

BOOK REVIEW:**DRIFTING AWAY: UNDERLYING CURRENTS OF BREXIT****Rana İZCİ CONNELLY***

Brexit and British Politics by Geoffrey Evans and Anand Menon, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2017. (ISBN: 978-1-5095-2386-3)

The Road to Somewhere. The New Tribes Shaping British Politics by David Goodhart, Penguin, Kindle Edition. 2017.

Where We Are. The State of Britain Now by Roger Scruton, Bloomsbury, Kindle Edition. 2017.

Referendums are often associated with direct/participatory democracy. In some controversial cases governments refer an issue to the citizens who are eligible to vote. The public has the final say on such sensitive issues and the results are often announced as: The people have spoken! Regular elections are not very different in this sense. Whether it is a close fought election or not, the results are widely evaluated as the ‘will of the people’ especially if you are on the winning side. Nevertheless, parliamentary processes promise coalitions, negotiations, compromises and new elections. Sometimes, the voices of those who lost the election should also be taken into consideration while forming governments. Moreover, there is a specified timetable for the elected to face challenges. And the electorate can change their minds even before the end of a period of office, thereby forcing governments to respond their demands.

Referendums, on the other hand, do not possess these dynamic, interactive elements of negotiation once a decision has been made. They more often present a black and white picture, an end rather than a continuous process, unless there is a second referendum to re-evaluate the situation. Hence, their results have even more dramatic and long lasting impacts on public life particularly if the referendum question is poorly formulated or the issue at stake has been inadequately addressed or politically ill-treated for decades, are rushed

* Ph.D., e-mail: ranaizci@marmara.edu.tr.

in response to immediate events, and concern highly politicised intergenerational and intergenerational issues in the form of different visions for future.

That's more or less what happened in United Kingdom European Union Membership Referendum held in June 2016. Since the very promise of holding a referendum was uttered by David Cameron, the debates and literature on Brexit have developed very quickly. Ranging from academic articles to pocket guides, reports and memoirs, British exceptionalism and EU membership has been investigated with a view to understand what was happening. The advantages and disadvantages of EU membership were fiercely discussed on different platforms. Sovereignty and migration were the main elements of those heated discussions. Both the Leave and Remain campaigns tried to convey their opinion about UK's EU membership to the general public and persuade those who had not yet decided how to vote. In the end Brexiteers succeeded despite widespread expectations of a yes vote. Nonetheless, even Brexiteers had different visions and expectations of how Brexit should take place when they voted for it.

It would not be wrong to argue that the nature of the Brexit negotiations and the risks of 'no deal' compel not only Remain voters but also third parties to wonder why the Leave side won 51.89 per cent of the votes, cutting across traditional political loyalties. Evans and Menon argue that the majority of the voters had already come to the conclusion before the Referendum was held that EU membership was not good for them. They claimed that the Leave campaign's motto of 'taking back control' attracted some undecided voters while fortifying the decisions of many who could benefit neither from globalisation nor freedom of movement. At this point, it is worth mentioning that history will not be benevolent to Tony Blair not only for his support for the USA in the Iraq war but also his decision to open the British labour market to Central and Eastern Europeans seven years before the EU requirement to do so. According to most Leave voters, the adaptive capacity of the legal, economic and social systems to such immigration was not good enough and almost all systems failed in the end. The 2008 financial crisis, long-lasting austerity policies, and housing problems also exacerbated the issues of socio-economic share of public goods. Therefore, as Evans and Menon state, negative feelings towards the British political establishment and EU membership among those who felt 'left out' or 'left behind' intertwined due to the complex dynamics of European integration and globalisation (Evans and Menon, 2017). It is, thus, an appalling irony that the most disadvantaged communities and groups will probably suffer most from the termination of EU funded projects and policies.

Undoubtedly the Single European Act and Single Market were the most successful achievements of European Integration from the traditional UK

perspective. After 1991, however, alongside steps towards deeper integration, the rise of Euroscepticism in the UK was almost unstoppable among the politicians and governing elite. Thus, it was not surprising that the Anti Federalist League Party was established in 1991 (Evans and Menon, 2017: 6). Evans and Menon explicate carefully and methodically all the developments and events that led to the Referendum and how and why the Leave side won the case.

