CHAPTER 8

Conclusions

THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA
AND THE PLATFORM GIVEN TO POST-TRUTH

In this investigation, there is no question that populist politicians in the form of Grillo, Salvini and Johnson were often given a platform on many occasions by the mainstream media. Toye (2013: 5) stressed the importance of the social, political and cultural context. More importantly still he stressed that rhetoric is not merely the means by which ideas are expressed but also a means by which they are generated. Similarly Wodak (2001: 65–66) argues that in terms of the media discourse it can constitute social practices and not just reflect them.

Giving populist politicians too much of a platform, it could be argued, could have such unforeseen consequences as helping them to generate their ideas and emotive Post-Truth emotive Eurosceptic rhetoric, beyond even the constituencies they intend to reach. Mainstream journalism has traditionally built stories around the quotes of leading politicians in normal times. What has to be remembered is that these are not normal times, for a multiplicity of reasons.

The deliberately provocative Eurosceptic emotive Post-Truth rhetoric of Grillo in the earlier sections of analysis are not surprising, even when they border on or in fact enter into the realms of hate speech, in his alarmist demonising say of Africans arriving in Italy, posing a threat of tuberculosis. However when the mainstream Italian media gives Grillo
yet another platform for such provocation, *without* challenging the lack of factual substantiation is far more worrying. This was prevalent in a plethora of articles.

Sarra (2018) built a news piece around Grillo’s quotes in *Il Giornale*, ahead of the 2018 general election. Grillo claimed only his Five Star Movement and Berlusconi’s Forza Italia could win. In quoting Grillo so extensively and putting him centre stage in the story, in *Il Giornale*’s case, to highlight what was deemed the greatest threat to Berlusconi’s Forza Italia, they are nevertheless giving Grillo the oxygen of publicity. In building a story around and reproducing his Post-Truth, it could be argued they are giving him and indeed his blog publicity. While *Il Giornale* in this instance does not produce any Post-Truth of its own. In giving such a platform to Grillo’s rhetoric they are helping him to generate his ideas to a public outside his more central political constituency. What *Il Giornale* is not doing and needs to do, is to actually challenge the unsubstantiated, emotive rhetoric of Grillo (Lewis 2016). They are legitimising the Post-Truth articulated by Grillo in this instance. In a way, it could be argued this is as worrying as crafting their own and this could be said of other journalists throughout this investigation.

*La Repubblica* (2018) also repeats the lazy journalism of *Il Giornale*, giving Grillo again the stage and amplifying further his Post-Truth emotive rhetoric among *La Repubblica* readers, but without any substantiation sought by the newspaper and a false equivalence (Lewis 2016) again perpetuated, where the journalists on the centre-left publication don’t call out and challenge the notion of *La Casta*, the elite, more clearly articulated in this piece, but merely give it a platform. Zapperi (2018) in *Corriere della Sera* does likewise, handing Grillo a platform and in its more extensive coverage, more so than the aforementioned. *Il Giornale* then does much the same, this time handing Berlusconi a platform (Binelli 2018).

Ahead of the 2016 UK referendum on EU membership, the British newspapers were also seen to give Johnson a platform. Newton-Dunn, the Sun’s political editor wrote a piece on June 1, 2016. Johnson then looms large, quoted saying then Chancellor, George Osborne gave “air kisses” to International Monetary Fund chief, Christine Lagarde, then describing the referendum fight as a struggle against “people who know Christine Lagarde and can go mwah, mwah with her”. Johnson is allowed to appeal to the prejudiced emotions of a populous increasingly angry with the *elite*. There is a suspension of reality, as the Johnson quotes are used to
convince the reader of how Osborne is in it (the elite) with Lagarde. There are no supporting facts offered by Johnson or The Sun. Newton-Dunn should be challenging the unsubstantiated position of Johnson, in framing and presenting Lagarde and Osborne as the elite. Instead a story is built around the quote. The Sun is contributing to Post-Truth in its failure to hold Johnson to account, but merely gives him a platform. This further undermines the position of journalism in relaying the facts and questioning potential untruths.

Newton-Dunn (2019) does much the same, when reporting how Johnson returned to Parliament after the proroguing was deemed illegal by the Supreme Court. The front-page piece starts with:

‘Rampaging Boris Johnson last night dared “scared” Jeremy Corbyn to give him an election so voters can end the Brexit logjam.’

