In 2004, writer David Goodhart caused controversy in Britain with an essay warning that growing social diversity was putting strain on the social contract that underpins the welfare state. Christian Kjelstrup, editor of Eurozine partner journal Samtiden, speaks to Goodhart about how Brexit and the ongoing debate over immigration have reflected his arguments.

Christian Kjelstrup, Samtiden: You’ve been concerned about the tensions between solidarity and diversity at least since you wrote the notorious ‘Too diverse?’ essay in 2004. [1] Why did you come up with your notions about Somewheres / Anywheres?

David Goodhart: I do not think the essay was ‘notorious’! It was an honest attempt to grapple with a real issue. Yes the essay was a kind of warning to the left saying that the two principles that you attach the greatest importance to, diversity and solidarity, are necessarily in tension - at least if you accept the common-sense assumption that people are readier to share with people they feel familiar with and with whom they share norms of behaviour.

The essay was written at the end of 2003 and caused quite a controversy when it was reprinted in the Guardian newspaper, the main paper of the centre-left. It was written before the jihadist 7/7 attacks in London or the big inflow of workers from central and eastern Europe after the accession of the ex-communist countries in 2004, both of which have given an extra twist to this ‘progressive dilemma.’

I think the underlying tension I describe is central to modern politics and I
have, as you imply, returned to it in a somewhat different form in the Anywhere-Somewhere value divide. But the tension has not manifested itself, at least not yet, in the manner I predicted of declining support for the welfare state. In continental Europe that is partly because a lot of welfare is managed through quite individualised compulsory insurance systems. In the UK there is a more common-pool welfare system based on general taxation which is therefore vulnerable to declining feelings of common identity with fellow citizens.

And I think there is some evidence of this decline in the UK: we have seen the introduction here of policies such as household welfare caps and child benefit to be paid in future to just two children. The fact that free movement gives European newcomers immediate access to all aspects of the social state has also been a factor behind the Brexit vote. And I suspect UK welfare will shift closer towards the continental insurance model over time to help mitigate the solidarity/diversity tension.

But overall social security spending is holding up for now, including in the UK. One reason is that relatively high levels of public spending may be one surviving element of the ‘progressive coalition’ between the liberal middle class (especially those that work in the public sector) and the working class. Another reason is the sheer tenacity of the state in resisting attempts to cut it back.

What has emerged much more strongly than I predicted is the force of the political reaction against diversity and mass immigration: clearly one of the main factors behind Brexit, Trump and populism in Europe is a muted form of white identity politics. And I do not think this will go away, I think it is a matter of channelling it in a benign direction.

The fundamental diversity/solidarity divide I pointed to in that essay is also of course reflected in the Anywhere/Somewhere value divide, indeed it is the central divide in the western political soul, maybe even in the human soul itself. It is expressed in many different ways: rights versus duties, freedom versus security, globalism versus nationalism, mobility versus roots.

The first term in all those couplets has had an exceptional run in the past couple of liberal decades and it is time for a bit of rebalancing.
The essay was met by, partly, quite harsh criticism and you were even accused of expressing right-wing or even racist sentiments. Then came Brexit and Trump. From your new position of having left or having had the liberal ‘tribe’ slightly turn its back on you, did you think ‘Hah! This is exactly what I warned about’? Do you think the liberal left has been too naïve to pay sufficient attention to the Somewheres’ world view?

It is not very gracious to say ‘I told you so’! But yes I do think I spotted a widespread discomfort with the dominant Anywhere liberalism, a discomfort that is as much cultural as economic. Anywheres have been too oblivious to their own power. They have ruled in their own interest and called it the national interest. And this is not just about economic policy and the shift to an open, high-immigration, knowledge economy which benefits Anywheres and often disadvantages Somewheres. Almost the entire political-policy spectrum is dominated by secular, liberal Anywhere assumptions, at least in the UK: the huge expansion of higher education and relative neglect of technical and vocational education; the way in which cognitive ability has become the gold standard of human esteem; the way in which many forms of group attachment (national, local, ethnic) have become suspect; the declining importance of the private realm and the attempts to minimize gender differences and gender roles that many people still value. And then on top of this the Somewheres have been told that the Anywhere worldview is morally superior to their own.

