



# UK report on the discursive construction of justice in politics

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## About ETHOS

*ETHOS - Towards a European Theory Of Justice and fairness* is a European Commission Horizon 2020 research project that seeks to provide building blocks for the development of an empirically informed European theory of justice and fairness. The project seeks to do so by:

- a) refining and deepening knowledge on the European foundations of justice - both historically based and contemporarily envisaged;
- b) enhancing awareness of mechanisms that impede the realisation of justice ideals as they are lived in contemporary Europe;
- c) advancing the understanding of the process of drawing and re-drawing of the boundaries of justice (fault lines); and
- d) providing guidance to politicians, policy makers, advocacies and other stakeholders on how to design and implement policies to reverse inequalities and prevent injustice.

ETHOS does not merely understand justice as an abstract moral ideal that is universal and worth striving for. Rather, justice is understood as a re-enacted and re-constructed lived experience. The experience is embedded in firm legal, political, moral, social, economic and cultural institutions that are geared to giving members of society what is their due.

In the ETHOS project, justice is studied as an interdependent relationship between the ideal of justice and its real manifestation – as set in the highly complex institutions of modern European societies. The relationship between the normative and practical, the formal and informal, is acknowledged and critically assessed through a multi-disciplinary approach.

To enhance the formulation of an empirically-based theory of justice and fairness, ETHOS will explore the normative (ideal) underpinnings of justice and their practical realisation in four heuristically defined domains of justice - social justice, economic justice, political justice, and civil and symbolic justice. These domains are revealed in several spheres:

- a) philosophical and political tradition,
- b) legal framework,
- c) daily (bureaucratic) practice,
- d) current public debates, and
- e) the accounts of vulnerable populations in six European countries (the Netherlands, the UK, Hungary, Austria, Portugal and Turkey).

The question of drawing boundaries and redrawing the fault-lines of justice permeates the entire investigation.

Alongside Utrecht University in the Netherlands who coordinates the project, five further research institutions cooperate. They are based in Austria (European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy), Hungary (Central European University), Portugal (Centre for Social Studies), Turkey (Boğaziçi University), and the UK (University of Bristol). The research project lasts from January 2017 to December 2019.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report critically examines the discursive construction of justice as political representation in the United Kingdom, taking as a starting point two recent and highly mediatized events. The first is the 2017 general elections, called by the Conservative Party in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to consolidate its authority ahead of Brexit negotiations. The second is the fire that engulfed Grenfell Tower, part of a social housing estate in one of London's wealthiest boroughs, killing over 70 residents and leaving many others traumatized and homeless. Our analysis mainly draws on written statements issued by key actors (political parties, advocacy groups, institutions), complemented with semi-structured interviews offered by individuals and organisations closely involved in the response to the Grenfell fire.

Apart from their coincidence in time, with the fire taking place only a week after the elections, these two events present a number of parallels that make them particularly well suited for a study on political justice. In both cases, a recurrent theme of public discourses is the criticism of out-of-touch elites, which echoes the populist turn currently observable across Western Europe. However, the characteristics and interests of these elites are depicted very differently. In the context of the general elections, they are often represented as a pro-European and globalist middle class willing to sacrifice the economic interests and security of the British nation(s) on the altar of free movement and anti-racism. In Grenfell-related debates, the elites are portrayed as mainly upper-class whites who seek to entrench their economic privileges by capturing political institutions.

The discourses analysed also diverge in terms of the 'ordinary people' or the 'community' who are seen as misrepresented by political elites. In the general election, the 'left behind' are (hard)working parents whose sex, race, abilities, sexual orientations and religions generally remain unstated but who are regularly juxtaposed to the female, non-white, disabled and homosexual beneficiaries of 'targeted' policies, as well as to the 'Islamic extremist' perpetrators of terrorist attacks. The working class plays a similarly prominent role in the claims of Grenfell fire activists, but unlike in the general election, it is a racialized working class that is also subjected to stigma and discrimination. This symbolic disadvantage is perceived as manifesting itself in the neglectful and sometimes contemptuous treatment received by local authorities.

A final instructive parallel between these events is the ubiquity of migrants as objects of political discourses and their contrasting oversight as subjects of political participation. During the general election, migrants are regularly depicted as a threat for public services and social cohesion, although those in work (especially in strategic sectors, such as healthcare) are also recognised as contributing to the British economy. Nevertheless, their exclusion from the national vote is largely taken for granted, despite the participation of some in local elections. In the aftermath of Grenfell, the declaration of an amnesty for undocumented survivors brings their victimhood under the spotlight, but the laws and policies that underpin their irregular status remain unproblematised, thereby tainting the whole Tower with the stigma of undeservingness.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

BAME Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic

BBC British Broadcasting Corporation

BME Black and Minority Ethnic

LWRA Lancaster West Residents Association

OBV Operation Black Vote

RBKC Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea

TMO Tenant Management Organisation

TUC Trades Union Congress

UKIP UK Independence Party

## 1) GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to explore the discursive construction of justice as political representation, that is, the opportunity to participate in democratic debate and to shape societal norms and laws. As well as focusing on whether various groups are represented we engage with how that political (non)representation is constructed in political discourse. This is a broad question that is of course highly context dependent and dependent too on the nature of the groups in question. The UK is experiencing a populist revival marked by hostility to 'elites', and the elevation of an idea of the popular will that found a particular expression in the Brexit vote and its aftermath. This was epitomized in the UKIP leader, Nigel Farage's impromptu speech outside Parliament on hearing of the success of the vote leave campaign which he characterized as a victory for 'the real people'. With 'Remain' posited as an elite position but backed by most parliamentarians (who are often uniformly depicted as 'elite' whatever their backgrounds) the nature of political representation has become an important point of British debate, even if it is not so expressed. Are MPs bound to represent their constituents or their beliefs? What happens when the knowledge of 'experts' comes up against 'the will of the people', and how should MPs negotiate this? And what about those who are excluded, the 48% who are, presumably, not 'the real people'? The roots and ramifications of this debate extend beyond Brexit. There is acknowledged to be a problem with a sense of exclusion from political debate and representation, captured in the idea of the 'left behind', but this is often characterised as an exclusion of the 'white working class', who are not politically represented because of their class interests, and who represent an authentic Britishness (or more properly, Englishness).

This sounds like a classic case of the international populist turn outlined in ETHOS Deliverable 4.1 (Bugra, 2017). However, this is complicated, to some extent, by the popularity of leftist Labour Party leader Jeremy Corbyn and the attendant massive growth in Labour Party membership (now the largest party in Western Europe with more than half a million members). It could be argued that this is simply a form of *economic* populist nationalism – the Corbyn-led part of the Remain campaign for the EU referendum was felt by some to be lackluster (The Economist, 2016; Wilson 2016) – but the fact remains that Corbyn and most of his allies have been supportive of the rights of migrants and refugees and the non-negotiability of the rights of EU citizens in the UK before and during the Brexit transition period, and they have avowedly and determinedly aligned themselves with anti-racist projects for decades. Should they achieve power, the Shadow Home Secretary, Diane Abbott, would be the UK's first Black Home Secretary.

Given the recent prominence of these issues, the UK general election of 8<sup>th</sup> June 2017 is a particularly interesting moment to analyse the discourses around political representation. Prime Minister Theresa May announced this early election on the 18<sup>th</sup> of April. Her Conservative Government had a small majority that was (and continues to be) seriously split over the Brexit question. She stated that her 'opponents believe the government's majority is so small' and that '(i)f we do not hold a general election now their political game-playing will continue and the negotiations with the European Union will reach their most difficult stage in the run-up to the next scheduled election'. There were other factors too: Mrs May had become leader of the Conservative Party – and hence Prime Minister – as a result of the previous leader, then Prime Minister David Cameron, standing down after the Brexit vote, and wanted to confirm her legitimacy as leader. Finally, the Conservatives and Mrs May herself were riding high in the opinion polls following the election of Jeremy Corbyn as leader of the Labour Party. Strong voices outside and within the Labour movement had declared his leftist leadership would make the Labour Party unelectable. Citing a need for 'certainty, stability and strong leadership' after the EU referendum and that '[t]he country is coming together, but Westminster is not' (May 2017), May called the election expecting that Labour would be out of power for a generation.

An often-cited response to the election announcement came from 'Brenda from Bristol'; when BBC reporter Jon Kay asked people to comment, Brenda replied 'You're joking – not another one!' (BBC 2017a). She

seemed to have captured a popular sentiment with The Telegraph concluding that ‘we are all Brenda’ (2017) and the New Statesman describing her as ‘the nation’s voice of reason’ (2017). It seems that at the outset the general public was not viewing this election as an opportunity for political expression. However, while the Labour Party did not win the election, they improved their electoral position far beyond expectations, and the chants of ‘Oh Jeremy Corbyn’ that resounded round summer music festivals suggests that the UK is, for the moment at least, more immune to the ‘generalized disillusionment about the socialist experiment’ (4.1) than many other EU states.

For our ‘second event’ we chose to focus on the Grenfell Tower fire of the 14<sup>th</sup> of June 2017. This was a fire that consumed a low income residential tower block in West London, spreading rapidly and trapping residents, many of whom had been socially housed. By September 2017, the reported death toll was about 80 people of whom 69 were said to have been named, and the final number announced by the London Metropolitan Police in November was 71 (Rawlinson 2017; Rawlinson et al. 2017). The fire that engulfed the block occurred after local and national government cuts to low-income housing. This raised considerable questions over political representation, non-representation, and how that representation is itself represented. Theresa May’s inept handling of her visit to the devastated site was roundly condemned for her refusal to engage with local people. (Jeremy Corbyn, in contrast, was praised for his compassionate and committed walkabout). However, the political criticism was not only raised at the level of national government. The elected Local Authority of Kensington and Chelsea was the focus of considerable rage, and in a spontaneous action in response to the fire hundreds of people descended on Kensington Town Hall chanting: ‘We want justice’.

