivist institutionalism as this approach is relevant to our research question on the performance of political actors in the public realm. Constructivist institutionalism is related to political performance and to the way in which political leaders use discourse within institutional configurations.

### 3.2.1.1 Constructivist institutionalism

Constructivist institutionalism, also termed as ideational and discursive, focuses on ideas and how they are communicated in the political sphere. This approach emphasises the role of ideas in political institutions and the relationship to structure and agency/material. One of the leading exponents of constructivist institutionalism is Colin Hay. He states that “constructivist institutionalists were motivated by the desire to capture, describe, and interrogate institutional *disequilibrium*” (Hay, 2008, p. 57-60). Hay is referring to the inability of rational choice and normative/sociological “institutionalist scholarship to deal with post-formative institutional change particularly that associated with disequilibrium dynamics” (ibid, p. 57). He views rational choice and normative/sociological institutionalism as relying on the assumption of equilibrium. He argues against this; constructivist institutionalism seeks to define institutional disequilibrium through reference to ideas in the political process. This approach stresses language and discourse. Hay combines normative and sociological forms of institutionalism, he identifies both premised upon behaviour that is based upon norms. He does however, acknowledge some common ground with historical institutionalism as well as difference:

“if historical institutionalism has typically served as an initial source of inspiration for constructivist institutionalists, it has increasingly become a source of frustration and a point of departure” (Hay, 2008, p. 60).

Hay’s departure from historical institutionalism was mainly because of its over-emphasis upon formal political structures and de-emphasis upon the political actors within such institutions and their ability to structure political outcomes. The common ground that both constructivist and historical institutionalism share is based on the importance of ideas; for historical institutionalists this has been associated with the work of Peter Hall. Hall’s work signifies the importance of ideas within policy that is made within a setting of policy paradigms. “Policy makers internalise such paradigms

and work within a framework of ideas” (Hall, 1993, p. 279) which can lead to policy changes, thus to institutional changes. Constructivist institutionalism shares another common feature with its historical predecessor e.g. path dependency, which highlights the importance of history informing the present. The important point in the similarity between constructivist and historical institutionalism is limited to sequential developments and their ability to impact and cause change;

“constructivist institutionalism emphasize not only institutional path dependency, but also ideational path dependency. It is not just institutions, but the very ideas on which they are predicated and which inform their design and development, that exert constraints on political autonomy. Institutions are built on ideational foundations which exert an independent path dependent effect on their subsequent development” (Hay, 2008, p. 65).

Constructivist institutionalism focuses on ideational path dependency and highlights ideas through time and how such ideas shape and inform current institutions. The role of ideas in constructivist institutionalism and structure/agency is discussed in the following two sub-sections.

### **3.2.1.1a The role of ideas**

Ideas are the basis of constructivist institutionalism:

“ideas should be accorded a crucial role in political explanation, since actors behave the way they do because they hold certain views about the social and political environment they inhabit. Moreover, those ideas cannot simply be derived from the context itself” (Hay, 2002, p. 213).

According to Hay, political actors lack complete information about their environment and contextual setting, they make assumptions and direct these assumptions towards forms of strategic action. Ideas thus become crucial to political outcomes. “Ideas provide the point of mediation between actors and their environment” (Hay, 2002, p. 209/210). If ideas are accepted as integral to political outcomes and if such outcomes (based on ideas)

“include material effects (as invariably they do) then it must follow that the material and the ideational are related dialectically, since the ideas actors hold have demonstratable material effects. In sum, a dialectic understanding of the relationship between the ideational and the material is logically entailed by a dialectic understanding of the relationship between structure and agency” (ibid, p. 210).

Hay highlights the role of language and discursive performance and its specificity to the institutional context within which actors operate. As follows, the structure-agency/material-ideational debate.

### **3.2.1.1b Structure-agency**

According to Hay

“structure means context and refers to the setting within which social, political and economic events occur and acquire meaning. Agency refers to action, in this case political conduct. It can be defined simply, as the ability or capacity of an actor to act consciously and, in doing so, to attempt to realize his or her intentions” (Hay, 2002, p. 94).

He relates the structure-agency debate to the material-ideational, in that structure equates to the material and agency to the ideational. The structure/agency debate is crucial to understanding new institutionalism, particularly the constructivist variant, as ideas are accorded a central role in understanding political outcomes. It is the structure/agency question which forms the basis of constructivist institutionalism; this enables understanding of how structures impact on individuals and vice versa and how political outcomes are shaped as a result of this interaction (albeit to differing degrees). Hay states that though “analytically separable, structure and agency are ontologically intertwined” (Hay, 2000, p.2). According to McAnulla (2005, p. 33), Hay reiterates the view of Anthony Giddens who argues that “structure and agency are ontologically fused, that they are in fact two sides of the same coin that may only be separated analytically” (see McAnulla, 2005, p. 33). Giddens refers to structure within social analysis as

“the structuring properties allowing the ‘binding’ of time-space in social systems, the properties which make it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist across varying spans of time and space and which lend them ‘systemic’ form” (Giddens, 1984, p. 17).

Structure thus refers to rules and resources; rules have two meanings for Giddens: “constitution of *meaning* and secondly rules refer to the *sanctioning* of modes of social conduct” (ibid, p. 18). In order to fully understand the structure-agency debate, Giddens refers to the duality of structure as system and structuration:

“structure, as recursively organised sets of rules and resources, is out of time and space, save in its instantiations and co-ordination as memory traces, and is marked by an ‘absence of the subject’. The social systems in which structure is recursively implicated, on the contrary, comprise the situated activities of human agents, reproduced across time and space. Analysing the structuration of social systems means studying the modes in which such systems, grounded in the knowledgeable activities of situated actors who draw upon rules and resources in the diversity of action contexts, are produced and reproduced in interaction” (ibid, p. 25).

The duality of structure as relating to social systems and structuration means that, for Giddens, structure is not external to individuals. In terms of the relationship between structure and agency “structure is not to be equated with constraint but is always both constraining and enabling” (ibid, p. 25). Institutions therefore can offer actors opportunities as well as constraints or constraints and no opportunities.

Agency is a form of action. The degree to which structure is affected by agency or vice-versa has been explored by Archer (1995). She asserts that structure and agency are ontologically distinct and argues against the position taken by Hay and Giddens that structure and agency are ontologically intertwined. Archer states that structure and agency are distinct by virtue of the different properties and powers each possesses and puts forth a threefold morphogenetic model of structural conditioning, social interaction and structural elaboration:

“structural conditioning refers to systematic properties or aggregate consequences of past actions which shape social situations and endow people with interests. Action will always be predated by

forms of social conditioning” (Archer, 1995 cited in McAnulla, 2005, p. 33).

Archer defines social interaction in

“which agents while socially conditioned also express their own irreducible emergent powers relating to intentionality, rationality, personal psychology, consciousness or unconsciousness. These powers mean that, whilst agents are socially conditioned, their actions are never fully determined”. Thirdly, structural elaboration “modifies structural properties, in part, in line with the intention of actors but in large part in the form of unintended consequences emerging from conflict and concession between different groups. Agency then does not create structure, but only transforms (or reproduces) it in any ‘generation’” (Archer, 1995 cited in McAnulla, 2005, p. 34).

Archer’s separation of structure and agency illuminates the influence of one over the other. Hay objects to Archer’s separation, arguing that both structure and agency are ontologically intertwined and should not exist as separate entities. According to McAnulla, Hay’s oversight “overlooks the fact that structure is a *condition* of agency and vice versa” (McAnulla, 2005, p. 34).

The structure/agency debate is fundamental to understanding constructivist institutionalism and the centrality of ideas in the organisation of political life. For Hay, structure and agency are analytically separable but ontologically intertwined; although both are linked through actors and ideas, it is possible to separate the two as demonstrated by Archer. Viewing structure and agency as distinct from one another has the advantage of uncovering the cause and effect relationship between the two. According to Hay

“institutions emphasise the extent to which political conduct is shaped by the institutional landscape in which it occurs, the importance of the historical legacies bequeathed from the past to the present and the range of diversity of actors’ strategic orientation to the institutional contexts in which they find themselves” (Hay, 2000, p. 14-15).

In terms of political performance, for Hay, political actors are able to stress the role of ideas (the ideational) to affect political outcomes; however, the link between the material (structure) and the ideational (agency) suggests that political action occurs within pre-existing frameworks and structures. Hay's assessment of structure and agency is relevant to our research as he stresses the role of political institutions and political actors and the interaction between the two. Political action therefore cannot be seen in isolation to institutions. Constructivist institutionalism stresses the role of ideas within institutions; the ideational thus stresses the role of discourse and language and its deployment to political purpose within institutional configurations.

Having theorised political institutions as relating to our research, the institutions that the leadership case studies operate within and upon are discussed in the following section.

### **3.2.2 British political institutions**

In order to present a broader view of British political institutions as contexts of leadership performance, McAnulla (2006, p. 12) outlines the following table which he refers to as 'Traditional models of British politics'. McAnulla's view indicates that British political institutions are informed by a range of theories and perspectives. The institutional context within which Blair, Brown and Cameron perform is highly complex and related to historic notions of power and authority and current perspectives:



(McAnulla, 2006, p. 12).

McAnulla's research represents the broad institutional context which frames political performance and offers a range of performative opportunities and/or constraints. As follows, Rhodes & Dunleavy (1995) detail cabinet government *vis-à-vis* the executive in their model of 'the core executive' which suggests that "a range of institutions are important in the operation of central government and that the distribution of power may be horizontal rather than vertical" (see Smith, 1999, p. 15-17 for an appraisal of the merits of 'the core executive' thesis). The party as a condition of leadership

performance is detailed thereafter. We must stress that the research consulted refers to the institutional context post-1997 which is specific to the period of analysis used in this thesis.

### **3.2.2.1 The core executive**

The ideas that constitute cabinet government are related to British political history and culture, particularly in the Labour party. We shall pay particular attention to the idea of *primus inter pares* and collective responsibility. Rhodes & Dunleavy's *The Prime Minister, Cabinet and Core Executive* (1995) researches the core executive thesis by outlining six scenarios through which prime ministerial power is exercised e.g. prime ministerial government, prime ministerial cliques, cabinet government, ministerial government, segmented decision making and bureaucratic coordination. Cabinet government is viewed as an institution and as a condition of leadership performance, this also applies to the shadow cabinet. Two key features of cabinet government: collective responsibility and the notion of first among equals (*primus inter pares*) are significant in terms of the modern conception of the cabinet and relationship to political leadership performance. The origins and history of cabinet government within the framework of analysis are not detailed; however, there is one point that we make on the shift from monarchy to parliament in the 19<sup>th</sup> century which developed the notion of collective responsibility and the prime minister as first among equals. The 19<sup>th</sup> century shift from monarchy to parliament and government created greater emphasis upon the cabinet as a decision making body which was central to the day-to-day functioning of government. Sampson states

“as the franchise was extended in the nineteenth century and the civil service expanded its scope, the cabinet became more institutionalised, the crucial link between a more democratic parliament and a more powerful executive” (2004, p. 880).

Bagehot's description of the cabinet as in *The English Constitution* (1867) is cited by Sampson as:

“the efficient secret of the English constitution may be described as the close union, the nearly complete fusion, of the executive and the legislative powers...A cabinet is a combining committee – a hyphen which joins, a buckle which fastens, the legislative part of the state to the executive part of the state. In its origins it belongs to the one, in its functions it belongs to the other” (Bagehot, 1867 in Sampson, 2004, p. 88).

Bearing in mind Bagehot's description of cabinet government; British political history has stressed two key features of cabinet government: the principle of the prime minister as 'first among equals' alongside the cabinet, and collective responsibility.

The notion that the prime minister as Head of the cabinet assumes a position of first among equals is central to the historic tradition of cabinet government (see Mackintosh, 1977; Hennessy, 2001; King, 2009). However, the term itself is of course a contradiction; to be first is not the same as being equal to another member of the same institution. The contradiction underlies the supremacy and depiction of political leadership *vis-à-vis* the core executive, and therefore legitimates the performance of a dominant prime minister to command, control and overrule the cabinet.

“The cabinet is always expected to present a common front, under the principle of collective responsibility” (Sampson, 2004, p. 89). Heywood describes collective responsibility as all members “sing[ing] the same song” (Heywood, 2000, p. 193) thus maintaining the public integrity of government as a collective institutional arrangement.

March and Olsen attribute the centrality of norms and values to the behaviour of political actors; the notion of collective responsibility assumes the behaviour of members of the cabinet as defined by rules and mutually reinforcing behaviour.

Normative institutionalism outlined by March and Olsen is relevant to the evolution of cabinet government, as culture within the cabinet and the wider party can affect the collective nature of the cabinet. This point is qualified by Lijphart who states that

“because strong cabinet leadership depends on majority support in the House of Commons and on the cohesiveness of the majority party, cabinets lose some of their predominant position when either or both of these conditions are absent” (1999, p. 12).

Three points are made on cabinet government post-1997 as a condition of contemporary leadership performance. First, according to Lijphart “the most powerful organ of British government is the cabinet” (1999, p. 10). The centrality of the cabinet to the legislative and executive branches of government and to the wider political system reinforces Lijphart’s view. However, in practice, the centrality of the cabinet depends upon the exercise of executive power and dominance and management of colleagues, rivals and adversaries. Political actors therefore operate within a system of cabinet government which conditions political performance. Second, Heywood cites the declining influence of the modern cabinet “whether or not cabinets are invested with formal policy-making responsibility, they have struggled to maintain their political role and status” (2000, p. 194). He attributes the weakening of cabinet to the growing prominence of the chief executive i.e. the prime minister which he sees as resulting from a) the media, particularly the tendency of television to focus upon personality and image; b) the need for clear policy leadership in a globalised world; and c) the increased size and importance of government departments and agencies which contribute to policy development (see Heywood, 2000, p. 193-4). Third, we must preface our remarks pointing out that King was writing after the Blair premiership; his points nevertheless illustrate our point about modern cabinet government as a condition of leadership performance. King’s (2009) conception of modern cabinet government is

“collective decision making by some combination of the full cabinet and a range of formally constituted cabinet committees, with non ministers brought in as and when” (2009, p. 328).

While asserting the advantages and disadvantages of cabinet government (luck, orderly decision making, frank thorough discussion versus less good luck, delay, fudge, obfuscation) (King, 2009, p. 328), King states that the future of cabinet government in the constitution remains unclear, and four broad options are available to future prime ministers and governments:

1. "To reinstate something approaching post-war cabinet government, that is, a system of government at the top based on the ultimate authority of the cabinet sustained by a network of cabinet committees" (2009, p. 328).
2. The old fashioned virtues of the cabinet would take into account the expansive size of modern cabinets; thus the size of the cabinet would be reduced to half a dozen instead of 20 and more.
3. A recognition of collegial government e.g. an orderly form of committee government. The full cabinet would exist in the background; constituted committees alongside the prime minister, officials, advisers would take decisions.
4. "The 'smart casual' option stresses informality and almost infinite flexibility. The characteristic modes of communication include phone calls, e-mails, text messages, snatched conversations in corridors" (ibid, p. 330).

The modern form of cabinet government relevant to the case studies and period of analysis has evolved from its pure type, from collective responsibility, ministerial accountability and cabinet intimacy in policy making, to prime ministers exercising considerable degrees of political power *vis-à-vis* the cabinet, and in fact bypassing cabinet government, failing to record information, or failing to engage in detailed policy discussions. Cabinet government as an institution provides leaders with opportunities for political performance and use of the self to affect political outcomes.

The political party as a condition of leadership performance is discussed in the following section.

### **3.2.2.2 The political party**

This section makes reference to the origins and evolution of the British political party system of governance and the characteristics of the Labour and Conservative party organisation. The political party is viewed as an institution which frames political performance within a series of normative party values, ideologies and traditions.

Ingle notes the “Whig interpretation’ of history as marking the beginning of political parties at the time of the constitutional settlement of 1688-9”. He refers to the two-party myth as rooted in the Whig/Tory political factionalism of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Ingle, 2008, p. 6). Judge notes that

“the incremental admission of urban and industrial classes into parliament post-1832 had repercussions for the party system therein... party became the major force in parliamentary politics and brought attendant institutional change. The essence of ‘party government’, with parties identified with both government and opposition and each party seeking to secure an electoral majority, was apparent by the mid-1830s” (2006, p. 30).

Forman & Baldwin note that after the 1867 Reform Act

“the growing power of nationally organised political parties began to limit the independence of individual MPs. One of the consequences was to accord increased political stature to the main party leaders, such as William Gladstone and Benjamin Disraeli, who alternated as Prime Minister for nearly twenty years” (1999, p. 291).

The development of the political party therefore gave additional power and authority to party leaders and prime ministers throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in particular as expressed in the leadership of Tony Blair, his reconfiguration of the organisation of the party e.g. the declining influence of trade unions within the Labour party consequentially created scope for leadership performance within the party. The expansion of the media at this time also provided the basis for mass coverage and greater scope than in the 20<sup>th</sup> century for leaders to use the personal to political effect. Party organisation and the effect upon leadership performance are detailed.

Forman & Baldwin (1999) depict the organisation of both Labour and Conservative party:

Table 3.2.1. Labour party organisation

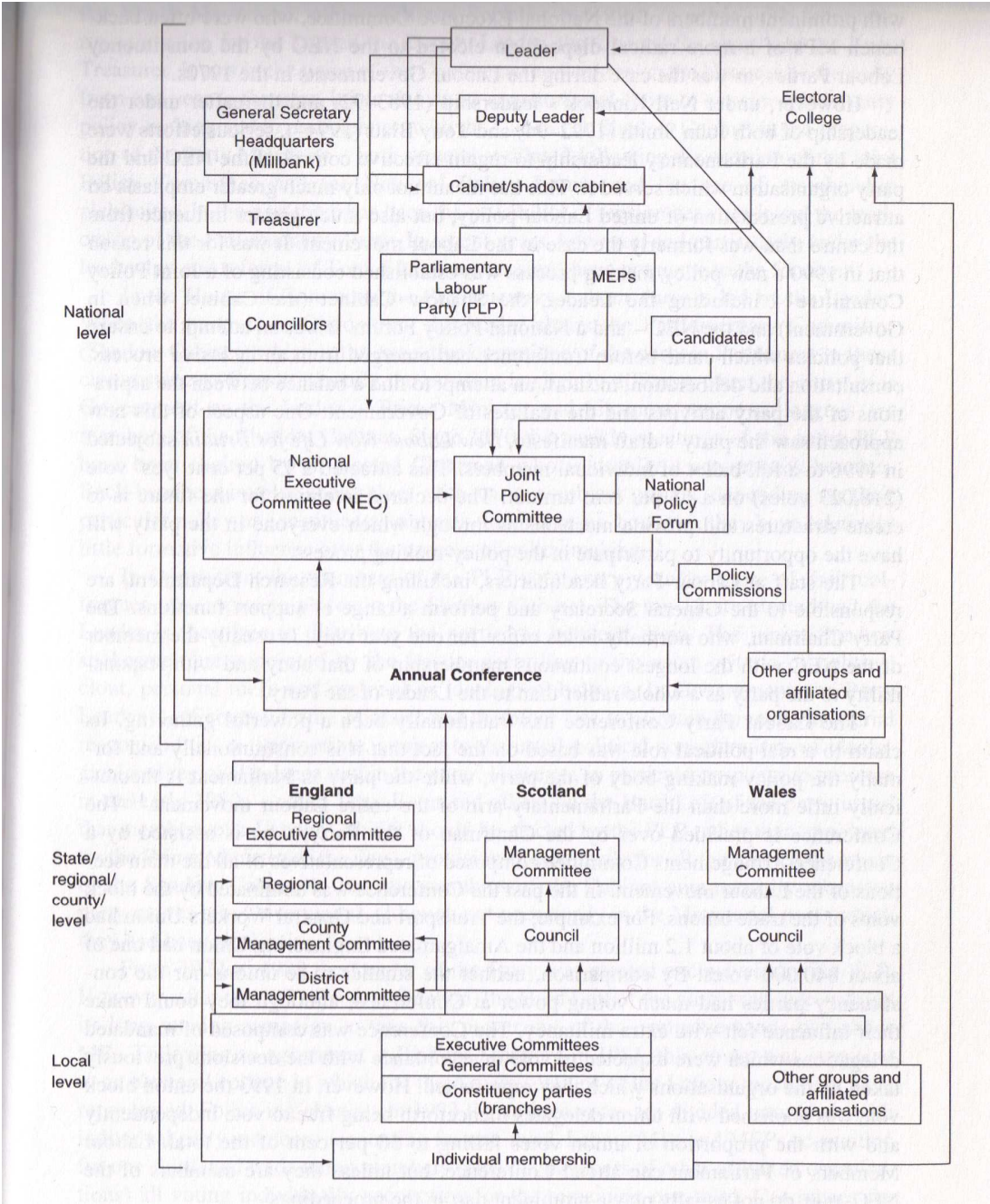
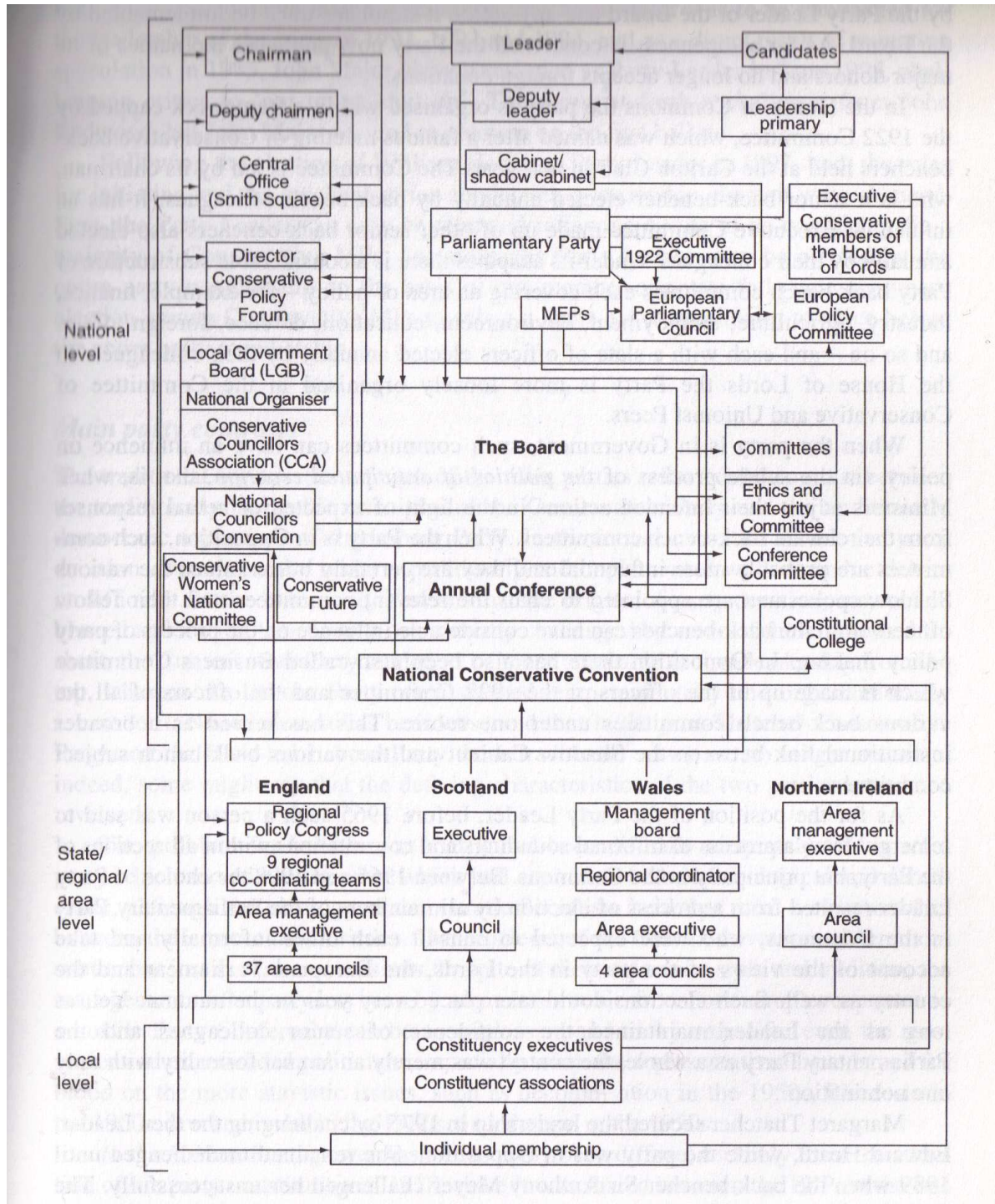


Table 3.2.2. Conservative party organisation



Both diagrams depict the complex internal organisation of the Labour and Conservative parties and depict the leader as part of a series of complex networks which take place at the national level; the arrows pointing to and from the leader

illustrate this. For example, both Tony Blair and David Cameron (and their predecessors) did not become party leaders from the bottom-up e.g. individual membership at the local level to state/regional/county level to national level. Instead, both leaders were situated within the complex set of networks that exist at the national level before being endorsed as party leader. David Cameron's rise to political prominence illustrates this. Within the sphere of national politics, David Cameron worked at the Conservative Central Office before being selected as a party candidate for the safe seat of Witney in Oxfordshire and became MP for Witney in May 2001 (Beech, 2009, p. 19). Thereafter, in the 2005 party leadership election, he stood as a candidate and became leader of the party. Cameron's political trajectory existed within the sphere of national politics only. His performance as party leader from 2005-2010 existed at the national level; upon becoming prime minister in 2010 it is only then that the state/regional and local levels become conditions of political performance. Therefore, the national political party determines candidates for the leadership election; the local level has some part in their selection as party leader. As party leader, it is mainly the national level of the party that is significant. As prime minister, all levels of party organisation (national, state/regional and local) become relevant, and the audience for political performance becomes wider; the comportment of political leaders *vis-à-vis* the political party is fashioned by complexity.

Our second point on the political party as a condition of leadership performance is that the positioning of the annual conference assumes a centrality in the organisation of both political parties. The annual conference has proximity to the regional and local level as well as to the national level. This suggests that the annual party conference is considered as crucial to the organisation of the party. Leadership performance at the conference is therefore a national event, and important in terms of maintaining internal political support and political outcomes.

The political party exists as a series of complex and related spheres of influence which are conditions of leadership performance. As we have demonstrated, the practice of party leadership exists at the national level of party organisation. The national, regional and local tiers of the party all become related conditions which frame political performance at the prime ministerial level. The annual conference is central to the party and incorporates the national, regional and local levels of party organisation; the scope for leaders to use the personal as a political resource and establish the self as a site of political authority at party conferences has highlighted the role of discursive performance and performative actions.

### **3.2.2.3 The media**

For the purposes of analysis here, the media is viewed not as a political institution *per se* but an institution which affects and structures British politics and the practice of leadership. In chapter 5 there is extensive discussion of the interviews conducted with media practitioners including commentators and editors which describe the effects of the media upon British political leadership. Without stating here all the analytical points derived from the interview data, we make two points on the media as a condition of contemporary political leadership performance.

In the late 1980s, Britain's first celebrity glossy magazine *Hello!* was launched; the positive audience reception to the notion of celebrity resulted in similar, highly popular, magazines being launched throughout the 1990s. The conjuncture of celebrity culture and the expansion of 24 hour news and the Internet in the 1990s offered political leaders mass exposure and the ability to communicate with audiences in new ways. Corner and Pels as referenced in sub-chapter 3.1 sum up this point and state that

“the mass visibility that is afforded by modern mediated politics has foreground issues of ‘style, appearance and personality’, breaking down some of the forces that separate politics from entertainment and political leadership from media celebrity” (2003, p. 2).

The media provides the basis for celebrity culture. The emphasis that the media places on celebrity culture and its impact upon politics has been cited by Hennessy (2001) who cites Richard Eyre’s comments on the coverage of the 1997 election campaign, and that since the days of Churchill and Attlee:

“all politics has declined to the condition of show business, and all politicians have been obliged to become performers. They choose their costumes carefully, their décor fastidiously; their fellow actors and their agents; they study their scripts, they rehearse, they put on make up and they give performances; they adapt their acting styles from the would-be intimacy of the small screen to the not-to-be avoided histrionics of the public platform; and sometimes, often disastrously, they improvise” (Eyre, 1997 in Hennessy, 2001, p. 86).

The mass media and its reflection of celebrity culture has impacted upon British political leadership performance, personalisation, and the public versus private image, character and persona of political actors (as demonstrated in chapters 6-8).

Our second point on the media is that post-1997, Philip Gould notes that politics takes place through an “entirely new environment: a context of ceaseless change and exploding technological opportunity in which the news media focuses on personalities not policies” (Gould, 1998, preface). He notes that “the demands of modern government fuse together the act of delivery with the communication of delivery” (ibid). This offers leaders performative opportunities and constraints in that the self can be used as a political resource to mediate policies and campaigns; however, the increasing emphasis upon political actors can lead to negative scrutiny. Our main point is that post-1997, the operation of New Labour and leadership actors in the public realm relates to changes in the mediation of politics, namely, the expansion of political reporting and 24 hour News, which consequentially affects the practice of political leadership.

### **3.2.3 Conclusion**

In conclusion to this sub-chapter, institutions exist not as separate entities, but within and alongside social, political and economic contexts which they are a part of. Institutions frame political action and can affect political outcomes, and are therefore inherently linked to leadership performance.

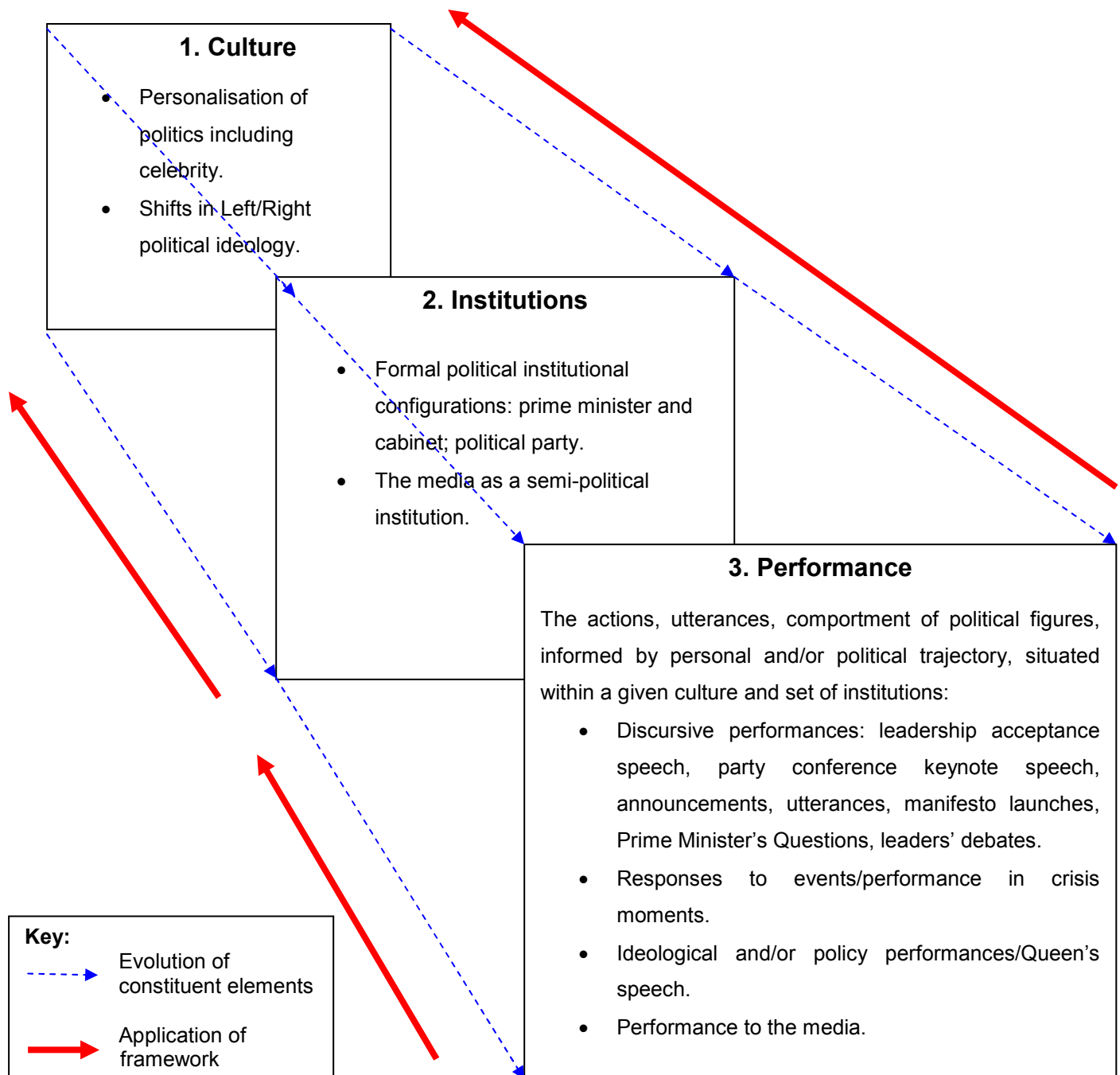
### **3.3 Performance**

### **3.3a Overview**

Elements of political performance have been identified in the classic and contemporary literature on leadership (chapter 2). However, the literature lacks emphasis on the analysis of political performance *per se* and upon the role and details of individual performances, the role of political discourse in the construction and deployment of leadership persona, and the effects of these.

This sub-chapter outlines political performance within the context of British cultural and institutional configurations. The term performance as used in this research is defined, and types of performance relevant to the leadership case studies are outlined. The main thrust of this chapter is to elaborate performance as the third constituent part of the framework. To reiterate, the following framework of British political leadership performance is used in this research:

## *A framework of British political performance*



### **3.3.1 Political performance**

For the purposes of analysis, performance refers to the public presentation of political actors. Whilst there is a clear differentiation between a leader's public and private

performance, our focus of analysis relates to the public performance e.g. a discursive event such as a public speech, the announcement of policy or the presentation of the self including publicly perceived comportment. Performance as used in this thesis is twofold. First, performance is a physical act; including the comportment, gestures, image and style of political figures. Second, political performance is verbal and discursive; this includes the physical, but stresses the role of language and rhetoric and its deployment to political effect. Physical performance can exist without discursive performance but discursive performance invariably includes aspects of the physical e.g. what is said and how it is said. Bearing this in mind, everything that political actors publicly say and do can be considered as performance and as forms of political action which have intended and unintended political consequences.

Style and image are not strictly performance – performative acts – in the sense that, for example, rhetoric is; however, we take style and image as part of our analysis, as style and image exist as part of physical and discursive performance and have performative significance. Style and image contribute to and emerge from political performance and comportment; essentially, the repetition of particular leadership traits or actions constitutes leadership style. Image is thus an acquired public perception of a political actor. Performing a particular image through a range of physical and discursive actions can affect the media refraction of performance and thus the ‘reception’ of character in the public realm. Tony Blair’s image as prime minister as a ‘regular guy’ was partly constructed through physical and discursive performances undertaken to political purpose, but also through the mediated performance as communicated by the media in the wider public realm. The endorsement of Tony Blair’s ‘regular guy’ image by the media helped him constitute his publicly perceived political persona. The inclusion of style and image as part of performance emphasises that contemporary British politics and the deployment of leadership are constituted in personalities and their mediation. The caveat is – and it

is a major caveat – that political actors are not fully in control of their image as it is informed by, and refracted through, the media. In some circumstances – often cumulatively – ‘image’ is, indeed, out of control. The premiership of Gordon Brown analysed in chapter 7 illustrates the negative impact of the media portraying and refracting leadership personalities in the public realm. The Brown premiership raises an interesting point which we come back to in our concluding chapter, that the style and image of predecessors can frame the mediation of political leadership and impact upon subsequent leadership styles.

The description of political performance used in this research includes four performative categories that are relevant to prime ministers and aspirant leaders and are specific to British cultural and institutional configurations:

- Discursive performances: leadership acceptance speech, party conference keynote speech, announcements, utterances, manifesto launches, PMQs, Leaders’ Debates.
- Responses to events/performance in crisis moments.
- Ideological/policy performances/Queen’s speech.
- Performance to the media.

All and each of these performative categories will be informed by, framed by, will shape and be shaped by the evolving image and style of political leaders. The analysis of each type of performance makes reference to the preceding persona as impacting upon political performance. Chapter 4, on methodology details specific methods used in analysing each of the four performative categories.

### **3.3.1.1 Types of political performance**

This section outline the ways in which each of the four performative categories (discursive, events/crisis, ideological/policy and media) enables leadership character and persona to gain expression in public consciousness.

The first performative category is discursive; the analysis of the range of performances included in this category allows us to appraise a leader's discursive persona and its effects. Discursive performance stresses a communicative event in which language and its use can link speaker and audience and thus affect political outcomes. We should stress that discursive performance and the communicative event between speaker and audience is culturally and institutionally informed. Prime Minister's Questions (PMQs) is one of a series of discursive performances which has a cultural and institutional tradition in which, often ferocious, political exchanges take place mainly between the prime minister, MPs and opposition parties. The tradition of PMQs as situated within the House of Commons and broader institution of parliament can offer political leaders performative opportunities and constraints e.g. a leader can enhance his/her position *vis-à-vis* the party (or diminish political authority as was the case with Iain Duncan Smith, Conservative party leader from 2001-2003 (see Bale, 2010 who elaborates Smith's inability to perform at PMQs and the negative effect upon the party and his political authority)).

Expected and unexpected events and crisis moments can – invariably do – present themselves during a leader's premiership. We consider a crisis as an event but an event may not necessarily be the same as a crisis, though it still presents difficulties, challenges and opportunities. The impact of an event as refracted through the media and a leader's reaction to events and circumstances can affect political image. Political persona can therefore be projected through responses and reactions to

events and circumstances. Performance in crisis moments can offer opportunities to fashion or re-fashion one's publicly perceived character and persona. This may have positive ramifications in terms of status and authority, particularly if the use of performative actions e.g. comportment, discourse and action are fitting to circumstance as well as to the political culture. Responses to crisis moments are forms of political action.

Policy initiation and its presentation can, if successfully received by the audience within the polity or more restricted constituency, enhance the status of the leader as well as confer authority and legitimacy. Policy making and its 'assumption' by the leader are considered as performance e.g. a policy speech or announcement highlights discursive performance and use of political rhetoric, and projects the idea that the leader 'owns' and is even the author of policy. Responses to policy, nationally and internationally, are acts of political performance.

From the period of analysis used in this thesis (1997-2010), the expansion of the media (e.g. 24-hour News and the Internet) takes on crucial significance for the mediation of political leadership in Britain to the point that press secretaries and advisors take on a very important role in terms of managing leadership style and image to affect political outcomes. The media is an institution and condition of leadership performance. Performance in the media e.g. interviews with commentators and journalists, can generate tangible political outcomes through positive political coverage, more so since the expansion of the media and ability to reach wide audiences. Interviews with the media or articles in newspapers or magazines exist as discursive performances, and highlight the role of language and its political effect.

### **3.3.2 Conclusion**

This sub-chapter has presented the third constituent part of the framework of political performance. The definition of political performance as used in this research is the public actions, utterances, and comportment, image and style of political actors, situated within a given culture and set of institutions.

In the next chapter, the methodology used for assessing the four categories relating to political performance is detailed.

## **4 METHODOLOGY**

#### **4a Overview**

Three strands constitute the methodology for this research on contemporary British political leadership. First, the application of the framework of political performance as the main method for analysing leadership performance is outlined in section 4.1. The methods used to analyse each of the four categories of performance (discursive, events/crisis, policy and media) are detailed. Second, elite interviews were carried out with senior practitioners who constitute an integral part of contemporary British politics especially as regards the deployment of leadership. The research participants, including former political leaders and chiefs of staff, speechwriters, policy makers/advisors, media commentators, including public service broadcasting editors and caricaturists, and civil service support leaders, illuminate the practice of contemporary British politics and leadership and provide insights into the Westminster context within which leadership performance takes place. Although the elite interviews were not the main part of the methodology for this study on political performance, the analysis of the interviews was important and has methodological and case study relevance in terms of describing the Westminster context within which the case studies operate. Elite interviews, which provided direct insights into the cultural and institutional Westminster context that the leaders perform within, are analysed in section 4.2. Thereafter, the research approach e.g. qualitative methodology and use of the constructivist paradigm (4.2.1), selection of research participants (4.2.2), access and gatekeepers (4.2.3), semi-structured interview structure (4.2.4), role of the researcher (4.2.5), ethical considerations including anonymity (4.2.6), and data management (4.2.7) are outlined. The use of a comparative case study approach is the third part of the methodology which allowed in-depth examination of the case studies within their context of British parliamentary institutions and political culture (4.3).

## **4.1 Political performance methodology**

In sub-chapter 3.3, political performance in the context of British cultural and institutional configurations was outlined. This section details the specific methods used in analysing the following four types of performance which are relevant in assessing the leadership performance of the case studies:

- (4.1.1) Discursive performances e.g. leadership acceptance speech, party conference keynote speech, announcements, utterances, manifesto launches, Prime Ministers Questions (PMQs), and Leaders' Debates.
- (4.1.2) Responses to events/performance in crisis moments.
- (4.1.3) Ideological/policy performances.
- (4.1.4) Performance to the media e.g. interviews, articles.

### **4.1.1 Discursive performances**

Discursive performance highlights the role of language and rhetoric and its deployment to political effect. A body of literature describes discourse analysis *per se* e.g. the practical aspects of language including syntax (sentence structure), semantics (meaning), phonology (sounds/tones) (see Stubbs (1983), Coulthard (1985), Schiffrin (1994), Nelson (2002)). Critical discourse analysis (CDA) emphasises the relationship between language and society and emphasises the context in which language is grounded. Authors such as Fairclough (1995, 2001), Wodak and Meyer (2001), Chilton (2004), Luewen (2008) have used CDA to analyse political discourse. For our purposes, some aspects of discourse analysis and CDA are referred to; the method used for analysing discursive performances draws upon contributions from the following authors, from Aristotle (2004), and in the contemporary context, Bolinger (1980), van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) Atkinson (1984),

Gaffney (1991, 2001, 2007), Chilton (2004), Gladwell (2005) and van Dijk (2008) as elaborating discourse, political communication and performative techniques.

The analysis of a discursive performance is considered as a physical performance. We analyse a discursive performance by focusing upon three strands. First, the significance of the opening statement is referred to in relation to Gladwell's (2005) assertion that audiences cast snap judgements upon actors very quickly. Gladwell's research as in *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* is primarily about behavioural psychology. His assertion that audiences judge actors immediately can be used in our study of political leadership performance as this thesis identifies the immediacy of reactions to persona. Taking into account Gladwell's assertion, the first utterances that a leader makes and the language/issues that exist discursively can affect the relationship between a leader and the audience. We should also stress that physical comportment throughout the delivery of the opening statement of a speech (body language and gestures) can also affect the relationship between leader and follower. The second strand in analysing a discursive performance includes selecting discursive moments from the speech which demonstrate the relationship between performance and persona. The following list cites discursive techniques that can be deployed by a speaker to political effect. The techniques listed are performative in that their use can enhance the status and authority of a leader and can affect political outcomes and may contribute towards a leader's discursive persona. The following list draws upon the work of Max Atkinson (1984) as well as a range of other authors cited. Atkinson's study of observable human politics is essentially about the interaction between political speakers and the audience and the use of particular verbal and non-verbal techniques used to gain a favourable audience response. His notion of 'claptrap': particular devices used to catch audience applause focuses upon political speakers at large-scale party rallies. Although Atkinson focuses on political oratory within the context of rallies, his insights into language, discourse and political

behaviour are helpful methodologically and can be used in analysing discursive performance relevant to British political leadership, most notably, leadership acceptance speech, party conference keynote speech, announcements, utterances, manifesto launches, PMQs and Leaders' Debates. Our analysis of discursive performances includes reference to the following communicative techniques:

- The speakers depiction of the world, depiction of the self and others (see Gaffney 2001, 2007).
- The use of Aristotelian *pathos* which refers to the ability of the speaker to use emotion to political effect e.g. metaphorical language.
- The speakers relationship to discourse and audience, Chilton (2004) refers to three strategies by which utterers manage their interests e.g. coercion, legitimisation and delegitimation, and representation and misrepresentation.
- Use of personal pronouns.
- Use of alliteration to create emphasis upon a particular aspect of the speech e.g. use of a particular sound in the first syllables similar to rhyme may be used to create emphasis (see Atkinson, 1984, p. 81); (alliteration and repetition may be used together but can exist separately).
- List of threes e.g. repetition of the same word three times or three contrasting words. "One of the main attractions of three-part lists is that they have an air of unity or completeness about them. Lists comprising only two items tend to appear inadequate or incomplete" (ibid, p. 57).
- Use of rhetorical questions to pose a puzzle and engage the audience (ibid, p. 75).
- The use of opposites/contrastive pairs may be used to resolve the rhetorical questions. Moreover,  

"praiseworthy evaluations of 'our side' involve speakers in comparing 'us' favourably with 'them'. If 'we' are virtuous, resolute

and full of good intentions, then presumably 'they' must be wicked, weak and full of bad intentions. However, insults aimed at 'them' do not have to be left implicit, but can and often do comprise the main burden of a politician's message. When made openly, criticisms and attacks directed at opponents also have a similar capacity for attracting a favourable response, and as such constitute another important type of applaudable message" (Atkinson, 1984, p. 39).