You have to define in your words ‘Anywheres’ and ‘Somewheres’ for Samtiden’s readers. To what extent are Somewheres equivalent to those who have recently been sucked up by the populist movements and those who were in favour of Brexit? To what extent are Anywheres synonymous with supporters of cosmopolitanism, globalism, multiculturalism?

Yes, of course; I have already used the terms a few times, but let me define them more clearly. The main value divide in our society is between the 20 to 25 per cent of the population I call the Anywheres (the people who see the world from Anywhere), who are well educated and mobile and tend to favour openness, autonomy, fluidity – and a larger group of people (about 50 per cent of the population) I call the Somewheres (the people who see the world from Somewhere), who are less well educated, more rooted and value security/familiarity, and place a much greater emphasis on group
attachments (local, ethnic, national) than the Anywheres.

Anywheres are generally comfortable with social change because they have so-called ‘achieved identities’ a sense of yourself derived from your educational and career achievements which allows you to fit in pretty much anywhere. Whereas Somewheres have ‘ascribed identities’ based more on place or group which means that your identity can be more easily discomforted by rapid social change.

This sounds like a very binary distinction but there is a big in-betweener group of about 25 per cent of the population and there is a great variety of both Anywheres and Somewheres. It is important to remember that Anywheres are not just the metropolitan or cosmopolitan elites; they are around one quarter of the population and many of them have quite mainstream lives and beliefs. Though there is a sub-set of more extreme Anywheres I call the Global Villagers (about 5 per cent of the population) and there is also a group of more extreme Somewheres I call Hard Authoritarians (about 5 to 7 per cent of the population).

It is important to note that I have invented the labels but I have not invented the value groups. The divides play out somewhat differently in different countries, and they are fuzzy at the edges and change over time but in the UK they are plainly there to see in the opinion and value surveys such as the British Social Attitudes Survey. The differences overlap to some extent with social class but are distinct.

Why has the divide emerged so strongly in recent times? First, the greater importance of socio-cultural politics. Socio-economic politics and the old left/right division remain important but are increasingly eclipsed by the ‘security and identity’ issues. Second, the rapid growth in the number of Anywheres, driven by the expansion of higher education, has unbalanced the system. Anywheres have become too dominant as I argued above. All the main political parties (apart from the populists) are dominated by Anywhere priorities and assumptions and most of the policy agenda too, at least in Britain.

Populism is the reaction to liberal Anywhere overreach. Most but not all of those who voted for Brexit are probably best described as Somewheres. The task of politics in the next generation is to find a new settlement between these two legitimate worldviews, the two halves of humanity’s political soul.
But aren’t those notions to a certain extent blurred? For instance, Anywheres can work abroad and in general be orientated towards the world, and yet at the same time be rooted in a local community. And, vice versa, it’s not at all difficult to imagine a Somewhere with a higher degree from a foreign country, who travels a lot, and yet is a nationalist.

In the UK the Anywhere/Somewhere divide is particularly acute because of residential universities and the dominance of London. Young people who do well at school, from whatever class background, usually leave home to go to college and if they are pursuing upper professional careers might well then move to London or another metropolitan centre. They lose touch with their school friends and create new professional networks. But yes, you are right they will often settle and create new kinds of roots, perhaps in the middle class quarters near a university. And yes, it is possible to imagine a Somewhere as you describe. Not everyone fits neatly into these meta-categories. Everyone is idiosyncratic.

How about yourself – are you a somewhere or anywhere now?

I am an Anywhere with Somewhere sympathies.

If Anywheres are significantly outnumbered by less-educated Somewheres, isn’t that a reason why we should listen to the minority here: that because of their academic background, Anywheres are more likely to possess a sophisticated world view?

Haha! No, that is a kind of Anywhere arrogance that drives the Somewheres mad! Educated people are no more objective than uneducated people. I do not mean the scientists or doctors; obviously they have hard, objective knowledge. But the academics, journalists, commentators or just opinionated professional people are no more neutral than Joe Public. When it comes to views about politics and society even the highly educated start from their own values and priorities. They do not come to their opinions from a neutral survey of the social science journals, though they may find such journals useful to find facts to support the arguments they already feel drawn to.

