Maritime Migration, Brexit and the Future of European Borders: Anthropological Previews

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Abstract Since the start of this decade external borders of the European Union have increasingly become sites of hardship, uncertainty, danger and death as hundreds of thousands of people every year attempt to enter Europe to escape war and poverty in North and Sub-Saharan Africa and the Middle East. The year 2015 saw the arrival of over one million people via maritime routes, an unprecedented number that caused panic among politicians on the continent and unsettled societies of the "old" and the "new" European Union. Neo-nationalist and neo-fascist parties and movements gained significant ground. In June of 2016 voters in the United Kingdom chose to leave the European Union in the Brexit referendum whose erratic consequences will continue to play out for some time to come. The migratory crisis of the previous year fuelled the "Leave" vote by creating the perception that immigration to the EU is unchecked, and that the UK must "take control of its borders". While it is not yet known what exactly is meant by "taking control", we can observe that as a result of these events the terms and conditions of migration, mobility and citizenship in Europe are shifting. In this essay I argue that this is a shift away from what I call the neoliberal-humanitarian consensus towards a new model whose exact shape is as yet undetermined, but whose emergent features are illuminated by recent anthropological scholarship. Drawing on the UK case study I will show that the control of borders and regulation of mobility is undergoing a distinct anti-humanitarian turn. I will explore the significance and prospects of this new anti-humanitarianism and the possibilities of anthropological insight.

Keywords migration, borders, Brexit, Mediterranean, anthropology.

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The year 2016 will be remembered as the year of the great unsettling of the post-Cold War world order. The election of Donald Trump to the US presidency, Brexit, and the terrorist attacks in Belgium, France and Germany all of course have a genealogy that can be traced many years back. Nevertheless it is fair to say that it was in 2016 when the widespread sense of disorientation and unpredictability of the future has fully taken hold. Anxiety has pervaded mainstream culture for a long time (Since September 11, 2001? Since the start of the economic crisis in 2008?) but it was 2016 that brought the eerie perception that what appeared known of the world order, of Europe and its seemingly stable democracies, can no longer be relied upon.

The confusion is not helped by the way in which public, or "national", conversations have unfolded: with everyone speaking at once, on social media just as in a crowded public place, with the authority of experts widely doubted and voices of ignorance unfiltered. Public fora are fragmented and in the digital cacophony academics, and anthropologists among them, occupy their own ambiguous space. On the one hand academic blogs are vibrant and informative, with scholars publishing thoughtful analyses of all the social and political preoccupations of the day, on a quick turnaround and without the slow grind of the traditional peer review. Thanks to editors and curators, this writing is more often than not good quality, enlightening and accessible. On the other hand all of this intellectual production appears to have a limited reach, read mostly by friends and colleagues and rarely cited in mainstream media.

These reflections have a place in the beginning of this essay about maritime migration, Brexit and the future of European borders because the research I draw on, and the argument I make, dwell precisely in this space of ambiguous futility (or perhaps futile ambiguity) which lies somewhere between the constant calls for anthropologists to bring their work to the wider public (Stein 2016) and the mind-boggling reality of what has been called post-factual politics (Macdonald in Green et al. 2016). I am in agreement with those who insist that that anthropologists must engage with the public via the media and other forums. But we already do. It is certainly not the shortage of informed analysis that has caused phenomena such as Brexit, xenophobia in Europe and the rise of Trump in the US. For all the merits of our discipline, it is not *more* public knowledge of anthropological scholarship that is going to fix the damage that these things have and will continue to cause. However, and this is a modest suggestion, perhaps anthropological work on issues such as migration and citizenship, poverty and austerity, nationalism and xenophobia can in some instances help anthropologists, in their roles as educators and public intellectuals, to stay one step ahead of events and identify spaces for strategic intervention. This is why I have given this essay the subtitle "anthropological previews".