- Use of intonational shifts (changes in pitch and tone). "In packaging applaudable messages, orators are thus able to use intonational shifts to communicate to the audience whether they are proposing to carry on or come to a close" (ibid, p. 63). Physical gestures can also aid intonational shifts (see Atkinson, 1984, p. 64).
- van Dijk and Kintsch (1983) refer to the situational model which is "an integrated structure of episodic information, collecting previous episodic information about some situation as well as instantiated general information from semantic memory" (p. 344). Thus, what the political speaker sees or thinks about is a construction e.g. the situational model; "it is the representation of that fragment of the world that the text is speaking about" (p. 338). The authors go on to state that a communicative context model "representing speech acts and their underlying intentions, as well as other information about speaker, hearer, and the context" (p. 338) forms the link between the situational model and the text representation. For our purposes, reference to the situation contextualises political discourse, and reference to situation/context can be deployed to affect political status, authority and outcomes.
- van Dijk in *Discourse and Context* (2008) states that contextualisation is not a pure mental phenomenon and that a "crucial component of a theory of situation-discourse relations should be a cognitive theory about how members represent communicative situations as context models" (van Dijk, 2008, p. 120). To illustrate the interaction between social situation and discourse, van

Dijk cites the example of Tony Blair's Iraq speeches in the House of Commons and states that Blair's utterances were informed by the context model which he more or less consciously represented and ongoingly monitored e.g. setting: time, date, place: House of Commons; position in the House: Despatch box; his personal identity as Tony Blair; his personal attributes as being democratic and tolerant; his communicative identity as the main speaker and as recipient; his political identity as prime minister, head of government, leader of the Labour party; his national identity as British; the current political action(s) e.g. defending policies, seeking legitimacy for sending troops to Iraq; the relevant social and political opinions (see van Dijk, 2008, p. 122 for a full description of Tony Blair's context model). In terms of analysing a discursive performance, van Dijk's elaboration of the context model is helpful to us methodologically as he refers to the interaction between the speaker, the situation and the discourse and the deployment of context and the self to affect political outcomes. Our analysis therefore makes reference to van Dijk's situational model as relating to political persona. Similarly, Chilton (2004) refers to the cognitive approach to political discourse in that discourse is defined by a 'frame' within which the speaker's cognitive experiences are expressed.

The points made above illustrate a range of physical and discursive, rhetorical and communicative techniques that suit analytical purpose; discursive performances may or may not include the above, depending upon the interaction between the discourse and situation, performance and reception. The analyses of discursive performance therefore make reference to communicative techniques as part of discursive performance in order to demonstrate the relationship between performance and persona.

The third strand in analysing a discursive performance is analysis of the relationship between political actors and the audience – audiences vary according to situation and context and exist as, for example, an immediate studio audience, viewing public, opponents, media, and colleagues. The analysis of the relationship between speaker and audience identifies:

- References to the audience, e.g. ‘we’, ‘us’ or ‘our’. “Directing praise to ‘us’ and “assertions which convey positive or boastful evaluations of our hopes, our activities or our achievements stand a very good chance of being endorsed by audiences with a burst of applause” (Atkinson, 1984, p. 37).
- Invented dialogue e.g. use of rhetorical questions.
- Proximity to the audience – whether in a studio hall or televised invented proximity created through gestures and body language (see Gaffney, 1991).
- Proximity to and size of the audience are conditions which affect imagined relationships between leaders and audiences (see Gaffney, 1991, 2001).
- Scanning the audience encourages imagined dialogue between speaker and audience “it also has the considerable advantage of revealing signs of boredom, puzzlement or disbelief, to which speakers can instantly respond with a suitable joke, explanation or elaboration” (Atkinson, 1984, p. 12).

As the analysis of discursive performance focuses on performance and language, each of the three strands makes reference to Bolinger (1980) who notes the relationship between performance and language/the physical and the discursive: “eye contact, head movements, gestures with arms and hands, posture, facial expression, distance from another speaker, noises such as clearing the throat, loudness and softness, high pitch and low pitch, the real or pretended quaver that

accompanies emotion – all communicate singly, together, and in concert with language” (1980, p. 11).

The method for analysing performance in events/crisis moments is set out in the following section.

#### **4.1.2 Responses to events/performance in crisis moments**

The relationship between circumstance and performance is important in terms of the effect upon political persona and image. Throughout a leader’s premiership, events and crisis moments may present themselves as eruptions into the polity. Given that events and crisis moments differ in terms of scale and complexity, an event is analysed discursively and makes reference to the points in section 4.1.1; analysis of a crisis makes reference to a) the immediacy of leadership response; b) type of response e.g. pragmatic and/or discursive (as listed in section 4.1.1); and c) relationship to culture and institutions in order to demonstrate the relationship between performance and circumstance and impact upon political persona. As image and style are included as performance, the impact of an event or crisis upon leadership image is also treated as performance.

#### **4.1.3 Ideological/policy performance**

The analysis of ideological/policy performance makes reference to the political trajectory of a leader e.g. personal and/or political relationship to the specific policy in question and performance of the policy (or its effect upon leadership image). Thereafter, the ideological/policy performance is analysed discursively e.g. the policy utterances, situational dependency (as indicated by van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983 and van Dijk, 2008), depiction of the speaker, and relationship to the audience.

#### **4.1.4 Performance specifically to the media**

As most of leadership takes place through the mass media, the mediation of leadership performance is crucial to political authority, survival in office and relationship to audiences. Arguably, each utterance and action is a mediated performance which impacts upon the publicly perceived political persona. According to Gaffney “in the modern period, the mediation of the politician is an essential feature of his or her political reality” (2007, p. 200). For our purposes, leadership performance to the media relates specifically to interviews to the media (television, radio, print) and articles written for the print media (newspapers, magazines). The method used for analysing interviews and articles is similar to the method set out for analysing a discursive performance such as a speech. Specifically, we refer to the following points:

- Depiction of the self and others, the depiction of the world (see Gaffney, 1991).
- Themes within the interview/article (see Gaffney, 1991).
- Use of the situational/context model (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983, van Dijk, 2008).
- Emphasis upon particular points/themes and relationship to the self.

The use of elite interviews as providing the context within which British political leadership performance takes place, and the use of a case study approach as the second and third parts of the methodology are detailed in the following sections.

#### **4.2 Elite Interviews**

Six groups of elites were interviewed including 2 former party leaders and 1 chief of staff; 4 speechwriters, 2 policy makers/advisors, 15 media commentators including

public service broadcasting (PSB) editors, political commentators and magazine editors, 4 caricaturists and 2 leaders of Quasi Non-governmental Organisations. The research participants illuminated the practice of contemporary British politics and leadership, and provided the context within which the case studies perform. The rationale of using interviews was a qualitative approach based upon constructivism as a mode of enquiry. Section 4.2.1 refers to the research framework and constructivism.

#### **4.2.1 Research Framework**

A qualitative approach was adopted as the data produced is 'deeper' than a quantitative approach and deals with the actor's feelings [research participants] through the process of *verstehen* (see Schwandt, 2001). "Qualitative approaches can effectively give voice to the normally silenced and can poignantly illuminate what is typically masked" (Greene, 1994, p. 541). In addition, qualitative data has a focus on 'thick' description; categories which include "richness and detail in the data" (Denscombe, 1998, p. 220), "stressing the interpretation of cultural meaning" (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1994, p. 258), and "includes the intentions of the social actors" (Blaickie, 2000, p. 240). These four categories exemplify the way in which the use of 'thick' description (introduced by Geertz, 1999) provides data that is contextually informed, interpretative, and focused upon the intentions of the actors. In our case, as the elites were internal to the political process, the data produced was contextually informed.

Underlying the qualitative approach, the constructivist paradigm was adopted; in doing so, the knowledge claims that were made from the interview data would typically seek the meaning of human action. The use of elite practitioners allowed understanding of the role of research participants and their contribution towards

political phenomena in contemporary Britain. Furthermore, as constructivism is contextually grounded, all research participants were part of the political process, therefore, contextually embedded within British politics.

“Constructivist inquirers seek to understand contextualised meaning, to understand the meaningfulness of human actions and interactions as experienced and construed by the actors in a given context. The aim is based on the assumption that the social world, as distinct from the physical world, does not exist independently” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 986).

The constructivist paradigm is inductive and works broadly from data to theory as opposed to the positivist paradigm of hypothesis testing, that is to say, the other way round. (The use of induction is referred to in section 4.2.7).

#### **4.2.2 Research Participants**

Research participants were drawn from six broad areas which provided a working framework with which to understand British political phenomena. Research participants were selected according to two criteria: a) their knowledge of, and involvement in, the political process; b) their representativeness for the categories used e.g. speechwriter, policy maker. The following groups were interviewed:

- 1). Former party leaders and chiefs of staff.
- 2). Speechwriters.
- 3). Caricaturists.
- 4). Media commentators/correspondents/public service broadcasting editors.
- 5). Policy makers/advisors.
- 6). Leaders of Quasi-non governmental organisations (quangos).

This pattern of interviewees provided analysis of the Westminster context within which the case studies operated e.g. role of speechwriters, impact of the media and caricaturists, policy makers, leaders of quangos upon a leader's publicly perceived character traits and political persona; and the impact of such contexts upon British

political leadership. The interviews with former party leaders highlighted the relationship of leaders to the Westminster context.

#### **4.2.3 Gatekeepers and access**

Given the contemporary nature of the research topic, interviewees were difficult to access as they worked in “closed or private settings where access is controlled by gatekeepers” (Silverman, 2000, p. 198). In our case, research participants were internal to the political process and most had a direct link to the case studies and operated within the ‘Westminster village’. Having approached participants as a University PhD student who was conducting research, all declined to be interviewed, citing various reasons e.g. time, did not want to elaborate case studies, and anonymity.

Partly in order to overcome this barrier, I undertook a full-time research internship at Demos, a centre-left London-based think-tank. Demos is a recognisable brand within the Westminster village context; working at Demos was particularly helpful for the research in terms of access to participants and neutrality. Accessing research participants through gatekeepers became much easier as Demos already had an established network of contacts with elites across the three main political parties. For the duration of fieldwork, I became part of the ‘Westminster village’ context and adopted the pattern of networking and language used by the elite community. At Demos I was also able to observe the role of think-tanks and relationship to political actors and politics, particularly leadership politics. As a full-time research intern I had access to all the identified research participants who, having previously declined to be interviewed, now agreed. The internship at Demos was successful in terms of gaining access to research participants as well as a base for 6 months while I carried out the fieldwork (September 2008-February 2009). As an independent PhD student,

access to research participants was refused; ironically, as an involved intern at Demos, access to interviewees was infinitely easier.

#### **4.2.4 Semi-structured interview structure**

Semi-structured interviews were used to gain the viewpoints of research participants; this allowed respondents greater voice than in a structured interview; and offered the researcher a degree of latitude in terms of posing further questions to points raised by the interviewee. As a qualitative approach to the research was adopted, semi-structured interviews were the best method of gaining the views of elites and their role in the political process. This approach provided understanding of political phenomena in British politics as elaborated by research participants, and provided understanding of political leadership in context. The aims were not to provide a “mirror reflection of the reality that exists in the social [and political] world” (Silverman, 2000, p. 125) as in the positivist tradition, partly because

“we cannot study lived experience directly in social science due to language, speech and systems of discourse mediate the very experience and define the very experience we attempt to describe. We study the representation of experience, not experience itself” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000. p. 636).

Elite interviewees provided representations of their experiences within the political process, enabled understanding of the nature of contemporary British political leadership as constructed by the Westminster village, and generated analytical/theoretical propositions from the interview data. In order to generate meaningful data, the interview questions posed were open-ended but all related to the theoretical preoccupation with British political leadership performance and were informed by a series of pre-identified themes that emerged from the literature review and framework of political performance. The identified themes for each group were:

- Former party leaders: character traits, political culture, institutions, events/circumstances, practice of leadership. Chiefs of staff: role, influence, projection of the leader, relationship to the media.
- Speechwriters: process of speechwriting, characteristics, projection of character, audience.
- Caricaturists: characteristics of the product, representation of political actors, impact, audience and longevity.
- Media (including Public Service Broadcasting editors, commentators and magazine editors): influence/impact, practice of political reporting, representation of political actors, relationship between politics and the media.
- Policy makers: characteristics, impact, representation of political actors.
- Leaders of quangos: role of the quango, relationship to political actors.

The questions/discussion prompts used for each group were derived from the identified themes referred to. The questions used were consistent for each group interviewed, apart from political leaders as previous party leaders made direct reference to their experiences of political leadership and performance. The interview sheet used prompts rather than definitive questions. The prompts/questions used for former political leaders were:

- Does the idea of the character traits of a leader have any mileage in terms of politics?
- Are character traits politically significant?
- How do leaders communicate with audiences?
- How do events and circumstances affect leadership?
- What is the role of the media as regards leadership and performance?
- Does the style and substance, policy and personality debate inform contemporary political leadership?

- Does the conflation of the public/private realm affect political leadership persona?
- Will the character and image of political leaders play a part in the General Election of 2010? If so, how?

The questions/discussion prompts used for speechwriters, media practitioners, caricaturists, policy makers, leaders of Quangos were as follows:

- What is the role of [speechwriter, media, caricaturist, policy making, leader of the quango], in terms of politics?
- Does the idea of the character traits of a leader have any mileage in terms of politics? If so, how?
- How does the character of a leader come across in [speechwriting, political coverage, visual journalism, policy making]?
- What is the impact of [speechwriting, political coverage, visual journalism, policy making] on political leadership?
- Can sympathetic coverage enhance the status of a leader? Can you promote the leader rather than policy?
- Specific questions on the case studies i.e. how did coverage of Tony Blair inform his 'regular guy' image?
- Will image and character play a part in the General election of 2010? If so, how?

For all six groups, the themes determined the questions. However, new themes emerged from the interviews which are outlined in the analysis chapter (see chapter 5). The emergence of new themes provided a richer account of the context in which the case studies operate.

#### **4.2.5 Role of the researcher in conducting the research**

The role of the researcher was internal to the research process. My own 'self' was acknowledged and used as an additional resource e.g. as a young, smart, formally dressed British-Asian female, I gained a positive response from interviewees. Although the characteristics of the researcher can lead to bias and error, a focus on objectivity and a strict ethical code of conduct overcame this. At all times, I was professional, adhered to ethical guidelines and considerations and protected the anonymity of research participants. The context of the interviews varied and was determined by the interviewee, some interviews were conducted at the institution where interviewees worked e.g. Portcullis House, Millbank, or informal settings such as various coffee shops and pubs around Westminster. Some interviewees rearranged interviews, 2 interviews were conducted by telephone, and 1 interviewer requested sending questions by email, and responded discursively in writing. 3/30 interviews were not conducted in person. According to Bryman "telephone interviewing suffers from certain limitations when compared to the personal interview" (2004, p. 115). Given the ratio of telephone to personal interviewing, 2:30, meaningful data was obtained although I was unable to produce full transcripts of the telephone interviews. At the beginning of the interviews, I introduced myself and the research, and reason for conducting interviews; this provided a context for research participants as their role in the research was acknowledged. Some interviewees were very interested in the thesis and a discussion followed; others were aware of time limitations and diary commitments and therefore wanted to begin the interview immediately. I then gave participants the consent form to which they either agreed to be recorded or not (see appendix A). Where interviewees did not want to be recorded I took notes. The length of interviews varied from 15 minutes to one hour, depending upon the time available to interviewees. I received very positive feedback from

interviewees regarding my subject knowledge, and professional conduct during the interviews. As follows, ethical considerations are referred to.

#### **4.2.6 Ethical Considerations**

“Qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000. p, 447). Throughout the research process there was an emphasis on ethics as the research topic was of a sensitive nature and research participants were part of the political process. Interviewees therefore had overt access to the research project and interview questions.

#### **4.2.7 Data management**

The 30 interviews were treated as a data-set. All recorded interviews were fully transcribed; the main points of the telephone and non-recorded interviews were noted.

The data-set was then separated into six groups of interviewees. As part of the research methodology, I adopted a qualitative approach and the constructivist paradigm which is inductive in that it works from data to theory. The interview data was coded according to pre-identified themes identified in the literature review and framework of political performance. The interview data generated analytical points which constituted the Westminster context within which the case studies perform within and upon. The points raised in the interviews are set out in chapter 5 and are referred to in chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9.

### **4.3 Case Study Approach**

The framework of political performance was applied to the case studies. “As a research strategy, the case study is used in many situations to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomenon” (Yin, 2003, p. 1) This approach tied in well with the aims of our research which were to understand political phenomena, specifically, political leadership performance in Britain. The use of a case study approach allowed us to “appreciate the uniqueness and complexity of the case, its embeddedness and interaction within its contexts” (Stake, 1995, p. 16). The case study approach enabled us to understand political phenomena and the notion of political persona in relation to institutional structures and cultural conditions within the polity.

Yin identifies three different types of case study: 1) exploratory, 2) explanatory which focuses on causal investigations; and 3) descriptive which outlines and describes a phenomenon within its natural context (see Yin, 2003, p. 1-5). In addition to this, Stake (1995, p. 4-5) outlines a further three types of case study: 1) intrinsic: when the research is interested in the case; 2) instrumental: when the case is used to understand more than what is obvious to the researcher; and 3) collective: when a group of cases are studied. For the purposes of our research, the type of case study that we used was explanatory (which will seek to explain political phenomenon and look at causation) and descriptive. Our case study approach is also explanatory and collective and as we are analysing the leadership performance of more than one political leader, our case study approach is also comparative.

The case studies were analysed according to the application of the framework of political performance; the interview data provided the specific Westminster context for leadership performance and was used in the analysis of the case studies. The

material used for analysing the performance of the case studies was derived from several sources: biographies, academic literature, speeches and party manifestos were obtained from official party websites. Some broadsheet newspapers and online news websites also provided useful information.

A comparative case study approach allowed us to determine leadership performance and its operation within cultural and institutional contexts and comparison of leadership performance and political persona.

#### **4.4 Conclusion**

The framework of political performance, elite interviews, and the use of a case study approach enabled contextually informed analysis of political leadership performance in Britain. The following chapter (5) outlines the interviews conducted with elite practitioners and provides the context for chapters 6, 7, 8 and 9 on the leadership performance of the case studies.

## **5 ANALYSIS OF ELITE INTERVIEWS**

## **5a Overview**

The purpose of this chapter is twofold. First, to describe the interviews conducted with a range of senior practitioners (former party leaders and chiefs of staff, speechwriters, caricaturists, media practitioners, policy makers and leaders of quangos) which constitute the Westminster context within which the case studies operate. Each of the six groups were interviewed with a view to understanding the activity of the practitioner, the representation of political actors, and the perceived practice (by the practitioners) of contemporary British politics and leadership.<sup>3</sup> Second, drawing on the interview data, the specific Westminster context relevant to contemporary British political leadership performance is presented.

### **5.1 Former party leaders**

Two former leaders of a national political party were interviewed with a view to understanding contemporary British leadership performance, the relationship between leaders and culture and institutions, personalisation and its effects, and, the mediation of leadership.

#### **5.1.1 Leadership and the emergence of character**

Both party leaders agreed that the character traits of political leaders were important to British political practice; political leader B made reference to 'character' as 'perceived character' and stated that the perception of character can contribute to political effectiveness (we can also add that the perception of character can contribute to the perception of political effectiveness). A positively perceived character as represented by the media can have tangible political effects; for

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<sup>3</sup> 30 interviews were conducted in total. 27 out of 30 interviews were fully transcribed and notes were taken during the other 3. The interviews constitute approximately 30 hours of digital recording and 120 hours of transcription. They are not included as appendices but are available on request.

example, enhance one's status and credibility amongst audiences, peers, adversaries and the commentariat, confer authority and legitimacy, increase one's popularity and fend off political rivals, and generate sympathetic media coverage. Conversely, a negative perception of political actors through one's political actions (or lack thereof) or by way of association, can be very damaging and, often, very difficult to distance oneself from; such circumstances can offer adversaries and rivals political opportunities.

### **5.1.2 Leadership and culture**

Political leader B made specific reference to the political culture in the polity and its "leadership-centred" emphasis e.g. personalisation of political leaders in which the conflation of the personal and political can offer political advantage and opportunity. The boundaries between the political and the personal, the public and the private have become increasingly fuzzy and distorted. Analysis of politics and political processes must take into account the personal. For political actors, the integration of the personal into political activity (and its reception) can generate forms of personal capital; the use of the 'self' as a political resource (and often the correlation with personal capital) has placed greater emphasis upon Aristotelian *ethos* (the person). The 'person' thus exists as a publicly perceived political persona.

### **5.1.3 Leadership and institutions**

Both interviewees made significant reference to the ways in which the media portray politicians, noting that the media is influential in shaping audience opinion. The mediation of leadership (including editing and selecting coverage) is crucial to

political effectiveness and survival in office. The appraisal of the character of political actors in the public realm is a mediated appraisal which may at times be incomplete, edited or politically biased. The ability to read the media is crucial to understanding political elites and political processes more generally. Political leaders are vulnerable to media biases and prejudices; and understanding the role of media management (press secretaries, spin doctors) is important to understanding contemporary politics. Political leader A referred to the relationship between the comportment of political actors and media perceptions:

“if the media perception of someone is as being younger then the politician’s reaction will be to try and look more mature. If the perception is of somebody older then the reaction is to try and say and do things which make you appear to be younger”.

#### **5.1.4 Leadership and circumstance**

As regards events and circumstances, political leader A stated “what’s happening at the time can be completely defining”. Both leaders agreed that the public display of character is fashioned by circumstance and events or eruptions to the polity as well the evolution of political culture: “leadership qualities are a question of fashion depending on the circumstances of the time” or “two years ago you would have put forward a different set of requirements than today”. Leadership responses to unexpected circumstances or events as forms of political action can offer opportunities to fashion publicly perceived character and persona; conversely mishandling or inaction may lead to negative constraints which can damage reputations and status. However, the mediation of leadership and relationship to circumstances is important in terms of the public perception of leadership character and persona.

One interview was conducted with a political chief of staff. The following three quotations as regards leadership performance and character are relevant for our research:

- “In a democracy political personality as manifested in the perception of the public is crucially important and shapes political landscapes and polls and what is felt to be possible”.
- [On the relationship between character and performance] “It is acutely intertwined. It matters if you make a mistake and the way that the public perceive you shapes their response. Tony Blair and the Bernie Ecclestone affair – his character bought him the right to say sorry. It matters when things go wrong”.
- [On political leadership image] “Substance is everything and image follows. We live in a world in which there is a total intermediation of political communication”.

## **5.2 Speechwriters**

The interviews focused on the practice of speechwriting and relationship to aspects of leadership performance; more specifically, to the invention of the discursive persona.

### **5.2.1 The practice of speechwriting**

As regards the activity of speechwriters and the process under which political speeches are produced, all four speechwriters interviewed agreed that speeches are not exclusively the result of an iterative relationship between a political leader and

speechwriter; actors such as special advisors are also key contributors and proof readers. The involvement of multiple actors is consequential for the construction of the publicly perceived discursive persona and its relationship to the audience. In the elaboration of the speechwriting process, speechwriter D raised the point that part of the process involves an understanding of psychology and audience: attention span, suitable junctures to bury something in the text. And that the consideration of the audience is important e.g. a delegate list can help tailor the speech; however, audience can be unpredictable and cannot always be controlled to political purpose.

### **5.2.2 Representation of character**

On the question of how the character of political leaders is represented in speeches, all four speechwriters agreed that familiarity with the personal narrative, comportment, gestures and tone of a speaker enables political character discursive expression. Two out of four speechwriters were of the view that “you have to work with ones strengths” and to emphasise these in speeches. The other two speechwriters were of the opinion that one’s strengths, by virtue of being them, can be likened to a solid base, and that new character traits can be introduced and built into speeches. Speechwriter C stated “the first year he [David Cameron] was seen as lightweight, we made him more gritty after the first year in terms of policy. Now he is more hard headed and not fluffy language”. For speechwriter A

“the trick then is to write against that main tendency and not to confirm it because you’ve got that anyway. So with Blair you get that lightness, that frothiness anyway... what you want to do is give him the stuff that he doesn’t have by virtue of simply being himself. So in a sense you’re writing against character traits”.

### **5.2.3 Impact/success**

All four speechwriters agreed that the success of a speech can be measured through the following days' press coverage. A leader's discursive persona can therefore be appraised through the following day's press coverage. However, this is not always possible; for example, David Cameron's 2008 party conference speech received front page coverage from only three newspapers, as events within and outside of the polity i.e. the global financial crisis, dominated headlines. His speech and its impact were overshadowed by circumstance. Speechwriter A stated that the reduction of a speech into a sentence or soundbite and its appearance in televised News can also demonstrate the impact and success of a speech. The soundbite contained in a speech serves a function beyond media coverage, that is, the longevity of a speech in public memory; for example, Gordon Brown's 2008 conference speech which was primarily about 'serious times', was tagged as the 'no time for a novice' speech. The soundbite also contributed towards Brown's perceived character at this time.

### **5.2.4 Relationship to the audience**

All four speechwriters agreed that the ability to gauge audience was crucial to the success of a speech. Misreading the audience can sometimes establish perceptions of leaders as politically incompetent and out-of-touch, which can be damaging for political careers. Speechwriter B stated that the impact of a speech can be determined by the audience's reaction in the conference hall. However, audiences at party conferences (aside from the media commentariat) are party members; the reaction of the party faithful in most circumstances is positive (and sometimes euphoric) rather than negative. Speechwriter A stated the way in which speeches filter out beyond the conference hall can affect political actors:

“the audience for a political speech isn’t big enough but it does get through into the system in a different way which is you are influencing a smaller group but that smaller group in turn influences a larger group so you’re talking to your colleagues, to the informed journalist, to the informed public through the broadcast media usually and the speech will usually change the terms of trade; it will change the terms on which you are viewed”.

### **5.3 Caricaturists**

This section describes the interviews with caricaturists and refers to the practice of political caricature and how this relates to aspects of leadership performance e.g. to the relationship between political caricature and image and persona, and to the ways in which persona is shaped by visual representation.

#### **5.3.1 Caricature and image**

The characteristics (and practice) of political caricature i.e. the representation of political actors, is, by nature, negative and reductive. Caricaturists, also referred to as ‘visual journalists’, often exaggerate what is considered to be trivial e.g. facial expressions or gestures; such exaggerations/trivialisations can balloon and establish themselves within mainstream politics, in doing so, establish a particular image and/or persona of political actors which can live on in public memory. The embeddedness of political caricature as a part of the political process can have damaging and irreversible political consequences; for example, Steve Bell’s depiction of John Major wearing his underpants outside his trousers made reference to Major’s perceived character as dull, silly and twitty, and a comical imitator of Superman; traits which proved difficult to negotiate and revise in the public realm.

#### **5.3.2 The activity of visual journalism**

The activity of visual journalism can damage the reputations and status of political leaders. Illustrations of Sir Menzies Campbell (leader of the Liberal Democrats in mid 2007) walking with a zimmer frame or wearing colourful woolly socks symbolised his age and, consequentially, a ferocious media attack on Campbell's leadership began through the mediums of print and visual journalism. This dented his authority and legitimacy within his party and beyond, and led to his resignation. The image of youthful party leaders became, at least for a time, part of the culture of contemporary British politics. Aside from the activity of the caricaturist as a "licenced court jester" (Caricaturist A), caricature has a dark side that can diminish political credibility and end political ambitions and careers. Another case in point being the representation of David Steel in 'Spitting Image' in that it contributed to the failure of the Steel-Owen alliance. Conversely, some illustrations have the opposite effect and can (temporarily and dependent upon the lifespan of the cartoon) enhance the status of political actors. Depictions of Gordon Brown as 'Superman' in late 2008/9, drawing humour from his Freudian slip at Prime Minister's Questions when he said that he had saved the world instead of the economy, in part, revived his image as a pragmatic, experienced and capable executive who was able to solve complex problems such as the financial crisis. The caricature of Brown as 'Superman' coincided with an increase in his poll ratings; caricature can, temporarily, enhance the status of political figures (see BBC Poll Tracker).

### **5.3.3 The representation of political leaders**

One of the characteristics of political caricature includes "exaggerating the cock-ups the politicians make" or "going for the weak spot" (Caricaturist A). Visual journalism is therefore based upon some truth and likeness to the political actor being represented; and such likeness or (albeit exaggerated) faithfulness is constructed around the actions, utterances, comportment, style and image of the subject. Political

caricature exaggerates aspects of leadership character as identified by caricaturists.

Caricaturist B stated that

“some political figures can be reduced down to symbols and props i.e. Thatcher and her handbag, Churchill and his cigar, Hitler and his moustache; with other political figures this may not be so easy and when this is the case, cartoonists tend to concentrate on physicality”.

In the quotation above, the image and style of political actors is crucial to understanding politics. Caricaturist C stated that:

“I used to think that I was drawing a cartoon to bring a government down but I realised that’s not the point at all. They are in fact almost as ritualised as a kind of no theatre that politicians must expect to be treated in extremely unpleasant and disrespectful ways because it is part of the political process”. Interviewee C elaborated the way in which the character of Gordon Brown was represented in caricature: “I think Gordon is an interesting case because um, um... I always used to draw him before he became Prime Minister as this kind of brooding Hamlet figure indecisive Hamlet figure, you know sort of him, pictures of Blair about to peg out in the forum as Julius Caesar and Brown saying to the conspirators ‘not yet he is still looking a sight too feisty’ and then, um, when he became Prime Minister, he was actually doing quite a good job for about 2 or 3 months”.

## **5.4 Media**

In this section, the interviews conducted with media practitioners are described. The interview sample was divided into three categories: 5.4.1) Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) political editors, 5.4.2) political correspondents and 5.4.3) political magazine editors. The three categories included practitioners from television and print media. We decided to focus primarily on these two mediums as the mediation of political discourse and leadership takes place actively through these two established mediums in contemporary British politics. From the 20 media interviews conducted, we sought to understand the mediation of politics and leadership; coverage of politics: process, content, selection; political literacy; personalisation of

political discourse; representation of the character of political leaders; and elements of political performance.

#### **5.4.1 Public Service Broadcasting (PSB) Editors**

##### **5.4.1a PSB and political literacy**

All three political editors interviewed agreed that the role of PSB is to provide the public with political information that is based upon truth and actual events/scenarios and that political coverage remains faithful to the values of objectivity and impartiality.

The public dimension was endorsed strongly by PSB Editor B:

“I think public service broadcasting feel a weight of conscience to help people to understand politics and guide them towards the election and their decisions which you wouldn’t, I don’t think the conscience would weigh so heavily, if the public section really wasn’t there”.

The nature of PSB as non-partisan means that it is one medium through which audiences gain political literacy that would have itself, at least impartial and value-free. In spite of this, however, PSB Editor A stated that the mantra of PSB is to “inform, educate and entertain” and went on to state that “being entertaining and engaging is absolutely crucial”. Similarly, PSB Editor B made reference to “the appetite for sexy stories in inverted commas, umm... appetite for personality stories and we dabble in those and maybe we overdo it”. The nature of political coverage within the medium of PSB (in part responsive to competing mediums) has changed and can be referred to as ‘politainment’; politainment referring to the representation and coverage of politics in an entertaining fashion. Therefore, political literacy that audiences gain through the medium of PSB may not be completely objective and may contain elements of entertainment which may offer political actors positive opportunities in terms of status, credibility, authority; or, negative constraints. PSB is

linked to culture e.g. the emphasis upon celebrity – which informs performance via the institution of the media.

#### **5.4.1b Editorial practices and political coverage**

The question of editorial practices is politically significant and consequential in terms of political coverage and representation. All three PSB editors described editorial practices e.g. “in the end all you can do is ask yourself ‘does this matter?’ and is this of interest to the public” or

“we choose and if I think er that it’s important that people see that moment, er, and I think that it tells you something about the person or if it’s something that they’re entitled to see because it tells me something I mean learn about the person because they suddenly got angry, or lost their way or something like that then you know Charles Kennedy Um losing his way at the press conference because of his alcohol problem... at the election 2005, er, you you put it in”;

or “most of the politics that we cover is not so much the machinations but so much what the politicians are doing and the impact of their decisions or not on our viewers”.

PSB editor B outlined editorial influence and responsibility and value judgements:

“and to say that we don’t shape things and were just I think is er slightly er understating our role. I think we should know our role and our influence because we’ve got to be responsible and we’ve got to be beating ourselves up and self... all the time, making sure we don’t abuse it, to pretend that we don’t have it er opens the door to all sorts of abuse I think”.

“My job is meant to be about judgement. It’s meant to be um, every journalist, most journalists job is meant to be about judgement. It’s about working out what’s important that day, who these characters are, what makes them tick, what their judgement is like but um... that’s what we do” (ibid).

#### **5.4.1c Representation of political actors**

In the discussion of the representation of political actors, all three PSB editors made reference to editorial practices and the emphasis upon impartial coverage as it

happens, and coverage that is based upon the actions of politicians, PSB editor A, B and C respectively stated:

“We would never select a look and feel for our packages and our studio with the objective of helping to positively or negatively present a party leader. I mean that would never enter our mind. We would never get involved in trying to enhance or diminish the reputation of any politician. We would never do sympathetic or hostile coverage. We report the news as we see it”.

“He [the politician] decides erm the original framing and we can only use the picture he gives us. I don’t I don’t think we... the question might have suggested that we in some way were trying to work out how that we project him as a leader and I don’t think we really I don’t think that’s a mental process we go through”.

“We try and cover things as they happen and try and do them as faithfully as we think we are covering them correctly. I don’t think we go out and think ‘this man is wonderful, this man is whatever, we will paint him that way. I think image is rather like a cartoon, cartoonists seize on an aspect of someone’s personality or look and use that as a short-hand. Political journalists do the same as well”.

All three editors emphasised their role in the process of representing politicians and that they aimed to faithfully present news and politics as it happens, as opposed to consciously projecting and endorsing political figures in particular ways that would be beneficial (or not) to them. In the discussion of how the character of politicians is represented, PSB Editor A made reference to the ways in which they select politicians for TV interviews:

“on the basis of how they perform. If a politician mumbles their way through an interview then you may think people will immediately be turning to the off button so we have to consider those factors as well. This is where the whole image side of things comes in”.

Character and performance are acutely intertwined and can have positive effects for politicians. PSB editor A referred to David Cameron’s performance of his 2005 conference speech against his political rival, David Davis:

[Cameron’s] “performance was notable because it was seen in stark contrast to his political opponent in that particular conference which was David Davis... Cameron’s speech looked better but if you stood back and made an assessment, actually what those two speeches said was more than what they just said. You’re saying being a leader of the party, being the leader of any institution is a performance and you have to instil confidence”.

In this case, it was the performance itself that conferred character traits upon the audience and in turn generated personal capital and established Cameron's political persona within his party and as a credible opposition leader.

PSB editor B referred to the relationship between performance, character and faithful political coverage:

“when Gordon was running for office, um maybe this is shaming him, no, but he would he would frequently miss the step on his way er onto the platform and then just... not fall over but just miss the step slightly... we use that shot because it was him and it was it was authentic, it was authentic, it told you something about the man. You've got to engage and draw people in and, but it is about the man and and likewise, if I saw David Cameron, the equivalent would be sort of turning round and just sort of touching his hair a bit in the in the shop window, god I'd use that shot as well it just, there's something authentic about it”.

The mediation of the character of politicians through PSB is informed by the value-judgements of editors as indicated by PSB Editor B:

“I'm supposed to be, you know, getting to know them, working out who they are and helping people with that judgement its er, you know enormous... er er it's a responsibility and a privilege and all sorts of other things”.

As PSB is unlike other media outlets which are commercially driven, it was noted in the interviews, nevertheless, that the style of political coverage has changed in response to intense competition from other mediums such as the Internet and the press, as well as a change in audience expectations towards entertainment. The emphasis upon entertainment and personalisation of politics has altered the ways in which politicians communicate, for example, PSB editor A stated that the style of politicians communicating in the media was

“one of which you concede where you have limitations, you're more honest in the way you communicate and I think a lot of broadcasters actually warm to those kinds of politicians because it's more engaging for the public and you don't hit a brick wall”.

High levels of personalisation, as in British politics e.g. the public display of the character of political leaders and its mediation, can generate forms of personal capital and create a series of imagined relationships between leader and led (or leader and audience) which in turn can offer politicians followership, authority and legitimacy.

#### **5.4.2 Political Correspondents**

Political correspondents were interviewed with a view to understanding media influence; the practice of political commentating; the representation of political leaders; the mediation of political leadership; and the relationship between correspondents and politicians. Political reporters, journalists, commentators and sketch-writers were included in the category of political correspondents.

##### **5.4.2a Political influence of the media**

All interviewees were aligned to different sections of either mainstream press or T.V. and PSB channels, they noted that political influence did not really lie with their institution, and cited objectivity, competition between different mediums (in particular associated with New Media and the Internet) as weakening the influence of any one medium, and that the fragmentation of audiences means that specific new mediums such as blogs are able to represent specific audiences and interests.

Political commentators who worked for newspapers noted that the media “can shape the impressions of people” (Correspondent A) but influence is limited to readership profiles and political affiliation. However, the political influence of newspapers was cited as being linked to readership profiles. Furthermore, the declining sales of newspapers were also referred to; they have become niche products which appeal to different readership profiles and are representative of particular interests (ibid). It was

also noted that the medium of television is politically influential than newspapers in shaping the preferences of audiences.

#### **5.4.2b Practice of political reporting**

In terms of the practice of political reporting and representation of the performance of political leaders, 3 interviewees made reference to the principles of objective reporting: “we try and tell it straight and as it is” or “we are mirror images of politicians. If a politician is hopeless the media will report him as hopeless. If a politician is brilliant, and has what we call box office appeal, we can get that out there” or “we work hard to be fair”, suggesting that politics is faithfully reported and that political actors (through their actions, comportment, performances) are able to control, to some extent, their mediation in the public realm. Correspondent B noted that editorial practices are important in terms of how politics is reported “even with a paper, an editor has influence over how the leaders appear on page 2 of *The Times*. So that kind of features obviously in the promotion of people”. The activity of political commentating strives to be fair and impartial; however, editorial practices can be influential and feature in the ways in which politics and political actors are represented.

Correspondent C made reference to the practice of political reporting, and that the media can exacerbate political infighting between opponents, and shape the image of political actors; the example cited was that of Vince Cable’s intervention at Prime Minister’s Questions in November 2008 citing Gordon Brown as ‘Mr Bean’ (see also chapter 7):

“it will often be a newspaper or a TV programme which spots something you know. The ... writers, the commentators, they are quite influential at projecting the image. I mean it was famous you know – Stalin to Mr Bean quote... but I mean he was... but I mean he was following on, that was something in a way that had been set

by the media. And you will find that the attacks that politicians make on each other, both parties, are usually based on what was happening in the media”.

The media are thus semi-political actors who are embedded in the political process; contemporary British politics cannot be seen in isolation to the media.

#### **5.4.2c Representation of politicians**

Interviewees were questioned about how they represent the image and character of politicians. 6 out of 8 correspondents noted that representation depends upon different forms of political action undertaken by politicians e.g. responses to events/circumstances, performance handling (or mis-handling) during crisis moments, performances in front of the media which cultivate a particular character and image e.g. “David Cameron’s opening his home through Webcameron, portraying him as a family man” (Correspondent C). It was agreed that the reporting of the perceived character of political leaders was a result of political actions undertaken by politicians themselves (and his/her team of spin doctors) and that political reporters “just write what they see”. And,

“any mess that occurs is usually created by the politicians themselves. Yes we highlight it, yes we magnify it. But only on the basis that you know its blatantly obvious for all to see... but they don’t actually make the initial incision. The initial incision is usually the creation of the politicians” (Correspondent D);

or “I suppose perceptions of their character change and they are often determined by things that they do” (Correspondent A); if this is the case then political actors are able to some extent, control their publicly perceived character and image within media circles and beyond.

#### **5.4.2d The relationship between correspondents and politicians**

The relationship between correspondents and politicians can be formative of the representation of political actors and consequential in terms of the amount of political coverage, duration and type of coverage e.g. positive or negative. Such a relationship (in part brokered by spin-doctors) can be decisive in offering politicians positive opportunities to shape and manage their publicly perceived character and persona or negative constraints. The relationship is particularly important in contemporary British politics given the context of commercialisation and intense competition between media institutions in gaining access to news stories. Correspondent A stated “what we are striving for is to be close enough to politicians so that they will tell us what is going on and tell us in their opinion and tell us the truth and give us great stories they give to us first before they give to anyone else”. Access to political actors and political representation is an important one; correspondent C noted that politicians can, to an extent, control the media by offering them privileged access which results in positive coverage and if coverage is negative any future access will not be granted. If this is the case, political actors can shape their mediated character and image. Conversely, correspondent B noted that it is the media that have influence over politicians:

“we are constantly interacting with leaders; they are watching what we say. They’re constantly watching what we say and adapting their projection of themselves to media expectations. So it’s a complicated interaction”.

We now turn to the analysis of political magazine editors and look at the representation of political actors in the context of commercially driven mediated political output. The aims were to understand politics in practice from the point of view of political editorship in the context of a political magazine.<sup>4</sup>

### **5.4.3 Political magazine editors**

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<sup>4</sup> In total, 3 political magazine editors were interviewed from two leading magazines, Editors A and C worked for the same magazine.

### **5.4.3a Role of political magazines**

In the discussions of the role of political magazines, Editors A and C who worked for the same magazine stated that their publication was a political lifestyle magazine which “represents the positive side of politics”. The magazine is sent to every elected politician in the U.K. and sold nationally. Editor A stated that political coverage is comprehensive and that they were trying to overcome the approachability issue in that the publication is not only read by politicians but has a wider appeal. Editor B stated that their publication attempts to uncover a “side of new political leaders which might be underplayed elsewhere” and that the emphasis was upon the intellectual life and intellectual heritage of politicians. The two magazines differed in terms of purpose and priorities, the question of audience was important in terms of purpose; both magazines are monthly publications and are sold nationally. The typical readership profile is likely to be political practitioners within the Westminster Village, MPs, academics, policy makers and some sections of the electorate.

### **5.4.3b Representation of the character of leaders**

All three editors stated that they aim to faithfully to portray the character of political leaders while adhering to the house style of the publication, whether that is “delving into one’s intellectual heritage” or “talking to them more about their life as a politician, and what drives the day to day acts of being a politician”. Interviews with leaders contained headings appropriate to the character of the politician; Editor A interviewed Gordon Brown at the beginning of his premiership in 2007, the seriousness projected throughout the interview represented Brown’s perceived character and the publication highlighted one of the quotes from the interview that referred to Brown differentiating himself from his predecessor, a quote which read “I have character, not personality”. The projection of the seriousness of Brown as prime minister, devoid

of spin was captured in the publication. Editor A stated that a lot of time is dedicated to

“investigating relationship between parties and government departments... and obviously that increasingly involves people’s personalities, their decisions, their judgements and all that comes down to character at the end of it”.

Political coverage is thus coverage of the publicly perceived character of politicians who perform within (and to) Westminster (and beyond). One out of the three editors interviewed referred to performance. Editor C stated “if you’re not naturally good at performing in modern politics its unlikely you’ll succeed”, and went on to state that presentation is linked to character: “well the character again can sound a presentation” and “character is the vehicle through which you communicate who you are, what you are about, and why you are good for the country”. Thus performance and presentation are linked to character; the positive reception of a leader’s performance, presentation and character by political magazine editors and the media more generally can have tangible political effects e.g. positive coverage of character and representation of persona.

In terms of the influence of magazines in creating political characters, editor C stated “I don’t think the media do create characters. I think characters create themselves” and “the media doesn’t create the persona, it’s your actions that allow them to create the persona”.

## **5.5 Policy makers**

Two civil service policy makers were interviewed with a view to understanding the nature of policy making and its impact, and the relationship between policy and leadership performance.

### **5.5.1 The activity of policy making**

The activity of policy making in British politics differs departmentally and is informed by the style of the policy leader. Policy maker B provided a threefold framework with which we can understand the policy making process within the context of British political culture and institutions:

1. "Policy can be made by an unelected government and if they are voted in it is generally the case that the policies outlined in the manifesto become legislation".
2. "Within a parliamentary cycle you have to react to events. When this government was re-elected in 2005, the global economic downturn was not on the horizon. So policies are being reinvented in the light of events: economic; military; social; the big explosion in knife crime".
3. "The third aspect of policy is ministers and their department briefs are constantly thinking of ideas, receiving ideas from their civil servants, special advisors, general public, lobby groups'. It is also the case that under the direction of the Prime Minister of the day, The Strategy Unit provides policy and strategy advice and undertakes commissioned pieces of work".

The way in which policy is presented and received by audiences can affect the publicly perceived persona of political leaders. Policy is one area through which the character of a leader gains expression within the public realm.

### **5.5.2 The projection of character through policy**

As policy is one way in which a leader's character is projected; unexpected events and circumstances can offer opportunities to deploy innovative policy, in so doing, fashion publicly perceived character and persona. The 2008 financial crisis offered scope for

"fundamental changes in direction e.g. recapitalising the Banks was innovative policy of a very big nature, and bold and brave. That was clear policy innovation. It's risky, big and it's got to impact; it was driven out of urgent events. So in a crisis that means someone is a risk taker, have the judgement and guts to try things that are different and I think that comes to the character of people" (Policy maker A).

