

Continuity with New Labour? Deconstructing the Triangulation of David Cameron's Conservatives

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Abstract

This paper examines the ideological nature of David Cameron's Conservative party, specifically in relation to the 'triangulated' perspective of the 'Third Way' utilised by New Labour. Continuities between the ideas, discourses, and political tactics guiding Cameron's approach and those used by New Labour are identified. However, while a level of continuity is recognised, it is argued that 'Cameronism' represents a distinctive ideological project in itself, which (selectively) utilises the ideas of New Labour and the Third Way, yet redirects this inherited framework in a deeply anti-statist, (partially) Thatcherite direction.

Keywords: *David Cameron, Conservative Party, New Labour, Third Way, Triangulation.*

Introduction

The legacy of Thatcherism and the dominance of New Labour in government have both proved problematic for the post-Thatcherite Conservative party (Heppell and Seawright 2012a: 2). Significantly for David Cameron, on becoming party leader in 2005, not only did he inherit an electoral landscape irrevocably altered by the impact of New Labour, he was also faced with the (relative) hegemony of New Labour's governing project; in attempting to understand the nature and development of 'Cameronism', then, recognising the significance of New Labour is crucial (Kerr Byrne and Foster 2011: 199). While the problematic of Thatcherism comprises a necessary part of the following analysis, it is the nature of 'Cameronism' and its relationship with New Labour – specifically in terms of ideas, discourses, and political tactics - that will be the prime focus of this paper.

Despite these difficult inheritances, Cameron became prime minister in May 2010 after forming a Coalition with the Liberal Democrats, and has since embarked upon a radical and extensive reform agenda with 'impressive vigour' (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 4). The 'radical' nature of this governing project seemingly caught many commentators by surprise, and the impact of 'Cameronism' on the future of British politics is likely to be vast (Kerr, Byrne and Foster 2011: 195-196). Attempting to deconstruct the ideological content of 'Cameronism', therefore, seems not only a worthwhile academic endeavour, but an essential part of understanding current trajectories in British politics. To do so, the primary lens of analysis, here, will be New Labour, and specifically the 'triangulated' perspective of the Third Way. 'Triangulation' describes a process of ideological and political positioning, by which two seemingly contrasting positions are juxtaposed, and then 'transcended' by the formulation of a third position, which utilises and combines features of these original positions, creating a distinctive (triangulated) perspective which can be positioned as centrist (McAnulla 2010: 292). This formula is not new (Callinicos 2001: 4; Giddens 2000: 1), yet was 'resurrected' by Clinton (Giddens 2001: 1) and utilised by New Labour in the form of the Third Way (Barrientos and Powell 2004: 9). The extent to which Cameron's Conservatives may be utilising similar 'triangulated' ideas to those employed by New Labour has received limited detailed analysis (especially see McAnulla 2010), and this paper aims to contribute to the literature on Cameron by using this analytical lens.



This paper comprises three substantive chapters. The first will examine the ideas of the Third Way – as a construct utilised by New Labour – with the aim of providing an analytical framework from which continuity between Cameron’s Conservatives and New Labour will be assessed. This chapter will initially examine the theoretical foundations of the Third Way, followed by a critical interrogation of the nature of this framework, and the way in which New Labour utilised Third Way ideas. From this foundation, an interpretation of New Labour’s Third Way will be offered, and the key areas over which an analysis of continuity will be based defined.

The second chapter will examine the extent to which Cameron’s ‘modernisation’ of the Conservative party displayed continuity with the ideas, tactics and discourses of New Labour and the Third Way, specifically in relation to Cameron’s period in opposition. Continuity will be identified in terms of Cameron’s triangulated narrative of post-war British politics, Cameron’s broad acceptance of New Labour’s policy framework, and the way that Cameron attempted to transcend political dividing lines in his discourse and in constructing (triangulated) policy. The tensions existing within Cameron’s reconciliatory project, however, will also be recognised. Finally, it will be argued that Cameron’s response to the financial crisis highlighted these existing tensions, yet did not undermine his pre-crisis ideological approach.

The final chapter will extend this analysis, engaging more substantively with the *ideas and values* guiding ‘Cameronism’, specifically through examining key aspects of Cameron’s current governing agenda, such as welfare, public service reform, and expenditure cuts - areas which importantly dominate current narratives in British politics. Two possible interpretations of ‘Cameronism’ will be developed - as displaying continuity with the ideas of New Labour and (/or) Third Way values, or as a type of Thatcherite revisionism – from which an interpretation of ‘Cameronism’ will be forwarded which seeks to reconcile these competing explanations, yet which recognises the significance of ‘Cameronism’ as a distinctive ideological project. The central thesis of this paper is that ‘Cameronism’ (selectively) utilises the ideas of New Labour and Third Way values, yet *redirects* this inherited framework in a deeply anti-statist, (partially) Thatcherite direction. This paper will conclude by summarising these arguments.

1. The Third Way framework

To assess the ideas of the Third Way – as a construct utilised by New Labour - this chapter will initially examine the theoretical justifications and values guiding this triangulated framework, as grounded by the major proponents of the Third Way project - Giddens and Blair. This method of presentation must be met with the initial qualification that Giddens and Blair do not offer analogous accounts of Third Way politics. This (unresolved) difficulty may also be compounded by the fact that the Third Way, when offered by Blair and Giddens, was ‘in the process of construction’ (Giddens 2001a: 3). So, for example, Giddens’ Third Way account has a greater focus on post-materialism than Blair’s, and the two disagree on the cause of contemporary individualism; in this sense, it has been argued that these accounts could be separated between Blair’s ‘social moralist’ Third Way, focused more on communitarian values, and Giddens’ progressive, ‘post-traditionalist’ interpretation (Driver and Martell 2002: 89-91). For the purpose of this chapter, however, these accounts will be encountered together, and through developing the common themes between the two, a clear framework of Third Way politics emerges.

Centrally, the Third Way aims to provide a framework for ‘thinking and policy making’, seeking to renew social democracy within a world which has experienced fundamental change (Giddens 1998a: 26). ‘Change’ plays a significant role within The Third way narrative, and engaging with the implications of this change acts as a critical foundation for the Third Way project (Blair 1998: 6). This change is identified on two, interrelated, fronts.

The first notion of change is political, from which a specific narrative of post-war British politics is constructed. Within this narrative, Britain is seen to have experienced both an excessively statist brand of social democracy, and individualistic neoliberalism in the post-war era; both of these political projects, however, have proved unable to provide a political settlement equipped to deal with change (Blair 1998: 5-6). For Giddens (1998a), ‘socialism’s’ economic theory is seen to have always been ‘inadequate’, underestimating the ability of markets to innovate, increase productivity, and be adaptable to change; the spread of globalisation since the 1970s arguably highlighted this fundamental weakness (4-5). In this sense, ‘old style’ social democracy – characterised by an overly centralised state and a confined market role within a managed economy (Giddens 1998: 7) – while providing ‘formidable achievements’ such as the NHS, was ‘too inflexible’ to respond to change (Blair



1998: 5). Similarly however, while Blair (1998) argues that some Thatcherite economic reforms comprised ‘necessary acts of modernisation’, the neo-liberal ‘antipathy’ towards the public sector meant that the New Right - characterised by a minimal state role and an individualistic, autonomous civil society; a devotion to free market economics and an acceptance of inequality (Giddens 1998a: 8) – was unable to adequately deliver public services, so became a threat to social cohesion (5-6). It is the perceived failure of these two (discursively constructed) post-war political paradigms that defines the triangulated position of the Third Way, as ‘an attempt to transcend both old style social democracy and neoliberalism’ (Giddens 1998a: 26).

The second notion of change constitutes a sociological account of global transformation. For Giddens (1998a), the context for theorising contemporary social democracy is expressed in relation to global ‘dilemmas’ (29-68). The most imperative of these is Globalisation, a process characterised not only by the expansion of global markets (Giddens 1998a: 30), but also the transformation of our experience of space and time (Giddens 1994: 4; 1998: 30-31). This process has a number of important implications for governance – for example, it ‘pushes down’, creating new ‘demands’ and ‘possibilities’ for local identities to be renewed, necessarily changing the role of the state (Giddens 1998: 31-32). Furthermore, the effects of globalisation ‘actually conceived’ are seen to have given rise to the ‘New Individualism’ (Giddens 1998a: 34-37), expressing the notion that we increasingly live our lives as individuals, which means that we must find new ways of producing solidarity; for Giddens, this can no longer be provided by a ‘top-down’ state, but requires us to take responsibility for our own lifestyles, beyond the idea of ‘collective provision’ of ‘old style’ social democracy (1998a: 36-37).

Furthermore, while Left and Right are seen to still exist, this distinction has lost its previous significance; in a similar way that Fukuyama (1992) spoke of ‘the end of history’, Giddens (1998a) argues that ‘no one any longer has alternatives to capitalism’ (43). Instead, it is argued that key modern issues transcend political dividing lines (such as identity politics, or ecological issues), concerning our personal ‘life politics’ decisions - issues that will be increasingly encountered by action and organisation beyond the state (Giddens 1998: 44, 46-53).



Using these accounts of change as a foundation, a theoretical framework of Third Way politics emerges.

