



# What Is a People? (New Directions in Critical Theory)

*Alain Badiou, Judith Butler, Georges Didi-Huberman, Sadri Khiari, Jacques Ranciere*

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These outspoken intellectuals seek to reclaim “people” as an effective political concept by revisiting its uses and abuses over time. Alain Badiou surveys the idea of a people as a productive force of solidarity and emancipation and a negative tool of categorization and suppression. Pierre Bourdieu follows with a sociolinguistic analysis of “popular” and its transformation of democracy, beliefs, songs, and even soups into phenomena with outsized importance. Judith Butler calls out those who use freedom of assembly to create an exclusionary “we.” Georges Didi-Huberman addresses the problem of summing up a people with totalizing narratives. Sadri Khiari applies an activist’s perspective to the racial hierarchies inherent in ethnic and national categories, and Jacques Rancière comments on the futility of isolating theories of populism when, as these thinkers have shown, the idea of a “people” is too diffuse to support them. By engaging this topic linguistically, ethnically, culturally, and ontologically, these scholars help separate “people” from its fraught associations to pursue more vital formulations.

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