Alternatively, for those who want to explore the mindsets of Leave voters, Roger Scruton and David Goodhart provide engaging narratives. The contention between “Anywheres” and “Somewheres,” according to Goodhart, explains the road to Brexit and the rise of outriders in the more comprehensive geopolitical context. In the case of the UK, he argues that the domination of anywheres (or anywhere liberalism) who are associated with high level careers, skills, higher education and mobility has caused resentment in some parts of society (Goodhart, 2017: 19-48). Somewheres, especially, had to endure various difficult? challenges in their lives. In his words: Somewheres are those who value familiarity and local and national attachments over change, living mostly in old industrial and maritime areas. Though younger generations are in favour of equality in gender roles, family values and traditions still have significant role in their life styles (2017: 23-24). Goodhart also emphasizes that there is a large group of Inbetweeners while anywheres and somewheres include people from all walks of life. Even so, he uses “ascribed” and “achieved” identities to explain the essential differences between two extremes underlying more of a split identity problem which anywheres might suffer most (Goodhart, 2017: 3-4, 116).

Roger Scruton also refers to Goodhart’s categorisation of different worldviews and reflect on the identities; shared and individual, in his book. He also stresses the feeling of being a stranger in one’s own country, and the pace of change taking place at the socio-cultural background of the nation. He employs a different categorization of values and life styles to explain: the difference between “oikophilia” and “oikophobia”; people who are already happy and rooted where they are and people who are still in search of such a place or desire to be somewhere else (Scruton, 2017: location 975-1032). According to him, togetherness (regardless of ethnicity) which constitutes the very fabric of this island is in danger due to embedded oikophobia in the political system. Scruton sees the dominant declining literature “Britain falling behind” as one of the factors that challenge national pride and alienate citizens (Scruton, 2017: location 1208). Both Goodhart and Scruton underline the importance of the sense of belonging and point out the role of the education system (mainly residential universities and boarding schools) in shaping identities. The EU, according to both categorisations, has already turned into a

project of adoptable, mobile identities. At this point, Scruton draws the reader's attention to the law of the land and traditions of accountability in the UK. And he asserts that as technocratic and bureaucratic elements of European integration intensify the democratic deficit widens too. It particularly upsets British public who have never been very pro-European anyway. Even though the British electorate has lost its sense of belonging in mainstream politics and parties, far away politicians and unknown, unreachable bureaucrats in 'Brussels' aggravate the aloofness.

Sovereignty is certainly another important issue within the context of mass institutionalisation of the European project. Scruton tries to explain why France and Germany have different bonds with the EU than the UK through legal systems, traditions of political systems and the sense of belonging. According to him, leave does not mean leaving the true European ideal but the EU which turned its back on its distinctive achievement - nationality. Both Goodhart and Scruton seem to be well aware of the Little Englanders and Albion nostalgias but they argue that most Leave voters are neither racists nor xenophobic.

All categorizations risk oversimplifying facts, as both Scruton and Goodhart agree. Furthermore, it is not very clear in both books how to accommodate highly educated, affluent, influential, very mobile and networking young or middle age leave voters within such categorisations. The question to be answered is a difficult one within the bounds of such categorizations: can this phenomenon be explained solely by embedded Euroscepticism in the political system? or by optimism for a better future outside the EU? et or by invoking an impracticable longing for a lost world? or by the belief that the European project has reached its limits? All in all, they still offer a deeper insight enabling their readers to understand the dividing lines in British politics. Then again, in all these categorizations, it is possible to feel a slight male bias. For example, even though Goodhart admits the male bias in public life, when he discusses women it is still usually in the context of family life or in the context of career versus raising children cases; women are not seen as agents in their own right, unlike men who are (Goodhart, 2017: 205-14).

All three books were published in the aftermath of the referendum but are not blueprints explaining which way Brexit will or should proceed. Nonetheless, all three make the reader think whether European integration might have followed a different path to solve the democratic deficit problem and also remind us of a number of important issues such as: calling people names does not persuade others holding different views but destroys communication; everyone needs a voice; people prefer positive narrations of the future to gloomy predictions; and referendums make things more complicated at a time when reconciliation in society is both a forgotten and a fragile art.