(i) Neo-liberal economics. Firstly, the acceptance – and, indeed, embrace - of a dynamic market economy, is a central component of Third Way thinking (Blair 1998: 8-11). This follows the belief that it is the private sector that creates wealth, not the state (Blair 1998: 10) - the Left, then, ‘has to get comfortable with markets’ (Giddens 2000: 34). This faith in the private sector should be seen alongside the utilisation of market mechanisms within the public sector (Giddens 1998a: 100), promoting innovation, competition and efficiency, with the government exercising tight fiscal discipline (Blair 1998: 8). While this economic model may be neo-liberal in character, this embrace of the market must be coupled with an awareness of its ‘socially and culturally destructive power’, which must be encountered and ‘scrutinized’ (Giddens 1998a: 64). In this sense, the government has a clear role to play in terms of social justice.

(ii) Inclusion, opportunity, and social justice. This role of the government in addressing the ill effects of the market and promoting social justice is exemplified by notions of inclusion within Third Way thinking. Giddens (1998a) sees that equality should not be defined in terms of ‘after the event’ distribution, but should be centred around the idea of ‘inclusion’, with the ‘cultivation of human potential’ - through participation, citizenship, access to work and education - as a key driver of government policy (101-103). Redistributive measures should be aimed towards tackling exclusion (Giddens 1998a: 107); indeed, while progressive taxation should be a core part of Third Way politics (Giddens 2001a: 8-9), government’s main focus should be a ‘life-chances approach to equality’, stressing equality of opportunity (Giddens 2001b: 178). Blair echoes this altered conception of equality, emphasising ‘opportunity for all’, with the notion of opportunity intrinsically linked with society (Blair 1998: 3).

(iii) Modernisation of the state, public services, and civil society. From this foundation, the Third Way emphasises the necessity for an altered role of the state and civil society, and a redefinition of the relationship between the two. It is argued that government - or, the ‘social investment state’ - should work in ‘partnership’ with civil society to renew damaged communities (Giddens 1998a: 69). This will be enabled by the cultivation of an ‘active civil society’, centred around harnessing ‘local initiative’, entrepreneurship, and third sector



involvement (Giddens 1998a: 78-83), where the state is to play a role as an ‘enabler’, ‘helping people help themselves’ (Giddens 2001a: 3). This must be coupled with modernisation of public services, where a commitment to continued expenditure should be seen alongside a move away from excessive centralisation, and towards local partnerships and increased autonomy of services at a local level (Blair 1998: 15). This modernisation should be combined with a focus on democratic renewal, especially involving devolution and the reinvigoration of local democracy (Blair 1998: 17). This altered state role has important implications for welfare.

(iv) Positive welfare. For Giddens, the enabling state should look towards a notion of ‘positive welfare’, provided not only by the state, but also by third sector organisations and business (1998a: 127-8). Expenditure will be directed towards generating ‘entrepreneurial spirit’, giving individuals the skills to cope with a ‘world of ‘speeded-up change’, but also to ‘provide security when things go wrong’ (Giddens 1998b: 29). An example of a Third Way welfare strategy is provided by New Labour’s ‘welfare-to-work’ programme, equipping individuals with the skills they need within the modern workplace (Blair 1998: 9). This notion of welfare follows Giddens’ (1994) idea of ‘generative politics’, aiming to provide a framework for reflexive individuals to make their own life decisions (15).

(v) Rights and responsibilities. Finally, Third Way thinking aims to cultivate a new relationship between individuals and civil society, stressing the communitarian theme of individual obligation, and the notion of ‘no rights without responsibilities’ (Giddens 1998a: 65). This ‘new citizenship contract’ should realise that most rights are conditional (for example, within welfare-to-work programmes, the right to welfare is conditional alongside the responsibility to look for work) (Giddens 2003: 4), and should thus be centred upon the maxim, ‘the rights we enjoy reflect the duties we owe’ (Blair 1998: 3-4).

These elements comprise the theoretical basis of the Third Way. As Blair (1998) notes, this framework focuses on reconciliation between themes which have been ‘wrongly’ branded antagonists – such as the new mantra of rights *and* responsibilities, or, in policy terms, measures such as cutting corporation tax *and* introducing a minimum wage (1,7). ‘After a century of antagonism’, New Labour’s key goal was reconciling social justice *and* economic efficiency (Blair 1999). Herein, it is argued, lies the essence of the Third Way, which

(pragmatically, and flexibly) uses these guiding themes as a framework to combine values from contrasting ideological positions in constructing policy (Blair 1998: 1).

Interpreting the Third Way

To make an assessment of the Third Way – as a construct utilised by New Labour - it is necessary to examine interpretations of this framework, alongside an analysis of the way in which New Labour employed Third Way ideas. From this foundation, a specific interpretation of *New Labour's* Third Way will be offered, which will act as a conceptual framework from which continuity with Cameron's Conservatives will be assessed. Before doing so however, it should initially be argued that to reject the Third Way simply as an electoral device, as some critics do (for example, see Lee and Stanley 2006), would fail to recognise a broader attempt to 'redefine the social democratic discourse' from the Left (Bastow and Martin 2003: 46); in this sense, while there may be problematic – indeed, contradictory - features of this framework, a critical engagement with these ideas must attempt to take seriously the ideological terrain offered by the Third Way itself (Leggett 2004: 186).

Initially too, it should be recognised that the Third Way is a discursive construct (Bastow and Martin 2003; Fairclough 2000). An analysis of the language of the Third Way, therefore, offers a useful starting point from which to deconstruct its ideological content. Importantly however, it should not be assumed that this discursive framework is analogous to the material reality of Third Way/New Labour's policy; therefore, an examination of the 'rhetoric-reality dichotomy' (Fairclough 2000: 142-156) – here, between Third Way values and New Labour in government - will play a necessary role in the following analysis. Importantly too - as Fairclough (2000) argues - the reconciliatory discourse of the Third Way (inherent within any triangulated philosophy), such as 'economic dynamism *and* social justice', must be approached with caution; this rhetoric of reconciliation leaves the relationship between dyadic terms unexplained and unscrutinised, therefore acting to shroud possible contradictions between certain values (viii-ix, 16). While this discourse implies equal weight between seemingly incompatible terms, in reality, the relationship of power between these terms may lead to the marginalisation of specific values; for example, emphasis on social justice may be subordinate to the goal of economic dynamism (Fairclough 2000: 11). These



considerations will play an important role in the following analysis, in relation to the discourses employed both by New Labour and Cameron's Conservatives.

Firstly then, it can be seen that the Third Way's justificatory framework for change, and the theoretical implications of this, have been problematised by some critics. For example, Finlayson (1999) argues that the political conclusions of New Labour's Third Way are not drawn from normative claims, but are based solely upon a sociological diagnosis of the condition of society (271). In this sense, the Third Way lacks an 'ethical core' (Finlayson 1999: 274), as the justification for policy is identified as the current socio-economic context, which is seen as both the condition and legitimating factor of economic modernisation (277-287). Therefore, ideas of communitarianism and citizenship expressed within the Third Way are arguably of a secondary concern to these specific accounts of socio-economic processes (Finlayson 1999: 271), where the Third Way interpretation of globalisation is seen to be 'the single most important factor which has transformed our world' (Hall 1998: 11).

It is arguably this commitment to a specific definition of globalisation – as an 'uncontradictory, uni-directional phenomenon' (Hall 1998: 11) - which provides a framework from which the Third Way can depoliticise economic developments, making them seem incontestable (Finlayson 1999: 277-278). The Third Way therefore seeks to limit the possibility of political alternatives through constructing an essentialist programme characterised by the perceived objectivity of its own framework (Bastow and Martin 2003: 67-68). In this way, Finlayson's charge of the Third Way lacking a normative foundation could be contested; its apparently 'neutral' language of sociological description is actually an *unacknowledged normative framework*, where one view of reality is presented as a single, uncontested reality (Rose 1999: 472). The Third Way therefore removes our current experiences of globalisation from their political and ideological context, presenting them as a necessity (Mouffe 2005: 119). This process is enabled through discourse. For example, the nominalisation of change within the Third Way narrative, implying a level of abstraction from actually existing processes of change, implicitly enforces a perception of inevitability surrounding modernisation (Fairclough 2000: 25-29). This is reinforced by discourse emphasising the negative impacts associated with current political practices, constructed both through the language of 'change' (Raco 2002), and through the narrative of crisis employed by the Third Way (Bastow and Martin 2003: 50) (in a similar way that constructing narratives of crisis comprised an essential part of Thatcherite hegemonic strategy - for example, in



terms of discursive constructions of the ‘winter of discontent’ (Hay 1996), or narratives of post-war decline (Tomlinson 2007: 14-15)). This construction of ideological closure through discourse comprises a key feature of Third Way politics.

This interpretation has led some critics to reject the Third Way as an ideological cloak for neo-liberalism (Anderson 2000; Callinicos 2001). It has been argued that the Third Way acts to entrench an existing neo-liberal consensus, suppressing alternatives to this project through ‘subsidiary concessions and softer rhetoric’, thus forming an ‘ideological shell’ for neo-liberalism (Anderson 2000: 7), further radicalising this agenda (Callinicos 2001: 121-123). In this sense, the Third Way’s account of globalisation has been interpreted as a ‘Trojan horse’, from which to ‘smuggle’ neo-liberalism (Dillow 2007: 50).