You are concerned about giving Somewheres voice in a society
where they, due to immigration, feel themselves more and more culturally estranged. And yet, isn’t the real gap here the one between Somewheres and Anywheres, and not between Somewheres and immigrants, with whom they often share values – e.g., closely knit families (an important topic in your book) and communities?

I think most Somewheres are discomforted by rapid social change and therefore have a bias against large-scale immigration, often for economic reasons too. Liberals tend to unfairly describe Somewheres as anti-immigrant, but in most cases that is not the case. And yes, I often make the point that ethnic minorities are a potential bridge between the two value groups. They are in the country in part because of Anywhere openness and they often retain more international connections than the native population but their religiosity, strong families and social conservatism gives them a more Somewhere worldview.

What is your biggest fear? Are you afraid that British society will get more and more polarized (and I’m not thinking now about possible Scottish independence, although that too might lead to polarization)?

There is still quite a strong consensus in Britain in favour of a regulated market economy with, by historical standards, a pretty substantial state (the political argument is essentially between a state taking 38 per cent of GDP and one taking 42 per cent of GDP) and with a public realm with a strongly egalitarian and liberal ethos. If anything there has been a convergence between classes on socio-economic issues in recent decades, the divergence is over culture, openness and sovereignty.

It is worth unpacking the national sovereignty argument here. Liberal writers like Ivan Krastev and Yascha Mounk have developed this idea of the two parts of the phrase liberal democracy increasingly being at war with each other. They have invented a new sort of triangulation in which they attack the elites for becoming undemocratic and the populists for becoming illiberal. I think there is more evidence for the first than the second.

What do I mean by that? I think the key concept here, especially in the European context, is what the British former civil servant Ivan Rogers has called technocratic depoliticization.
At the European and indeed the global level technocratic elites tend to agree that we can no longer be effectively governed at the national or local level and are happy to pool sovereignty to make markets and politics work better in a more interdependent world. And that means removing more and more things from the democratic contest. This is not just about majority voting in the EU or WTO regulations it is also true of domestic politics: think of independent central banks or the much greater legal activism of the judiciary in the era of human rights legislation with its deep hostility to majoritarianism.

Now all of these things that shrink the democratic space may be entirely justified in their own terms. But you can bet your bottom dollar that when things are removed from the national democratic arena they will inevitably be decided according to those Anywhere priorities of openness, diversity and so on.

Moreover, at a personal-psychological level the Anywheres, especially in the higher elite, are comfortable with relinquishing sovereignty. They understand the trade-offs, the benefits to be gained in GDP growth or greater cooperation to combat climate change, they may even have a friend of a friend who works at one of the international organisations. They also tend to have quite a high degree of sovereignty in their own personal and professional lives so don’t really feel the loss of it associated with the shrinkage of national citizenship.

So the problem is that Anywhere politics is tending to hollow out national democracy which is experienced as empowering by elites and disempowering by non-elites. And this diluting of democracy can lead to populist-rejectionist responses.

As Ivan Rogers has written: ‘If you evacuate many domains of public policy of any real element of choice at the citizen level... then the only way to voice opposition become to voice opposition to the whole system and to argue that it needs to be demolished rather than changed from within.’

So illiberal democracy is the product of elite-led undemocratic liberalism or what I would call liberal Anywhere over-reach. And yes, some of the opposition to this political evolution has been authoritarian and xenophobic, reflecting the views of anything between 2 and 10 per cent of the population. But the rise of illiberal democracy has been exaggerated. The
rise in support for populist parties, many of which have actually participated in coalition governments around Europe, has not, thankfully, led to any significant change in the liberal-constitutional consensus. There has been no consistent attempt to undermine minority rights or subvert the rule of law. Immigration continues at quite high levels and the initial response to the refugee crisis of 2015 was a welcome one, even if it did subsequently sour.

