The Social Consequences of Brexit for the UK and Europe

Euroscepticism, Populism, Nationalism, and Societal Division[1]

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Abstract

This article examines the 2016 Referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union and draws on initial research into the reasons that the UK voted to leave and demographics of the leave vote. This initial analysis suggests that the Brexit (British Exit) vote reveals wider and deeper societal tensions along the lines of age, class, income, and education (Goodwin and Heath 2016). By providing an account of the background and events of the referendum, this article asserts that the vote was a case study in populist right-wing Eurosceptic discourse (Leconte 2010; Taggart 2004), but it also reveals strong elements of English nationalism (including British exceptionalism and social conservatism) in parts of British society (Henderson et al. 2016; Wellings 2010). Given this, the article begins to make sense of Brexit from a social quality perspective and outlines a possible social quality approach to the UK and Europe post-Brexit.
Keywords: Antiestablishmentarianism, Brexit, Euroscepticism, English nationalism, left behind, populism, societal division

On 23 June 2016 the United Kingdom (UK) voted by a referendum to end its forty-three-year membership of "the European project." After a close-fought, often incoherent, and rambunctious referendum campaign, in the end, a difference of just over one million voters enabled the Leave

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campaign to win the referendum by 51.9 percent of the vote to 48.1 percent. This article examines the background to the referendum campaign and how populist and nationalist forces were mobilized to support the long-running campaign by right-wing Eurosceptic groups for the UK to exit the European Union (EU). Wider societal divisions are revealed by the Brexit (British Exit) vote (Goodwin and Heath 2016), and it is proposed that the social quality approach can be useful to analyze these divisions, while promoting an open, internationalist, and universalist path post-Brexit.

The article first examines the roots of Brexit by tracing the development of Euroscepticism in the UK since the early 1990s and the formation of the latest stage of "the European project"—political and economic integration within the European Union. British Euroscepticism is underpinned by two interlinked factors: the resurgence of populism and English nationalism. Second, an account of the referendum campaign is outlined that highlights the influence of populism and English nationalism, which includes opposition to representative (liberal) democracy, the idealization of a "heartland," and the articulation of the particular social values that make up this "heartland" (Taggart 2004). Third, an analysis of the Brexit vote reveals deeper underlying factors beyond the articulated concerns that voters have with unresponsive elites, the protection of British values and norms, and an opposition to immigration. These include widening societal divisions between people on the lines of age, education, and skills, wealth, geographical location, and social values. Although not clearly articulated in the accounts of people's reasons for Brexit, issues of inequality and austerity are cited as important. Fourth, the article subjects the argument developed to the social quality framework and proposes the ways in which social quality can begin to analyze the societal divisions revealed by Brexit, and its implications for social quality as a universalist, internationalist, and progressive concept.

The Roots of Brexit

Over the past forty years there has been increasingly mainstream opposition to projects of European unification in the UK, especially since the establishment of the European Union in the early 1990s (Geddes 2013). Though this must be set in the context that British Euroscepticism (as discussed below, this is largely *English* nationalism) has a longer legacy of opposing any form of European integration dating back to before World War II (Crespy and Verschueren 2009; Forster 2002), and can even be traced back to the period of the formation of the Church of England and separation from Rome in the sixteenth century (Smith 2006).

In more contemporary British Euroscepticism, Anthony Forster (2002) identifies three key periods; Macmillan's application to join the European Community (EC) in the 1960s through to Wilson's referendum in 1975, which voted in favor of membership of the EC; second, the Thatcherite redefinition of the terms of the European debate, which led to the third period of opposition to the Maastricht Treaty and EU moves toward political and economic integration, in which current British Euroscepticism finds its most defining reference point. It is this current period that has seen the rise of strong opposition among Eurosceptic groups in the UK, coalescing into the 2016 EU Referendum and vote to leave the EU.

However, in this period the roots of British Euroscepticism go wider and deeper than just the politics of the UK's relationship with European institutions to include the legacy of English nationalism that is grounded in the myths of the British Empire (British exceptionalism) and impact of World War II on the national consciousness. This finds contemporary expression in opposition to several aspects of cultural, economic, and political globalization through the rise of populism. Combined with this tendency toward both left-wing and (especially) right-wing

populism, Euroscepticism and its influence on the 2016 EU Referendum can be seen as not just a political process but also as a cultural and economic one. This has implications for the societal preconditions for, and consequences of, the Brexit vote.

Euroscepticism

It is important to acknowledge that Euroscepticism is not solely a British phenomenon. Cécile Leconte (2010: 46; 2015) argues that the mainstreaming of Euroscepticism began in the 1990s, and was not just confined to Britain, but included the German chancellor Helmut Kohl's opposition to the "regulation fury" of the Maastricht Treaty and a number of close-run referenda. The rejection (and subsequent acceptance) by Denmark of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and 1993, France in 1992, and Ireland's initial rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in 2010, and the rise of populist Eurosceptic leaders in France, Austria, the Netherlands, and elsewhere suggest conflicting views on satisfaction with the direction of "the European project" (Leconte 2010, 2015; Taggart 2004).

However, a strong tradition of British Euroscepticism is connected to the post-imperial decline of the British Empire and general economic decline (Gifford 2008). Indeed, British people are the least likely of all twenty-eight EU member states to identify as "European" (Dennison and Carl 2016). However, there is not an essential "national character" that is predisposed toward Euroscepticism, but rather, as elaborated below, populist political and media actors can articulate aspects of national antagonisms such as societal inequalities and tensions within societal integration as problems deriving simply from "the European project" (Canovan 1999; Geddes 2013).