The policy of recapitalising the banks initially was very successful in terms of the positive character traits of Brown that were conferred upon the audience, first internationally and then nationally. The replication of Brown's 'Bailout' policy package internationally was decisive in enhancing his status and moral authority internationally; positive endorsements from (mainly) international political peers fed into the national perception and image of Brown as wise, innovative, and proactive, and temporarily enhanced his status and credibility as prime minister. Interviewee B stated that the Bailout policy was "a good example of an innovation that boosted the reputation of the person who took it". Small scale policy innovations too can have positive (or negative) effects.

### **5.5.3 Policy versus personality**

Over the last 10-15 years the policy versus personality or style versus substance debate has gained currency in British politics and has coincided with the personalisation of political actors. We sought to understand the views of policy makers in relation to this. They stated:

"in the long run substance will always prevail over form. People who are salesmen and no substance do get found out. You have got to be able to do both in the modern political age. If you can't communicate your policies and make people believe that what you are doing is right, the morals and character behind it then you will fail. I think it's necessary to have both. The British public will always vote for something that they think is right rather than something that is presented smoothly" (Policy maker A)

Policy maker B stated "I think things change a lot. I think at times style matters, I think at other times substance matters". The projection of either personality over policy or vice versa depends upon several factors; what is important is that a leader's comportment (whether emphasising style or substance) fits events/circumstances and audience expectations.

## **5.6 Quasi non-governmental organisations**

Two leaders of Quasi non-governmental organisations were interviewed. As both leaders have direct experiences with past and present prime ministers and party leaders, the interviews sought to understand contemporary political culture, institutions and leadership performance from the point of view of the interviewees.

### **5.6.1 Contemporary political discourse**

Both interviewees were reflective of the Blair administration and the leadership of Gordon Brown. Interviewee A referred to British politics and the emphasis upon a presidential style of government:

“I think it’s – I think it’s something which is changing. I think people now talk when they talk about the prime minister they talk about and ask questions about whether we’ve got now a presidential form of government. In other words are people more interested in the person, that person and their characteristics, their character, their competencies rather may be than they are in individual policies”. Question: And has that changed over time? “I think it probably has. I think it’s too simple to say it’s kind of following the American model. But even in my lifetime I’ve seen quite significant shift towards kind of presidential character based system”.

Interviewee A also referred to the role of spin in relation to the Blair administration and the ways in which confidence was lost in Blair:

“I think the other thing you can’t kind of ignore where he’s [Tony Blair] concerned is the effect of what became his spin. You know people’s confidence in him and their ability to believe him. So what started out as informal regular guy who will engage and speak to people, kind of people then became to start questioning that I think, you know. Can we believe what we see? Can we believe what we hear? Is it actually to some extent, artificial? Is it a charade because you know the spin appears to be capturing the person? So even before Iraq I think people had begun to kind of out, but it was the Iraq policy that did it for him”.

On the personalisation of politics, interviewee A stated

“I think we are just becoming a more obsessed with – well image and character are different things. I mean I think one would hope that character always has played a part in elections. I think the fact

that people are under such scrutiny during the election period, means that their character is under huge kind of investigation”.

On the mediation of leadership, interviewee B stated that

“the public’s relationship with political leaders I think is mediated through the print and televisual media to be honest so er, I I I don’t I don’t think people feel a greater sense of connection with the politicians now. In fact in some ways I think they feel slightly more alienated”

and went on to note that the electorate’s alienation from politics is manifested through declining levels of political trust. Perhaps even more important than this, interviewee B elaborated on the image management and staging of political actors:

“I think this sort of image management of politicians identity, of their personality, character whatever er I think it’s a real problem because it prevents people, prevents people getting some sense of who this person really is er, but er, but also makes it very difficult for people to identify with them”.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion to this chapter which has described the interviews conducted with a range of practitioners integral to contemporary British politics, aspects summarising the Westminster cultural and institutional context within which the case studies operate are outlined. This is then related to contemporary leadership performance, character and persona. The following aspects constitute the Westminster context:

- A cultural shift within the polity in which a “leadership-centred kind of political culture” has emerged (Political leader B). The emphasis upon political leadership has highlighted the role of character, the ‘person’ and the ‘persona’. For example, “where David Cameron goes, where he is seen, what he is seen wearing, what he is seen talking about, what his interests are, all serve to define the character” (Speechwriter C) and “if you’re not naturally

good at performing in modern politics its unlikely you'll succeed" (Political magazine editor C).

- An institutional shift is evident in the ways in which politicians are portrayed in the media. The age of 24 hour news has intensified coverage of political leaders; in some cases the ferocity of media coverage can offer positive opportunities for performance as well as negative constraints. The media are thus semi-political actors who are embedded in the political process; contemporary British politics cannot be seen in isolation to the media.
- A highly influential media operates within Westminster, which, at times, operates as a "pack mentality" (Political correspondent A) and can significantly affect political status, authority and outcomes. Political leaders are thus not in control of their publicly perceived character and persona.
- The value judgements of PSB editors are significant to the political process and the representation of political actors in the public realm; PSB editors are semi-political practitioners who can help or hinder political careers. The often close relationship between politicians and PSB editors/journalist can blur objectivity and can determine value-free judgements which consequentially can cause damage to the credibility of PSB.
- Political correspondents were committed to the principle of objective political reporting; however, in practice, the value judgements of political correspondents and editors can feature in political reporting.
- The rise of New Media e.g. the Internet, has lessened the influence of newspapers or news broadcasts and has increased the competitiveness between correspondents in terms of gaining access to politicians and news stories. The role of spin doctors is a feature of contemporary British politics.

- The way in which political actors are received by caricaturists is important in the representation of politicians. The nature of political caricature depends upon several factors, including the actions, utterances, image, style, character, performances of politicians, events and circumstances, and the actions of political peers and opponents.
- Speeches are part of the political process, and one of the ways in which the perceived character of politicians is imagined by audiences. "Speeches are an important act of leadership. It's a very effective form of leading because you're gathering your tribe because they're all watching, not necessarily there in the hall paying keen attention, all 300 MPs you got and they then start to pick that up it's a lot more efficient than writing to them all or having them all in for a meeting and you're doing it all the time. So it's a very important act of leadership... its honing the argument and pushing it forward". (Speechwriter A). Moreover, the emphasis upon party conference speeches by the media illustrates not only the role of language in politics but political performance.
- British politics has undergone a shift towards a highly personalised/semi-presidential system in terms of contemporary styles of leadership and the emphasis placed upon political actors:  
  
"I think people now talk when they talk about the prime minister they talk about and ask questions about whether we've got now a presidential form of government, in other words are people more interested in the person, that person and their characteristics, their character, their competencies rather than they are in individual policies". "I think it probably has. I think it's too simple to say it's kind of following the American model. But even in my lifetime I've seen quite significant shift towards kind of presidential character basis system" (Leader of opposition B).
- Policy innovations that are responsive to circumstances/events can have some effect upon a leader's status and authority. Through policy, the publicly perceived political persona can emerge both nationally and internationally.

Circumstance and a leader's handling of unexpected events through policy can have positive (and negative) effects. The media reception of policy can be decisive in terms of the perceived character of a leader. Political commentator F stated that "positive coverage is very potent".

Taking into account aspects of the Westminster cultural and institutional context, contemporary British political leadership performance is affected in several ways:

Firstly, political leaders negotiate (whether explicitly or implicitly) their character and image with media institutions. The mediation of leadership is the product of (or struggle with) inherited media institutions which may be politically biased. The media are semi-political actors who are embedded in the political process.

Secondly, the increasing emphasis upon the visual mediation of leadership has emphasised the role of symbolic politics and offered political leaders scope to fashion their political image and style. Furthermore, political action (timing, what is said, done, when, how, by whom) is crucial to the publicly perceived image and character of leaders. Political persona can also be shaped by circumstance and can offer scope for political performance.

Thirdly, political leadership can be reactive, specifically relating to one's political rivals and adversaries, for example

"in 1991 when John Major's government ran into the sands, and there was huge disillusionment – Tony Blair was new, and different, what was looked for, in him as a leader was a reaction to what people had become disillusioned with... it is less the product of what people are or what the public think they are; it is more about the product of how we offer an alternative to what is discredited" (Political leader A).

Political performance cannot be viewed in isolation from political opponents. The ability to outshine or rival political rivals can generate forms of personal capital and enhance a leader's status and credibility within mainstream political discourse.

Fourthly, the value-judgement of PSB editors is one way in which the mediation of the perceived character of politicians can translate into political success: followership, personal capital, election winning and so on or political failure. The ways in which the character of politicians is reported by the media is based upon some element of truth. An already established character and image can have negative political ramifications as regards the mediation of political persona e.g. Brown's dithering over a possible election offered the media scope in which

“quickly they were able to portray a character who was not just dithering but kind of they implied or lots of different... implied lots of different other things for him... awkward or weird or – so I think that does – a misfit” (Political correspondent H). The speed in which the political representations of Brown as the above began was based upon his political actions (albeit exaggerated) and “it does have a slight impact – it feeds through his media, the press he gets, as a slow drip feed effect on the public” (ibid).

Fifthly, the projection of a publicly perceived character and image by a politician that fits ill with circumstances can be damaging, and, very quickly, politicians are no longer in full control of their character and image and are susceptible to negative representations. Even more fatally, once a negative perception gains currency in the media and it can feed into public perception, political status and authority can be damaged. The attempt to recuperate the loss of personal/moral capital can be even more damaging and disingenuous. If it is the case that media representations are exaggerated, then we might say that the role of political reporters is similar to the practice of caricature, as correspondent F pointed out “all we are is a verbal equivalent of a cartoonist”. In addition to the ways that political reporting offers insights into the character of politicians, correspondent F noted the importance of

photographs “photos are the most potent way of getting the image across”. Visual imagery can inform leadership character, image and persona.

Sixthly, political leaders are not in control of their publicly perceived image and persona and are vulnerable (and susceptible) to negative, often very damaging and undermining representations by caricaturists. The frequency of some representations can keep alive a particular image of a political actor and in doing so, can erode and diminish political reputations. Illustrations of politicians are, in part, shaped through the lens of the caricaturist, and the wider prism of caricature as a practice can have negative consequences. Illustrations of politicians in some cases, transcend political time and space e.g. the boundaries of the national polity and exist on an international stage. When visual representations transcend the polity, the image and character of political actors is exposed to a wider audience, and the audience reception to such representations can (if positive) permeate its way through cultural boundaries and offer political actors mass exposure. This enhanced international image can then (though not always) permeate back into the national polity with significant effects. Conversely, the rejection of such representations offers constraints and limited or no opportunities. Therefore, culture outside the polity becomes significant when illustrations of political leaders (or political leaders themselves) transcend national political boundaries.

Seventhly, the effectiveness of a political speech can often be determined by performance and delivery as annual political party conferences have become rally-style events which attract considerable national media attention. A leader's conference speech is important in terms of establishing or reasserting moral and political authority, enhancing political status and credibility, improving political image, and increasing one's stock of personal capital. The memory of David Cameron's 2005 party leadership speech (see chapter 8) was his performance and delivery which established Cameron as a site of political authority within the Conservative

party and as opposition leader. If immediate audiences for political speeches (i.e. in the conference hall) are considered as powerful actors able to initiate a snowball effect of opinion, then the relationship between leader and led becomes crucial to the understanding of politics. Devotion and dependency upon a speaker can translate into positive support and emotional availability. It was, however, the general view among speechwriters that the media reception of a speech (coverage and comment) can impact upon the ways in which political actors are mediated.

This chapter has demonstrated the Westminster context within which the leadership case studies operate. The interviews conducted with elite practitioners who were integral to the political process indicated that leadership character, persona and performance are affected, in most part, by the media. The media refraction of political persona projected in the public realm can dramatically affect political status, authority and tenure in office.

The following three chapters, 6, 7 and 8 apply the framework of political performance to the leadership case studies and use the insights from this chapter as partially constitutive of the context within which performance takes place. Chapter 9 has three sub-chapters, 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3 which correspond to each of the three Leaders' Debates and similarly uses the insights from this chapter as contexts of political performance.

## **6 CASE STUDY, TONY BLAIR**

## 6a Overview

Tony Blair's performance as opposition leader (1994-1997) and as prime minister (1997-2007) is analysed. Nine moments of performance are analysed in order to demonstrate the effects of individual performances upon cultural and institutional contexts, personalised leadership and its operation within a personalised polity, the role of the media and portrayal of leadership actors, the role of symbolic leadership politics *vis-à-vis* the political party, and political institutions offering performative opportunities and constraints. Accounts from Peter Mandelson, Alastair Campbell, Philip Gould and Anthony Giddens – key actors who were central to the development and mediation of New Labour and the mediation of Tony Blair's public persona are referenced throughout this chapter. The following performances are analysed:

- (6.1.1) Party modernisation:

Under the leadership of Blair, from 1994-1997 the identity of a traditionally Left party was discursively repositioned as a centre-Left political party; the Labour party was rebranded as New Labour. Within the context of party rebranding, the appeal of the party was broadened and theoretically justified by its adherence to 'Third Way' politics and the construction of a developing trend of 'modernising' within the party. Blair's modernisation of the Labour party is analysed in terms of rebranding and his discursive response to the rewriting of Clause Four.

- (6.1.2) The Blair/Murdoch agreement:

In 1994, Blair courted media tycoon, Rupert Murdoch and secured positive print media endorsement leading up to the 1997 General Election. We identify the significance of the agreement and Blair's relationship to the media thenceforth; the creation of the role of a press secretary i.e. the appointment

of Alastair Campbell (and centrality) to New Labour; and Blair's move away from his 'Bambi' nickname.

Seven moments of performance during the Blair premiership are analysed:

- (6.2.1) 'Cool Britannia':  
We analyse the refracted impact of the performance upon Blair's image as incoming prime minister.
- (6.2.2) Diana moment:  
The death of Diana is treated as an unexpected event in which Blair exploited a defining and emotionally intense moment in British culture. Blair's statement on her death is analysed as a discursive performance.
- (6.2.3) Bernie Ecclestone scandal:  
Blair's response to the scandal as a performance i.e. his public apology and the effects upon his persona are analysed.
- (6.2.4) Institutional revisions:  
Including, the dispersal of political power i.e. independence of the Bank of England from Government; centralisation of government and revision of collective cabinet government, reform of the House of Commons and Lords; and devolution of Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; and the cumulative effects of these upon his persona and image.
- (6.2.5) Good Friday Agreement:  
We analyse, as a performance, the projection of Blair's persona through the events leading up to the peace process and Blair's announcement of the peace deal
- (6.2.6) Foreign policy, 1999 Kosovo:

Blair's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 as refracted through the media is analysed.

- (6.2.7) Foreign policy, 2003 Iraq War:

Analysis includes reference to Blair's deployment of the special relationship between America and Britain and Blair's discursive performances on the Iraq war.

## **6.1 Leader of the Opposition (1994-1997)**

On 12 May 1994, Labour leader John Smith's death prompted an internal contest. Between the three main contenders, John Prescott, Margaret Beckett and Tony Blair, Blair (aged 43) was, through the party's Electoral College voting system, declared leader of the party on 21 July 1994 with 57% of the vote. Prior to the election, Blair was considered as the "modernisers candidate" (Mandelson, 2011, p. 176) which, in some respects, legitimated his pursuit of modernising the party as leader with a whole series of social, political and economic effects. Blair inherited a strong political party in which there was a general confidence (in part informed by the negativity that dominated John Major's administration and party popularity owing to John Smith) that Labour would win the 1997 election. This was performatively significant in that the institution of the party is a condition of leadership performance and can be used to political purpose. Party modernisation and the Murdoch agreement as forms of political action are analysed in the following sub-sections.

### **6.1.1 Party modernisation**

Under the leadership of Blair, the Labour party was modernised and rebranded as New Labour. A symbolic part of the identity of New Labour was Blair's rewriting of Clause Four of the party's constitution which had "committed the party to the

common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange” (Curtice, 2007, p. 35) as informed by his predecessors, John Smith and Neil Kinnock.

New Labour and the revision of Clause Four were simultaneously presented by Blair at his first conference speech in October 1994. The conference was viewed “as an opportunity to dramatise Tony’s boldness and Labour’s change of direction” (Mandelson, 2011, p. 183). Campbell notes that Blair “would never get as big an opportunity to use a single conference to reshape the party and to signal his commitment to change” (Campbell, 2010, p. 55). He also notes that aside from setting out a new approach as regards policy, the conference was crucially about political leadership and presenting Blair as a “new leader who wanted to change the party” (ibid, p. 55). (Chapter 5 makes reference to speeches as an “important act of leadership” (p. 142). For Blair, his first conference speech provided an opportunity to personalise the self to political purpose; moreover, the party as an institution provided a platform to use the self to mediate political ideology). The characteristics of New Labour were presented as a “modern social democracy” (Mandelson, 2011, preface). Campbell notes that the conference slogan ‘New Labour, New Britain’ was bold, however, “the problem was that New had an opposite, and you couldn’t guarantee there wouldn’t be a lot of hostility” (Campbell, 2010, p. 56). Thus Blair’s relationship to the party and members becomes important as regards policy change.

As a form of policy, Campbell notes that for Blair, “in terms of political substance, it [Clause Four] didn’t actually mean that much. But as a symbol, as a vehicle to communicate change, and his determination to modernise the party, it was brilliant” (Campbell, 2011, p. 50). The act of rewriting Clause Four was mainly symbolic in terms of defining Blair “as a leader of conviction, and Labour as a party ready to recast itself for the modern age” (Mandelson, 2011, p. 178). Blair was part of the

modernisers within the party as opposed to the traditional, and soft (and hard-) Left.

The rewritten Clause Four reads: <sup>5</sup>

1. The Labour party is a democratic socialist party. It believes that by the strength of our common endeavour we achieve more than we achieve alone, so as to create for each of us the means to realise our true potential and for all of us a community in which power, wealth and opportunity are in the hands of the many not the few, where the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe, and where we live together, freely, in a spirit of solidarity, tolerance and respect.

2. To these ends we work for:

- a dynamic economy, serving the public interest, in which the enterprise of the market and the rigour of competition are joined with the forces of partnership and co-operation to produce the wealth the nation needs and the opportunity for all to work and prosper, with a thriving private sector and high quality public services, where those undertakings essential to the common good are either owned by the public or accountable to them;
- a just society, which judges its strength by the condition of the weak as much as the strong, provides security against fear, and justice at work; which nurtures families, promotes equality of opportunity and delivers people from the tyranny of poverty, prejudice and the abuse of power;
- an open democracy, in which government is held to account by the people; decisions are taken as far as is practicable by the communities they affect; and where fundamental human rights are guaranteed;
- a healthy environment, which we protect, enhance, and hold in trust for future generations.

3. Labour is committed to the defence and security of the British people, and co-operating in European institutions, the United Nations, the Commonwealth and other international bodies to secure peace, freedom, democracy, economic security and environmental protection for all.

4. Labour will work in pursuit of these aims with trade unions, co-operative societies and other affiliated organisations and also with voluntary organisations, consumer groups and other representative bodies.

5. On the basis of these principles, Labour seeks the trust of the people to govern.

(Coates, 2000, p. 4-5) (see also Riddell, 1997, p. 47).

The theoretical justification for the abolition of Clause Four and move to the centre-ground was 'Third Way' politics. Professor Anthony Giddens provided the

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<sup>5</sup> The original Clause Four as adopted by the Labour party in 1918 was as follows: "To secure for the workers by hand or by brain the full fruits of their industry and the most equitable distribution thereof that may be possible, upon the basis of the common ownership of the means of production, distribution, and exchange, and the best obtainable system of popular administration and control of each industry and service" (Coates, 2000, p. 4).

theoretical/academic justification for a traditionally Left party embracing the centre-ground of British politics. “At its core the Third Way movement was based on the belief that efficient management of a capitalist, globalizing economy could be coupled with modest innovations to make a real difference in the lives of ordinary people” (Wilson, 2007, p. 7). Blair’s justification for the rewriting of Clause Four as a discursive performance was that:

“the Third Way stands for a modernised social democracy, passionate in its commitment to social justice and the goals of the centre-left, but flexible, innovative and forward-looking in the means to achieve them. It is founded on the values which have guided progressive politics for more than a century – democracy, liberty, justice, mutual obligation and internationalism. But it is a Third Way because it moves decisively beyond an old left preoccupied by state control, high taxation and producer interests, and a new right treating public investment, and often the very notions of “society” and collective endeavour, as evils to be undone” (Blair, 1998a).

Blair’s emphasis upon modernisation was evident; the party and its political trajectory were not entirely relevant in delivering a ‘modernised social democracy’. However, Blair did make reference to the values that were inherently those of a traditional Left party: democracy, liberty and justice, which he conjoined with the values that underpin the Third Way (and traditional let it be said) notion of internationalism which was a response to neoliberalism and globalisation. Blair’s use of opposites e.g. traditional Left and Right values/dispositions was an appeal to the middle ground; crucially, he retained aspects of the discourse of the Left and appealed to the Right. Such a bold constitutional revision as if imposed by Blair had positive ramifications for his image. He became symbolic of vision; the party was now modern and a credible alternative to an outdated Conservative administration. His image became that of an innovative and bold political moderniser who provided a hitherto unelectable Left party with fresh modern appeal.

The rewriting of Clause Four meant that “the party rejected the ‘socialist’ position that the state should own and run the country’s major industries and instead embraced

the market” (Curtice, 2007, p. 35). This marked to the Right policies of a supposedly Left opposition party and then government in 1997. The policy legacy of Thatcher was evident; “issues such as law and order, welfare reform, small businesses, the burden of taxation – would place New Labour on the on the side of Britain’s aspirational majority” (Mandelson, 2011, p. 183). The symbolic value of the constitutional change was that no one believed that the Labour party would pursue further nationalisation. The rewriting of Clause Four had no practical logic to it; it was mainly symbolic and, paradoxically therefore, consequential.

“The symbolic act of rewriting the outdated Clause IV (Part Four) of the party constitution should assist the party to criticise more effectively the market economy’s many shortcomings and to develop a credible economic alternative” (Radice, 1993, p. 24 in Riddell, 1997, p. 29)

In summary, the rewriting of Clause Four and the commitment to Third Way politics meant that Blair had ideologically shifted the party towards the centre-ground in an attempt to reach a larger group of the electorate. The policy was reactive as regards the opposition (see chapter 5). The abolition of Clause Four and the re-branding of the party from Labour to New Labour personalised Blair as the catalyst of change; his image was that of a visionary and political moderniser. His perceived character as projected in public consciousness was of a bold, confident, self-assured leader and politician, an innovator, moderniser, a practical problem-solver, and a risk-taker who responded to a changed political environment, pulling his party to both power and the mainstream of the political culture.

The following sub-section analyses the Murdoch agreement and its significance for the mediation of Blair in the public realm.

### 6.1.2 Murdoch agreement

The Blair/Murdoch agreement has been covered exhaustively in academic biographies of Blair (Rentoul, 2003; Seldon, 2004, 2007), but is downplayed in the mainstream media. As the agreement has been downplayed, we analyse not the performance itself but the effects of it upon Blair's image e.g. the significance of positive media endorsement i.e. Blair's nickname by the media as 'Bambi', his appointment of a press secretary, and the positive media endorsements in the run-up to the 1997 General Election.

Within two months of Blair becoming party leader, on 13 September 1994, a meeting was held between Tony Blair and Rupert Murdoch. Reports have stated that Blair managed to charm the media tycoon so that the major selling newspapers in Britain owned by the Murdoch Press (*The Sun*, *News of the World* and *The Times*) would support the Labour party and positively endorse Blair leading up to the 1997 General Election (see Campbell and Stott, 2008, p. 13,14) . In return for positive media endorsement, the Labour party (once in office) would overlook the power and influence of Murdoch's empire (see Rentoul, 2003, p. 313, 338).

Blair's political actions and relationship with the highly influential Murdoch press, though arguably underhand in a negative way, did not have negative effects upon his image; the opposite is true; through devious political actions Blair secured positive media endorsements at a time in which the mediation of politics and leaders within the Westminster context became increasingly personalised (see chapter 5). From 1994 onwards, three significant effects in terms of Blair's image emerged from the agreement.

First, as a consequence of positive media endorsement, Blair's political nickname as the Walt Disney cartoon character, a young, soft and endearing deer 'Bambi' was revised. The traits associated with 'Bambi' i.e. not forceful, commanding or domineering became much less associated with Blair's persona as was hitherto the case. Such an image of the leader of the opposition would have proved highly damaging if it had stuck as it would have implied that Blair was unable to command authority and lead the party, unable to take strategic decisions, and was a push-over. Blair negotiated and revised this image of himself as 'Bambi', for example, in his dispatch box political exchanges with John Major in 1995, Blair was quoted "I lead my party. He follows his" (Blair, 1995). Thereafter, Blair undertook bold constitutional party reform, and the image of a soft and endearing figure was shed (although the image of 'niceness' remained). Through 1994 and 1995, however, the Bambi image screened out any reference to Blair as the leader of a party that harboured Leftist socialists, the demonised trade unions, or the 'wreckers' of less than ten years earlier. Blair's 'Bambi' nickname offered him opportunities rather than constraints, his perceived image was that of a young politician who was not scheming and interested in Machiavellian power struggles. The character traits that his nickname projected upon the audience were: honest, soft, endearing, gentle; his image was therefore that of a trustworthy person – a contrast to the politicians characterised by sleaze allegations in John Major's administration, as well in to his own party's past. Blair's positive image as an honest, young, potential prime minister was enhanced by his family-guy image, him as a loving father and husband. Blair's revision of his image as Bambi towards the 1997 election meant that he lost the nametag but did not lose the associated character traits or positive image that this fictional character represented.

Our second point on the significance of the Murdoch agreement is that in the same month in which substantial media support was secured, Blair created the role of a press secretary which illustrated the importance that he attributed to the media and

party communications. The appointment of Alastair Campbell in September 1994 was politically significant for Blair. The role did not exist in previous Labour administrations. Campbell's trajectory as a former journalist and experience of the media industry was formative to the mediation of Blair's political leadership image thenceforth. Campbell's centrality to the Labour party and proximity to Blair highlighted the significance of the media for political outcomes, to iterate Campbell's centrality to Blair, New Labour and at a general level, political modernisation, Blair stated "together we could change the face of British politics for a generation, and change the world while we're at it" (Blair, 1994a cited in Campbell, 2010, p. 51). During the three years in which Labour was the opposition party, Campbell, along with Peter Mandelson, managed the party's media communications in a holistic fashion. They promoted the New Labour brand and adhered to the 'Millbank model' of command and control (see Kuhn, 2007, p. 124). Following the success of Campbell and Mandelson in promoting the Labour party and its leader to the electorate and to the media, the 1997 election victory saw Campbell's promotion as Blair's chief press secretary and official spokesman. The appointment of Alastair Campbell and the positive media endorsements secured from Rupert Murdoch were also contexts to Blair's leadership performance post-1997. The emphasis upon the media created the conditions upon which government business was centralised and emphasis placed upon political leadership. We come back to this point in our analysis of the Blair premiership.

The third impact of the Murdoch press upon the Labour party was that in the "1997 election 6/10 national dailies supported Labour compared with 3/11 in 1992 and 5/9 national Sunday titles provided their support as against a mere three in 1992" (Kuhn, 2007, p. 131). (Appendix B pictures the front page of Britain's biggest selling tabloid newspaper, *The Sun* and its public endorsement of Blair ahead of the 1997 election). The quantitative change in the media and its relationship to party politics had tangible

qualitative political effects. The 1997 victory for Labour was helped by an uncritical media. Blair's political actions and association with the controversial figure, Rupert Murdoch did illustrate negative character traits e.g. Blair as ready to morally compromise the Left's principles. Crucially, however, the Blair/Murdoch agreement highlighted Blair's recognition that the media (and its expansion at this time) can affect political leadership performance, not only by mediating his image, but also by screening out alternative narratives (see also chapter 5 which references the qualitative and quantitative media shift and effect upon political leadership performance).

As opposition leader from 1994-1997, Blair had radically changed the historical constitution of the party, and the appearance and identity of the party in the public realm from Labour to New Labour. The reorganisation of the political party coupled with uncritical and sympathetic media coverage meant that Blair was able to mediate political discourse towards the middle classes and appeal directly to them on issues such as Education and the Economy. Blair's performance as opposition leader was formative of the emergence of his positive political persona as a pragmatist and moderniser. As opposition leader, Blair used the self to channel change and therefore was the symbolic catalyst of political change.

We now analyse the performance of Blair as Prime Minister.

## **6.2 The Blair premiership**

Blair became prime minister on 2 May 1997 commanding a House of Commons majority of 179 seats. On the day of victory, Blair's entrance to Downing Street was similar to that of a celebrity. At this time, celebrity had become part of the Westminster context and offered a range of performative opportunities. A huge media

presence (reflective of the qualitative and quantitative media shifts) awaited Blair as did crowds of supporters waving Union Jack flags as Blair's official car entered the gates of Downing Street (see Appendix C). The unprecedented scale of attention that Blair received on victory day emphasised his political popularity and a largely sympathetic media. Crucially, Blair took advantage of a new context of news media which was directed towards personalities not policies (see Gould, 1998, preface) with photo opportunities with his wife and children outside 10 Downing Street. The incoming prime minister was perceived as a happy, young, caring, loving father and husband; the personal was used to political effect and the conflation of the public and private realm was clearly evident. (See also chapter 5 for reference to a leadership-centred political culture within the polity which provided Blair with opportunities to personalise the self).

The following seven performances, during the Blair premiership are analysed: (6.2.1) 'Cool Britannia', (6.2.2) The Diana moment, (6.2.3) The Bernie Ecclestone scandal, (6.2.4) Institutional revisions, (6.2.5) The Good Friday Agreement, (6.2.6) Foreign policy: intervention in Kosovo and (6.2.7) Foreign policy: 2003 Iraq War. Each performance of the Blair premiership is narrated in context; the analysis demonstrates the relationship between political performance and persona, taking into account cultural and institutional contexts.

### **6.2.1 Cool Britannia**

Blair used the conflation of celebrity, media, the personal and the political which had gained cultural expression from the late 1980s. At a reception in July 1997, guests included footballers, fashion designers, pop stars, television presenters, entertainers and socialites. Blair was pictured drinking and mingling with guests such as Noel Gallagher, Sven-Goran Eriksson, Charlotte Church and June Sarpong. The media

referred to the party as 'Cool Britannia' which promoted U.K. 'Brit Pop' and British talent to the world and afforded Blair huge publicity and the ability to fashion his image by way of association with celebrities and socialites (see Appendix D). 'Cool Britannia' was part of the broader New Labour project: ushering in a new way of thinking. However, the drinks reception highlighted somewhat a slight over-indulgence and a lack of seriousness about the prime ministership, and this rather negative effect would be repeated on several occasions in the future. The long term effects of Blair's use of celebrity to political purpose were negative as well as positive; contradictory traits emerged: modern, but perhaps over indulgent, and not politically focused, the contradictory traits proved somewhat difficult to control during his premiership.

In terms of the significance of 'Cool Britannia' for Blair's image, his association with celebrities translated into a character that was aware of and was interested in popular culture, trendy and in-touch; the antithesis of his predecessor John Major. Freedland notes that

"there was an echo of Harold Wilson about the early Blair. Just as Wilson had sought to ride the spirit of the 1960s by posing with the Beatles, so Blair wanted to be a man of the 90s and noughties, with Noel Gallagher and Chris Evans" (Freedland, 2007).

However, as noted, a range of paradoxical traits emerged from 'Cool Britannia' that express themselves later in Blair's premiership.

Blair's performance in response to the death of Princess Diana is analysed next.

### **6.2.2 The death of Princess Diana**

On 31 August 1997, the death of Princess Diana presented itself as an event which offered Blair – an incoming prime minister who was hugely popular and enjoyed poll

ratings of 72% within his first two months in office – political opportunity to emphasise publicly – and even invent new – perceived character traits. It was an opportunity to enhance his political authority and status, and exploit a defining emotional moment in British culture. Alistair Campbell notes that Blair's response to the death of Princess Diana was "going to be a test for him, the first time the country had looked to him in a moment of shock and grief" (Campbell, 2011, p. 125). Blair acknowledged the use of emotion "what I have to do today is try to express what the country is feeling. There will be real shock" (Blair, 1994b cited in Campbell, 2011, p. 126). Blair's statement on the death of Princess Diana was immediate, and preceded any public utterance from the Royal Family; highlighting the political significance of parliament and government *vis-à-vis* the Monarchy (see sub-chapter 3.2), and himself *vis-à-vis* everyone. Blair's statement is analysed as a political performance in terms of: staging which constitutes part of the performance (6.2.2a); Blair's statement and declaration in memory of Diana (6.2.1b); and his relationship to the audience (6.2.1c). All three areas of analysis allow us to identify the emergent character traits that were projected in public consciousness through performance.

### **6.2.2a Performance and staging**

The location of Blair's statement was in his Sedgefield constituency, outside a Church with a view of a graveyard; the background was grass, a historic stone wall and the view of headstones in the distance. The choice of Blair's constituency portrayed him as a leader who remained close to constituents. The staging conferred positive character traits upon him: humble and personable, as if returning 'home' to mourn.

### 6.2.2b Blair's declaration

Blair's statement on the death of Princess Diana was short in duration (1minute and 30 seconds). The full text of the statement in which Blair evoked the memory of Diana was:

"I feel like everyone else in this country today. I am utterly devastated. Our thoughts and prayers are with Princess Diana's family, particularly her two sons. Our heart goes out to them. We are today a nation in a state of shock, in mourning, in grief that is so deeply painful for us. She was a wonderful and a warm human being, although her own life was often sadly touched by tragedy. She touched the lives of so many others in Britain and throughout the world with joy and with comfort. How many times shall we remember her in how many different ways – with the sick, the dying, with children, with the needy. With just a look or a gesture that spoke so much more than words, she would reveal to all of us the depth of her compassion and her humanity. I am sure we can only guess how difficult things were for her from time to time. But people everywhere, not just here in Britain, kept faith with Princess Diana. They liked her, they loved her, they regarded her as one of the people. She was the People's Princess and that is how she will stay, how she will remain in our hearts and our memories for ever" (Blair, 1997a).

Blair began the statement by positioning himself in front of a bundle of microphones; he looked puzzled; his head was tilted slightly to the left as if he were in deep thought. A huge media presence awaited Blair's response; he did not acknowledge his immediate media audience, instead, he stood before them in a reflective state. Blair's silence and expression of near disbelief were interrupted by a journalist who stated "can we please have your reaction to the news?" The question did not receive an immediate answer, a moment of silence followed. Blair's first interface with his immediate audience was a brief glimpse at the cameras followed by his first utterance "I feel like everyone else in this country today. I am utterly devastated". The delivery of this first sentence appeared difficult physically, Blair shrugged his shoulders in disbelief and was not standing upright, his head was tilted to the side and, whilst speaking, he moved his head from left to right as if in disbelief; his hands were clasped together in a semi-religious prayer-like gesture. Moreover, close up

shots of Blair revealed that his eyes were teary (see Appendix E). Blair's tone was slower than usual and he was hesitant when speaking; the intonational shifts further indicated unease. Blair physically and discursively projected grief and disbelief in the public realm. His public display of emotion demonstrated that in spite of being head of the executive, he was unafraid of expressing his feelings – as if unable to hide them – and unafraid of appearing to be either weak or emotional. Blair demonstrated a new kind of political persona within British political discourse which was framed around emotion. In the statement, there were three significant moments in which Blair evoked the image of Diana:

- “She was a wonderful and a warm human being, although her own life was often sadly touched by tragedy. She touched the lives of so many others in Britain and throughout the world with joy and with comfort”.
- “How many times we shall remember her, in how many different ways, with the sick, the dying, with children, with the needy, when, with just a look or a gesture that spoke so much more than words, she would reveal to all of us the depth of her compassion and her humanity”.
- “She was the People's Princess and that is how she will stay, how she will remain in our hearts and our memories for ever” (Blair, 1997a).

Blair's positive endorsement of Diana fitted with her phenomenal popularity with a large swathe of society prior to her death. The ability to re-create her memory and demonstrate positive character traits: compassion, humility and moral conviction constituted Blair's invention of her as the 'people's princess'. In so doing, Blair evoked her memory within the public realm, began the start of mourning, and crucially, demonstrated that he too (like her) was one of the 'people', therefore likening himself to the public and increasing the scope for imagined relationships between leader and audience. The public now shared with the persona of the prime minister a range of human emotions, even associating her emotions – caring, generous-spirited and emotional – with his.

### **6.2.2c Relationship to the audience**

Throughout the statement, there were two audiences that Blair was performing to: the media and the viewing public; although this Diana moment is a rare example of almost deliberately refracting his emotional persona through and past the media to reach – and grieve with – his national audience alone. Blair assumed an implicit relationship with the audience based upon mutual grief for Princess Diana, as indicated in 6.2.2b. Blair stated “I feel like everyone else in this country today” and “we are today a nation in a state of shock, in mourning, in grief that is so deeply painful for us”. Similarly, the repeated use of “we” and “our” evoked mutual feelings towards Diana that Blair and the viewing public shared.

In sum, Blair’s declaration on the death of Diana as a political performance was significant in terms of the perceived character traits that were conferred both upon the audience and then upon Blair. Blair’s performance and use of emotion to political purpose meant that his persona had started to emerge as a caring, kind, compassionate prime minister, unafraid of expressing his emotions and able to act in a calm yet emotionally appropriate manner fitting to circumstance. According to Marr, by the summer of 1997 Britain had two super celebrities. One was Tony Blair and the other was Princess Diana; Blair’s positive endorsement of Diana was

“sentiments of one natural charismatic paying tribute to another. Blair regarded himself as the people’s prime minister, leading the people’s party, beyond left and right, beyond faction or ideology, a political miracle-worker with a direct line to the people’s instincts” (Marr, 2007, p. 518).

Marr goes on to state that after Blair’s impromptu eulogy of Diana, his popularity ratings rose to over 90%. Blair’s performance, and positive relationship to the audience and use of emotion to political effect did not weaken his position as incoming prime minister; the opposite is true; Blair’s use of emotion resulted in positive endorsement from the audience, increased his political authority and status

and extended his positive honeymoon period. He thus used the institution of the premiership to dramatic emotional and personal purpose.

### **6.2.3 Bernie Ecclestone scandal**

In January 1997, Formula One Racing Chief donated £1,000,000 to the Labour party whilst in opposition. Post-May 1997, the party, however, made a commitment to ban advertisements for cigarettes. In November 1997, the government exempted Formula One, which included Ecclestone, from the advertising ban. Details emerged of Ecclestone's donation and his perceived political influence upon government policy making. Blair immediately denied that the donation was a way of changing policy and made a public apology on Radio 2's primetime 'Jimmy Young Show'. His self-testimony "I think most people who have dealt with me, think I'm a pretty straight sort of guy, and I am" (Blair, 1997b) was self endorsing without being apologetic for improper political behaviour. Blair's self-testimony sought to project to the audience, the image of Blair as 'regular', that he shared a likeness to the audience, and that he was straightforward and accessible, traits which were reaffirmed by virtue, in fact, of appearing on a primetime Radio 2 show. In terms of his political persona, Blair's 'regular guy' image created the persona of a straight-talking prime minister which translated as a character that was trustworthy and upfront. Finlayson notes that leaders need to undertake a difficult balancing act "on the one hand, they must appear more efficient and skilled than anyone else; at the same time they must appear 'one of us'". He goes on to add that "the contemporary image of leadership, in Britain certainly, requires the appearance of extraordinary ordinariness" (Finlayson, 2002, p. 590)

Despite the public apology, the Ecclestone affair presented a negative side to Blair's perceived character, in that it implied that he might be less than moral, and that

policy commitments were characterised by flexibility and covert transactions. The Ecclestone scandal, however, did not have immediate negative ramifications as, at this time, Blair was still enjoying his honeymoon period which was extended as a direct result of his performance in relation to the death of Princess Diana. Blair's positive political character that existed prior to the scandal was important and "matters if you make a mistake and the way that the public perceive you shapes their response. Tony Blair and the Bernie Ecclestone affair – his character bought him the right to say sorry. It matters when things go wrong" (Chief of staff A, Elite interviews, see chapter 5). The scandal was "our [New Labour's] first encounter with 'sleaze'. It boiled down to money and politics" (Mandelson, 2011, p. 241). It did, however, sow negative seeds as regards perceived character which would express themselves later in response to Blair's 2003 foreign policy (6.2.7). The effects of the Murdoch agreement, Cool Britannia and the Ecclestone scandal began to exist alongside Blair's positive image; consequentially, a shadow persona was being constructed that would crash into public consciousness very negatively later on in his premiership.

The analysis of Blair's response to the Ecclestone scandal has demonstrated that political popularity and a previously established character can be powerful and persuasive; when political errors are made they can be forgiven, but also – and perhaps more importantly – that 'forgiving' becomes part of politics because of the use of the self to political purpose.

#### **6.2.4 Institutional revisions**

The following points illustrate the reconfiguration of historical political institutions undertaken by Blair; they are considered as political performances:

- On 6 May 1997, without cabinet consultation, Blair's chancellor, Gordon Brown, announced that the Bank of England would operate independently from Government.
- Throughout 1997 Blair carried out the following reforms: modernisation programme of the House of Commons: a change in the format of prime minister's questions, from two 15 minute slots taking place on Tuesday and Thursday to one 30 minute slot on Wednesday. Increasing ministerial accountability which included the prime minister's appearing before the Liaison Committee twice a year, this 2.5 hour slot allowed for prime ministerial scrutiny, although topics for discussion were known well in advance. Rectifying the under-representation of women in public life: five women were part of Blair's first cabinet in 1997: Clare Short, Margaret Beckett, Harriet Harman, Mo Mowlam and Ann Taylor.
- Local and regional governments were given greater powers and control of budgets.
- Towards the end of 1997, devolution Bills for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland were introduced to Parliament and became law in 1998.
- Throughout 1998 and 1999, Blair reformed the House of Lords, mainly, the substantial reduction in the number of hereditary peers in favour of appointed peers on a largely party political basis not unconnected to party political funds. The institutional revision of Parliament's legislative second-chamber was criticised heavily and seen as a failure. Blair was seen to have weakened the second chamber by screening out governmental opposition and scrutiny; and, "its supposed 'packing' of the Lords with 'cronies'" (Cowley, 2007, p. 32). The House of Lords reforms were problematic for Blair as they were proposed at the beginning of his premiership and were still ongoing in 2007 when he left office; this affected Blair's image in that it appeared that he had not thought

through the reforms, was hasty and had acted incompetently without regard for the history of political institutions. Instead of the traditional scrutiny function of the second House, the House of Lords was organised and structured around a transactional purpose; for some, it was as if peerages were given out in return for financial donations and/or media influence (see Cowley, 2007).

- Centralisation of government: at the beginning of the Blair premiership *The Ministerial Code* was published outlining the creation of the Prime Minister's Department as the central machinery of government; centralisation and government control were exercised as MPs and Ministers had to clear any media appearances with No. 10. An increase in special advisers was evident in the Prime Minister's Department, the Policy Unit, Research and Information Unit and Strategic Communications Unit (see Hennessy, 2001, chapter 18).
- In relation to cabinet government, Blair had revised the notion of collective government, for example, "a decision of momentous importance for the future of the nation's economic policy [Bank of England] and arguably the sovereignty of parliament had been taken [without cabinet consultation]" (Rentoul, 2003, p. 331). Moreover, the visibility of special advisers in government further detracted from the notion of collective cabinet government. Hennessy states that "bilateral rather than collective dealings with his ministers remained the preferred way of doing business" (2001, p. 520). In an interview with BBC Radio 2's The Michael Cockerell Show on 'Blair's Thousand Days', Blair makes reference to bilateral ministerial relationships:

"people often say in relation to Cabinet government, look I would be pretty shocked if the first time I knew a Cabinet minister felt strongly about something was if they raised it at the Cabinet table. I would expect them to come and on my door and say, "Look, Tony, I've got a problem here. I disagree with this" or "I disagree with that"' (Blair, 2000 cited in Hennessy, 2001, p. 520).

- In 1999, the Greater London Authority Act introduced the principle of an Elected Mayor. In 2000, Ken Livingstone, former Labour leader of the Greater London Council won as an independent candidate after the party, as it were, replaced him as its candidate with Frank Dobson. The Ken Livingstone scandal is very complicated; we retain one point on how this affected Blair's image. The fact that Livingstone was replaced by Dobson highlighted Blair's negative shadow persona and the perception that politics was characterised by transactions and even vindictiveness, in this case. The initiative of elected Mayors was not widely introduced on a regional level.

Kuhn notes that during Alastair Campbell's tenure as press officer from 1994–2003, New Labour government's strategic approach to media management was characterised by three key features:

- Centralisation: co-ordinated government communications so that a single message, top down, was presented; ministers were locked into contracts with the government communications arm as any media interviews or appearances had to be pre-booked.
- Professionalisation: sound-bites, whose utilisation also saw the favouring of journalists that gave New Labour sympathetic coverage over unsympathetic ones.
- Politicisation: Campbell became more partisan with the press; non-partisan civil servants acting as ministerial press officers were weeded out; and the number of politically appointed special advisers rose, several of whom fulfilled a proactive partisan media relations role. (Kuhn, 2007, p. 124), (see also Franklin, 2001, p. 130-144).