The proponents of illiberal democracy can point to some worrying developments in Poland and Hungary but that is a product of the unique post-communist history of central and eastern Europe. It’s true there was the burkini ban, but that fizzled out into a farce. The Swiss have banned new minarets but that is a minor inconvenience to Swiss Muslims.

So, there has been some polarization as some Somewheres have found a political voice in populist parties but I do not think that illiberal democracy is sweeping across Europe.

One of the reasons illiberal democracy has been largely held at bay, at least so far, is because most Somewheres and many populist voters have a political worldview that I call decent populism. What that means, in a nutshell, is that most Somewheres (at least those under retirement age) have accepted what I call ‘the great rights liberalisation’ of the last 40 years on race, gender and sexuality.

They are, in the main, modern people but they are not liberals. As I have already described, their identities are often strongly rooted in the places and groups they come from and for that reason they often find change to those places – or indeed the country as a whole – discomforting. They often see change as loss and for that reason tend to be hostile to mass immigration, though (to repeat) usually not to individual immigrants. They feel strongly about people, especially newcomers to a country, conforming to common norms (some have a high attachment to order). They are sensitive to welfare free-riding, put security before liberty and still believe in some kind of gender division of labour.

They are comfortable enough in the modern world but do not embrace the two ‘masses’ that have had such an impact on it: mass higher education and mass immigration.

Because Anywhere politicians and commentators do not understand socio-
cultural politics in the way that they understand the utility maximising of socio-economic politics they are inclined to caricature Somewhere responses. It is true that open versus closed has in some respects become the new left versus right, but it is a very self-serving dualism for pro-openness Anywheres. Have you ever met anyone who wants to live in a closed society? But many Somewheres feel with good reason that the forms of openness that have emerged in the past 20 to 30 years do not always benefit them.

Anywhere liberalism underestimates or misunderstands decent populism. Liberalism tends to see group attachment and modern equality as incompatible or in active conflict. But attachment to an in-group – national, local, ethnic, etc. – does not require hostility to an out-group, and usually in the modern world can sit happily alongside an instinct of equality towards the stranger or outsider.

How can these two groups - you refer to ‘the great divide’ between Anywheres and Somewheres - be reconciled?

Reconciling these two groups is the central task of modern politics. Anywhere dominance cannot simply be replaced by Somewhere dominance. Anywheres represent some of the most progressive and dynamic forces in society but they have to show more emotional intelligence towards those who do not share their priorities and interests. Liberal Anywheres need to practice a bit more of the pluralism they talk about that means also making more effort to distinguish between the obviously unacceptable, illegitimate forms of populism – racist, anti-democratic groups like Golden Dawn in Greece – and more mainstream, legitimate forms like UKIP in the UK.

We need to find common interests and common enemies: we all have an interest in social and environmental stability, climate change is a common enemy.

Why is solidarity and diversity mutually exclusive? Is it not possible to imagine a society where, say, people are culturally diverse, and yet can be politically equal and united, as one of your opponents, Kenan Malik, has pointed out?

They are not mutually exclusive but they are in tension; a tension that sensible politics can mitigate. I think that combination you describe is
possible but only if cultural change is relatively gradual. And when ethnic majorities start shrinking rapidly, as we are seeing in many parts of America and some parts of Europe, you can get a white identity politics backlash, clearly one of the factors behind Trump.

Speaking of equality, in ‘A Postliberal Future?’ you write that ‘Postliberalism is universalist in the basic sense that it believes all humans’ lives are of equal worth. But it also believes that this universalist ethic must be tempered by moral particularism: all humans are equal but they are not all equal to us; our obligations and allegiances ripple out from family and friends to stranger fellow-citizens in our neighbourhoods and towns, then to nations and finally to all humanity’. This might even seem like an echo of the Orwellian ‘All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others’: In what cases has a society, in your opinion, a moral obligation to help strangers, and in what cases should they not engage? Yes, I’m talking about immigration.

Yes, some people are more equal to us than others. To think otherwise is quite inhuman. To value a stranger’s child as much as your own is a kind of madness. And if everyone is my brother then nobody is (not even my actual brother!) because my emotional and financial resources are spread too thin. Does anyone in Norway seriously think you should spend as much on development aid as you spend on health and welfare for Norwegians? Universalism interpreted as an equal obligation to all humans would be an abomination.