After the fire it rapidly emerged that the authorities had dismissed local concerns, in particular issues voiced by residents of colour. These had been raised during and after a refurbishment project, which allegedly played an important part in the spread of the fire. The organisation that managed the building, the Tenant Management Organisation (TMO) was also the focus of anger. It was supposed to represent the interests of tenants but it was claimed in practice ignored them. This denial of political voice, and their representation as troublemakers, was felt to be a factor in the fire itself. A few months before the fire in November 2016 the Grenfell Action Group noted that despite the concerns raised about the dangerous living conditions, the TMO kept ‘playing with fire’, adding that ‘[i]t is a truly terrifying thought, but the Grenfell Action Group firmly believes that only a catastrophic event will expose the ineptitude and incompetence of our landlord, the KCTMO’ (2016: para 1).

For each of these two events, our analysis starts with an overview of the social context in which the discourses were produced, to clarify the meanings and connotations of key concepts as well as the role played by different institutions and actors. Subsequently we introduce the sources from which discourses were extracted, as well as the individuals and organisations who accepted to participate in the study as key informants. In the case of those who requested anonymity, we limit ourselves to a brief characterization of the position from which they entered public debates. Lastly, we expose the results of the analysis itself, employing the same approach for documentary sources and interviews. The conclusion highlights key lessons regarding current conceptions of political justice in the UK.

## **2) EVENT 1: UK GENERAL ELECTION 2017**

### **2.1) CONTEXT**

While May declared to have called the election to gain a stronger position in Brexit negotiations that fitted with a new five-year term, political commentators added that ‘Mrs May couldn’t resist the opportunity presented by the opinion polls’ which the Conservative Party was leading by 20 percent at the time of the announcement (BBC



2017b). However, to many people's considerable surprise, no party managed to secure an overall majority and the election resulted in a hung Parliament. The Conservative Party remained the largest with 317 seats and 42.3% of the vote, the Labour Party gained 30 more seats resulting in 262 seats with 40% of the vote, and Liberal Democrats won 12 seats with 7.4% of the vote (House of Commons 2017).

The 68.7% turnout was the highest since 1997 (House of Commons 2017). General elections in the UK generally see a higher turnout among older voters, and while this was still the case for the 2017 election, the proportion of voters between the ages of 18 and 24 went up by 20% compared to the previous election (ibid). The turnout of this group of voters was the highest in 25 years (Ipsos MORI 2017). Turnout among BAME voters also increased by 6% compared to 2015. More Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) voters supported the Labour party, with an 11% increase, while the Conservative Party lost 4% of its BAME voters (House of Commons 2017). Labour Party turnout increased by 12% among middle-class voters compared to 2015, while support for the Conservatives increased among the working class by an equal 12% (Ipsos MORI 2017). There were no significant differences in turnout among male and female voters in both the 2017 and 2015 general elections (BES 2017).

Commentators concluded that May's 'gamble' had 'failed' because of inter alia a weaker 'Brexit effect' – most of the leave voting seats remained in Labour's hands – and May's minimal media engagement (Holder et al. 2017; Hunt and Wheeler 2017). In fact, she did not participate in any TV debates or public rallies throughout the campaign. Her absence invited accusations that she was 'running scared' or 'complacently assuming victory' (Hunt and Wheeler 2017). In addition, commentators pointed at May's change in social care policies including a controversial 'dementia tax' proposal as a reason for the Conservative Party's disappointing results (ibid).

These comments hint at the main topics of public debate during the election campaign which included both 'common' election topics such as education, housing, the NHS and social care, and migration in a broad sense, as well as the dominant topic of Brexit. The UK's strategy for leaving the European Union had become the central theme from the moment May announced the snap election in which she proposed to 'let everybody put forward their proposals for Brexit and their programmes for government'. In practice, as became clear in subsequent negotiations, the election campaign was big on Brexit rhetoric but short on Brexit detail.

The terror attacks in Manchester on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May and London on the 3<sup>rd</sup> of June shifted the course of the campaign toward security and anti-terrorism policies, with May stating there is 'far too much tolerance of extremism in our country' in her statement following the London terror attack. Even before these events, an Ipsos MORI study conducted in February 2017 found that 'terrorism' was the 'second biggest issue that Britons worry about', just behind the NHS. The Labour Party and a number of journalists criticised the Conservative Party for cutting back on police numbers (Mason and Walker 2017), while May pointed out that it 'is not just about resources, it is about the powers people have' and focused on the Party's policy on the retention of criminal records in the DNA Database (May in Question Time with David Dimbleby 2017). Most parties suspended their campaign for a day after the London Bridge attack, apart from the UK Independence Party (UKIP) whose leader, Paul Nuttall, stated that suspending the campaign days before the election was 'precisely what the extremists would want us to do'. By the end of the campaign, the atmosphere was described as 'sombre and strangely off-kilter' following the incidents and the campaign suspension (Hunt and Wheeler 2017).

## **2.2) SAMPLE**

For this country report, 21 documents were selected for in-depth analysis of their argumentative content and linguistic devices. Focusing on discourses of justice as political representation in official narratives, we selected the manifestos of the major political parties who contributed to public debates during the campaign, i.e. the Conservative Party, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, Scottish National Party, Green Party and UK Independence

Party. The emphasis is on the first two as the main contenders due to the UK's plurality voting system. The other manifestos are included to illustrate broader debates regarding migrant rights, BAME inequalities and Brexit.

In addition to party manifestos, which allow for in-depth analyses of official narratives in a fixed form, TV debates have become an established part of UK election campaigns and reveal how these narratives interact with questions and challenges. Due to the Conservative campaign's decision to withdraw from TV debates with other leaders, we also selected the Question Time Party Leaders Special in which presenter David Dimbleby and a live audience ask questions to party leaders. The Leaders Special with Theresa May and Jeremy Corbyn was watched by 4 million viewers and described as having 'potentially swung the election', as 'over a third of viewers said the BBC's election programme influenced their vote' (Hughes 2017; Blumler et al. 2017).

In order to examine the election campaign's shift toward security and anti-terrorism, official statements by Mayor of London Sadiq Khan and Prime Minister Theresa May were included too.

Advocacy group discourses were selected based on their engagement with issues of migration and BAME equality during the election. They cover different stances, with Operation Black Vote (OBV) focusing on BAME rights, Migrants Organise, Migrant Rights and Hope Not Hate being migration support organisations, and Migration Watch UK standing as an anti-migration advocacy group.

The Trades Union Congress (TUC) has been included as representative of the majority of trade unions in England and Wales. Its mission is to 'stand for equality, fairness and justice, and for the dignity and respect for all working people' (TUC 2018). In the context of the election, TUC issued several statements and a report with recommendations on how to proceed with Brexit.

### **2.3) DESCRIPTION OF DISCOURSES IDENTIFIED**

To understand the discourses it is important to appreciate the audience, the people to whom campaigning is addressed. To vote in a UK general election, which determines the composition of the UK Parliament, one must be over the age of 18, be a British or Irish citizen and reside in Britain or be a British citizen who has been residing abroad for less than 15 years. Commonwealth citizens who reside in the UK or have been given 'leave to enter' (i.e. temporary stay) are also entitled to vote. EU citizens do not have the right to vote; neither do convicted prisoners or members of the House of Lords. Voting is a right and not compulsory in the UK.

#### **2.3.1) REPRESENTING THE 'ORDINARY HARDWORKING BRITISH FAMILY'**

Across the different election themes of Brexit, health and social care, migration, and security, the target of major parties' election campaigns is 'the mainstream British public' (Conservative Party Manifesto 2017:7) which is represented as consisting of 'hardworking families' (1). The Conservative Party's vision for a 'fairer Britain' is one 'that works for everyone, not just a privileged few' (5) and it is argued that the way to establish it is through cultivating a 'Great Meritocracy' (7). This 'Great Meritocracy' is described as 'a country where everyone has a fair chance to go as far as their talent and their hard work will allow, where advantage is based on merit not privilege' and aimed at 'support[ing] the millions of people who live in ordinary, working families' (49). The Labour Party too summarises its vision as one 'for a country that works for the many, not just the privileged few' (Labour Party Manifesto 2017: 4). While it does not use the word meritocracy, Labour also promises to 'build a country where we invest our wealth to give everyone the best chance' (4). A 'fairer Britain' for Labour is one 'where everybody is able to get on in life, to have security at work and at home, to be decently paid for the work they do' (5). Like the Conservative Party, Labour writes about 'an economy that works for all' and not just 'a narrow elite' (8). Scarcely surprisingly for election manifestos the emphasis is on the political representation of 'ordinary people', and the desirability of this political representation as a means of holding elites to account via

the ballot box. Thus the election called out 'the real people' as against the 'corrupt elites' (Mudde, 4.1) through idea of 'ordinariness'.