This essay was written in response to one of the most momentous events of 2016, that is the June referendum in the United Kingdom on the continued

membership in the European Union, which ended in what is known as Brexit. I draw together multiple scholarly threads, which have informed my recent work around the themes of mobility, migration and borders in Europe. I begin with highlighting the theoretical concerns that emerged from this work. I then introduce the concept of the neoliberal-humanitarian consensus on human mobility. I argue, based on the case study of Brexit, that this consensus is falling apart. In the Conclusion I examine the emergent implications of its disintegration.

Maritime migration perspectives and Brexit

Prior to Brexit my research was focused on the ramifications of the refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, and in particular on the question of how European leaders and the institutions they represent account for the repeated migrant boat disasters, which came to be reported with devastating regularity particularly since the Arab uprisings in 2011. Just in the last five years 13,500 people died at sea, according to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.[1] Some perished in large disasters covered by international media, others unheard and unseen out in the open sea. How do official European bodies, ostensibly the guardians of a legal order in which human rights play such an important part, explain these deaths at sea and the active neglect that in some cases has contributed to such disasters?

In 2013 and 2014 I conducted fieldwork in Strasbourg, at the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe where I followed the work of the Committee on Refugees, Migrants and Displaced Persons and of the rapporteur who completed for the Council of Europe the report on the so called 'left to die boat' (PACE 2012). The 'left to die boat' was the Libyan dinghy carrying 79 people that ran into trouble at sea in the spring of 2011 and was abandoned for two weeks until all except for nine of its passengers died, in spite of the fact that the authorities knew the exact location of the drifting vessel.

In the course of that project I had the opportunity to observe and talk to many MPs representing a number of European countries. I noted among other things that even in a seemingly clear-cut case, like the 'left to die boat,' the unwillingness to take political responsibility for what happens at sea to people attempting to cross European borders trumps factual evidence and dilutes any lessons that could potentially be learned from such a tragedy (Follis 2015).

One such hotly contested lesson was the proposition that at a time when so many refugees take desperate measures in order to cross the sea, it is the responsibility of coastal states and the European Union to conduct robust search and rescue operations that would prevent future migrant boat

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1   For up to date data see the UNHCR Information Sharing Portal
     at http://data.unhcr.org/mediterranean/regional.php (accessed on Dec 16, 2016).

disasters, similar to the one that occurred on the 3rd of October of 2013, when 360 of the 500 passengers died near the coast of Lampedusa. After that tragedy, not waiting for the rest of the EU to get its act together, the Italian Ministry of Defense launched operation *Mare Nostrum* in the Central Mediterranean, which over its yearlong duration brought approximately 140 thousand people to safety (PACE 2014). In the Parliamentary Assembly in Strasbourg, a debate unfolded where politicians drew on the same set of facts to support diametrically opposing positions. For the opponents of proactive search and rescue drawn primarily from right-wing parties across Europe, the numbers of people crossing the sea, the methods of work of the Mare Nostrum operation, or the numbers of people rescued at sea served as the basis of accusations that the Italians operate, as Maurizio Albahari put it, "state-owned ferry line for unauthorized migrants and an insurance policy for traffickers" (Albahari 2015: 5). For the less numerous defendants of the Italian model of search and rescue the same set of facts documented the effectives of an unprecedented humanitarian operation carried out on the basis of a moral mandate.

Shortly after I finished my fieldwork in Strasbourg, and about a year and a half before Brexit, the same question, namely whether proactive search and rescue constitutes the right response to the ongoing crisis at European maritime borders became a political issue in the United Kingdom. I continued to follow the debate, recognizing the arguments I had already heard articulated in Strasbourg, not least by British parliamentarians. Spokespersons for the Conservative government of David Cameron, and particularly for the then-Home Secretary Theresa May announced, in late 2014, that they do not support preemptive search and rescue operations at sea, because such operations only encourage more migrants to cross the Mediterranean. The implication was that if there was no expectation of rescue, the people would not board the boats in the first place, for they would know that should anything go wrong, they would die. Britain, whose government extended precious little support to the refugees fleeing Syria, made it very clear that it would not accept any asylum seekers arriving in Europe via the maritime route and that it would not contribute to the efforts of other EU states to rescue migrants in the Mediterranean.[2] Its critics quickly dubbed this approach the 'let them drown' policy (Hodges 2014). As I show below, a few months after it was announced, the policy was softened and in spite of the brief outrage that it caused, the wider public quickly forgot the issue. I argue however that the 'let them drown policy' was a harbinger of a shift away from what I call the *neoliberal-humanitarian consensus on human mobility* towards a new model whose exact shape is as yet undetermined.