Similarly, it has been argued that the Third Way framework itself has been used as a means to legitimise neo-liberal ideas (Cammack 2004; Hall 2003; Morrison 2004). In this way, it is argued that the significant feature of New Labour’s triangulation is the existing relationship of power between its conflicting strands – the dominant, neo-liberal strand, is engaged in a ‘transformist’ process with the social democratic, subordinate strand, where the ‘latter always remains subordinate to and dependent on the former, and is *constantly being transformed into* the former, dominant one’ (Hall 2003). In this conception, social democracy is not rejected *per se*, yet where social democratic values are maintained, they are subsumed within the dominant neo-liberal position; for example, ‘modernisation’, in terms of public sector reform – in reality dominated by a ‘new managerialist’ approach characterised by quasi-privatisation and a drive for efficiency - becomes an example of New Labour’s ‘linguistic slippage’, enabling the concept of ‘reform’, to become ‘equivalent to its absolute opposite – marketisation’ (Hall 2003). Similarly, Cammack (2004) argues that Giddens’ Third Way attempts to legitimise neo-liberalism through appropriating the social democratic lexicon; through acknowledging the appeal of social democratic ideas, and through ‘invoking them in support of a diametrically opposed agenda’, Giddens’ framework ‘subverts and neutralises those values, and promotes the hegemony of the neo-liberal project’ (152). In this interpretation, communitarian rhetoric within the Third Way is simply a means by which the redefinition of traditional socially democratic commitments can be achieved within an altered (neo-liberal) political framework (Goes 2004), within which only a minimal conception of social justice is compatible (Morrisson 2004: 180-181).



Specific interpretations of New Labour in government support these criticisms. For example, it has been argued that New Labour's political economy essentially marked an accommodation with Thatcherism, leaving much of the heritage of the New Right unchallenged (see Hay 1999, especially 145-172; Heffernan 2000; Watkins 2004). This argument follows that key aspects of neo-liberal economic strategy – 'liberalization, deregulation, privatisation, re-commodification, internationalization, and reduced direct taxes' – were not just maintained by New Labour, but willingly extended (Jessop 2007: 283). Indeed, deregulation, privatisation (such as of Air Traffic Control in 2001) – or quasi-privatisation, such as the embrace of Private Finance Initiatives (PFIs) – and the use of internal markets within the public sector (Hall 1998: 11), comprised key elements of New Labour's governing agenda. Moreover, New Labour's emphasis on inclusion (through work) has arguably been wholly geared towards market suitability (Jessop 2007: 283). Therefore, whilst notions of social justice and communitarian rhetoric may have been employed in an attempt to soften this strategy, this rhetoric has arguably not been bolstered by actual policy measures (Jessop 2007: 283, 287).

However, while these analyses rightly interrogate the Third Way narrative, highlighting existing tensions within New Labour's reconciliatory discourse, it can be argued that these interpretations too readily reject the significance of alternative (socially democratic) ideological elements within this framework. Criticisms focusing on the Third Way's specific interpretation of sociological change (Bastow and Martin 2003: 67-68; Mouffe 2005: 119; Rose 1999: 472), and the exclusion of political alternatives through discourse (Bastow and Martin 2003: 50; Fairclough 2000: 25-29; Raco 2002), do indeed identify necessary components of Third Way politics. However, to claim that neo-liberalism holds a wholly dominant role within this framework (especially Anderson 2000; Callinicos 2001) may be problematic. It should be recognised that ideologies are not 'closed' entities, but are contested, contingent, and necessarily open (Bastow and Martin 2003: 59-60) - 'their static definitions are arbitrary' (Bevir 2005: 80-81). Ideologies are therefore not locked 'in a zero-sum relationship with each-other such that the presence of elements from one excludes those of the other' (Bastow and Martin 2003: 59), meaning that the existence of neo-liberal themes within the discourse of the Third Way – or indeed, New Labour's governing agenda - does not render the Third Way the antithesis of social democracy. To draw comparisons between essentialist versions of fixed ideological positions not only overstates the coherence of



ideology itself, but suggests a ‘rigid uni-dimensional framework of options’ from which ideology can be situated (Bastow and Martin 2003: 63). The reification of ideology, then, should be avoided in an analysis of the Third Way (and, indeed, of Cameron’s Conservatives), as this not only undermines the contingency of political ideas, but also the notion that Third Way politics could utilise a variety of ideological traditions.

Indeed, it can be argued that the ‘originality’ of the Third Way lies in its *combination* (rather than transcendence) of Left and Right, offering a ‘wide and potentially fertile’ foundation for formulating policy thus leaving room for a number of ‘third ways’ within this framework (Driver and Martell 2002: 67, 83-85). Although this broad nature has been interpreted as possessing inherent ambiguity (Smith 2001: 267), or lacking ideological foundation (Smith 2004: 224) (indeed, it has been argued that New Labour’s governing regime was characterised by pragmatism (Allender 2001; Coates 2001)), it can be argued that *specific utilisation* of this framework necessarily relies upon the existence of guiding values (Driver and Martell 1998: 181; Plant 2001). Interpretations of these values clearly differ - some (as seen) focus on New Labour’s neo-liberal thrust (Hay 1999; Heffernan 2000; Jessop 2007: 283; Watkins 2004), others their communitarian emphasis (Bevir 2005), or indeed their commitment to an albeit revised and modernised social democracy (Fielding 2003; Gamble and Wright 2001: 4; Mandelson and Liddle 1996; Randall and Sloam 2009: 106). However, what is important to recognise is the way that New Labour utilised this framework to combine Left and Right in constructing policy.

These ‘combinations’ - such as granting independence to the Bank of England *and* introducing a national minimum wage; reforming schools policy to promote social mobility *and* taking a tough stance on juvenile crime (Driver and Martell 2002: 84-85) – arguably characterised New Labour’s policy regime. Indeed, while New Labour utilised PFIs and internal market mechanisms (in an attempt) to increase efficiency within the NHS, for example, the commitment to free provision of healthcare was nevertheless maintained within this ‘new frame of reference’ (Shaw 2004: 76-77). In relation to welfare too, while New Labour’s reforms contained a market emphasis (Jessop 2007: 283), they equally aimed to address social exclusion in substantive ways, while also confronting child poverty (see Annesley 2001; Driver 2004). In this sense, it should importantly be seen that New Labour ‘triangulated’ in constructing policy, through combining themes from contrasting ideological perspectives, thus enabling their position to be presented as centrist (McAnulla 2010: 292).



This interpretation of the Third Way however, as a broad framework (albeit with internal conflicts and tensions) which New Labour utilised to form a specific triangulated philosophy, does not imply total continuity with all of the values of the Third Way (as offered by Blair and Giddens). Indeed, the Third Way's idea of an 'enabling state' arguably failed to eclipse Blair's centralised, 'command state' (Gamble 2005: 433-434), and while Third Way rhetoric advocates an increased role for non-governmental actors in service delivery and governance, it can be seen that New Labour utilised the principle of depoliticisation, enabling Blair's governments to distance themselves from specific governing processes whilst retaining a level of executive control (see Burnham 2001). Indeed, it can be argued that in reality, New Labour widely expanded the role of the state, with economic growth heavily reinvested in welfare and public services (Smith 2010: 819-820). Similarly, while Third Way ideas focus on decentralisation, beyond the introduction of devolved assemblies, New Labour actually introduced 'extensive centralising measures', especially in relation to local councils (McAnulla 2010: 299). These discontinuities highlight the scope for selective utilisation of the Third Way framework, and also the importance of scrutinising the relationship between rhetoric and reality throughout the following analysis (as outlined by Fairclough 2000: 142-156).

How then, are we to interpret the New Labour's Third Way? It has been recognised that the Third Way offers a broad framework for formulating policy between Left and Right, leaving room for a number of 'third ways' within this framework (Driver and Martell 2002: 67, 84-85). New Labour utilised this framework in a specific way, creating a distinctive triangulated position within the narrative of political and sociological change outlined by Giddens and Blair. Significantly then, specific utilisation of this framework (re)directs the Third Way narrative. Importantly too, it has been recognised that the Third Way itself is a construction in discourse (Bastow and Martin 2003; Fairclough, 2000). Central to this is the creation of a reconciliatory discourse between contrasting ideological themes, from which triangulated positions can be constructed, allowing specific positions – even radical positions – to be presented as centrist (McAnulla 2010: 392). Third Way discourse also seeks to depoliticise specific policy trajectories (Bastow and Martin 2003: 50; Fairclough 2000: 25-29; Raco 2002). As Fairclough (2000) argues however, this reconciliatory discourse must be deconstructed, as this narrative leaves the relationship between seemingly reconciled values

unscrutinised, acting to shroud the dominance of (or contradictions between) certain values (viii-ix, 11, 16).

New Labour's Third Way, then, has been interpreted here in three, interrelated ways:

- (a) as a specific narrative of post-war British politics in which a triangulated position can be constructed, driven by broad guiding values – as outlined by Giddens and Blair;
- (b) as a strategy of political positioning, in which (triangulated) policy can be constructed by combining perspectives from contrasting ideological traditions, transcending political dividing lines and therefore presenting positions as centrist; and,
- (c) as a discursive construct which ties the (often conflicting) elements of this reconciliatory project together, and which can importantly act to depoliticise specific political trajectories, presenting contingent, normatively driven outcomes as necessary and incontestable.