Who are these 'ordinary many' that are juxtaposed to the 'privileged few'? According to the Conservative Manifesto 'ordinary, working families' are 'people who have a job but do not always have job security; people who own their own home but worry about paying the mortgage; people who can just about manage but worry about the cost of living and getting their children into a good school' (7-8). Similarly, Labour expresses concerns about 'too many of us [who] are in low-paid and insecure work' and 'too many of us [who] fear our children will not enjoy the same opportunities that we have' (8). The two main parties represent themselves as part of the hardworking mainstream of ordinary people though interestingly the Labour Party uses terms that suggest that their membership/ideals map directly on to the 'ordinary person' by using the terminology of 'us' – e.g. 'too many of us' (Labour Party Manifesto 2017: 8), while the Conservative Party (whose membership is much smaller) uses language that indicates recognition rather than common interest, e.g. by stating to 'govern in the interests of the mainstream of the British public' rather than 'pursu[ing] an agenda based on a supposed center ground defined and established by elites in Westminster' (Conservative Party Manifesto 2017: 7). The Conservative Manifesto also emphasises leaders are willing to 'be straight with people about the challenges ahead' and to deliver 'discipline and focus, effort and hard work' (5). These hardworking ordinary families are also said to 'have been ignored by politicians' (8) through which the Conservative Party linguistically distances itself from the aforementioned 'Westminster elites'.

The notion of the ignored ordinary British family also comes to the fore in TUC statements. TUC situates the anti-EU and anti-migration sentiment in the 'left behind communities' where 'voters feel alienated by the pace of change, and by the pressure that they feel poorly managed immigration has put on wages, housing and public services' (2017: 2) but also stresses that 'with nearly six million workers in Britain earning less than the independently set living wage, migrants are certainly not the only group used by unscrupulous employers to undercut a fair rate for the job' (3). TUC connects British 'left behind' communities with migrant communities as both are 'undercut' by austerity measures and do not benefit from post-crisis economic growth.

The ignored families are presented to 'deserve secure, well-paid jobs' (8) and a 'new deal for ordinary, working people giving them a decent living wage' is therefore required (Conservative Party Manifesto 2017: 12). The 'ordinary families' are valued by means of this discourse precisely because they are hardworking, and it is through an environment that allows for everyone to reach their 'potential' by means of 'hard work' regardless of their background that justice and fairness can be attained. The proposed 'Great Meritocracy' is therefore represented as counteracting 'endured social injustices'. Interestingly one of the examples given is '[i]f you are a white, working-class boy, you are less likely than anybody else in Britain to go to university' (idem: 49). This needs to be seen in the context of a turn in the public debate to concerns about the 'white working class' that dates back over a decade and received renewed attention with the Brexit vote (Ford and Goodwin 2014). It introduces class into debates, but in the guise of nationalist identity politics.

In sum, the 'ordinary hardworking families' discourse presents people who are in paid but 'insecure' employment and are part of 'families' as the mainstream of Britain, for whom the 'best Brexit deal' and general economic policies should be designed. Their intrinsic value stems from hard work as a way of contributing to society, but the problem is that these families have been ignored by political and economic elites over the last decades. One consequence of this discourse is that those who are not (hard)working are addressed through separate policies and even referred to in separate chapters of political manifestos. In other words, they are not presented as part of the 'core' group for which policies are designed. For example, people who require mental health support or make use of social care services are addressed in separate chapters and thereby structurally separated from the 'hardworking ordinary Brit'. And while all major parties address injustices in care provision and funding, the question remains how someone who is (involuntarily) unemployed or unable to work is to relate

to the main discourse of 'hardworking families'. A similar question can be posed for those who do not identify as being part of a (traditional) family.

How do ethnic minorities fit into this picture? Interestingly, the 'endured social injustice' highlighted by the Conservative manifesto highlights injustices for the white working class male population in education, while social injustices linked to BAME populations relate to being 'treated more harshly by the criminal justice system' (49). Within the argumentative structure of this discourse it is argued that the injustices experienced by minority ethnic groups, such as racism in job applications, will be mitigated through a meritocracy that recognises only hard work and not background or identity. However, the proposed solution of the 'Great Meritocracy' is arguably more applicable to injustices in educational attainment compared to the criminal justice system. The 'hardworking family' is a colour-blind concept and neither Labour nor Conservatives explicitly address the racialised identities of the 'ordinary British family'. The assumption of whiteness as default, together with the addressing of BAME related injustices in separate policies, means a set of minorities effectively become sidelined as secondary policy issues that (literally) come after the 'core' has been addressed.

Challenges to this 'core' have been voiced through BAME rights activists such as OBV, which actively participated in the campaign. OBV was established to work towards racial justice and equality in the UK and engages with public institutions through voter registration, lobbying, and political leadership campaigns. When it was established in 1996 its first campaign aimed to mobilise the Black vote (understanding 'Black' in the British political sense of African, Asian and Caribbean people) 'to serve notice on political parties that they ignored the Black electorate at their peril'. In 2017 OBV sought to seize the opportunity to create a more diverse parliament as the surprise nature of the election impeded the lengthy shortlisting practices commonly employed by parties.

In these and earlier elections, OBV also focused on increasing the turnout of Black voters, reported to be 16% lower than for white voters in 2010. The campaign drew public attention during the 2015 general election with posters of BAME actors, musicians, and athletes photographed with parts of their faces painted white (OBV 2015). The organisation also campaigns for LGBT marriage rights and draws attention to representations of historical developments of western liberal values as found in liberal democracies which often exclude women and people of colour from the historical record. OBV is aligned with Operation Disabled Vote which was set up in 2014 and 'seeks to inform and inspire disabled people around the UK to use their vote to demand greater equality and opportunity'.

OBV's narrative appeals to both central offices of the major parties and 'BME<sup>1</sup> voters' as marginal constituencies with 'sizable minority-ethnic communities could make a critical difference' (2017: para 9). The BAME rights discourse argues that a more diverse representation contributes to more 'equitable representation'; however, the organisation is anxious to avoid the slippage between politicians as representing their constituents and politicians as representative *of* their constituents and recognise that 'not every black or minority ethnic MP wants to speak about race equality. Nevertheless it stresses that 'there are others who do, and the issues affecting, for example, young black workers have to be dealt with' (para 6). Thus OBV attempts to address both the politics of recognition and the politics of representation (4.1).

OBV targets voters in general and works across political parties. Both Labour and Conservative parties recognise their contribution to public debate and political representation. In a Race Equality 17 blog post at the time of the campaign, Corbyn writes: 'I've looked at the manifesto written by 20 BAME organisations and I agree that along with our broader vision for equality, your proposal to have a Race Equality Strategy right across government is absolutely what you will see with the next Labour Government' (2017: para 9).

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<sup>1</sup> Terminology referring to people of colour in the UK is changing and contested. OBV uses the term BME rather than BAME.

In formal political fora explicit racism is not acceptable and referring to racialized identity is handled carefully. However, this does not mean that racism is not a feature of formal and informal public debates. Some media and Conservative attacks on Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott were criticised as ‘dog-whistle politics’, a phrase used to describe how racism is mobilized implicitly but not explicitly in the same way that a dog whistle cannot be heard but affects the behaviour of dogs. Diane Abbott was a particular target of hostile commentary during the election campaign. While she temporarily stepped aside during the Labour campaign due to reported health reasons, her TV appearances were described as a ‘car crash’ which resulted in both support on social media and a campaign to set up a ‘Diane Abbott care package’ as well as an increase in hostile comments and attacks online (Asthana and Stewart 2017). The Conservative campaign used images of Abbott and fragments of her interviews on ad vans and Facebook campaigns. Replying to the Facebook ad which included a mashup of Abbott’s statements pieced together to make it sound as if she supported al-Qaida, Abbott said ‘it was literally fake news... The Tories need to explain why they singled me out. It felt terrible, it felt awful – you felt you were in a kind of vortex – as I became aware of what was happening – the Facebook ads, the Tories name-dropping me for no reason’. Fellow Labour and BAME MP Chuka Umunna stated in an interview with the Guardian that ‘there is absolutely no doubt that a large part of the commentary on Diane not just during the general election but over the years has been driven by straightforward racism and misogyny and you just have to look in online to see it’. Both Abbott and Umunna have argued that the abuse of Abbott and other BAME and female MPs is likely to ‘put young black women off getting involved in politics’ (ibid).

In term of categories employed, the British campaign narratives clearly distinguish between ‘migrants’ on the one hand, and ‘BME voters’ on the other hand. The issues discussed in relation to the former are citizen rights and worker status (as unpacked below), while the policies proposed to deal with BAME related problems are focused on preventing discrimination in job application processes and in the criminal justice system. The clear separation of ‘migrant’ and ‘BAME/BME’ labels can be juxtaposed with continental discourses that prioritize labels such as ‘second’ or ‘third generation migrants’.

### **2.3.2) POST-BREXIT: ‘RIGHTS FOR EU CITIZENS’ AND ‘THE CONTRIBUTION OF THE MIGRANT WORKER’**

Apart from separating BAME status from migrant status, another distinction came to the fore in the selected documents. Due to the dominant frame of Brexit negotiations EU migrants became discursively separated from migrants in general and non-EU migrants specifically, a process that had begun with EU Enlargement in 2004. The language used to address and represent injustices in the case of the former has been predominantly rights-based highlighting migrant-*citizens*, while migration in general has been assessed in terms of its value for and contribution to the UK economy through the status of migrant-*workers*.

All major parties offer proposals on the status of EU migrants in the UK as a part of their envisioned ‘Brexit deal’ but their content diverge. Labour and Liberal Democrats want to unilaterally protect the rights enjoyed by EU citizens in the UK, regardless of other EU states’ reciprocation of this pledge for UK citizens. Conservative policy pledges to secure rights but only on a reciprocal basis and therefore does not offer a unilateral guarantee for the right to remain and other entitlements of EU citizens. Labour described this policy as using EU migrants as ‘bargaining chips’, which they deemed ‘shameful’ and ‘unjust’ because ‘EU nationals do not just contribute to our society: *they are part of our society*’ (Labour Party Manifesto 2017: 24). However, despite this assertion there was no engagement with matters of political representation. That is, while the Labour Party did indeed assert that EU citizens are part of British society, the fact that they are part of British society with no national political representation was not an issue. In fact, it was only the anti-migration and anti-EU campaign group Migration Watch that drew attention to this question, perhaps predictably not raising the lack of migrant representation but rather complaining about the right of Commonwealth citizens’ right to vote irrespective of length of residence or permanent residence:

As we have said before, this is a hangover from the days of Empire, an anachronism that should not have been allowed to continue, except for nationals of the few Commonwealth countries that grant similar rights. It really is time to call a halt.