Sun readers could have believed they were being presented with the whole truth, rather than the epistemic selection only offering part of it. The reason as to why Corbyn was reluctant to trigger a general election, as was indeed much of the opposition benches, is not discussed with the readers, so they do not think about it (Entman 2010) namely: concerns the government could still find a way of leading the country to a No Deal Brexit—as opposed to being ‘scared’ of the judgement of the people. The Sun does not present the picture of Johnson and his provocative language. Indeed it is only the Telegraph that provides a platform for some of it. While the Telegraph and Mail make cursory mention of the issues over his language in Parliament, The Sun in its main story makes no mention of it at all and unless the reader delves into the subsequent pages, the Prime Minister’s hate speech is not an issue in the narrative at all (Entman 2010).

While say the Italian newspapers gave a platform to and failed to challenge the Post-Truth of Grillo, pretending Johnson was not guilty of hate speech on the floor of the House of Commons (Newton-Dunn 2019), with a plethora of MPs citing the threats of violence they had received, from those using Johnson’s very same language, is probably worst still. The Daily Telegraph (Rayner 2019) does the very same thing in covering this story.

When Johnson uses the Logos, as if to say: they are trying to reverse Brexit people—so we need an election, by referring to Labour’s “obsessive desire to overturn the referendum result” Rayner gives a platform for Johnson’s emotive Post-Truth—without challenging the veracity of what
is claimed. More worringly, much like Newton-Dunn (2019) unless *Telegraph* readers read the coverage on page two and three, they would not even be aware of how a series of MPs (including on the Tory benches) complained about the prime minister’s inflammatory language, replicated by trolls who had made death threats against a series of MPs. Very little of this was covered all the same. “Epistemic competition is as much about choosing which truths can be considered salient and important as about which claims can be considered true and false, and these choices have important consequences”. (Social Studies of Science 2017). *The Daily Telegraph*, like *The Sun*, chose not to highlight the language used by the prime minister, accusing fellow MPs of ‘surrender’ and ‘betrayal’.

In endeavouring to develop a nuanced approach to newspapers giving Post-Truth a platform, it was noted how *The Guardian* (Asthana and Stewart 2016) ahead of the referendum, did provide then Prime Minister, David Cameron, with a platform for his emotive rhetoric—but not one that was unsubstantiated and in the realms of Post-Truth, as the other publications mentioned did. Cameron is not utilised to convince the audience of the veracity of something that is open to conjecture (as was the case with the *Telegraph* and *Daily Mail*). As is customary in news, the piece is built around the authority’s quotes. Cameron responded to the Brexit campaigners, saying the suggestion Turkey would join the EU was a “lie” (line 30). What is however noticeable from the piece, is that Cameron accused the Brexiters of “stoking intolerance and division with extreme warnings on immigration” (lines 1–2). Rather than the emotive compelling seen earlier in the chapter he does provide a rational, substantiated argument for his position in the piece. A spokesperson for Leave did respond to Cameron’s arguments, in the piece.

Journalists need to challenge Post-Truth, but hate speech even more. In not giving Johnson’s hate speech due prominence—the Sun and the *Daily Telegraph* do not have to confront it. Perhaps this takes the analysis of Post-Truth emotive rhetoric to another level, in that hate speech, as sadly evidenced in this particular investigation, is never far behind. Much as Lewis (2016) and BuzzFeed’s editor-in-chief of news, Ben Smith, argued that journalists need to confront Post-Truth, this investigation has thrown up the need to do likewise with hate speech.

An observation would be that the Italian newspapers, in their engagement with Grillo are somehow behind the times. These are not normal times and much like their British counterparts, they have not been wise to the change, where beyond the emotive discourse that is eminently
quotable, there is epistemic selection of facts at best and more commonly an eradication of the facts completely. They are giving Post-Truth an unchallenged platform. You can expect this for ideological reasons, when supporting Grillo, but in the case of all the mainstream Italian publications investigated, none of them do.

The British newspapers in this section have nevertheless gone further in creating a platform for emotive discourse than their Italian counterparts. The Italian publications, while facilitating Grillo’s Post-Truth, at least in this sample, did not give a platform to his hate speech (very much present in his ranting analysed on Grillo’s blog). The British publications however, bar the Guardian here, ignored in their main frontpage stories, any existence of Johnson’s hate speech. So there was no need to confront it. This is perhaps more worrying than the platform provided to Johnson’s Post-Truth.

The British publications cited in this section (with the notable exception of The Guardian) were ideologically supportive of Johnson and Brexit, so here a distinction can be drawn with the Italian newspapers. Nevertheless, there lies an inherent danger in just providing a platform for Post-Truth. In failing to at least on some level hold Johnson to account, they are undermining the very essence of what journalism needs to do, very much, in these troubled times: call it out. The Guardian (Asthana and Stewart 2016) seemed to leave the calling out to Cameron himself. But it was at least there.