Andrew Geddes (2013: 1) argues that the UK has historically been ambivalent about EU unification, few British politicians have been enthusiastic about the EU, and that since the 1950s, "opposition to European integration has remained a powerful political undertow in British politics." This led Stephen George (1998) to famously describe the UK as an "awkward partner" with the rest of Europe. As a result, a pragmatic and skeptical position about grand projects has been the British political class's approach to the EU, with a narrow focus on the economic costs and benefits of membership. This means that the UK's relationship with Europe has been seen as one of "conditional and differential engagement," in which the ambivalence of British policymakers has placed the UK within an "outer tier" of the EU (Geddes 2013). This has meant that the UK has increasingly been subject to EU-wide initiatives, while remaining largely peripheral to other European actors driving the development of the EU.

In the past three decades, an economic and trading relationship has been the cornerstone of the British right's approach to Europe and in power the British left has embraced some of the aims of "social Europe" (e.g., the social chapter). But as Geddes (2013: 14) argues, "The EU's move, from 'market-making' to 'polity-building' has created more space for Euroscepticism in British politics that draws from the representation of the European project as a threat to national identity, as well as wider disaffection from the political system." Nicholas Startin (2015) argues that there have been three key events in moving Euroscepticism into the mainstream of British politics: the Maastricht Treaty (1992), the big bang of EU member state expansion (2004), and the global financial crisis and eurozone economic crisis (2008 onward). Maastricht was especially divisive for John Major's Conservative government in the 1990s and led to significant backbench rebellions within the Conservative Party, which, combined with the media portrayal of EU policy, promoted an especially "right-wing Euroscepticism" that is "regressive and

conservative within the British political culture, but its strength lies in its capacity to be populist and appear contemporary and radical" (Gifford 2006: 857).

The expansion of the EU since 2004, with increasing migration and competition for low-skilled, low-pay insecure work in the UK as part of the overall neoliberal direction of British society, the consequences of the financial crisis and the Conservatives' austerity policies, have disproportionately affected the social conditions of older, blue-collar, lower-skilled people (Ford and Goodwin 2014a). This, along with a hostile right-wing news media eager to place blame for domestic issues on the EU, hasincreased Euroscepticism (Startin 2015). This has therefore had a significant influence on the quality of debate on Europe within the UK, which contributes to the UK's weak and skeptical relationship with the EU, while a "cycle of pragmatism and radicalization which [Conservative and Labour] parties undergo in and out of office respectively" increases the disruptive aspects of Euroscepticism (Forster 2002: 140–141). However, while public debate is framed by news media presentation and the politics of EU membership, two factors underpin a wider societal responsiveness to Eurosceptic themes: populism and English nationalism.

The Rise of Populism and English Nationalism

While growing Euroscepticism within the political class (especially within the Conservative Party) contributed to the decision to put the UK's membership of the EU to a popular plebiscite, the rise of populism has been charted by political theorists as a means for the articulation by "the people" of "grievances and opinions systematically ignored by governments, mainstream parties and the media" (Canovan 1999: 2). This includes those characterized as "left behind" by rapid societal change associated with political, cultural, and economic globalization processes, of

which Europeanization is a part (Ford and Goodwin 2014b), and austerity politics (O'Hara 2015).

Pillars of the British establishment have been beset by scandals in recent years. These include the 2007–2008 financial crisis caused by the risky and unregulated behavior of leading global financial institutions and public anger with the subsequent return to banker's bonuses, tax avoidance and evasion schemes by celebrities and major corporations, the intrusion into the private lives of citizens by the British news media (such as the Milly Dowler phone hacking scandal perpetrated by the *News of the World*), and the contempt shown for the political class following the MPs' expenses scandal, during which one Conservative MP was publicly derided for spending public money on a floating duck house (Allen 2009). This has contributed to an already general decline of public trust in the political class (Hay 2007), with IpsosMori (2016) reporting that only 21 percent of the British public now trusts politicians to tell the truth. This extent of distrust in the political class and other elites is both a cause and a symptom of the rise of populism in the UK.

Populism can be described as an antiestablishmentarian discourse that emphasizes "the people" against "the elites," partly through mythmaking, but also through the simplification of complex issues (Leconte 2015: 258). As there is no inherent theoretical foundation to populism, the concept eschews a straightforward theorization (Canovan 1999) and is often referred to as a "thin ideology" that combines with "fuller" ideologies (Stanley 2008), or a type of discourse through which other grievances are articulated (Leconte 2015). Paul Taggart (2004) refers to three components of the concept of populism. First, populist politics is oppositional to representative (liberal) democracy and identifies "charismatic leadership" as an aspect of defining its oppositional discourse (which includes mythmaking and simplification of complex

issues). Taggart (2004: 273) identifies Marine Le Pen, Jörg Haider, and Silvio Berlusconi as charismatic right-wing European populists, and in the referendum, Nigel Farage, Boris Johnson, and, to a lesser extent, Michael Gove, variously took on this role (discussed below).

Second, a "heartland" is called upon as an idealized conception of an imagined past, which has since been weakened or destroyed by enemies of "the people," providing populists with a narrative of crisis for their "reluctant" political action (Taggart 2004). Important in all populist discourses of "the people" is that they form either an ethnic, civic, or political category, against another group—"the other" (Leconte 2015: 258). Populists often engage in homespun rhetoric, in order to simplify complex issues in communicating opposition to "the other." This helps to define "the people" that populists claim to speak on behalf of. In the case of the referendum, this can be "Middle England" or the white working class. Indeed, it is possible for both to identify with the same populist discourse as "ordinary people" against the elite: "[t]he people are nothing more than the populace of the heartland and to understand what any populist means by the 'people' we need therefore to understand what they mean by their heartland" (Taggart 2004: 274).