[2]   Based on a decision made under the Prime Minister David Cameron, the UK government is resettling up to 20,000 Syrian refugees in Britain by 2020.
See https://www.gov.uk/government/world/syria (accessed on Dec. 16, 2016).

The neoliberal-humanitarian consensus on human mobility

On the 23rd of June 2016 British citizens, by a majority of 52 to 48 percent, decided that Britain should leave the European Union. This vote, the vote for Brexit, was cast under the banner of "taking back control". In the view of a large proportion of the voters who chose *Leave*, nothing is more in need of that control as much as British borders. Many voices in the British media sought to explain the Brexit vote as a protest of those who for years have made clear their discomfort with Britain's high immigration figures but have felt disregarded and ignored precisely on this issue.

That explanation of course is only one part of the story. But regardless of any other possible causes of the Brexit vote, it does bring to the fore important questions concerning the status of borders in Europe in the imagination of its publics. This has always been a complex issue. As the anthropologist Sarah Green observed

> *[T]he question of where the borders of Europe may be located is not a simple matter of locating the boundaries, the edges, of somewhere; rather, it requires an understanding of both past and current relations among places ... an understanding of the classification system used to establish what is to be included and excluded; and an understanding of the regional practices that either reinforce or challenge the EU's formal intended relationships among its various bits and parts.* (Green 2013: 348)

If this is the case, then British voters registered a fatigue with this complexity. The British public is of course generally rather ambiguous about their Europeanness. For the four plus decades of UK's EU membership this was reflected in awkward status that Britain had at the European table, economically strong and important to the common market yet forever securing opt-outs from new commitments and resisting further integration. It does help, naturally, that Britain is an island. It was not part of the Schengen area without internal borders; it opted out of certain areas of the Common Asylum Policy, which allowed PM David Cameron to refuse participation in the European Commission's 2015 plan to distribute refugees among member states based on a quota system (Peers 2015). Ultimately, the idea that Britain's borders require special protection is not new. But it has acquired a renewed force. In Brexit, people were asked a simple binary question to settle complex matters of policy, and apparently many based their answer solely on the *Leave* campaign's promise that UK borders would be finally under control.

The fatigue with EU's overly complex border arrangements and the ways in which they take certain types of traffic from under the control of sovereign border enforcement is in no way limited to Britain. It is often assumed that

all anti-immigrant, neo-nationalist discourses are essentially the same, and that they all share the same points of intersection with law and justice discourses of border enforcement, but there is scope for much creative comparative research. There are important differences between Britain, Denmark and Hungary, to name just a few countries where border anxiety, or what John Borneman has called the fear of penetration (Borneman 1998), is a prominent political theme. In spite of any differences however, we are witnessing the following paradox: as the areas of democratic decision-making are shrinking at many levels of government and in many places in Europe and beyond, it appears that politicians are increasingly responsive to the voice of the people in one specific area, and that is the control of borders and migration. Democratic standards such as political accountability, the rule of law and the protection of minorities are eroding or being actively dismantled. At the same time it appears that a significant proportion of the political class believes that the will of the people to erect walls and kick out strangers must be heeded at any cost. This can be shown on several examples. Donald Trump won at least some portion of the support that led him to victory based on his promise to build a wall long the US-Mexico border. The new nationalist government in Poland rejected EU refugee quotas ostensibly on the basis of its electoral mandate (Deutche Welle 2016). The new government in the UK, under the prime ministership of the former Home Secretary Theresa May, seeks to drive down immigration numbers at any cost, because "the people have spoken".