The Construction of Eurosceptic Emotive Post-Truth by the Media

Beyond providing platforms to populist politicians for their Post-Truth and more worringly still, hate speech, it was also established that various mainstream newspapers in both countries constructed some Eurosceptic emotive Post-Truth rhetoric of their own. D’Ancona (2017) argues that we have to be proactive, like the Occupy movement, arguing we need a loose-knit alliance in response to Post-Truth, shaking us out of our passivity. It can be argued that goes for passivity and lazy journalism in the Post-Truth age as well. Davis (2017: xii) asks why the usual human habit of seeking truth has in some cases been overridden: “The premise underlying this approach is that it takes more than a liar to create a false belief – the recipients of the lie are often willing accomplices to the falsehood”.

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Hence it is what the Forza Italia supporting readers of Il Giornale wish to see in Ferrara’s piece (2018), ahead of the Italian general election. Ferrara and Il Giornale are intent on demonstrating Boldrini, President (the equivalent to the British Speaker) of the Chamber of Deputies, one of the two Houses in the Italian Parliament, is a hypocrite—and crafting the piece, such that that is the conclusion that can be drawn. In terms of rhetoric, there is the notion of anticipating the point, employing logos (Leith 2012: 57–58) to help the reader reach the point, before the writer gets there. In this case: so you can see that Boldrini is a hypocrite.

Similarly Giorgia Meloni, leader of the Brothers of Italy party and potential political ally in what could have been a Forza Italia-led government, is utilised by Il Giornale (Grilli 2018) to castigate a rival centre-left publication, La Repubblica. The Grilli piece is headlined: “Giorgia Meloni does not mince her words and responds to attacks, blow by blow. This time on the radar of the Brothers of Italy party leader, Francesco Merlo [a La Repubblica journalist] is finished off”. Il Giornale has chosen in this article to focus on Meloni’s riposte. However, the nature and details of the attack from Merlo and La Repubblica is never shared with the reader. This is not only a framing (Entman 2010) of the discourse. There is consciously epistemic selection at play, depriving the reader of that context that could inform understanding. A platform is given to a series of Meloni’s quotes. There is no balance and no response from Merlo or La Repubblica. There is not even an attempt at creating a false equivalence. This again is Post-Truth, providing the Forza Italia readers with what they want to hear—but depriving them of the core facts and built on a false premise. It is also a clear example of the party–press parallelism (Hallin and Mancini 2004), with Il Giornale unashamedly taking sides and not actually a reasoned discourse at all. Il Giornale harnesses Meloni’s wrath and then intensifies several fold to re-enforce its emotive message with the readers.

In a series of news stories, focusing on the term EU migrant, not only was there evidence of persuasive news (Rowinski 2016, 2017), in the form of argumentation, but also a suspension of rational argumentation, presenting emotive purported facts unequivocally, in the form of unmodalised declaratives (Mautner 2008). The likes of Leadsom and Fox as ministers were quoted—but then the newspapers intensified the emotive rhetoric themselves.

Closer inspection revealed there was no substantiation for: widespread fears over immigration; a particular strain on public services; violent
thugs from the EU left to roam our streets (Groves, June 1, 2016; Doyle 2016) but instead an appeal to how readers may have felt about issues like immigration, which became a central focus. In terms of the linguistic means by which this was achieved compulsion was effectively employed. Another way of understanding this is such texts reaffirmed for readers what they wished to believe. This flew in the face of the evidence regarding EU immigration, conspicuous by its absence (Wadsworth et al. 2016; Springford 2013; Devlin et al. 2014; Allen 2016). Beyond the term EU migrant it was even more prevalent. What was apparent was a theme in the discourse equating EU migration with a strain on public services and the benefits system—despite a complete lack of evidence to support this from either politicians and most pertinently, the newspapers themselves. Newspapers were generating and actively constructing their own Post-Truth around these issues.

Ahead of the EU referendum, Dominiczak and Swinford (2016) started a piece in the Daily Telegraph with: “Migrants will be barred from entering Britain after Brexit unless they can speak good English and have the right skills for a job. Boris Johnson and Michael Gove pledge today as they set out their vision for the UK outside the European Union”.