It is over these areas that an assessment of continuity between New Labour and Cameron's Conservatives will be made. From this foundation, the following chapter will assess how far Cameron's 'modernisation' of the Conservative party displayed continuity with the ideas, tactics and discourses of New Labour and the Third Way, specifically focussing on Cameron's period in opposition. In so doing, this chapter will lay the foundations for an interpretation of 'Cameronism' offered within the final chapter, which will extend this analysis to offer a substantive interpretation of the foundational *ideas and values* guiding Cameron's approach, and 'Cameronism's' relationship to New Labour and Third Way values.

2. Cameron's Conservatives in opposition

It has been argued that 'the extent to which Cameronism borrows from Blairism is quite remarkable' (Kerr, Byrne and Foster 2011: 199). Indeed, Cameron's self-styled image as the 'heir to Blair' has arguably been 'quite shameless' in its appropriation of Blair's political tactics and modernising rhetoric (Byrne, Foster and Kerr 2012: 16-17). This chapter will



assess the extent and nature of this appropriation, in relation to Cameron's period in opposition – separated between Cameron's early 'modernisation' and Cameron's post-financial crisis approach, to emphasise the significance of the crisis in highlighting the tensions existing within Cameron's discourse - while also providing context in relation to the ideological debates surrounding Cameron's leadership.

Cameron's 'modernisation': The heir to Blair?

On becoming leader of the Conservative party in 2005, Cameron's initial focus was 'decontaminating the brand', aiming to distance the party from the perception that they were the 'nasty party' (see May 2002), 'of old-fashioned prejudice, inward looking intolerance and existing at some remove from the concerns of the 'ordinary people'' (Fielding 2009: 168). This 'decontamination' centrally required image change (Quinn, 2008: 179), and was intended to signal a shift to the centre-ground of British politics (Bale 2009: 227) - the necessity of which was especially emphasised after the general election defeat of 2005 (see Ashcroft 2005: 111). Indeed, an acknowledgement within the party of this necessity for change was reflected in the outcome of the 2005 leadership election itself; rather than ideological acceptability – within the context of a predominantly Thatcherite (economically dry, Eurosceptic, and socially conservative (Heppell and Hill 2009: 398)) PCP - which had determined the leadership victories of Hague in 1997 (Heppell and Hill 2008: 64) and Duncan Smith in 2001 (Heppell and Hill 2010: 48), Cameron's appointment was arguably determined by electoral considerations on behalf of the party (Dorey 2006: 41; Heppell and Hill 2009: 399).

Initially, this decontamination process involved a 'media silence' on issues which reinforced the party's negative perception - especially the so-called 'Tebbit trinity' of Europe, immigration and tax - creating a 'vacuum' which the leadership could fill by focussing on issues not typically associated with the party (Bale 2009: 227), in line with Cameron's new discourse of a 'modern compassionate Conservatism' (Cameron 2006a). This process also involved distancing the party from the legacy of Thatcherism (Evans S 2008: 295), through disavowing particular policies of the Thatcher era – such as the introduction of the poll tax in Scotland (Dorey 2007: 143-145) – yet for the most part not by claiming Thatcherism to be 'outmoded' (Buckler and Dolowitz 2009: 260), but 'by stressing, in effect, that 'that was then



but this is now'' (Bale 2009: 227). Following this logic, Cameron attempted to shift his party's emphasis from the overtly economic focus associated with Thatcherism, towards inclusive post-materialist concerns (Kerr, Byrne and Foster 2011: 195). Indeed, Cameron made significant attempts to address quality of life issues within his discourse, arguing that 'there's more to life than money, and it's time we focussed not just on GDP, but GWB – General Well-Being' (Cameron 2006b), while also stressing the negative impacts of 'corrosive consumerism', and the importance of a healthy work-life balance (Bale 2009: 227).

Cameron also sought to emphasise his party's green credentials, notably proposing a carbon-levy on big business, but in the most part through generating media gestures such as cycling to work (with his 'carbon-heavy' Lexus following behind), and visiting a Norwegian glacier to witness the damaging effects of global warming (Evans S 2008: 298-299). The new party logo too was intended to symbolise this commitment to the environment (Carter 2009: 235). This new emphasis was reflected by the policy review process initiated by Cameron on becoming leader; out of the six policy groups established, only one focussed explicitly on economic policy, while three examined issues related to quality of life and social justice (Lee 2009a: 51). Moreover, following in Blair's footsteps, Cameron expressed the aim to make his party more socially representative, especially through placing an increased number of women candidates in winnable seats - a sentiment expressed to the party only two minutes into his leadership (Campbell, Childs and Lovenduski 2006: 18).

This progressive rhetoric was also combined with more substantive (though broad) policy concerns, which importantly converged with the political ground of New Labour. Indeed, it should importantly be seen that Cameron broadly accepted the policy framework established by New Labour during his early period in opposition, centring upon an acceptance of continued and increased investment in key public services, alongside a continuation of the neo-liberal economic model established by the previous Conservative administrations and endorsed by New Labour (Gamble 2011: 175). In this sense, it should be recognised that prior to the financial crisis, the economy represented an area of ideological continuity between Cameron's Conservatives and the approach of New Labour and Third Way values, with the Conservatives essentially aligned with New Labour's political economy – itself adopted from the market model of the Thatcher/Major governments (Lee 2009: 58) - reflecting the general assumption 'that neither the economy nor the model was broken' (Lee



2009b: 77). In light of this convergence, Cameron shifted his focus towards the social sphere (Dorey 2009: 260).

In doing so, Cameron centrally stressed the importance of public services to his agenda, emphasising his family's reliance on state schools and the NHS (Bale 2009: 227), and importantly through committing to match New Labour's public spending (Griffiths 2009: 104). Cameron argued that public services were 'at the heart' of his 'vision for Britain' (Cameron 2006c), and has highlighted the role of public sector professionals as wealth creators in terms of nurturing human capital (Cameron 2009a), while equally recognising the harsh treatment of public sector workers under the Thatcher governments (Dorey 2009: 260). Importantly too, Cameron shifted his approach to social justice closer to that of New Labour and Third Way values, in recognising the importance of relative poverty rather than simply material poverty (marking a decisive shift from a Thatcherism), and in looking to address these issues through inclusion – a process which society is seen to be responsible for, not simply the state (Cameron 2006d). In this sense, 'a tangible 'New Labour' effect' can be identified within Cameron's approach to the social sphere (Beech 2009: 30); however, while Cameron shifted his focus to inhabit the policy framework of New Labour, to differentiate his party politically (or at least discursively), Cameron employed the narrative that 'British society was broken' (Gamble 2011: 175), and this key trope manifested itself in Cameron's notion of the 'Big Society', explored below.

Cameron's initial concern on becoming leader, then, was both about changing prominent perceptions of the party, from one which was seen as 'nasty', and as being against things, to one that was now openly *for* things - the new party was *for* the National Health Service, it was *for* gay rights (Norton 2009: 39-40) - yet also involved inhabiting the political ground of New Labour (and, as indicated, some Third Way values) over substantive policy areas. Cameron accepted New Labour's central (triangulated) goal of social justice *and* economic efficiency (Cameron 2006a).

Importantly too, enabling these processes of political positioning, Cameron sought to construct a specific narrative of post-war British politics in which he could position his party in this new direction. Indeed, Cameron's early discourse directly echoed the Third Way's criticism of both excessive statism and unbridled individualism seen to have characterised post-war British politics (McAnulla 2010: 290-291) - as outlined in the previous chapter.



Cameron sought to develop a narrative which accepted the limited nature of markets in themselves, ‘but also continued to reject the premise that the state was the most efficacious means of tackling social problems’ (Dorey, Garnett and Denham 2011: 57). Importantly however, Cameron effectively extended this narrative by arguing that New Labour in government had failed to move away from a reliance on statist solutions (McAnulla 2010: 291), and through constructing his own triangulated position, or ‘Third Way’ within this narrative, centred around the signifier ‘society’ (or, as this narrative developed, ‘the Big Society’).

Following this Third Way-style narrative, Cameron has criticised the ‘big state’ tendencies and ‘centralising, bureaucratic mindset’ of New Labour (Cameron 2005a), arguing that ‘the state keeps getting bigger and bigger but the long-term challenges are just not being tackled’; instead of trusting individuals, Cameron argues that New Labour relied too heavily upon the state: ‘they ban things and pass new laws instead of giving people power and responsibility’ (Cameron 2006e). Similarly, Cameron has been critical of the centralising nature of Thatcher’s institutional reforms, which reduced the power and autonomy of local government, and therefore of local communities and citizens too (Cameron 2007). Equally, Cameron has criticised the excessive individualism of the Thatcher era, and while Cameron has praised Thatcher’s economic modernisation, he has been critical of Thatcherism’s failure to encounter the damaging social effects of this change, especially in terms of relative poverty (McAnulla 2010: 290). This assessment of the post-war era has been influenced by the ideas of Philip Blond, who argues that the excessive statism of the immediate post-war period, and the individualistic neo-liberalism that has dominated since 1979, has created a ‘bi-polar nation’, with a ‘bureaucratic, centralised state that presides dysfunctionally over an increasingly fragmented and isolated citizenry’ (2009).

