

BOOK REVIEWS

Brexit and the Political Economy of Fragmentation: Things Fall Apart. By Jamie Morgan and Heikki Patomäki (ed.). Routledge. 2018. ISBN 978-1-138-57604-9, £115.

Uncertainty and confusion have dominated the early stages of this era-defining event. Brexit means Brexit, the UK government has been very firm on this, however the consequences of the various forms that Brexit might take still creates a substantive discussion. Is Brexit a last gasp of neoliberalism in decline? Is it a signal of the demise of the EU? Will Brexit boost disintegrative trends in the European and world economy? What is UK set to become after Brexit?

This timely edited collection has extensively explored these questions. The chapters in this book were originally published in multiple issues of the well-known Journal *Globalizations*. **Jamie Morgan** – Professor of Economic Sociology at Leeds Beckett University and the co-editor of the *Real World Economics Review*, and **Heikki Patomäki** – Professor of World Politics at the University of Helsinki, edit articles from a number of renowned academics into an inclusive, comprehensible and stimulating study of the distinctive and different approaches to Brexit.

Jamie Morgan and Heikki Patomäki primarily focus on the reasons that led David Cameron's Conservative party to call a referendum. The editors discuss the sharing of sovereignty with the EU through the Maastricht (1992) and Lisbon (2007) treaties, the growing popularity of the UK Independence Party (UKIP) and the debate on immigration.

UKIP increased its voter base 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 the country's long term collective interests. (1)

Morgan and Patomäki stress the importance of taking a longer term and a wider view on Brexit and its consequences in this book, which consists of 10 contributions that emphasise the *aitia* (the rationalisation of action) and *prophasis* (causes) of Brexit.

Owen Worth starts by delving deeper into the discursive formations and meanings of neoliberalism. Worth suggests that the roots of the successful Brexit vote can be found in the free market purity that was implicit in the ideals behind Thatcherism. He argues that free market liberalism tends to generate the forces of its own demise. He highlights a comment from Nigel Lawson, former Chancellor of the Exchequer to Thatcher, now a peer in the

House of Lords: “Mrs Thatcher could now finish what she has started”. Worth also brings up the Thatcher – Reagan doctrine of a strong liberal national tradition for popular support.

Boris Kagarlitsky approves Worth’s suggestions on the structural developments of the British society, but takes a different approach on Brexit. Kagarlitsky argues that the statistics show the division of the Brexit vote does not coincide with racial or gender differences, but to a large extent reflects the differences in class. He criticises 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. He claims that it was mainly the working class and the lower classes of society who voted for Leave. It was exactly the mass of common people in England who, by voting to leave, contributed to the formation of the new European agenda. Overcoming and unmaking bureaucratic, authoritarian and neoliberal EU institutions is the only way to progress towards the making of a new democratic Europe (12). Kagarlitsky refers to the London based Socialist Review in saying:

Britons did not only vote against the EU. They did so in the face of opposition from three quarters of MPs, the leadership of biggest parliamentary parties – the Conservatives, Labour and the Scottish National Party – the overwhelming bulk of British industry and almost every major capitalist institution, from the bank of England to the International Monetary Fund (Choonara 2016).

The Brexit vote was not only a rebellion against the neoliberal European project, but also a popular uprising against Britain’s own ruling elites, including both intellectual and political classes, business and media (13). According to Kagarlitsky, the main political thrust of the era is the struggle of the peoples of Europe against the neoliberal regime of the European Union. The outcome of this struggle depends on the level of solidarity between grassroots movements, and on their ability to unite on the basis of common goals, overcoming prejudices and illusions, freeing themselves from obsolete language and labels (16). He claims that the issue of overcoming neoliberalism is the urgent historic task of today – not because we do not like this system, or because it does not correspond to our values, but because it has exhausted its potential for development and can only survive by devouring the resources needed for the basic reproduction of society. In other words, the longer this system remains, the more it will self-destruct, and undermine our livelihoods (17).

Jamie Morgan focuses on the British future after Brexit and claims that the institutional form this will take is not yet fixed. Morgan warns 'to be careful what you wish for' and stresses the relative openness of the immediate future. He points to the deep sense in the UK that the political elite cannot be trusted, and do not represent the electorate (20). The deep sense of there being one rule for the few and another for the many is created by experience (23). Morgan discusses the main issue of Brexit as the nature of globalisation instead of being inside or outside of the EU. He identifies trade relations as the main concern for the UK's future institutional arrangements. Policy discussions currently focus on *who* to trade with, rather than more fundamentally, *what kind of economy* would address the problems that produced Brexit. Morgan determines Brexit to be a regional and a global issue, not just a UK issue. Problems for the UK are also problems for the partners and those positioned as competitors (25). It inserts a new complication into the Trans-Atlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, creating a potential distraction from the core problem of corporate accountability. Brexit may also lead to a lurch in neoliberalism, a further evolution and perhaps its death throes (26). Morgan concludes that nothing is certain at the moment and we should not need a disastrous Brexit to realise that it signals something more important. Systems are fragile because they are constituted through people, but this fragility is also a strength because it is the potential for transformative change (26).