Centralisation, professionalisation and politicisation as indicated by Kuhn contributed to a fourth feature, namely, the projection of Tony Blair to suit political purpose. One of the caveats of stressing the personality of the leader is that if character and personality exist at the centre of politics then these are the issues which become central to politics itself, with a whole series of consequences.

Having outlined Blair's performances in relation to political institutions, we make one point on the relationship between performance and political persona. In terms of character traits, the institutional reconfigurations that Blair carried out can be characterised in terms of centralisation versus dispersal of power. This demonstrated opposite character traits, centralisation illustrated Machiavellian style power politics; in contrast, power dispersal (devolution, Bank of England, Local government) softened (and justified) government centralisation and illustrated pragmatism, courage, boldness, conviction, a modern executive unconcerned with the concentration of political power. However, reform of the House of Lords e.g. substantial reduction in the number of hereditary peers in favour of elected peers and as referenced earlier "supposed 'packing' of the Lords with 'cronies'" (Cowley, 2007, p.32) began to foreground previous negative character traits that expressed themselves during the Ecclestone scandal e.g. possible corruption and dishonesty. The institutional revisions carried out by Blair all involved 'character' and elements of personalisation which had some positive and controlled, and some negative and not controlled, effects upon his image and persona.

Despite the developing paradoxes in Blair's character traits, his persona remained as a popular, young, modern prime minister until 2003, in part informed by a sympathetic and largely uncritical media. We make one additional point on political popularity as formative of the acceptance of institutional change. Setting the Bank of England free from Government was an unprecedented move in 1997 in recent British

political history. This reflected New Labour's wider embrace of neoliberalism as a form of governance which embraced markets and capitalism. Rentoul states that post-election euphoria and "a fresh face and a basic level of competence was enough of a contrast to induce a heady change of national mood" (2003, p. 331). The widespread acceptance of this institutional reconfiguration (although announced by chancellor, Gordon Brown) can in part be owed to Blair's personal popularity, and his ability to use it to political effect.

In this chapter, four performances of Blair as prime minister have been analysed (Cool Britannia and Blair's use of celebrity, the statement on the death of Princess Diana, the response to the Bernie Ecclestone scandal, and institutional revisions). The conjuncture of all four performances highlighted – and in some cases even created – a range of character traits: calm, poised, unafraid to express emotion, approachable, brave, yet powerful, as well as the beginnings of others: (just possibly) corrupt, (just possibly) dishonest. However, a largely sympathetic media did not exploit the possible negative traits and Blair's positive political persona remained more or less unchanged overall.

Blair's performance in Northern Ireland politics and the Good Friday Agreement are analysed in the following section.

#### **6.2.5 Good Friday Agreement**

The Good Friday Agreement, announced on 10 April 1998, was a momentous event in Irish political history. Up to this point, Northern Irish politics had been characterised for nearly thirty years by political factions, Unionist violence and IRA terrorism, and enormous hostility between the Catholic community and the British Army and Government. Blair's centre-stage role in the Agreement marked the perceived end to

the violent struggles that had dominated Irish politics; moreover, a positive London-Dublin connection was reinstated.

The analysis of Blair's performance is his announcement of the peace deal on Good Friday (10/04/1998) as in section 6.5.2a; however, it is also worth stressing Blair's post-election commitment to the peace process, as well as the energy that he expended on the peace process in the final week of negotiations (03/04/1998-10/04/1998) as chronologically indicated, and the effects of these on his political persona. The following points are considered as a series of inter-related conditions which conditioned Blair's announcement of the peace deal:

- 16 May 1997: Blair's first engagement as prime minister outside Westminster was a speech delivered in Belfast at the Royal Agricultural Society. The speech detailed the Anglo-Irish question and the importance a resolution had for him personally, "It is a responsibility that weighs not just upon the mind, but the soul" (Blair, 1997c).
- 14 October 1997: Blair held face-to-face talks with the republican leadership, more specifically, with Gerry Adams, the President of Sinn Féin at Stormont, East Belfast. In so doing, Blair became "the first British PM for 70 years to meet a Sinn Féin delegation" (BBC, 1997). The political breakthrough was an achievement for Blair. He urged both Protestant Unionists and Catholic Republicans to unite. In a bid to rally support for the peace deal, he stated "we can continue with the hatred and the despair and the killing, treating people as if they were not parts of humanity, or we can try and settle our disagreements by negotiation, by discussion, by debate" (Lyal, 1997).
- 12 January 1998: multi-party talks resumed at Stormont after the Christmas break. The British and Irish governments issue a document entitled

'Propositions of Heads of Agreement' in an attempt to add impetus to the talks (see Blair, 1997c).

- 18 January 1998: a delegation from Sinn Fein travelled to Downing Street for talks on the 'Propositions of Heads of Agreement' document (ibid).
- 29 January 1998: Blair announced 'The Bloody Sunday Enquiry', an inquiry into the death of civilian protesters in Londonderry, January 1972. This was a key demand of Nationalists in the run-up to the political deal. They wanted a new fully open public inquiry into the events (BBC, 2006a). Blair's goodwill gesture was seen as a gesture of inclusion rather than the isolation of nationalist groups.
- 4 March 1998: the British Government issued a discussion paper on the future of policing in Northern Ireland in response to the Poyntzpass killings which took place the previous day in County Armagh (see Blair, 1997c).
- 12 March 1998: Gerry Adams, President of Sinn Fein met Tony Blair at 10 Downing Street after their temporary expulsion (from 20 February to 9 March) from multi-party talks because of alleged IRA involvement.
- 23 March 1998: Sinn Fein rejoined talks, in part owing to the meeting held with Blair on 12 March.
- 29 March 1998: David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist party, travelled to Chequers for private talks with Blair.

The points made above illustrate Blair's commitment to achieving peace in Northern Ireland. As incoming prime minister, Blair's first official visit outside London was to Belfast where he gave a speech in which he outlined the effect of the Anglo-Irish question upon him personally: "it is a responsibility that weighs not just upon the mind, but the soul" (Blair, 1997d). The speech was well received and Blair's commitment was both personal and formal; talks with the Sinn Fein delegation

followed. Blair's role in the week of negotiations leading up to the Peace Agreement (03/04/1998 – 10/04/1998) is narrated; thereafter, his announcement of the peace deal is analysed as a discursive performance.

The deadline for reaching a peace deal was set by George Mitchell, Chairman of the multi-party talks: Maundy Thursday, 9 April 1998. Events in the week leading up to the deadline were accelerated, rich and dramatic. On 1 April 2008, Blair welcomed Bertie Ahern, the Irish prime minister, to Downing St for talks on the details of the agreement, and talks lasted into the evening. The meeting was followed by another meeting on 3 April, the third meeting between Blair and Ahern in three days, in which both prime ministers mulled over details of the agreement. Meanwhile, in Ireland, the second enquiry into 'Bloody Sunday' was opened (3 April 1998) and was headed by Law Lord Saville, (see Blair, 1997c).

On Saturday 4 April, The Alliance party of Northern Ireland (APNI) held its annual conference in Belfast. John Alderdice, then leader of APNI called on the British and Irish prime minister to take personal control of the final stage of the multi-party talks at Stormont (see Blair, 1997c), an illustration of the perception by the Northern Irish of the importance of Blair's role in the peace process. On Sunday 5 April, Bertie Ahern's mother died. He was not present at the multi-party talks, thus leaving Blair at various points to oversee the process. On Monday 6 April, George Mitchell, Chairman of the multi-party talks, presented a somewhat delayed draft settlement of the deal late into the evening. Internal party divisions on the peace process were expressed with 12 resignations from Sinn Fein. To add to this, the following day (Tuesday 7 April), the draft paper was rejected by the Ulster Unionist party, the same day that Blair arrived in Northern Ireland for the final stages of the agreement. Upon arrival in Northern Ireland, Blair uttered a personal and political soundbite: "this is no time for soundbites – but I feel the hand of history on our shoulders. I really do" (Blair,

1998b, p. 57). The perceived character traits that this soundbite projected upon him was of someone determined, a peacemaker, poised, focused and undaunted, and, of course, participating in, making, a moment of history. Later that day, Blair's dedication to the peace settlement was formally restated in a meeting with Bertie Ahern and David Trimble, leader of the Ulster Unionist party who had rejected the draft paper earlier in the day. In Blair's autobiography, he positively endorses Bertie Ahern's character and situates both leaders as modernisers as regards the peace process "his presence and mine, his personality and mine, in a way symbolised the new, modern realities which were extinguishing old attitudes. In a sense we personified the opportunity to escape our history, British and Irish, and move on" (Blair, 2010, p. 168). Blair's identification of sameness with the Irish prime minister informed his performance as regards the announcement of the peace deal i.e. use of association to positive political effect.

On Wednesday 8 April, Hillsborough Castle, County Down was the scene for a breakfast meeting between Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern. The two prime ministers discussed the settlement amid signs of dissatisfaction from some of the parties involved. Talks continued that day at the Parliament building in Stormont, Belfast. On Thursday 9 April, the day of the midnight deadline, further discontent were expressed, "the Ulster Unionist John Taylor didn't turn up with his delegation and announced that he 'wouldn't touch the agreement with a ten-foot barge pole'. He was later won back by the prime minister's handwritten pledges to Unionists" (Boulton, 2008, p. 54). Blair's 'fatherly' role in the process and his ability to 'keep it together' was emphasised; a demonstration also of his status in Irish politics. Later that day, further disarray was expressed as Jeffrey Donaldson, part of the Ulster Unionist party's team of negotiators walked out and left the negotiations and did not return. Late in the evening, after 11pm a march took place outside Stormont, led by Ian Paisley, then leader of the Democratic Unionist party (DUP), in protest against the

negotiations. Amid the chaos, negotiations continued; the midnight deadline had passed and no announcement was made.

Blair's intense and unrelenting role in the Northern Ireland peace deal was heavily reported by the media; particularly that Blair had had no sleep, and that he had expressed such commitment to achieving a successful resolution. The media coverage of Blair was significant in terms of projecting his publicly perceived character and the notion that history was being made and that Blair was the central political actor in this decisive moment of the peace process.

Some 36 hours after party leaders were last seen, 18 hours after his deadline, on Good Friday at 17:36pm, the Chairman of the talks, George Mitchell, announced the successful resolution between both sides. Blair's contribution and centre-stage role in the peace process was particularly evident in the last week of negotiations. His hands-on managerial style and emphasis on process was seen to have led to a historic political breakthrough in Northern Ireland; political success which was attributed to his personal performance and personal efforts.

#### **6.5.2a Announcement of the Peace Deal**

Soon after the announcement by George Mitchell, Tony Blair and Bertie Ahern emerged from the 36-hour talks. Both men stood on the steps of Stormont jubilantly shaking hands, dismissing tiredness and exhaustion. The firm handshake was over-extended, but fitting to the euphoric moment that the two prime ministers had expended such energy upon. The excitement was shared by the eagerly awaited press and the jubilant crowd who cheered the two brave executives who seemed to have changed Northern Irish political history. With the meaningful handshake, a self-assured and confident Blair took to the lectern before the Irish prime minister;

preceding Bertie Ahern was an expression of Blair's status and authority (constitutionally, this was a U.K. political event, but irrespective of this, Blair was clearly the star of the show). Crucially, he used the performative opportunity to political effect and fashioned his perceived character and persona. In his first public utterance in 36 hours, Blair's statement was as follows:

"In these past few days the irresistible force, the political will has met the immovable object, the legacy of the past, and it has actually moved it.

The idea that if one side wins something in Northern Ireland, the other loses is gone. The essence of what we've agreed is a choice: we are all winners or all losers; it is mutually assured benefit or mutually assured destruction here. Thank you" (Blair, 1998c).

Three performative moments in Blair's statement were politically significant. First, in his utterance of "political will", Blair nodded his head and turned to the right to acknowledge Bertie Ahern, both executives nodded at each other; a mutual act of self endorsement and iteration of ownership of the peace settlement. Second, in his reference to the "immovable object" and the claim that the past had met the "political will" of the present, Blair's comportment was self assured and confident, his neck was elongated and his posture indicated confidence, he looked out over his audience, and assuredly nodded to himself as if he were reading his thoughts out aloud and that the "political will" that had moved the "immovable object" was in part, in fact, himself. Third, at the end of the statement, Blair stated "thank you" followed by an accomplished nod downwards. He then turned to his right and jubilantly grinned and nodded at Bertie Ahern, he stepped back a little, Bertie Ahern positioned himself towards the lectern and the two prime ministers once again firmly shook hands in celebration of their achievement.

Blair's ability to resolve the politico-religious conflict in Northern Ireland that dated back to late-nineteenth century (Gladstone had sought and failed on two attempts to achieve home rule for Ireland (1886 and 1893)) – if not to the seventeenth century,

demonstrated courage, dedication, a focus upon process, outcomes and diplomacy, and, of course, personal success. Blair's performance in Northern Ireland had positive effects for his political persona; courage, persistence, commitment, persuasion, successful diplomacy, now historic significance were expressed as additional attributes to his already positive persona. In summary, Blair's performance in the Good Friday Agreement demonstrated the following two points:

- Events and circumstances can exist as forms of Machiavellian *fortuna* and offer leaders opportunities for the expression of political persona.
- Through performance, Blair's political persona existed beyond the immediate polity. He had used performance to generate personal capital. As in Kane's concept of moral capital, by resonating with the audience on the need for the Peace Agreement, the successful resolution resulted in the audience conferring upon the persona of Blair authority and legitimacy as demonstrated in his personal poll ratings (BBC, 2007).

Let us turn to Blair's performance in relation to foreign policy, specifically, Kosovo in 1999, the year after the Good Friday Agreement. Up to the Kosovo crisis, Blair's character and persona were seen as positive. His ownership of the Northern Ireland Peace Process was a conflict-resolution condition which seemed to condition Blair's political actions in the Balkans War.

#### **6.2.6 Foreign Policy: 1999 Kosovo**

The Balkans War began in 1998 and lasted into 1999. The, essentially, Albanian-Serbian conflict was over the disputed territory of Kosovo. We list Blair's interventions relating to the crisis (6.2.6a); thereafter, the range of discursive and performative

actions cited are analysed in terms of their effect upon Blair's political persona (6.2.6b).

#### 6.2.6a Blair's intervention in the crisis

- Blair's peace-mission for Kosovo was made in his statement to the House of Commons on 23 March 1999 in which he stated "autonomy for Kosovo would be guaranteed, with a democratically-elected Assembly, accountable institutions and locally controlled police forces. After three years Kosovo's status would be reviewed" (Blair, 1999a).
- On 24 March 1999, on the day that bombing of Serbia started, "Blair took a high moral tone from the start" (Rentoul, 2002, p. 525). In a statement in Berlin, Blair stated  
  
"justice is all that those poor people, driven from their homes in their thousands in Kosovo, are asking for, the chance to live free from fear. We have in our power the means to help them secure justice and we have a duty to see that justice is now done" (Blair, 1999b cited in Rentoul, 2002, p. 525).
- On 21 April 1999, Blair met U.S. President Clinton for talks on the crisis and NATO intervention. The meeting concluded that the 17 members of NATO would need persuasion regarding military action. Clinton would lobby half and Blair would take the other half (see Rentoul, 2002, p. 525).
- In a speech in Chicago on 22 April 1999, Blair set out his *Doctrine of the International Community* which set out the justification for international intervention. Therafter, Rentoul notes that  
  
"in a series of interviews with US media, Blair developed the idea that regional groups of states, such as NATO, could take action to enforce international law, such as that against genocide, without express authorisation from the UN, provided that the action were consistent with the UN Charter" (Rentoul, 2002, p. 527).

- Blair's appearance on *Larry King Live*, a U.S. television show, in which he likened Milosevic to Hitler in his pursuit of 'racial genocide' earned him U.S. political support (See Rentoul, 2002, p. 527).
- Britain and America committed troops to Kosovo.
- On 25 May 1999, NATO approved the deployment of 50,000 troops. On 2 June, President Clinton made public that he would be meeting his joint chiefs of staff the next day to discuss military options.
- On 2 June, Milosevic conceded all NATO's demands. The Serbs started to withdraw on 10 June and the bombing campaign was halted (see Rentoul, 2002, p. 529-30).

#### **6.2.6b Performance as regards Kosovo**

In terms of Blair's performance and comportment on the international stage (as in 6.2.6a) and their relationship to traits and persona, we can make the following points.

- Blair's condemnation of President Milosevic's' policy of ethnic cleansing was courageous; his action promulgated an humanitarian agenda.
- Blair's ability to persuade U.S. President Bill Clinton highlighted the Anglo-Saxon special relationship but also Blair's influence upon the U.S. interventionist agenda.
- Blair's capitalisation of political support and use of popular culture and celebrity e.g. appearance on U.S. show *Larry King Live* was formative of gaining U.S. support and credibility.
- Hennessy states that Blair's "prominence within the NATO coalition showed that any residual notion of Tony Blair as *primus inter pares* is wrong [in cabinet]" (Hennessy, 2001, p. 506).

- Blair's ability to alter the configuration of NATO and empower the organisation and its members was a demonstration of diplomacy, political will and resolve.
- The positive political outcome in Kosovo was attributed, in part, to Blair's leadership of the crisis. "Blair was hailed by the British press as the hero" (Rentoul, 2003, p. 530).
- Blair's *Doctrine of the International Community* was a discourse that existed at the international level that stressed and linked interventionism and humanitarianism. The document justified Blair's political performance and lead role in the crisis; we come back to the document and its relationship to Blair's justification of geo-political interventionist discourse when we analyse his performance in the 2003 Iraq War.

Blair's performance in Kosovo was significant in terms of his ability to persuade a foreign power such as America that military intervention was the right course of humanitarian action. Blair's leading role in the crisis and within NATO highlighted Britain's influence in the world. The performance had a positive political outcome for Blair's persona in that his persona as a statesman existed internationally as well as nationally.

Thus far in this chapter on the performance of Tony Blair, we have analysed a series of performances as opposition leader and as prime minister. In so doing, the relationship between performance and political persona has been demonstrated. Before analysing Blair's 2002/3 Iraq War policy as the final political performance, we outline Blair's perceived character traits and political persona which emerged from the performances analysed in this chapter:

- As leader of the opposition, Blair demonstrated contradictory traits; the abolition of Clause Four was bold and courageous. The Murdoch agreement illustrated a possibly negative side to Blair which did, however, contribute to victory at the 1997 General Election.
- As incoming prime minister, Blair's political persona was that of a young, popular prime minister. The drinks reception held at Downing St. to celebrate victory, 'Cool Britannia' demonstrated the conflation of the public and the private. Similar to the Murdoch agreement, 'Cool Britannia' illustrated a negative side to Blair's character which gradually added to his negative persona.
- Blair's performance in relation to the death of Diana displayed emotion, compassion and grief.
- The response to the Bernie Ecclestone scandal brought to the fore the image of Blair as possibly corrupt and dishonest.
- The reconfiguration of political institutions demonstrated a modern executive, but also, possible insensitivity towards and shortsightedness as regards British political tradition and institutions. The range of institutional revisions undertaken either concentrated political power in the office of the prime minister or dispersed power away from the centre, thus illustrating paradoxical traits: accommodating to political opinion e.g. demands for devolution, but also, potentially, not thinking through political reforms in terms of feasibility (House of Lords).
- Blair's ownership of the Good Friday Agreement demonstrated diplomacy, problem-solving skills and the ability to persuade political peers.
- The intervention in the Balkans War hailed Blair as an international as well as national peace-maker who was concerned with human suffering but who was

militarily decisive. Compassion and conviction were perceived traits that were associated with this performance.

The character traits and overall persona as identified through the analysis of performance are contradictory and ambivalent; and they are contexts to Blair's foreign policy performance in the Iraq War. Despite the existence of some negative traits which gain further expression in the public realm through Blair's 2003 Iraq War foreign policy, initially, Blair's positive role in the Good Friday Agreement and in Kosovo provided the contextual moral justification for international intervention in 2003. However, Blair's personal popularity ratings were declining, almost halved from the 90% in the immediate aftermath of the Diana moment. The declining poll ratings were, arguably, the classic result of the wear and tear of office, but took place in the context of an emerging and negative shadow persona. Let us examine Blair's foreign policy initiative on Iraq. First let us preface this with reference to the U.K./U.S. 'special relationship' as a context to his foreign policy performance on Iraq.

#### **6.2.7 Foreign policy: response to 9/11 terrorist attack**

The first utterance of a post-war 'special relationship' between the U.K and U.S came in Churchill's 1946 'Iron Curtain' speech which marked the beginning of the Cold War. Churchill's oration called for a closer Anglo-Saxon relationship in which he envisaged the two states carrying out a night-watchman role in policing global conflict. The original 'special relationship' was based on trust and collaboration was formed between prime minister Winston Churchill and president Harry Truman after the Second World War; in the 1980s, Margaret Thatcher highlighted the relationship in the Falklands' conflict (2 April 1982) as an echo of an earlier alliance. The path-dependent Anglo-Saxon alliance was a condition of Blair's relationship to the U.S. and his foreign policy performance.

On 11 September 2001, America was the target of a terrorist attack, henceforth internationally and nationally referred to as '9/11'. On the day of the attacks, before President G. W. Bush responded to the attacks, Blair immediately expressed a positive Anglo-Saxon stance against global terrorism: Britain would stand "shoulder to shoulder" (Blair, 2001a) with the United States. Blair repeated this stance in his party conference speech on 2 October: "we were with you at the first, we will be with you at the last" (Blair, 2001b). Blair's immediate expression of a positive U.K./U.S. stance against terrorism was indicative of his forthcoming policy performances as in section 6.2.7a. This solidarity with the U.S. was the performed context of his subsequent comportment *vis-à-vis* Iraq. The analysis of Blair's foreign policy performance regarding Iraq focuses on two speeches to the House of Commons (24 September 2002 and 18 March 2003) in which Blair discursively performed the dossier which justified his forthcoming military interventionist stance with the U.S. Blair's relationship to the dossier and discursive invention of it are appraised with a view to identifying his character and political persona (6.7.2a). Thereafter, we appraise the revision of Blair's persona as intelligence information contained in Blair's Iraq War dossier was considered to be, at the very least, exaggerated (section 6.2.7b).

#### **6.2.7a Discursive performance on the Iraq dossier**

Blair presented his dossier on Iraq to the House of Commons on two separate occasions. Five main points from his first narrative performance of the Iraq War dossier on 24 September 2002 are as follows:

- "Mr Speaker, thank you for recalling Parliament to debate the best way to deal with the issue of the present leadership of Iraq and weapons of mass destruction" (hereafter referred to in the text as WMD).
- "Today we published a 50-page dossier detailing the history of Iraq's WMD, its breach of UN resolutions and the current attempts to rebuild the illegal WMD programme. I have placed a copy in the

Library of the House". (Blair then provided his audience with an overview of the Gulf War, efforts of the U.N. inspectors to ascertain the possible threat posed by the regime and its relevance for the current terror threat).

- "I set out the history in some detail because occasionally debate on this issue seems to treat it almost as if it had suddenly arisen, coming out of nowhere on a whim, in the last few months of 2002. It is an 11 year history: a history of UN will flouted, lies told by Saddam about existence of his chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programmes, obstruction, defiance and denial".
- "But let me put it at its simplest: on this 11 year history; with this man, Saddam; with this accumulated, detailed intelligence available; with what we know and what we can reasonably speculate: would the world be wise to leave the present situation undisturbed; to say, despite 14 separate UN demands on this issue, all of which Saddam is in breach of, we should do nothing; to conclude that we should trust not to the good faith of the UN weapons inspectors but to the good faith of the current Iraqi regime?".
- "To those who doubt it, I say: look at Kosovo and Afghanistan. We proceeded with care, with full debate in this House and when we took military action, did so as a last resort. We shall act in the same way now" (Blair, 2002).

In terms of the effects of the performance upon Blair's persona, we make the following points:

- The opening of the speech was informed by Blair's context model (van Dijk, 2008, p. 120 in chapter 4 on methodology) in that he represented his social situation as prime minister through discourse. His use of formality e.g. "Mr Speaker, thank you for recalling Parliament to debate..." highlighted his personal identity and communicative identity as speaker and his political status as prime minister. This was the chief executive and leader of the country speaking.
- Blair's emphasis upon Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) was immediate; he cited WMD as illegal and in breach of UN regulations; references to WMD were juxtaposed with references to the Gulf War and the immediate threat of terror. By citing the present terror threat and its relationship to WMD, Blair evoked fear and danger amongst the audience. In so doing, his intention was

to persuade his audience that military intervention was justified and that there was a grave danger.

- By presenting the history of the middle-east conflict, Blair highlighted the 11 year struggle with Saddam Hussein which was characterised by lack of international co-operation. By evoking Saddam Hussein's perceived disregard for the U.N., Blair highlighted the threat and danger that were associated with Saddam. Blair's use of fear was created by citing Saddam's actions as defiant and obstructive; by presenting the negative traits of the enemy, Blair proposes military action to tackle fear.
- Blair characterised the struggle against terrorism as the struggle against one person, therefore depicting politics being about personalities. Negative references to the enemy were overt and personal; depictions of Saddam Hussein's character e.g. "lies told by Saddam", "obstruction, defiance and denial" or "this man" provided a contrast between the enemy and the imagined 'we' or 'I'. The personalisation of Saddam personalises the character of Blair as concerned with human suffering and injustice.
- Blair's positive reference to Kosovo presented "episodic information" (van Dijk and Kintsch, 1983, p. 344, see chapter 4 on methodology). The use of previous information reminded the audience of the successful humanitarian outcome in Kosovo and its attribution in large part to Blair. Moreover, references to previous political actions were deployed as the moral basis for intervention in Iraq.

In the aftermath of the presentation of his dossier, Blair's popularity ratings increased from 34% (September 2002) to 42% (18 March 2003) (BBC, 2007), an illustration that his discursive response to the dossier had some generated agreement which impacted upon his popularity ratings. However, there was discontent among the

government regarding the dossier and planned military intervention; foreign secretary, Robin Cook resigned in March 2003. Members of the cabinet expressed their disaffection to the media regarding the lack of consultation but maintained the myth of collective government without undermining it. The largest War protest in the U.K. took place on 16 February 2003 with an estimated one million protestors. Amid criticism towards Blair's foreign policy and lack of collective government, his second discursive performance of the Iraq dossier on 18 March 2003 was highly personalised and emphasised ownership of the dossier. The following five points illustrate Blair's highly personalised foreign policy stance:

- "I beg to move the motion standing on the order paper in my name and those of my right honourable friends".
- "I believe we must hold firm".
- "So let me explain the nature of this threat as I see it".
- "This is not the time to falter. This is the time for this house, not just this government or indeed this prime minister, but for this house to give a lead, to show that we will stand up for what we know to be right, to show that we will confront the tyrannies and dictatorships and terrorists who put our way of life at risk, to show at the moment of decision that we have the courage to do the right thing.
- "I beg to move the motion was Blair's final utterance" (Blair, 2003).

Such statements and the use of the self demonstrated Blair's belief in his actions, a sense of righteousness and self confidence. Blair's explanation of the perceived threat was an attempt to persuade colleagues to confront and control terrorism e.g. the use of Churchillian discourse: "this is not the time to falter" and "to show that we will confront the tyrannies and dictatorships and terrorists who put our way of life at risk" see Jenkins, 2001) emphasised Blair's struggle against the enemy. Blair's persuasive appeal was strengthened because such a tone invites agreement by raising all the issues to a moral and visionary level. The contrast between the imagined 'us' and the enemy was an appeal to the values that define 'us' and an appeal to confront the "tyrannies and dictatorships" that "put our way of life at risk".

Both speeches in which Blair interpolated, performed the dossier, as it were, in particular his latter performance, sought to establish his moral crusade and himself as a site of political authority on a global scale. His condemnation of Saddam Hussein and terrorism more generally was like a personal challenge and was a rallying call to other world leaders. Both performances of the dossier had positive implications for Blair as his poll ratings demonstrated an upwards trajectory, demonstrating some audience support on this issue despite the protests. On 20 March 2003, the invasion of Iraq began. However, post-June 2003, Blair's publicly perceived character and persona were revised. The revision of Blair's character and the negative character traits that emerged existed inside his positive image. By making the defence of the dossier so personal, and its acceptance dependent upon his character, Blair was undertaking a very high-risk strategy, any diminution – let alone collapse – of the credibility of the dossier would almost automatically lead to a similar diminution in both Blair's credibility and, perhaps even more importantly, integrity.

#### **6.2.7b Revision of character and persona**

In June 2003, reports began to emerge in the media that Blair's 'Iraq Dossier' was fundamentally flawed. Reports claimed that the intelligence information had been 'sexed up' (The Guardian, 2003) in a bid to garner support for the invasion of a foreign power.

The emergence of the falsification of intelligence claims (specifically, the falsification of the claim that WMD could be deployed in 45 minutes) (ibid) and Blair's deep and personally interpolated relationship to the dossier initiated the gradual but relentless revision of his publicly perceived persona. Negative character traits quickly became

associated with Blair, and were amplified because of his previously established character. It was not long before that the following character traits were associated with Blair: mistrustful, deceitful, scheming and dishonest.

Blair's political persona from 1997-2003 was that of a young, modern, in-touch prime minister. Post-2003, it was revised into a villain-like Judas, and as someone who was prepared to deceive everyone. From 1997 and up to 2003, Blair's appeal was based upon the personal and the persuasive. The revision of his character contrasted with the traits that previous performances, analysed in this chapter projected within the public realm. We should stress that in many ways the former traits (1997-2003) create the latter ones (post-2003), that is to say that the dramatic fall in his popularity was crucially linked to his personalisation of his role over the previous decade.

### **6.3 Conclusion**

In conclusion to this chapter, we make the following point on Blair's deployment of character to political effect. The response to the Bernie Ecclestone scandal highlighted negative character traits e.g. possible corruption and dishonesty. At the time, Blair was able to deal with these; his public apology and self-testimony as a 'regular guy' and his popularity meant that his negative 'character' did not at the time present itself as a difficulty. A sympathetic media also helped avoid negative press and coverage. Post-2003, the traits of dishonesty, deceit, and even corruption re-emerged in relation to the Iraq War Dossier and other moments. As the War began to go seriously wrong, Blair began to appear as the negation, the very opposite of what he had seemed. This could only happen on the scale it did because of Blair's own emphasis upon and deployment of character.

## **7 CASE STUDY, GORDON BROWN**

## 7a Overview

As theorised in sub-chapter 3.1 and demonstrated in chapter 6, the development of celebrity and personalisation within the British polity stresses leadership and the deployment of the self to political purpose. Institutionally, advances in the media, especially recently the advent of 24 hour news coverage and development of the Internet, now offer prime ministers, party leaders, and political elites more generally, scope through multiple media to personalise the self, much more than in the post-war period. There is also now greater scope for the political persona to be exploited by the media. One of the political consequences of the conjuncture of celebrity culture, personalisation of the prime minister and media advancement is that image, style, performance, character, personality have become accessible and important aspects of contemporary British politics (see also chapter 5).

This chapter applies the framework of political performance to the premiership of Gordon Brown and analyses how performance and persona are factors in the political process. The following performances are analysed:

- (7.1) First utterance as prime minister (27/07/07):

Including Brown's arrival in Downing St, performance of the statement and use of the self as a political resource.

- (7.2) Events of the summer recess (July 2007-September 2007):

Four crisis moments characterised the summer recess; we do not analyse Brown's performance in each crisis moment, as they projected the same traits in public consciousness. We analyse Brown's flirtation with the idea of an early election towards the end of the summer recess as a form not of political action but of political inaction which revised his positive political persona as incoming prime minister.

- (7.3) Global financial crisis (September-December 2008):  
Including reference to the emergence of the crisis and policy initiation e.g. Bailout package.
- (7.4) Expenses Scandal (May 2009):  
Brown's immediate and longer-term responses to the crisis as a series of discursive performances are analysed.
- (7.5) Leadership crisis (June 2009):  
The leadership crisis was an attack upon Brown's character; Brown's first media interview after the crisis began is analysed as a discursive performance.

The analysis of each performance will enable us to a) establish Brown's publicly perceived character traits and political persona; b) identify the role and effects of persona upon the political process; c) understand the ways in which political action is informed and/or limited by cultural and institutional contexts; and d) identify the impact of performance upon cultural and institutional contexts.

As leadership performance takes place within a given culture and configuration of institutions, the performances above are informed and/or constrained by culture and institutions. We retain from sub-chapters 3.1 and 3.2 one point on culture (7b) and institutions (7c) as contexts/conditions which facilitate or constrain political action. Brown's political trajectory (7d) is also referred to as a context which conditions his performance as prime minister. Thereafter, the performances are analysed and situated within identified cultural and institutional contexts.

## **7b Culture as a condition of leadership performance**

The deployment of a highly personalised style of leadership has become the dominant practice of a British prime minister and incorporates aspects of celebrity. The Blair premiership exemplified this practice which used celebrity culture and the media to political purpose. Leaders who work within this narrative may enjoy political advantage provided that they personalise the self and adopt aspects of celebrity. Conversely, leaders who work against the grain of established cultural narratives may find themselves rejected by the culture and presented with a series of negative constraints.

Foley (2000) argues that the precedent set by Tony Blair's dominance of government represents a standard against which his competitors and successors will be judged. As Blair's successor, the culture that Brown inherited provided 'space' for a dominant prime minister to perform. According to Foley, Brown's style of leadership, whether dominant or not, would be one of the areas that he would be judged against. We come back to the question of predecessors in the concluding chapter of this thesis and make reference to Blair and Brown as an example. The "leadership-centred kind of political culture" (see chapter 5) that Brown inherited was a condition of his performance as prime minister.

## **7c Institutions as conditions of leadership performance**

Brown inherited a dominant relationship between prime minister and cabinet. His predecessor, Tony Blair, deployed personal authority to command and control the cabinet as well as centralising government communications e.g. establishing a prime minister's office (see Hennessy, 2000). Blair's management of the cabinet has been referred to as 'sofa-style' government in which the business of government was conducted informally with individual members of the core executive, as opposed to

with formally minuted cabinet meetings (see Hennessy 2005, p. 10 and King, 2009). A powerful prime minister can exercise personal authority to dominate, command and control the core executive. Moreover, under the leadership of Tony Blair, the relationship between executive and cabinet was a contested one. The overlap of competing political/economic spheres of influence between prime minister Blair and chancellor of the Exchequer Brown created a dual leadership situation, described by Hennessy as a “diarchy” (2000), or as a “duumvirate” by King (2009, p. 318). Paradoxically, although Brown inherited a divided institution of prime minister and cabinet; as prime minister, he had more room to perform within this institution as he did not initially have a strong and powerful chancellor to compete with (see King, 2009).

#### **7d Political trajectory as a condition of leadership performance**

The one essential point that we retain on Brown’s political trajectory as a condition of his performance as prime minister is that as chancellor (1997-2007) Brown’s perceived character demonstrated paradoxical qualities. His tenure as chancellor was characterised by economic stability, growth and prudence; and thus brought to the fore positive character traits: strong and competent (see also Bower, 2007).

Post-1997, the alternative interpretations of the ‘Granita deal’<sup>6</sup> were formative of a dual prime ministership/power struggle between Blair and Brown, to the point where the institution of the cabinet was divided into ‘Blairites’ and ‘Brownites’. The cleavage within the core executive had a serious implication for Brown’s character and

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<sup>6</sup> The Granita deal has been covered mainly in biographies (see Bower, 2007), academic literature on Blair and Brown and texts written by political advisors and spin doctors. The Granita deal was an agreement between Blair and Brown regarding the 1994 leadership of the Labour party, and the roles that they would occupy thereafter. Marquand states that ‘Blair promised his rival that he would be Chancellor of the Exchequer if Labour won, with effective control over social as well as economic policy. He may or may not have added that when he gave up the prime ministership, Brown would be his preferred candidate for the succession’ (2008, p. 357). See also Mandelson, 2011, p. 170, 171, 182, 338 for an account of the Granita deal and effects upon Brown.

persona in the public realm. The Blair/Brown power struggle was intensified institutionally as, nominally, both prime minister and chancellor were “First Lords of the Treasury” (see Hennessy, 2001). Brown’s powers over the institution of the Treasury could be overruled, although in practice rarely were. The relationship between Blair and Brown was expressed, nevertheless, in the ownership and coveting of policy fiefdoms (see Hennessy, 2001 p. 526 and Hennessy, 2005, p. 10), Brown’s coveting of the prime ministership portrayed Brown as impatient, power-hungry and jealous. Moreover, Tony Blair in his last performance at PMQs made reference to Brown as the “big clunking-fist” (Blair, 2006), highlighting both a positive and a negative side to Brown’s character.

Bearing in mind the points made on culture, celebrity and personalisation; on institutions; and on trajectory as contexts of leadership performance, the following sub-sections analyse the premiership of Gordon Brown.

## **7.1 First utterance as prime minister**

Brown’s statement upon arriving in Downing Street is analysed according to three areas. First, we identify the political significance of Brown’s arrival, as this constitutes part of the performance; second, we analyse Brown’s discursive performance of the statement in terms of his first utterance and key moments which demonstrate the relationship between performance and persona; third, we identify Brown’s use of the self to political effect.

### **7.1.1 Arrival in Downing St**

Brown emerged from his official car with his wife Sarah. They held hands and at a gentle pace walked towards a microphone that was placed in the middle of the street

with a backdrop of the door of Number 10 in view. The image of Gordon and Sarah had a function beyond iterating the role of the personal in politics. She in a cream jacket and red and cream skirt, softened his image. By virtue of her presence and femininity she gave his often dour character and persona warmth. As the couple walked towards the microphone, Brown positioned himself in front of it and Sarah stood to his left. She gave him 'room' to perform his new image to the people of Britain as prime minister; her posture was elegant and upright, her hands were clasped, her head tilted slightly to the left as she looked at him while he spoke (see Appendix F).

The media presence that greeted Brown was modest, and certainly not comparable to that of Tony Blair's entrance in 1997, with large crowds waving union jack flags. The restrained media representation illustrated the non-triumphalist notion of Brown's inheritance as prime minister; reinforced his lack of personal/political mandate; and dumbed down the integration of aspects of celebrity in mainstream British politics. The positive side of this was that it afforded him an image of modesty. Brown's arrival in Downing St was his first performance as prime minister; the performance was not treated as a media event which incorporated aspects of celebrity culture, but did include personalisation with Sarah Brown softening his image as prime minister.

### **7.1.2 Performance of the statement**

Brown began by acknowledging the media presence before him with a look from left to right. He paused for a couple of seconds and cupped his hands into one another; his expression can be described as a mixture of disbelief and contained joy. The first paragraph of the statement reads:

"I have just accepted the invitation of Her Majesty The Queen to form a Government. This will be a new Government with new priorities, and I have been privileged to have been granted the great

opportunity to serve my country, and at all times I will be strong in purpose, steadfast in will, resolute in action in the service of what matters to the British people, meeting the concerns and aspirations of our whole country” (Brown, 2007a).

Brown’s first utterance as prime minister: “I have just accepted the invitation of Her Majesty The Queen to form a Government” was spoken with a deep voice, his head was held high, neck elongated whilst scouting the press from left to right. At the end of the sentence, Brown nodded down and quickly looked back up, an illustration of self content, joy, and the affirmation of his place in British politics. The utterance was formal yet self reinforcing and illustrated that he believed that he was the rightful successor to Tony Blair.

He then made reference to his government as a new government with new priorities. A ‘new’ government and premiership projected through the following personal traits: “I will be strong in purpose”, “steadfast in will” and “resolute in action”. Such character traits illustrated Brown’s projected character as well as the character of the new government, as responsive to citizens, pragmatic, powerful and dependable.

Brown emphasised ‘change’ and progressive politics, and described forthcoming political actions that would create a new kind of politics illustrating his vision and inclusive programme for Government:

“and this need for change cannot be met by the old politics. So I will reach out beyond narrow Party interests, I will build a government that uses all the talents, I will invite men and women of goodwill to contribute their energies in a new spirit of public service to make our nation what it can be” (Brown, 2007a).

Let us now analyse Brown’s use of the self.

### **7.1.3 Use of the self**

In spite of the 'modesty' of the staging, the use of the self in Brown's statement was strong. A total of 21 personal pronouns were used within a short statement which, paradoxically, was delivered in under three minutes. Brown's use of the self included "I have" or "I will"; such references positioned him in path dependent political space as chancellor (I have) as well as situating him in the future as prime minister (I will). Such references iterated Brown's political experience and referred to the future and his new government's forthcoming programme for change e.g. "I will continue to listen" or "I will try my utmost" and "resolute in action in the service of what matters to the British people". The positioning of the self in the past, present and future projected Brown as an experienced yet modern politician.

In the third paragraph of the statement 'I' was used a total of 9 times. The personal pronoun served two functions: firstly, it situated Brown amongst the British people and their calls for change e.g. "I have listened", "I will continue to listen" or "I have heard the need for change". Secondly, change was evoked through belief in him: "this need for change cannot be met by the old politics. So I will reach out beyond narrow party interests. I will build a government that uses all the talents". Moreover, Brown outlined his plan of action for government; in so doing, he articulated the need for change. Brown endorsed himself as the person who would replace old politics with new politics and his vision for change.

In summary, Brown's first performance as prime minister was personalised by virtue of Sarah's presence, and by the clear demonstration of personal emotion (see Appendix G) but did not heavily embrace aspects of celebrity culture. The statement was short and meaningful; Brown projected himself as a progressive prime minister and outlined his 'new' politics which would be responsible, pragmatic and responsive

to individuals. His references to 'new' politics replacing 'old' politics created space between his premiership and that of his predecessor, Tony Blair. By separating old and new politics, thereby almost implying that Blair represented the past and old politics, Brown implied that he represented change, progressive values and new politics. After the performance, Brown's persona as a strong conviction politician began to emerge; he distanced himself from the Blair premiership and his political trajectory by iterating the paradoxical need for change and progressive politics.

## **7.2 Events of the summer recess (July-September 2007)**

Five events moments characterised the summer recess period:

1. July 1 2007 a terrorist car bomb in a 4x4 was driven into Glasgow Airport.
2. July 7 2007 Britain suffered the worst flooding for over 60 years.
3. August 2007, Foot and mouth disease broke out in Surrey.
4. Mid-September 2007: Northern Rock banking crisis emerged.
5. Mid-September 2007: Courting of the idea of an autumn election.

The first four crisis moments constitute a stream of events that we refer to but do not analyse in detail, as Brown's performance in each crisis conveyed similar positive traits. The last event of the summer in which Brown courted the idea of an early election is analysed, as the traits that emerged from this performance revised his established character and had negative and lasting political effects in terms of his status and political authority. The first four events of the summer period presented themselves as crisis moments within the polity and had positive ramifications for Brown's publicly perceived character. Brown's pragmatic and calm response to each crisis: denouncing terrorism and holding immediate talks with security experts; pledging extra funding for areas affected by flooding; cancelling his summer break to

chair the government's emergency 'Cobra' committee meeting on foot and mouth; and guaranteeing the savings of Northern Rock customers, all projected positive character traits in the public realm. Brown's performance in the four crisis moments projected strong, pragmatic, decisive, and competent aspects of character. Brown's role in the Northern Rock crisis illustrated his performance both as prime minister and as chancellor. Against the backdrop of four crisis moments, Brown's persona emerged as a strong and pragmatic prime minister. This was reinforced by positive poll ratings (see BBC poll tracker, 2007). However, political inaction in clarifying speculation of an early election led to the revision of Brown's character. This event is narrated in more detail in order to demonstrate political action versus inaction and the negative impact upon political persona.

### **7.2.1 Election speculation**

Approximately one week before the start of the annual Labour party conference, from mid-September, the following actions by members of the cabinet created speculation that an early autumn election was imminent: Ed Miliband, minister for the cabinet office and a loyal Brownite, began drafting the party manifesto. Other practical aspects of approaching an election too were expressed: "Labour had booked advertising hoardings; inquiries were made about the Queen's movements to ensure she would be in London if Brown needed to seek dissolution of Parliament, and television slots were reserved" (Cracknell and Schofield, 2007).

The half hidden 'secrecy' of political actions added weight to growing speculation within the polity that an early election would be held by the end of 2007. Brown neither denied nor confirmed the developing situation, and avoided any direct questions on the election by the media. In so doing, he failed to clarify claims and end speculation. Upon questioning in a live interview by the BBC's *Andrew Marr*

*Show* on the first day of the Labour party conference (23 September 2007), Brown did to some degree quash election speculation but not completely. When asked by Marr whether his advisers were telling him to call an early election, Brown responded “No. I’m actually getting on with the job” (Brown, 2007b). Brown’s response can be read as a denial; however, media speculation continued and he did not assertively put an end to speculation. Brown’s political inaction in failing to end speculation demonstrated a long period of indecisiveness once the speculation was ended decisively.