Following these criticisms of both statism and neo-liberal individualism, Cameron has attempted to construct a Third Way-style narrative which inhabits the space between these two positions, arguing that while the left may be preoccupied by the state, and the right often too focussed on the individual, ‘what really matters is in between – society’ (Cameron 2009b). This narrative draws upon the ideas of Kruger (2007) - Cameron’s then special advisor – who argues that Western politics should be seen in terms of a dialectic process, by which the Left, whose thesis is the state, and the Right, whose thesis is the individual, are struggling for sublation into their shared antithesis: society (14). Yet between these two



paradigms - of ‘self-seeking individualism’ and the ‘all-aggrandising, all-powerful state’ - ‘society is being squeezed to death’ (Kruger 2007: 41). In this sense, Cameron’s narrative should be seen as an attempt to recover society from the negative consequences of both Left and Right – a position reflected by Cameron’s oft cited phrase: ‘there is such a thing as society – it’s just not the same thing as the state’ (Cameron 2005b), which (discursively) attempts to differentiate Cameron’s position from the hegemonic projects of both Thatcherism and New Labour.

It is from within this narrative that Cameron’s ‘Third Way’ - the ‘Big Society’ – has emerged, as a community-centred alternative to the ‘big government’ of New Labour (see Cameron 2009c; 2010a). Seeking to offer an antidote to the narrative offered above, the Big Society centrally aims to ‘re-imagine’ the role (and size) of the state (Cameron 2009c), envisaging a move away from excessive centralisation, towards increased involvement of communities in local decision-making, and of voluntarism, charities and the third sector in public service provision (Pattie and Johnston 2011: 405). While the Big Society only surfaced as a defined discursive formation in 2009 (see Cameron 2009c), and only became a prominent theme in itself during the 2010 election campaign (Seawright 2012: 38-39), Cameron argues that the Big Society describes the guiding philosophy that has been present throughout his tenure as party leader (Cameron 2010a). In this way, the Big Society (even if not referred to by Cameron explicitly) represents a significant component of ‘Cameronism’ requiring interpretation; this will be encountered in the following chapter, where two interpretations of the Big Society – as displaying continuity with the ideas of the Third Way, or as a reinstatement of Thatcherite, neo-liberal logic – will be forwarded and assessed. Importantly however, it should be recognised that this triangulated position emerged out of an analogous narrative of post-war politics to that of the Third Way, employed by New Labour.

Interpreting Cameron’s ‘modernisation’

For some commentators offering early interpretations of Cameron’s leadership, this repositioning was seen to display ‘bold and innovative’ modernisation, ‘instigating a sharp break with Thatcherism’, and signalling a shift towards a more ‘socially tolerant and compassionate’ conservatism (Dorey 2007: 140-143). Indeed, this apparently value-driven approach was seen to be informed predominantly by social liberalism (Norton 2008: 329),



and this renewed focus on social concerns seemed to indicate that Cameron was successfully reviving the party's 'One Nation' tradition (though it should be recognised that the definition of 'One Nation' conservatism is contested – see Seawright 2007) which had been submerged since the 1980s (Dorey 2007: 162; Dorey, Garnett and Denham 2011: 87) - or at least showed that Cameron was making a significant attempt to move the party away from the unbridled market approach of Thatcherism and towards a 'Disraelian-inspired' politics of 'social priority' (Evans S 2008: 313). For O'Hara (2007), even, Cameron's approach was consistent with a pragmatic, sceptical conservatism, placing emphasis on the respect of traditional thinking, political engineering and means, rather than dogmatic ideology and ends (343).

Contrary to these interpretations however, commentators were quick to point out Cameron's less than convincing modernising credentials – especially considering Cameron's role in writing the party's 'traditional' 2005 election manifesto (Reeves 2008: 64; Green 2010: 673) – and the seemingly 'instrumental' nature of Cameron's thinking has been highlighted (Kenny 2009: 159). In this way, the extent to which Cameron's 'modernisation' initiated change has been contested (see Gamble and Wright 2006: 159).

Indeed, it has been argued that despite (and in conflict with) Cameron's 'modernised' rhetoric, Cameron's discourse throughout this period in opposition was in fact underscored by a deeply held antipathy towards the state (McAnulla 2011: 5). Lee (2009b) argues that Cameron's narrative of 'the broken society' was centrally grounded in a desire to divide the state and society, and 'to extend Thatcherite insight of individual entrepreneurial initiative as the prime agency of social change from the economy to society' (Lee 2009a: 58). For McAnulla (2010) too, Cameron's position on social justice essentially represents 'what is in substantive terms a long-standing Conservative, even Thatcherite, goal' - to 'roll-back' the influence of the state, and to replace it with a system in which 'welfare is supplied locally by social entrepreneurs or volunteers making moral judgments concerning who 'deserves' help' (308). Thus, it could be argued that Cameron's focus on 'social responsibility' – a key theme employed throughout Cameron's tenure as party leader (which importantly has not been presented alongside a corresponding notion of rights granted by the state, as per the Third Way framework (McAnulla 2010: 305)) – should simply be interpreted as an attempt to place this dominant anti-statism in electable terms (Evans S 2008: 328). In this sense – as will be developed in the following chapter - it could be argued that this 'inherent scepticism towards



the state' moves Cameron's approach away from that of New Labour (Kerr 2007: 51-52), and towards the guiding values of Thatcherism (Evans S 2010: 328).

It could be argued, then, that Cameron's 'modernisation' should be interpreted as a 'permission to be heard' strategy (Bale 2008: 277), with the progressive rhetoric and ideas of New Labour employed by Cameron as a 'sorbet between courses, intended to cleanse the electorate's palate of late Thatcherism'; once the Conservatives were no longer seen as the 'nasty party', tougher policies in traditional areas such as welfare and immigration could re-emerge on the party's agenda (Reeves 2008: 64). Indeed, Bale (2011) argues that Cameron's strategy had always been engineered towards returning to a more traditional agenda over time - albeit one which 'was carefully phrased and which complimented rather than crowded out the party's reassuring messages on public services' (348-349). For Bale (2008), then, Cameron was cultivating what could be called the 'and theory' of Conservatism, aiming to combine these 'tough' and 'tender' messages, without moving away from the party's traditional values (294).

This interpretation can be reinforced by the way in which Cameron shifted his emphasis rightwards over time (Bale 2008: 278; Carter 2009: 290). Indeed, especially after the so-called 'Brown Bounce' in 2007, traditional Tory attitudes towards the family, crime, and even immigration, re-emerged on Cameron's agenda (Bale 2008: 278), while the progressive themes which Cameron had been espousing since 2005 lost centre-stage; the much trumpeted A-List, for example, 'was watered down and then quietly done away with' once it had made a sufficient (presentational rather than substantive) impact (Bale 2011: 382), and the environment seemed to disappear from Cameron's agenda (Carter 2009: 290).

Crucially however, while Cameron was more willing to play upon traditional themes once the party brand had been sufficiently 'decontaminated' (Bale 2008: 297), Cameron did not simply shift his party rightwards in a similar fashion to his predecessors - even under pressure from his party to do so (Evans S 2008: 293) - but was 'constantly calibrating' between 'the traditional and the innovative' (Bale 2011: 323). For example: at the end of 2006, Cameron had focussed strongly on marriage and the traditional family unit, yet came into 2007 'with what was basically a left-wing populist attack on supermarkets and energy providers' (Bale 2011: 323-324); similarly in 2008, while one week saw Osborne promising to squeeze welfare budgets, in the following week the party announced commitments to



extend paternal leave rights, and increase spending on health visitors (Bale 2008: 281). In this sense, following the tactics of political positioning of New Labour's Third Way, it can be argued that Cameron sought to transcend traditional dividing lines through combining themes from contrasting ideological positions in his discourse, remaining committed to traditional party themes though placing them alongside this new, progressive rhetoric. As Cameron told his party in 2009:

Yes we're the party of strong borders, law and order and low taxes – and we always will be. But today we're also the party of the NHS, the environment and of social justice too (Cameron 2009d).

Importantly, this triangulating logic has been extended across a range of policy areas, and applied in relation to specific policy positions.

In terms of Cameron's approach to the family, for example, Cameron has emphasised his belief in the traditional family unit, which he views as the 'best institution' to raise children (Hayton 2010: 497). However, this approach has been combined with a socially liberal position, in which Cameron has given support for civil partnerships for same-sex couples; while Cameron has displayed a desire for marriage to be positively recognised within the tax system, he has also made it clear that this would apply to couples in civil partnerships too (Hayton 2010: 497). In this way, while Cameron's stance on the family model 'remains fundamentally Conservative and consistent with that of his predecessors' (Hayton 2010: 497) – albeit presented in a less moralistic fashion (Kisby 2009: 246) - through triangulating, Cameron has been able to present his relatively traditional position as centrist. As McAnulla (2010) rightly argues, this process does not simply follow Downsian logic, matching policy stances with the supposed preferences of the median voter, but crucially aims to 'present positions, even potentially radical positions, as centrist and relatively uncontroversial' (293).

This strategy can be identified within much of Cameron's discourse and policy presentation: while Cameron has criticised multiculturalism in Britain, he has also made efforts to encounter racism within his own party; similarly, while Cameron has called for welfare claimants to display individual responsibility, he has equally condemned irresponsible behaviour of politicians and bankers (McAnulla 2010: 293, 295). Cameron too has appropriated similar combinations directly from New Labour, combining a tough stance on law and order with a commitment to encounter the social causes of crime, while also echoing



Blair's central focus on 'social justice *and* economic efficiency' (McAnulla 2010: 293-294), emphasising the need for 'capitalism with a conscience' (Cameron 2009e).

