



May 2019

June Lunch with Irene Gallego Romero

More details to follow in next month's newsletter, but June's luncheon is on the 19th June with Dr Irene Gallego Romero. Here is how she describes herself on the University of Melbourne website.....

My group explores the ways in which natural selection and evolutionary change have shaped the human species (and sometimes, other mammals too!), with a particular focus on gene regulatory processes. Because gene regulation is still not easily predicted from sequence-level data, we often use induced pluripotent stem cells (iPSCs) to examine the means by which multiple cellular mechanisms interact to regulate gene expression and ultimately give rise to inter-species or population-level differences. By combining the versatility of iPSCs with the power of functional and comparative genomics we address questions about the mechanisms of evolutionary adaptation in humans that are intractable by other means.

Diary dates

19 Jun	Lunch with Irene Gallego Romero
17 Jul	Lunch with Prof Dan Hunter (Dean of Law, Swinburne)
14 Aug	Lunch with Craig Jeffrey on India

Lunch Review – Brexit!

Professor Daunton's talk on Brexit was well attended in our new trial venue of the George on Collins. Your editor is reliably informed that there was sufficient wine, the venue was perfectly pleasant though the backpacker staff did not quite reach the level of service we've been spoiled with by Pino and co. It's proved very difficult condensing the Prof's insights....so a somewhat lengthy synopsis follows....because we just can't get enough of Brexit!

Professor Daunton says that “ These are the two questions that shape my longer or deeper history of the second referendum”.

Before the 1975 referendum, British engagement with European integration was distinctive and meant that Britain always differed from the founding members and never fully committed. Why?

The views of the British public have changed considerably since the 1975 referendum. Then, 67.2% voted to be in the EU and 32.8% to leave and with a lower turn out of 64.5% (as opposed to 72.2% turn out and the infamous 52%/48% in 2016). The only two areas with a leave majority in 1975 were the Western Isles and Shetland. Why this shift?

Why not engage in the initial creation of the european economic community - Responding to post-war reconstruction

After WW2 British engagement was always different from that of other European countries. There were four main reasons why Britain did not engage:

Psychological The experience of defeat and occupation in Europe created a desire to create a stronger bloc to prevent being overwhelmed by the Soviets and United States. Britain was neither defeated nor occupied – rather, the legitimacy of the British state was validated by the war.

Financial There were massive sterling debts in India and Egypt, these needed to be paid. 80% of world currency reserves were in Sterling. The Imperial preference in tariff policy (“home producers first, empire producers second, and foreign producers last”) was adopted in 1932 in response to the great depression and was part of a wider move to create trade blocs. 1930-33 the proportion of imports from the empire rose from 27% to 38%. In 1951, Australia alone took 12% of British exports – more than the Six European

Nations. 1952-54 the Commonwealth took 48% of exports – The Six, just 19.6%.

Agriculture Agricultural policy in the Six was based on subsidised farming, yet the UK believed in free trade and cheaper food.

The Commonwealth Government to government relationships with Britain in obvious leading role meant it was not easy to accept a supranational Europeanism in which Britain was not the dominant player. The ECSC – the precursor of the EEC - had a supranational high authority, court of justice' Britain did not need to rebuild institutions after war, did not face issues of collaboration/resistance – instead, the legitimacy of its institutions was enhanced., Britain had stood alone against tyranny.

Why did attitudes change? - Britain joined Europe and reaffirmed in the 1975 referendum

In 1971, 244 MPs voted against joining, 356 for. Only 39 Conservatives voted against the government and against membership of the EU – about 80% voted for; 69 Labour members voted for membership, against the party line, ie about 70% against. (These positions are reversed in current times).

Wake-up call

There were dangers in relying on the sterling area and imperial preference system – i.e soft markets and not being able to compete with better quality goods from Germany or more advanced consumer goods.

By 1962, Britain traded more with "The Six" than with Commonwealth. It was no longer a gamble to join the EU, but an acceptance of the new reality and was part of a Conservative party strategy for competition at home and abroad.

The common trope in the 1960s was that Britain was the sick man of Europe, suffering from British diseases of inflation, low productivity and industrial unrest – the low effort equilibrium and the apogee or nadir of the three day week.

The response from the left came from Tony Benn in 1974 who thought that the final collapse of capitalism might only be weeks away – why prop it up with Tory measures like the EEC? He wanted socialist planning, whereas the Conservatives favoured expanded market capitalism.

EEC as an alternative to socialism - or was it a capitalist bloc?

In the 1970s, the Conservatives were the "European" party. The EU offered competition, a growing market and was not socialist, socialism being viewed as a potential threat at home (eg the Alternative Economic Strategy of Benn).

Why was Labour hostile to Europe? Labour was more hostile as it viewed the EEC as a capitalist bloc. The EEC was less multiracial, and in their view harmed the "undeveloped" world with its protectionist policies. EP Thompson (historian, socialist & peace campaigner) defined the EEC as a "group of fat, rich nations feeding each other goodies" and united by "introversion white bourgeois nationalism".

Agriculture

The common Agricultural policy was locked in by 1975 – and Britain found that they needed to find reasons to accept it.