The language used to refer to individuals who have been born in another EU country or hold another EU country's citizenship while residing in the UK differs significantly from the language used to describe those born in non-EU countries or without EU citizenship. The former are described as 'EU *nationals*' (Labour Party Manifesto 2017: 24) or 'EU *citizens*' (Green Party Manifesto 2017: 9; Hope not Hate 2017: 7; TUC 2017: 7) who hold 'guaranteed *rights*' (Liberal Democrat Manifesto 2017: 10; UKIP Manifesto 2017: 19) such as the '*right* of EU citizens to remain in the UK' (Green Party Manifesto 2017: 9), whereas the latter are described as 'non-EU *migrants*' (UKIP Manifesto 2017: 3), '*migrant workers*' (Conservative Party Manifesto 2017: 20), or '*foreign workers*' (UKIP Manifesto 2017: 14). An alternative to these discourses can be found among the pro-migration advocacy groups. Migrants' Rights Network called for 'a rights-based approach to immigration' in general rather than just for EU migrants but did not specify the need for a right to vote for EU citizens residing in other EU countries (2017: para 4).

For most other migrants, party discourses link status based on their contribution to UK society as workers. The Conservative Party praises the previous Conservative government for its 'control in the system', as 'thanks to Conservatives in government [...] we have more skilled workers and university students, less abuse and fewer unskilled migrants' which 'better suits the national interest' (Conservative Party Manifesto 2017: 54). The Conservatives also suggest to better align the input of the Migration Advisory Committee with the proposed industrial strategy to 'set aside significant numbers of visas for workers in strategically important sectors, such as digital technology, without adding to net migration as a whole' (2017: 20). Albeit employing more positive rather than restrictive language and proposals, the Labour Party also contributes to this discourse by stating that 'public and private sector employers depend on immigrants' and that the Party stresses to 'value their contributions, including their tax contributions' (2017: 28). The consensus around support for certain types of 'hard working migrants', redolent of 'hardworking families', is manifest in the fact that UKIP joined Labour and Conservatives in their proposal to exempt migrant workers in the health and social care sector from immigration caps due to shortages and increasing funding pressures. In Question Time, Corbyn defends this policy by stating that 'the health of all of us has depended on... depends on those who have made their homes here', although later in the conversation he does stress the need to 'stop overseas-only recruitment practices' and focuses on retraining locals in the long-term instead as set out in the Labour manifesto (2017: 28).

Central to this discourse is the notion of 'sustainable migration' (Conservative Party Manifesto 2017) or 'balanced migration' (UKIP Manifesto 2017: 31) defined by UKIP as a level of migration that would 'still allow us to bring in the key skills we need, while giving a breathing space to public services under immense pressure' (33). Imperative to understanding this discourse that establishes the 'value' of the figure of the migrant is that what is to be 'sustained' or to be made 'fair' here is mostly of economic nature. As a result, proposed numbers of net migration and the potential exclusion of international students in migration statistics have been subjected to much public debate during these campaigns. For Conservatives, 'controlled, sustainable migration' comes down to a net migration of 'tens of thousands' (48). For UKIP, 'fair and equitable migration' means 'approximately halving gross immigration for a five-year period' (33). The use of debating numbers of migrants that can be 'allowed in' as a linguistic device also helps to establish the presented societal dangers of migration, such as threats to 'a cohesive society' and 'abuse' (Conservative Party Manifesto 2017: 54), the legal principle of 'one law for all' (UKIP Manifesto 2017: 35) and 'racism and discrimination as a kind of patriotism' (Liberal Democrats Manifesto 2017: 69).



### 2.3.3) SECURITY AND UNITY OVERCOMING/OVERSHADOWING MINORITY STATUS: 'WE WILL NEVER LET THEM WIN'

As the campaign evolves and is influenced by the political and social salience of the terrorist attacks, the topic of security becomes more dominant and discourses emphasise the intersection between security, migration and minority status. May stresses her track record as Home Secretary in her TV appearances. In Question Time, she answers the question why she is to be trusted as PM as follows:

I said we would do something about extremist hate preachers, and I excluded more than any Home Secretary before me. I said I would do something about 'stop and search' because I don't think anybody should be stopped and searched on the streets of our country because of the colour of their skin. I said I would be tough on crime, and I said I would ensure our police and Security Services would have the powers they need to be able to do their job and I gave them those in the legislation that I put through. And I made sure we kept the records of criminals and terrorists on the DNA Database.

May seeks to establish herself as trustworthy and as a politician who sticks to her plan, something that may have been worth stressing given her previous promise not to call a snap election. Perhaps partly because of her decision to opt for a presidential style in the Conservative election campaign she emphasises her personal role as Home Secretary – note the structure of the above quotation: *I said..../ did..../ said..../ did..../ did..../ did....*. She grounds her trustworthiness in issues of security, a policy area which is said to require 'strong and stable leadership' after the attacks in Manchester and London (Conservative Manifesto 2017: 4). In this answer, she both appeals to a safety focused, anti-extremist and anti-terrorist agenda – which may have resonated with popular anti-Islamic imaginaries in the post-Manchester political climate – and anti-discrimination and BAME equality rhetoric. Syntactically, the BAME equality statement is sandwiched between 'tough on terrorists' speech.

Striking a different tone after the London Bridge attack, Sadiq Khan's official statement aimed to establish unity among 'innocent' people regardless of migration, BAME or visiting status. He set out a juxtaposition between 'these coward terrorists' and 'innocent Londoners and visitors'. His use of the term 'visitors' refers to the city's many tourists and supplements his inclusion of non-British people, combined with his status as the first BAME mayor of London, and the public imaginary of the diverse 'city of Londoners'. Furthermore, he emphasises the 'we' of community rather than the "I" of strong government. Sadiq Khan is a Muslim and clearly felt it necessary to speak as a representative of the 'Muslim community' even though that was not his political position. In the vigil at London Bridge, flanked by two women, (White) Home Secretary Amber Rudd and (Black) Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott, he began his speech by expressing unity across political divides:

'We stand together tonight to honour the memories of the innocent lives lost and people injured in the barbaric attack in our city on Saturday night. London stands in defiance against this cowardly attack on our city, our people, our values and our way of life.'

'As the mayor of London, I want to send a clear message to the sick and evil extremists who commit these hideous crimes. We will defeat you. You will not win.'

'And as a proud a patriotic British Muslim I say this: You do not commit these disgusting acts in my name.'

'Your perverse ideology has nothing to do with the true values of Islam. You will never succeed in dividing our city.'

This is notable for its handling of 'us' and 'them' and how the Mayor positions himself. He begins with an assertion of 'we-ness' and continues to reiterate 'our', juxtaposing the 'we' with the 'you'. He also inserts his racialised identity into the speech. This is significant since a White, non-Muslim mayor would not have to rebut

any suspicion that this act was in his name. An Asian, Muslim mayor does. This is not asserted, it is simply 'known'. Sadiq Khan speaks first 'as the mayor of London', but then as the representative of the Muslim community, a community which has not necessarily elected him but which he is seen to speak for on account of his ethnicity and religion. He declares himself not only a British Muslim (which we know he is) but a British Muslim who is 'proud and patriotic', presumably proud of Britishness and of Islam, and clear that allegiance to Britain is not in contradiction with Muslim identity.

In her speech after the London Bridge attack, May similarly stressed unity while playing on the name of the country by saying that 'we need to live our lives not in a series of separated, segregated communities, but as one truly *United Kingdom*'. Apart from stressing unity, juxtaposing labels such as 'innocent' versus 'coward' and statements employing a 'winning' narrative are a recurring occurrence after these and other attacks. For example, Sadiq Khan wants to make it clear 'that we will never let them win', and Paul Nuttall mentioned that suspending the UKIP campaign after the Manchester attack would 'allow the terrorists to win'. In their comparison between popular sports and anti-terrorist discourses, Lean et al. (2013: 450) point out that 'fighting terrorism' is likened to winning at the Olympics or football through a discourse in which the other 'team' is described as 'disgusting', 'cowardly', and 'awful', and 'fighting' and 'winning' are often equated too. May furthermore stated in her speech after the London Bridge attack that 'the evil ideology of Islamic extremism' will 'only be defeated when we turn people's minds away from this violence and make them understand that our values – pluralistic British values – are superior to anything offered by the preachers and supporters of hate'. Again, the rhetoric alludes to a game of values at the end of which one team 'wins' and the other is 'defeated'.

#### **2.2.4) DISCUSSION**

Interdiscursivity shows that official narratives aimed at a 'core' of the mainstream British public. This core is discursively constructed to be made up out of 'ordinary' British people who 'deserve better' by virtue of their nature of being 'hardworking citizens' but who have been forgotten by political elites who rule for the 'privileged few'. Both Labour and Conservatives aim to shorten the symbolic distance between party and voter, the difference being that Labour uses 'us' and 'we', while the Conservative Party states 'to govern in the interest of the British public'. Conservatives equate common characteristics between voter and politician ('hardworking' and 'honest') but ultimately portray themselves as leaders, rather than part, of the people whose 'interests' they seek to recognise. Similarly, May's 'I said... I do...' narrative and the presidential tone in her speech after the London Bridge attack reinforce her and her party's positioning as leaders of the public who govern on behalf of rather than being a part of the public itself. It is important to point out that this is not simply an ideological difference, as the Conservative Party was in government and the Labour Party in opposition. It is therefore more difficult for the Conservative Party to present itself as the underdog than it is for the Labour Party.

