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Sociology of the European Union; Exploring the Sociology of Europe

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BOOK REVIEW

Favell, Adrian and Guiraudon, Virginie (eds): *Sociology of the European Union*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 266 pp., £65.00 (hardback), ISBN 9780761940722

Roche, Maurice, *Exploring the Sociology of Europe*, London: Sage, 2010, 296 pp., £27.99 (hardback), ISBN 978-0-230-20711-0, £24.99 (paperback), ISBN 978-0-230-20712-7

Contemporary European socio-political studies can be divided into three rather distinct streams: (1) comparative analysis or cross-national comparisons in which one or several aspects of the relationship between often several nations and a rather distant union is in the foreground, (2) 'eurology' or specialized studies of the institutional complex that makes up the union from agriculture to welfare, and (3) 'the present as history' or more sweeping narratives and sociologies of the unified yet divided continent that came through after the fall of the wall. For decades disconnected, in recent years a few sociologists and social scientists have made ambitious attempts to overcome the ambiguities and shortcomings of current social research mapping a new and different Europe.

To Maurice Roche, a reader in sociology at Sheffield University in UK, Europe, its society/ies and nation-states including its union is a sociological continental 'social complex' while for the authors contributing to the volume edited by Favell and Guiraudon the present union in all its diversity constitute the core of the analysis whether the focus is on its social foundations or its policies and politics. While Gerard Delanty (Sussex) and Philip Schlesinger (Glasgow) endorse the first, Michèle Lamont (Harvard), William Outhwaite (Newcastle) and Helen Wallace (LSE) promote the latter on the back cover of the respective book. Thus, both books represent serious efforts to come to terms with the challenges that present-day Europe pose to the student of society and social sciences. They share a certain Anglo-Saxon bias but in particular the Favell and Guiraudon reader through its variety of contributors makes the best to transcend it but a non-Western voice have made this volume truly global.

Social complex or a union composed of diversity in unity? Surrounded by the attacks on the currency of the eurozone, the continent has since 2010 been in turmoil and so are also its social sciences. Hence, it ought to be harvest time for sociology as a science of social change and stability. Roche's emphasis on exploring the state-of-the-art results in an

introductory, rather abstract and eclectic approach towards the social complex called European Society – a singular complex or modernity between networks and empire – which on the one hand is outlined in time from pre-modernity to the present, on the other hand as contemporary and transitory civil and institutional space. Simultaneously it is both conceptual and analytical with an emphasis on social transformation. In the most recent decade, Roche has been involved in European research networks stretching from culture to social welfare policy. He has also a strong interest in history, addresses the violent history of the continent, and is not uncritical towards its present masters' global ambitions. Nevertheless, at different levels there are cores as well as peripheries. Approaching 'civil Europe' he demonstrates a keen eye for various more or less popular undercurrents using the notion of cosmopolitanism as a search light challenging current forces dominating this social complex of 'plurinationality'. Though closer to the third type of European studies, Roche has been involved in both of the other types of approaches, and is well aware of the necessity to go beyond the limitations of all three.

The authors contributing to Favell and Guiraudon's anthology are of course less coherent as a group – social researchers affiliated with European as well as North American universities – but as a joint venture the book is even more explorative than Roche's with whom they otherwise have a lot in common. The boundaries of European studies are put to the test though the union as an analytical entity in some sense makes its introductory chapter of and by Favell and Guiraudon somewhat less inclusive than Roche's outline of the study of European society. Nevertheless, F&G's overall approach is more hands-on in its focus on the social foundations such as social stratification and mobility as well as the organization of the economy including cultural capital and resources. Furthermore, in the second part of their book – politics and policies – it is not exclusively focusing on Brussels and the ambitions of the political leaders of the main nation-states and political parties but starts out exploring the dynamics of grass-root social movements across the member-states of the union. The possibilities and limits of European identity and mobilization are explicitly scrutinized. Moreover, in two concluding chapters by Hans-Jörg Trenz and George Ross, respectively, the volume edited by F&G draw theoretical conclusions for future studies of European integration – and disintegration whether or not the current turbulence results in the end to the present common currency, a stronger Germany and weaker constellation of member-states.

These books are thought-provoking and well worth reading in academic course work. Taken together they may even provide ample ground for socratic dialogue in the classroom. However, they share a common weakness in their superficial treatment of the continental mediation of

popular cultures and local identities – through such mainstream activities and events as music and sports – that simultaneously strengthen and challenge the present social order. Both books touch upon Norbert Elias unfinished theorizing of the civilizing process but fails to address its true potential as well as its obvious limitations. The sociology of Europe and its various movements and unions is still in its infancy. As an attempt to overcome the divisions within European studies it is definitely a respectable enterprise. The two volumes under review were present at its founding moment and will most likely contribute to its up-bringing, for instance to connect earlier disconnected research streams.

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