Election speculation dominated the five days of Brown’s first party conference as prime minister (23/09/08-27/09/08). On 30 September 2008, *The Sun* “a mass-market paper” (Mandelson, 2011, p. 489) had switched its support from Labour to Conservative. The significance of the Murdoch press and political outcomes has been demonstrated in chapter 6. Politically, this was significant for Brown and presented itself as a negative institutional condition to performance hereon in. Post-Labour party conference, Brown’s inability to use language and discourse to political effect e.g. clarifying election speculation, continued as the Conservative party conference began. Approximately two weeks had gone by with neither full confirmation nor complete denial of an election; Brown’s indecisiveness was emphasised (and was, paradoxically, highlighted by decisiveness in announcing the withdrawal of troops in Iraq). Against the domestic political background of Day 2 of the Conservative party conference, on 2 October 2007 Brown flew to Iraq, his first visit to Basra as prime minister. He announced the withdrawal of 1,000 troops. Brown was criticised by former prime minister, John Major, for his surprise visit to Iraq which was seen as a political strategy to overshadow the Tory party conference (see Major, 2007). He was also criticised by Shadow Justice Secretary, Nick Herbert, for not announcing the troop withdrawals to the House of Commons but to the media (see Herbert, 2007). Brown’s visit to Iraq and the negative reactions that he received

implied that his politics were not that dissimilar from the politics of spin that had characterised the Blair administration. Brown's arrival back to Britain gave the opposition party greater scope to launch personal criticisms.

On 5 October 2007, Brown held an election summit at Number 10. This action added weight to election speculation. Brown's public political silence continued amid a "Tory bounce which now put both parties at 38% and cut the Labour lead by 4%" (see Cracknell and Schofield, 2007). The Tory bounce in opinion polls can be attributed in large part to David Cameron's performance at the Conservative party conference which was positively received by the media; Cameron's persona was positively refracted through the media as prime minister-in-waiting (*The Telegraph*, 2008). Cameron's speech emphasised defiance and personalisation of Brown; negative characterisations of Brown and hostility towards him were then reiterated by the media which further undermined Brown's fragile political persona (see BBC poll tracker). During this period, criticism from David Cameron was fierce, accusing Brown of "great weakness and indecision"; (Cameron, 2007a) and soon helped establish an image of the prime minister as weak and indecisive. Cameron's attacks highlighted Brown's lack of action.

On Sunday 7 October, three weeks after signs of an early election, Brown ended his silence and invited the BBC's *Andrew Marr Show* to 10 Downing Street. In the interview with Marr he revealed his decision, stating:

"I will not be calling an election, and let me say why. Over the summer months we have had to deal with crises – we have had to deal with foot and mouth, terrorism, floods, financial crises. And yes, we could have had an election based on competence, and I hope people would have understood that we acted competently. But what I want to do is show people the vision that we have for the future of this country in housing and health and education, and I want the chance, in the next phase of my premiership, to develop and show people the policies that are going to make a huge difference and show the change in the country itself" (Brown, 2007c).

The three week election speculation was officially over as Brown politicised his 'voice'. Brown attributed the crisis events over the summer and forthcoming policies as a justification for his three week silence on the issue. What had begun as a strategy to gain a legitimate personal mandate had turned into a major political miscalculation. Brown's three week political silence had negative consequences for his character from then on. His inability to discursively express his position on the possibility of an early election demonstrated uncertainty, weariness and indecisiveness; a contrast to the image of the new, strong prime minister that Brown had cultivated prior to this event. Brown's political inaction relating to the election illustrates three points:

- Political inaction: silence, lack of clarity or the inability to add 'voice' to a particular situation/event can have negative political consequences for one's image, status and authority. Political inaction can therefore be as potent, damaging and irreversible as action.
- The expression of negative traits can define a leader's premiership thereafter and have a dramatic impact upon status and authority. In the case of Brown, before the election debacle emerged, he had enjoyed steady poll ratings of 39%. An ICM opinion poll conducted immediately after the election fiasco (10 October 2007) placed the Tories at 43% and Labour at 36% (Sparrow, 2007).
- Political errors of judgement can leave leaders vulnerable, and can give opposition parties, rivals and adversaries political momentum. John McDonnell, the Left-wing Labour MP, claimed:

"This has been a complete fiasco from start to finish. It will do us a lot of damage. After weeks of political game-playing by the inexperienced, testosterone-fuelled young men in Brown's team we have presented the Tories with an own goal, making a Labour leader look weak, and re-associating the party with spin" (McDonnell, 2007).

Errors of judgement can weaken the position of the leader from within the party and can weaken internal support (see Powell, 2010, p. 37, 38 who describes Brown's public display of indecision and negative impact upon his leadership thereafter and the party). Moreover, during Brown's first term in office, on 6 November 2007, the day of the Queen's Speech, David Cameron and acting leader of the Liberal Democrats, Vince Cable, attacked Brown's persona negatively. David Cameron stated:

"That is what Britain needs: solving long-term problems, not short-term political tricks; a clear vision for the future, instead of a tired and cynical Prime Minister who has forgotten what he is trying to achieve; and consistent, strong leadership, instead of a weak Prime Minister who cannot stick to anything for longer than five minutes. That is the change that people want, and that is the change that our party will deliver" (Cameron, 2007b)

Vince Cable stated:

"The Queen's Speech has been long in anticipation. The Prime Minister has been waiting for it for 10 years. He has had a 35-year political career distilling many of the ideas that have come forward today. He postponed the election in order to inject more vision, but the sense of anticlimax is deafening. We have heard little new, no ideas and little vision. Is that really what we were waiting for? I fear that the Prime Minister now cuts a rather sad figure. He was introduced to us a few months ago by his predecessor as the great clunking fist, but the boxing story has gone completely awry. Like a great boxing champion, as he once was, he has somehow made himself unconscious falling over his own bootlaces and is now staggering around the ring, semi-conscious and lost, and hanging on to the ropes. What is certainly absent is any forward movement or new ideas". (Cable, 2007a)

Both Cameron and Cable continued to critique Brown. Cameron continued characterising Brown as 'a bottler' and Cable, on 28 November 2007 at PMQs ridiculed and demeanoured Brown by making reference to him as 'Mr Bean' – a hapless satirical comedy figure: "The House has noticed the Prime Minister's remarkable transformation in the past few weeks from Stalin to Mr. Bean *[Laughter]* creating chaos out of order, rather than order out of chaos" (Cable, 2007b). Throughout Brown's first term in office, Cameron and Cable's criticisms involved

major attacks upon the persona. References cited above by Cameron and Cable e.g. Brown as “a weak Prime Minister”; “the Prime Minister now cuts a rather sad figure”; and “from Stalin to Mr Bean”, were attacks upon Brown’s political persona. Such criticisms brought to the forefront of British politics the question of political leadership and character traits. Such personal criticisms by rivals and adversaries served as a constant reminder of Brown’s political inaction over election speculation, sought to diminish Brown’s political authority, and provided negative conditions for Brown’s forthcoming political actions.

During Brown’s first year in office, his political popularity decreased (see BBC Poll Tracker), and hostility towards him increased from within the party, from opposition leaders and from the media commentariat. Media hostility towards Brown iterated the ‘pack mentality’ of the media and its ability to act in a concerted fashion (see chapter 5). At this time, David Miliband, then foreign secretary, published an article in *The Guardian* before the summer recess entitled ‘Against all odds we can still win, on a platform for change’ (Miliband, 2008). The article by Miliband was perceived as a criticism of Brown’s leadership and the beginning of a possible leadership contest, thus further diminishing Brown’s authority and internal support from the party.

In sum, Brown’s inaction relating to the election revised his political persona as a strong and competent prime minister into an indecisive and fearful leader. Against overwhelmingly negative personal attacks upon Brown’s character, his performance in the global financial crisis managed to, albeit temporarily, restore some status and authority.

### **7.3 Global financial crisis**

The global financial crisis emerged dramatically in September 2008. Before narrating the scale of the crisis, we make reference to two conditions which conditioned Brown's financial policy performance. The first condition of Brown's performance in the global financial crisis was his political trajectory. As chancellor, Brown's ten year leadership of the Treasury was characterised by stability, growth and prudence. He had a positive reputation for managing the economy (see Bower, 2007). Brown had accrued international political capital with fellow leaders and chancellors and finance ministers; his personal capital was arguably greater internationally than nationally and conditioned the overwhelmingly positive international response to his policy proposals as in section 7.3.2. The second condition was that during the 2007 summer recess, the first major expression of a banking crisis within the polity emerged. Northern Rock, Britain's biggest mortgage lender, was in extreme financial difficulty. Brown's pragmatic response in guaranteeing customer deposits and then the nationalisation of Northern Rock in February 2008 demonstrated political action fitting to unexpected circumstances. Brown's response to Northern Rock was a prelude to financial policy making in response to the international crisis. Bearing in mind the two positive conditions referred to, the global financial crisis is narrated (7.3.1), Brown's response to the crisis and policy performance is detailed (7.3.2) as is the international endorsement and replication of Brown's bailout policy package and effect upon political persona.

#### **7.3.1 Emergence of the global financial crisis**

The first major expression of the global crisis within the British economy was in the early hours of 15 September 2008. At approximately 05:30am, news that U.S. Bank, Lehman Brothers had collapsed was reported; staff at the Canary Wharf Headquarters were told that morning that the company had gone into administration.

On the day of the collapse, the reverberations domestically and internationally were significant: a loss of confidence in markets, plummeting share prices, at “4.30pm BST: FTSE 100 closes almost 4% lower at 5,202.4, a 210 point drop, wiping out £50bn of value” (*The Guardian*, 2008), which contributed to a raft of job losses and growing insecurities. All of these developments iterated the functioning of markets within (and not separate from) a system of global finance, the suddenly fragile triumphalism of western capitalism, deregulation and the embracing of the free market economy, policy positions that New Labour had embraced post-Thatcher (see sub-chapter 3.1). The impact of the crisis within the polity was job insecurity, companies announcing redundancies and reduction in working hours, and liquidations.

### **7.3.2 Policy response to the crisis**

Brown’s policy position as a response to the crisis was set out on 13 October 2008 in two separate but related performances. The first policy performance was a joint press conference at Downing Street with the chancellor, Alistair Darling. The second performance was a speech on the Global Economy on the same day at The Reuters Building, Canary Wharf, the location serving as a reminder of the financial crisis, as the collapse of Lehman Brothers on 15 September 2008 in the U.K. had emerged from within Canary Wharf. We should stress that Alastair Darling was rarely seen as in charge of economic policy, Brown operated a dual role – as prime minister and as chancellor. The following points illustrate Brown’s policy response to the crisis:

13 October 2008: Joint press conference with Alastair Darling at Downing St:

- “The action we are taking is unprecedented but essential for all of us”.
- “British banks are being strengthened today through the injection of nearly £50 billion of new capital from the government and from the markets. There is not a bank in the world that has not been affected

by the global storm, some more than others, but at this time of uncertainty we want British banks to be able to lead the world and to be as strong and as well capitalised as any across the globe”.

- “I believe that only by global action can we fully restore the confidence that is needed and build the international financial order, and I will put forward proposals for major reform of the international institutions in a speech in the City later this morning”.
- “To let the chips fall where they may would be the height of irresponsibility, it would be a failure of leadership at precisely the moment vigorous action is needed to protect people who need that help most. And if we pull together as a country we can come through these times stronger and not weaker” (Brown, 2008a).

Before we analyse the above as policy responses to the crisis, we highlight one significant quotation from Brown’s second policy performance on the global crisis which he set out in a speech on Global Economy at the Reuters Building, Canary Wharf:

“We will not shirk from our responsibilities and are prepared to go beyond the conventional thinking by taking the decisive action that is necessary to support British families and business through difficult times. But let me repeat, we have no interest in running British banks, we do have an interest in strengthening their position. And this has always been the way for Britain. The British people have always risen to the challenge of a crisis and we must do so again, and to pull together as a community and to show that spirit, resilience and determination which has defined Britain to the world as a nation for generations. And by maintaining that British spirit, working in partnership with our friends across the globe, I believe we can come through these tough times together as a global community as well as a Britain that is stronger, not weaker. And we have to recognise that the action we need is not just national, but global” (Brown, 2008b).

Having set out key quotations from Brown’s policy responses to the financial crisis, we make the following points. The Bailout package proposed by Brown, injecting British banks with nearly £50bn worth of “new capital from the government and the markets” (Brown, 2008a), prevented the collapse not only of the banking sector but the economy. The scale of monies involved was far bolder and braver than the nationalisation of Northern Rock in February 2008 and reflected the depth of the crisis which Britain faced. Brown’s pragmatic response to the crisis illustrated decisive leadership at a time when the U.K. economy faced the prospect of collapse

and mass inflation. Brown described the domestic policy position as “unprecedented but essential” (ibid). His endorsement of the policy reflected the depth of the crisis but crucially, it reinforced leadership, responsibility and courage; traits which reflected the character of the British prime minister. Brown’s description of the policy as “essential” indicated that he was operating on a known area of financial expertise and that the policy decision would be a corrective to the immediate crisis that British banks faced; as well as a corrective to deregulated financial institutions of the Thatcher period that had continued under the premierships of Blair and Brown. Brown stated that the injection of new capital would enable “British banks to be able to lead the world” (ibid), in so doing, reaffirming their and his status and authority. Brown’s policy action served as a model for international financial crisis management. The positive reception internationally resulted in the replication of Brown’s policy (see Borger, 2008). Policy replication internationally meant that the traits associated with the policy internationally were reflected back on to Brown, but underreported by the media.

Throughout the crisis, Brown had successfully managed to use the economic context to political advantage. His Keynesian policy position of quantitative easing provided a pragmatic solution to the crisis and reflected his experience in the area of finance, markets and the economy. Consequentially, his ability to avoid an economic crisis brought to the fore positive traits that existed as chancellor, and during the Northern Rock banking crisis as in 2007. Through policy performance, Brown managed to restore some political status and authority, and the positive persona that existed at the beginning of his premiership regained public expression (see BBC poll tracker).

The analysis of Brown’s policy performance as a response to the financial crisis has demonstrated four points. First, the context which conditioned Brown’s performance in the financial crisis (political trajectory as chancellor and response to the smaller

scale, Northern Rock banking crisis in 2007) demonstrated political experience in the area of financial management; Brown's previous positive character traits provided a positive context for financial policy performance. However, there was a negative aspect to the character of Brown related to whether or not he had foreseen the crisis, given his apparent economic expertise. Second, crisis moments can offer prime ministers scope to fashion and/or re-fashion their publicly perceived character, image and political persona. Brown's experience of financial management seemed to fit well with the context of unprecedented national and international financial chaos. The financial crisis existed as Machiavellian *fortuna*; and enabled Brown to use context (financial crisis) to evoke his expertise in finance and refashion his publicly perceived character. Third, the scale of the crisis and Brown's positive actions in managing global finance (evoking of a new financial architecture, global organisation of the G8 and then G20) demonstrated his pragmatic response and proposal to help solve global financial mis-management through the creation of regulatory frameworks and innovative policy. The replication of Brown's policy internationally was an endorsement of his strong leadership and calm yet effective policy response. Fourth, policy decisions are one aspect against which the performance of a leader is judged. In this case, policy ownership had a positive impact and elevated his political status and authority at the time within the polity. As in chapter 5, Policy maker A stated that in this crisis Gordon's Brown's policy position was "a good example of an innovation that boosted the reputation of the person who took it". Policy positions and their reception can have positive political consequences for the practice of political leadership.

In sum, the financial crisis had positive political effects for Brown; he had deployed a policy which was innovative and responsive to the crisis. In so doing, he fashioned his character and persona nationally and internationally as a pragmatic statesman.

We now analyse Brown's performance in the Expenses Scandal of May 2009.

#### **7.4 Performance: Expenses Scandal**

The Expenses Scandal emerged on the evening 7 May 2009 through several evening News bulletins which reviewed the following days' newspapers. Details of the breaking scandal were published in *The Daily Telegraph* the following day (8 May 2009). The front page of the paper led with a picture of Brown and his brother; his expenses claim form which detailed cleaning payments for a flat that they had both shared. Brown's involvement in the scandal was damaging for his authority and status as a conviction politician; the scandal presented Brown as someone who had cheated at a petty level despite his positive financial reputation at the national and international level. In this section, we refer to the Expenses Scandal with a view to appraising Brown's performance at this time. For the purposes of analysis we focus on the following responses:

- (7.4.1) Brown's immediate response: BBC interview (8 May 2009), and
- (7.4.2) Brown's longer-term response in an article written in *The Independent* newspaper (27 May 2009).

##### **7.4.1 Immediate response to the Scandal**

Brown's response to the Scandal was immediate (even though he was not in London). On the evening that the story became news (7 May), Downing St issued an immediate statement that the Prime Minister has acted with the full approval of the parliamentary authorities. The focus upon the system, institutions and procedure was formative to Brown's responses to the Scandal. The following day (8 May) in a train interview, Brown, returning to London, told the BBC that

"this is a system that's got to change. You probably remember that I've been trying to make big changes in this system which abolished this allowance, to make sure that everything is properly registered, even receipts of £25 are registered by MPs. MPs have to live in two places at once, they have to live in constituencies and also in

London to do their work in London. There's got to be some recognition of that. But the system doesn't work; I've said it doesn't work, it's got to be changed, we voted for change and that change has got to come quickly" (Brown, 2009a).

Brown condemned the institutional structures which had allowed MPs to claim expenses without registering every single claim, and emphasised that he had been "trying to make big changes" that would have encouraged accountability. He evoked a sense of urgency that the system was not fit for political purpose and that "change has got to come quickly". His utterances demonstrated forthcoming reform of the institutions. When asked about public anger on the issue, Brown replied

"the system's got to be changed. I've been determined over these last few months that the system's wrong, the system is not the way to work, the means by which you compensate people for having to live in two different places and its got to be better than what we have got at the moment. I've tried to persuade other MPs of that, we are making progress, there will be a new system in place over the next few months" (Brown, 2009a).

Brown reiterated that the Expenses Scandal was caused by the system and the institutional structures; deflecting blame from the political elites and the culture that had existed within the institutional structures. However, his response was contradictory; he pontificated but was seen as personally compromised. Accusations that Brown had himself wrongfully claimed expenses limited his response to the Scandal. He was unable effectively to condemn the actions of political elites as he too stood accused of wrongdoing. Involvement in the scandal limited Brown's political voice, and prevented him from using his political persona to advantage.

Brown's immediate political response to the Expenses Scandal focused upon the institutional structures, inadvertently perhaps failing to show contrition and acknowledge public anger. Moreover, he created 'space' for political rivals to outperform him. On 11 May, opposition leader David Cameron, made a public apology to BBC News for the Expenses Scandal. Brown followed suit the same day in a speech made to the Royal College of Nursing Conference in Harrogate. Brown

stated “I want to apologise on behalf of politicians, on behalf of all parties for what has happened in the events of these last few days” (Brown, 2009b). Brown’s apology was still not, however, a personal one as he did not acknowledge that he had acted irresponsibly. The fact, moreover, that Brown had followed the precedent set by the opposition leader and apologised (almost) after and not before Cameron projected Brown as reactive and not proactive. Brown’s timing in displaying some contrition, but the lack of a full personal apology elevated the position of his political rival whilst at the same time undermining his own image, authority and status as prime minister. Also there were others who were spotless.

In summary to Brown’s immediate political response to the Expenses Scandal, we can say he focused upon the system and evoked the need for change, as opposed to acknowledging the concerns of voters, condemning wrongdoing and showing contrition. Brown’s lack of emotion provided space for rivals and adversaries to outshine him. And they did. Brown had also elevated the position of David Cameron by following him in terms of an apology. Brown’s involvement in the Scandal had the effect of limiting his political voice and, therefore, limiting the scope to positively fashion his character and persona. We must stress that up to this point, the Expenses Scandal and the performances analysed in this chapter had, with the temporary – and arguable – exception of the financial crisis, become a relentless and accumulating series of negative character issues for Brown.

#### **7.4.2 Longer-term response to the Scandal**

Brown’s second and longer term response to the Expenses Scandal was an article published in *The Independent* on 27 May 2009 entitled ‘Campaign for Democracy: I’ll consider anything that makes the political elite accountable to citizens’. The juxtaposition of democracy (which is universal) and the (in comparison, petty and

minute) Expenses Scandal in the same article was significant in terms of Brown putting the Scandal into wider political perspective. Brown's article began by endorsing public anger:

"revelations about the unacceptable practices in MPs expenses have angered and appalled me. They have shown that the British people want to be proud of our democracy and are furious when it is undermined" (Brown, 2009c).

In his previous utterances (interview with the BBC), Brown had attributed the Scandal to political institutions. He now extended this to the political elites. In so doing, he acknowledged public outrage, and demonstrated, or attempted to demonstrate, the affinity between his and the audience's views. As pointed out earlier, Brown's involvement in the Scandal limited his voice and possibilities for the condemnation of the wrongful actions of others. Brown's endorsement of public outrage "I will not tolerate behaviour that is against everything I believe in" (ibid) was ineffective given his – albeit minor – involvement in the scandal. In terms of outlining a vision for change, Brown referenced previous episodic information i.e. his support for Charter 88 and the freedom of information upon becoming prime minister:

"transparency is the foundation of a modern democracy and I strengthened the public's right to secure information free of charge' and 'the strengthening of Parliament against the executive was merely the first part of a rolling programme of constitutional reform' were juxtaposed by setting out future actions. References to the past, present and future demonstrated that Brown is aware of history and is able to outline forthcoming plans without being historically insensitive i.e. 'in a few weeks, Jack Straw will announce the outcome of a long period of consultation on our constitutional renewal Bill. Most MPs enter Parliament to serve the public but that consultation will now have to take into account the revelations of the abuse of the system" (Brown, 2009c).

Brown's vision for reform was based upon citizenship:

"since March we have been consulting on a Green Paper on a Bill of both rights and responsibilities – about how to entrench the rights and freedoms of the British people in relation to the state. In the months ahead we will move in all these areas". In addition to the evoking of individual rights and responsibilities, Brown proposed redistribution of power so that agency would have greater control over decision-making and structure: "I will be talking about how by

recall, redress and better representations all local people can have far more influence on local budgets and local decisions, from policing to schooling”.

“Everyone must know that they are being heard. We will shortly publish proposals which reform the Commons and put more power where it belongs – in the people's hands. There is no option I will not consider if it redistributes power. What has always been clear to me is that we must look at new ways in which the political elites can be made accountable to serve more effectively the single most important person in our democracy – the citizen” (Brown, 2009c).

Brown's article on the Expenses Scandal and democracy suggested personal anger and outrage, endorsed previous actions e.g. Charter 88 and the Bill of Rights and Responsibilities. Brown's vision for change was evoked through references to the redistribution of power in which agency can fashion political debate and structure, and create the possibility of recall, a bold move which would place power in the hands of citizens, greater transparency and accountability with the strengthening of parliament against the executive, and a system in which politicians serve citizens. Brown's discursive persona as a progressive politician who believed in redistributing power to enable agency to fashion structure was evoked in the article by setting out public consultations and the Constitutional Renewal Bill.

The analysis of Brown's political performances relating to the Expenses Scandal (BBC interview and article in *The Independent*) demonstrates the following three points:

- Brown's involvement in the Scandal (though minute compared to other political elites) limited his political voice and political action.
- Brown's vision for changing political institutions can be seen as hypocritical given his (albeit small) involvement in the Scandal.
- Brown's lack of contrition and of emotional intelligence offered scope for opposition leaders to outshine Brown thus weakening his status, image and authority as prime minister.

In this chapter we have analysed four moments of political performance and appraised Brown's persona. Before analysing the final performance, let us briefly chronologically recap his political persona.

Brown's statement upon arriving in Downing Street as prime minister was not related to aspects of celebrity but did incorporate use of the personal to political effect e.g. Sarah Brown's presence softened Brown's image as a loving husband. He used the statement to establish dividing lines between old and new politics; in doing so, he distanced himself from his predecessor, Tony Blair. At this stage, Brown's positive persona was starting to emerge.

The events of the summer recess, specifically Brown's response to four simultaneous crisis moments projected a calm and pragmatic prime minister, undaunted by unexpected dramas in the polity. Through performance, Brown developed a positive political persona, as was reinforced in poll ratings. Towards the end of the summer recess period, Brown created speculation of an early election. The claim was plausible given Brown's newness to the job, positive political persona and good poll ratings. However, he allowed election speculation to continue for three weeks. His lack of judgement and decisiveness was significant as it subsequently revised his positive persona into a negative one. Colleagues, rivals, adversaries and the media attacked him, undermining the 'persona'; personal criticisms therefore dominated Brown's first year in office (2007-2008).

In September 2008, Brown's policy response to the global financial crisis illustrated strong leadership at a time in which the U.K. economy faced the prospect of collapse and mass inflation. The replication of Brown's Bailout policy package internationally (temporarily) revised his political persona. However, a relatively neutral media assessment of his actions did not enable Brown's positive persona to gain much

expression in national consciousness, most of his advantage operating at the international level.

The Expenses Scandal which emerged in May 2009 had negative effects for incumbents of the wider political system. However, the Scandal was particularly negative for Brown as, the day that the story broke, he was characterised as one of the main political actors who had taken part in illegitimate acts involving public finance. As he was the prime minister, this was particularly damaging for Brown's already negative persona; his inability to express contrition further developed his negative persona. It is not our role to speculate in this thesis. We should not perhaps speculate, but might venture here, that a 'clean slate' for Brown in the Expenses Scandal might have had a stunningly positive effect upon his persona, adding to and actually enhancing his dour Protestant, Scottish image.

Bearing in mind the negative political culture as informed by the Expenses Scandal and Brown's negative persona, in June 2009, Brown was the subject of a leadership crisis in which five cabinet members resigned. Of the high profile resignations, James Purnell's was the most politically damaging for the status and authority of Brown. The former Blairite initiated a personal attack upon Brown's leadership and called for him to stand down as prime minister. Purnell's resignation letter was published on the front page of *The Times* newspaper and publicised by the media on the eve of the Local Election results (4 June 2009) and published the following morning. The letter stated "I now believe your continued leadership makes a Conservative victory more, not less likely" (Purnell, 2009). The following section analyses Brown's first interview since the leadership coup and failed backbench rebellion which was published in the *Guardian Weekend* magazine. We should also stress that the leadership crisis was essentially about Brown's character and leadership qualities.

## **7.5 Leadership crisis interview**

Brown's interview entitled 'It's a strange life really' was published on 20 June 2009 in the *Guardian Weekend* magazine. Brown was interviewed by Katherine Viner on two separate occasions during "the week in which he saw off dramatic attempts to unseat him" (Viner, 2009, p. 18). The 6-page interview as a discursive performance was framed by what Brown referred to as two earthquakes "one economic, unparalleled since the war, one political, the biggest parliamentary scandal for two centuries" (Brown, 2009d, p. 23). Throughout the interview, Brown made reference to these two contemporary contexts and his relationship to them. The interview with Viner was not presented in a question and answer format; rather, the interview was informal and conversational in that Viner's reflections and responses were also included. Brown's interview in the *Guardian Weekend* was aimed at an elite audience (like his article in *The Independent*), and had little effect in terms of restoring his authority and status beyond this readership profile. Our main analysis of the interview is based upon the two main themes that Brown alluded to: the political with reference to the personal and the economic.

### **7.5.1 The political sphere**

The interview began with reference to the political and, inevitably, reference to the personal. Brown's first reference to the leadership coup was through the use of humour, Viner notes that "he jokes about the Hotmail plot, brushing off suggestions that his political career is all but over" (Viner, 2009, p. 18). Throughout the interview, Brown made three indirect references to the coup (and the two of them using humour):

- "I wouldn't exaggerate how bad it's been".
- "Interesting. Challenging. It feels like any other week".

- “When things are difficult, you have to be sure of who you are and what you want to achieve. When people criticise you, you’ve got to listen to that criticism and to learn from it, which I’ve tried to” (Brown, 2009d).

The evoking of normality when referring to the attempted coup was interesting as Brown appeared to project calmness. He emphasised “learning from criticisms” and evoked humility; thus fashioning his character as a political survivor who remained focused upon governing, and devoted to the mantra of “I’ve got a job to do” (Viner citing Brown, 2009, p. 18). Brown’s sense of political drive was strong and emphasised his ethos of hardwork, commitment and resilience. When questioned further about the leadership coup, Brown stated that he had “been through lots of things before”; as bad as this asked Viner, to which he replied “yeah”. His response explained the sense of normality that was evoked earlier in the three indirect references to the coup. He stated “but this is one that’s been more in the public eye. But you stop thinking about who you are and think about what you’ve got to do”. The sense of political drive and ambition was highlighted, projecting Brown as hardworking, determined and focused. The sense of political duty was further highlighted in the interview; politics was referred to “as a purpose and a mission” and that “it’s the big causes that matter, that drive you on” (ibid).

Apart from the leadership crisis which Brown alluded to in passing, he made reference to politics and the use of the self as a political resource: “it was quite a revelation to me that politics was less about ideals and more about manoeuvres” (Brown, 2009d). Brown also made reference to personal weaknesses, “I’m not as great a presenter of information or communicator as I would like to be”, a partial apology for his style and its fitting ill with the political culture which encouraged a highly personalised comportment of the prime minister. The fact that Brown alluded to personal weaknesses was in itself admission that the ‘character’ of Brown did not

correspond to the political culture; a perhaps trick to make the impersonal personal. Brown made some attempt at personalisation which was quickly politicised “I think Britain’s Got Talent [reality TV show] is really interesting... surely the future for our country is more that Britain has got talent than it is Britain is a broken society”; thus indicating Brown’s sense of optimism, in contrast to David Cameron’s pessimism and characterisation of Britain as a broken society.

When questioned on whether or not he had been upset by the last nine months in which his image had changed from the man who saved Britain from financial meltdown – to a pariah, Brown responded “however much you feel responsible, and however much your integrity is... is... and you feel hurt by what people are saying, you’ve got to deal with it”. The admission of hurt had the function of softening Brown’s image and attributing emotion to him, even though the pragmatic reference to “you’ve got to deal with it” implied a greater guiding political mission and sense of political duty.

In sum, Brown’s references to politics inevitably, and deliberately, included references to the personal; the leadership crisis was alluded to in passing, and Brown did attempt to evoke a series of new character traits: humility, responsibility and the ability to listen and learn from criticism. References to the political were thus framed around the notion of character traits and leadership qualities. Brown attempted to reconstruct the persona and used his perceived lack of charisma to good effect; however, the interview did not have a particularly positive impact in terms of restoring at a national level his political authority as prime minister.

As we pointed out earlier, the interview was framed around what Brown referred to as two earthquakes – one economic and one political. Let us turn to Brown’s references to the economy.

### 7.5.2 The economic sphere

In the interview, Brown made reference simultaneously to “private and public worlds [that] have both shown themselves to be irresponsible” (ibid). He also referred to the embracing of markets and capitalism, the rise of individualism, consumption and the pre-eminence of political elites as symptomatic of the Expenses Scandal. Brown attempted to distance himself from the irresponsibility of private and public worlds: “one thing I didn’t cause is the expenses crisis” or “I was calling on the rest of the world all the time to create a global supervisory regime” (Brown, 2009d). The evoking of distance from the economic crisis had the reverse effect; Brown highlighted his political trajectory as chancellor and asserted that he was not the cause of the crisis but had oversight of the economy and then made reference to the crisis as a global financial crisis:

- “Every government in the world is having trouble”.
- “It’s easy to find an individual to blame, and make that person the source of the trouble, but we’ve been hit by a world economic hurricane, by an expenses crisis unparalleled in the history of Westminster”.
- “The international ambitions of these banks made them take risks that nobody could ever have contemplated” (Brown, 2009d).

By situating the crisis within the global context, Brown highlighted the international rather than national dimension of the crisis and created distance between the ‘self’ and the context; in this case, he attempted to separate Machiavellian *virtu* and *fortuna*. The fact, however, that – as in the article in *The Independent* and this interview in the *Guardian Weekend* – the Expenses Scandal and the wider crisis were so discursively intertwined, made Brown’s dissociation from each extremely difficult.

In the latter part of 2009, the media claimed that Brown was suffering from depression (see Lewis, 2009). His mental health became the source of negative characterisations which were previously alluded to by some of the core executive. In early 2010, author Lance Price, former Downing St Aide published *Where Power Lies. Prime Ministers v The Media*, and Andrew Rawnsley, a journalist and Westminster insider, published *The End of The Party* (2010). Both books accused Brown of bullying staff. The negative characterisation of Brown and the over-serialisation of both books by the press and broadcast media emphasised a negative side to Brown's personality which some of the core executive had alluded to at the time of the leadership coup, and before that. The books and the media comment on Brown's personality implied that he was an unstable prime minister, unable to command authority, and was suffering from depression, and possibly taking antidepressants (see Lewis, 2009). The highly personalised attacks upon Brown were major political factors, as politics seemed to be inordinately at this time depicted and organised around personalities. Chapter 5 made reference to the pack mentality of the media and, effects upon the mediation of political personality; this was clearly demonstrated in the Brown premiership.

Brown's performance in each of the leaders' debates' is analysed in sub-chapters 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3. Brown's performance and persona as demonstrated in this chapter is a context to his leadership performance in the live televised Debates.

## **7.6 Conclusion**

Four concluding points are made. First, as incoming prime minister, the culture presented Brown with the challenge of conforming to a celebrity/personalised leadership style that had been deployed by his predecessor, and became a trend that was accepted by the culture within the polity. Brown's deployment of an anti-

celebrity/personalised narrative throughout his premiership did have an effect upon the culture temporarily as he did manage to reverse the personalised/semi-presidential culture that had characterised the last decade on two separate occasions. During the first few months of Brown's premiership, his anti-cultural narrative was accepted by the culture within the polity and enhanced his status and authority; however, this was soon rejected as the culture itself reverted to the discourse of personalisation within which Brown was uncomfortable. The second occasion in which Brown's anti-celebrity narrative was accepted by the culture was at the time of the financial crisis of 2008/9. The crisis provided political space for Brown to project seriousness, boldness, pragmatism, and decisiveness, as opposed to celebrity-style leadership comportment. The projection of seriousness and pragmatism by Brown and some positive media coverage was endorsed by the culture; however, soon the political culture rejected Brown's leadership style which de-emphasised celebrity and personality at a moment when a series of negative personality traits seemed to enter the public perception, one after another. Such a development suggests that leadership is culturally embedded and that if executives work against the grain of political culture this can have often quite negative political consequences. Conversely, the functioning of leaders within established cultural narratives can offer opportunities and predominantly positive political outcomes. A second and related conclusion is that a personalised polity can become dramatically negative to leadership in adverse circumstances.

Our third conclusion is that Brown's actions and policy performance as a response to the financial crisis enabled him to fashion his character and persona within the polity and beyond. Brown's international character and persona differed from that that existed within the domestic polity. In order to theorise and explain the cleavage in Brown's character and persona within two different political contexts (national and international) we can refer to the work of John Kane and his concept of moral capital.

In chapter 2, Kane refers to moral capital as “moral prestige” which is established by individuals “avowing their service to some set of fundamental values, principles or goals, that find a resonant response in significant numbers of people” (Kane, 2001, 10). Arguably, as chancellor, Brown accrued a greater stock of moral capital by resonating with international political actors on issues relating to finance, economic management and prudence than he did domestically as prime minister-in-waiting. Brown’s stock of moral capital internationally was considerably higher because

“when such people judge the agent or institution to be both faithful and effective in serving those values and goals, they are likely to bestow some quantum of respect and approval that is of great political benefit to the receiver. This quantum is the agent’s moral capital” (2001, p. 10).

In the case of Brown, world leaders positively endorsed Brown’s commitment to good economic management and prudence and thus bestowed on him the quantum of moral capital.

Our fourth concluding point is that the performances analysed in this chapter evoked a range of contradictory character traits associated with Brown’s persona in public consciousness. Machiavelli’s description of leadership refers to the relationship between political disposition and circumstance. This fits our description of Brown’s contradictory traits. We should also point out that the trait of indecision was repeated in several of Brown’s performances e.g. election indecision and two other performances not analysed in this chapter for the purposes of space: policy on Gurkhas settlement rights in the U.K. and the 10p Taxation policy. The repetition of indecision further negated Brown’s publicly perceived character.

Essentially, throughout the Brown premiership, the question of character became predominant and relentless; and raised questions as to whether Brown was actually

able to cope with the question of character and the role that it had assumed in contemporary British politics.

## **8 CASE STUDY, DAVID CAMERON**

## 8a Overview

Highly effective political performance was the basis for David Cameron's political prominence within, and beyond, the Conservative party. During the 2005 party leadership campaign, Cameron's speech against his main rival, David Davis, emphasised talented personalisation, concerted use of the self as a political resource, and an image of youthful and dynamic leadership. Through the performance of himself, as it were, Cameron established his own persona as a site of political authority, and changed the configuration of the leadership campaign. Prior to the performance, Cameron had been consistently behind David Davis in opinion polls (see Wells, 2005).

The structure of this chapter applies the framework of political performance to David Cameron. Cameron's performance during the campaign for leadership of the party (September-December 2005), and the first two years as party leader (December 2005-December 2007) are analysed in order to demonstrate the relationship between performance and persona. Post-2007, Cameron's persona developed but was not that dissimilar to the persona that emerged during 2005-2007. In order to analyse Cameron's performance during the time periods identified, we stress context and tradition as central conditions of performance in his case. In section 8b, we refer to Cameron's immediate context; he was the fifth post-Thatcher leader of the Conservative party, a party characterised by factionalism and infighting. His three immediate predecessors, Michael Howard (2003-2005), more so, Iain Duncan Smith (IDS) (2001-2003), and William Hague (1997-2001) iterated the Right/wing nature of the party (and its negative perception in the public realm) (see Bale, 2010). In section 8c, therefore, we refer to the tradition of Conservatism that existed, arguably up to and not including Thatcherism, a long tradition informed by the ideas and the memory of figures such as Edmund Burke, Benjamin Disraeli, and more recent

thinkers like Michael Oakeshott (1978), and the notion of 'One Nation Conservatism'. Particular attention is drawn to Oakeshott's work which describes Conservatism not as an ideology but as a series of dispositions. We adopt Oakeshott's description of Conservatism as a series of dispositions and set out five New Right Conservative dispositions that were immediate contexts to Cameron's leadership performance. The Westminster context as referred to in chapter 5 is also relevant to Cameron's performance e.g. a personalised political culture and the media emphasis upon political personality.

The following leadership performances are analysed:

- (8.1) The 2005 campaign for leadership of the party:  
Cameron's leadership speech is analysed, particularly in terms of his relationship to Conservatism, policy and relationship to the audience.
- (8.2) Performance as party leader from December 2005-December 2007:  
Within this period we appraise Cameron's relationship to Conservatism and the evoking of modern 'Compassionate Conservatism', and focus upon three performances.
- (8.2.1) Relationship to policy:  
One of Cameron's first acts as leader of the party was setting up six policy groups which would report back in 18 months time. This provided Cameron with time and space to define a policy agenda and space to change the appearance of Conservatism through performance. We identify the significance of the policy groups and their impact upon Cameron's persona.
- (8.2.2) Insistence upon the environment:  
Cameron's discursive and performative actions relating to the environment are identified; it was through these that he evoked the values that underpin

‘Compassionate Conservatism’ and thus inflected some aspects of New Right Conservatism. We also identify Cameron’s use of photo opportunities in which he used conflation of the public and private realms and aspects of celebrity culture to enhance his political persona.

- (8.2.3) (Expressions of) commitment to equality, including gender equality and homosexuality.

The analysis of each performance makes reference to the way in which Cameron appeared to inflect the immediate post-Thatcher disposition of New Right Conservatism by drawing upon and integrating aspects of One Nation Conservatism in order to constitute modern ‘Compassionate Conservatism’. While drawing upon a range of dispositions that already existed within the party, Cameron created the perception of a new type of Conservatism. Fundamentally, none of the post-Thatcher leaders blended different strands of Conservatism. Cameron was therefore able to do many things, in particular to distance himself to a certain and consequential degree strategically, but more importantly discursively, from the Right/wing party leadership. In conclusion, the relationship between performance and ‘ideology’ and relationship between culture and institutions is elaborated.

We begin this chapter by referring to Cameron’s immediate context (8b); to the tradition of Conservatism, and the post-Thatcherite disposition of Conservatism (8c); we shall then analyse the performances.

### **8b Context: the party and immediate predecessors**

Post-Thatcher, through to 2005, the Conservative party had four leaders, John Major (1990-1997); William Hague (1997-2001); Iain Duncan Smith (IDS) (2001-2003) and Michael Howard (2003-2005). All four leaders were unable to reconcile a

fundamental tension that existed within the party, namely, whether to pursue New Right Conservatism as exemplified by Thatcher, or not. The party was thus characterised by cleavages and factionalism, and viewed in the public realm as a predominantly Right-wing political party (see also Bale, 2010; Beech, 2009). One of the problems that Cameron faced was that he too was a post-Thatcher leader and of similar age and educational background to both Hague and IDS (Eton public school, Oxford University, and the Bullingdon Club – Hague did not attend Eton but did attend Oxford University and was part of the Bullingdon Club) who were considered as representing the Right of the party. In order to differentiate himself from the negative connotations associated with his predecessors, Cameron began to draw upon pre-Thatcherite narratives that existed within the party e.g. One Nation Conservatism, without critiquing its opposite: New Right Conservatism associated with Hague, IDS and Howard. Fundamentally, Cameron appeared to distance himself from his post-Thatcher predecessors by evoking a new narrative that had been unfamiliar to them and the party for more than two decades, without critiquing New Right Conservatism.

The second context of Cameron's leadership performance was the tradition of Conservatism which has been alluded to above. In the following section we identify One Nation Conservatism, typified by Disraeli in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as the main tradition which had existed, arguably, up until the deployment of Thatcherism, and which Cameron drew upon in order to create a new performative and discursive narrative 'Compassionate Conservatism'.

### **8c Context: tradition of Conservatism**

One Nation Conservatism as a Conservative political ideology was typified by Benjamin Disraeli in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both as opposition leader (1868-1874) and as

prime minister (1874-1880). Disraeli's approach emphasised "the elevation of the condition of the people" (Norton and Aughey, 1981, p. 109). The essence of Disraelian Conservatism combined paternalism, national identity and Empire; the conjuncture of all three implied a society that was not informed by (antagonistic) class divisions, and a society which had regard for helping the (deserving) poor. "One Nation progressive Toryism was determined to prevent the retreat behind the privet hedge into a world of narrow class interests and selfish concerns" (ibid, p. 79). Post-Disraeli, One Nation Conservatism was continued by 20<sup>th</sup> century Conservative leaders. The tradition was particularly evident in the post-World War Two War leaders: Winston Churchill, Anthony Eden, Harold Macmillan, Alec Douglas-Home, and Edward Heath.

In order to understand the practical day-to-day working of Conservatism, Oakeshott (1978) refers to Conservatism not as an ideology but as a disposition or series of dispositions, as a set of attitudes or a worldview that exists within a particular organisation and contributes towards its identity. Oakeshott states

"to be Conservative is to be disposed to think and behave in certain manners; it is to prefer certain kinds of conduct and certain conditions of human circumstances to others; it is to be disposed to make certain kinds of choices" (1978, p. 23).

Let us reference the range of dispositions that Oakeshott expresses in order to capture the essence of the Conservative worldview. Quintessentially, Oakeshott's contribution to our research is that Conservatism exists not as an ideology but as a series of attitudes:

"The general characteristics of this [Conservative] disposition... centre upon a propensity to use and to enjoy what is available rather than to wish for or to look for something else; to delight in what is present rather than what was or may be".  
"To be Conservative is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried; fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss".

“The man of Conservative temperament... will find small and slow changes more tolerable than large and sudden; and he will value highly every appearance of continuity. To be Conservative is not merely to be averse from change (which may be an idiosyncrasy); it is also a manner of accommodating ourselves to changes, an activity imposed upon all men. For change is a threat to identity, and every change is an emblem of extinction” (Oakeshott, 1978. p. 25).

Oakeshott's approach is helpful to us in that David Cameron operated within and upon this Conservative *disposition* to create and establish his persona. By its nature, a disposition is nebulous and not tangible; changing the appearance of a disposition or set of attitudes is perhaps easier – and arguably more consequential – than, say, changing a party's constitution, for example. Inflecting dispositions within the party made Cameron's performance rich and dramatic, as it was through discursive and performative actions that he changed the appearance and the projection of the party, and moved it to the centre-Right of British politics. We use Oakeshott's idea of Conservatism as a disposition and refer to five quintessential post-Thatcher party dispositions/attitudes which typify New Right Conservatism and which existed immediately before Cameron's rise to political prominence, and which are contexts to his leadership performance. Cameron acts within and upon a series of post-Thatcher Conservative dispositions: attitudes towards national identity, and attitudes towards Europe, institutions, immigration, women and sexuality. The following five dispositions are the opposite of Oakeshott's approach (some of the following dispositions were also part of Disraeli's One Nation Conservatism); for our purposes, they highlight New Right Conservatism as an immediate context to Cameron's leadership performance:

1. Attitude to national identity and immigration:

In March 2000, at the party's spring conference on immigration, Hague “suggested that, under a second-term Labour government, Britain would become a ‘foreign land’. He also promised voters no less than eight times in

the same speech that “we will give you your country back” (Bale, 2010, p. 123). Hague was viewed as flirting with extremism. In February 2004, Michael Howard visited Burnley and stressed that “the BNP [British National party] are a stain on our democratic way of life” (Howard, 2004). Howard’s visit was considered as contradictory in that he advocated a tough stance as regards asylum seekers (immigration controls and cutting benefits) yet was perceived as both critiquing the BNP yet flirting with its electorate.

#### 2. Attitude towards institutions:

The Conservative attitude towards institutions (political or social e.g. the family, the church) was one of respect, preservation and rule bound behaviour.