Third, different populisms draw their values from their own conception of the "heartland," not from the populist discourse itself. For Taggart (2004: 275) "[p]opulists mobilize when their heartland is threatened … populism, lacking core values, is highly chameleonic" and can differ in different contexts. This means that populism can be found across the political spectrum. Left-wing populism asserts "the people" against economic and political elites in the name of social justice, either through working class consciousness or other identities, and can assert participatory democracy against corrupt elites, for example, in the Occupy movement— "for the 99% against the 1%" (Graeber 2013). While there is a parallel left-wing critique of the

democratic deficit within the EU and problems with the neoliberal logic driving much of its policy direction (Lizoain 2016), the account of the EU Referendum below asserts that the vote to leave was driven largely by right-wing populist Euroscepticism.

Koen Abts and Stefan Rummens (2007: 418) describe right-wing populism as a "twofold vertical structure" that is antagonistic upward toward the "intellectual, economic and political elites" who, separate from the people, abuse their positions of power and influence, and a downward antagonism centered on "those at the supposed bottom of society, criminals, foreigners, profiteers and perverts who threaten the purity of the people." Populism therefore provides legitimacy for excluding "the other," and the vertical antagonism allows for the removal or exclusion of "the enemy" from the political, or even the overall societal, domain (Abts and Rummens 2007: 419). It forms part of a discourse of opposition to mainstream political parties, immigration, social and cultural liberalism, permissiveness, multiculturalism, internationalism, belief in progress, and a strong perception of "losing out" or being "left behind" in these processes of Europeanization and globalization (Canovan 1999: 4; Ford and Goodwin 2014b; Leconte 2015). Given this, Leconte (2015: 257) argues that researchers should focus on understanding how populist leaders articulate and reshape popular grievances and how people actually perceive and identify with discourses such as populist Euroscepticism.

England is divergent from Scotland and Northern Ireland (and to a lesser extent, Wales) in its Euroscepticism with many polls showing majority support for Brexit in England, compared with 65 percent support for remaining in the EU in Scotland (Henderson et al. 2016). Indeed, survey data shows that the more strongly individuals identify as English, the more likely they are to support withdrawal from the EU (while conversely in Scotland, those who see themselves as British are more likely to be in favor of Brexit) (Henderson et al. 2016). This has connected

populist Euroscepticism with English nationalism (Gifford 2006, 2008), which helps to define the values that underpin the populist conception of the "heartland."

English nationalism can be defined by its defense of "British sovereignty," often against Europe, and the sense of the uniqueness and longevity of Parliament, where other European countries are perceived as all too ready to cede sovereignty (Wellings 2010). This "hubristically melancholic" nationalism presents "nostalgia for the past combined with an increasingly organized and popular Euroscepticism" (Wellings 2010: 498). Ben Wellings (2010: 498) identifies the ideological makeup of English nationalism as opposition to bureaucracy, open borders, and migration, all of which are perceived to contribute to the erosion of sovereignty. This connects the values of English nationalism with social conservatism and an imagined past built through the history of Empire and victory in World War II, which has been diluted by increased movement of people, permissiveness, and deindustrialization.

While English nationalism suggests "the people" as socially conservative, this is problematic for the Conservative Party because its neoliberal direction since the Thatcher years has espoused a more internationalist, free-market "Anglo-American nationalism" that has often conflicted with the social conservative base (Gifford 2008). English nationalism is not just the preserve of the traditional British right, but also is a theme within Labour's core working-class constituencies in the former industrial areas of northern England. This has provided the conditions for the rise of the populist Eurosceptic, and English nationalist, UK Independence Party (UKIP) (Ford and Goodwin 2014a, 2014b).

While UKIP's membership was famously described as "fruitcakes, loonies, and closet racists" by David Cameron (BBC 2006b), the perception that UKIP supporters are drawn only from Conservative-leaning right-wing voters in wealthier areas in South East England has

masked the growth of the party's popularity, and its core message of Euroscepticism, in the deindustrialized northern English constituencies that have traditionally supported Labour. These people tend to be older, white, and working class, with generally lower educational qualifications, while mainstream political parties have tended to focus on "the center": highly educated, financially relatively secure, and socially liberal middle classes (Ford and Goodwin 2014a). The former composes a "left-behind" (or marginalized) group of people in these regions. These groups also tend to have shared social values that have been ignored by the adoption of multiculturalism, civic citizenship, social liberalism, and international and globalizing politics. The values of the "left-behind" include a shared "ethnic" or "ancestral" conception of national identity and citizenship that is inherited by blood and birth, defense of sovereignty of this distinct ancestral identity from foreign cultures, ideas, and peoples (Ford and Goodwin 2014a).

As a result, deep dissatisfaction with the enlargement of the EU and increased movement of people, especially from new member states in central Europe opened up tensions in British politics that neither New Labour nor Conservative parties could address. During the 2000s, these generally older, white working-class voters turned away from both Labour and the Conservatives, and toward the UKIP on the themes of concern about the level of immigration, threats to "traditional" British identity, and the arrogance of "metropolitan" political and economic elites, culminating in the party's victory in the 2014 European elections with 26.6 percent of the national vote (Ford and Goodwin 2014a, 2014b). Crucially, UKIP did not create this disillusionment but has capitalized, either by design or fortune, on the disjuncture between mainstream political parties with their embrace of neoliberal globalization and cultural globalization and these marginalized segments of the electorate (Ford and Goodwin 2014b). Given these developments, the referendum took place in a period in which

antiestablishmentarian right-wing political discourse and right-wing media narratives have supported Eurosceptic populism. This has connected with the English nationalism that is present in the lived experience of the "left-behind."