Outside of this core are people who are not British citizens or who are not in the position to be 'hardworking', addressed through separate narratives and policy proposals. These groups outside the core are separated into distinct categories of 'BME voters', 'EU citizens' and 'migrant workers' and are addressed and discussed according to these labels with their category-specific policy issues and injustices.

Claims of justice as political representation are made in the case of BAME voters specifically, while the other two aforementioned minority labels are not involved in such discourses, potentially as they may be assumed not to have the right to vote in the general election. As such, 'EU citizens' and 'migrant workers' are talked *about* but not *to*. This is not to say they are not involved in discourses of justice and fairness, as exemplified by the diverging opinions regarding migrant rights after Brexit and the notion of 'sustainable' or 'balanced' migration.

Debates show a dialogue between some of the political parties, yet the low visibility of the Conservative campaign on TV and a 'head-to-head' between the two major parties are noticeable. The BAME and migration



advocacies analysed mostly operate using independent, online channels of communication, but often engage directly with party narratives.

### **3) EVENT 2: GRENFELL TOWER FIRE**

#### **3.1) CONTEXT**

Grenfell Tower stood in an area of West London known as North Kensington, also referred to as Ladbrooke Grove or W10, in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC). It is an ethnically and socio-economically mixed area with both double-fronted Victorian houses and post-war council estates. While average property prices compiled by the housing portal Rightmove exceeded £2 million in RBKC at the time of writing, the English Indices of Deprivation 2015 showed that the area around the tower was among the 10% most deprived in England. The 'Windrush' migrants who were brought in from the Caribbean to work in the UK after the Second World War 'often found homes in areas of slum or poor housing' such as Notting Hill in North Kensington which they restored and refurbished over the decades (RBKC 2016). The area's recent history is intertwined with different 'waves' of migration, e.g. Irish and German immigrants in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Spanish refugees fleeing the Spanish Civil War in the thirties, and people from northwest Morocco and Algeria since the early seventies (ibid). According to 2011 census data, less than half the residents of the Kensington and Chelsea borough were born in the UK and the area has the highest proportion (38%) of 'residents who describe themselves as belonging to a non-British identity' compared to the rest of Greater London (RBKC 2011: 3). Some 40% of Kensington and Chelsea residents described themselves as 'White British', 29% as 'Other White', 10% as 'Asian/Asian British', 7% as 'Black/Black British', 6% as 'mixed', and 4% as 'Arab' (idem: 6). The area is known for the Notting Hill carnival, set up in the sixties when the inhabitants of the area 'welcomed a dash of colour to what was then a down-at-heel district' and 'race relations in Notting Hill were a constant difficulty' (Muir 2011). The 2017 carnival opened with a tribute to the victims of the fire (Guardian 2017).

The local Council has long been dominated by the Conservative Party, which won 37 out of 50 seats in the 2014 elections (12 went to the Labour Party and 1 to Liberal Democrats). However, in the 2017 general election which took place a week before the fire, the Labour MP candidate was elected by a narrow margin of 20 votes (RBKC 2018a). At civil society level, Grenfell residents are represented by Lancaster West Residents Association (LWRA), a democratic body whose membership is open to residents of Lancaster West council estate (of which the tower was part). According to its Constitution, one of the Association's core aims is to "act as a collective voice in matters which affect [members'] rights regarding the management, maintenance and improvement of their homes, local amenities and the local environment" (Article 3b). This is done in consultation with the Council and its TMO, an arm's-length organisation created in the 1990s to manage the social housing stock.

On paper, the TMO empowered tenants by allowing them to elect over half of its board members (the remainder being Council appointees and independents). This structure had been designed to avoid the Council's loss of control on social housing at a time when Conservative policy encouraged its privatization. It was thus a radical move that had received widespread support from residents themselves (Apps 2017). In practice, however, some residents (especially those of Lancaster West Estate, who had its own independent management board until it was abolished in 2013) encountered difficulties translating their claims to the TMO. In 2008, to address mounting complaints, the RBKC appointed an independent adjudicator to assess the level of discontent and identify ways of improving the TMO. The adjudicator's report portrayed a general culture of neglect and underperformance, manifested through lack of response to requests for repairs, poor quality of works effectively carried out, disrespectful behaviour among TMO staff and insufficient oversight by board members.

Recommendations included launching a process of mediation/conciliation to build relationships between the TMO and aggrieved residents, training TMO board members, conducting TMO staff appraisals to reinforce respect for residents, improving communication between the Council and the TMO, and creating a separate committee to oversee TMO performance (Memoli 2009). Subsequent annual reports and surveys produced by the TMO depicted a well-functioning organisation, positively evaluated by a large majority of residents.

In recent years the North Kensington area has been undergoing major 'regeneration' projects with 'redeveloped' estates, replacement of 538 Council properties and a 'rebranding' of Portobello Square (Masey 2016). In February 2015, the Council issued a commitment to 'only redevelop Council estates if it is possible to rehouse all existing tenants in better homes in the new development or in the nearby area (unless, of course, they choose to move elsewhere)' (RBKC 2015). However, a BBC investigation found that it had levied some £60 million in fees since 2011 from developers who had failed to build the required proportion of social housing. In addition, nearly half of the funds it had received to build affordable homes since 2009-2010 remained unspent, exacerbating the shortage of housing options for low-income residents (BBC 2017).

As other social housing tenants, Lancaster West residents were worried about the implications of such trends for their future in the borough. In 2010, some of them came together to create the Grenfell Action Group, focused on opposing the construction of a leisure center on a green space near the estate. In the following years, the group broadened its target to the progressive disappearance of social housing and associated gentrification taking place across the borough and London, attributing them to a deliberate policy of 'managed decline' (Grenfell Action Group 2018). As early as January 2013, one of its blog posts reported safety concerns regarding limited access to the Grenfell Tower area for emergency services (Grenfell Action Group 2013a). A blog post from the same year raises concerns about faulty electrical supply and insufficient emergency exits for residents (Grenfell Action Group 2013b). According to the same blog, the group received a letter from the RBKC Council legal services requesting the removal of posts containing 'direct accusations of unfounded criminal actions', considered as 'harassment' and 'defamatory'.

Residents' concerns were not converted into representation on a formal political level but rather represented as troublemaking and even at the formal political level it proved difficult to raise issues. In a press statement to the Guardian after the fire, Councillor Judith Blakeman (who was also a member of the TMO board) stressed that she brought forward residents' complaints regarding the installation of gas pipes in the main staircases of TMO buildings. According to Blakeman's account, TMO responded by including protective boxes around the gas pipes but declined the Councillor's request for an independent safety adjudication of Grenfell Tower (Booth and Wahlquist 2017). In addition, the London Fire Brigade had ordered TMO to make safety improvements to two tower blocks in 2015 after a blaze in Adair Tower in North Kensington leading to several residents being hospitalized after suffering from smoke inhalation, but according to Grenfell Action Group (2016) these improvements were not executed.

In the immediate aftermath of the fire, a large number of community groups and individuals organized to provide emergency assistance to survivors and defend their interests, spurred by what was widely perceived as a slow and inadequate response from public authorities. Some of them, such as LWRA and Grenfell Action Group, were already well-established in the area. Others took shape specifically as a response to the fire, such as Justice4Grenfell, which has been playing a key role in the organisation of monthly silent marches in honour of the victims, and BMELawyers4Grenfell, a coalition of BAME lawyers and activists who have mounted challenges against specific government actions. One of those actions was the creation by the Prime Minister of a Public Inquiry on the causes of the fire and the immediate response of public authorities, chaired by retired judge Sir Martin Moore-Bick. The Inquiry published its terms of reference on the 10<sup>th</sup> August 2017 and officially opened on the 14<sup>th</sup> of September. The composition, remit and procedures of the Inquiry triggered considerable controversy, with local residents pushing for a more diverse panel of experts, a broader investigation into the fire's long-term causes and more community participation in the hearings. By the 12<sup>th</sup> of February 2018, 521

survivors, residents of the Tower, family members of the deceased or injured and other persons with a significant interest in the Inquiry had been granted the status of core participants enabling them to receive evidence, make statements and suggest lines of questioning for witnesses (Grenfell Tower Inquiry 2017, 2018). Evidential hearings were scheduled to start in May 2018 (Grenfell Tower Inquiry 2018).

At local authority level, residents and activists have also been invited to express their grievances and hold political representatives to account through the Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee, made up of 9 councillors (7 Conservatives and 2 Labour) and 2 co-opted residents, with 2 more seats remaining vacant (RBKC 2018b). Since October 2017, the Scrutiny Committee has been meeting on a monthly basis in Notting Hill Methodist Church, a stone's throw from Grenfell Tower. Like the Public Inquiry, the Scrutiny Committee has been widely broadcast and attracted considerable media attention, as well as criticisms for its limited representativeness and engagement with residents' concerns (Pasha-Robinson 2018; Thompson 2018).

### **3.2) SAMPLE**

For this country report, 19 documents were selected for in-depth analysis of both argumentative content and use of linguistic devices. Focusing on discourses of political representation and justice in official narratives, we selected statements and reports issued by national and local authorities before and after the fire. Apart from looking at official narratives from the Government, the Home Office, the RBKC Council and the TMO, statements made by individual politicians such as Jeremy Corbyn and Labour MP David Lammy<sup>2</sup> were included to account for a view from the opposition.

