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Democratic Dissent and the Politics of Rescue during the Twenty-first Century's “Inhospitable” EU Migration “Crisis”

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This article uses critical approaches to examine the ways in which dissenters have objected to the European Union's current “politics of rescue.” The authors argue that the term “hospitality” has been a key term in liberal theorizing about mobility since the Enlightenment, but that various neo-liberal “pull” theories, worries about securitization and the militarization of rescue efforts in the Mediterranean have converged in ways that have turned Europe into an “inhospitable” place for foreigners. The authors use three short case studies—of maritime captains' and sailors' rescue efforts, academic critiques of FRONTEX, and vernacular reactions to the iconic Kurdi image—to put on display the contradictions that exist when illiberal decisions are made by EU communities that are supposed to be democratically governed by hospitality principles. They also argue that the focus on the social agency of “traffickers” deflects attention away from the structural and colonial facets of these migration “crises.”

Keywords: hospitality, Aylan Kurdi, *Mare Nostrum*, migrants, politics of rescue, dissent

Introduction

For centuries, ancient mariners who crossed the Mediterranean were told that their maritime duties included the rescue of those who suffered from shipwrecks, and the European

common law that developed over the ages underscored the importance of being “hospitable” to those whose lives were threatened by storms and other hazards. By the time of the Enlightenment, Immanuel Kant and other continental philosophers were instantiating rights of mobility as some of the human rights that should be granted to rational human beings. In a host of ways, the Schengen areas that allow some 400 million Europeans to travel across symbolic zones without having to show visas can be viewed as a part of this legacy of European “hospitality” (Taylor 2015). The term “hospitality” can in turn be linked to other key words or phrases in contemporary neo-liberal lexicons—cosmopolitanism, rule of law, equality, egalitarianism and so forth—and these rhetorical figurations help to signal that many sovereign states have decided to come together and form the European Union.¹

Talk of mobility during colonial and imperial years, and the inherent rights of humans to travel free of encumbrance, made sense when it was Europeans who were negotiating with each other about Westphalian borders and travel overseas, but what happens to those same vaunted principles, such as hospitality, when tens of millions of the denizens from other parts of the world flock to Mediterranean shores and demand their own human rights? Moreover, what happens when freedom of movement principles are juxtaposed with more restrictive ways of conceptualizing securitized necessities? Note, for example, how many interdisciplinary European theorists and international relations practitioners comment on the “new” twenty-first-century dangers from terrorists that might require us to respect “human security rights.” All of this becomes even more complicated when European observers on other continents disagree about the polysemic and polyvalent meanings of perceived refugee, migrant or Syrian “crises.”

Although it is notoriously difficult to point to any specific historical event or major catastrophe that ushered in contemporary worries about rising numbers of asylum seekers traveling to Europe, there is little disagreement that many nongovernment organizations (NGOs) and official EU documents record the fact that at least 20,000 people have died trying to cross the Mediterranean. While many critics of EU asylum policies complain that not enough is being done to make Europe a “hospitable” place, anxious Europeans who read about being “swamped” by migrants support the massive funding of fences, walls, drones, electronic surveillance equipment and other apparatus that could be used by those charged with “border management” of the porous “southern” borders of Europe.

During the last decade, some crews on EU ships in the Mediterranean have been accused of looking the other way when they came across leaky vessels that are said to be led by “traffickers.” As we argue in more detail, by focusing on the social agency of the smugglers or traffickers, and by using securitizing and militarizing frameworks to combat this problem, European decision-makers can collectively dodge the endemic structural and functional problems associated with migration.

What is even more inhospitable are the allegedly horrendous conditions that exist in detention centers that can be found across parts of Europe and places like Morocco, Turkey, Libya, and Algeria, funded in part by the signing of bilateral or multilateral agreements. Those Africans and foreign others who flee political repression or leave those detention centers have to hide from the omniscient gaze of the European Union’s border surveillance system (EUROSUR), a management system that aids those who want to deport “rescued” travelers who can be sent back to their “countries of origin.”

Even those nations that wish to be hospitable have short-term memories as the movement of asylum seekers into their countries brings populist pressures for the passage of more restrictive legislation on foreign mobility within, and across, European borders. Fingers are pointed in all directions by those advocating draconian or illiberal policies as local populations in all of the European countries express their worries about the dangers that might come when future generations of their own European children might have to compete with the supposed hordes of “irregular” migrants.