Indeed, in Britain rigid and effective border controls measured by a decisive bringing down of the net migration numbers are the political order of the day. Politicians, and not only those on the right, are eager to deliver. Setting aside for the moment the moral, legal and social problems of rigid border controls, how would this goal be achieved? The unilateral shutting down of traffic is neither practical nor desirable for any government. But what the government can do is revoke what I call the *neoliberal-humanitarian consensus on human mobility,* which has dominated border and migration policy in the European Union since 1990s. The consensus has a history which deserves some examination.

In his book *The Migration Apparatus*, the anthropologist Gregory Feldman describes the world of EU migration policymaking as acephalous, that is headless, "a decentralized apparatus of migration management composed of disparate migration policy agendas, generic regulatory mechanisms and unconnected policy actors and policy 'targets'" (Feldman 2012: 5). Feldman's ethnographic focus is on the technocrats responsible for the day-to-day perpetuation of the apparatus and on the "*mediated* practice of policymaking" which, as he argues following Foucault, renders the migrant "an object of information, never a subject of communication" (Foucault 1977, cited in Feldman 2012: 6). In spite of tensions within the apparatus, migration policymaking in the EU is converging within a political context that Feldman describes as

a contest of "right vs. right" (ibid.: 25). The traditional left has eroded and what remains is a political scene dominated by the right bifurcated into neo-liberalism and neo-nationalism. Between them,

> *[They] share a strong desire to crack down on illegal migration ... [and] a concern for a strong security establishment, even though neoliberals want it to clarify the circuits through which discrete and mobile individuals move and neo-nationalists want it to protect a more rooted and well defined national (or local) collective. It is thus no coincidence that the EU has had more success in reaching agreements on the negative aspects of migration management, for example border security and migrant return than in other migration policy domains* (ibid.: 9).

My understanding of *the neoliberal-humanitarian consensus*, draws on Feldman's work. Until recently, this consensus governed European borders and the movement across them, both within and into the European Union. The neoliberal approach dominated policies on economic migration and interpretations of the freedom of movement within the EU. Within the common market, "discreet and mobile individuals" as Feldman says, were allowed to move in pursuit of economic opportunity. Under certain narrowly defined circumstances outsiders could legally come too, particularly if it was in the interest of powerful economic actors. The strong security establishment would step in to filter out everyone else, except the ever shrinking small minority covered by the humanitarian exception, that is those who could plausibly claim the need for protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention and EU asylum regulations. States did not question their humanitarian commitments in principle, but rather, as many anthropologists and other scholars documented, empowered their migration management bureaucracies and law enforcements to apply the humanitarian exception sparingly, and to depoliticize and hollow out the concept of asylum (Good 2007; Ticktin 2006; Mountz 2010; Fassin 2005 and others).

This consensus, in which neoliberal policies and humanitarian imperatives came together, was a fragile one to begin with. My claim is that in 2014 and 2015 it met its demise. During that time European leaders found themselves confronted with the rapidly rising numbers of people arriving via maritime routes who manifestly needed humanitarian protection. In spite of concerted efforts, these refugees resisted easy reclassification as illegal immigrants. So, as the strategy of reclassifying them proved insufficient, Feldman's contest of "the right vs. right", tilted to, well, the right and the neo-nationalists, now on the offensive, simultaneously demolished the neoliberal element of the consensus and went after the ideas and principles of humanitarianism itself.

The case of Brexit

Showing this happened on the example of Brexit requires backtracking to the *Leave* campaign's demand for "taking back control" of Britain's borders. The harshest border control scenarios, those that involve the shutting down of the labor market to foreigners and the deportation of all failed asylum seekers, are unlikely to be realized, in Britain or elsewhere, mostly due to the influence of the business lobby. That however does not mean that the control of movement across borders will proceed as before. Once committed to securing borders and bringing down immigration, politicians must be seen acting on their promises. Facts so far indicate that they will do so on the cheap, at the expense of those without any democratic representation whatsoever, that is the most vulnerable people on the move-refugees escaping conflict, poverty and hopelessness in war-torn and failing states.