The 2016 UK EU Referendum: A Perfect Storm of Societal Division, Political Short Termism, and "Banging on about Europe"

Despite long-running clamoring for a referendum by sections of the right (UKIP, elements of the Conservative Party, right-wing news media), the moves toward political and economic integration have increased both ambivalence and general opposition to the EU among the population. Richard Eichenberg and Russell Dalton (2007: 147) suggest that "national identity remained a core commitment of European citizens even as they support the broad tenets of market integration." However, the realization of a referendum on Europe can be traced to the attempt by Cameron to "modernize" the Conservative Party after successive electoral defeats to New Labour. This section outlines the events that led up to the referendum, including changes to the Conservative Party in opposition, the referendum pledge and subsequent attempt to renegotiate the UK's role in the EU, and the "short campaign" between 19 February 2016 and the vote on 23 June 2016. It is suggested that the referendum was in part a highly risky attempt by the then prime minister to manage internal Conservative Party tensions—one that failed to recognize the extent of rising antiestablishmentarianism, populism, and English nationalism. In the following section, these latter factors are pointed to as reasons behind the Leave vote's success and it is suggested that wider analysis of societal inequalities in the UK can help to understand the implications of Brexit.

Cameron's Modernization Project, Election, and Referendum Pledge

Following the Major government's internal post-Maastricht battles over Europe and subsequent routing in the 1997 general election, where Tony Blair's New Labour won an unprecedented landslide victory, the strongly Eurosceptic Conservatives continued to lose elections outright. But under David Cameron's leadership, the Tories were able to form a coalition government with the centrist Liberal Democrats, as the largest party following the 2010 election. While lacking an electoral majority, the route for the Conservatives back into power was the result of a five-year attempt to "detoxify" the Tory brand by "modernizing" the party. Part of Cameron's modernization project in opposition was to adopt more environmentally aware ("vote blue, go green") and socially liberal rhetoric ("hug a hoodie," "compassionate conservatism"), including the much vaunted "big society" idea, which dusted off appeals to an imagined conservative communitarianism of the postwar One Nation Tory type, while seeking to retrench the role of the state in society (Corbett and Walker 2013). These served as attempts to move the Tories on from "banging on about Europe" (BBC 2006a).

Meanwhile, the New Labour government in 2008 ratified the Lisbon Treaty on further European integration, which evidenced an increasingly neoliberal direction, despite having in 2004 promised a referendum on the European Constitution Treaty (as the Lisbon Treaty was formerly known). This emboldened the Eurosceptic right's demands for a referendum on EU membership, led by three-time UKIP leader Nigel Farage, whose party climbed to second in the 2009 European elections and would eventually win the highest share of the vote in 2014. With the combination of pressure from the intake of hard-line Eurosceptic Conservative MPs in the 2010 election and an attempt to stymie the "revolt on the right" by UKIP, in January 2013,

Cameron made a pledge to hold an in/out referendum on British membership of the EU if the Conservatives secured a majority in the forthcoming 2015 general election (BBC 2013).

This move ultimately put long-term societal instability and Cameron's political career (as a pro-remain Tory) on the line for short-term electoral advantage. After a surprise majority was achieved in the 2015 general election, the in/out referendum was a manifesto commitment that was included in the Queen's Speech. The risk taken by Cameron at the time of the pledge was felt initially to be mitigated by the assumption that the 2015 election result was likely to require another coalition government, and perhaps the EU Referendum pledge, like the pledge to cut a further £12 billion from the "welfare bill," would need to be negotiated with the pro-EU Liberal Democrats.

The stipulation laid down in the referendum pledge by Cameron was that he would provide his favored offer of a renegotiated relationship between the UK and the EU against Brexit. By February 2016, after some concessions, Cameron had negotiated four key principles from the other 27 member states:

- A four-year "emergency brake" on in-work benefits for migrants
- A reduction in child benefit paid to EU migrants when their children remain overseas
- The removal of the phrase "ever closer union" from any future EU treaties involving the UK, which would end any further political integration between the UK and EU
- "Emergency safeguards" to protect the City of London and reduce "red tape" for British businesses (BBC 2016).

While this failed to appease Eurosceptics within the Conservative party, Cameron's renegotiated EU membership to some extent echoed analysis of recent polling on the preferences of the public (Vasilopoulou 2016). These include issues of freedom of movement within the EU—"the right to work and receive welfare in another EU country"—while concerns about British sovereignty and ending the political integration of Europe were other, less prominent concerns (Vasilopoulou 2016: 222). Sofia Vasilopoulou's (2016: 226) analysis suggested that focusing on a utilitarian cost/benefit analysis of European integration would be a powerful frame for influencing voters' decisions on continued membership. The renegotiation was put to the country on 19 February 2016, with a referendum date of 23 June 2016—little over four months for the UK public to engage and consider the pros and cons of the in or out positions.

The "Short Campaign"

Two broad campaigns were marshaled: Remain or Leave, which themselves were hasty coalitions of members of different political parties and political positions, each with their own set of reasons and political difficulties in presenting their particular cases. The official Remain campaign—Britain Stronger in Europe—was essentially a cross-party campaign in principle, but revealed antagonisms between the Conservative and Labour leaderships. The perception of the united Westminster establishment against the people of Scotland in the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum weighed heavy on the reluctance of Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn to share a platform with Cameron (Labour in for Europe was a rival, somewhat lukewarm campaign for defending workers' rights and reforming the EU from within).