The advocacy groups included as actors in this analysis include Grenfell Action Group and LWRA as community-led groups that were involved in the area both before and after the fire. Islamic Relief was selected as a nation-wide charity that offered support in the immediate aftermath of the fire and has a religious outlook. The Movement for Justice campaign is a community initiative that came about after the fire and employs different means of communication such as Facebook rather than traditional media.

These 19 documents provided the basis for our first coding of narratives, which was conducted without pre-existing theoretical framework. This inductive analysis brought several themes to the fore, such as the representation of the community in traditional media and official narratives, narratives of blame and healing, gaining access to political representation, migration and undocumented status, and social housing.

Based on these initial themes we contacted a set of actors including LWRA, Justice4Grenfell and BME Lawyers for Grenfell, as well as Labour Councillor Judith Blakeman, elected in Grenfell Tower's Notting Dale ward and a member of the Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee. We conducted 6 interviews over the course of January-February 2017 which lasted between 1 and 2 hours each. In these interviews we asked respondents questions about their understanding of the 'Grenfell community', the root causes of the fire, their engagement with institutions and the media, and their understanding of political (in)justice.

These interviews were transcribed and deductively coded based on the themes that arose from the initial document analysis. Coding and analysis were conducted manually due to the small number of interviews and transcription by different research assistants. The interview and discourse analysis required attending to silences, which can be just as meaningful as explicit narratives. Such silences can be rendered visible by referencing outwards to the institutional and societal context in which the narrative is produced and by making connections across sources. Different frameworks of discourse analysis were compared to assess their suitability

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<sup>2</sup> A family friend of David Lammy's died in the fire.

within selected sources and validity across different sources and within their social-political context. The document analysis was revisited after the interviews to facilitate comparison among narratives.

### **3.3) DESCRIPTION OF DISCOURSES IDENTIFIED**

#### **3.3.1) AUTHORITY VERSUS COMMUNITY**

Immediate support on the ground by emergency services were described by May as both 'heroic' and 'not good enough' (May 2017: para 3-4). Similarly, Corbyn writes in his first press statement after the fire that he gives 'thanks to the firefighters who risked their lives to save the lives of others, and the police and the paramedics who did the same' (2017a: para 8). The role of authorities is ambiguous across narratives and not univocally considered to be 'good'. For example, the Grenfell Tower fire emergency instructions advised residents to stay in their flats in case of fire. In an interview with journalist Owen Jones, Labour MP David Lammy (2017) reflects on the fire protocol and says: 'Good people do what they are told, and they stay in their flats', thereby creating a dichotomy between 'good people' and 'bad authorities' who 'ignored' and 'let them suffocate'.

Media reports and civil society organisations have highlighted the importance of the 'local community' during and in the immediate aftermath of the fire. In a press statement Zia Salik from Islamic Relief UK (2017) details the organisation's response to the fire and notes that 'the community has come forward' and 'was overwhelming'; 'the whole neighbourhood, the churches, the mosques, everyone knows someone who was in the tower'. Members of the local community involved in the justice-seeking advocacy groups have also underpinned this narrative of absent authorities but an active community providing each other with support. In our interview with Judy Bolton, founding member of the community group Justice4Grenfell, the absence of an organized and empathic response of local and national government is a recurring theme. Judy explains what the immediate aftermath of the fire looked like:

This was five days after, and there was still no response from officials. I saw a man carrying mattresses tied to his back, he was carrying them to the church, because he knew people were sleeping on floors... So that someone could sleep. There were mums with their children by their side, who were walking with their buggies, and in the buggy, there were bags of clothes.

This community-focused narrative critiques the limited support from 'authorities' such as the RBKC Council and the UK Government and consequently 'community' is defined in opposition to authorities, the Council and the Government. A week after the fire, LWRA (2017: para 1) released a statement requesting that 'all levels of the council are held to account' which juxtaposed council representatives who 'carry responsibility' with 'victims' who deserve 'real respect and justice'. LWRA also formally requested the leader of RBKC Council Nicholas Paget Brown's resignation:

specifically because although even the PM has confirmed the response from the RBKC to the Grenfell disaster was not adequate, NPB still insists on the news that RBKC does a great job and takes credit for the work of our tight-knit community, of which the council has had nothing to do with' (LWRA 2017: para 3).

Apart from critiquing the inadequate response from local government, this narrative takes issue with Paget-Brown taking credit for community solidarity and thereby defines the work of the community in opposition to that of the Council. Paget-Brown announced his resignation one week after the statement was issued (Paget-Brown 2017), in a move that reveals the subordination of councillors' perceived legitimacy to their capacity and willingness to advance the interests of those under their authority. In this case, councillors are portrayed as pursuing their own personal agenda, thus misusing the power that has been conferred to them by the 'community'. In a context of massive loss of life, suffering and trauma, one could argue that even Hobbes'

minimal conception of the social contract (according to which rulers should protect first and foremost the life and limb of their subjects) had been violated.

It is important to stress that the 'community' is not a self-evident concept. Who is deemed to be a part of it is contested even among those who identify as members. A local activist states: 'I know people from the tower that consider everybody that's involved in anything to do with it [to be community members], so volunteers, and locals, and survivors, family'. This is contrasted to those who say 'No, no, just us in the tower'. Councillor Judith Blakeman describes the Grenfell community as 'a range of communities, but they are all interconnected'.

The perceived dichotomy between the community and government officials was fostered by mistrust and the threat of a potential cover-up. Describing officials' lack of engagement in the days after the fire, Judy Bolton explains:

We then found on the RBKC website, and typed in Grenfell, and I am also on the TMO, which is the housing association, and all of the meetings are public, they are in the public domain, because minutes are taken... and we typed in Grenfell, and we found all the information was gone, the papers, the headings were there, but the information was not available. So, we then started thinking 'why would this be taken down?'. And it was then, I think, alarm bells started ringing, we got still no response, it was two weeks...

Mistrust of authorities also came to the fore in an interview with Joe Delaney, member of LWRA and the Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee as well as core participant in the Inquiry, when discussing the purpose of 'regeneration' works carried out on Grenfell Tower:

When it was decided that the building would be regenerated as opposed to demolished, the bulk of the money spent on that regeneration was spent on the exterior, which didn't do any of the residents any good whatsoever. The residents of the tower would rather have things like decent lifts and better quality facilities within the properties.

Likewise when it comes to the Council's policy of 'managed decline':

Lots of Councils pursue a policy of what is known as managed decline, which is where they allow an area to become so run down that the only possible solution to correct the problem is to bulldoze it and start again. But what tends to happen in those cases is that the percentage of properties in a particular area that are social housing is reduced, in some cases, to zero.

Residents' opposition of the community to authorities is echoed in London Mayor Sadiq Khan's public letter to the PM:

'There is considerable mistrust and anger amongst the community, particularly directed towards those in positions of authority. A concerted effort is therefore required by Government and then the Chair of the Inquiry to explain to the community the Public Inquiry process, in particular the timescales involved and the likely milestones' (2017: para 3).

'It is therefore essential to ensure that families, survivors and civil society groups have a role in drawing up the Terms of Reference for the Public Inquiry and are consulted on where Inquiry hearings are held as any attempt to exclude them from the process risks further fueling mistrust' (idem: para 8).

Indeed, some actors excluded from core participant status by the Inquiry have raised questions regarding the reasons for denial, as discussed by Zita Holbourne, co-founder of Black Activists Rising Against the Cuts (BARAC) and active member of BMELawyers4Grenfell:

Looking at how many people have been rejected as core participants, is there a pattern here? Are they deliberately excluding people who are asking difficult questions, as that is what it seems to us. Because we were told we can't be a core participant, but we have been there from the very beginning and we are made up of survivors and families and local community members of Lancaster Estate who were directly impacted, how do we not meet the status of core participant?

The lack of local political representation in the years before the fire, the absence of national and local authorities in the aftermath, the threat of a cover-up and issues of engagement in the Inquiry have led to mistrust and a community which is defined in opposition to the authorities. This can be contrasted with the language employed by PM Theresa May in a statement on meeting victims of the 'Grenfell Tower Tragedy', according to which the 'government is there for them' (2017: para 2). Announcing the Public Inquiry, she stresses it will be 'open and transparent' and that 'Government and ministers will cooperate fully' (para.13). In this way, she simultaneously reinforces democratic ideals of government accountability and the notion that her own administration complies with this ideal.

### **3.3.2) VICTIMHOOD, CLASS AND MIGRATION STATUS: CULTIVATING EMPATHY, COUNTERING STIGMA**

In the aftermath of the fire, the Home Office offered 'migrant survivors' the possibility to claim a 12-month leave to remain in the UK with access to state support and assistance. In addition, the RBKC Council announced an amnesty from prosecution for illegal subletting for Grenfell tenants 'to encourage tenants who have not yet done so to come forward with information to assist in confirming the identities of the victims of the Grenfell Tower fire' (RBKC 2017: para.2). RBKC describes this amnesty as in the 'public interest' and hopes that 'all residents feel able to come forward without delay and without any worries as to the consequences'.

By September 2017 the Independent reported that few residents had come forward to take up the 12-month amnesty (Bulman 2017). Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott criticised the offer in a public letter to Home Secretary Amber Rudd as a 'partial measure' which put undocumented residents at risk of deportation after the 12 months had passed: 'to access all the support they need without fear of deportation, any survivors or their family members concerned about their status must be given indefinite leave to remain' (Abbott 2017: para 2, 5). Barrister Jolyon Maugham who volunteered after the fire declared 'I've been told by a number of different sources that individuals were receiving medical treatment outside the NHS from charities because they were afraid to come forward to the NHS because they feared it would lead to their information being passed to the Home Office' (Bulman: para 13).