Challenges to the neoliberal element

Before we discuss the situation of the refugees, we should examine the neoliberal element of the neoliberal-humanitarian consensus, which is also unlikely to survive intact. To understand better why that is the case, we must revisit the EU principle of the free movement of people. This principle stipulates that any citizen of any EU country has the right to enter, reside and work in any other member state. For as long as this principle enabled the citizens of Western Europe to come to London for opportunity and adventure (see Favell 2008), while at the same time allowing for example British pensioners to retire in Spain, it was treated in Britain as a welcome perk of the Common Market. In 2004 however eight postsocialist states of Eastern Europe joined the EU. Their citizens did not automatically qualify for freedom of movement. Most other EU states imposed a transition period of seven years. But the British government, which at the time operated on the sure footing of economic growth embraced the idea that, as an article in the *Financial Times* put it at the time, "migrants are a useful way of filling skills shortages in the economy and boosting growth" (Turner 2002). The UK chose to open its borders to the new EU citizens right away, without any transition.

In Eastern Europe at the time the then-Home Secretary Jack Straw's declarations that migrants are welcome and that they will be good for Britain's economy were received as a sign of admirable openness, which contrasted positively for example with the widely reported fear of the "Polish plumber" in France. What few people remarked on at the time, but what comes into sharp relief today, was that by opening the UK's labor market in 2004 Tony Blair's government displayed its full commitment to such neoliberal ideas as abandoning protections of the local markets, and the belief in the power and rationality of individuals who serve the economy by pursuing their own

material interests. An analysis of the balance of gains and losses from this approach is outside the scope of this essay, but suffice it to say that from today's perspective freedom of movement appears to be, for all involved, a burden as much as a gift.

In any case, the government's move almost instantly resulted in a tenfold increase in numbers of EU citizens coming to live and work to the UK, from about 10,000 per year even up to 200,000 per year, reaching the total number of just over three million in 2015, in the total population of 64 million (Migration Observatory 2016). This rapid increase in numbers soon began to alter attitudes to freedom of movement. One economic crisis later, in the space of less than a decade, what used to be seen as an opportunity for Britain to embrace came to be viewed as an unwanted imposition by and from Brussels. The already-deprived non-metropolitan communities, which suffered most as a result of the post-2008 downturn, were encouraged by the neo-nationalist press and politicians to believe that immigrants were to blame for their malaise, not long-term trends such as deindustrialization and lack of investment coupled with the more recent austerity policies. Although the British elite had no shortage of supporters of the *neoliberal* in the neoliberal-humanitarian consensus, they had an increasingly difficult time convincing the dejected public that on the whole immigration is still good for the economy.

Indeed, to those voters who are immigration-hostile and empowered by the Brexit vote, taking control of borders emphatically means limiting all, not just European immigration. This was made clear by Nigel Farage of the UK Independence Party who a week before the vote unveiled the notorious "Breaking point" campaign poster which showed a crowded line of refugees presumably clamoring to enter Britain. Farage justified the poster by saying that it was intended to illustrate the dysfunction of the EU's system of border control, but it was widely read as suggesting, with nasty racial overtones, "vote *Leave* if you do not want these people here".[3] But the idea that pulling out of the EU would alter numbers of those applying for asylum, or indeed achieve a dramatic reduction in total immigration is far-fetched. In practice "taking control" of borders in a country wishing to still partake in the global economy, with international business links, tourism and education would require mounting a near-totalitarian apparatus of control, and even then it would still be destined to fail.

In 2015 UK's supervised international borders were crossed 100 million times, of which 36 million crossings were by non-UK residents (Cox 2016). Imagine applying a rigid regime of entry and exit checks, as Farage and others propose, to traffic of such magnitude. Imagine the cost, the time, the aggravation to both the controllers and the controlled. Imagine the scale of surveillance and of the violence that would inevitably have to accompany any such regime.