Like the Scottish Independence Referendum, which was narrowly won by the unionists, the Remain campaign engaged in "Project Fear," with increasingly shrill doomsday scenarios

presented to a distrusting public. This included a range of "expert" commentary, such as governor of the Bank of England, Mark Carney, and analysis from the International Monetary Fund, which culminated in the chancellor George Osborne's claim that Brexit would cost each household £4,300 and, in the dying days of the campaign, threatening a £30 billion "punishment budget" of further austerity cuts to public budgets combined with rises in general taxation (Mason et al. 2016). Even if true, the question remained—was this enough to scare "left behind" groups who may have considered that they had nothing left to lose?

While the weight of the political and economic establishment presented the Remain case, other political and media elites supported the Leave campaign. Originally rival campaigns, cross-party Vote Leave (featuring Conservatives Boris Johnson and Michael Gove and Labour grandee Frank Field, among others) and Leave.EU, bankrolled by UKIP donor and businessman Arron Banks, which provided a platform for Farage, both presented the case for leaving. Both the official Vote Leave and Leave.EU campaigns engaged in populist antiestablishmentarian rhetoric in comparison with the technocratic Project Fear of the official Remain campaign.

While evidence of this populism is presented below, it is important to also acknowledge the frame for the referendum provided by the news media. As discussed earlier, the right-wing news media in particular has tended toward strong Euroscepticism since the 1980s, while only the *Guardian*, the *Independent*, and the *Financial Times* are considered in any way "Europostive" (Startin 2015). The Eurosceptic campaigns include the *Daily Express* (circulation around 500,000), which officially endorsed UKIP and its long-running Leave campaign (Startin 2015).

The Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (2016) conducted a study of 928 news media articles during the first two months of the official referendum campaign and found that 45

percent of articles had been negative about the EU compared with 27 percent that were in favor of remaining. This is combined with a practice among right-wing newspapers such as the *Daily Express*, the *Sun*, and the *Daily Mail* to present aggressively anti-EU headlines ("STICK IT TO THE EU!"), contentious claims ("QUEEN BACKS BREXIT"), and mythmaking, such as that about the EU "banning" bendy bananas from British supermarkets (Castle 2016; Henley 2016).

With the backing of the majority of the British news media, both Leave organizations engaged in emotive and "positive" campaigns that appealed to populism and the sense of English nationalism, including the slogan "Vote leave, take control," emphasizing the repatriation of sovereignty to Parliament as direct representatives of "the British people" and extensive use of red and white in campaign literature connecting with the English national flag. Boris Johnson appealed to "hope" for the voiceless and restoration of democracy across Europe, while in response to the cataclysmic warnings from the Remain campaign, Michael Gove claimed that "the people" were "tired of experts." A defining image from the Vote Leave campaign was the infamous homespun claim (since repudiated both in the sense of its truthfulness and whether it would ever be actually carried out) on the side of a red bus, "we send the EU £350 million a week, lets fund our NHS [National Health Service] instead."

Meanwhile, on 16 June 2016, Farage posed in front of a Leave.EU campaign poster with the slogan "Breaking point: the EU has failed us all," featuring a snaking queue of hundreds of presumed EU migrants through a field (who were in fact Syrian refugees), which had chilling echoes of Nazi propaganda. While almost all media commentators condemned the poster, its underlying intention was to reinforce the connection for English nationalists and Eurosceptics between concerns about immigration and the EU. With horrifying symmetry, on the same day the Labour MP Jo Cox, a passionate campaigner for the plight of refugees in the Syrian conflict,

was murdered outside of her constituency office in Birstall, West Yorkshire, by a far-right British nationalist, who was reported to have shouted "put Britain first!" as he shot and then stabbed Cox (Boyle and Akkoc 2016). After one of the darkest of days for British democracy, the campaigns were paused for three days while MPs and the public mourned the death of Cox.

By 23 June, polls had suggested a return to a lead for the Remain campaign, after some polls had previously indicated a surge for Leave. But when the results were announced, the Leave campaign had won by a narrow 17,410,742 votes (51.9 percent) to 16,141,241 (48.1 percent) on a turnout of 72.2 percent. Adopting the populist and nationalist refrain, Farage declared in the early hours of the following morning, that 23 June 2016 should be renamed the UK's "Independence Day."

The Populism and English Nationalism of Brexit, and Its Social Consequences

The immediate aftermath of the Brexit vote saw a collapse of the pound on the financial markets, and Cameron resigned as prime minister the next day. While the next few weeks of political maneuvering behind the scenes that saw the then home secretary, Theresa May (who had been conspicuous by her absence in the referendum campaign) emerge as prime minister. Meanwhile the Labour Party has since been riven by infighting and a poorly timed attempt to remove Corbyn as leader. The wider societal shocks of the Brexit vote in the UK saw a significant rise in racist and xenophobic attacks in the country, including several racially motivated murders that have been attributed to Brexit, with a reported 42 percent increase in recorded hate crimes in the week before and after the vote, while the head of the National Police Chiefs' Council stated, "Some people felt [Brexit] gave license to vent [racist] views or behaviour" (Dodd 2016).