Pankaj Mishra, author of Age of Anger, has criticized you (in an article published by the Norwegian daily Klassekampen last year) for neglecting the reasons why immigrants or people from, say, Muslim countries cause panic among Somewheres, and the reasons behind their resentment: that they systematically, throughout history and today have been treated worse, suffer, and having a hard time making ends meet. With an increased gap between rich and poor in the world, a world which requires global solutions, why focus on the conflict between Anywheres and Somewheres, and not on this great divide?

Mishra is ignorant of basic social facts. The last 20 years has seen more people raised out of poverty than ever before in human history. There has
been an increase in inequality in both the countries where poverty has declined and in rich countries where the benefits of globalization have been unequally spread. But in most European countries the increase in inequality has been quite mild. In the UK for example there was a step change in the late 1980s but income inequality has stayed relatively steady since then and social security spending as a proportion of GDP continues to rise in most rich countries. Over the past 60 or 70 years the value of citizenship in a rich country has continued to rise as the social state has become more generous. And over the last 30 years the cost of transport from poor countries to rich ones has fallen. It is not surprising given those two things that more people from poor countries try to get into rich ones, and hence the bureaucracy of immigration and border control has had to grow. Why should poor people in rich countries make themselves poorer by allowing more open borders? It is not going to happen. The task is to make poor countries as much like rich ones as quickly possible. And in the meantime if rich countries out of misplaced moral conscience encourage too much brain drain of the new middle class from developing countries we merely slow down that process.

Your book was first of all written with UK as its context. How do you think your Anywheres-Somewheres theory would apply to a country like Norway, which is fairly egalitarian, politically stable, not a member of the EU, and where the question of immigrants has caused quite a lot of dispute, turmoil and disagreement among the public/‘ethnic Norwegians’?

I think the value divide I describe is a reality in all developed countries, though of course it takes a different form in different countries. Norway has seen a rise in support for populism that is partly driven by Somewhere push-back against Anywhere liberalism.

Recently, you have declared yourself a postliberal. What is your definition of postliberalism and can it be located on the traditional left-right political axis?

Postliberalism absorbs much of modern liberalism but balances it with an appreciation of community, social stability and the obligations and duties that accompany our rights. It combines aspects of left and right. My own political credo echoes that of the American political scientist Daniel Bell who said he was a pro-market social democrat in economics, a liberal in politics and somewhat conservative in social and cultural matters. This is the hidden
majority in most developed countries.

**Finally, part of the subtitle of your latest book is ‘... the Future of Politics’? What is the future of politics? Is your general point that identity, more than traditional left-right issues, will characterize politics in the period to come? What is your own recipe to overcome the challenges you describe in your book?**

All politics is to some extent identity politics, my side against your side, my cause against your cause or your indifference. The civil rights movement in America was an expression of identity politics. But it was good identity politics, people outside the mainstream wanting to join it. It was a centripetal force, a bid to overcome past division and strengthen team America.

Today’s identity politics is different. It often reflects the concerns of the liberal Anywhere graduate class who often do not have the traditional grievances of the working class or excluded minorities. But left politics has historically been about grievance and changing society so grievances have to be found and are found. Campus identity politics also gives middle class youth who have often led very individualistic lives a taste of the pleasure of belonging.

So one can see the appeal. But I think it as a big problem for the left. The left, or any successful movement, needs to be centripetal to pull forces together to become hegemonic. But identity politics is by definition centrifugal, about division into niches of grievance.

And in this it reflects the fragmentation of the wider society, something that any reform politics has to set its face against. All the recent social and political trends have been centrifugal: the end of the Cold War removed the common enemy for western societies, immigration and diversity has tended to reduce trust and solidarity, the media once drew society together round the campfire with everyone watching the same programmes at the same time whereas now social media divides us and, indeed, has become one of the main channels through which identity politics thrives.

*This is an extended version of an interview first published in Norwegian*
in Samtiden.
Footnotes