In the 1975 referendum focus had turned to food security with concerns about a Malthusian crisis (ie population growth is potentially exponential yet growth of food supply is linear). The CAP might mean higher prices but could prevent shortages. The era of cheap food was over.

Margaret Thatcher campaigned for EU membership and said that 'most housewives would rather pay a little more than risk a bare cupboard. In the Common Market we can be sure of having something in the larder'.

An agony aunt made the point in a less politically correct fashion : 'Like the day of the red-coated soldier beating the living hell out of fuzzy-wuzzies, the day of cheap food has now gone'. [Saunders 278]

The Pro EU camp shifted the ground from cheapness to availability.

What happened to undermine support in 21st century?

Chained to a corpse?

The "Wake up call" was forgotten.

With the advance of neoliberalism in UK and decline of social democracy, the EU now looks statist and controlling. The EU is rejected by free-market fundamentalists who see Britain as buccaneering. Leaving the EU would complete the Thatcherite agenda – she had warned at Bruges of the risk of defeating socialism at home only for it be reintroduced from Brussels.

The Eurozone is seen as a flawed device: although Britain is not in the euro, it no longer seemed that

the European economy, rather the future lies with compared with BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa). The upward trend in negative attitudes towards the EU started in 2010 with eurozone crisis. This could appeal to the left as well as right, for example the “exploitation” of Greece for the benefit of German “industrialists”. The Eurozone’s economic woes coupled with the migrant crisis made EU look incompetent – the timing of the 2016 referendum was therefore rather unfortunate in that the EU’s political capital was at an all time low.

Deindustrialisation and globalisation

It is not hard to understand why attitudes to the EU shifted in declining industrial areas – by 2016 there was not a single Durham miner, or for that matter a Sunderland shipbuilder. In 1975, they still had good wages and status: miners, shipyard workers had skills specific to a trade, not based on formal qualifications – they had tangible capital. Since the 1970s Britain has deindustrialised – not because of the EEC but due to changes in technology - even if produce the same amount of goods as before, she needs fewer workers.

In 2016 these older skills are worthless, competing with similarly low-skilled workers from EU – benefits of the EEC went to those with formal qualifications, able to handle abstractions and intangible capital.

Supporters of EU failed to grasp the anger of those who were suffering.

It is clear that geographical areas of low pay, high unemployment, a tradition of manufacturing and lower skilled workers voted overwhelmingly to leave the EU.

By contrast, the better educated benefited from lower trade barriers, they were not affected by free movement of labour and were likely to benefit as they had valuable skills which were attractive in job markets in EU and around world. 37% of university graduates voted leave compared with 60% without a university education; 35% of upper and upper middle class compared with 64 % in working/lower classes.

Eu winners and losers

Two sets of winners: middle class in emerging markets and global plutocracy

Losers the working/lower middle class in developed world

The well-off elite argued that immigration was a net benefit, that it was misleading to complain about it. Immigration brought valuable, hard-working people [where would I be without my

Polish cleaner?] and younger people who paid taxes, not a drain on wealth of idle white working class. Hypocritically, the same people complained about other migrants - Russian oligarchs and Chinese driving up house prices in London and Cambridge.

Austerity

The real issue was not EU migrants to the UK. EU Migrants were net contributors to taxation but were widely seen as leading to problems in NHS, schools, housing. Those problems did exist, and wages were stagnant. It was claimed that leaving EU would give £350n a week to NHS but the issue was NOT Brussels, but austerity after 2010.

Austerity was an entirely self-inflicted wound – led by Cameron, Osborne and the LibDems who now campaign to remain. Austerity had nothing to do with Brussels – other than indirectly in seeing what it did to Greece. In France, incomes of lowest 50 per cent of the population risen by 32 per cent since 1982 – unlike in Britain.

Communities were left to cope with consequences of globalisation with less help from central government. The Brexit vote was related to austerity and poor provision of public services – and found to be more significant than immigration in determining the vote.

Has Britain ever got over winning the war?

Europe moved on from the Second World War – Britain did not. Note the ways that the war and its legacy are commemorated:

In France, commemoration is as part of Europe: Macron referred to France not standing alone in First World War, needing Canadians, British, Italians US. The political message is pro European

In Britain, there is no mention of others in armistice service, except for the Commonwealth. In Second World War, there is a myth of standing alone. It is interesting to observe a note written for PM Cameron about the commemoration of WWI– ‘we must ensure that our commemoration [of the First World War] does not give any support to the myth that European integration was the result of the two World Wars’

Identity

Concerns about national identity are more important than economics: The British fear the loss of cultural identity.

Look at the 1966 World Cup and the Union Jack – Englishness and Britishness were interchangeable, but now, the cross of St George has replaced the union jack.

The census of 2011 asked for self-identification: in England 60% said solely English (77% in the north-east, 37% in London) compared with 29% of respondents identifying as English and British. There has been a clear shift in the Scottish independence movement: in a 1996 survey, only a third of English chose English rather than British; this rose in 2011 50%. In 2011, 40% of the English would like “English” on their passports. The Scots could seek freedom from London – England could not seek freedom from London but could seek it from Brussels.