At the time of writing, early analysis has proved to be a mixed picture of the initial effect of the Brexit vote on the British economy, suggesting an initial dip in the Financial Times Stock Exchange, a drop in the value of the pound to levels not seen since the 1980s, and evidence of a contracting economy (Belam 2016). Longer-term effects are likely to be exacerbated if and when the British government invokes Article 50 to formally set the Brexit process in motion, which will necessitate a resolution of the impasse in negotiating positions between access to the European Single Market and denial of free movement of EU citizens. Divisions within the Conservative Party do not appear to be healed, with some moving toward a "hard Brexit" position that will seek a clear break and application to the World Trade Organization for trade negotiations, to a "soft Brexit" that seeks to compromise and retain some aspects of the UK's economic relationship with the EU. This is notwithstanding the legal travails over the "advisory" nature of the referendum (HM Government, 2015). The return of Eurosceptic neoliberals such as David Davies, Liam Fox, and Johnson to key positions within the cabinet suggest that "hard Brexit" is not off the agenda. The overall societal picture reflected in the referendum result does not look good for the UK and, as Leconte (2015) posited above, attention to how both political actors mobilized popular grievances against the EU and how Leave voters identified with this discourse are aspects of understanding Brexit.

Populism and English Nationalism in the Referendum

The referendum campaign provides a textbook account of populist politics in the UK. This can be illustrated by drawing on Taggart's (2004) three components of populism. These include opposition to representative democracy, an imagined past of the "heartland," and the English nationalist values that make up this vision of the "heartland."

As highlighted above, the tactic of Project Fear backfired spectacularly for the Remain campaign, with an increasingly distrusting and incredulous public refusing to heed Osborne's warnings of economic meltdown. This was supported by the Leave campaign's emotive appeal to "taking back control" from unresponsive and distant elites, whether from Brussels or from complicit "Europhile" politicians in Westminster. Further, the "charismatic leadership" of Farage, Johnson, and Gove in constructing a "David versus Goliath" narrative drenched in myths about migration and out-of-touch "experts," English stoicism, and World War II referencing defiance, increased the sense that the referendum represented an opportunity for voters to give the elites a bloody nose, especially for those who can be considered to be "left behind."

The second aspect of populism, the construction of a "heartland" and narrative of a crisis, requiring "reluctant" action, suggested that the UK was better off before increased European integration and free movement of people, and that a return to this imagined past by "standing on our own two feet" would represent a return to a prosperous golden era of British exceptionalism. This conception of the "heartland" mirrors the UKIP strategy for building support across the country—direct appeal to Eurosceptic voters drawn from middle and upper class "Tory shires" in the South and South East of England. This is combined with an articulation of grievances over the neglect of white working-class communities in northern and eastern regions, and seaside towns, drawing in especially older voters, for whom stable employment has given way to competition for low-pay insecure work, and for whom the dramatic increase in university education under New Labour came too late in their lives (Ford and Goodwin 2014a).

It is clear in the themes presented by the Leave campaign, along with long-running right-wing news media narratives, that the right-wing populism underpinning much of the discourse on Brexit is drawn from English nationalism. This preference for social conservatism, including

distrust of migrants, ethnic minorities, welfare "scroungers," along with selfish elites, found

resonance in the Leave vote. Indeed, initial analysis of the vote supports this picture (Goodwin

and Heath 2016; Lambert 2016).

The economy has long been held as a decisive factor in the voting intentions of the

British public (hence the "strong economy" message that featured so prominently in the

Conservatives' 2015 election campaign and use of economic arguments in Remain's Project

Fear). Startin (2015) questions the economic cost/benefit analysis and suggests that the rise of

UKIP and Euroscepticism has relegated "rational choice" views about the EU in favor of more

emotive appeals to sovereignty and anti-immigration sentiment (through the lens of the negative

societal consequences of freedom of movement). Indeed, Eric Kaufmann's (2016) initial

reflection on the Brexit vote (drawing on 2015 electoral data from people indicating that they

will vote to leave) suggests that identity, rather than economic arguments, motivated Leave

voters, and that these voters value order and social authoritarianism over openness and

permissiveness: "[t]he order–openness divide is emerging as a key political cleavage,

overshadowing the Left–Right economic dimension." The evidence suggests that Leave voters

are also more likely to support capital punishment and value the importance of disciplining

children (Goodwin and Heath 2016; Kaufman 2016).

Michael Ashcroft's polling of referendum voters suggests the heaviest concentration of

Leave voters in many coastal areas, northern English regions (except for Liverpool, and

Manchester in particular), and especially the North East of England, while Scotland, Manchester,

and parts of London and the South East went more strongly in favor of Remain (Lambert 2016).

Further, Leave voters tended to identify more as "English" than "British" (71 percent of Leave

voters) (Goodwin and Heath 2016). Finally, the social values that characterized Leave voters

further suggest a prevalence of social conservatism: Leave voters were most likely to oppose multiculturalism (81 percent of Leave voters), social liberalism (80 percent), immigration (80 percent), environmentalism (78 percent), feminism (74 percent), the Internet (71 percent), globalization (69 percent), and capitalism (51 percent) (Lambert 2016).

Finally, societal inequalities between Remain and Leave voters suggest that the UK is deeply divided in terms of age, class, material wealth, social and cultural values, national allegiances, geography, and educational opportunities (Goodwin and Heath 2016). Goodwin and Heath (2016) argue that three key aspects help to define the cleavages between Leave and Remain voters, which points to an underlying problem of inequality. Income and poverty were latent issues in the referendum: "[g]roups of voters who have been pushed to the margins of our society, live on low incomes and lack the skills that are required to adapt and prosper amid a post-industrial and global economy, were more likely than others to endorse Brexit," while having lower educational qualifications increases the chances of supporting Leave, and marginalization is also experienced as a "double whammy": lack of educational qualifications and skills are predominant in areas that lack employment opportunities. While inequality and austerity are considered to be marginal to Leave voters' identification with populist Euroscepticism and English nationalism (Dennison and Carl 2016), Matthew Goodwin and Oliver Heath (2016) suggest that a deeper analysis of the societal divisions involved in Brexit need to explore inequality further.