The article explains the intensions of UK ministers Johnson, Gove and Patel to introduce an Australian-style points-based immigration system. However the voice of the newspaper itself, as a political actor, is also heard in the third paragraph: “Their statement, which is also signed by the employment minister, Priti Patel, will infuriate Downing Street and represents a major challenge to David Cameron’s authority”. And in the next paragraph: ‘It will be seen as the first policy of a Eurosceptic manifesto that could be enacted after a Brexit and will bolster claims by Mr Cameron’s critics that he cannot remain as Prime Minister until 2020 in the event of a Leave vote. “The politicians are not talking of a Eurosceptic manifesto – the Telegraph is”.

Halfway down the piece: “Mr Johnson and Mr Gove warn that the scale of immigration is putting a ‘particular strain’ on public services and that ‘class sizes will rise and waiting lists will lengthen’ if Britain does not leave”.

So when the authors are not contriving their own Post-Truth, they provide a platform for populist politicians to articulate it.

The Daily Mail (Groves, June 1, 2016), produced a piece headlined: Brexit immigration revolution! There are a series of unsubstantiated claims: a ban on jobless EU arrivals was blocked by Brussels; Leadsom’s
claim of George Osborne’s national living wage being a huge draw for migrants that is fuelling uncontrolled immigration ‘from within the EU’, including those instigated by the newspaper itself.

In a piece by Walters (2019), the Daily Mail focuses on a survey demonstrating the public wanted an election—detracting attention away from the main story elsewhere: Johnson having to return to Parliament after his proroguing of the House of Commons was ruled illegal by the Supreme Court. The Mail conducted a poll ahead of the Supreme Court decision on the proroguing of Parliament by Johnson, framing what it knew would be Corbyn’s resistance to an election as corroboration of him and indeed ‘the establishment’ trying to stop Brexit—rather than the issue of concern to many, which was a snap election would still allow the Johnson government to take the UK into a No Deal Brexit.

If Post-Truth is the articulation of emotions, where facts are secondary, then this survey and its use to present an article by the Mail, is testament to that understanding. It is giving credence to those emotions—with no facts supporting that emotive notion—because this article is a collation of what people feel to be so—and so in our Post-Truth age, on some level, it is. It is an effective construction of reality.

The Daily Mail reported that some 52% in the Survation survey, believed the Establishment wanted to block Brexit. The Daily Mail also defined ‘the Establishment’ for readers: “a loose term applied to institutions ranging from the Commons and Lords, the civil service, big business and the judiciary to the BBC”. A survey collating public sentiment can easily be conflated with facts regarding the issues at hand. The Daily Mail has manufactured some Post-Truth of its own.

Both in Italy and Britain, when the newspapers are sympathetic to the populist ideologies of elements of the Right, they can go beyond giving a platform to the Post-Truth rhetoric of these politicians but craft some of their own to compliment and indeed in the case of this last piece by the Mail (Walters 2019).

**POST-TRUTH AND HATE SPEECH. THE MAINSTREAM MEDIA CALLS IT OUT**

There are however times when the mainstream media calls it out (Lewis 2016) and while allowing the populists a voice, as has to often be done, when dealing with political leaders, counters by evidencing methodically a lack of substantiation by such politicians.
To this end Ziniti (2019) in La Repubblica produces a piece accusing Salvini of, as alluded to in the headline ‘dancing around the figures’.

**Context**

The context behind the rally and the dispute between Salvini and Pope Francesco does not need revisiting. A clear distinction can be drawn however between Il Giornale and La Repubblica. It could be argued that in a previous article Il Giornale was guilty of creating a false equivalence between Salvini’s positioning and the critique of the Democratic Party and the Five Star Movement. But that is to give the latter two parties a chance to respond to the premise Salvini creates—without calling it out as factually incorrect in the first place. Arguably not doing so intones and legitimises Salvini’s claim at the outset, when it should not.

The Nieman Report (Lewis 2016) raises the issue of false equivalence. This mainly relates to how to report on Trump. Nevertheless the following points have some transferability and can be applied to how the EU was covered by the British and Italian press, both when key political actors were being quoted and when indeed the journalists themselves, were constructing a false equivalence in their copy over Europe.

As Nicco Mele, director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard (Lewis 2016) argues, the pressure to be “balanced” belies an important fact: false equivalence is itself a form of untruth. Mele argues Trump’s presidential campaign forced news-rooms to confront false equivalency head-on. What do you do when the overwhelming accumulation of facts lies on one side of the argument? Do you have to be seen to offer exactly the same amount of copy for the counter-argument? Think back to the BBC’s coverage of ‘Europe’ over the last decade. The number of times the BBC’s flagship morning news programme, Today, would start with an interview with Nigel Farage, leader of the then peripheral anti-EU UKIP. Was this not creating a false equivalence—which has now, post the vote for Brexit, become mainstream?