In this way therefore, throughout his early period in opposition, Cameron displayed continuity with the tactics of New Labour and Third Way ideas in a number of areas. Following the specific areas for analysis outlined in the previous chapter, Cameron constructed a narrative of post-war British politics analogous to that of the Third Way - yet constructed a distinctive triangulated position within this framework, centred around the signifier 'society'. Cameron too broadly accepted the policy framework established by New Labour, and sought to compete politically in areas such as public services and social justice, attempting to differentiate his position from that of his predecessors. This new focus was reflected in Cameron's discourse, as Cameron combined themes from Left and Right in constructing policy, positioning his party as centrist. Significantly however, it can be argued that this repositioning was politically astute; Cameron's carefully triangulated position could be interpreted as a method in which traditional party themes could be retained, and even resurrected (Finlayson 2007: 4-5). Indeed, it has been argued that despite (and in contrast with) Cameron's 'modernising' rhetoric, Cameron's discourse since becoming leader has been underscored by anti-statism (Evans S 2008: 328; Lee 2009a: 58; McAnulla 2011: 5). In this sense, following the arguments of Fairclough (2000: viii-ix) outlined in relation to New Labour, it could be argued that Cameron's tactics of political positioning – centrally the construction of a reconciliatory discourse between contrasting themes - may have acted to shroud the (traditional, anti-statist) nature of Cameron's dominant values.

The Financial Crisis: Ideological divergence?

Significantly, the financial crisis of 2007/8 seemed to force this (partially) latent anti-statism to the surface of Cameron's political agenda, highlighting these identified tensions within Cameron's triangulated project.

In contrast to Brown's largely Keynesian response to the crisis, utilising the resources of the state to stimulate demand in attempt to keep the economy moving, Cameron called for deep and immediate cuts, and was less inclined to advocate tax rises to protect the welfare state (Smith 2010: 826-827). Cameron argued that Labour had failed to exercise fiscal



conservatism in the good times – ‘no money was ever put aside for a rainy day’ (Cameron 2008a). What was required to deal with the crisis, then, was to exercise fiscal responsibility and to cut public expenditure to tackle Britain’s growing debt, which in the long-term meant reforming public services and confronting Britain’s ‘broken society’ to reduce its reliance on the state (Cameron 2009f). Cameron attacked Labour’s ‘big bossy government’ (Cameron 2008b), and no longer promised to match Labour’s planned expenditure (Dorey 2009: 265). Contrary to the convergence characterising the economic approaches of New Labour and the Conservatives in the pre-crisis period, then, it has been argued that the financial crisis initiated a period of divergence (Lee 2009b: 77-78) – even, revealed an ‘ideological chasm’ between the parties - centring upon the debate over ‘the nature of the state and its role in the economy and society’ (Smith 2010: 819). Importantly however, while the crisis did indeed have the effect of sharpening the distinctions between the two parties in relation to their visions for the state, the nature of this divergence requires qualification.

Importantly, it should be recognised that it was Brown’s interventionist response to the crisis (in terms of bank bailouts, and fiscal stimulus packages) - rather than Cameron’s discourse of fiscal responsibility - that marked discontinuity with the neo-liberal consensus that had defined the parties’ pre-crisis economic approaches (Evans M 2009: 96). Indeed, if the crisis precipitated divergence, it was Cameron’s position that maintained ideological continuity with Labour’s pre-crisis approach and the values of the Third Way (McAnulla 2010: 291-292). In this sense, the importance of the financial crisis in signalling Cameron’s apparent abandonment of the centre-ground (see Bale 2009: 230) may have been overstated. Importantly too, it should equally be recognised that while the crisis did have the effect of highlighting the existing (and possibly dominant) anti-statism within Cameron’s approach, Cameron maintained his commitment to the public services (and especially the NHS) which had dominated his narrative prior to the crisis (Smith 2010: 827-30). Cameron employed the narrative of the Big Society – outlined above - in an attempt to reconcile the tensions emerging within this discourse: between the desire for fiscal prudence and the retreatment of the role of the state on the one hand, and Cameron’s commitments to welfare and the public services on the other. Cameron would cut expenditure, yet remained committed to protecting ‘front line’ public services (Dorey 2010: 408). Significantly, then, while the tensions within Cameron’s discourse may have become more visible, Cameron kept triangulating.



3. Cameron's Conservatives in government: 'Cameronism' in sharper focus

Importantly then, the previous chapter identified continuities between Cameron's Conservatives and New Labour in a number of areas. Alongside these similarities however, the tensions existing within Cameron's reconciliatory project have been highlighted, and tentative conclusions made in relation to the nature of Cameron's dominant values. Extending this analysis, this chapter will engage more substantively with the *ideas and values* guiding Cameron's approach, specifically in relation to Cameron's current governing agenda. Two possible interpretations of 'Cameronism' – which importantly reflect the 'tension' identified within Cameron's approach, above - will be developed, from which an alternative interpretation will be offered which seeks to reconcile these competing explanations, recognising the way in which 'Cameronism' *redirects* New Labour's Third Way in a distinctive direction.

Before doing so however, it should initially be noted that, of course, Cameron's actions in government are constrained by the existence of the Conservatives' Liberal Democrat Coalition partners (Bennister and Heffernan 2011: 21). However, it should be recognised that while Cameron may be constrained by Clegg, in a similar way that any prime minister is constrained by a powerful intra-governmental 'rival' – such as the way in which Brown constrained Blair (Heffernan 2003: 365-366) - Cameron still possesses sufficient power resources to be predominant (Bennister and Heffernan 2011: 21). Indeed, across key areas of the Coalition's governing programme, the Conservative approach has been dominant (Bochel 2010b: 271), aided by the considerable ideological alignment of the leadership of the two parties (Lee 2011a: 6-9). In this sense, the Coalition governing programme, here, will be viewed as *Cameron's* governing programme, and debates relating to intra-Coalitional power-relationships left unencountered.

'Cameronism' as displaying continuity with New Labour and (/or?) the Third Way

Firstly then, Cameron's governing agenda could be seen to display broad ideological continuity with New Labour and (/or) the Third Way. Following from the level of continuity identified above, this interpretation locates continuity in terms of the *ideas* defining



Cameron's governing agenda, in relation to interpretations of trends in public policy, and a specific interpretation of Cameron's Big Society.

Initially, a level of continuity with New Labour and Third Way ideas can be identified across broad areas of public sector and welfare reform, with both parties 'hitch[ing] their projects to a post-modern version of the state' (Driver 2009: 93). In terms of attitudes to welfare, for example, it can be argued that continuity - or even, as Deacon and Patrick (2010) argue, a 'framing consensus' (161) - exists between the ideas of New Labour and Cameron's Conservatives, centred upon the assumption that the best way to bring individuals out of poverty is through inclusion, thus through supporting and continuing New Labour's welfare-to-work reforms, outlined above (Driver 2009: 91-92). The Coalition's Work Programme (DWP 2011), for example - the central plank of Cameron's welfare strategy - is predicated upon the notion of alleviating poverty through inclusion, and the idea that the right to welfare for those that can work be conditional on the (responsible) actions of individuals themselves in attempting to find work - ideas which can be clearly traced to the values of the Third Way. This consensus was displayed during the 2010 general election campaign, with both parties focussed on 'making work pay' (Driver 2011: 106). Driver (2011) argues that this continuity has been further displayed by the Coalition, who have maintained New Labour's commitments to early years provision, the target of eliminating child poverty by 2020, and the national minimum wage - 'all core features of New Labour's post-Thatcherite social policy' (115).

Similar continuities can be identified in terms of wider public service reform, centred upon the idea of creating 'user led' public services, governed by the principles of increased user choice, greater local autonomy, and the diversification of service provision (Prabhakar 2010: 207). In terms of education, for example, the Academy programme advanced by Gove continues New Labour's reforms based on the (quasi) marketisation of the education system (Prabhakar 2011: 28-29). The introduction of Free Schools and the Pupil Premium equally represents a wider shift towards both marketisation and the diversification of provision in education, and towards user empowerment within the public services (Griffiths 2011a: 79). In relation to health reform too, Prabhakar (2011) argues that the Coalition can be seen to be extending New Labour's NHS reforms, following the logic of making GPs 'the gatekeepers of the health services' by giving them greater autonomy, significantly in terms of



management and budgetary responsibility (29-30), thus displaying continuity with Third Way values of decentralisation in the public services.

Yet while this level of consensus may be identifiable, it should equally be recognised that key differences between the parties exist in terms of their view of the role of the state in delivering these services (Griffiths 2009: 107-108; Prabhakar 2010: 207; Deacon and Patrick 2010: 178). The goal of user choice, for example – while advocated by New Labour – has been promoted to a greater extent by Cameron’s Conservatives (Prabhakar 2010: 204); indeed, while New Labour ‘wrestled with the potential trade-offs between choice and equity’ in public services, ‘the Conservatives have seen choice itself as enough to improve those services’ (Griffiths 2009: 107-108). Cameron’s Conservatives too are clearly ‘more comfortable than the other parties with the private sector delivering NHS services’, and aim to go further than New Labour in giving autonomy to public service professionals (Prabhakar 2010: 204-205). Furthermore, while Cameron’s continuation of the Academy programme may reflect trends towards decentralisation and marketisation in the schools system, it should be recognised that in government, the Coalition has been far bolder in their promotion of these reforms than New Labour had been in office, and less concerned about reducing central control (Griffiths 2011a: 78-79). However, while these discontinuities do exist, it must be asked whether they highlight divergence between the guiding values of Cameron’s Conservatives and New Labour’s Third Way, or whether they simply represent a broader discrepancy between Third Way values and New Labour’s actions in government.