Thousands of potential asylum seekers who traveled across the Mediterranean between 2011 and 2016 have been met with tear gas, high fences, militarized national border patrols, and myriad xenophobic performances. Even in places like Sweden, representatives from the Swedish Democratic Party, like Oscar Sjöstedt, have not only called for the prevention of immigration into Sweden but “negative immigration” or “repatriation” that would be carried out by discouraging state support for immigrant job placement in that country. Representatives from the Médecins Sans Frontières have recently argued that, once “again, Europe’s main focus is not on how well people are protected, but on how efficiently they are kept away” (Médecins Sans Frontières Staff 2016).

In this article we explore the ways in which dissenting defenders of policies of “hospitality” have been trying to critique what we view as illiberal European governance. By building on the work of critical migration scholars we illustrate how status-quo policies of securitization and deterrence—that play well in front of populist European audiences—end up exacerbating the problems associated with these perceived refugee crisis.

We recognize that defending a position which privileges “hospitality” has to take into account realpolitik concerns. Allowing for more mobility and asking for greater protection of migrant or refugee rights is not an easy position to defend. Perceptual worries about the existential scope of a contemporary migration “crisis” have severely tested the bonds that hold the EU together. Anatol Lieven provided an excellent summary of some of the conundrums that confronted European decision-makers and nationalistic populations when he explained:

Udo di Fabio, a former judge of Germany’s Constitutional Court, warned this month that in opening Germany to the enormous new wave of migrants from North Africa and the Middle East, Chancellor Angela Merkel and her government have “created a historic breach of law,” involving a direct conflict between present government policy and the constitutional obligation to defend the country’s borders, territorial integrity and democracy. Only a few months ago, such a statement would have come only from the right wing of German politics. Today, it increasingly represents the views of the German—and European—mainstream. It is difficult to exaggerate the effect on European opinion of the combination of the vast increase in migrant numbers, the Islamic State terrorist attacks in Paris, and the mass criminality in Cologne and elsewhere. Commentators have begun to warn about the possible collapse of key features of the European Union. (Lieven 2016, paras 1–2)

Those who circulate these types of counterterrorism rhetorics have not hesitated to defend inhospitable ways of conceptualizing EU treatment of asylum seekers.

In order to explore the rhetorical force of some potentially constructive dissenting rhetorics in these refugee situations we want to focus readers' attention on how several different communities of social agents have responded to the controversial efforts of those involved with Italy's "*Mare Nostrum* Operation" (MNO). While defenders of this operation claimed that Italian sailors and others working alongside them saved tens of thousands of migrants—and in the process showed the world the meaning of the word "hospitality"—detractors using economic and militaristic frames of discourse analysis lampooned MNO as an example of costly, idealistic ways of "pulling" unwanted foreigners into Europe.

From a rhetorical standpoint it is perfectly understandable why some southern European authorities would decide to name their major rescue operation "*Mare Nostrum*." The Mediterranean Sea has often been the sentimental subject of continental poetry—one only need ponder the lyrics of the Catalan Joan Manuel Serrat, and his album *Mediterráneo* (Serrat 1971) to understand this continuum of water and land as a place of mystery, beauty, and even death. But the Mediterranean Sea was not always referred to by that name. During the Roman Empire it was common to refer to the waters surrounding the Italian peninsula as *Mare Nostrum*—"our sea." At the end of the nineteenth century the idea of *mare nostrum* would resurface among Italian nationalists who sought to unify the peninsula (and its waters) as a nation-state. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, MNO has appeared in new imaginations, as a hospitable and merciful campaign to rescue thousands of "irregular" immigrants on their way to mainland Europe, regardless of origin.

One of the key issues we consider is how various cosmopolitan and local communities have reacted to the ending of MNO in 2014 and its replacement by what some regard as the inhospitable Operation Triton. Did this move by EU decision-makers signal how a liberal Europe was now going to prioritize border management over hospitality, while it passed policies that, as critics contend, forced migrants to venture on alternative and more dangerous routes, often paying smugglers, generating a black market along the Mediterranean and increasing the risk of injury and death? One's reactions to MNO often provided a litmus test that measured how one thought about the "push" and "pull" facets of refugee or migrant crises.