Unlike Il Giornale, rather than a cursory comment from other parties and not actually relating to countering Salvini’s claim, Ziniti (2019) and La Repubblica spend a lot of the subsequent article demonstrating how the accumulated evidence lies on the other side of the argument, effectively countering Salvini’s position—having correctly quoted his position,
it has to be said. Like previous articles analysed, La Repubblica refers to a Facebook video by Salvini. Unlike others in this case, Salvini’s Post-Truth emotive rhetoric is not just cited and given a platform. Instead at the end of the article, Salvini’s emotive and often factually incorrect rhetoric is allowed speak for itself, with the full 30-minute Facebook video offered to readers. It currently has 604,000 views. This way the readers can decide for themselves and realise that what Salvini says flies in the face of the truth. This is a clever way of countering the circumnavigating of the mainstream media by Salvini (and Grillo before him) in the use of social media. It is also more effective than the Reality Check approach, D’Ancona (2017) takes issue with.

La Repubblica, as an unashamedly centre-left publication is, embedded in the Italian media landscape, less hamstrung by possibly now dated conceptions of impartiality and objectivity, a la BBC, that gives parity to voices that should not be given equivalent airtime or print copy. In this sense it could be argued such Italian journalism is more honest and candid, starting from the counter-position, opposing Salvini. The first issue in January 1976 of La Repubblica carried an article by founder Eugenio Scalfari declaring the paper to be a “journal of information that doesn’t pretend to follow an illusory political neutrality, but declares explicitly that it has taken a side in the political battle…” (Poggioli 1991: 6). The notion of neutral journalism does not exist in Italy, where “a wide range of competing world views contend” (Hallin and Mancini 2004: 61). Forcella (1959: 454) notes “Facts for a political journalist never speak of themselves. They either say too much or too little”. Putnam (1973: 81–82) in comparing British and Italian elites, notes high levels of partisanship in Italy: “In journalism, this style is reflected in that facts are not seen as speaking for themselves, commentary is valued, and neutrality appears as inconsistency”.

The article introduction reads:

Two for Salvini, 402 for the UNHCR (The UN refugee charity), 307 for the OIM (Mission of the International Organisation for Migration).

The reference is to the death count in the Mediterranean and the article goes on to systematically and thoroughly show how Salvini’s claim of having reduced the deaths of those making the hazardous journey from Africa, to practically zero, is evidenced to be wrong.

Crerar (2019) in the Mirror, writes a news piece following Johnson’s reappearance in Parliament in September, after the Supreme Court ruled his proroguing illegal.
The front-page introduction reads as follows:

Boris Johnson was hauled back into the Commons yesterday after his Supreme Court slapdown but failed to show an ounce of remorse.

He angered MPs by saying the best way to honour murdered Remainer MP Jo Cox was to ‘get Brexit done’.

*The Mirror* acts a clear counterpoint, ideologically, to the *Mail* and even more so the *Telegraph*, giving a platform to those objecting to the PM’s perceived provocation of the house and obfuscation. There is a coarseness in the discourse and Deacon (2016) noted the inability of either side to tolerate the other’s position.

While there is considerable emotional rhetoric and the *Mirror*, through its evaluative language accentuates it all the more—there is no Post-Truth, as prevalent in some of the copy on the other side. Like all newspapers, they will cite somebody reflecting a position similar to theirs and Sheerman’s moral outrage against Johnson at the end, reflects the *Mirror’s* positioning on the whole debacle.

*The Mirror* is holding a position and from say an Italian perspective and that of those consciously trying to challenge Post-Truth and Hate speech, the notion of impartiality in such a hostile political environment is impossible. This is the notion of a false equivalence not being the way to report. These are not normal times.

As Nicco Mele, director of the Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard (Lewis 2016) argues, the pressure to be “balanced” belies an important fact: *false equivalence* is itself a form of untruth. Mele argues Trump’s presidential campaign forced newsrooms to confront false equivalency head-on. What do you do when the overwhelming accumulation of facts lies on one side of the argument? Do you have to be seen to offer exactly the same amount of copy for the counter-argument? Think back to the BBC’s coverage of ‘Europe’ over the last decade. The number of times the BBC’s flagship morning news programme, *Today*, would start with an interview with Nigel Farage, leader of the then peripheral anti-EU UKIP. Was this not creating a false equivalence—which has now, post the vote for Brexit, become mainstream? Is this not, as outlined at the start of the conclusions, Toye’s (2013: 5) point about rhetoric is not merely the means by which ideas are expressed but also a means by which they are *generated*. By this logic,
if you do not call out the Post-Truth rhetoric (or indeed hate speech) of the populists, you are complicit with them.