In this sense, it could be argued that these discontinuities represent the tensions existing within New Labour’s governing project, rather than fundamental discontinuities between the guiding values of the Third Way and Cameron’s approach. Indeed, while Cameron has been critical of New Labour’s centralising tendencies, it can equally be argued that Blair himself – and indeed, the values of the Third Way - expressed the same visions for user choice, decentralisation, and autonomy in the public services that are currently directing Cameron’s approach, but was held back in his reforms by residual statism existing within his party (Prabhakar 2010: 205). It should also be recognised that New Labour’s public sector reforms were articulated as a staged process, where centralised targets and regulation would initially be required to ensure minimum standards, but would be followed by user and professional empowerment once this was no longer necessary (Griffiths 2009: 105-106; Thompson 2010: 210-211). In this sense, discontinuities in terms of the values underlying ideas of public



service provision between New Labour and the Conservatives should not be overstated (Thompson 2010: 211). Indeed, as Osborne has argued, Cameron's Conservatives could even be in the best position ideologically to complete Blair's unfinished reforms (Prabhakar 2010: 205).

Extending this argument further, while Cameron may see his vision of the Big Society as a 'bottom-up' response to New Labour's 'top-down' governing project (Prabhakar 2011: 34), the Big Society, in fact, could be viewed as a continuation and extension of the reforms to the public sector articulated within the Third Way and carried out in part by New Labour (Gamble 2011: 178; Pattie and Johnston 2011: 407). As outlined, Blair had intended to extend his reform agenda in a similar direction to Cameron's current approach, yet these intentions were held back by intra-party disputes (Pattie and Johnston 2011: 407). Similarly too, a clear focus on individual 'responsibility' rather than state responsibility can be commonly located within New Labour's rhetoric and the focus of the Big Society (Kisby 2010: 486). In this sense, the Big Society could be interpreted as 'an attempt to take on some of Blair's unfinished business' (Pattie and Johnston 2011: 407), and may represent broader ideological convergence between Cameron's Conservatives and New Labour, centrally grounded in the endorsement of New Labour's pre-crash neo-liberal political economy - itself dictating a smaller role for the state in terms of public service delivery, extending New Labour's 'post-welfare contracting state' (Evans M 2009: 31-32).

'Cameronism' as Thatcherite revisionism

Alternatively however, while these continuities may be identifiable, Cameron's wider ideological position and current governing project could be interpreted as a type of Thatcherite revisionism. This follows that Cameron's anti-statist approach (outlined in the previous chapter) 'is something of a natural progression from the approaches of the Thatcher governments', reflected by Cameron's apparent 'enthusiasm' for public sector cuts and related reform agenda, and an alternative interpretation of Cameron's Big Society (Bochel 2010a: 18-19).

It can be argued that 'for all Cameron's revisions, additions and qualifications of contemporary Conservative thinking', there seems no doubt that 'his ideological inclinations



still bear huge resemblances to those favoured during the Thatcher-Major years' (McAnulla 2011: 6). While Cameron may have developed a narrative highlighting the insufficiency of neo-liberalism alone, it can be argued that Cameron's 'broad philosophy is one which not only endorses much of the neo-liberal critique of the state, but seeks to push the project of state retrenchment further' (McAnulla 2011: 6). In this interpretation, it could be argued that the Big Society represents nothing more than an inventive reinvigoration of Thatcherite logic, applied to the 'previously neglected area' of the social sphere (Dorey, Garnett and Denham 2011: 3-4), guided by the fundamental (albeit implicit) assumption 'that the state is bad and almost everything else – the free market, charities, volunteers – is better' (Kisby 2010: 485). Indeed, Kerr, Byrne and Foster (2011) argue that the Big Society itself is simply an inverted reinstatement of Thatcherite logic; Thatcher's 'rolling back the frontiers of the state' becomes Cameron's 'rolling forward society', only 'presented in a more palatable form for the post-Thatcherite 2010s' (198).

This perspective can be reinforced by an interpretation of the Coalition's cuts agenda – centrally outlined in the Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR) of October 2010 – which has instigated a substantial restructuring of public services, involving 'significant transfers of responsibility from the state to the private sector and the citizen' (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 4). The depth of this attempted fiscal retrenchment is unparalleled in post-war British politics - indeed, is larger than that achieved or attempted by Thatcher - yet is planned to be implemented within a single parliamentary term (Lee 2011a: 20-21). In introducing this austerity programme, Cameron has been bolder than his European counterparts - especially in contrast to his 'relative inactivity' in dealing with deeper issues within the financial sector (Lee 2011b: 67-70) - with only countries who have had little other option (such as Greece) cutting at the same rate as Britain (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 5). The necessity of this course of action, however – predicted to most severely impact the poorest 10 per cent of the population (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 7-8), and especially women (Bryson 2012: 162-163) – has been questioned. While the Coalition inherited a large public sector deficit, the country's external debt 'remains average for OECD countries', and has not been difficult to fund through government bonds (Gamble and Wright 2011: 2) – the majority of which not mature for approximately thirteen years (Beech 2011: 275-276). In this sense, the depth of Cameron's cuts agenda, and the idea that Britain's debt needs to be repaid by the next election, are not economic necessities (Beech 2011: 275-276).



In this way, it could be argued that ‘despite the protestations of wanting to be ‘fair’’ (Ellison 2010: 59), Cameron has wilfully utilised the politics of recession as a way of introducing ideologically driven reforms to the welfare state (Beech 2011: 276; Kisby 2010: 490; Page 2010: 38), with the economic requirement to cut *some level* of public expenditure used as a justification for significantly reducing the role of the state, in a way that Thatcher had been unable to achieve in the 1980s (Bale 2010; Bochel 2010b: 271).

This interpretation can be reinforced by the relatively coherent nature of the cuts programme itself, reaching further in its scope than a response to the task of deficit reduction (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 9). Rather than following ‘the usual technique of salami slicing’, the Coalition is arguably using the deficit as a means to permanently restructure many public services, driven by the central goal – as articulated within Cameron’s Big Society – of ‘the substitution of the private sector for the public sector in the delivery of public services’ (Gamble and Wright 2011: 2). More specifically, public sector reform proposals have focussed on achieving greater autonomy for local bodies in terms of budgeting and decision making (which, specifically in terms of the NHS and Academy schools, will increase the role of the private sector - for example, see Campbell 2012), an increased emphasis on individual rather than state responsibility, and an overall promotion of private and third sector service provision (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 9). While it has been recognised that these reforms were initiated by Blair, Gamble and Wright (2011) argue that the Coalition clearly aims to entrench this process further (2); indeed, whereas New Labour and Third Way ideas were committed to raising levels of public provision to match those in leading European countries, this aspiration is ‘decisively rejected’ by the Coalition, with measures such as public sector pension cuts and caps on jobseekers’ and housing benefits set to reduce spending below previous levels indefinitely (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 6-7). Indeed, contrary to New Labour’s reform agenda, the Coalition arguably rejects the role of the state in ‘promoting social ends’ (Griffiths 2011b: 27-28).

In this sense, Beech (2011) argues that the CSR should be interpreted as ‘*means* to secure the wider ideological *end* – the ‘big society’’, which itself represents a neo-liberal plan ‘to roll back and unpick the welfare state in a manner reminiscent of the unfulfilled aspiration of Thatcher’ (276-277). Thus, Cameron’s governing regime arguably represents ‘nothing short of a paradigm shift’ in British politics (Beech 2011: 277) – ‘away from the previous version of a market system for which government provided human capital and social infrastructure



investment’, and ‘towards a vigorous, flexible and inegalitarian market liberalism’ (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 11).

Significantly however, the way in which Cameron has sought to discursively depoliticise this agenda – through presenting the distinct nature of this programme as driven by inevitable economic imperatives - should also be recognised. Not only does Cameron contextualise Coalition cuts as ‘unavoidable’ (Cameron 2010b), and as ‘the only way’ (Cameron 2011), but Cameron has attempted to hold the Labour party to account not only for previous economic mismanagement, but for *future* Coalition policy:

I think that people understand by now that the debt crisis is the legacy of the last government. But exactly the same applies to the action we need to deal with it. If there are cuts – they are part of that legacy (Cameron 2010b).

By conflating the necessity of *some level* of cuts with the specific agenda pursued by the Coalition, Cameron reinforces a notion of inevitability surrounding austerity measures, effectively depoliticising the outcomes of the Coalition’s economic policies, while failing to acknowledge their normative dimension. In this way, Cameron’s discourse of the financial crisis should be viewed through the lens of depoliticisation, with Cameron presenting specific policy directions as beyond government control (Kerr, Byrne and Foster 2011: 200-201). The idea of dealing with Labour’s ‘mess’ pervades Coalition discourse (for example, see Cameron 2011; Osborne 2011), as both the justification and legitimating factor for government policy. This discursive tactic has been reinforced the way in which the Coalition has sought to define Britain’s economic situation as a crisis, ‘declaring public spending to be out of control, and Britain to be facing a sovereign debt crisis ... similar to Greece’ (Gamble and Wright 2011: 2). This narrative has been pursued so forcefully that it has arguably become hegemonic; not only is the idea that ‘there is no alternative’ to cuts supported by the majority of the electorate (Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 2), but the Labour party have also altered their position to align themselves within this narrative (see Wintour 2012a: 1; 2012b: 10).