3   To view the poster and an example of the criticism see Riley-Smith 2016.

Let us imagine further what it would take to expel those who have entered without permission or have failed to secure the right to settle. In this context politicians like to mention deportation as a facet of "taking control". It is deceptively simple. While putting a person on a plane and sending them "home" may sound easy enough, but in reality, as Nick De Genova and colleagues have shown (De Genova and Peutz 2009), removal is a lengthy and expensive procedure involving many official agencies and private contractors. More often than not, it involves the use of force. For these reasons only just over 12,000 enforced removals were carried out by the UK government in 2015, which stands out as a relatively small number when compared with the overall migration and border crossing figures (Home Office 2016). In light of this, what are we left with? There is a government facing a specific set of conflicting demands. On the one hand it answers to a public whose expectations of taking back control of borders have been elevated to unrealistic heights. On the other hand there is the socioeconomic reality and external environment where the postulated "crackdown" simply would not work.

In these conditions what we are most likely to see post-Brexit is not the fundamental overhaul that the public appears to demand, but rather persistent obstruction of movement through visas, permits, refusals of entry and other forms of generalized harassment of selected groups of migrants, an approach that has already been well rehearsed on the external borders of the European Union, as I was able to document in my ethnography of the Polish-Ukrainian border, but as others also have also shown (Follis 2012; see also Fassin 2011). In spite of the unequivocal outcome of the opening of the UK's labor market in 2004, the movement of people remains important to the UK's economy and radically undercutting it is difficult, costly and impractical. Who better to understand this than the new UK Prime Minister Theresa May? It was she after all who in her six years as Home Secretary repeatedly had to admit that her attempts to restrict non-EU migration to the UK have largely failed.

Undermining the humanitarian element

But what Theresa May also knows is that physical borders are far from the only site where foreigners can be made to feel unwelcome. Numbers, after all can be reduced not just through enforcement of restrictive laws but also through the manipulation of sentiments, through symbolic deterrence and manufactured hostility. This requires well-calibrated direct and indirect messages sent out to current and prospective migrants to let them know that they are unwanted, and that their lives, should they arrive, will be made difficult. May has a record of crafting such messages designed both for those already in the UK, and those who have yet to embark on the potentially deadly journey across the Mediterranean or Aegean Sea to enter Europe.

And so, in 2013, when the UK Parliament was passing the Immigration bill, May openly advocated creating, what she called, a "hostile environment" for irregular migrants. Part of this strategy, insightfully analyzed by the anthropologist Dace Dzenovska, has been to encourage every upstanding British citizen to keep their eyes and ears open and to inform the UK Border Agency of neighbors who might be in the country illegally, committing benefits fraud and other migration related offences (Dzenovska 2014). The duty to perform identity checks was imposed on bank clerks and private landlords, thus expanding the reach of the border force into the heart of everyday communities. May's message to those already in the UK without requisite documents has been "go home or face arrest". The posters with this text displayed on billboards were driven by Home Office vans through English towns in 2013 (see Travis 2013). They were roundly criticized in the mainstream media and by the UK NGO sector. This form of communication was subsequently discontinued, but the message got out. While of course in theory legally resident immigrants had nothing to fear, and ostensibly only the "bad" undocumented ones were the targets, the key characteristic of hostile environments is that everybody breathes their foul air.

Hostile environment internally is one thing, but as every contemporary border practitioner knows, and as anthropologists like Ruben Andersson (2014) and political geographers like Alison Mountz and Nancy Hiemstra (2012) documented, the most effective border control is when the prospective immigrant never makes it to the border in the first place. Hence the rapid development of the practices of so-called "remote control" where states set up their border precincts in the territories of other states and screen prospective entrants far in advance of their actual arrival (Zaiotti 2016).