With this in mind, the rest of this article is divided into four major segments. The first three segments highlight the work of different communities of dissenters who have reacted to MNO while advocating for more hospitable ways of configuring refugee rights—sailors and fishermen defending broad definitions of the "duty to rescue," academic critics of restrictive migration policies and public viewers of the iconic photograph of A(y)lan Kurdi. The concluding segment explains how the intersectional work of these three communities might aid dissenters who want to see more European hospitality.

Sailors, Fishermen and *Mare Nostrum* Operation's Performative Enactment of Hospitality

As noted previously, some of the key groups that have been caught up in the "push-pull" realpolitik disputes about the balancing of humanitarian and security concerns are the sailors and commercial fishermen who do not always share the sentiments of the neo-liberal

EU authorities who prioritize border management. Between 2013 and 2016 many sailors and sea captains who have witnessed the advent of both Italy's MNO and the EU's Triton mission have become cognizant of the fact that they can be put in jail if EU member states do not immunize them from legal prosecution when they choose to rescue migrants, refugees, or asylum seekers. These particular social agents found that they risked a great deal when they did not defer to the authority of FRONTEX officials or when they chose to follow old maritime values and expectations instead of listening to elite and popular defenders of the "deterrence" way of viewing foreign travelers. For many Europeans, noted Ben-Yehoyada (2015, 184), witnessing rescuing dilemmas has turned the "Mediterranean into a mirror that reflects their dilemmas about the tensions between the bounds of their political union and boundless humanity."

It was no coincidence that a decade before the end of MNO, captains and sailors watched with horror as Elias Bierdel, Vladimir Dachkevitch, and Stefan Schmidt—the president of the German NGO *Cap Anamur*, and the captain and first officer of the ship bearing the same name—found themselves in an Italian court staying trial for allegedly aiding and abetting smugglers. The actual trial began in November 2006 in Sicily, but two years earlier Dachkevitch and Schmidt had picked up 37 irregular immigrants who were said to have been "at the sea's mercy in a dinghy" (*Statewatch* 2007, 1). After the captain and first officer of the *Cap Anamur* moved into Italian territorial waters they waited for weeks for permission to land, and during this period some of the migrants, who worried about the shortages of supplies, threatened that they would jump back into the sea. Eventually the crew of the *Cap Anamur* decided that they had to enter the port of Empedocle without obtaining permission from Italian authorities.

Many of the rescued on the *Cap Anamur* were Sudanese, and when Dachkevitch and Schmidt requested permission to dock they provided a list of the names and the presumed nationalities of the rescued migrants. Disputes ensued in Italy as police, customs officials, NGO representatives, and *carabinieri* (Italian police) officers disagreed about whether those rescued could apply for asylum or should be treated as "illegal migrants."

Under the terms of the Dublin Convention, Malta may have been the technically legal place for *Cap Anamur* to have docked and requested asylum, but all of this was complicated by the fact that the captain and first officer invited a film crew on board so that they could help video and archive evidence that illustrated the complicated nature of the politics of rescue. Part of this tragedy came about when the *Cap Anamur* sat in a harbor as officials from Malta, Italy, and other countries debated about which country should be "rescuing" these 37 irregular migrants.

After five years of heated courtroom wrangling, the sale of the vessel and a loss of millions of Euros, an Italian appellate court acquitted the head of the German rights NGO, the captain, and the first officer. While defenders of the court proceedings averred that this was a typical example of humanitarian idealism that did not take into account European needs for management of borders, securitization, respect for international treaties, anti-smuggling efforts, and terrorist threats, defenders of the *Cap Anamur*—some leftist newspapers in Germany (*Die Tageszeitung*)—were reporting that it should be Italy's refugee policies, and not these rescuers, who should be put on trial. The German Development Minister, Heidemarie Wiecek-Zeul, argued that the appellate reversal of the lower court signaled

a “good day” for refugees, and showed that Europeans “cannot just close our eyes to the suffering of refugees at Europe’s doors” (*Der Spiegel* Staff 2009, 1–3). By 2009, Bierdel—who lost his boat and witnessed a drop in donations to his German NGO—was forced to resign as head of this rescue organization. Bierdel told reporters that he had brought reporters on board so that he could set an example for those who wanted to critique “European policies that walled off refugees and created a situation in which people seeking a better life often drowned” (2009, 5).