Ann Pettifor's focus is the role financialisation has played in creating the dissatisfactions that motivated much of the Leave vote. She describes this as 'a form of social self-protection' and argues that Leave voters rejected the advice of dozens of leading economists and several powerful financial institutions (29). This was the latest manifesto of the popular dissatisfaction with the economists' globalised, marketised society (33). Pettifor concludes her article with her fears; this instinct of self-protection will energise the far right, not only in Britain but also in the EU and the US. She also argues that nationalism, protectionism and populism are not confined to Western nations and Brexit might have a wider impact in countries such as India.

Bob Jessop disagrees with Owen Worth about the impact of Thatcherism on Brexit. He argues that Thatcherism was *rassemblement* of the establishment, in contrast, the Brexit conjuncture reflects 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 (36). According to Jessop, the dominance of neoliberalism indicates that the choice posed in the referendum was misleading: the real choice should have been in or out of neoliberalism rather than in or out of the European Union (39). To conclude, he states that Brexit is so polyvalent a notion and so complex a

process that its present meaning is hard to define and its future trajectory hard to discern. Nonetheless, it will require a shift in the balance of forces through popular mobilisation, combining social movements and party organisations (42).

Noah Toly changes the focus to London. He asks the question 'what does this mean for London?' (47). Toly claims that the liberal economic policies made global cities, and more restrictive policies will, to a certain extent, unmake some of them. He identifies London as a 'golden goose', which the UK decided to strangle with the Brexit vote. (46). Toly argues that in an open global economy, and for global cities like London, boom and bust are not only cycles, following one after the other, but adjacent places. In contrast to this, he also points out that London was a global city long before anyone knew the terms of an open global economy, and states that the cities can lead the way (49).

In contrast to Morhan and Jessop, **Jo Guldi** stresses the positive potential of as-yet-unrealised possibilities. Guldi explores the chances of implementing plans for restoring the NHS, building new homes, and reducing income inequality.

Peter Wahl looks at Brexit from a different point of view and questions the future of European integration. He claims Brexit has put the question of the final goal of integration on the agenda and it's either 'Eurotopia' or nationalism. According to Wahl, 'more Europe' approach is unrealistic for the foreseeable future. On the other hand, nationalism is an illusion and is potentially dangerous. He suggests a third way for the future of the EU; 'differentiated integration', based on the respect for diversity and plurality and interest in international cooperation (63).

James Galbraith rings the bells of danger and points out the immediate devastating impacts of the 'Leave' vote. Galbraith reminds us of the departure of David Cameron along with George Osborne and the potential exit of Scotland from the UK. He then enlists the events that will follow; 'first, the London based international banks will move some operations to EU territory, second, British universities and scientific institutions will be hit hard, and third EU law will not limit departure of refugees from EU territory' (67). Galbraith highlights the conflicts in Ukraine, Libya, Yemen, Iraq and Afghanistan and argues that the Brexit decision has not helped at all to deal with these. He claims that if the project of sustaining peace between outside powers cannot be made to work, there will be hell to pay (68).

In contrast to James Galbraith, **Steve Keen** and **Silke Trommer** discuss the post Brexit trade policies, potential gains of diversity and how they can be a victory for middle power Britain. Trommer claims that, historically, the UK government has been able to influence the design of the international trade regime (100).

Leonard Seabrooke and **Duncan Wigan** focus on the tax regimes. Seabrooke and Wigan claim that wealth flows are fickle by nature and a Britain effectively excluded from its giant neighbouring market is unlikely to remain attractive (114).

Joachim Becker makes a comparative analysis between the Yugoslav and EU integration crisis. He compares the disintegration of Yugoslavia with the disintegrative tendencies in the EU. He claims that in both 1980's Yugoslavia and today's EU, entrenched patterns of uneven development and hybrid forms of statehood combining federal/supranational and confederal elements set the structural stage for disintegrative tendencies, which were finally unleashed by a deep economic crisis (135). Becker argues that in both cases, the central institutions lost legitimacy through neo-liberal austerity and structural adjustment policies, particularly among the popular classes. According to Becker, it is not yet clear how far the disintegration of the EU will go and which political forces will shape it (136).

Overall, *Brexit and the Political Economy of Fragmentation* brings a wide range of articles together and offers the readers a very good platform with various different approaches on Brexit.

Ethina Spring, Birkbeck College, University of London, UK