

Janus's other face

One of the privileges of working in an academic institution is that it gives you the space to take time to think and research rather than simply reacting instantly or regurgitating soundbites, particularly on important issues. As a result, I have been thinking about the 2016 referendum (and, more recently the EU elections) for some time and there is a fascinating amount of academic research on the subject, some of which I hope to contribute to. Sometimes, however, the professional is personal and I recognise echoes of where I live in much of the description.

I happen to live in an area that would be characterised by much of the media as 'left behind'. It is one of the "places that don't matter"^[1]. It is an estate with a high proportion of social housing, lying in a former mining town, and it matches many of the demographic characteristics of 'Brexitland'^[2] – with a largely white, working-class populace with fewer formal qualifications than average. The contrast with my workplace – a vibrant, multicultural university situated in the heart of a major city – is always fascinating.

In many ways, these are the Janus-like faces of modern Britain: one looking forward and the other looking back. In my job, I can see advantages that the EU has brought: freedom of movement in Europe means that an academic can move seamlessly from Greece to the UK. It is amazing to work alongside the talent that an entire continent can provide and there is no question that our research and students benefit enormously from this. The same works in reverse too: if personal circumstances were to permit then I would be able to do work (whether via direct employment or a temporary secondment) across Europe, bringing back experience and networks for the benefit of students and colleagues.

There are innumerable other opportunities offered by the EU to institutions such as mine. Participation in ERASMUS enables our students to experience life in another country, and for other European students to see what we have to offer here. Likewise, the EU is an enormously important provider of research funding, not to mention ESIF. More broadly, I see the benefits of trans-continental just-in-time supply chains every time I drive past Jaguar's Castle Bromwich

factory, JLR's i54 Engine plant or pass BMW's state-of-the-art engine plant at Hams Hall near Coleshill.

Janus's other face, however, has not had an easy time in recent years. Older and less cosmopolitan, this group have little opportunity to take advantage of the things the EU offers. What good is ERASMUS to anyone you know? After all, you have to be in higher education to even participate. As for frictionless supply chains – you're more likely to get a ride to the moon than a coveted job at a car engine plant.

Similarly, the closest you've ever got to taking advantage of the ability to work in another EU country is watching Auf Wiedersehen Pet. That's hardly surprising – most of us in the UK lack the language skills to successfully make a life in another EU country and the incentives to move for most are rather small. Whilst those in high-paying middle-class professional jobs might spend time in Paris, Luxembourg or Munich, that's hardly an opportunity open to those who left school at 15 or 16 (or even 18) in the 1970s.

What you do remember, however, is good jobs disappearing. Secure jobs with decent pay and a pension. Hard work but you knew where you stood. It was the late 1970s and early 1980s when the UK's motor industry was decimated. Being in a customs union didn't do you much good then. Nor did things get much better for you after the establishment of the Single Market. Those in this position at the community around them and lament. Change has come far too quickly and they have had little control over it.

The old community had many faults but it did have a strong sense of identity. It was cohesive and homogenous. Everything that Janus's other face is not. That has started to change and it isn't always an easy experience for some. This overwhelmingly white, working-class town now has a small (but rapidly growing) ethnic minority community and a significant Eastern European population. For a community where newcomers were rare (even from other parts of the UK, like myself), hearing languages other than English and seeing Polski Skleps spring up has been jarring.

It's also worth noting that the experience of immigration is very different in places like this to more cosmopolitan areas. The type of

migrant is quite different from, say, the more salubrious cosmopolitan parts of London, Birmingham or Manchester. Don't misunderstand: many of the individuals involved are lovely, but the cultural gap (in both directions) that needs to be bridged is much larger than for many communities. A well-off risk management consultant in London has far more in common with the Polish computer programmer next door who speaks flawless English and went to France as an ERASMUS undergraduate than a retired former shopping assistant has with their Polish neighbour who works as an Amazon delivery driver whose English can sometimes be a little halting.

Secondly, the social infrastructure is very different. Much of this relates to how schools etc. are funded but it has a very real effect on communities' experiences of migration. None of this, of course, is to deny the intolerance and racism seen in our communities. However, in most cases it is the sense of being utterly out of control of all of these changes and how quickly they're occurring that is pervasive rather than simple racism or hatred of 'the other'. Given the level of vitriol that has infected public discussion at the moment, I think it behoves all of us to occasionally have a look at the world through Janus's other face.

1. *Rodríguez-Pose, A., Commentary: The revenge of the places that don't matter (and what to do about it). Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy and Society, 2018: p. rsx024-rsx024.*
2. *De Ruyter, A., et al., Tales from an Episodic Journey into "Brexitland": Understanding the Underlying Factors as to Why People Voted "Leave". CBS Working Paper, Forthcoming.*