#### 3. Attitude towards Europe:

Post-Thatcherism, Europe was an issue that divided the party. Leadership stances on Europe (e.g. pro, anti, anti, anti, corresponding to Major, Hague, IDS, and Howard) reinforced the broader contradictions of the party.

#### 4. Attitude towards sexuality:

Under the leadership of Hague, at the end of July 2000, the party had tried to block in the House of Lords the government’s attempts to repeal Conservative Legislation (Section 28) that prevented local authorities ‘promoting’ homosexuality (see Bale, 2010, p. 117). At about the same time, Michael Portillo was marginalised by the party as his sexuality was highlighted; subsequently he was not a contender in the 2001 leadership election.

#### 5. Attitude towards women:

In July 2002, as part of Iain Duncan Smith’s reshuffle, Theresa May was appointed party chairman, this was viewed by many as tokenism (Bale, 2010, p. 160). In 2003, the male/female ratio in Michael Howard’s shadow cabinet was 12:1, even worse than the previous 27:3 in 2001.

The five post-Thatcher dispositions constituted Cameron's immediate context and were contexts to his performance. Through performance, Cameron inflected such contexts and established his political persona in the public realm. We demonstrate this by focusing on the following performances detailed in our introduction: (8.1) Leadership speech during the 2005 campaign for party leadership. (8.2) Performance as party leader from December 2005-December 2005 including: (8.2.1) Relationship to policy; (8.2.2) Insistence upon the environment; and, (8.2.3) Commitment to equality.

### **8.1 Leadership campaign speech**

In this section, Cameron's speech to the party (4 October 2005) during the leadership campaign is analysed. The speech constituted a significant part of the campaign, captured the essence of performance, and established Cameron's publicly perceived political persona. Cameron organised his performance around the party and his discursive relationship to Conservatism, this is our main area of analysis; thereafter, Cameron's relationship to policy and to the audience and the impact of performance upon the emergence of his political persona is analysed.

#### **8.1.1 Relationship to Conservatism**

At the beginning of the speech, Cameron endorsed three of his immediate predecessors; in doing so, he did not critique New Right Conservatism, and therefore appeared not to have a negative and confrontational relationship to it. This was particularly significant as Cameron started to evoke the values of 'One Nation' and 'Compassionate Conservatism' without critiquing its opposite:

“And there's something I want to say at the start. Being leader of the opposition is one of the most difficult jobs in Government. And this party owes a huge debt and gratitude to three people who have given it their all and worked their heart out over the last eight years.

And your fight has not been in vain. William Hague who campaigned so hard to keep this country out of the Euro and who put that issue on the map, I saw to William, you helped save the pound and we should thank you for that. Iain Duncan Smith got this party to focus on public services and on social justice. And Iain you showed that this party does care about the weak, about the poor, about the vulnerable, about the dispossessed, about those who get left behind and we thank you for that. And Michael Howard, Michael you gave this party a sense of discipline, a sense of unity, a sense of purpose that we must thank you for. And we must never ever lose" (Cameron, 2005a).

The gesture of generosity to Hague, IDS and Howard was strategic in that it projected humility; crucially, however, by not critiquing New Right Conservatism he created space to make subtle references to its opposite, One Nation Conservatism, and more importantly, modern Compassionate Conservatism.

Throughout the speech, Cameron used Conservative dispositions e.g. the family, national identity and (a contemporary version of) 'Empire', and Britain's standing in the world, to evoke values of fairness, duty and compassion. In so doing, he gave old/existing dispositions new discursive reality and emphasised the values that constitute 'Compassionate Conservatism' which blended the dispositions of 'One Nation', 'New Right' and modern Conservatism. The following five examples from the speech illustrate this:

"I want to be able to say to the mother who's worrying how to for Christmas? and how to get the kids to school: "Yes, we want to leave more money in her pocket, but we also know that we've got to have good public transport, too, so we'll share – that's right, we'll share - the proceeds growth so that we keep taxes down on the one hand and better public services on the other".

"I want to be able to say to the family that's worrying about paying for childcare and seeing enough of the family that we support the family because we know that's the best way to bring up children in a loving and caring home.

"I want to be able to say to the young mother, to the first time mother whose worried about the air she breathes, about the food that she puts into her child's mouth, the park that she walks in, the public spaces that she lives in. that we understand, a modern Conservative party understands that quality of life matters as well as the quantity of money".

"I want to say to the student whose horizons extend far beyond this country, far beyond Europe and into the wider world that we are not

isolationist or xenophobic. We are a self confident, proud, outward looking country that believes Britain does best when she engages ethically and enthusiastically with the rest of the world”.

“And when we talk about foreign affairs, we don't just stand up for the rights of people in Gibraltar and Zimbabwe, but we'll stand up for the people of Darfur and sub-Saharan Africa who are living on less than a dollar a day and getting poorer as we get richer” (Cameron, 2005a).

By making references to the values that constitute ‘Compassionate Conservatism’: duty, responsibility, morality and fairness, Cameron began to inflect the prevailing dispositions of Conservatism. In so doing, he implied, even discursively created, a kind of dependency upon himself, in that the party could only become a modern party through belief in him. By evoking the values of Compassionate Conservatism, Cameron gave old discourses, such as One Nation Conservatism, new reality. In doing so, he suggested alternative dispositions for Conservatism and an alternative identity for the party in the public realm. And through its not being contested (he alone was ‘discoursing’) he appeared discursively to have appeased all sides of the party while maintaining its unity. By blending two older narratives he seemed to be creating a new, modern one, a quintessentially Conservative – reflective yet implying no radical breaks – ‘disposition’.

In the speech, Cameron made subtle references to the ‘One Nation Conservatism’ and the values that underpin modern ‘Compassionate Conservatism’; such references were as if, and doubtless in reality were accepted by the audience as he did not critique the immediately preceding New Right Conservative disposition associated with Hague and IDS; by endorsing and not critiquing predecessors, Cameron retained aspects of New Right Conservatism and enfolded them within Compassionate Conservatism.

### 8.1.2 Relationship to policy

Significantly, Cameron's speech did not contain any specific policy proposals. He did, however, insist upon critiquing the Labour Government's Education policy, as well as making negative references to the then chancellor, Gordon Brown. In doing so, Cameron expressed an awareness of policy making and its inextricable link to the economy and demonstrated the appearance of some policy depth. The following six examples illustrate our point:

"And what is the governments answer? What is Labour's answer? We now have an exam system where 16%, 16 out of every 100 is a pass. We have a system where parents with children in failing schools have no means of escape and no means of redress".

"Everyone knows, everybody knows that our education system just as health system needs radical reform. But there's one man, one man standing in the way? His name is Gordon Brown and he's the great roadblock".

"And also, everyone knows that we need to have a much simpler tax and benefit system. But one man stands in the way. Gordon Brown. The great tax riser, the great complicator, Gordon Brown".

"Everyone knows that we need to deregulate to set our business men and women free to compete with and giants of India and China and East Asia. But one man stands in the way. Gordon Brown. The great regulator in chief".

"How are we going to stop him? Who's going to stop him? Tony Blair can't do it. God knows, he's tried hard enough. There is only one group of people that can stop Gordon Brown and it's us here in this room".

"And do you know there's one thing he fears more than anything else: and that is a Conservative party that has the courage to renew and change itself. So I say let's give Gordon the fright of his life" (Cameron, 2005a).

Cameron's critique of the then chancellor, Gordon Brown, and not the then prime minister, Tony Blair, was strategic. He preferred not to critique Blair as, at this time, performative similarities between Blair and Cameron were beginning to express themselves in the public realm, particularly through newspapers (see Letts, 2007). Had he critiqued Blair, stylistically he would have inadvertently negated himself. In Cameron's delivery of the critiques of Brown, he appeared stern, his tone of voice appeared slightly aggressive; his comportment displayed anger and disbelief at the current government's policies – he stood still at this point in one place, tilted his head

in reflection and then shook his head. Cameron's serious disposition illustrated anger with the current administration, and in particular, Brown, even though he did not present the audience with any policies that would rival those of the Labour government. Let us examine Cameron's relationship to his audience.

### **8.1.3 Relationship to the audience**

Cameron had three audiences he performed his speech to: 1) the immediate audience in the conference hall which comprised party members, colleagues and leadership rivals, 2) the media, and 3) the viewing public. For our purposes, let us focus upon Cameron's relationship with the immediate audience in the conference hall as during the campaign for leadership of the party, the party itself was his main audience.

Cameron's performance to the party was crucial to his endorsement as party leader; in the speech he did two things: he developed a positive relationship with the party, and he established the self as a site of (potential) political authority. In order to demonstrate this, we identify the proximity between Cameron and the audience; the use of humour; invention of interactivity, and the emergence of Cameron's political persona within the party.

Throughout the speech, Cameron developed close proximity between himself and the party audience through the following:

- Not having a lectern, Cameron walked around the stage, increasing the proximity between himself and the party faithful, 'entertaining' their eyes. Whilst walking he would sometimes stop and look directly at party members (see Appendix H).

- Physically, Cameron's comportment was relaxed and not tense; he walked around the stage casually, at times with one hand in his pocket. Cameron's energy conveyed youthfulness and dynamism; traits that his immediate predecessors had previously lacked.
- Perhaps most importantly, Cameron delivered his entire speech without notes; speaking without notes and not appearing to be nervous or hesitant in delivery of the speech illustrated self-confidence. More significantly, it made redundant the suggestion and role of political speechwriters and emphasised 'authorship' of the speech, Cameron therefore appeared as genuine and truthful. In contrast, in David Davis' performance to the conference, he had a fixed position at the lectern and made continuous reference to his notes; in doing so, he highlighted the role of the speechwriters and therefore appeared not as genuine as Cameron. And we cannot underline too strongly how much more interesting to listen to a speaker is when talking rather than reading from a script. Simply in this, Cameron implied a new kind of leadership.
- Speaking without notes increased Cameron's ability to positively engage with the audience and invent dialogue and interactivity. In doing so, he projected himself as a potential party leader who was concerned with dialogue and the views of the party (albeit imagined dialogue) and would offer a different style of leadership. Cameron delivered the entire speech without notes. This iterated his conversational style with the audience and facilitated imagined dialogue.

In addition to the projected close proximity between himself and the party faithful, Cameron made other more striking illusions of proximity. He did this through the use of humour on two separate occasions, at the beginning and end of the speech:

"There's something else I should probably say at the start of this speech. It's becoming almost obligatory and that is that if there is out there an 82 year old, or a 42 year old or a 22 year old that at any stage in this speech wants to shout out 'nonsense' you just go for it

because I'll will tell you something about this party, we're not frightened about debate, we don't mind having an argument and we believe in free speech. But I would be grateful if you wouldn't shout 'nonsense' the whole way through".

"Change just isn't about policies or presentation or organisation or even dare I say it, having a young, vigorous, energetic leader – although come to think of it, that might not be such a bad idea" (Cameron, 2005a).

Cameron's use of humour was positively received by the audience. The use of light sarcasm and slight narcissism; endorsing the self as "a young, vigorous, energetic leader" did not have a negative impact upon his persona; conversely, Cameron's use of humour to make positive references to the self projected self-confidence and friendliness, and quite strikingly, through irony, even slight self parody, brought the self centre stage.

Cameron's invention of interactivity between himself and the immediate audience was further highlighted by three rhetorical questions:

"I don't want to sit around and wait and lose again in four more years. Do you?"

"There are some who say, you've just got to attack the government with more vigour and they will just fall apart. But I say that's not the answer, people know they have failed; they want to know how we are going to succeed. I don't want to let them down again. Do you?"

"Some say that we should move to the right. I say that would be wrong. I don't want this party to turn into a fringe party, never able to challenge for government again. I don't want to let that happen to this party. Do you?" (Cameron, 2005a).

Rhetorical questions engage an audience (see Atkinson, 1984, p. 75 cited in chapter 4, methodology); the interactivity complemented Cameron's previous use of humour; in doing so, he constructed a rich discursive relationship between himself and the audience.

At the end of the speech, Cameron thanked his immediate audience; this was performatively reinforced by his standing in the middle of the stage and taking a bow down towards the party. Symbolically, almost theatrically, the bow represented

Cameron asking the audience for their approval, and a recognition that this truly was a 'performance'.

Three points summarise the analysis of Cameron's leadership campaign speech to the party. First, in the speech, Cameron inflected post-Thatcher dispositions while not critiquing his predecessors (Major, Hague, IDS and Howard), who constituted such dispositions. This allowed him in a subtle way, to evoke the values that constituted modern Compassionate Conservatism. Second, Cameron drew upon the values/dispositions of One Nation Conservatism in order to constitute modern 'Compassionate Conservatism', a particular type of 21<sup>st</sup> century conservatism which blended a tradition that had existed within the party, even within aspects of Thatcherism. In doing so, he gave discursive reality to his pre-Thatcher as well as pro-Thatcher audience and did not isolate himself within one tradition. Third, one of the immediate contexts of his performance was that he was behind in opinion polls (see Wells, 2005). Through performance, Cameron revised this image dramatically by outperforming his main rival, David Davis, and, in so doing, altered the discourse of leadership within the party. Cameron's lively and energetic performance established his political persona and led to his victory in the party leadership election on 6 December 2005.

As follows, Cameron's performance as party leader is analysed.

## **8.2 Performative comportment as party leader**

As party leader, Cameron's relationship to Conservatism, specifically the evoking of Compassionate Conservatism, is analysed through the following three performances:

- (8.2.1) Relationship to policy:

One of Cameron's first acts as leader of the party was to set up six policy groups which would report back in 18 months time. We analyse the six groups as combining One Nation and New Right Conservatism; more importantly, the policy groups provided Cameron with political time and space to alter the disposition of Conservatism, and to express 'Compassionate Conservative' in the wider public realm.

- (8.2.2) Insistence upon the environment:

Cameron's Commitment to Climate Change and the promotion of an environmental agenda is analysed as a series of performances which altered traditional notions of Conservatism.

- (8.2.3) (Expressions of) commitment to equality:

Including gender equality and homosexuality.

### **8.2.1 Relationship to policy**

During Cameron's first week as party leader (5 December -12 December 2005), six policy groups were set up under the following headings: economic competitiveness; quality of life (including the environment); public service reform; security; global poverty; and the social justice policy group. All six would report back in 18 months time (July 2007). The immediacy of setting up of a range of policy groups, each with a different set of priorities, meant that Cameron was not bound by policy commitments as were his predecessors, Hague, IDS and Howard. The focus of each policy group, which combined One Nation and New Right Conservatism is elaborated:

- The Economic Competitiveness policy group reflected New Right Conservatism and suggested the continuation of neoliberalism as a form of

governance. The remit of the group was to investigate economic competitiveness and taxation and highlighted the role of markets in politics.

- The title of the Quality of Life policy group suggested a modern idea and appeal to post-industrial generations. The remit of this group included the environment and explored how to make Britain a safer place to live, e.g. safer public spaces.
- The Public Service Reform group would report on improving public services in terms of cost effectiveness and offering greater freedom and control for service users as well as public servants. Both 'One Nation' and 'New Right' Conservatism were evoked through this policy group.
- The remit of the National and International Security policy group as evoked in Cameron's leadership acceptance speech were responses to international terrorism, safety, dignity, discipline and re-civilising society (Cameron, 2005b). This group evoked the Conservative disposition of national identity and even 'Empire', as well as caring for the elderly; both 'One Nation' and 'New Right' traditions co-existed in the priorities of this policy group.
- The Global Poverty policy group also dealt with globalisation and highlighted 'One Nation Conservatism'.
- The Social Justice policy group was headed by former party leader, Iain Duncan Smith. This policy group would report on "social action to ensure social justice, and a stronger society" (Cameron, 2005b). A modern approach was evoked in terms of rebuilding communities, dealing with the issues associated with "drug abuse, family breakdown, poor public space, chaotic home environments, high crime" (ibid).

Each policy group had a launch event and ensured that Cameron had media coverage to promote his policy agenda and use the personal to political effect. The

leadership-centred political culture as outlined in chapter 5 was significant in terms of Cameron using the self to political purpose. In summary, three points are made on Cameron's policy groups and use of context and tradition:

- First, initiating six policy groups gave Cameron time to develop a policy agenda that fitted contemporary political culture. The culture was relatively unresponsive to Right-wing Conservatism, as had been illustrated by three post-Thatcher election defeats (1997, 2001 and 2005). In order to reverse this, his own persona was used to channel discourses, dispositions and audience reactions, to create new opportunities.
- Second, the priorities of all six groups represented the conjuncture of One Nation and New Right Conservatism; by marrying both traditions, Cameron enabled the values that underpin Compassionate Conservatism expression e.g. a Disraelian concern for "the elevation of the condition of the people" (Norton and Aughey, 1981, p. 109) and a Thatcherite emphasis upon neoliberalism. In doing so, he appealed to pre-Thatcher as well as post-Thatcher audiences, but more importantly, gave the impression that the post-Thatcher factionalism that had characterised the party no longer dominated. The combination of One Nation and New Right Conservatism illustrated that the party was moving from the Right to the centre-Right of British politics.
- Third, the range of policy groups indicated a forthcoming broad and inclusive as opposed to limited and exclusive policy agenda, as was the case particularly with Hague and IDS. The policy groups provided Cameron with political time and political space to reinforce the discourse of Compassionate Conservatism with physical and performative realities.

We now turn to Cameron's emphasis upon the environment and equality as two discourses through which Compassionate Conservatism as a disposition gained traction in public consciousness and changed the appearance of the previous version of Conservatism.

### **8.2.2 Commitment to the environment**

We narrate six of Cameron's discursive and performative acts as party leader relating to an environmental/Green 'disposition', and appraise the relationship between his performance and Conservatism:

- In January 2006, "Cameron announced that the rock-star/anti-poverty campaigner, Bob Geldof, would act as an advisor to the policy group on globalization and global poverty" (Bale, 2010, p. 291). The recruitment of Geldof "suggested that Cameron's Conservatives (as the Party's instantly revamped website now billed them) weren't the same old Tories" (ibid).
- Throughout 2006, Cameron demonstrated a personal commitment to the Green agenda by using the media as a conduit to announce that he had commissioned an eco-architect to remodel his new house, plans for which included solar-panels, water-harvesting, and a roof-mounted wind turbine (Booth, 2006). Moreover, Cameron was pictured with sellers of the *Big Issue*. He and his wife, Samantha, were often pictured recycling; he was also regularly pictured cycling to work (though followed by his official car), and making use of new technologies e.g. 'Webcameron' – a video journal which he used to personalise his persona. The conflation of the public and private realm gave Cameron space to express the personal through the political.
- On 20 April 2006, Cameron visited the island of Svalbard in Norway to see the effects of global-warming. He exploited photo opportunities in which he

was pictured viewing the Norwegian glacier by sledge (see Appendix I). His trip was criticised for coinciding with the United Nations speech on climate change by then chancellor, Gordon Brown, and for emphasising personality rather than policy. The trip expressed Cameron's personal commitment to a Green agenda.

- In order to reinforce the performative act of visiting Norway, Cameron outlined his relationship to the environment in an article for *The Independent* on the same day (20 April 2006). The article, entitled 'We need a greater sense of urgency on climate change', began by personally outlining his environmental disposition:

"since becoming leader of the Conservative Party I have sought to push the environment up to the top of the political agenda. Not only is it something that I feel strongly about, but I am aware that my position has given me a unique opportunity to stimulate national debate on an issue that we cannot afford to ignore. I intend to take it" (Cameron, 2006a).

- Throughout 2006 Cameron continued lobbying the Government to introduce a Climate Change Bill which was advocated during his leadership campaign. On 1 May 2006, Cameron attended 'Koko' – an Indi club in Camden which hosted a Friends of the Earth concert. The aim of the concert was to promote the Climate Change Bill. Cameron's participation in the event emphasised his personal commitment to the Green agenda as well as his wider engagement with Friends of the Earth. (After almost two years of lobbying, the Climate Change Bill and Energy Bill were passed as legislation in November 2008).
- Towards the end of 2006, Cameron convened a Conservative Local Green Energy Summit.

Cameron's insistence upon the environment enabled a constituent part of modern 'Compassionate Conservatism' to gain public expression. By emphasising the environment, Cameron also repeated an old policy position that existed in 1990: the

Thatcher administration, though not radically committed to the environment, did publish the first Government White Paper entitled '*The Common Inheritance*'. By bringing these strands together, Cameron:

- Appealed to traditional Tory values of duty, pragmatism and rightful action.
- Started to detoxify the brand of Conservatism.
- Highlighted his commitment to the Disraelian 'Quality of Life' policy group.
- Evoked 'Compassionate Conservatism' as a disposition, and enfolded Thatcherism within it by referring to the 1990 White Paper.

Cameron's commitment to the environment was symbolic of modern Conservatism: he combined discourses on the environment with performance, e.g. cycling to work or forging alliances with Friends of the Earth. His commitment was unlike his predecessors. His focus on the environment illustrated pragmatism.

We now refer to Cameron's commitment to equality and the effects of this upon the disposition of Conservatism and his political persona.

### **8.2.3 Commitment to equality**

Cameron's (expressions of) commitment to both gender and sexual equality countered a series of extremist and stereotypical dispositions that existed within the Conservative party. Cameron evoked traditional Tory values of fairness and equality, values that underpinned modern Compassionate Conservatism. We identify his commitment to gender and to sexuality in sections 8.2.3a and 8.2.3b.

### 8.2.3a Commitment to gender equality

Cameron's commitment to gender equality was evident at the start of his leadership of the party. In his leadership acceptance speech on 6 December 2005, he stated:

“we will change the way we look. Nine out of 10 Conservative MPs, like me, are white men. We need to change the scandalous under representation of women in the Conservative party and we'll do that” (Cameron, 2005b).

In his first week as party leader, on 12 December 2005, in a speech delivered in Leeds on candidate selection, five positive actions (and not “crazed political correctness” (Cameron, 2005c)) that would increase the number of women and minority Conservative MPs were announced. First, candidate selections would be frozen “until we have established a system that guarantees increased diversity, fairness and meritocracy” (ibid). Second,

“a priority list of ‘our best and brightest’ would be drawn up by the Party's Board Committee on Candidates from the existing candidate list, but at least half the people on it would be women and a significant proportion would be disabled or ethnic minority candidates” (Lee, 2009, p. 8).

Third, there would be a review of progress after three months, and any further action taken if needed. Fourth, there would be an intensive head-hunting programme for new women and minority ethnic candidates, which would be supported by a mentoring programme led by Theresa May. Fifth, non party members such as local community stakeholders would engage in candidate selection in a bid to engage local communities in selection processes (Lee, 2009, p. 8-9).

Throughout 2006, Cameron's discourse on equality relating to women and ethnic groups, specifically his five ‘positive actions’, were publicised by the mainstream media (BBC, 2006b). Moreover, in photo-opportunities, Cameron did not demonstrate an awkward or fabricated disposition towards women or ethnic groups. He positively engaged with both groups. In 2007, he appointed five women to his

shadow cabinet, in contrast to the 12:1 ratio in Michael Howard's shadow cabinet. In May 2007, Cameron stayed overnight with a Muslim family in Balsall Heath in Birmingham in order to understand the issues that ethnic communities faced. Cameron posted a photo journal as well as writings on his Web profile entitled 'Webcameron' detailing his experience and engagement with the ethnic community. Photos of this period demonstrated Cameron's relaxed disposition and positive engagement with the Muslim family he stayed with (see Appendix J). Chapter 5 on the Westminster context refers to the importance of photos in terms of leadership image. Cameron used the self and photographic imagery to political effect.

Cameron's discursive and performative engagement with women and ethnic communities started to inflect the party's previous disposition towards minority communities. He appealed to the values of tolerance and fairness and started to change the image of the party from narrow-minded Conservatism to a party that was modern, accepting and outward-looking.

The following section refers to Cameron's performance relating to sexual equality and the effects of this upon the prevailing and traditional disposition of Conservatism.

### **8.2.3b Commitment to sexual equality**

The first major expression of Cameron's commitment to equality towards homosexuality was in his first conference speech as party leader (4 October 2006). In references to the importance of marriage as an institution, Cameron stated: "and by the way, it means something whether you're a man and a woman, a woman and a woman or a man and another man" (Cameron, 2006b). The discourse of supporting Gay marriages was radical given the party's previous homophobic disposition towards sexuality. By discursively supporting Gay marriages, a position that the party

had avoided, Cameron projected the appearance of equality and the acceptance of diversity, without overtly endorsing homosexuality; he made reference to homosexuality through light humour. Cameron's disposition towards homosexuality can be read as a direct response to the party's disposition of extremist attitudes towards homosexuality, as was expressed in the marginalisation of Michael Portillo during the 2001 party leadership campaign. However, and this is crucial, Cameron's discourse on sexual equality was not complemented by performative acts. He did not positively engage with the homosexual community or representatives of Gay rights. He had started minimally to inflect the discursive disposition of Conservatism relating to homosexuality, but not through positive political actions. The party's attitude towards homosexuality remained largely unchanged, or certainly not radically challenged.

In summary to this section in which we have identified Cameron's commitment to both gender and his perceived commitment to homosexuality, we can make the following point. Cameron's commitment to gender equality was much easier to deploy and personalise than the party's disposition towards homosexuality. The discursive and performative insistence upon gender equality overshadowed the commitment to sexuality. Cameron's engagement with women and ethnic communities had positive ramifications for his persona as a modern, responsive and pragmatic leader. The lack of progress on sexual equality, however, was an illustration that some aspects of New Right Conservatism were still active and constituent elements of Compassionate Conservatism.

### **8.3 Conclusion**

Four conclusions on the performance of David Cameron are made.

First, in light of our reference to Oakeshott that Conservatism exists as a series of dispositions; given that dispositions are nebulous and sometimes incoherent, their appearance can be changed relatively easily. The first major expression of Cameron's relationship to Conservatism was in his leadership speech to the party conference against his rival, David Davis on 4 October 2005. In the speech, Cameron outperformed Davis and, subsequently, started to inflect Conservatism in a subtle way. He did so by appealing to traditional Tory values of fairness, responsibility and moral duty. The appeal to such values that underpinned Compassionate Conservatism, however, blended Disraelian One Nation and New Right Conservatism. By appealing to both, Cameron critiqued neither. During the campaign, the values that underpinned 'Compassionate Conservatism' were evoked in a subtle way and were accepted by party members, as expressed in the party's endorsement of Cameron as party leader on 6 December 2005. As party leader, Cameron had a legitimate internal mandate which enabled him to express modern Compassionate Conservatism as a complex series of dispositions thereafter.

Second, as party leader from 2005 onwards, through discursive and performative actions, Cameron integrated aspects of 'One Nation' Conservatism and 'New Right' Conservatism i.e. pre-Thatcher and post-Thatcher, in order to constitute modern 'Compassionate Conservatism'. By integrating two Conservative traditions, by discursively blending their dispositions, he had broad appeal and was not ideologically isolated within one group. Implicitly, he started to appease the post-Thatcher factionalism that had characterised the party. Cameron evoked 'Compassionate Conservatism' without renouncing the values of New Right Conservatism or the values that characterised One Nation Conservatism.

Third, political trajectory is considered as one of the reasons that none of the post-Thatcher leaders evoked 'One Nation Conservatism' apart from Cameron (and in

some respects, John Major). Cameron's ability to downplay his political trajectory (he was special advisor to Chancellor Norman Lamont in 1993 during 'Black Wednesday' – the day that Sterling was devalued) meant that he was not defined by trajectory but managed to present himself as a political outsider. One advantage of being a political outsider is that the persona is less developed (apart from 'outsiderness'). Downplaying his political trajectory offered Cameron political advantage and space to develop the persona through discursive and performative actions.

Fourth, Cameron's performances fitted with a political culture which placed emphasis upon the personalisation of political actors. His reading of the culture e.g. conflation of the public and private realm and celebrity-status of politicians, was reflected in his performance during his campaign for leadership of the party and thereafter as party leader. Thus he used aspects of the Westminster context to political purpose.

## **9 CASE STUDY, LEADERS' DEBATES**

## **9a Overview**

In the following three sub-chapters (9.1, 9.2 and 9.3) we use our analysis of political leadership and the elaboration of a framework of political performance to analyse the performances of Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg in each of the three Leaders' Debates; we shall concentrate upon the demonstration of the relationship between performance and persona, upon the role of persona in performance. The insights derived from the interview material on the Westminster context are conditions of political performance in the Leaders' Debates.

Sub-chapter 9.1 takes a detailed approach compared to 9.2 and 9.3 in order to provide a full account of the context of the Debate and its performative significance for political leadership. The analysis of each political leader in the first Debate (sub-chapter 9.1) has a tripartite structure. First, we analyse the significance of the opening statements and refer to Gladwell's (2005) assertion that audiences cast snap judgements upon actors (see chapter 4, methodology). Second, we analyse the ways in which policy is given discursive reality and deployed rhetorically (or not) by each political actor. Third, we analyse the relationship of each political actor to the audience i.e. immediate studio audience, viewing public and the two opponents.

In sub-chapter 9.2, the second Debate was organised around the theme of foreign policy; thus we analyse each leader's discursive interpolation of foreign policy. However, the second Debate thematically diverged from foreign affairs to domestic affairs and was more similar to than distinct from the first Debate. Our analysis therefore focuses upon one significant moment for each leader which highlighted performance and persona.

As the third Debate focused on the economy, in sub-chapter 9.3, we analyse the relationship of each political actor to the economy and economic policy positions.

As we stated in sub-chapter 3.3, political performance is twofold. First, performance is a physical act; including the comportment, gestures, and facial expressions of political figures. Second, political performance is verbal and discursive; this includes the physical, but stresses the role of language and rhetoric and its deployment to political effect. Physical performance can exist without discursive performance (e.g. walking into a room), and discursive performance can exist without the physical (e.g. a communiqué) but they usually complement each other. So we focus particularly upon what is said and how it is said. Bearing this in mind, the practice of contemporary British political leadership is increasingly oriented towards not only performance in this sense, but also the image and style of political actors. Arguably, everything that political actors say and do can be considered as performance and therefore as forms of political action which have intended and unintended political consequences.

Our analysis of the political actors in the Debates identifies existing persona – that is persona at the moment of performance – and appraises the iteration, interpolation, counteraction or revision of persona through performance.

Having referred to the cultural significance of the Leaders' Debates in sub-chapter 3.1, let us make two brief points on the setting (venue, stage, lectern etc) as offering political opportunities and/or constraints. (Appendix K pictures all three political actors at the first Debate).

First, the three Debates were hosted by different broadcasters: ITV, Sky and the BBC. Each broadcaster decided upon the location of the Debate and stage design. In

all three Debates, each political leader had a lectern; the proximity between the actors was a matter of stage design for each broadcaster and did impact upon political performance, as we shall see in the following three sub-chapters.

Second, each Debate was themed i.e. the first focused upon domestic affairs, the second on foreign affairs and the third on the economy. Each Debate offered opportunities to discursively emphasise policy positions, and equally fashion the persona. However, in practice, the second Debate thematically diverged and thus limited each political actor's ability to fashion political persona through the discourse of foreign policy.

In sub-chapter 9.4, we conclude our analysis of all three Debates and use our analysis of British politics and the practice of leadership to understand the qualitative shift in the comportment of the 2010 election compared to that of 2005, including analysis of cultural and institutional contexts which have facilitated this shift.

## **9.1 First Leaders' Debate**

### 9.1a Overview

This chapter analyses the performances of Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg within the context of the first Leaders' Debate which focused upon domestic affairs. As follows, we set out a detailed structure of analysis for each leader. Each political actor, by virtue of his presence and participation in the live televised Debate had a political persona that existed in public consciousness, in part constituted by the self, rivals and adversaries, colleagues and the media. This preceding persona is a context that is formative to political performance and is referred to. The structure of this sub-chapter is as follows:

- (9.1.1) Our analysis of Nick Clegg's performance throughout the Leader's Debate makes reference to his preceding persona and the role of a political outsider. We analyse Clegg's opening statement (9.1.1a) which exploited the distinction within the culture of old and new politics. He gave old and new politics discursive reality by using this characterisation to establish dividing lines between himself and his rivals. In section 9.1.1b, we analyse Clegg's discursive interpolation of policy and the effect of this upon his persona and the persona of his rivals. Section 9.1.1c identifies Clegg's relationship to the audience.
- (9.1.2) The analysis of Gordon Brown's performance takes into account his premiership and the relentless issue of character and leadership qualities. Section 9.1.2a analyses his opening statement and dependency upon the language of the economy. We analyse Brown's appeal to the audience through the use of syllogism. Section 9.1.2b analyses his relationship to policy in which he attempted to reinstate a previous persona through the discourse of healthcare, defence, political reform and education. In section 9.1.2c we appraise Brown's relationship to each of the three audiences:

immediate studio audience, the viewing public and his political opponents, Cameron and Clegg.

- (9.1.3) Our analysis of David Cameron's performance in the Debate highlights the impact of his preceding persona upon his performance in the Debate. Section 9.1.3a analyses his opening statement which made reference to a range of issues apart from policy. In 9.1.3b we appraise Cameron's relationship to policy throughout the Debate. In doing so, we identify a) the lack of policy detail as confirming the existing weakness in his persona; and b) negative references towards Brown and Clegg as a way of deflecting policy questions. 9.1.3c analyses Cameron's relationship to the audience and takes into account his reputation as a confident political performer.

We now analyse the performance of each leader and follow the format outlined. The order of our analysis follows the sequence of opening statements in the Debate; we begin with Nick Clegg, thereafter, Gordon Brown and David Cameron.

### **9.1.1 Nick Clegg**

Before analysing Clegg's opening statement, discursive interpolation of policy, and relationship to the audience; let us focus upon Clegg's preceding persona as a context to his leadership performance in the Debate.

Prior to the Debate, Nick Clegg, leader of the third largest party in Britain, had struggled to assert himself as a credible political actor and as a site of political authority within his party and within the polity. We can identify five reasons for this. First, the dominance and authority of his deputy leader and shadow chancellor, Vince Cable, during the initial global financial crisis of late 2008 and throughout 2009, meant that Cable was perceived as a site of wisdom and political authority and

overshadowed Clegg (in fact, he overshadowed virtually everyone at certain moments). Second, the lack of ideological distinction between party policies meant that the Liberal Democrat party found difficulty in occupying a policy position that was distinct from Labour and Conservative. Third, the two-party dichotomy between Labour and Conservative has been a dominant feature of British politics and therefore limited the voice of the third party. Fourth, the media had not given Clegg or his party the same level of attention as Labour or Conservative, with the exception of Vince Cable. The conjuncture of the above contributed to the lack of visibility that Clegg had within the polity and beyond. Fifth, and perhaps most significant of all, Nick Clegg's political persona prior to the Debate was virtually non-existent. His political image as it existed, moreover, came close to ridicule with his revelation of, arguably, sexual promiscuity in an interview for men's magazine *GQ* in March 2008 in which Clegg admitted to having slept with "no more than 30 women" (Clegg, 2008). Clegg's youthful appearance and good looks reinforced his admission, but made him seem laddish and vain. Perhaps sexually successful but politically lightweight. Such a frank admission highlighted political inexperience and projected Clegg as enjoying a nominal title as party leader but not as a site of political authority within his party and within the polity. Moreover, Clegg had misjudged the culture within the polity; had Clegg been a political leader in a polity such as France, the admission of a highly active sex life might in fact have elevated his status and authority. The revelation in Britain did not enhance his status, especially given that he was married with small children.

The inclusion of Clegg in the Debates meant that he had a 'stage' and 'voice' of equal significance to Brown and Cameron which provided space for his political persona to emerge and manifest itself within national consciousness.

Like David Cameron, Nick Clegg lacked political experience; he became leader of the Liberal Democrat party in 2007. Liberal Democrat party policies pursued 'liberalism', namely, opposition to the invasion of Iraq, electoral and constitutional reform which favoured proportional representation, emphasis upon civil liberties and environmental issues. Although Clegg was vocal in the immediate aftermath of the Expenses Scandal, his policy assertions (reforming political institutions) did not have positive ramifications for his persona as party leader. He was a party leader nominally but commanded little political authority, even attention.

The analysis of Clegg in the Debate will enable us to appraise the emergence of Clegg's persona and the role of the political outsider. We begin by analysing his opening statement.

#### **9.1.1a Opening statement**

Clegg's statement was the first utterance of the debate. This offered political advantage in that he had some scope as the first speaker to frame the terms of the Debate and nature of the political exchanges between the three participants, but also as the first speaker and the least known, was the most 'noticed' of the three leaders. More importantly, Clegg had the opportunity to assert himself as a credible political actor as well as shape the character and image of his rivals.

Clegg's opening statement was as follows:

"I believe the way things are is not the way things have to be. Now you're going to be told tonight by these two that the only choice you can make is between two old parties who've been running things for years. I'm here to persuade you that there is an alternative. I think that we have a fantastic opportunity to do things differently for once. And if we do things differently we can create a fair society, the fair country we all want. A fair tax system, better schools, an economy no longer held hostage by greedy bankers. Decent open politics. Those are the changes I believe in. I really wouldn't be standing here tonight if I didn't think they were all possible.

So don't let anyone tell you that the only choice is old politics. We can do something new. We can do something different this time. That's what I'm about, that's what the Liberal Democrats offer" (Clegg, 2010a).

As a political outsider, Clegg used the opening statement to effect. He emphasised discourses of old and new politics that existed within the culture and gave them discursive reality. In doing so, Clegg used this characterisation to establish dividing lines between himself and his rivals as well to define the political leaders in the debate, including himself. He referenced his political rivals, Brown and Cameron, as "these two" or as "two old parties who've been running things for years", and implied that they represented old politics. The characterisation of Brown and Cameron as more similar to than distinct from one another had the function of dissociating Clegg from them both. The political outsider, by virtue of his definition, was less well known than Brown or Cameron and therefore represented new politics. In the case of Clegg, being less well 'known' was a political advantage as he was able to distance himself from both Brown and Cameron who were well known and therefore at a disadvantage as their persona was much more developed than Clegg's. Clegg presented the audience with a bold choice: old versus new politics, with Clegg the embodiment of the latter. Physically, as Clegg's lectern was positioned to the left of both Brown and Cameron, he gestured 'old politics' e.g. when referring to Brown and Cameron as "these two" he used his left hand to present the audience with the opponents which represented 'old politics' (see Appendix L). The synchronisation between the physical and the discursive performance appeared to be genuine in that the physical reinforced the discursive and vice-versa. Clegg's use of contrastive pairs e.g. old and new politics, was effective as he was able to fashion the persona of his rivals as well as himself.

Throughout the opening statement, Clegg had projected himself as a political leader who was able to articulate his opinions, someone who was at ease with performance

and not intimidated by his rivals. Clegg's comportment illustrated self confidence. He looked straight into the camera, in doing so, he established an unmediated relationship with the viewing public and created a sense of perceived immediacy between speaker and audience which is often the basis of imagined relationships between leader and led. Throughout the opening statement, Clegg spoke slowly and projected the publicly perceived character traits of honesty, reflection, thoughtfulness and sincerity.

By the end of the opening statement, Clegg had physically and discursively established dividing lines between old and new politics. He had fashioned the image of his rivals and portrayed them as representing old politics. The appeal to ordinary voters to "do things differently for once" was an appeal to the immediate and viewing audience to participate in new and open politics which depended upon him. Clegg's political persona as a straight talking politician and as a site of political authority was starting to emerge and manifest itself.

We now turn to the second part of our analysis of Clegg's performance in the Debate and appraise his relationship to policy.

#### **9.1.1b Relationship to policy**

In a somewhat similar way to Cameron, prior to the Debate, Clegg lacked 'policy depth'. The format of the Debate and its emphasis upon domestic affairs was an opportunity for Clegg to project policy depth and gravitas.

Throughout the Debate, Clegg continuously made reference to policy. He outlined a range of Liberal Democrat policy positions and critiqued the policy trajectories and current policies of both Labour and Conservative parties. Clegg's discursive

interpolation of policy throughout the Debate counteracted the previous image of him as lacking policy depth. For the purposes of space, the following four examples illustrate the way in which Clegg showed awareness of policy and, by making continuous reference to Liberal Democrat policy positions, he projected policy depth and breadth:

- In response to a question on immigration, Clegg endorsed restoring exit controls and proposed regional immigration similar to that of Australia and Canada. Clegg also proposed an amnesty for illegal immigrants.
- On Law and Order, Clegg proposed more police on streets which would be funded by scrapping Identity Cards and deploying the £3Billion worth of savings to frontline public services.
- In response to how to improve Education, Clegg proposed an 'Education Freedom Act' which would ban government from micro-managing schools and proposed smaller class sizes and a National Curriculum based upon the Swedish Education system.
- In response to a question on long term choices on economic stability, Clegg proposed a radical Defence policy to get rid of the costly £100 Billion Nuclear Missile, Trident. On the issue of Trident, Clegg reinforced the sameness of Brown and Clegg as they both opposed his policy position; he stated "I think the world has moved on and you two need to move with it". As a cost saving measure, this policy position fitted with the Liberal Democrat Party trajectory which pursued liberalism and soft as opposed to hard power. Clegg's discursive interpolation of Defence policy was striking given that prior to the Debate he had been a political outsider.

Clegg demonstrated a positive relationship to policy by detailing policy positions e.g. outlining policy costs, savings and implications, endorsing Liberal Democrat policies by making reference to other polities which had deployed similar measures. When discursively referencing policy, physically Clegg appeared to be relaxed and not intimidated by his rivals. He was at ease with the format of the Debate and did not stutter or hesitate when speaking; moreover, he did not have a dependency upon his notes as did Cameron and Brown. In addition to Clegg's invention of policy depth and breadth through the discourse of education, defence, law and order or immigration, he used policy to differentiate himself from his opponents. Policy was used to negate and portray both Brown and Cameron as outdated and tired; and to establish the self as a site of political authority. To illustrate this we refer to Clegg's correction of Brown who had claimed ownership of reforming the House of Commons and Lords through forthcoming referendums and the right to recall MPs. Clegg was asked by the moderator to clarify Brown's assertion, to which he responded:

"I am absolutely dismayed about this. This is something I actually put forward in the House of Commons. We already could have had that Law. People could have had the right to sack MPs. Labour MPs voted against it. Conservative MP's didn't vote" (Clegg, 2010a).

Clegg's immediate assertion and correction of policy ownership was a brave exchange from a political outsider to the prime minister. By claiming that he, Clegg, was the leading proponent of reforming political institutions, his exchange with Brown raised questions about Brown's integrity. Physically, Clegg's comportment illustrated disbelief, whilst correcting Brown he answered him directly by looking straight at him, eyes wide open and hands out to his sides in disbelief as if trying to comprehend something. He also appeared not to be intimidated by Brown as he did not falter at all when speaking. Clegg's correction of policy ownership demonstrated two things: first, that he was very attentive during the Debate; second, that he was not intimidated by Brown.

In summary to this section in which we have appraised Clegg's relationship to policy, we make the following three points:

- Clegg had invented a positive relationship to policy through his comments on immigration, law and order, defence or education. By outlining a range of new policy positions he had appeared to possess policy depth and breadth. Clegg's insistence upon and defence of Liberal Democrat policy positions illustrated that he had a positive relationship to policy as well as confidence and self belief.
- Clegg's physical comportment when discussing policy was self assured and confident; he articulated his opinions well and was not intimidated by his rivals. He addressed his opponents and spoke to them directly and was not hesitant in speech.
- Clegg had invented a positive relationship to policy through a range of policy discourses. His insistence upon policy detail reinforced his invented relationship to policy; he had revised his previous image of lacking policy depth.

We now turn to the final area of our analysis of Nick Clegg and appraise his relationship to the audience.

#### **9.1.1c Relationship to the audience**

Each political actor in the Debate had three types of audience: the immediate studio audience, the viewing public, and the two political opponents. In this section, we appraise Clegg's relationship to each audience.

Clegg's relationship with the immediate studio audience was personal and immediate. By referring to questioners by first names he increased the personalisation, between himself and the questioner e.g. "Gerard, what I would say is..." or "you won't believe this, Jacqueline". Furthermore, Clegg physically moved around the lectern to facilitate dialogue between himself and the questioner; he positioned himself so that he faced the questioner and looked directly at them. Through the combination of personalised discourse and physical movement, Clegg invented and gave the impression of interaction between himself and the studio audience; the audience did very little apart from pose the question. Nevertheless, the invention of interactiveness as constructed through the physical and the discursive was used to project the persona of a leader who was able to have meaningful dialogue with a range of followers. In order to reinforce the interaction between himself and the questioner, on one occasion Clegg used humour and stated "apparently I'm not allowed to ask you questions... so just nod your head". Clegg iterated his positive relationship with the studio audience in his closing statement. He referred to the name of five out of the seven questioners and the questions that they had posed: "whether it is on the questions from Alan on care, Jacqueline on crime, Helen on politics, Joel on schooling, Robert on the deficit, I believe we can answer all of those questions". Naming his questioners was politically significant as it demonstrated that Clegg was an attentive listener and had engaged with the audience throughout the Debate. Clegg reinforced the five discursive references to the questioners by using his hand to gesture where in the audience they were sitting. The physical hand gesture reinforced the discourse as well as the illusion of interactivity between himself and the audience.