In this sense, comparisons can be drawn between the discursive techniques of New Labour and Cameron’s Conservatives: while Blair generated discursive closure around specific reform processes through utilising narratives of ‘globalization’ and ‘change’ (Bastow and Martin 2003: 67-78; Mouffe 2005: 119; Rose 1999: 472), Cameron has utilised similar tactics



in relation to the financial crisis and deficit reduction; similarly, while Blair employed a narrative of crisis to create a sense of inevitability surrounding economic modernisation (Bastow and Martin 2003: 50), Cameron has utilised the language of crisis to depoliticise normatively driven policy programmes (Gamble and Wright 2011: 2). In this sense, a common theme linking New Labour and ‘Cameronism’ – and, indeed, both of these projects with Thatcherism too – is the discourse of ‘there is no alternative’, with these political projects ‘happy to present themselves as merely responding to circumstances over which they have very little control’ (Kerr, Byrne and Foster 2011: 204).

Following this interpretation, then, while Cameron may be utilising the discursive tools of New Labour in an attempt to legitimise his governing project, the actions of Cameron’s Conservatives in government show that despite Cameron’s (at least rhetorical) ‘moderation’ over areas such as the public services, the ‘commitment to neoliberal *means* and *ends* appear to trump other competing concerns’ (Beech 2011: 278).

‘Cameronism’ assessed

In light of these alternative explanations, then, how are we to interpret ‘Cameronism’, and ‘Cameronism’s’ relationship with New Labour and the ideas of the Third Way?

Significant continuities have been identified between Cameron’s Conservatives and the ideas of New Labour and Third Way values over a number of areas, following the framework for analysis outlined in the first chapter. In opposition, Cameron’s narrative of post-war British politics directly echoed the Third Way’s critique of excessive statism and neo-liberal individualism employed by New Labour. Cameron too attempted to transcend political dividing lines in combining themes from Left and Right in constructing policy, and broadly accepted New Labour’s (pre-crisis) policy framework, based on the triangulated goal of social justice *and* economic efficiency (Cameron 2006a). Continuity has also been recognised in terms of the *ideas and values* guiding Cameron’s approach, and the discursive techniques utilised to legitimise Cameron’s governing project. Indeed, it has even been argued that Cameron’s current public sector reform agenda, and vision of the Big Society, could display a deeper level of ideological continuity with the Third Way than the realities of New Labour’s governing project.



Importantly however, the deeply anti-statist, Thatcherite tendencies of ‘Cameronism’ have also been recognised, limiting the extent of this continuity. This anti-statism has been evident within Cameron’s discourse throughout his tenure as party leader (Evans S 2008: 328; Lee 2009a: 58; McAnulla 2011: 5), guiding much of Cameron’s governing agenda. In this sense, it could be argued that once deconstructed, Cameron’s approach – at its core – is driven by a deeply held antipathy towards the state. Importantly however, to alternatively equate ‘Cameronism’ with Thatcherism would be equally problematic; this not only risks reifying the complex nature of Thatcherism itself (Kerr Byrne and Foster 2011: 197-199) – an analysis warned against in the first chapter (see Bevir 2005: 63) - but would also fail to recognise the ways in which ‘Cameronism’ revises and rejects ‘Thatcherite’ ideas. Importantly, Cameron’s broad philosophy represents a decisive shift from Thatcherism in a number of ways. As has been explored, Cameron’s acceptance of the importance of relative poverty – and indeed, Cameron’s (albeit in some cases limited) commitments to the public services, especially the NHS – marks Cameron’s approach from Thatcher’s. Importantly too, the notions of responsibility and community at the heart of Cameron’s Big Society agenda, and indeed Cameron’s adoption of ‘nudge theory’ (see Thaler and Sustein 2009) too (McAnulla 2011: 4-5), are not easily reconciled with the Public Choice assumptions of Thatcherism, viewing individuals as self-interested utility maximisers (Smith 2010: 830).

To interpret ‘Cameronism’ as a continuation of either of these paradigms, therefore, would be insufficient. Alternatively, it should be recognised that what is significant about ‘Cameronism’, is the way in which this project (selectively) utilises the ideas of New Labour and Third Way values, yet *redirects* this inherited framework in a deeply anti-statist, (partially) Thatcherite direction. An interpretation of ‘Cameronism’, then, should be attentive to the complex interplay *between* these interpretations, and the way in which ‘Cameronism’ utilises a variety of elements to create a distinctive ideological project. This redirection is most evident – and, indeed, most significant - in terms of public sector reform: while Cameron may be continuing elements of Blair’s (Third Way) reform agenda (Gamble 2011: 178; Pattie and Johnston 2011: 407), explored above, Cameron has extended this process of state retrenchment far further, significantly rejecting New Labour’s aspirations for high levels of public provision and social investment, as articulated within the Third Way (Giddens’ ‘social investment state’) (see Griffiths 2011b: 27-28; McAnulla 2011: 8-9; Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 6-7). In terms of Cameron’s utilisation of the Third Way lexicon too, while

Cameron has echoed New Labour's focus on 'responsibility', Cameron has placed much less emphasis on New Labour's corresponding notion of rights, instead preferring to talk of 'freedoms', in terms of freedom from the constraints of the state (McAnulla 2010: 305), thus redirecting the mantra of 'rights *and* responsibilities' in an anti-statist direction. Indeed, Cameron's appropriation of New Labour's discourse of 'responsibility' could be interpreted as a means by which to retain this dominant anti-statism (Evans S 2008: 328).

In this way therefore, it can be seen that 'Cameronism' appropriates and utilises the ideas, discourses, and tactics of New Labour and the Third Way, creating a distinctive triangulated philosophy within this inherited framework. The distinctiveness of 'Cameronism' lies in its combination of retention, refashioning and redirection of various elements this framework; 'Cameronism' is neither New Labour continued nor Thatcherism revised, yet is an 'original' project in itself, grappling with complex ideological inheritances.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the nature of 'Cameronism' and its relationship with New Labour, in relation to ideas, discourses and political tactics – specifically focussing on the notion of 'triangulation'.

The first chapter examined the ideas of the Third Way – as a construct utilised by New Labour – and assessed various interpretations of this framework, while also examining the way in which New Labour used Third Way ideas. An interpretation of New Labour's Third Way was constructed, which recognised the importance of the Third Way's triangulated narrative of post-war British politics and broad guiding values, the way that New Labour utilised this framework as a strategy of political positioning through the construction of triangulated policy, and the significance of discourse in reconciling the (often conflicting) elements of this project. This interpretation acted as a framework for assessing the 'triangulation' of Cameron's Conservatives, and possible continuities between New Labour and 'Cameronism'.

From this foundation, the second chapter critically engaged with the ideas, tactics and discourses utilised by Cameron during his leadership in opposition. Continuities with New Labour and Third Way ideas were located on a number of levels. Cameron broadly accepted



New Labour's policy framework during his early period in opposition, centred upon an acceptance of continued investment in key public services, alongside a continuation of Labour's neo-liberal economic model (Gamble 2011: 175); Cameron accepted the goal of social justice *and* economic efficiency, yet condemned New Labour's 'top down' governing approach (Cameron 2008c). Indeed, Cameron constructed an analogous narrative of post-war British politics to that articulated within the Third Way, yet constructed a distinctive triangulated position within this narrative, centred around the signifier 'society' (from which the 'Big Society' followed). Cameron too transcended political dividing lines through combining themes from contrasting ideological positions in constructing policy. Importantly however, the anti-statism underlying Cameron's approach – and, indeed, possibly dominating his reconciliatory discourse – was also recognised (Evans S 2009: 328; Lee 2009a: 58; McAnulla 2011: 5). Cameron's response to the financial crisis – while not displaying ideological divergence with Third Way values – highlighted the tension existing within Cameron's approach: between this ever prominent anti-statism, and Cameron's continued commitments to the public services.

Extending this analysis, the final chapter engaged more substantively with the *ideas and values* guiding 'Cameronism', specifically in relation to Cameron's governing agenda – examining trends in welfare policy, public service reform, and Cameron's cuts agenda. Two possible interpretations of 'Cameronism' were developed, yet both shown to be insufficient in themselves. Importantly, while Cameron's governing agenda (and indeed, discursive techniques utilised to legitimise this project) may represent broad continuities with the values and ideas articulated within the Third Way, reflected in part by New Labour – especially in relation to welfare policy and public service reform – Cameron has arguably extended New Labour's process of state retrenchment in a radical new direction (see Griffiths 2011b: 27-28; McAnulla 2011: 8-9; Taylor-Gooby and Stoker 2011: 6-7). An alternative interpretation of 'Cameronism', then, has been forwarded which recognises the way in which 'Cameronism' (selectively) utilises the ideas of New Labour and Third Way values, yet *redirects* this inherited framework in a deeply anti-statist, (partially) Thatcherite direction, creating a distinctive triangulated philosophy.

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