One interpretation could be that The Mirror is framing the story to highlight an aspect of what occurred in Parliament, as opposed to Johnson’s response. Conversely, maybe the Mirror has moved its position, in light of such Prime Ministerial provocation and that to give Johnson more than a cursory defence would be to create a false equivalence, not merited by the seriousness of what happened—on the other side of the argument.

BuzzFeed’s editor-in-chief of news, Ben Smith recognised early on that reporting on Trump necessitated relinquishing typical assumptions about political coverage. “The structure of political reporting is to tacitly assume that candidates typically tell the truth about basic things, and that lies and open appeals to bigotry are disqualifying”, he says. “Trump violated all these rules without—in the eyes of the Republican primary voters who mattered—disqualifying himself”. In December of 2015, Smith declared that BuzzFeed staff could call Donald Trump both a liar and a racist. “He’s out there saying things that are false, and running an overtly anti-Muslim campaign”, he wrote in a memo (Lewis 2016). The Mirror included the shouts of “liar” and “you should be in jail” and also Sheerman’s clear accusation of lying, at the close of the piece.

The hate speech, used by the Prime Minister, was weaponised by the Mirror. It was a means of framing Johnson and creating a clear binary—with the Mirror the enemy in the ideological divide. What the Mirror did not do, at least in its main article, was to outline how those that received death threats complained of their potential assailants using the very language employed by the Prime Minister on the floor of the house. According to the criteria used by the ECRI (2016a) and Liberty (Liberty 2017a, b), inciting violence, makes Johnson’s language hate speech. This, it is suspected, is an oversight and would have strengthened the corroboration in the Mirror. Notably, for all the emotive rhetoric and lack of false equivalence, there was no Post-Truth prevalent in the Mirror piece. Substantiation was offered throughout.

Stewart and Proctor (2019) wrote on the same issue for The Guardian, in a piece headlined: MPs’ fury as Johnson claims to speak for Britain on Brexit.

The Guardian, akin to the Mirror on the centre-left and also Remain side in the new fault line in British politics, presented in a fulsome manner, the positioning of the Prime Minister at the outset (unlike the
Mirror) and in so doing, through this clear context, utilised the positioning of those responding to Johnson, to demonstrate how: he should have resigned; should have toned down his language; and had not allayed fears over a No Deal Brexit scenario.

For all that, the angle at the outset is clear and Johnson, unlike in the Telegraph, is not given a platform, with from the very start equal weighting being given to what he says and those who instantly respond. Here The Guardian flies in the face of the tendency of British newspapers, giving a platform to prime ministers, who, in the majoritarianism system are seen to speak to and indeed for the nation (Hallin and Mancini 2004). As has been stressed, now are not normal times. To give populist prime ministers or ministers the platform as previously, working on the basis their comments are based on substantiated facts, is foolhardy in the extreme, in the light of everything that has been investigated in this book.

Much the Mirror piece just analysed, the Guardian accentuated the emotional rhetoric to some extent. However, there is no epistemic selection, with the piece providing the most rounded coverage on that day’s events, taking in all sides. Arguably there is also no false equivalence, despite this, as the article finds the Prime Minister wanting and demonstrates that by going through the narrative of how Johnson went on the attack from the very outset, by his use of inflammatory language and creating the people versus parliament dichotomy. This seems to be akin to how Repubblica cited Salvini in full regarding the deaths in the Mediterranean.

Stewart and Proctor (2019) and their approach nevertheless mitigate the ‘calling out’ of Johnson, in comparison to Buzzfeed over Trump (Lewis 2016).

The Mirror did not shy away from quoting MPs who called Johnson a “liar” presumably over misinforming the Queen over the reason for the proroguing of Parliament, with Barry Sheerman’s emotive rhetoric quoted in full.

The hate speech of the Prime minister is however placed into context, by means of the Sherriff quote, clearly evidencing how the repeating of Johnson’s words, such as surrender and traitor, by others, did result in threats of violence against MPs (ECRI 2016a; Liberty Liberty 2017a, b; UN 2019).
Post-Truth and Hate Speech. What Is to Be Done?