Post-Brexit: The Social Quality of the UK and Europe

Apart from the huge political and economic questions about the direction that the UK and other member states in Europe should take following the Brexit vote, there must be a concern with the

wider societal implications of Brexit. These are rooted in inequalities, including cleavages

between class, age, wealth, education and skills, geography (including urbanization), and

crucially, social values and identity. This suggests an important role for social quality, in both the

analysis of the emergent divisions between people and ruptures in the societal and political fabric

of the UK, and also as a normative universalist and internationalist project for creating a more

cohesive, open, and progressive society. A further question is whether this is possible from the

transformations that Brexit will engender.

Social Quality in the UK and Brexit

Sue Hacking (2015: 111) argues that in the UK the political issues of economic security and

social exclusion provide evidence of the articulation of some the themes of social quality.

However, these emphasize "identifying and rehabilitating antisocial individuals" (Hacking 2015:

117). Neoliberal policy developments since the New Labour years have focused on the

employability of individuals (paid work as the solution to social exclusion) through to the

Coalition Government's Welfare Reform Bill, which emphasizes "nudging" individuals to

"move into work" by withdrawing income support, combined with increasingly authoritarian

policies of social control (such as anti-social behaviour orders) (Harrison and Sanders 2016).

Further, concerns with social cohesion have developed from perceptions of the "failure"

of multiculturalism. These have tended "to polarize UK social politics toward a focus for social

action on poverty through the reduction, or empowerment, of excluded groups, conceptualized as

reclamation of economically or morally participative citizens" (Hacking 2015: 111). An example

of a recent approach to increasing social inclusion and promoting social cohesion has been the

Coalition's Troubled Families Programme, which sought to help 120,000 identified "families

with multiple problems" by joining up services in order to save public money and achieve better outcomes (Hayden and Jenkins 2014). The lack of success of a policy direction that favors initiatives such as these combined with deep cuts to public services suggest that neoliberal policy approaches have a role to play in fermenting the discontent that has given rise to populism and English nationalism, which are evidenced above as part of the Brexit vote.

Crucially, social quality is also concerned with re-theorizing the conditions of socioeconomic security, social cohesion, social inclusion, and social empowerment within society (van der Maesen and Walker 2012). This provides a direct counter to the underlying problems that have helped to produce Brexit; arguably, poor levels of all four conditional dimensions. As Hacking (2015) argues, the value of an alternative social quality approach for the UK is to try to move the individualizing and moralizing perspective on poverty and inequality that has historically been adopted toward a more interventionist and collectivist approach that recognizes the relationship between individuals and communities in the formation of collective identities. The Brexit vote and analysis in this article suggest that populism and English nationalism underpin the formation of collective identities centered around deep societal divisions: filtered through the populist lens as "the British people" against "others" (whether elites or minorities). This poses a significant challenge to developing the normative values associated with social quality (see below).

Since social quality concerns itself with "the extent to which people are able to participate in social relationships under conditions which enhance their well-being, capacities and potential" (Beck at al. 2012: 68), there are also social quality questions around participation in democratic processes in the UK. The social quality concept of "participation" clearly goes beyond immediate and visceral feelings of empowerment in a popular plebiscite such as the EU

Referendum, with all the public and news media debate that has surrounded it. But again, the social implications of the societal divisions revealed by the Brexit vote indicate that this popular energy needs to be channeled into practical policies for improving people's lives through responsive and active political institutions, and potentially the diffusion of long-term inclusive and democratic participation into other areas of society, such as the workplace and local community (Corbett 2014).

Developing a Social Quality Analysis of Brexit

Drawing on four sets of interrelated factors that make up the social quality framework, we can propose a project for analyzing the social implications of Brexit. The following are tentative reflections on the value of social quality theory to the issues, tensions, and societal divisions highlighted in this article. As set out by Wolfgang Beck and colleagues (2012), we can look at the four sets of factors and their constitutional, conditional, and normative dimensions. The social quality theory suggests that interrelated constitutional dimensions help to realize "competent social actors," while conditional dimensions determine "the opportunities for and outcomes of social quality," and normative dimensions can be used to "make judgements about the appropriate or necessary degree of social quality" (Walker 2015: 52, 53, 55).

Considering the first set of factors, social recognition, cohesion, and solidarity, in relation to the analysis of Brexit above suggests that the role of populism and English nationalism in articulating people's grievances encourages a sense of exclusivity of social recognition, rather than openness. This may reinforce lack of social recognition for some groups within society. For example, "ethnic" or "ancestral" nationalism excludes those who are not considered to be "genuinely" British (or English), creating further division between white British and ethnic

minority groups. Further, unless the "left behind" white working-class groups are rewarded with improved social conditions, disillusionment may increase with the lack of social recognition. This has obvious implications for the cohesiveness of UK society and the fermenting of societal divisions by pitting different collective group identities against one another. Likewise, solidarity becomes inward-facing social conservatism, focusing on ordered communities and defense of this version of Britishness.

The second set of factors includes social responsiveness, inclusion, and equal value. As already suggested by the exclusive notion of social recognition that is encouraged by English nationalism, this also relates to the lack of openness of groups, communities, and systems that the populism of Brexit may facilitate. If social institutions are perceived as only responsive to specific British groups, then further societal dislocation could occur. This would increase exclusion in British society and underplay the equal value of all citizens. Moreover, the preference for voting Leave by over 17 million British people as a rejection of political and cultural elites suggests that the perception of a lack of social responsiveness of the British and international establishments already exists.