Mike Kenny, Professor of Politics at Queen Mary University in 2014 said that the re-emergence of English national identity ‘may well turn out to constitute one of the most important phases in the history of the national consciousness of the English since the 18th century’.

Revival of the anglosphere

Britain is psychologically returning to the Anglosphere or CANZUK (Canada, Australia, New Zealand and the UK) or “Empire 2.0” as it is called by civil servants. This new union is not with Europe but with the white empire. *Britannia Unchained 2012*, a right wing treatise by five conservative MPs calls for a neoliberal project of deregulation, uniting fellow buccaneers who made the empire by pursuit of private wealth, and should release itself from the ties of the EU.

In April 2014, Nigel Farage proclaimed ‘Let’s re-embrace the big world, the 21st century global world. Let’s strike trade deals with India, New Zealand, all of those emerging parts of the world’. His UKIP manifesto in 2010 said ‘Britain is not merely a European country, but part of a global community, the Anglosphere.... From India to the United States, New Zealand to the Caribbean, UKIP would want to foster closer ties with the Anglosphere’. [Pearce and Kenny 145]

David Davis, the “Brexit bulldog” said in 2016: ‘This is an opportunity to renew our strong relationships with Commonwealth and

Anglosphere countries. These parts of the world are growing faster than Europe. We share history, culture and language. We have family ties. We even share similar legal systems. The usual barriers to trade are largely absent’.

Conclusion

COMPLETE NEARER TIME WHEN MORE SENSE OF WHAT HAPPENS

Your editor has not tampered with Professor Daunton’s Conclusion. It is indeed, to be completed.....

Commercials

If you have an offer, message or request of a personal or not-for-profit nature that you would like us to include in this section, please contact the editor at newsletter@cambridgesociety.org.au.

Snippets

We acknowledge our particular debt to Varsity and to the University News Release Service.

Cambridge Investigates its Slave Links

The University of Cambridge is to investigate its own historical links with slavery and will examine how it might have gained financially. It has launched a two-year study that will examine its archives to see whether it gained from the slave trade.

Universities have faced questions about the legacy of links to slavery.

"It is only right that Cambridge should look into its own exposure to the profits of coerced labour," said vice-chancellor Stephen Toope. "We cannot know at this stage what exactly it will find but it is reasonable to assume that, like many large British institutions during the colonial era, the university will have benefited directly or indirectly," said Prof Millett.

Discovery of genetic variants that protect against obesity and type 2 diabetes could lead to new weight loss medicines

Scientists have known for several years that genes can influence a person’s weight. One of the genes that is known to play a key role in regulating weight is MC4R, which codes for the melanocortin 4 receptor. This receptor acts like a

switch in the brain to suppress appetite. People who have genetic variants that disrupt this receptor gain weight easily.

Now, in a study published today in the journal *Cell*, researchers have shown that other genetic variants in the MC4R gene that increase the activity of this brain receptor can protect people from becoming overweight, a finding that could lead to the development of new medicines that ‘copy’ the protective effect of these genetic variants to achieve or maintain weight-loss.

A team in Cambridge looked at the MC4R gene in half a million volunteers from the UK population who have taken part in the UK Biobank study, finding 61 distinct naturally-occurring genetic variants. While some of these genetic variants predisposed people to become obese, other variants provided protection against obesity and some of its major complications, such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

To investigate the reasons for this mystery, the team, who previously showed that MC4R works in the brain as a ‘switch’ to tell us to stop eating after a meal, studied the function of these genetic variants in a number of laboratory experiments. They found that MC4R gene variants linked to higher obesity risk stopped the gene from working, whereas variants that offered protection against obesity kept the gene ‘switched on’.

variants that caused the receptor to remain ‘switched on’. People with these variants would eat less, which could explain their lower weight. People with two copies of these particular variants (1 in over 1,000 people) were on average 2.5 kg lighter than people without the variants and had a 50% lower risk of type 2 diabetes and heart disease.

“This study drives home the fact that genetics plays a major role in why some people are obese – and that some people are fortunate enough to have genes that protect them from obesity,” says Professor Farooqi of the University of Cambridge.

The discovery adds to recent work by the team which showed that some slim people have a genetic advantage when it comes to maintaining their weight.

“It doesn’t mean that we can’t influence our weight by watching what we eat, but it does mean the odds are stacked against some people and in favour of others,” added Professor Farooqi. A powerful emerging concept is that genetic variants that protect against disease can be used as models for the development of medicines that are more effective and safer,” said Dr Luca Lotta, Senior Clinical Investigator at the Medical Research Council Epidemiology Unit and joint lead author of the study. “Our findings may pave the way for a new generation of weight loss therapies that activate MC4R preferentially via the beta-arrestin pathway.”

“Our work would not have been possible without the unique blend of expertise in large-scale genetic epidemiology analysis and laboratory experiments at the Institute of Metabolic Science,” says Professor Wareham, Director of the MRC Epidemiology Unit and Co-Director of the Institute.

“Genetic studies of thousands of people and a functional understanding of the mechanisms behind protective genetic variants can really help us inform the development of a new generation of medicines for common diseases like obesity and diabetes that affect millions of people globally.”