Grillo’s blog and Salvini’s Facebook entries demonstrated emotive Post-Truth rhetoric over Europe that at times entered the realms of hate speech and on some occasions hate speech that incited violence. Conversely Johnson was not found wanting on his Facebook page, choosing, rather than a coarseness in rhetoric, the very converse and being seeing to try and unify a nation over the weeping wound that is Brexit for Remainers and an unequivocal victory for Leavers. Yet Johnson’s Post-Truth rhetoric and hate speech has surfaced in Parliament and occasionally in his columns in the Daily Telegraph. This suggests at least that it is not always the new digital landscape that is the game changer. Albeit limited, it suggests that there can be different responses in divergent countries, even in Europe. Italian politicians seem to have weaponised the digital landscape in a way that Johnson, as least has not. There again, aside from Johnson’s rhetoric, the targeting of voters on Facebook ahead of the Brexit vote, which although not central, became part of the Cambridge Analytica scandal, suggests the picture is more complex still.

Returning to the centrality of how to respond to Post-Truth, in the last section of these conclusions, The Mirror and La Republicca called it out and nevertheless quoted Johnson and Salvini respectfully—but then systematically went about challenging the Post-Truth and hate Speech made manifest by these populist politicians. D’Ancona (2017) argued for an equally emotive engagement from those challenging Post-Truth and that the distant yet nevertheless relevant approach of fact-checking, would not capture the public imagination the way those peddling Post-Truth have succeeded in doing. I concur and although in the last tracts of this book, it could be argued that the Mirror were partisan in their attack on Johnson returning to Parliament and La Repubblica equally so in discrediting Salvini’s attempts to portray himself as a protector of human lives at sea as a good Christian.

D’Ancona argues that during the EU Referendum campaign, voters were bombarded with ‘intellectually defensible but emotionally un-relatable’ statistics for employment, trade and the economy (Lulie 2017). They are technical and abstract, and at times condescending numbers that do not speak to the ordinary experience of the individual. Aaron Banks the businessman that bankrolled the Leave. EU campaign, reflected on our times: “The Remain campaign featured fact, fact fact, fact. It just
doesn’t work. You’ve got to connect with people emotionally. It’s the Trump success” (Worley 2016).

The departure between D’Ancona and Banks is that the former is calling for ‘wrapping facts with emotional resonance’, while the latter is not concerned about facts at all (Lulie 2017). Perhaps the notions of wrapping facts with emotional resonance was what La Repubblica but even more so, the Mirror did, as Johnson defended his government after the Supreme Court ruled his proroguing illegal. The Guardian, flagging up its commentary pieces on Facebook, through use of emotive quotes, ahead of the 2017 general election also weaponised emotional rhetoric, but it is suspected this too was creating an emotional resonance around the facts. Maybe you can have a reasoned exchange of views, even if there is some emotional power vested in those words. It is more honest than the false equivalence explored at various junctures.

The notions of balance are misplaced and a false equivalence (Lewis 2016) equally concealing the truth, in these strange times. Being partisan does not mean we as journalists cannot be methodical and scrupulous with detail. We can be nevertheless. In the Italian media environment this is less anathema, as has been shown. Yet what has also been demonstrated is that British news, especially over Europe, is no less partisan and persuasive (Rowinski 2017).

Being emotionally engaged in challenging the Post-Truthers does not mean suspending all rational argument as the basis for our democratic foundations. Wodak and Reisigl (2001: 265) argue democratic legitimacy has to be the result of discourse: “performed under the condition of largely egalitarian reciprocity and located within the different public spheres or fields of political action, of a free, open and rational formation of public opinion about political problems and questions of shared interest”. The Guardian on Facebook mentioned above could be respectful of the opposing position, without being any less emotive in its stance—on the proviso those emotive positions are supported by facts, something it can be assumed is the case, considering the readership.

In terms of this notion of democracy, it is argued that even those on the same side of the ideological fence as the Post-Truthers, commit an act of self-harm if they relinquish control and do not scrutinise the Post-Truthers comments to establish if their words can be substantiated. To cease doing so, as evidenced in a series of articles in both the Italian and British press, is to, on a more fundamental level, forfeit what journalists
should do: hold the powers that be to account. If this approach gains traction then we eventually become an irrelevance and that opens the door to an even more authoritarian era in Italy, Britain and elsewhere in Europe and beyond, where in trying to keep up with populists and the social media and bloggers, we make ourselves an irrelevance and our publics can simply get the information from the horse’s mouth on Facebook, Twitter or their blogs.

Initiatives such as scrutinising claims, fact checking, and litigation could be a good start, but they do not have the strength to turn the Post-Truth tide. For D’Ancona (2017) a systemic and structural response is needed, such as the inclusion of digital literacy in schools with the aim of creating citizen journalists and editors. Efforts by the tech giants of Google, Facebook and Twitter to filter fake news need to be scaled up, both in terms of commitment and technology.

