Citation:
Morgan, JA and Patomäki, H (2016) Special Forum on Brexit. Globalizations, 14 (1). pp. 99-103. ISSN 1474-774X DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2016.1228784

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INTRODUCTION

Special Forum on Brexit

Jamie Morgan & Heikki Patomäki

As part of initial campaigning in January 2013, Prime Minister David Cameron pledged to hold an in/out referendum if the Conservatives won a majority in the general election of 2015.[i] Received wisdom before the 2015 general election was that there would be another coalition government, and that a Liberal Democrat Party partner to such a coalition would reject a referendum; so centrist Conservatives could make the pledge, benefit from it, and likely never have to implement it. Thereafter, the intent was to both undercut the growing popularity of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and silence Cameron's own Conservative sceptics. European integration had been a source of division within the Party, particularly from the 1990s, based on issues that had never been resolved. These focused mainly on the sharing of sovereignty within the European Union (EU) through the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and then the Lisbon Treaty in 2007.

The immediate effect of a referendum pledge was to focus debate on immigration, and provide a degree of legitimacy to UKIP and a point of convergence for Conservative sceptics. In reality, immigration and EU membership are largely separate issues. It has been typical ever since the UK joined the European Economic Community in 1973 for annual net migration to the UK from outside the region to exceed that from within. What matters in UK politics is that UKIP increased their vote from less than 1 million to 3.8 million in the 2015 general election. In essence, in attempting to confront the problem of the Euro-sceptic right, Cameron put short-term strategy for his own party before long-term collective interests. He thus contributed to shifting the 'Overton window'—the range of ideas that can assume the centre stage in political discourse by being acceptable to the public—to accommodate the sceptics and UKIP's way of positioning a much broader set of issues. Obviously, this shift also affected the outcome of the referendum in June 2016.

It is important, however, to take a longer term and wider view to Brexit and its consequences. Events and episodes occur within processes. A number of processes may not only occur simultaneously but also coalesce and interact in various ways. Already Thucydides, in his Peloponnesian wars, understood the difference between events and underlying structures and processes. Thus, Thucydides distinguished between two types of causes, between aitia and prophasis. Aitia refers to the rationalization of action, and prophasis to the underlying causes, to the causes which are 'behind' or 'under' the level of rationalizations and concrete events (see, for instance, Edmunds, 1975, pp. 172–173). The 'going beyond' of rationalization can be done in at least three directions. The first direction is to move deeper into the discursive formations and meanings, for instance, by explicating the meaning structures underpinning a particular political stand, for example, in relation to the EU.

The second direction is to explain the concrete contextual and relational possibilities open to a positioned actor. A telling example is Cameron's apparent opportunity to increase his party's popularity by calling for a referendum. This opportunity was made possible by the underlying institutions (such as parliamentary democracy, voting system, laws concerning referendum, article 50 of the Lisbon Treaty) and the specific constellation of forces and developments pre- ceding the call (such as continuous disputes about financial taxes and regulation as well as over the future of the City of London, and the rise of UKIP and related ideas across parties).

The third direction of going beyond mere rationalization is to analyse causal or existential, often unintended consequences of action, involving effects of power. Actors do not always know what they are doing does in terms of underlying structures and processes. Moreover, systemic intra- and inter-dependence may give rise to emergent

powers and properties, which are (re)produced in the context of at least some unintended consequences of action. Brexit may, for instance, constitute a turning point in the European integration process and, beyond that, in the processes of global political economy and security. To use Alexander Wendt's (1999) categories, the prevailing culture of anarchy may further shift from Kantian and Lockean understandings towards Hobbesian understandings.[ii]

This special forum consists of 10 contributions that shed light on the aitia and prophasis of Brexit. Owen Worth starts by delving deeper into the discursive formations and meanings of neoliberalism. He argues that the roots of the successful Brexit vote can be found in the free market purity that was implicit within the ideals behind Thatcherism. While the libertarian right can lay claim to have been the ideological victors of Brexit, the reality within British society has been that of increasing cleavages, stimulating right-wing reactionary forces (but also Jeremy Corbyn's precarious rise within the Labour Party). Worth concurs with Karl Polanyi that free market liberalism tends to generate the forces of its own demise. This seems to indicate a new Polanyian double movement (cf. Patomäki, 2014).