Personal security, socioeconomic security, and social justice form the third set of factors. These relate to how feelings of a lack of socioeconomic security influenced the Leave vote by older, white working-class voters that make up part of "left behind" groups. Although if the post-Brexit direction of British society is driven by social conservatism and without policies for redistribution of wealth, income, property, and opportunities, then there may be further decline in personal security for many groups of people in the UK. From this, increased socioeconomic insecurity and ultimately, social injustice may continue to develop.

The fourth set of factors includes personal capacity, empowerment, and human dignity. The initial analysis of the Brexit vote revealed a tendency for those with lower educational qualifications, poorly paid and insecure work to vote for Leave. This suggests that the Leave vote was in part driven by a perception that British society is denying the personal capacity of older, white working-class people. The populist discourse deployed by Eurosceptics before and during the referendum channeled a desire for empowerment and human dignity into a simple solution to complex problems: leave the EU, and the UK can "stand on its own two feet." This suggests a perception of human dignity in the face of the EU as a bureaucratic monolith. These initial reflections reveal troubling times for the UK post-Brexit from the perspective of social quality. Although these reflections need elaboration in future research, the argument here suggests that social quality analysis has the potential to explain the extent of societal division and possible deepening of these in different ways following Brexit.

The Value of Social Quality for the UK and Europe Post-Brexit

The advantage of social quality is that it is an analytical tool and it is normatively grounded (Beck et al. 2012). Social quality is fundamental for charting a new direction of the UK and Europe post-Brexit. While undoubtedly the populist Eurosceptic discourses that articulated English nationalist values drew on strands of xenophobia and gave license to an increase in racist language and actions, it is important to recognize that this may also have been driven by poor levels of social quality in the UK; including lack of well-paid and secure jobs, and poor working conditions, the breakdown of communities, and the sense of dislocation, loss of direction, and disenfranchisement in a political and economic system that has created many victims. The usefulness of social quality in post-Brexit times could be its transformative potential for

developing a new form of open, internationalist, democratic, and progressive relationship between the UK and EU member states.

Moreover, the Brexit vote reflects a wider emerging problem in Europe: the possible resurgence of the populist far right, emboldened by UKIP's success in the UK. This is pertinent given that Euroscepticism is not just a British phenomenon (Leconte 2010). Indeed, Marine Le Pen, leader of the Front National in France congratulated the British on voting to leave, and has renewed calls for "Frexit" to follow the UK's lead (Mowat 2016). Ultimately, it is necessary to understand the deeper societal divisions that have contributed to the rise of populism and nationalism across Europe. This requires a response to the concerns and social conditions of over 17 million British voters, while opposing and reducing racism and xenophobia, and recognizing that just over 16 million UK citizens, including the majority of younger voters, desired to remain a part of the EU. In addition, critical reflection on how European and nation-state institutions can develop new relationships post-Brexit, including further democratization, decentralization of power, and international cooperation should be part of a considered response to Brexit (Lizoain 2016). This necessitates responses to this expression of discontent in a way that builds new inclusive and participatory forms of social democracy (Crouch 2013) and improves social quality across Europe.

Conclusion

This article has assessed the 2016 EU Referendum and early research into its social consequences. It has been argued that populist right-wing Eurosceptic political and media actors have achieved a long-running campaign to achieve Brexit from the EU, and have stoked societal tensions and grievances to achieve this through a populist discourse involving English

nationalism and social conservatism. The Brexit vote has also revealed stark divisions within British society, for which the EU referendum provided the opportunity for a popular revolt by "the people" against both elites and minorities.

For those who voted to remain (including this author), there has been public airing of grief at the result. But during the summer of 2016, as racists have been emboldened on the streets of British cities, there has been a tendency toward mocking Brexit voters when populist pledges, such as "£350 million a week for the NHS," were revealed to be lies (in this case within hours of the referendum result). This only plays into the sense of societal division and distant elitism. However, this article has drawn on initial research into the driving factors behind the Brexit vote and the wider societal conditions that have facilitated this popular uprising against "the establishment" to attempt to understand why Brexit occurred and to propose ways in which the societal tensions can be addressed. This article has also proposed that social quality provides an important framework to further develop an analysis of the problems revealed by the Brexit vote, and should be part of building a new consensus.

In the context of a possibly unending crisis for the neoliberal political and economic model (Gamble 2014), there has been a chance for the Left to build a new consensus. But without clear and coherent social democratic and participatory alternatives to the collapsing neoliberal order, it is clear that this vacuum is increasingly being filled by populism and nationalism by providing outlets for the anger of many people who feel let down or "left behind" by the societal impacts of neoliberal globalization (Payne 2016). This is borne out by the rise of right-wing demagogues such as Farage, and in the United States, Republican President-Elect Donald Trump (who proclaimed himself "Mr. Brexit"), along with a resurgent far right in Europe, including Le Pen's Front National. Meanwhile the left in the UK (Labour Party), Spain

(Podemos), and Greece (Syriza) have to different extents begun to recognize the gaps between elites and their affluent middle-class constituencies and "left behind" groups that are susceptible to social conservatism and nationalism. The left too, at this stage, has a tendency toward populism: "the 99% against the 1%," "austerity is a political choice." While these slogans may provide a genuine outlet for anger with neoliberal elites by progressives, they have yet to translate into a coordinated universalist and internationalist project for social democracy that has clear answers to the extent of societal divisions that Brexit reveals. The challenge for social quality researchers is to contribute to creating this project.

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