D’Ancona (2017) argues that the battle against Post-Truth cannot be won by facts alone. Research has shown that the more you provide people with proven facts to convince them of a particular point of view, the more they turn away from them. An increase in facts could mean more resistance and rejection of these given facts. D’Ancona concludes by saying that facts must speak to experience, memory and hope. I concur that what is required is a far better understanding of digital literacy, taught in schools. I would couple that with the need to teach citizenship, combating the passive consumerism of social media that D’Ancona (2017) also highlighted. But going further still, the problem in Britain and more recently in Italy is a collective memory that has, as also articulated in the media, developed a profound scepticism towards the European project. The EU and what it is trying to achieve, needs to be understood far better at least - but no less criticised or held to account. That failure by the EU, has also created a back door for the populists.

The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, emphasised there had been decades of “sustained and unrestrained anti-foreigner abuse” in the press, which has continued in Britain “unchallenged under the law for too long” (ECRI 2016a: 18). The ECRI (2016b: 16) regarding Italy, still noted: “this has not prevented the continuing use of aggressive and offensive language and even hate speech in political debate on radio and television against groups with ECRI’s remit”. The populists, when they go beyond Post-Truth and enter the realms of hate speech to ratchet up the emotive rhetoric, will not change. How we, as journalists, respond
to this and handle their comments has to. Hate speech, much like Post-Truth, has to be called out, not merely given a platform—especially if it incites violence (Liberty 2017a, b).

Euroscepticism is not waning, in light of the Coronavirus. EU states have been seen not to pull together—but instead to pull apart. Italy (Rowinski 2017) historically, wanted more Europe not less. Now it appears losing faith and indeed patience, with the project, as the fallout over Covid-19 is demonstrating, with the ghost of Greece and the previous euro crisis, still a source of real anger among the PIGS (Portugal, Italy, Greece and Spain). Jean Monnet, the founding father of the post-war ‘project’ said that Europe would be forged in crises (Lelliot 2020). The current crisis suggests maybe not.

Italy pleaded for fellow EU countries to send them medical equipment at the outset of the pandemic. Nothing came. Italy had to rely on the help of China and Russia. Italy’s Prime Minister, Giuseppe Conte, argued vociferously that Europe also needed to pool its debt, sharing the burden across the community. The proposal of Corona bonds was supported by France and Spain—but initially rejected by Germany, Holland and Brussels. This was an historical moment. A furious Conte said: “If Europe does not rise to this unprecedented challenge, the whole European structure loses its raison d’être to the people. We are at a critical point in European history”. (Lelliot 2020)

Lelliot (2020) argued: “That just about sums things up. The message being sent out is that Europe is a project for the good times and that when the going gets tough people can only really rely on their own government and the nation state”.

The EU’s reaction at this critical moment, almost feeds populist nationalism and the resulting Post-Truth, busily protecting the sanctity of the nation state, as seen by Grillo, Salvini, Johnson and Farage and apportioning blame elsewhere: Berlin or Brussels mainly. But we could do to remember that we in the liberal chattering classes unleashed this monster, as we spoke of many truths and relativism, including within the realms of journalism (Calcutt 2016; Gaber 2011). D’Ancona (2017) refers to the disappointment so many of the disaffected have come to feel with the mainstream political class—and by association the mainstream media. Kaltwasser (2014: 470) argues populism raises issues that are entirely legitimate and “we should avoid treating populism as an irrational impulse”. D’Ancona (2017: 140) is of the view: “political disappointment
is the handmaiden of Post-Truth, a solvent of trust and a cue to further tribal huddling”. All these lessons need to be learned.

As the author takes stock, a brief audit reaffirms that issues relating to **Post-Truth**, as a vehicle for Euroscepticism, have been investigated. If the media indulges rather than challenges (even when they are to some extent in agreement) this could usher in the **Post-Press** faze in political reporting. The reader will just go and watch Salvini and Johnson on Facebook, discounting or disbelieving the ‘untrustworthy’ media. This will not happen immediately, but a dismissive mainstream press fails to change its response at its peril.

And yes, at the time of writing Britain has ushered in leaving the EU. A common prognosis would be that if Italy leaves—the project is over: **Post-Europe**—or at least Post-EU.

As the Chinese thinker, Lao-Tzu famously said: “If you do not change direction, you may end up where you are heading”. At least if we journalists are willing to change, there could be a start. It’s now or never.

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