It is interesting to note that the illegal subletting amnesty was not subject to a time restriction in contrast to the original Home Office 'amnesty' offer. It appears that while in both cases the aim is to provide justice to victims of the fire and their families by being able to identify who was present in the building, undocumented status does (or at least initially did) weigh heavier than the call for justice. Yielding to mediatised criticism, the Home Office extended the limited leave beyond the 12-month period on the 11<sup>th</sup> of October 2017, stating that those who qualify for the initial policy could 'qualify for permanent residence after five years', subject to meeting security, criminality and fraud checks' (Home Office 2017: 6). However, the route to permanent residence did not apply to 'relatives of those directly affected by the fire'.

Despite its shortcomings, including the fact that procedures for extending leave may generate anxiety among a group that has shown fear of authorities and reluctance in coming forward until now, the amnesty proposal shows some recognition of the personhood of undocumented immigrants, who are routinely denied the most fundamental rights. By publicly acknowledging the suffering of undocumented survivors and, above all, by offering material support to help them recover, the Home Office accepts responsibility for these human beings by virtue of their mere residence on state territory. In other words, it accepts that dignity and justice can



sometimes trump border control and mandate the inclusion of those who do not fulfil the political community's formal membership criteria. This response is triggered by the discourses of victimhood emanating from institutions but also activists. Referring to the immediate aftermath of the fire, Islamic Relief described 'a state of helplessness, but the community has risen above it' and 'tries to keep their spirits high to help and support people in this situation', 'giving them a shoulder to cry on, giving them some moral support, spiritual support even'. Another activist recounts:

And then one family that lost all of their children. I know one child that's orphaned and lost all of their family, including parents. Some people have lost wives or husbands, but, maybe they got out with their kids. So there's different levels of grieving going on albeit for different reasons. Yeah, post-traumatic stress disorder, which is going to kick in really bad right about now because the chaos stops and the stress...

This narrative emphasises the exceptional 'level of grieving' affecting victims' family members, but according to the interviewee victimhood also extends to the neighbours or acquaintances of Grenfell residents:

But then look at their neighbours. They lost their neighbours. All these local people, most of them knew somebody, at least one person that died in there. The people that used to come out of there and watch the shop, there's an old man who lives over there. I managed to get loads of things to send him. But he used to stand on his balcony and every morning all the kids, he's a Black guy, but all the kids when they went to school in the morning, they said hi to him. It was like that little bloke in the thing. All them kids are dead. Eight of them.

In this description, victimhood is thus conceived as a blurry, complex and subjective concept, irreducible to clear-cut definitions in terms of place or residence, physical harm or parentage. For public authorities, on the other hand, victimhood can (or must) be precisely delimited, not least because it determines the boundaries of the political community and the rights it confers. It includes 'those directly affected' by the fire, but not secondary victims such as their family members, and certainly not their neighbours and acquaintances.

Portrayals of victimhood can create the emotional conditions of compassion and solidarity, but they also run the risk of conveying helplessness (as the above quote demonstrates) and even undeservingness. Several voices have thus forcefully opposed these discourses around the amnesties as they conflate the area with undocumented migrants and illegal subletting. As Judy Bolton explains:

Theresa May set the tone of the Government. Her first statement was 'yes our response has been slow, but we would like to say that anyone who was living in the tower on that evening, but who doesn't have a right to stay, or that those who are on benefits, we want you to come forward, because we want to make sure you get the support, an amnesty'. So that's in the psyche of the nation. And the media, when they filmed people to talk about their experience, they just filmed Muslim women, often wearing the hijab. So, it looked like they had just come to this country (...). And people started talking 'you are never going to know who was in that tower' and 'I bet all of these people are subletting'. While in that tower, there were people who lived there for three or four generations. It was a very diverse community. And the majority of people had their own businesses. We had people who were nurses, those who were doing the zero-hour jobs.

This counter narrative seeks to contest the portrayal that relies on labels regarding undocumented status and subletting by pointing at the diversity of the community both in migration and worker status. Another local community activist stresses the diversity, positive contribution and overall deservingness of residents, criticizing the biases and ignorance underlying media's obsession with poverty:

There was a news story about how poverty and poor people were stuck in this situation, and I think a lot of people resented that, because again the message that sends is that there's a problem with people being poor. A lot of these people were working people with full-time jobs, working in the NHS, serving people in the very serious committed and very skilled jobs. But they happened to be there for a set of reasons that had nothing to do with them, or people who were poor, or people who were impoverished. [...] I think people resented that because actually they felt very happy with what they were doing in the world, what contribution they were making.

Expressions such as 'working people with full-time jobs', 'serious', 'committed' and 'very skilled' stress the capacities and worth of Grenfell residents as active agents, 'doing' things and making 'contributions' to the world. Regarding debates on undocumented migrants who found themselves in the Tower, the interviewee adds:

I think it paints the picture of somewhere which is characterized by dysfunction, lack of legality, a ghetto, which stays in people's mind as of houses with 2 bedrooms with 15 family members living in mattresses and the toilet or-- it wasn't explicit but it was there and blaming of the situation on people who shouldn't really be there in the first place. So I think that's one part of it. An attempt to spin and characterize the situation in a certain way that fits into some media story. But also the desire to avoid any kind of structural explanation. And that's where the obsession with the undocumented -- there wasn't anything about their lives, or why they were undocumented, or what happened, or what other policies were affecting them.

This draws attention away from poverty and undocumented status as (stigmatised) personal characteristics in order to highlight their politically constructed nature and open the door to a more positive appraisal of individuals themselves. In this way, the local community activist seeks to retain the solidarity-enhancing properties of victimhood while getting rid of its stigmatising aspects. Zita Holbourne similarly displays an acute awareness of the labels and stereotypes used to describe the inhabitants of social housing in the area:

The people who are most often placed in tower blocks are people who are considered to be of the lowest denomination. 'We will just stick them in there'. And I lived in one those blocks because I got emergency housing, and yes, that is the first thing they offer you. They are working class people, the majority of them, so there is that stigma and discrimination applied to them as well. There is race discrimination. There is islamophobia, because it is a large number of Muslim people living in there.

Despite the diversity of the community highlighted above, an intersection of different derogatory labels and discourses have been applied to the inhabitants of the area and are only further entrenched by the official amnesties for subletting and undocumented residents. These axes of social difference are also mobilised by the protest movement Justice By Any Means. In their statement calling for a march to Parliament demanding 'Justice for Grenfell', the movement stated that the 'combustible cladding was put on Grenfell Tower to hide raw concrete from the delicate eyes of wealthy homeowners and millionaire investors with no concern for safety' (2017: para 5). The protest call draws on dichotomies of raw/delicate, working class/wealthy, safety/profit, resident/homeowner or investor, and immigrant/citizen.

Similarly relying on the 'working class' versus 'wealthy' dichotomy, Corbyn describes the Kensington area as 'a tale of two cities - it is among the wealthiest parts of this country but the ward where this took place is one of the poorest' (Corbyn 2017a: para 5). In his reply to the PM's public apology for the immediate response



to the fire, Corbyn argues that ‘from Hillsborough<sup>3</sup> to the child sex abuse scandal to Grenfell Tower the pattern is consistent, working class people’s voices are ignored, their concerns dismissed, by those in power’ (2017b: para 9).

### **3.3.3) GAINING ‘ACCESS’: REPRESENTATION AND ADVOCACY**

In response to the highly mediatised criticism of the lack of sprinklers and working fire alarms, potentially illegal cladding on the building, and TMO fire safety management which included instructions for residents to stay in their flats, the TMO (2017: para 1) issued a statement noting they were ‘aware that concerns have been raised historically by residents. We always take all concerns seriously and these will form part of our forthcoming investigations. While these investigations continue with our co-operation, our core priority at the moment is our residents’. In a later statement on the website, the firm emphasises its role in providing care for local residents by ‘going door-to-door, calling on each home in the finger blocks to offer advice and support’. By ‘going door-to-door’, TMO plays on an imagery of a ‘hands-on’ approach with little distance between residents and institutions.

This discourse of an accessible TMO stands in sharp contrast with the mistrust of residents and several narratives referring to occasions on which members of the community have raised concerns but were ignored by the TMO and the Council. Resident and former chair of the Residents Association for Grenfell David Collins declared in his press statement the day of the fire that Councillors refused to investigate the safety concerns he had voiced on behalf of TMO residents: ‘They [the Council] wouldn’t believe that the residents were concerned. Ninety percent of residents signed an independent petition asking for there to be an investigation into the organisation that runs this building because they were so incompetent. And the Council turned it down’. Collins highlights a failure of local residents to have their safety concerns taken into account either by the Council or the TMO, who are constructed as being ‘incompetent’ in providing representation.

Labour Councillor Judith Blakeman, who also sits on the Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee, agrees that residents’ concerns have been ignored over the past decades:

At the moment, we have 50 Councillors. We have 2 Liberal Democrats, 11 Labour Councillors, and all the rest are Conservative. It’s always been a Conservative borough ever since it was set up in the year 1900. What that means is that the interests of the people who vote Labour tend to be overridden and in recent years, in my view, what we’ve had has in fact been an elected dictatorship that has not listened to any concerns from the poorer parts of the borough that are represented by Labour.