Boris Kagarlitsky agrees with Worth's analysis of the structural developments of British society, but takes a different viewpoint on Brexit. He points out that statistics show that the division of the Brexit vote does not coincide with racial or gender differences, but to a large extent reflects the difference in class. It was mainly the working class and the lower classes of society who voted for an exit from the EU. Kagarlitsky criticizes not only the neoliberal elites but also the Left intellectuals and cultural critics of capitalism for failing to address the concerns of ordinary citizens and for misrepresenting the 'Leave' vote. 'The very idea that masses of common people make their choice rationally, according to their real interests, is totally unacceptable for them.' He argues further that the role of intellectuals in popular movements should be to help people over- come these prejudices, to move from an intuitive sense of their interest to a conscious understanding. Supportive of Lexit (Left exit from the EU), Kagarlitsky declares that 'the English voters expressed new pan-European trends and needs (in their best and worst manifestations)'.

Jamie Morgan warns, however, 'to be careful what you wish for'. He stresses the relative openness of the immediate future. The British future from Brexit is not yet determined because its institutional form remains undecided. However, if dominant conceptual frameworks continue to apply, then it seems unlikely that Brexit will address the underlying causes of grievances, since these transcend EU membership. Morgan argues that they are a product of a common political economy, understood as an ideational framework within globalizing processes. A significant commonality in globalization is that labour is treated as just one more factor of production, a unit cost, measured and rewarded in terms of its marginal productivity, and where the labour market is ultimately no different from any other. The prevailing economic policy suppresses social and organized elements in labour markets and work organizations. This has contributed to the decline of trust among citizenry. At the end of his piece, Morgan raises the question whether all this could be understood also in terms of the nowadays unfashionable concept of alienation. Alienation expresses itself as a deep sense of inauthenticity, a lack of self-worth or existential meaninglessness, where the actual potentials of the human are somehow being harmed by the system we live in.

Ann Pettifor also takes up the theme of the role of economics in creating context for Brexit. Pettifor's focus is the role financialisation has played in creating the dissatisfactions that motivated much of the leave vote. Following Polanyi she describes this as 'a form of social self-protection from self-regulating markets in money, trade and labour'. As she concludes, the underlying processes involved are not new and are not restricted to the UK. Noah Toly provides an additional perspective focusing on the concept of the global city and the considerable 'leadership' challenges this creates for London to transform itself in response to Brexit.

Bob Jessop analyses the organic crisis of the British state, explicitly making a distinction between events and processes. His point of departure is that the Brexit vote was a singular event that is one symptom of a continuing organic crisis of the British state.

> The Brexit conjuncture reflected a long-running split in the establishment, a worsening representational crisis in the party system, a growing crisis of authority for political elites, a legitimacy crisis of the state, and a crisis of national-popular hegemony over the population.

These crises cannot be traced back to a single process or level of causation, yet political economy can provide a key to understanding many aspects of the relevant complex. Jessop underlines that finance-led neoliberal policies 'privilege opportunities for monetary profit over the provision of substantive use-values'. In the process, wealth and income have become polarized and social cohesion degraded. These policies fuel de-industrialization and generate financial crises in the worldwide context characterized by the Euro crisis, economic migration and refugee crises, and, beyond Europe, the shift of the global centre of economic gravity to East Asia. Jessop concurs that 'a choice for entry or exit would not affect the overall dominance of neoliberalism—only its specific form and mediations'. But he also argues for 'pursuing an offensive strategy for fundamental reform of the European Union and its place within a world society'.

Jo Guldi uses her knowledge of history to seek guidance for the future. She asks: 'How likely are utopian futures of the kind that Jeremy Corbyn has recently envisioned for the future of post- Brexit Britain?' In contrast to Morgan and Jessop, who anticipate neoliberal business-as-usual in the post-Brexit UK (without implying that there are no alternatives to it), Guldi explores the chances of implementing a 10-point plan for restoring the National Health Service (NHS), building homes, and reducing income inequality. 'A deeper history of state, democracy, and expert rule in Brexit can highlight the underlying tensions and point to some sources of possible out- comes.' Resonating with Morgan's analysis of ideational commonalities, Guldi is particularly interested in the role of expert power in government since the eighteenth century, and in democratic alternatives to the dominant modes of expert knowledge such as neoclassical economics. Manifold utopian ideas have emerged at times in British history. Although only a limited number of these ideas were ever actually put into effect, history provides a rich source of knowledge about democratic and participatory ideas and experiments. Although dystopian futures are also possible, Guldi stresses the positive potentials of still partly unrealized possibilities.