And here I return to the 'let them drown' policy mentioned earlier. In 2014, at the height of the migratory crisis on the Mediterranean Sea, when the Italian Navy was pulling out on average 3000 people out of the water every week, the UK government went even further than "remote control". When the question of supporting the Italians by deploying European assets was put on the European Council's table in 2014, the British government announced that the UK did not support planned search and rescue operations in the Mediterranean and would not be contributing its forces. "We believe," said the Foreign Office "that [such operations] create an unintended 'pull factor', encouraging more migrants to attempt the dangerous sea crossing and thereby leading to more tragic and unnecessary deaths." (UK Parliament 2014) Not only should the UK stop saving people, another minister argued, it should also be publicized widely in North Africa and the Middle East that no rescue patrols await at sea. As the possibility of rescue changes into near-certainty of death in the event of anything going wrong on the journey, people will opt to stay home instead.

Many critics came forward, in the Parliament, in the media, in academia and NGOs. It was too much for too many people, who saw the blunt denial of

rescue as a dereliction of British values. Ultimately, like with the "go home" vans, the government backpedalled. David Cameron ended up sending a military vessel to the Mediterranean, but not before obtaining assurances that no persons rescued by the Royal Navy would be allowed to apply for asylum in the UK. They would be delivered to the nearest Italian port and left for the Italians to deal with. But even if the 'let them drown policy' was modified from its original form, the argument that rescuing people only makes more of them arrive has already been made and broadcast. The humanitarian part of the neoliberal-humanitarian consensus has also been undermined and discredited. The 'let them drown' policy of course was not about preventing the loss of life. It was never anything other than a form of border control.

Conclusion

This essay discussed the relationship between Brexit and the collapse of the *neoliberal-humanitarian consensus on human mobility* that governed the control of borders and migration in the European Union for over two decades. That consensus, generally upheld by the member states of the European Union and the European Commission itself rested on the twin pillars of the neoliberal approach to economic migration and the humanitarian response to the plight of refugees enacted through asylum policy. The vote in the UK to leave the European Union, while in many ways falling short of a democratic process based on informed deliberation, is said to have delivered a strong mandate for the government to limit immigration and strengthen border control. This, as I have shown, would be difficult. However the powers currently leading Britain have a track record of policies of border control by other means. One of them is the creation of a hostile environment for migrants. The other one is the 'let them drown' policy that rested upon the fundamental unwillingness to engage in areas of border crisis and to participate in international humanitarian efforts. Those efforts, flawed and insufficient as they are, marred by deficiencies of European solidarity, have nonetheless saved thousands of people in the last couple of years. As the UK withdraws from the European Union, its politicians will no longer have to concoct perverse arguments for why they do not want to participate in joint search and rescue operations. They will simply wash their hands of crises beyond their borders.

This is of course far from just an UK issue. Brexit has made the already appalling situation at Europe's Southern edges significantly worse. The vote appears to legitimize a politics based on "taking control of borders" which in practice means targeting the most vulnerable people on the move, refugees who have no place to go (the EU migrants, inconvenienced as they may be, after all have their own governments to stand up for them in the upcoming Brexit negotiations). Whether intimidating them through communal hostility or indeed leaving them to drown, these tactics represent what I would call

a post-humanitarian approach to human movement. As I have argued else-where (Follis 2016), the suspicion that our humanitarian impulses only attract an undeserving mob of unwanted migrants has been firmly planted and will continue to attract supporters to the anti-humanitarian model of border control in Europe and beyond. Based on the hostile tone that culminated in Brexit, it appears that a significant task for anthropologists will be to seek out those who oppose, resist and challenge this anti-humanitarianism at the grassroots level and above, including how they engage with the existing official institutions and legal framework (Tazzioli 2016), how they mobilize liberal concepts like human rights and spiritual or ethical ones, like hospitality, responsibility or compassion. This alternative politics will likely grow increasingly subversive in the coming years. It must be illuminated in the face of Brexit, which is nothing else but the "let them drown" policy writ large.

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