Councillor Blakeman situates responsibility for representative failures in the ‘elected dictatorship’ of Conservative Councillors who can rely on a stable majority. This indirectly frees opposition Councillors from responsibility for the cited neglect. She also adds that not only residents’ concerns but also those of opposition Councillors have been ignored by the TMO and Council:

The review [of the refurbishment by the TMO] that they undertook was absolutely pointless [...] They claimed that there were only seven complaints raised during the whole refurbishment practice, now I know that is absurd because I myself submitted at least 19 complaints on behalf of residents and the residents themselves submitted far more than 19 complaints. However, this report was referred back to the Housing and Property Scrutiny community which accepted

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<sup>3</sup> The Hillsborough disaster was a human crush at Hillsborough football stadium in Sheffield, England on 15 April 1989 resulting in 96 deaths and 766 injuries. The main cause of the disaster was found to be poor police control, but this finding was only after sustained media and police cover-ups.

it and congratulated the TMO on a really well-done job. They took no notice of any of the written representations that I'd made, that residents have made or any of the recommendations that we produced.

Later in the interview, Councillor Blakeman adds that the TMO board, of which she was expelled for discussing the fire with the media, is not provided with accurate information on residents' letters and complaints, presumably as the executive seeks 'to keep the contract with Council'. However some disagree with the shift of responsibility. Grenfell Action Group alleges a lack of representation by Councillor Blakeman, who they stress is also a 'ward councillor of long standing who does a lot of casework on behalf of many of the poorest and most disadvantaged residents of North Kensington' and who should 'know full well, if only as a result of this casework, the unpalatable truth about the culture of negligence, incompetence and abuse that is rampant among TMO officers at all levels of the organisation' (Grenfell Action Group 2015: para 5). Similarly, Joe Delaney argues that the opposition status of Labour 'is still not really an excuse for the behaviour of Labour politicians' and states that these Councillors should 'have engaged with the community as a whole at an earlier date'.

In addition to formal representation and attempts to access Councillors and resident members of the TMO board, which did not bear fruit in the years leading up to the fire, advocacy groups can provide an alternative route to political representation for residents. After the fire, different discourses address the forms of advocacy that are deemed to be the most just, community based, and effective. Again, diverging views reflect the diversity of the local community (or communities) which is presented as bringing about difficulties for community-based advocacy. As Zita Holbourne points out, 'there are also people who claim to speak on behalf of family members and survivors, but they are not necessarily a collective voice. And you can't be a collective voice for everybody, because there is always going to be that variation'.

Both Justice4Grenfell and BMELawyers4Grenfell can be seen as umbrella organisations or networks that function by filtering community concerns and channelling them through to particular political arenas. For example, Justice4Grenfell representatives attend the Grenfell Recovery Scrutiny Committee and strategy meetings, raising issues they have observed among their personal networks, such as outdated baby food items and compensation money that has not been paid in time to survivors. Similarly, BMELawyers4Grenfell communicates community concerns to shadow cabinet MPs, the national civil service, the Charity Committee or the media, 'depending on the preference of the resident'. They present these forms of advocacy as effective ways of political representation which are trusted by local residents and survivors, unlike the more traditional routes to representation discussed above:

'It's different from our perspective, because people trust us and we work together with people. There is a level of mistrust among some survivors of everybody, and there are many groups engaged with justice for Grenfell. And there may be groups they trust more than others. There is never going to be full trust unless they knew them already.'

'And there were no interpreters, so when we raised this, and I am not saying that we are necessarily the only ones raising these things, but you can see... when we raised things and wrote to the Charity Commission, it did have an impact.'

However, another community activist prefers to operate without an umbrella organisation:

Because we're not under any umbrella, we can ring the Council and go, 'Listen, right. You've got to sort this shit out because this is like blah-blah.' And we can really put pressure on without having anybody above us going, 'Listen, you've got to be polite, and you can't—' We know that we can be as forceful or not as we want. And as we thought of that, we find that's why we've managed to get so much done.

This narrative associates politeness with an umbrella organisation and being impolite with 'getting things done'. Alternatively, umbrella organisations focus on 'having an impact' in a way that is based on 'trust' among community members grounded in long-standing relationships.

### **3.3.4) DISCUSSION**

Inter-discursive analysis shows a marked divergence between official and community narratives regarding both local housing policy and the response to the fire, and what the Grenfell 'community' is like. While the former acknowledges a slow response, it also highlights formal routes of representation and situates hurdles to representation in residents' characteristics, who are described as undocumented and illegally subletting. The latter's discourse emphasises the neglect of local and national authorities and strong community support provided by the diverse range of community members who are 'proud business owners', 'lease holders' and 'hardworking people' of diverse backgrounds.

Looking at the diversity of narratives within these two oppositional sets of discourses, it becomes clear that different organisations and individuals point to different elements obstructing the just representation of residents' concerns. A recurring theme is the influence of class, race and migration status on residents' engagement with the institutions supposed to represent them. Be it the upper-class Conservative majority in Kensington and Chelsea Council, the TMO's negligent executive, the Public Inquiry or the Scrutiny Committee, institutions are rarely perceived as entirely legitimate by Grenfell residents, who often feel overlooked, disrespected and betrayed. While class grievances generally overshadow race and migration in the discourses of the 'community' and the political opposition, several actors also problematize the stigma and discriminations that have compounded the problems of the 'Grenfell community' – a community which readily acknowledges its internal diversity, but also the challenges it poses for political representation.

## **4) CONCLUSION**

By 'representation' in this piece we have focused on political representation - on how people engage with political institutions, and how that engagement influences decision-makers (or not). However, we have also explored how people are represented in public debate and the media, since the two meanings are closely related. Underpinning the politics of representation in both the election and Grenfell Tower are the politics of class, race and migration, their intersections and their contradictions. We have explored firstly how 'the people' were depicted and interpellated in the 2017 election. Both political parties recognised that a substantial number of people considered that their interests had not been properly represented for decades. This acknowledgement had a strong class element, apparent in the frequent use of terms such as 'ordinary' and 'hardworking'. The first of these implicitly criticises a certain kind of identity politics, suggesting whiteness and heterosexuality, but allowing for Blackness and homosexuality (though not queerness) if challenged ('*of course* Black people are 'ordinary families' – why would you think anyone could mean otherwise'). This caveat plays an important role in a context of strong social norms against overt racism. BAME people must be seen to be included. In less official, moderated channels, particularly social media, the limitations of that inclusion are nonetheless exposed. So we have the case of Shadow Home Secretary Diane Abbott subjected to racist and misogynistic abuse on social networks, with its more indefinable and polite reflection in mainstream media. Importantly, the representational counter to identity politics on the basis of class is itself a reiteration of identity politics rather than a politics of

redistribution. The 'real people' is an identity that is tied to (English) nationalism<sup>4</sup> and to an authenticity that is rooted in Whiteness. It is an identity that claims class as an English identity rather than as a relation, meaning that privileged men who in any other context would be seen as the upper class elite, such as Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson or William Rees Mogg, can claim common cause with the 'left behind' and disenfranchised.

Our analysis of the 2017 election material demonstrates how the idea of a disconnected elite that must be brought to heel and made to listen to the 'ordinary people' penetrated the thinking of both major political parties. However, at the same time as acknowledging these complaints and offering to deal with them, both political parties had to deal with the fact that politicians themselves were considered part of the elite. This inherent contradiction could best be managed by deflection – it was the other party that did not understand the 'ordinary person' because it was too removed from their daily struggles. Looking at the opposition turns attention away from oneself. We thus see played out the 'crisis of the institutional basis of just representation' (Bugra, 2017), which both parties promise to redress by putting themselves forward as a mechanism for 'ordinary people' to participate and be represented. In this process, the political participation of 'ordinary people' through voting in a general election is constructed as a self-evidently good thing, for it conforms to an ideal of worker citizen in need of recognition, redistribution and representation.

But what about the political participation of the worker migrant? In this general election but also in national elections more generally, the migrant/citizen divide, the boundary between 'us' and 'the others' that is the subject of the critique of populism, is hardened through the laws that restrict representation to formal citizens. The worker migrant is not portrayed as needing the full range of rights that enable her to develop and exercise her capabilities and functionings, but only limited redistribution and recognition as worker. (At the same time, national elections provide an opportunity to soften, at least rhetorically, the boundary of race, which is explicitly disavowed by anti-discrimination legislation.) This radical exclusion of the worker migrant from participation in national elections is rarely contested or constructed as a 'bad' thing as the exclusion of the 'ordinary' worker citizen would be. Such taken-for-grantedness is particularly striking when contrasted with the eligibility of Commonwealth Citizens to vote and the more complex picture of local-level representation which allows for the vote of EU nationals. Compared with local politics, national politics thus seems to offer little opportunity for Benhabib's 'democratic negotiation of citizenship', the on-going struggle over belonging and rights that continuously redraws the boundaries of the political community. Since general elections are premised on the exclusion of migrants, they offer no mechanism to redress that exclusion, particularly in times of acute hostility that make it most problematic.

Hostility and emotions broadly speaking also play a central role in the politics of Grenfell, where the neglect and contempt of political representatives are matched by the anger of bereaved residents and the larger community. The populist overtones of the political campaign are echoed in Grenfell's rebellion against out-of-touch elites, but in the latter case anti-migrant discourses are neutralized by the strong participation of grassroots organisations and individual activists advocating the interests of migrants and minorities. The anger is thus channelled upwards toward the bureaucracies that limit rather than enhance the capabilities and functionings of working-class and other subordinated people. Together with manifestations of empathy and solidarity, such anger allows these organisations and individuals to assert their membership in the hard-to-define 'local community' of those directly or indirectly affected by the fire and, in some cases, as representatives of this community. In the eyes of institutions, however, it also deprives them of objectivity and thus of legitimacy as key participants in the truth-seeking process of the Public Inquiry. This entrenches even further the cycle of political

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<sup>4</sup> Britain is not a nation state but a state comprised of four nations: England, N. Ireland, Scotland and Wales, with England very much the dominant force.

exclusion and hostility, contributing to perceptions of a deep incompatibility between the conceptions of political representation held by citizens and their authorities.

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