Peter Wahl looks at Brexit from the point of view of the future of the European integration process. 'The Brexit has put the question of the final goal of integration on the agenda.' The logic of thinking has been mostly binary: either Eurotopia or nationalism. Wahl maintains that the 'more Europe'-approach is unrealistic for the foreseeable future. In addition, he is also sceptical of its normative desirability, at least in its current neoliberal form. On the other hand, Wahl emphasizes that nationalism is an illusion that is potentially dangerous. The full disintegration of the Union would also be very costly. This can be generalized to globalization. 'It is not possible any more to disconnect from globalisation and the attempt to return back to the old style of nation-state is doomed to fail.' Thus, Wahl proposes a third way for the future of the EU. 'Differentiated integration' is characterized by two principles: flexibilization within the EU and opening towards the outside world. It would mean selective integration in certain areas and disintegration in certain others, both with variable participation. He takes up the example of the financial transaction tax to show what this could mean in practice—and not necessarily in Europe only, but globally.

James Galbraith alerts us to the dangers of prediction.

> In the immediate morning-after of the Brexit vote, the wide expectation was for economic chaos, a government of Leavers in Britain and a quick filing of Article 50, encouraged by the French, leading inexorably to Britain's exit from the EU under harsh conditions and to Scotland's exit from the UK.

In fact, the British exit from the EU is postponed, a mixed government of Conservatives has emerged and the London stock exchange recovered rapidly. 'The main economic consequence was a drop in Sterling, good for the FTSE 100 Index and potentially for the trade balance.' Hence, Galbraith's main point is about the EU as a whole. Can the Euro or the EU itself survive? 'Clearly under present policies [the Euro] will not survive indefinitely.' The current fragile hope for Europe lies in an effort to construct a pan-European democratic and social- democratic alliance. In the absence of progressive European transformations, also the prospects for global peace and security are going to diminish.

In the last piece of the Forum, Heikki Patomäki asks whether it is indeed true that either the EU will be democratized or it will disintegrate? Furthermore, if the current policies, principles and institutions of the EU generate counterproductive politico-economic effects and suffer from problems of legitimation, why is it that the European discontent is channelled, for such a large part, into nationalist politics of othering and scapegoating rather than into building a leftist-democratic movement for transforming the Union? Collective learning points towards the gradual spread of democratic and cosmopolitan sentiments, but the difficulties of learning and a two-phase causal mechanism from economic trouble, via existential insecurities and anxieties in everyday lives, to securitization and enemy-construction, explain why contrary tendencies may dominate. Trust in the EU has declined, in part due to a prolonged economic downturn and crisis (with deep roots in the global financialization process), but in part because of what is perceived to be the undemocratic or unchangeable nature of the EU. Problems of identity politics, securitization and enemy construction are not confined to Europe. They give rise to tendencies towards disintegration and conflicts, also worldwide. Patomäki concludes by pointing out that modest policy proposals and tentative steps within the existing EU Treaty framework may be too little too late. The question is whether there is enough time for deeper transformations in Europe—and also globally.

References

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1. Initial reference by the Conservatives to a variety of referendum predates 2013 and can be found in the 2010 general election manifesto (as a commitment to do nothing to augment EU powers without a referendum). In the 2010 election, UKIP received just 3% of the vote, but by 2013, polls indicated that they had around 15% support, and could thus contest Conservative marginal seats. This then gave Conservative MPs a reason to

support a referendum pledge, since it provided a campaign focus – 'vote Conservative and we will deliver on the EU, a vote for UKIP cannot do this' (as such the pledge broadened the appeal of an EU referendum beyond actual Euro-sceptics). Cameron's actual speech is a nuanced account of the need to make the EU more democratically accountable and to give its members/citizens a sense of commitment and voice in the wake of growing scepticism in a period of austerity politics, and so on. However, the media reports focus almost exclusively on the significance of the pledge as a response to Conservative Euro-sceptics.

2. According to Wendt (1999), the cultures of inter-state anarchy (meaning there is no world state) are shared ideas, which help shape state interests and capabilities, and generate tendencies in the international system. A Hobbesian culture is premised on unrestrained egoism and consequent war of all against all. In a Lockean culture, egoism is restrained, law and others are recognized, and cooperation and common institutions are more likely. In a Kantian culture, ethics and law matter even more, security can be collective and institutions of cooperation extensive and intensive. In Hobbesian cultures, the main subject position is 'enemy', in Lockean 'rival', and in Kantian 'friend'.