Clegg's relationship to the viewing public watching the Debate was personal and immediate. Throughout the opening and closing statements and the time allocated to contest the arguments put forward by opponents, Clegg addressed the viewing public

by looking straight into the camera and created an unmediated relationship between leader and potential followers and created the illusion of immediacy (see Gaffney, 2001). The scope for imagined relationships with the viewing public was extended beyond the immediate studio audience. Clegg used the physical and the discursive to create a sense of immediacy between himself and the studio and viewing audience. Throughout the Debate it was clear that Clegg had outperformed both Brown and Cameron and had projected himself as representing 'new' politics which was based upon dialogue with the audience.

Clegg's relationship with Brown and Cameron throughout the Debate was based upon the dichotomy of old and new politics. The use and repetition of such references served the function of projecting Clegg as the political outsider who embodied new politics. Clegg's interventions and characterisations of Brown and Cameron as being more similar to than distinct from one another occurred when both Cameron and Brown were debating policy positions; for example, "I don't know about you but the more they argue the more they seem alike" or "I think the world has moved on and you two need to move with it". Such strategic interventions reinforced Clegg's political status as an outsider who embodied new politics and change. Clegg listened attentively to the exchanges of his opponents and reinforced his relaxed composure as his head was tilted slightly to the right and his left hand was in his trouser pocket. When Clegg was in dialogue with both Cameron and Brown, his disposition was relaxed. He faced his opponents directly whilst challenging a range of Labour and Conservative policy positions, he was not hesitant in his exchanges with them and therefore appeared not to be intimidated by Brown and Cameron. In so doing, he appeared to be a confident and measured politician who was able to articulate his opinions.

Clegg's performance and relationship to each of the three audiences (studio audience, viewing public and the two opponents) was the same throughout the Debate. Clegg had used both the physical and the discursive to political effect, he had invented an interactive relationship with the studio audience, established an unmediated relationship with the viewing public and appeared not to be intimidated by his two rivals. Had Clegg's performance and relationship to each type of audience been different, this would have affected the emergence of his political persona.

We now analyse the performance of Gordon Brown.

### **9.1.2 Gordon Brown**

Our analysis of Brown's performance in the Debate focuses on the opening statement and appraises his dependency upon the language of the economy and use of syllogism. Second, we analyse Brown's relationship to policy, particularly his use of policy to reinstate a previous persona. Third, we appraise Brown's relationship to each of the three audiences: studio audience, viewing public and his two opponents, Cameron and Clegg. Let us first make reference to Brown's persona and its impact upon his performance.

Prior to the Debate, Gordon Brown's persona was that of a deeply unpopular prime minister. The persona was constructed or existed in the public mind through a series of misguided errors but also bad political fortune. This characterisation of Brown within the polity was exacerbated by a hostile press and included an overall and somewhat devastating portrayal of him as: unstable, controlling, power-driven, a bully, dour, indecisive, lacking in emotional intelligence, and, if this were not enough, calculated, and possibly on the edge of a breakdown. Brown had difficulty in revising such negative characterisations with the exception of his role in the financial crisis of late 2008 which did restore some political and moral authority, more so internationally

than nationally. Post-2008, up to the live televised Debates, Brown's premiership was characterised by a series of negative discussions regarding his character traits and suitability as prime minister. The three Debates' offered political opportunity to restore some political authority and status but also constraints e.g. his perceived lack of 'charisma' and personable character. This chapter analyses his performance in the first of the three Debates.

### **9.1.2a Opening statement**

Brown's role in the global financial crisis – stabilising the economy and markets nationally and internationally through policy making – temporarily enhanced his status and authority, more so internationally than nationally. Throughout the opening statement, Brown deployed episodic information as a corrective to his current negative persona, and sought to re-establish his reputation for micro and macro fiscal and economic management. Brown's opening statement was as follows:

"These are no ordinary times and this is no ordinary election. We've just been going through the biggest financial crisis in our lives and were moving from recession to recovery and I believe we're moving on a road to prosperity for all. Now every promise you hear from each of us this evening depends on one thing, a strong economy and this is the defining year. Get the decisions right now and we can have everybody better off. Get the decisions wrong now and we could have a double-dip recession and because we believe in fairness as we cut the deficit over these next few years we will protect police, your national health service and we will protect your schools. I know what this job involves; I look forward to putting my plan to you this evening" (Brown, 2010a).

Brown's opening statement was constructed around the economy. The insistence on the economy emphasised his belief in the integral role of the economy in everyday social and political life, and the sense that that is what really mattered.

Brown appealed to his audience through implied syllogism e.g. "a form of reasoning in which a conclusion is drawn from two propositions" (Soanes, 2001, p. 920). The

first proposition: 'the economy is important' is followed by: 'I am connected to the economy'; both propositions lead to the conclusion: 'I am important', demonstrated below:

Proposition 1: The economy is important:

"These are no ordinary times" or "every promise you hear from each of us this evening depends on one thing, a strong economy".

Proposition 2: I am connected to the economy:

"This is the defining year" or "we're moving from recession to recovery" or "get the decisions right now and we can have everybody better off. Get the decisions wrong now and we could have a double-dip recession".

Conclusion: I am important:

"I know what this job involves" (Brown, 2010a).

The syllogism served the following functions: the audience was presented with a view of politics that is hinged upon economic policy making. By extension, this highlights Brown's financial expertise and positive and dominant role in the 2008 global financial crisis. Moreover, the syllogism projected the following publicly perceived character traits: experience, wisdom, ability to grasp complex micro and macro economic issues, knowledgeable and pragmatic. Brown had used the opening statement to re-establish his reputation for fiscal management and to present himself as a credible political leader that could provide economic, social and political stability. It is clear, however, from his use of syllogism, that it is Aristotelian *logos* rather than *pathos* that Brown is displaying in order to persuade others that there is no logical alternative to him.

### **9.1.2b Relationship to policy**

Throughout the Debate, Brown used each of the seven questions posed by the audience to re-instate his previous decisive and authoritative persona that had existed at the time of the global financial crisis. The following eight examples illustrate our point:

- In response a question on law and order: “we will continue to fund the police force and spending on police will continue to rise so that we have enough police there on the beat for you”.
- On re-establishing the credibility of MPs: “I would cut one thing. I would cut the House of Lords not by 10% but by 50%, a small House of Lords directly accountable”.
- On education “we say it’s so important for our country while we cut the deficit we will maintain our investment in education per pupil now” or “we’ve got to face up to this fact about policy”.
- On the economy, Brown appealed to the audience by stating “I say to the whole audience here and to the nation it is important at this moment to take no risk with the economy”.
- On the armed forces “we use to spend £600 million on Afghanistan three or four years ago, it is now £5,000 million this year”.
- On healthcare “we will use the National Insurance to pay for healthcare, to pay for policing and to pay for schools”.
- In relation to care for the elderly “I want carers to be able to manage their own budgets as well”.
- Brown began his closing statement by stating “I’ve got to come to this central problem that we’ve got at the moment. We’ve got to make a decision now about how we secure the recovery this year” (Brown, 2010a).

Brown used a range of policy positions such as law and order, healthcare, defence and education to emphasise his previous authoritative persona; in so doing, he deployed economic terminology such as budgets, outlining costs, spending or referring to the recovery. Brown's dependency upon the language of the economy throughout the Debate when discussing policy had three functions: first, to remind the audience of his reputation for financial management; second, to replace his current negative persona with a previous positive one; third, to re-establish the self as a site of political authority. By extension, the overuse of economic references also highlighted the weaknesses in Cameron's persona e.g. his negative relationship to economic and political policy in comparison to Brown.

In summary, Brown's relationship to policy throughout the Debate depended upon the language of the economy. The emphasis upon quantity and numerics highlighted Brown's knowledge and experience in relation to the economy and his positive role in the financial crisis. Brown was attempting to reinstate a previous persona. However, the memory of him as saving the financial system from collapse was not a prominent memory within the polity, given that it was as if screened from view by the financial crisis itself, thus making it difficult to revise his negative persona.

We now appraise Brown's relationship to the audience.

### **9.1.2c Relationship to the audience**

Brown's relationship with the studio audience was at times personal and at other times not. Of the seven questions posed by the studio audience, Brown personalised his responses on two occasions and named questioners. On one occasion he began his response by stating "our questioner". Physically, Brown did not move around the lectern in order to facilitate dialogue between himself and the questioner. At times he

faced the questioner, at other times he looked into the camera or depended upon his notes. Brown's lack of personalisation, limited interactivity and dialogue with the studio audience throughout the Debate limited the relationship between speaker and audience and projected an anti-personal style of communication. However, we should add that at the end of the Debate, Brown was the first of the three to walk off-stage into the audience. He shook hands with the audience and both Cameron and Clegg followed suit.

Brown's relationship with the viewing public was both positive and negative. In the opening statement, Brown discursively used the imagined 'we' to invent dialogue between himself and the audience. However, his physical actions (lack of eye contact, not looking straight at the camera, dependency on notes, and lack of facial expressions other than a somewhat grim one) contradicted his discursive relationship to the audience. The lack of synchronisation between the physical and the discursive limited the potential of Brown's efforts.

Brown's relationship with his two political opponents was characterised by informality, as well as a disagreeable and negative disposition towards Cameron and an agreeable relationship with Clegg. Of the three political leaders in the Debate, Brown was the first political actor who referred to his opponents by first names. His references to Cameron and Clegg as 'David' and 'Nick' were politically significant as they illustrated informality and a lack of hostility towards them. The use of first names countered Brown's perceived dour, hostile, character. More significantly, both Cameron and Clegg followed suit and the exchanges between all three political leaders from then on were on first name terms. The introduction of informality by Brown demonstrated concession, even humility and respect for political opponents. Throughout the Debate, however, Brown's relationship to Cameron was based upon exposing the weakness in his persona e.g. a lack of policy depth and gravitas. Brown

probed Cameron on the Conservative party policy on deficit reduction, namely, the proposed £6Billion worth of spending cuts. Let us look at Brown's relationship with Cameron and the use of humour to criticise Cameron.

Brown was the first of the three political actors to inject humour into the Debate; he used sarcasm on three separate occasions to negate and expose Cameron's negative relationship to policy, expose Conservative party funding by Lord Ashcroft, and mock Cameron's election posters:

- "I'm grateful by the way for David for putting up all these posters about me and about crime and about everything else. You know, there's no newspaper editor who has done as much for me over the last two years because my face is smiling on these posters. I'm very grateful to you and Lord Ashcroft for funding that".
- "You can't airbrush your policies even though you can airbrush your posters".
- "It's not question time it's answer time David" (Brown, 2010a).

Brown's use of light sarcasm served two functions. First, to negate and expose the policy weaknesses in Cameron's persona. Second, to counteract the negative image of Brown that had existed in national consciousness (anti-personal, reserved), and project a humorous and sociable political figure. The physical and discursive performance of humour: laughter and a relaxed composure: stepping away from the lectern or smiling whilst speaking, projected Brown as humorous and light-hearted; traits which were the opposite of his publicly perceived character as serious, dour or calculated. Brown used humour to project himself as sociable and humorous. Brown's use of humour, however, increased a difficulty that he had i.e. the effect of his unfortunately wooden smile. Brown's use of humour was not a trait that existed publicly and appeared to be 'put on' as opposed to being natural, and therefore negated his character further.

Brown's relationship with Clegg was positive and agreeable compared to his relationship with Cameron. Brown expressed his positive relationship towards Clegg on three occasions:

- "You see, I agree with Nick, an arbitrary national cap [on immigration] will not work".
- "You see, I agree with Nick. There's got to be a right of recall for people who are in a constituency and find their MPs corrupt and parliament doesn't act".
- [on care for the elderly] "I agree with Nick, we want consensus on this, we want to proceed in a way that every party, that every part of the country is with us".

The endorsement of Clegg elevated his status; he was no longer a political outsider. By agreeing with Clegg, Brown implied a positive relationship between the two. In the context of speculation of a hung parliament Brown had projected both Labour and Liberal Democrats as more similar than distinct from one another. Brown then reversed the terms of endorsement. He invented Clegg's endorsement of him on three separate occasions:

- "I think Nick also agrees with me about a new House of Commons and a new House of Lords, properly accountable, with a new system of election that will be put to referendum next year".
- "Now, Nick supports me in reforming the House of Commons and the House of Lords".
- "Where Nick and I are agreed is that to give an inheritance tax cut to the 3,000 richest estates in the country, of £200,000 each, the biggest manifesto promise that the Conservatives made, is totally unfair to the rest of the population of this country" (Brown, 2010a).

Brown's assertion and suggestion of Clegg's relationship to him was presumptuous. On the issue of political reform, Clegg immediately corrected Brown of policy ownership and denied that he agreed with Brown. In so doing, Clegg distinguished himself from Brown and any association with old politics. Brown's agreeable

disposition towards Clegg was altered by Clegg's intervention and assertion of difference from Brown. This had negative effects for Brown in terms of policy ownership as his integrity as a politician and his moral authority were fragile and the subject of criticism by the media commentariat, colleagues and rivals. Being countered by Clegg probably had more negative effect than agreeing with him had positive effect.

In summary, Brown's relationship to his two opponents, and the use of first names projected informality and a sociable character which contradicted his previous character and persona. Brown's relationship to Cameron existed in part in Brown's use of sarcasm to expose the weaknesses in Cameron's persona. In contrast, his relationship to Clegg was positive and agreeable. In the context of speculation of a hung parliament, Brown's relationship to Clegg can be perceived as strategic and presumptuous. Brown's relationship between himself and Clegg was, however, quickly corrected by Clegg himself. We shall conclude Brown's performance in the Debate in sub-chapter 9.4 which concludes all three Debates.

We now appraise David Cameron's performance in the Debate.

### **9.1.3 David Cameron**

Cameron's endorsement as leader of the Conservative party in 2005 was based upon his performance against his main opponent, David Davis. Cameron's speech was delivered without notes and was a politically significant moment within the polity as it embodied aspects of celebrity and mass appeal. It even set a norm for politicians afterwards. From then on, as leader of the opposition, Cameron established a reputation as a confident and self assured political performer. As opposition leader, Cameron's relationship to policy was particularly significant for his

persona as it demonstrated political inexperience. Prior to the first Debate, Cameron performed what seemed to be, a series of policy u-turns and lacked clarity on the implications of policy nationally and internationally. The repetition of such actions in the first Debate confirmed Cameron's inexperience and implied a lack of political depth compared to his main political rival, Gordon Brown. Additionally, Cameron's self assured manner and wealthy Etonian public school, Oxford University and Bullingdon Club background permanently threatened to constitute an image of him as privileged and elitist. The Leaders' Debates offered Cameron an opportunity to revise the above persona and project himself as a prime minister-in-waiting who had policy depth and vision.

We now analyse Cameron's performance during the Debate and begin with his opening statement.

### **9.1.3a Opening statement**

Cameron's opening statement:

"I think it's great that we're having these Debates and I hope they go some way to restore some of the faith and some of the trust into our politics because we badly need that once again in this country. The Expenses saga bought great shame on Parliament and I'm extremely sorry for everything that happened. Your politicians, frankly all of us let you down. Now there is a big choice at this election. We can go on as we are or we can say no, Britain can do much better. We can deal with our debts, we can get our economy growing and avoid this jobs tax and we can build a bigger society. But we can only do this if we recognise we need to join together. We need to come together; we need to recognise that we are all in this together.

Not everything Labour has done over the last 13 years has been wrong, they have done some good things and I will keep those. But we need change and it's that change that I want to help to lead" (Cameron, 2010a).

Unlike the opening statements of Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown, Cameron's statement had no theme or narrative. He acknowledged a range of issues within the

space of 1 minute: the Leaders' Debates, trust in politics, the Expenses Scandal, the economy, choice at the election, creating a bigger society, and Labour's record in office. The range of political references was over ambitious within the limited time-frame. Cameron's 'big society' narrative which had been his guiding political idea up to this point was referred to but largely substituted with references to trust in politics, the Expenses Scandal and 13 years of a Labour government. Cameron did not use the opening statement to outline his ideas on governing Britain; references to the past rather than the future situated him with old politics and emphasised Clegg's characterisation of Brown and Cameron as representing old politics. Cameron's opening statement was unlike that of Clegg or Brown. The range of topics alluded to meant that the opening statement lacked coherence. Moreover, in terms of Gladwell's (2005) assertion that audiences reach snap judgements, Cameron did not present himself as prime minister-in-waiting. His fragmented opening statement was similar to his negative relationship to policy. Let us turn to our analysis of Cameron's relationship to policy.

### **9.1.3b Relationship to policy**

Policy-making, or rather its interpolation, is one avenue through which the political persona gains expression in national (and international) consciousness. The focus of the first Leaders' Debate upon domestic affairs provided Cameron with space to elaborate a range of policy discourses and to address the policy weakness in his persona. Our analysis of Cameron's relationship to policy has two strands. First, we identify the similarity to previous policy dispositions, e.g. an unwillingness to elaborate policy detail, specifically, the use of anecdotes as policy substitutes; second, we identify the use of negative references towards Brown and Clegg as a way of deflecting policy questions.

Throughout the Debate, Cameron repeated his previous policy disposition and used anecdotes as substitutes for policy detail. The following three examples illustrate this:

- On immigration: “I was in Plymouth recently, and a 40-year-old black man made the point to me. He said ‘I came here when I was six, I’ve served in the Royal Navy for 30 years. I’m incredibly proud of my country. But I’m so ashamed that we’ve had this out-of-control system with people abusing it so badly”.
- On law and order/ drugs misuse: “We’re not really dealing with the problem, which is to get these people to confront their problems and lead drug-free lives. I even went to a drug rehab recently in my own constituency, and met a young man who told me that he committed a certain amount of crimes so he could get in front of a judge who could then get him a place in a residential rehab centre”.
- On education: “The Department of Children, Schools and Families – a lot of teachers actually call it the Department of Curtains and Soft Furnishings because it’s so beautifully done up – they recently spent £3 million improving their own building, and putting in a – I’m not making this up - a contemplation suite and a massage room. As a parent of children at state schools, I want every available penny to go with the child into the school so the teacher can actually provide great education for our children”.

Cameron’s use of anecdotes demonstrated and confirmed the existing weakness in his persona i.e. lack of policy depth and gravitas. The failure to specify policies called into question both Cameron’s previous and potential relationship to policy. We should add, however, that Cameron’s use of anecdotes was effective overall in that they were of the newspaper headline-grabbing type, in spite, perhaps indeed because of, their lack of substance; and in subsequent press coverage, some of his points were taken up.

Throughout the Debate, Cameron deflected policy questions by personally and politically criticising Brown and Clegg. For the purposes of space in this chapter the following five examples illustrate our point:

- “We do need to reform welfare, but again, 13 years have gone by when welfare hasn’t been properly reformed”.
- “Gordon Brown is trying to make you believe he can protect health spending, he can protect education spending, he can protect police spending. He cannot do any of these things because he’s given this country the biggest budget deficit of any developed country in the world”.

- “I want to see a reformed House of Lords. The House of Lords should be predominantly elected. Gordon, you’ve had 13 years to sort out the House of Lords. If you’re not happy with the House of Lords, if there’s still hereditary peers sitting in the House of Lords. If you’re not happy with the House of Lords then why on earth have you not done anything about it? You’ve had all this time”.
- “Let me take Nick back to his manifesto and one pledge that’s in there that worried me a lot. My mother was a magistrate in Newbury for 30 years. She sat on the bench, and she did use those short prison sentences that you’re talking about. I’ve got to tell you, when someone smashes up the bus stop, when someone repeatedly breaks the law, when someone’s found fighting on a Friday or Saturday night, as a magistrate, you’ve got to have that power for a short prison sentence when you’ve tried the other remedies”.
- “Nick keeps saying he’s being very straight with you. In his manifesto is a promise for a £17 billion tax cut. It is a great idea. I’d love to do it but we don’t have £17 billion for a tax cut” (Cameron, 2010a).

Cameron’s criticism of both Brown and Clegg brought to the fore his negative relationship to policy. The unwillingness to specify Conservative party policies illustrated that Cameron still did not have a positive relationship to the policies of the party that he represented. His portrayal of both Brown and Clegg as incompetent political actors was not striking as Cameron did not present himself as a credible alternative, as he did not specify policy detail, implications and costs.

Throughout the Debate, Cameron avoided policy discussions; in the context of the Conservative party £6Billion deficit reduction plan, and upon being probed by Brown to specify the nature of such plans, Cameron made only two references to spending (and only these throughout the entire Debate):

- “Let me take on very directly this question of money and public spending because I think it’s going to be a common feature right through these Debates. How do we fund the public services that we need? And I think it’s really important that we start focusing on what we get out of the money we put in because if we think that the future is just spending more and more money we’re profoundly wrong” and “what matters is what comes out”.
- In response to a question on dealing with the budget deficit without damaging economic growth: “This is an absolutely vital question, and I’m glad it’s been asked, because we’ve got to get this economy moving. We’ve got to get this economy growing. What we say is save £6 billion in the coming current year in order to stop the jobs tax which we think will derail the recovery. Because if you put a

tax on jobs, that I think is a jobs killer, it is a recovery killer, it's an economy killer" (Cameron, 2010a).

The two examples referred to were the only occasions throughout the Debate in which Cameron made reference to economic policy. Our reading of Cameron's lack of policy detail is twofold. First, he seemed unable to grasp economic matters; second, he did not seem to perceive the economy as important enough to warrant attention.

We should also point out that when economic policy questions were being discussed by Brown and Clegg and upon being probed by Brown, Cameron's physical disposition indicated nervousness and lack of self confidence. He started writing notes, looked flushed and somewhat flustered when speaking, and moved back and forth to the lectern. The inconsistent physical comportment reinforced nervousness and weaknesses in his political persona. Cameron's physical and discursive policy performance throughout the Debate contrasted with his self assured manner prior to the Debate as well as his reputation as a self assured and confident political performer. Cameron's physical disposition contrasted sharply with that of Nick Clegg who appeared to be relaxed, confident and self assured when referring to his party's policies. Such a contrast reinforced Cameron's uneasiness in relation to policy. We refer to the dynamics between all three performers in the conclusion (9.1.4).

Cameron's avoidance of elaborating Conservative party policies through the use of anecdotes or by using policy to negate his two opponents illustrates two things:

- Cameron did not consider policy to be very important, particularly economic policy.
- Cameron used his time allocated to discuss Conservative party policies to criticise the policy trajectories and current policies of his two opponents. In so

doing, he deflected the attention away from himself momentarily. However, the avoidance of policy talk confirmed the existing weakness in his political persona.

In summary to our analysis of Cameron's relationship to policy, throughout the Debate, Cameron lacked policy detail and failed to counteract the existing weakness in his persona. His relationship to policy and performance of it throughout the Debate was negative e.g. lack of policy detail, appearance of nervousness, and lack of self confidence. The format of the Debate was not used to revise his persona or to elevate his status or authority; instead, the existing weakness in his persona was iterated and raised questions regarding his national leadership suitability. Cameron's lack of policy depth created space for his rivals, Brown and Clegg, to outperform him, a point we refer to in the conclusion of this sub-chapter.

We now turn to the third aspect of our analysis of Cameron's performance in the Debate and appraise his relationship to the audience.

### **9.1.3c Relationship to the audience**

Cameron's relationship to the studio audience, viewing public and his two opponents is analysed in this section.

Cameron's relationship to the studio audience was both positive and negative. Cameron followed Clegg's lead in terms of referring to the questioner by first name as well as positioning himself so that he was facing the questioners. However, he did not appear to be as confident and relaxed as Clegg; Cameron's dependency upon note-taking and their use when answering questions illustrated a sense of nervousness and lack of confidence. Cameron's use of naming was not as effective

as Clegg's style of addressing the studio audience. Cameron had been outperformed by a political outsider; this weakened the perception of him as an astute and self-assured performer.

Cameron's relationship with the viewing public was not positive. During the opening statement, he did not manage to imply an unmediated relationship with the viewing public as Clegg had managed to do. At times, Cameron appeared to be looking into the distance, at other times he looked into the camera but also at his notes; the inability to establish unmediated contact with the audience was striking as, since 2005, Cameron had always garnered support and credibility through performance. His physical disposition demonstrated nervousness, a lack of self confidence and the inability to perform under pressure. The demonstration of nervousness contrasted with Cameron's previously accomplished performances and called into question his reputation which had been founded on political performance.

Cameron's relationship with his two rivals, Brown and Clegg, was critical and negative and has been referred to in section 9.1.3b. He deflected policy questions by personally and politically criticising his two rivals. His relationship to Brown and Clegg was therefore based upon negative exchanges in the form of personal and political criticisms. Cameron's negative disposition towards both opponents deflected attention away from him, specifically in terms of policy questions, whilst emphasising his lack of policy depth.

In sum, Cameron's relationship to all three audiences contrasted with his previous performances in which he had garnered much audience support through performance, was able to confidently outperform his political rivals, and always appeared to be relaxed and self confident. Cameron's inability to consistently perform as above enabled his rivals to outperform him. His performance during the Debate

confirmed the existing policy weakness in his persona and image instead of revising it. By iterating his negative persona he created space for his rivals, Clegg and Brown, to outperform him.

#### **9.1.4 Conclusion**

In our main conclusion to all three Debates we will establish and appraise the personae of all three political actors and identify the impact of the performances upon culture and institutions. To sum up our analysis of the first Debate we make two brief points which we then expand in our main conclusion.

Our first point is on the impact of the political outsider. Prior to the Debate, Clegg was a political outsider, for many, an unknown, for others, a lightweight. One advantage of this status is that the persona is less developed and has not enjoyed the same level of attention as Brown or Cameron; the format of the Debate offered Clegg a stage that was of equal if not indeed greater significance to his rivals and space to develop his persona.

Our second point is that prior to the Debate, both David Cameron and Nick Clegg had a negative relationship to policy. However, Clegg outperformed Cameron by inventing a positive relationship to policy i.e. insisting upon making reference to Liberal Democrat policies, and showing self confidence when discussing policy. Clegg's self projection as possessing policy depth and breadth highlighted Cameron's lack of policy discussion. Brown also outperformed Cameron on policy. The fact that Clegg outperformed Cameron on policy demonstrates three things: first, the role of the political outsider can be so significant that it can transform and reconfigure the traditional imagined two-party dichotomy in British politics. Second, contemporary political discourse has placed emphasis upon the personality of

political actors. However, our analysis demonstrates that policy is important and that a lack of policy depth can have negative political consequences. Third, the synchronisation of the physical and the discursive can have positive ramifications for perceived character and persona as we have demonstrated with Nick Clegg. Clegg's performance throughout the Debate established him as a site of political authority. Conversely, the disjunction between the physical and the discursive with Cameron illustrated nervousness and tension. Cameron's reputation as a confident political performer was revised.

Our analysis of the first Leaders' Debate has demonstrated that the unexpected can have a dramatic effect upon the process of British politics. Up to this point, Nick Clegg had politically and institutionally remained a political outsider. His performance in the Debate revised his outsider status to the point that he was viewed as a potential Kingmaker in the event of a hung parliament, and of near equal leadership status to his rivals.

## **9.2 Second Leaders' Debate**

## 9.2a Overview

In this chapter, we analyse the performances of Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg in the second Leaders' Debate, and demonstrate the relationship between performance and persona. The second Debate focused on foreign affairs and was hosted by broadcaster, Sky. Our analysis of each leader focuses upon one moment in the Debate which had a significant impact upon the political persona. Before we set out the structure of our analysis for each political actor, we should note that although the second Debate was thematically organised around foreign policy, just two out of eight questions posed were exclusively about foreign policy i.e. Europe, and Afghanistan and future military action. The remaining six questions were on climate change, the Pope visiting Britain, restoring faith in politics, state pensions, a future collaborative government of all talents, and immigration; more domestic, therefore, than related to foreign affairs. The lack of thematic focus limited scope to fashion the persona through the discourse of foreign policy. We set out the structure of our analysis of each leader which takes into account the thematic divergence and makes reference to the preceding persona that emerged in the first Debate and its significance for performance in the second Debate.

Gordon Brown's performance in the first Debate was based upon his relationship to the economy. His insistence and dependency upon the language of the economy was used to reinstate a previous persona that existed at the time of the global financial crisis. Brown highlighted his relationship to the economy through a range of domestic policy positions and used episodic information to emphasise his lead role in the financial crisis. Our analysis of Brown's performance in the second Debate followed a similar pattern to his performance in the first Debate, namely, dependency upon the economy and use of syllogistic reasoning in his opening statement, as a way of garnering support and creating dependency upon him (section 9.2.1). The

lack of foreign policy questions limited Brown's ability to refer to his role in the global financial crisis and to reinstate the previous persona; in order to counter the thematic divergence, Brown made reference to his role in the financial crisis and to his international political capital. We analyse the overuse of self endorsement, and the negative impact Brown's appearing narcissistic had upon the persona.

David Cameron's performance in the first Debate confirmed the existing weakness in his persona, what we have called lack of policy depth and gravitas. Cameron's negative relationship to policy created space for his rivals to outperform him, as was the case with both Brown and Clegg. Taking into account the thematic divergence of the second Debate from foreign affairs to domestic policy, our analysis of Cameron's performance focuses on his relationship to policy (9.2.2). We appraise one significant moment in the Debate in which Cameron illustrates his flippant relationship to policy, and focus on a series of exchanges with Brown on the subject of care for the elderly. In the exchanges, Cameron committed himself and the party to five policy positions which were absent from the Conservative party manifesto. We appraise Cameron's relationship towards policy-making and the negative impact upon the subsequent persona.

Nick Clegg had unexpectedly outperformed David Cameron throughout the first Debate. An opinion poll conducted immediately after the Debate asked respondents who had performed best, Clegg polled at 51% (YouGov, 2010). Clegg's performance had immediately elevated his political status and authority. He became an instant 'media darling' nationally, and to some degree internationally, and enjoyed media treatment similar to that of a celebrity. 'Clegg-mania' was the term used by the media to describe his appeal, which embodied aspects of celebrity. In the first Debate, Clegg had invented a positive relationship to policy, he outlined policy detail, costs, implications and projected policy depth and gravitas. His policy on the replacement of

the nuclear missile, Trident, had been endorsed by four ex-Army Generals in the week leading up to the second Debate. The policy endorsement by senior military figures had positive effects for Clegg's persona and emphasised his perceived positive relationship to policy. The fact that Clegg was considered to be a threat to Cameron resulted in the Conservative party launching an attack upon a range of policy positions that Clegg had discussed in the first Debate. The Tory press dominated Clegg's honeymoon after the first Debate and up to the second; and it negated Clegg's policies as well as his character. This is very important as it was instantaneous and clearly a reaction to Clegg's success in the first Debate. The negative attacks upon Clegg's persona continued even on the day of the second Debate, as the Conservative party publicly criticised Clegg's relationship to financial donors through the right-wing print media. Clegg's response was immediate. He claimed his innocence by publishing his bank statements just two hours before the Debate was due to begin. Such an action eliminated him of any wrongdoing and, more importantly, his positive political persona was not revised. The analysis of Nick Clegg in the second Debate focuses upon his relationship to policy and the ways in which he maintained his positive persona (9.2.3).

As with all three case studies, we appraise the significance of both physical and discursive performance. We begin with the order of opening statements and start with Gordon Brown, thereafter David Cameron, and Nick Clegg.

### **9.2.1 Gordon Brown**

The lack of foreign policy questions limited Brown's ability to refer to his role in the global financial crisis and to reinstate a previous persona. To counter this, he made reference to himself and his relationship to the economy. We identify Brown's self endorsement throughout the Debate and begin with his use of syllogism in the

opening statement (9.2.1a). Thereafter, we identify Brown's overuse of self endorsement throughout the Debate and the negative impact of this upon his persona.

### **9.2.1a Use of syllogism**

Throughout the second Debate, Brown made continuous reference to the self. Similar to the first Debate, Brown used syllogism in the opening statement of the second Debate; the syllogism depended upon the language of the economy:

"This may have the feel of a TV popularity contest, but in truth, this is an election about Britain's future, a fight for your future, and for your jobs. If it's all about style and PR, count me out. If it's about the big decisions, if it's about judgment, it's delivering a better future for this country, I'm your man. Ahead are huge challenges, delivering the economic recovery in jobs, bringing our brave troops safely home from Afghanistan, keeping our streets free of terrorism, building alliances in Europe against nuclear weapons, against climate change, against poverty and to deal with our banks. Now, not everyone has the answers, but I say get the big decisions wrong and Britain's security and jobs are at risk. Get the big decisions right, and we can have a prosperous, fairer, greener and better Britain. Like me or not, I can deliver that plan. The way to do it is with a majority Labour government" (Brown, 2010b).

Brown's appeal to the audience based on syllogism in the opening address was as follows:

Proposition 1: The economy is important:

"Ahead are huge challenges, delivering the economic recovery in jobs, bringing our brave troops safely home from Afghanistan, keeping our streets free of terrorism, building alliances in Europe against nuclear weapons, against climate change, against poverty and to deal with our banks".

Proposition 2: I am connected to the economy:

"I say get the big decisions wrong and Britain's security and jobs are at risk".

Conclusion: I am important:

“Like me or not, I can deliver that plan” (Brown, 2010b).

The syllogism brought to the fore the memory of Brown as chancellor and emphasised his role in the financial crisis; it also sought to reinstate a previous persona, garner support and credibility and create dependency upon him. Throughout the opening statement Brown looked into the camera and addressed the wider viewing public. Both Brown and Cameron copied Clegg’s performance from the first Debate; in doing so, they followed the political outsider who had outperformed them both. Such changes on the part of both Brown and Cameron only served to enhance Clegg’s image still further.

Brown’s overuse of references to the self and the negative impact upon the subsequent persona is as follows.

### **9.2.1b Self endorsement**

Throughout the Debate, Brown repeatedly endorsed himself. For the purposes of space in this chapter the following six examples illustrate our point:

- “I worked with the European leaders through the global financial crisis. I had to persuade them that we had to restructure our banks and they had to restructure their banks. I had to persuade them they had to work with America in the G20, but when Europe and America works together, we are so much stronger”.
- “I persuaded the Americans to be part of the G20 that dealt with the banking crisis and I’m still pushing the Americans to take action on climate change as well”.
- “We are trying to get an economic recovery. That depends on economic recovery, depending on Germany, France and other countries growing as well”.
- “I think what people want is us to solve the employment problem, the economic problem and get on with the job. I need to work with these other countries in Europe – President Sarkozy, Chancellor Merkel. David’s walked away from the European People’s Party, which is an alliance of the centre, progressive parties in Europe, and gone in with a group of right-wing extremists. I want to work with the

sensible people in Europe to get jobs for our British economy. If we don't trade with Europe, we lose jobs, we lose businesses, we lose growth. Let's make sure our priority trading with Europe, sorting out the problems of the European Union, yes, but let's make sure we get a recovery that's stronger than ever".

- "In discussions on the United Nations: We are stronger, we've just been chairman of the G20 as a result of the efforts we made in the economy".
- On energy: "There is no British-only solution and David has to face up to that. You've also got to face up to the fact that the co-operation we've achieved, 100 countries have now signed carbon emission reduction plans. We're trying to persuade China and America to do so. We need America on our side".
- "I persuaded the Americans to be part of a G20 that dealt with the banking crisis and I'm still pushing the Americans to take action on climate change as well. But, David, I mean, your anti-Europeanism becomes more and more obvious as this debate goes on. It is the big society at home, but it's the little Britain abroad. I think you've got to rethink your policies" (Brown, 2010b).

Brown's references to the self brought to the fore his previous persona; highlighted his experience and also implied that his rivals did not have policy depth to deal with fiscal management. However, the overuse of references to the self e.g. "I worked with European partners", "I persuaded the Americans", "I had to persuade them...", and "I need to work with these other countries in Europe" all had a negative impact upon his persona. The expression of past achievements implied narcissism. Theoretically, the use of the self can offer both positive and negative political outcomes; in the case of Brown, the use of the self confirmed the negative media refraction of his personality as expressed in the public realm, and this through its unexpectedness, as if the non-personal Brown was reminding his audience of his persona. We argued in the previous sub-chapter that Brown's use of syllogistic reasoning was like a logical compensation for the lack of projection of self. In the second debate, its use alongside strong although quite clumsy projection of the self, seemed only to reinforce a sense of the speaker's own self regard without creating audience empathy with the persona.

We now analyse David Cameron's performance in the second Debate.

### **9.2.2 David Cameron**

The thematic divergence placed greater attention upon domestic policy than upon the agreed theme of foreign policy; this gave Brown greater political opportunity to probe Cameron on a range of policy positions, even though it had impeded Brown from deploying very much his own international status. Let us look at Cameron's flippancy towards policy as expressed in a series of exchanges with Gordon Brown on the issue of care for the elderly as one significant moment in the Debate which had an impact upon Cameron's persona.

#### **9.2.2a Relationship to policy**

The policy exchanges between Cameron and Brown highlighted Cameron's policy disposition as confirming the existing weakness in his persona:

GORDON BROWN: "But I've got one or two problems with the other two manifestos of the other parties. David doesn't seem to have mentioned free prescriptions for the elderly or free eye tests. And to be honest, Nick has a problem in his manifesto, because he seems to be cutting the budget of the winter fuel allowance this year. I would like them to explain to the pensioners of this country what in fact they propose to do" (Brown, 2010b).

ADAM BOULTON [Moderator]: David Cameron, your chance.

DAVID CAMERON: "I just think it is disgraceful to try and frighten people in an election campaign, as Gordon Brown has just done, and as the Labour Party are doing up and down the country. I would like to take this opportunity to say very clearly to any pensioner in the audience, anyone listening at home, that we will keep the free television license, we will keep the pension credit, we'll keep the winter fuel allowance, we'll keep the free bus pass. Those leaflets you have been getting from Labour, the letters you have been getting from Labour are pure and simple lies. A politician shouldn't say lies very often, I say it because I have seen the leaflets and they make me really very, very angry. You should not be frightening people in an election campaign, it is just not right" (Cameron, 2010b).

GORDON BROWN: I do seem to be right. David did not mention free eye tests.

DAVID CAMERON: "Well let me do it right now. We'll keep them. Let me challenge you. Will you now withdraw the leaflets... Will you

withdraw the leaflets that are going out round the country saying that the Conservatives would take away things like the free bus pass? You know, you really should be ashamed of doing things like that" (Cameron, 2010b).

During the exchanges with Brown, Cameron committed himself to five policy positions on care for the elderly: the free television license, the pension credit, winter fuel allowance, free bus pass and free eye tests; all of which were omitted from the party's manifesto. The fact that Cameron had 'made' policy during the live Debate suggested that he did not have a grip on the policy making process or that he did not consider policy to be important to warrant detailed discussion and planning. Cameron displayed anger towards Brown in the policy exchange referred to. Cameron's disposition was such that he raised his voice louder than Brown. The intonational shift indicated anger; moreover, Cameron appeared to be tense e.g. his shoulders were hunched together and not relaxed; he gripped the lectern whilst speaking, looked red in the face and starting to perspire. All of this demonstrated his uneasy relationship to policy-making; more significantly, it demonstrated his flippancy towards policy, and arguably a tendency to display anger.

In summary, our analysis of David Cameron's performance in the second Debate focused upon his relationship to policy. We have demonstrated Cameron's uneasy relationship to policy which confirmed the existing weakness in his persona.

We now appraise Nick Clegg's performance, specifically his discursive interpolation of policy.

### **9.2.3 Nick Clegg**

Our analysis of Nick Clegg's performance in the second Debate focuses upon his relationship to policy. As the second Debate diverged from the theme of foreign

policy, this limited Clegg's ability to fashion his persona through the discourse of foreign policy. He did, however, use the two questions on foreign policy, Europe and military action/defence, to highlight his political trajectory and experience. We appraise Clegg's discursive interpolation of foreign policy and defence.

### **9.2.3a Relationship to policy**

Clegg's performance in the first Debate demonstrated a positive relationship to policy despite being known for a lack of policy depth. In order to maintain the positive persona that emerged through performance in the first Debate, in response to a question on Europe, Clegg brought to the fore his political trajectory:

- "I actually worked for the man who was sent by Margaret Thatcher, would you believe it, to bat for Britain in Brussels. What I learned when I was there was this: the European Union is not perfect – of course not. This is a club that took 15 years to define "chocolate" in a chocolate directive. Anything that takes 15 years to define chocolate is not a model of democratic efficiency. What I also learned was this, that there are a whole load of things, whether we like it or not, whatever your views on Europe and the European Union, which we simply can't do on our own. We can't deal with international crime that touches and affects every single community in this country on our own. We can't deal with climate change on our own. The weather doesn't stop at the cliffs of Dover. We can't regulate these wretched banks that got us into so much in the first place which now sprawl across countries. I don't think the European Union is perfect. I want it reformed, that's why I want to lead in the European Union. But we're stronger together and we're weaker apart".
- "I worked in my previous life before going into politics for a while as a negotiator on behalf of all of us, on behalf of Britain and the European Union, negotiating trade deals with the Chinese government, the Russian government and others. What I noticed there was that the Chinese and the Russians, they only listened to what we were saying because I was representing the largest single market in the world of 475 million consumers" (Clegg, 2010b).

By highlighting his political experience, Clegg projected depth and gravitas. Cleverly, Clegg's self endorsement did not appear narcissistic, as he made many references other than to the self, and he emphasised a positive relationship to policy, as if setting himself within a knowing range of policies, events and developments.

Moreover, Clegg's recent political exposure and its positive reception gave the persona space to fill out and develop; references to the self were therefore not viewed as narcissistic.

We now refer to Clegg's discourse on defence policy and its use to enhance his status and authority. During the one week period from the end of the first Debate up to the second Debate, Clegg's policy positions were criticised mainly by the right wing print media, newspapers such as the *Daily Telegraph* and *Daily Mail*. His policy position on the abolition of the costly nuclear missile deterrent, Trident, was, however, endorsed by (some) senior military officials. Clegg made reference to this endorsement and thus attempted to maintain his positive relationship to policy. He did so on two separate occasions in response to a question on Afghanistan and future military action and defence:

- "I don't think it's right to do what both David Cameron and Gordon Brown want, which is now to commit, before we need to make a decision, to spend up to £100 billion renewing, exactly in the same old way, the Cold War Trident nuclear missile system. If you take decisions like that, then maybe you can equip our troops so they don't get so terribly overstretched, as they were in fighting two wars on two fronts in Iraq and in Afghanistan".
- "If you don't believe me, then believe the several generals who wrote just this week in a newspaper saying precisely what I have been saying all along, why take a decision now to commit that amount of money on replacing Cold War nuclear missile system, when that system has still got several years to run, when those military people themselves say there are cheaper and better alternatives, and of course most importantly, when the world is changing. President Obama said last week, I think quite rightly, that now the greatest threat to us is not the Cold War threats of old, it's terrorists getting hold of dirty bombs, Trident isn't going to help you with that. Let's move with the times, take decisions when we need to take them, and at least have this review, which I talked about, after the election and consider everything that is possible" (Clegg, 2010b).

Clegg's discourse on defence projected him as a pragmatic, modern politician who sought new solutions to new problems e.g. replacing Trident with a cheaper alternative that was responsive to new terrorist security threats. Clegg's reference to

President Obama and the (apparent) similarity in policy was an implicit endorsement of the Liberal Democrat policy on Trident, and an implicit association of Clegg with Obama. Clegg used external endorsements to enhance his status and authority as a pragmatic, modern and responsive politician.

#### **9.2.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion to this chapter on the second Debate, we can make two points on self endorsement and narcissism. For Brown, of course, the irony was that his established persona was a kind of anti-personal persona, this triggering notions of narcissism when references to the self start suddenly to multiply.

In the second Debate, both Brown and Clegg made reference to the self. In each case, self endorsement had startling political consequences. Brown's references to the self had a negative impact, and implied narcissism. In contradistinction to Brown, Clegg's use of the self was not received as narcissistic; Clegg's persona was less developed and therefore provided him with space to suffuse it with positive references. Our wider point on self endorsement and narcissism is that a less developed persona can be an advantage and references to the self do not imply narcissism. However, if a persona is developed, overuse of the self can imply narcissism.

Our second concluding point is that the performance of all three leaders was about the same (although weaknesses in Clegg's persona were beginning to emerge). Brown and Cameron performed slightly better than in the first Debate. By the end of the second Debate, performatively, all three leaders had rapidly converged, and no leader significantly outperformed the other two.

### **9.3 Third Leaders' Debate**

### 9.3a Overview

The third Debate focused on the economy; in this sub-chapter therefore, we analyse the relationship of each political leader to the economy. We set out the structure for our analysis of each leader which takes into account the significance of the preceding persona that emerged in the first two Debates. We begin in order of opening statements, David Cameron, Nick Clegg and Gordon Brown.

In the first two Debates, Cameron's negative relationship to policy seemed to confirm an existing weakness in his persona. In the context of the proposed £6Billion deficit reduction plan proposed by the Conservative party, Cameron failed to elaborate a suite of economic policies. He deflected policy questions by using anecdotes as policy substitutes, and by personally and politically criticising his opponents. Cameron's lack of policy detail created space for both Brown and Clegg to outperform him. Our analysis of Cameron's performance in the third Debate is twofold. First, in section 9.3.1a, we focus upon the relationship of his persona to the economy; Cameron's elaboration of policy detail throughout the third Debate was an illustration to the audience that the persona now possessed policy depth; he therefore appeared to possess some policy depth and gravitas. Second, in section 9.3.1b, we analyse Cameron's critique of Brown by formally addressing Brown as 'the prime minister' which, falsely deferential, highlighted Brown's political trajectory and (negatively) associated him with the financial crisis.

Clegg's performances in the previous Debates – relationship to the audience, invention of policy discourses, and characterisation of Brown and Cameron as more similar than distinct, were very effective, and revised his status as a political outsider. Clegg became an instant media darling; positive endorsement by the media also revised Clegg's political status. His persona as a credible, straight-talking politician

was starting to emerge in public consciousness. Our analysis of Clegg's performance in the third Debate identifies his relationship to economic policy (9.3.2a), and his (this time less successful) use of the discourse of old and new politics to characterise his two opponents (9.3.2b).

Brown's relationship to the economy in the previous Debates was apparent. He had used the language of the economy to highlight his positive role in the financial crisis and to reinstate a previous persona. However, Brown's insistence and dependency upon the economy in the first two Debates had negative ramifications for his persona. As we have seen, the overuse of self endorsements meant that the persona appeared narcissistic. In addition to the negative persona, two days before the third Debate, Brown was embroiled in the 'Duffygate' scandal. He had met pensioner Gillian Duffy whilst canvassing; she raised an issue on immigration to which Brown responded pragmatically. However, Brown later referred to Mrs Duffy as a 'bigoted woman' in a private capacity unknowing that his microphone was still on. The disjuncture of Brown's amicable and engaging conversation with the pensioner, and his private remarks emphasised previous negative accusations that Brown had a split personality, was a bully, and so on. The Duffygate scandal took place before the third Debate and confirmed catastrophically the negative persona that already existed in the media and public realm. Taking into account the negative persona that existed immediately before the third Debate, we analyse Brown's publicly perceived relationship to the economy. In so doing, we identify references to the self and to his leading role in the global financial crisis of 2008 (9.3.3a). In addition to self endorsement, we identify Brown's use of fear and anxiety to create dependency upon him. We analyse the impact of narcissism and evoking of fear upon Brown's already negative political persona.

We now follow the structure of analysis set out for each leader and begin with David Cameron.

### **9.3.1 David Cameron**

In this section we do two things. First, we analyse Cameron's relationship to the economy. Throughout the Debate, Cameron discursively created a positive relationship to economic policy and made continuous reference to Conservative party policies and outlined forthcoming policy actions and cost saving measures, but not in great detail. By elaborating economic policies, he projected the appearance of policy depth, which, arguably, was fragile. Second, we identify Cameron's use of formality to critique Brown. Cameron's formal address to Brown as 'the prime minister' evoked the image of Brown as prime minister (and as chancellor) as if responsible for and associated with the current financial crisis. There is also a certain mockery in the use of Brown's formal title.

#### **9.3.1a Relationship to the economy**

As we have said, Cameron's uneasy relationship to policy was highlighted in the first two Debates. He countered the weakness in his persona through his discourses on the economy, outlining economic policy positions, implications and cost saving measures and projected the appearance of policy depth. To illustrate our point, we refer to five examples in which Cameron uses the discourse of the economy to political effect:

- In his opening statement Cameron begins with the discourse of the economy: "Let me tell you what I would do. First, we've got to reward work and tackle welfare dependency. Second, we've got to fix our banks: tax them to get our money back, regulate them properly and get the lending again. Third, we've got to start making things again in this country. It's no policy to just borrow from the Chinese and buy goods made in China. Fourth, we've actually got to get value for money in our public services. I want good public

services for everyone, and we can only do that if we save and stop the waste. Let me tell you one thing I wouldn't do: with Greece so much in the news, I can guarantee you that I would never join the euro, and I'd keep the pound as our currency".

- "Let me respond to this point about the £6 billion as directly as I possibly can. £6 billion saving this year, so we stop the jobs tax next year. That means saving one out of every £100 that the government spends".
- "The first thing we need to do is actually regulate these banks properly. We would put back to the Bank of England the power to regulate the banks, including having a big say over the appalling bonuses that have been paid. The next thing we need is a bank levy. We say don't wait for the rest of the world, put that levy on now to start getting back the money from the banks that so many people have had to put in. We also want to see the banks lending again, particularly to small businesses, and so we need to make that happen. Something else we need to do is this, retail banks, banks that you and I put our deposits into, they should not be behaving like casinos, taking wild bets. So we agree with President Obama's plan, which is actually to say those banks shouldn't be able to take part in the most risky activities. That, I think, would start to get this under control, and make sure the banks serve the economy and serve the people, rather than the people and the economy serving the banks".
- "We want a bank levy to get the money off the banks that all of us have had to put into the banks. Do I want to cut taxes on all businesses, particularly small businesses to get the economy moving? You're damned right I do. We've got to get this economy moving otherwise we're not going to get the jobs, we're not going to get the investment and the wealth that we need".
- "I say after 13 years of a Labour government, there's a lot of waste we can cut out. There are quangos in education that spend £300 million a year. There's the fact that headteachers get 4,000 pages of information a year. The Department of Children, Schools and Families spent £3 million on itself, including, and I'm not making this up, a massage suite and contemplation room. I know that working in this government can be tough, but we don't need those sorts of things. Cut the waste, get the money into the classroom, and please stop trying to frighten people" (Cameron, 2010c).

By outlining some detail relating to the proposed £6Billion deficit reduction plan, Cameron (at last) projected what we have called policy depth. By prefixing responses with "let me tell you...", "let me respond to this point...", "the first thing we need to is..." or "we want a..." implied a positive relationship to the question and to economic policy.

Cameron had used the discourse of the economy to change the appearance of his persona; however, the lack of policy detail still implied his previous negative relationship to policy e.g. “do I want to cut taxes on all businesses, particularly small businesses to get the economy moving? You’re damned right I do” and “so we agree with President Obama’s plan, which is actually to say those banks shouldn’t be able to take part in the most risky activities. That, I think, would start to get this under control”. Cameron’s lack of policy detail did not therefore revise the existing weakness in his persona. Physically, Cameron’s disposition when outlining Conservative party policies was self assured, confident and relaxed. His body language suggested he was relaxed and not tense; his left arm rested upon the lectern and his head was tilted slightly to the left; he spoke clearly and did not stutter. In contrast, upon being probed by Brown to specify detailed policy proposals, Cameron appeared nervous and tense. He started to make notes and looked flushed. The contrasting policy disposition indicated that the policy weaknesses in Cameron’s persona were still evident. By appearing to possess policy depth, Cameron had copied Nick Clegg’s style, his performance therefore appeared somewhat rehearsed and not quite genuine, and, more importantly, still vulnerable.

Throughout the Debate, Cameron tried to emphasise a positive relationship to the economy, outlining minimal policy detail and cost saving measures. The lack of policy detail did not change the appearance of the persona.

We now turn to the second part of our analysis of Cameron and identify his critique of Brown, both personally and politically.

### 9.3.1b Critique of Brown

In the first Debate, Brown introduced informality in addressing political opponents. His use of first names was adopted by both Cameron and Clegg and was used by all opponents in the first and second Debates. In the third Debate, Cameron addressed Brown informally, but also formally. On seven separate occasions, he referred to Brown as the prime minister. The use of formality, conversely, evoked a certain scorn for the image of Brown as prime minister, reminding the audience of his unpopularity and the negative image of his premiership. Brown's political trajectory as chancellor was also highlighted in Cameron's references to 13 years of a Labour government. Moreover, Cameron's personal and political criticisms of Brown were juxtaposed with references to forthcoming Conservative plans. Cameron used the discourse of past and present to characterise himself and Brown. The following three examples illustrate our point:

- "What I would say to what the Prime Minister's just said is that if you look at the Labour record over the last 13 years, they did very much hitch the whole fortunes of the economy to the City of London. And we got into a situation where we ended up with the whole economy having to serve the banks rather than the other way around".
- "Now, the Prime Minister has just said, I wrote it down, "No life on the dole". But we've had 13 years of Labour government and there are five million people on out-of-work benefits. There are still three million people almost still on incapacity benefit. They have had so long to do something about this. Let me give you some positive things that we would that would make a difference".
- "I'm a little bit unsure about which country Gordon Brown thinks he's Prime Minister of. Because in Britain today, there are actually 900,000 young people not in employment, not in education, not in training. He's caused record youth unemployment. We've seen unemployment today 40% higher than when he came to power in 1997 after the longest and deepest recession in our history. So, to talk about as if somehow he's got a magnificent economic record is nonsense" (Cameron, 2010c).

We make one point on David Cameron's performance in the third Debate. Continuous references to economic policies sought to revise the weakness in Cameron's persona. The persona appeared to possess policy depth. However,

Cameron's previous flippant policy disposition still lingered. The appearance of policy depth that he had achieved was fragile.

We now analyse Clegg's performance in the Debate.

### **9.3.2 Nick Clegg**

In the first two Debates, Clegg had projected a very positive relationship to policy, characterised Brown and Cameron as more similar to than distinct from one another and had a positive relationship to the studio audience and viewing public. Through performance and positive media endorsements, Clegg had revised his status as a political outsider. His persona, as a credible, straight-talking politician was starting to emerge. Our analysis of Clegg's performance in the third Debate identifies his relationship to the economy and his use of the discourse of old and new politics to characterise the actors in the Debate.

#### **9.3.2a Relationship to economic policy**

Throughout the Debate, Clegg had the same policy disposition as in the previous Debates e.g. elaborating Liberal Democrat policies, outlining costs and policy implications. Subsequently, his invention of policy depth revised his persona further. In the third Debate, Clegg's repetition of previous policy dispositions confirmed the persona as possessing policy depth and gravitas. The following three examples illustrate our point:

- "We have set out in our manifesto, you can look at it in the back pages, we've set out numbers right there, specifying the savings that we do think should be made. Set out in much greater detail than any other party. £15 billion worth of savings which are a kind of upfront down payment to deal with this huge black hole we have in our public finances. What are we talking about? Things like scrapping the new generation of biometric passports, public sector pay restraint, saying the top 20% of recipients of tax credits

shouldn't receive those tax credits so they can be targeted elsewhere. I'm saying no to things like the multi-billion pound Eurofighter Typhoon project – a defence project. Those are the kind of big decisions you need to take”.

- “Specifically on bonuses, I would say we need to do the following. Firstly, it sounds draconian, but I think it's now necessary, we should say no bonuses whatsoever for the directors of banks at board level... Then I would say absolutely no cash bonuses at all above £2,500. And finally, I don't think banks which are making losses should be handing out multibillion pound bonuses at all, full stop. No bonuses in banks who make a loss. No bonuses for people at director level, and no cash bonuses above £2,500. That's specific, it's tough, but it'll finally root out this outrageous abuse of bankers' bonuses”.
- [On housing] “What do you do about it? I would do three things: firstly, there are hundreds of thousands of empty properties in our communities boarded up, no doubt there are many in Birmingham, too, which I think for a relatively modest amount of money you could convert into homes which people could live in. It is just not right, and people either can't afford like you, Anna, or simply can't find places to live in, that we have all these empty properties. We have a plan, set out, costed in our manifesto to convert 250,000 empty homes into homes that people can live in. Secondly, I would give local councils more freedom to borrow against their own assets so they can invest in building new homes. And the third thing I would do, all these empty flats we see in our city centres, built for one people... person, I think they should be converted into the homes that people need for young families, like yours” (Clegg, 2010c).

Clegg's responses to policy questions were detailed and direct. He gave policy discursive reality by setting out policy actions e.g. “no bonuses in banks who make a loss. No bonuses for people at director level, and no cash bonuses above £2,500”; “scrapping the new generation of biometric passports, public sector pay restraint” and “we have a plan, set out, costed in our manifesto to convert 250,000 empty homes into homes that people can live in”. By prefixing his responses with “I would say we need to do the following” or “I would do three things...” Clegg projected transparency, and gave the audience the impression that he was honest, transparent and forthcoming and present.

Clegg's reference to his policy on bank bonuses as “draconian” was a projection of the publicly perceived self as serious, decisive and pragmatic. Clegg had demonstrated a positive relationship to policy throughout the third Debate. His

invented relationship to the economy confirmed the preceding persona as possessing policy depth and gravitas.

We now appraise Clegg's characterisation of Brown and Cameron.

### **9.3.2b Characterisation of opponents**

In the first Debate, Clegg had emphasised discourses of old and new politics that existed within the culture and gave them discursive reality. Brown and Cameron were characterised as more similar to than distinct from one another. This characterisation was successful, in part owing to Clegg's status as a political outsider. Clegg repeated this characterisation in the second Debate. However, his overuse of depicting Brown and Cameron as representing old politics had become redundant by the third Debate, in part through the now slightly hollow repetition, in part because he himself was no longer considered as a political outsider. The characterisation of Brown and Cameron as more similar than distinct had been effective, particularly in the first Debate as Clegg was an outsider; the revision of his status therefore made such references repetitive, irrelevant and redundant. The following eight examples illustrate our point:

- "Can I try and move beyond the political point-scoring?"
- "Surely one of the problems here... Gordon Brown talks about a plan in the future, but has no details on it. David Cameron talks doing something now, but also has no details"
- "After 13 years of Labour, who would have believed it that you would have now a tax system where a multimillionaire from the City of London, pays a lower rate of tax on their capital gains, that's income to you or me, than their cleaner does on their wages. After 13 years of Labour, we have the bottom 20% of people in this country who pay more in tax as a proportion of their income than the top 20%. I think we need to change that. David Cameron says you can't afford tax giveaways. No, you can't".
- "Here they go again".
- "David Cameron has been talking about parties being too close to the city. The blunt truth is that both Conservative and Labour Governments now for ages have been far too close to the City, basically preferring the interests of the one Square Mile of the City of London, rather than the 100,000 square miles of the whole of the United Kingdom".

- “Maybe I should explain, rather than having David Cameron and Gordon Brown, very much in the style of old politics, making misleading claims. I think there is a problem. It’s a problem I didn’t create, you didn’t create, they created. It was Conservative and Labour Governments that created chaos in your immigration system so that lots of people came here illegally”.
- “One of the things we need to do immediately after this general election is restore the earnings link in pensions. There’s been a huge amount of talk about it from both the old parties about doing that, lets get on with it and do it. It was broken some years ago by the Conservative government, hasn’t been restored under 13 years of the Labour government. Lets get on and do that, David Cameron keeps repeating we’ve got nothing to say. We’re the only party, actually, in this general election campaign who’ve got a plan fully costed to get people off benefits and into work”.
- “Where we disagree is that I have a plan to make sure that taxes reward work when you start work. Particularly to get you off benefits. David Cameron’s priority is to give tax breaks to double millionaires, and Gordon Brown has no plans to lower taxes for people on ordinary incomes an ordinary incomes. That’s a big difference. That’s a big choice” (Clegg, 2010c).

In summary to our analysis of Clegg’s performance in the third Debate, he demonstrated a positive relationship to policy and confirmed the preceding persona. However, his overuse of the discourse of old and new politics to characterise his opponents and himself was not as effective as the first Debate. The revision of his political status made such references redundant and irrelevant.

### **9.3.3 Gordon Brown**

Throughout the Debate, Brown depended upon the language of the economy, as had also been the case in the previous two Debates. His use of the self was an attempt to reinstate a previous persona that had existed at the time of the financial crisis (2008). However, Brown combined self endorsements with negative references about the future of the economy, thus possibly creating anxiety in the attempt to create dependency upon him. We assess the impact of each upon his persona, which up to this point had been very negative. For the purposes of analysis, we refer to three

examples in which Brown made reference to the self; thereafter we refer to four examples in which he evoked fear and anxiety to create dependency upon the self.

### **9.3.3a References to the self**

We refer to three examples in which Brown made positive reference to the self:

- [opening statement] “There’s a lot to this job, and as you saw yesterday, I don’t get all of it right, but I do know how to run the economy in good times and in bad. When the banks collapsed, I took immediate action to stop crisis becoming calamity and to stop a recession becoming a depression. As a result of that, Britain is now on the road to recovery. But as we meet tonight, economies in Europe are in peril, and there is a risk of dragging us into recession. So I’m determined that nothing will happen in Britain that will put us back in that position, and I want to set out my plan, and why this year is so important. Support the economy now, and you will ensure that there are jobs and a recovery, and ensure that we can have the resources for deficit reduction. Shrink the economy now, as the Conservatives would do, and they risk your jobs, living standards and tax credits”.
- “David, I had to nationalise Northern Rock, and we had also to take over the Royal Bank of Scotland, and Halifax, Lloyd’s TSB, and the reason we did so was to save the savings and deposits of families throughout the country, if we hadn’t done that then the banks would have collapsed”.
- “We’ve got to support the recovery until it’s fully established. Then my deficit reduction plan, which is a four-year plan, comes into place. But take money out of the economy now” (Brown, 2010c).

Brown’s references to his role in the global financial crisis e.g. “I do know how to run the economy” or “I took immediate action” and “my Deficit reduction plan” became redundant as the persona that was emerging was narcissistic (attention is drawn to the ‘I’ drawing attention to the ‘I’). The overuse of the self did not have positive ramifications in terms of reinstating his previous persona of late 2008; instead, the repetition of self endorsement confirmed the narcissistic persona, and this in the context of the crushing blow to his image caused by the Gillian Duffy Affair.

We now refer to four examples in which Brown evoked fear and anxiety amongst the studio audience and viewing public in order to create dependency upon him:

- “But I do say one thing that is absolutely crucial: don’t believe that we can fail to support the economy this year. If we fail to support the economy this year, then we risk a double-dip recession, and that’s really the problem with the Conservative policy”.
- “David, for ideological reasons, and you put the recovery at risk. I do fear an emergency Tory budget in a few weeks’ time, putting the very work we’ve done to secure the recovery in jeopardy, and no other country in the world is prepared to do that now”.
- “But I have to say one thing that is absolutely crucial to the time we’re in at the moment in this uncertain and dangerous world: David is proposing that there be cuts in public spending now - £6 billion - and that will shrink the economy at a time when we need to support the economy. We cannot afford to lose jobs and businesses and lose growth now. We must maintain the recovery and support it, and please let us not make the mistake of the 1930s and the 1980s and the 1990s, and let us support the economy until the recovery is assured”.
- [Closing statement] “I know that if things stay where they are, perhaps in eight days’ time, David Cameron, perhaps supported by Nick Clegg, would be in office. But I’ve had the duty of telling you this evening that while we have policies for the future, the Conservatives would put the recovery immediately at risk with an emergency budget. I’ve asked David and Nick questions all evening. David has not been able to confirm, but it is the case that inheritance tax cuts will go to the richest people in the country. I believe he’s planning to cut the Schools Budget, and he hasn’t denied it. I believe also that child tax credits would be cut by both parties if they came into a coalition. I believe too that policing would be at risk from a Conservative government, because they have not said they would match us on policing either. And the health service guarantees that we have that gives every cancer patient the right to see a specialist within two weeks would be scrapped by the Conservative Government if they came into power. I don’t like having to do this, but I have to tell you that things are too important to be left to risky policies under these two people. They are not ready for government, because they have not thought through their policies” (Brown, 2010c).

Brown evoked anxiety by discrediting the Conservative party policies and their plans for the economy. Brown highlighted Cameron’s policy weakness; in so doing, he attempted to create dependency upon himself. However, instead of establishing the self as a site of political authority, he seemed calculated, almost self obsessed.

In summary to our analysis of Brown’s performance in the third Debate, we make the following point. His overuse of the self combined with the evoking of fear confirmed a

range of negative character traits that now co-existed in public consciousness with other negative traits.

#### **9.3.4 Conclusion**

We conclude the third Debate in the following sub-chapter which concludes all three Debates.

#### **9.4 Leaders' Debates: Conclusions**

### **9.4a Overview**

In sub-chapters 9.1, 9.2 and 9.3 we used our analysis of political leadership and the elaboration of a framework of political performance to analyse the performances of Gordon Brown, David Cameron and Nick Clegg in each of the three Leaders' Debates. This chapter concludes the performances of all three leaders in the Debates and uses our analysis of British politics and the practice of leadership to understand the qualitative shift in the comportment of the 2010 election compared to that of 2005, including analysis of cultural and institutional contexts which have facilitated this shift. We make four concluding points, one point on each political leader and one concluding point on the impact of the Debates.

#### **9.4.1 Gordon Brown**

Prior to the televised Debates, Gordon Brown's persona had become that of a weak and indecisive prime minister. His premiership was, in large part, informed by a series of relentless attacks upon his character, by cabinet members as well as the opposition and media commentariat. Brown did acknowledge that he suffered from communication shortcomings, arguably, performative shortcomings that existed within a culture that had come to place increasing emphasis upon the performance of political leaders. Despite the negative character attacks upon the person and the 'persona' prior to the Debates, Brown emphasised policy and substance as his main strengths. His performance in the Debates emphasised policy in order to recapture the few positive aspects of the persona. Brown's overuse of references to the self had the opposite effect; instead of reinstating a previous positive persona, he emphasised a kind of self referential narcissism which clashed with the received view of a character almost lacking in such 'human' concerns, and therefore confirmed and even worsened the existing negative persona. Re-instating a previous persona can be very difficult and can have a series of negative ramifications.

### **9.4.2 David Cameron**

David Cameron's rise to political fame within and beyond the Conservative party was based in great part upon using performance to political effect. As leader of the opposition, Cameron iterated the use of political performance and enjoyed an upward trajectory in personal poll ratings, mainly, in comparison to Gordon Brown, post-2007. Cameron had established a reputation as a confident and self-assured political performer; however, his persona displayed a certain weakness of 'weight' as regards policy detail. His performance in the first Debate emphasised his lack of policy depth as he deflected policy questions through the use of anecdotes and by critiquing Brown and Clegg. In so doing, Cameron provided space for Clegg to outperform him and exploit his outsider status.

In the second Debate, Cameron further highlighted his negative and flippant relationship to policy; in an exchange with Brown, he confirmed five policy positions that were not previously alluded to in the Conservative party manifesto. The lack of seriousness towards the policy making process highlighted Cameron's inexperience and questioned his suitability as prime minister. However, in the third Debate, Cameron's insistence upon policy projected some policy depth and gravitas. He did not, however, counter or overcome the accumulated weakness in his persona through performance in the Debates.

### **9.4.3 Nick Clegg**

Prior to the Debates, Nick Clegg had failed to assert himself as a site of political authority within the Liberal Democrat party and beyond, in part, due to the lack of media attention and the two-party dichotomy that characterised British political discourse. Possibly the greatest reason, however, was the stunning media status of his second-in-command, Vince Cable. Clegg's inclusion in the Debates was

significant as this meant he had a voice that was of equal significance to the two main political party leaders. Through performance in the first Debate, Clegg revised his outsider status and subsequently outperformed both Brown and Cameron. His persona as a modern political leader started to emerge, indirectly adding, in part, to Cameron's status as evidence of a new generation of younger leaders. Clegg's political popularity and media endorsements signified the transformation in his status from political outsider to potential Kingmaker role in the event of a hung parliament, irrespective of his or his party's electoral potential. Clegg's performances in the following two Debates were credible in that they maintained the preceding political persona; however, his repetition of a political outsider status became ineffective after the first Debate, and in fact drew him closer to the caricatures he was sketching of his two rivals. The characterisation of Brown and Cameron as more similar to than distinct from one another also became redundant as Clegg was now one of them through his own performance.

Clegg's performance in the Debates did, however, have a positive impact upon his persona and the perception of him in the public realm. He enjoyed mass exposure nationally (and internationally) as a result of the Debates.

#### **9.4.4 The significance of the Leaders' Debates**

We can make four points on the significance of the televised Debates in terms of culture and institutions and impact upon the comportment of the 2010 General Election.

First, the initiation and endorsement of the Debates by the media was an example of the enormous influence of the media upon the discourse of contemporary British

politics. The media as an institution therefore altered the traditional institutions within which leaders perform during leadership campaigns.

Second, the acceptance of the Leaders' Debates illustrated the wider cultural shift within the polity towards the strong personalisation of political actors.

Third, Mandelson notes that "the Debates had altered the rhythm of the campaign... the media's view of the parties' lack of candour on the deficit had closed off any meaningful policy debate on the economy" (2011, p. 539). The lack of focus upon the economy did not enable Brown to deploy the self to political purpose. Thus iterating the media's ability to frame political action and structure political outcomes.

Fourth, the comportment of the 2010 General Election compared to that of 2005 saw political performance and the 'persona' used to new effect and purpose. The televised Debates altered the discourse of contemporary political leadership in Britain, in particular, the 2010 election campaign. The actual effect of these upon political outcomes has yet to be fully researched.

## **10 CONCLUSIONS**

## **10a Overview**

This chapter outlines the theoretical and substantive contributions that this research has made to the discipline of political science. The research question addressed was:

- Are cultural and institutional configurations significant and consequential for contemporary British party leadership performance?

Three related sub-research questions were also addressed. How do political actors use the self to political purpose? What is the significance of political actors deploying their person and 'persona' to affect and structure political outcomes? What is the relationship between performance and mediation?

Section 10.1 refers to the framework of political performance as a theoretical contribution to the discipline of political science. The application of the framework to the case studies has delivered four substantive conclusions on each of the case studies (10.2). The findings are presented in section 10.3.

### **10.1 Theoretical contributions**

Previous research on British political leadership has referred to the relationship of culture or institutions to political leadership (Hennessy (2000); Foley (2000); Allen (2003); Marquand (2007); King (2009); Bale (2010)) but was less concerned with analysing British political leadership performance *per se*. Leadership biographies e.g. Rentoul (2001), Seldon (2007) or Bower (2007) are descriptively rich but have not analysed political performance within the context in which it occurs. Some attempts have been made to explain the premiership of Tony Blair in terms of an emphasis upon personal authority e.g. Hennessy (2000, 2005), Foley (2000), or the interaction of personal authority within an institutional context e.g. Shaw (2007) but have not

stressed performance *per se*. A framework of political performance was developed in order to answer the research question. The framework is a contribution to theoretical knowledge as each constituent part (culture, institutions and performance) has not previously been put together in this way to analyse political leadership performance. The framework is not limited, however, to polities which place emphasis upon leaders; nor is it framed only for polities which emphasise institutional contexts. It can be applied to political leaders and aspirant leaders within a range of polities, with a range of cultural, institutional and performative characteristics. The framework is used to understand politics as performance, and character and persona as political phenomena, which are situated within broader and yet specific cultural and institutional configurations. The robustness of the framework is expressed in the following two diagrams which indicate its general proposition (figure 10.1) and application to British political leadership (figure 10.2).

Figure 10.1 A framework of political performance

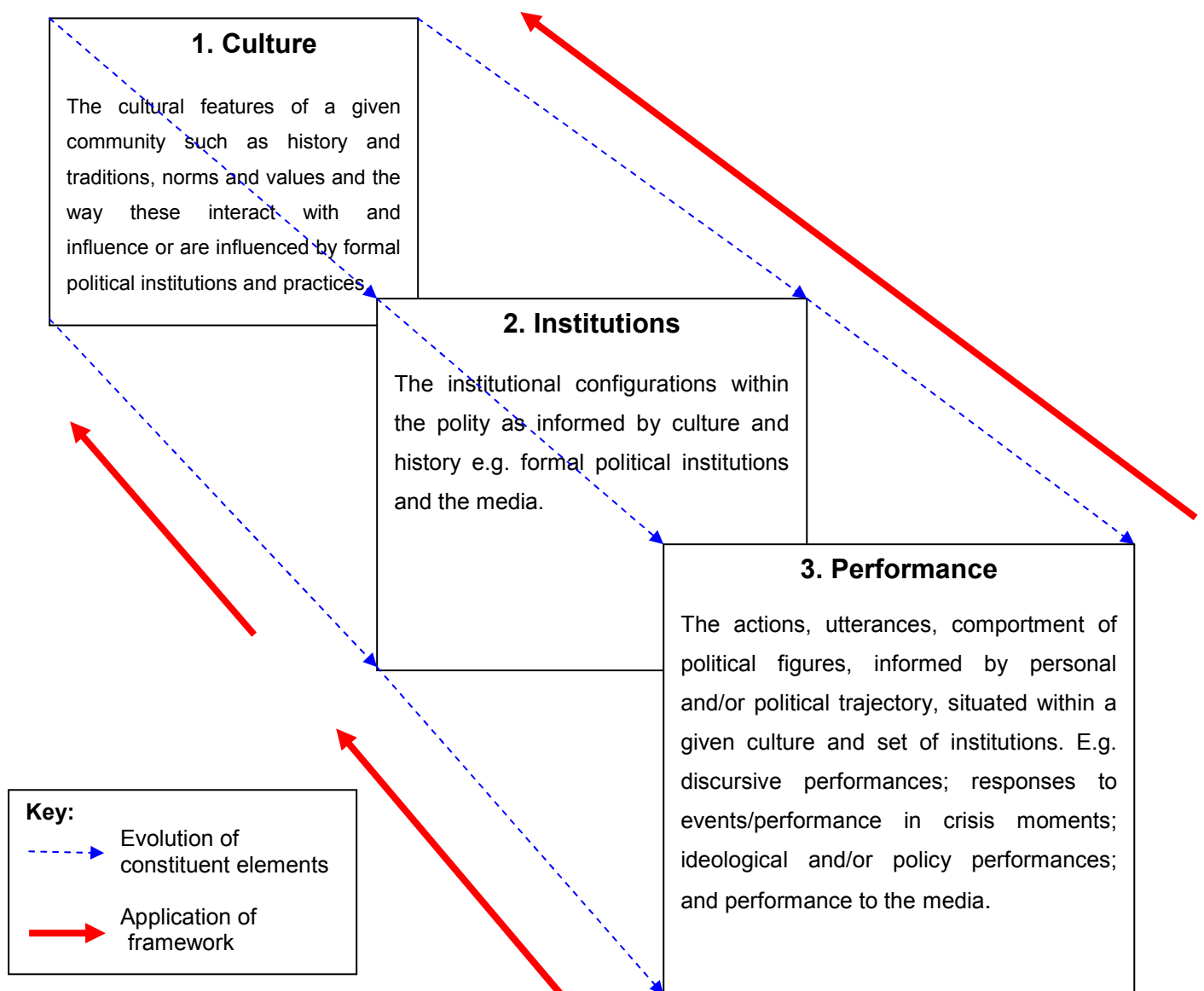
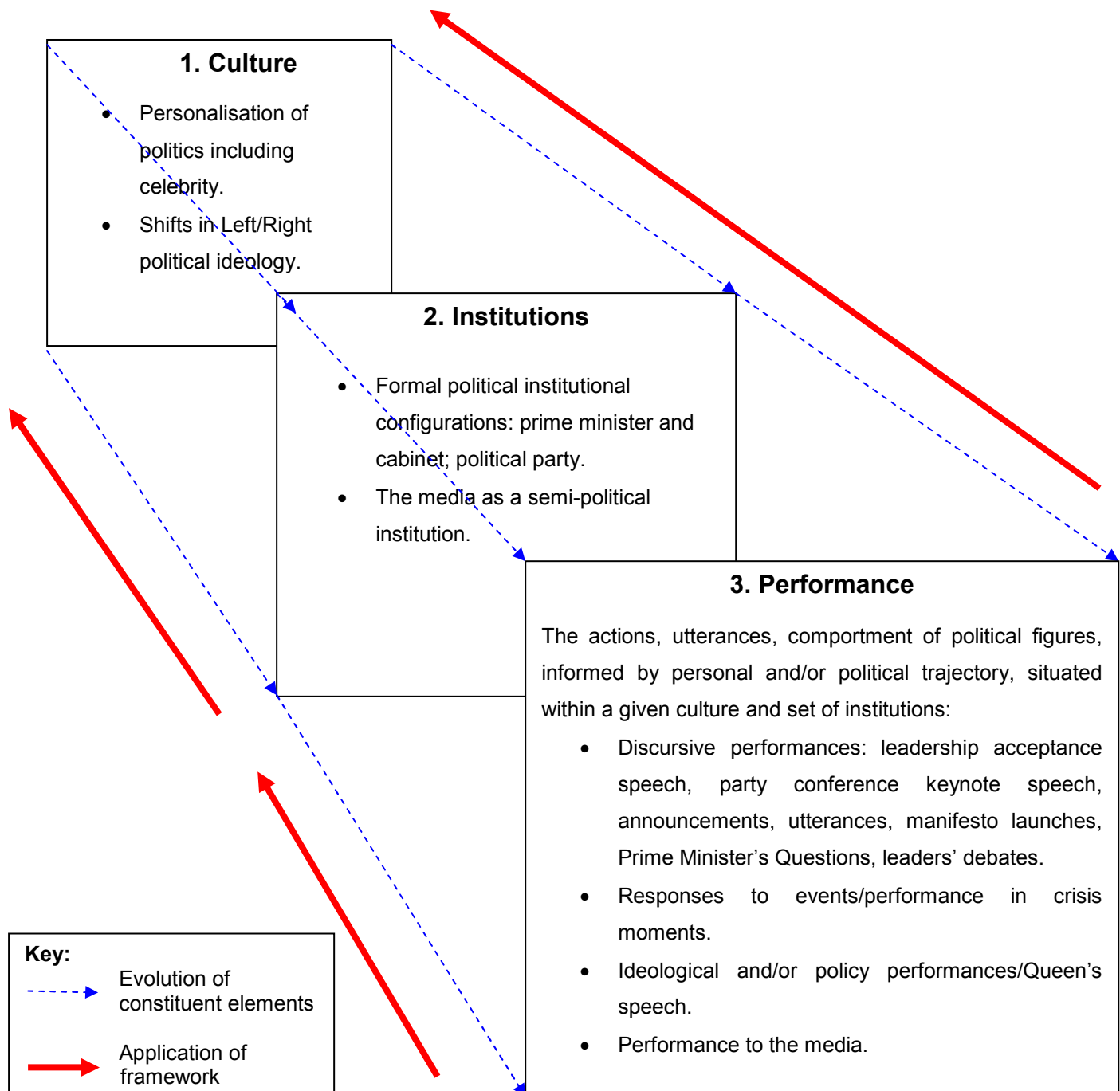


Figure 10.2 A framework of British political performance



The application of the framework of political performance to the leadership case studies has delivered four substantive contributions to understanding the leadership performance of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown and Nick Clegg in the Leaders' Debates.

## **10.2 Substantive contributions**

### **10.2.1 Tony Blair**

Tony Blair's inordinate emphasis upon the publicly perceived 'self' both in opposition and in government demonstrated that deployment of character and persona is context-specific and can have positive but unsustainable political consequences. Political ideology, culture and institutions were three contexts that were significant and consequential as regards Blair's leadership performance in the public realm.

Blair's relationship to political ideology as leader of the Labour party in which he embraced Third Way politics emphasised Blair as a moderniser and the catalyst of change thus developing his image as a modern leader who gave a traditionally Left party fresh appeal. Blair's use of ideology was context-specific but also a performance which emphasised an "actor-centred" trend (see Shaw, 2007) which heightened the role of symbolic political leadership in contemporary British politics. Blair's performance as regards political ideology did, for a time, have positive effects upon his political persona and image, however, this intensified under different circumstances which saw the revision of his publicly perceived character. As opposition leader, Blair's adoption of Third Way politics could be seen as analogous to Bill Clinton's ability to provide the Democrat party with renewed electable appeal. Despite obvious cultural and institutional differences in both polities, Blair's use of a Clintonian ideological strategy was acceptable given the Left history of both parties. However, Blair's foreign policy as regards the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and his closeness to Republican leader George W. Bush demonstrated a contradiction in Blair's character as regards political ideology and policy orientations. Post-2003, Blair's foreign policy discourses and actions were formative in ending his overlong honeymoon period which saw the dramatic fall in his popularity.

Blair's use of culture and institutions simultaneously enabled the symbolism of leadership to gain wider expression within the polity. Symbolic politics thus became increasingly part of contemporary British politics and was more consequential than was hitherto the case. Throughout the Blair premiership, several examples illustrate the interdependency (and use) of culture, institutions and performance e.g. the triangulation of political cultural ideology as enacted through the institution of the party, the integration of celebrity culture within political comportment or garnering media endorsements within and outside the polity, all of which enabled Blair's highly personalised style of leadership public expression. The ability to draw upon aspects of political culture and use institutional configurations to political purpose did, at least for a time, generate positive political support for Blair. The reverse is also true, that post-2003, Blair's overlong honeymoon period ended. Thus we see how culture and institutions are inherently linked to leadership and relate to the research question and sub-questions.

### **10.2.2 Gordon Brown**

Cultural and institutional developments within the British polity from the 1990s onwards e.g. personalisation and celebrity, the qualitative and quantitative changes in the nature and scope of the media and changes in the structure of the Labour party in particular highlighted the role that personalisation had assumed in contemporary British politics. A personalised polity in which a leadership-centred culture had emerged (see also chapter 5), an active 24-hour media and a highly personalised style of leadership developed by Tony Blair in which the self was deployed to political purpose were contexts of Gordon Brown's premiership. Brown's relationship to such contexts dominated his premiership positively and negatively.

During Brown's tenure in office, the question of character became predominant and relentless; and raised questions as to whether Brown was actually able to cope with the question of character and its role as part of the political process. Initially, Brown's deployment of an anti-celebrity narrative did, for a time, have positive political effects in terms of his popularity. However, the unresolved question of Brown's lack of political mandate and his attempt to legitimate his premiership began a period of intense media scrutiny as regards his character traits and suitability as prime minister. As character, personality, celebrity and their mediation had become culturally and institutionally embedded, Brown's inability or reluctance to 'perform' the dominant cultural and institutional narratives impacted negatively upon his political persona, popularity ratings and, very rapidly, premiership. Brown's negative relationship with the media created the conditions in which his status and authority as prime minister was questioned on several occasions, including being undermined by his own core executive.

Significant and formative parts of Brown's premiership were characterised by negative media reporting to the point that political action and its mediation was dominated by the "pack mentality" of the media (Political correspondent, A, see chapter 5) and its ability to act in a concerted fashion as regards the projection of political character and persona. The mediation of political leadership affects and structures political outcomes irrespective of positive political actions. Media reception to political persona thus affects political coverage. In the case of Brown, the interplay of a personalised polity, changes in the mediation of politics and the legacy of his predecessor, had dramatic and negative effects upon his premiership and tenure in office. Political leadership is thus culturally and institutionally determined.

### **10.2.3 David Cameron**

Talented personalisation and political performance were the basis of David Cameron's rise within the Conservative party. He used the context of the Conservative party and predecessors, in particular, the negative image of the party and predecessors in the public realm and ideological traditions of Conservatism to political purpose. Both contexts were formative in Cameron's election as party leader and thereafter. Substantively, the emphasis upon performance by a political actor to establish the public 'self' becomes a precondition of subsequent leadership style. From 2005-2010, Cameron's leadership style was highly personalised and stressed performance; the media reception to Cameron was largely positive given his ability to personalise the self; positive media endorsements followed with no real emphasis upon Cameron's policy weaknesses. Media reception to political performance and persona can structure political outcomes.

Cameron's leadership style was similar to that of Tony Blair's in that both deployed the self to political purpose and incorporated aspects of culture i.e. integrating personalisation and celebrity in political comportment. Both political actors used the institution of the political party to performative advantage and created emphasis upon the self as the embodiment of change. By deploying modern narratives as regards the Labour and Conservative parties, Blair and Cameron symbolised modern politics and gave their respective parties renewed appeal. Political performance is a cultural phenomenon which takes place within a range of institutional configurations. Political performance, particularly as expressed by Tony Blair and David Cameron, reflected the ways in which leadership affects cultural and institutional configurations. For Cameron, culture and institutions offered performative opportunities to deploy the self to political purpose. Cameron altered the image of the Conservative party from unelectable to electable, and by changing the image, he helped change the reality.

Thus, performance and discourse and, in this case, the institution of the party, were performatively linked.

#### **10.2.4 Nick Clegg**

The performance of Nick Clegg in the Leaders' Debates ahead of the 2010 General Election was culturally, institutionally and performatively significant as regards contemporary British political leadership. The cultural and institutional phenomena of the Debates reflected a personalised political culture and the qualitative and quantitative shifts in the media, thus providing Clegg with performative 'space' *vis-à-vis* Gordon Brown and David Cameron. Clegg's highly effective performance was based upon his relationship to opponents; it was through discursive interpolation of policy and the characterisation of old and new politics that Clegg was able to revise his outsider status (and outsidership) and present the self as a credible political alternative. Performance is thus framed by rivals and adversaries and their use to political purpose. Clegg's instantaneous media reception to political persona facilitated political popularity. Media reception to performance thus frames political outcomes.

At a symbolic level, Clegg's inclusion in the Debates reconfigured the Labour/Conservative dichotomy with a whole series of demonstratable political effects. The most significant being Clegg's centrality regarding the 2010 Election result and pivotal role as regards Conservative and Liberal Democrat coalition politics despite no electoral gain for the Liberal Democrat party under the leadership of Clegg.

In the case of Clegg, culture and institutions i.e. the significance of political personality within the polity and the format of the Leaders' Debates afforded Clegg

performative space to enable his political persona expression in the public realm. Thus culture, institutions and performance are inherently linked and dramatically transformed the status of Nick Clegg. The culturally and institutionally determined electoral system was also consequential for the prominence of Nick Clegg within the British polity post-Leaders' Debates.

### **10.3 Findings**

The findings of this research are as follows:

- Political leadership performance has assumed an integral role in British politics.
- Culture and institutions are contexts which frame political action, providing performative opportunities and/or constraints.
- There are various ways in which political actors deploy their person and 'persona' to affect and structure political outcomes e.g. comportment, speeches, interpolation of policy. The media reception of political persona affords political actors positive and negative opportunities and constraints. The relationship between the media and politics is significant and consequential for political outcomes.
- The relationship between performance and persona is significant; however, the mediation of performance and persona in the public realm is not controlled by political actors.
- The most important conclusion from the literature review, interview data and case studies is that culture, institutions and performance are inherently linked. Political performance cannot be seen in isolation from culture and institutions.

#### **10.4 Summary**

This research was an in-depth examination of contemporary British political leadership performance from 1997-2010. The research responded to British political leadership literature which lacked emphasis upon performance *per se* and also contributed to the discipline of political science in that the framework of political performance can be used in different contexts. The research conducted was a detailed account of leadership performance as relating to culture and institutions in the contemporary British political context. The findings are particular to the case studies but have wider cultural, institutional and performative significance for British political leadership.

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## **Appendices**

## Appendix A

## Interview consent form

**Thesis title:** Political Leadership: Character & Performance. A Comparative Analysis of British Political Leadership, 1997-2010.

**Supervised by:** Professor John Gaffney. School of Languages & Social Sciences. Aston University, Aston Triangle, B4 7ET. Email: [j.gaffney@aston.ac.uk](mailto:j.gaffney@aston.ac.uk)

### Purpose of the research:

The focus of Amarjit's research is the elaboration not of a framework of political leadership *per se* but of political persona. Having established the elements of a political persona, for example, that of Tony Blair, Gordon Brown, David Miliband, Vince Cable or David Cameron Amarjit will then apply the framework to 1) establish the character traits and other aspects of a politician's political persona; and, 2) to appraise the role of and effects of the political persona in the political process. An essential element of a politician's political persona is his/her discursive persona. Amarjit is particularly interested therefore on how the discursive persona is created on the basis of speeches supplied by speechwriters. The focus of Amarjit's research is also concerned with image more generally and the relationship of audience/s to the imagined personae of politicians, and the role of symbolic politics.

### Interviewee participation:

I understand that I have the right to agree or disagree with the digital recording of this interview. Where interviewees do not agree to be recorded they will be asked to sign the interviewer's notes in order to verify their accuracy. Where interviewees agree to the recording of the interview, the final written work may include quotations from the interview; the research follows Chatham House rules and all quotations will be non attributable and your personal identity as a research participant will remain anonymous at all times

A copy of the thesis will be made available upon completion.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any given time.

### Consent:

I agree to participate in this study and GIVE PERMISSION for this interview to be recorded.	
I agree to participate in this study and DO NOT GIVE PERMISSION for this interview to be recorded.	

Signature:.....

Date:.....

## Appendix B

Front page of *The Sun* newspaper (18 March 1997)



Available at

[http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/politics/domestic\\_politics/the%2Bsun%2Bdrops%2Bsupport%2Bfor%2Blabour/3365897.html](http://www.channel4.com/news/articles/politics/domestic_politics/the%2Bsun%2Bdrops%2Bsupport%2Bfor%2Blabour/3365897.html) (Accessed: 15 June 2007).

## Appendix C

## Tony Blair's arrival in office



Tim Rooke/Nils Jorgensen/Rex Features (1997). [Online].  
Available at:  
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2009/mar/29/cool-britannia-g20-blair-brown>  
(Accessed: 15 June 2007).

## Appendix D

## **'Cool Britannia'**



Naden, R. (1997) *Tony Blair and Noel Gallagher at the famous Downing Street reception* [Online].

Available at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/music/musicblog/2007/may/10/whathappenedtorockunderbl> (Accessed: 15 June 2007).

## Appendix E

## **Tony Blair's statement in response to the death of Princess Diana**



Available at: <http://www.labour-network.co.uk/blair/images/tbqgdiana1.png> (Accessed: 15 June 2007).

## Appendix F

## **Gordon Brown's first utterance as prime minister**



Berehulak, D. (2007) Getty Images [Online]  
Available at:  
<http://www.life.com/image/74939611> (Accessed: 30 June 2007).

## Appendix G

## Gordon Brown and Sarah Brown



Macdiarmid, P. (2007). *New Prime Minister Arrives at Downing Street*. Getty Images News. [Online].

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