These types of heated rhetorical exchanges about the *Cap Anamur* affair, between those who advocated more open borders and those who were sure that deterrence was the answer, helped with the constitutive crafting of all sorts of contested *topoi* (topics), narratives and other ideological figurations that were circulated in elite and public venues long before the 2014 “Syrian crisis.” Although there would be many “hotspots” that would serve as the epicenters of much of this discourse, it was some of the media representations of shipwrecks off the coast of Lampedusa that forced the hand of the Italian government. The Italian government announced the beginning of Operation *Mare Nostrum* on 18 October 2013, and this had everything to do with the fact that Pope Francis had called the deaths from the shipwrecks “shameful” on 3 October 2013. During 2013 some 3000 migrants lost their lives trying to reach Europe, but Angelino Alfano, the Italian Minister of the Interior, could report that some 91,000 migrants had safely arrived at Italian ports (Kreis 2014, 3).

For more than a year, countless maritime experts, supporters of open borders and others who wanted to see broad definitions of the “duty to rescue” applauded MNO efforts, but the ending of the MNO program complicated the legal, economic, and political positions of rescuers. The launching of the European Union’s Triton operation meant that maritime captains working on commercial vessels or local boats were now put on notice that military vessels, the coastguard, or FRONTEX would be the primary agents responsible for “legal” rescue in the Mediterranean after 2014.

By 2015 NGOs were preparing pamphlets that explained to would-be rescuers the promise and perils that came with private rescue missions in Mediterranean waters. The danger was that sailors who did not worry about the “politics” of those they rescued were now being accused of interfering with the systematic “deterrence” plans of the European Union. Carrying out rescues by commercial vessels after the emergence of Triton was a risky affair, especially when military vessels or sailors on coastguard vessels could accuse commercial vessels of interfering with organized and systematic border management schemes.

In the antiseptic, clinical reviews of success or failure of FRONTEX efforts, one often finds that official migration texts are written by authors who use the language of risk management to help keep track of the yearly efficacy of both private and public Mediterranean rescue missions. In some of these official meta-narratives, sailors who carry out unsanctioned rescues are lumped together with private NGO rescuers and both dissenting groups are vilified for helping “pull” too many migrants to European shores. These sailors can be characterized as well-intentioned social agents who do not understand the operative logic of neo-liberal European regimes that have officials who know more about how to balance securitization and humanitarian needs.

These deterrence rhetorics do not just vilify traffickers who get paid large sums of money as they use leaky boats to dodge coastguard crews. Sympathetic merchant crews in

the Mediterranean feel the ire of governmental officials who are convinced only universal respect for deterrence policies can help ensure foreigners realize that only those who go through proper legal channels should try these perilous voyages. As Marcon (2013) explains in an essay that appeared in *Il Manifesto*, skippers traveling to Lampedusa or Pantelleria who became entangled in rescue efforts have either appeared in Italian courtrooms or they have been threatened with legal action when they attempted rescues of “irregular migrants.”

Between October 2013 and October 2014, EU legislation was proposed to reduce the risk that Italian captains and their crews would lose their livelihood when they continued to indiscriminately pick up “victims” and “survivors” of Mediterranean shipwrecks, but sailors and captains referred back to the tales of *Cap Anamur* when they explained their reluctance to unilaterally participate in some rescue missions. The Italian fishers’ acts that saved lives, contended Ben-Yehoyada (2016, 183), “exemplified Mediterranean hospitality,” but this liberal principle had to be promoted by those who faced illiberal ways of conceptualizing border closings, funding overseas detention centers, and penalizing anyone who is aiding and abetting “traffickers.”

Many sailors and captains working in the Mediterranean on merchant vessels applauded the efforts of the Italian navy during MNO, especially after mainstream and alternative presses credited MNO with having rescued more than 140,000 people. Italian elites talked of how monetary concerns forced the termination of MNO, but others were convinced that there were more nefarious factors that contributed to the abandonment of the “Mare Nostrum refugee rescue program” (McNeal 2014).

By the spring of 2015, EUROSUR authorities and other EU officials began crafting new narratives that blended together talk of humanitarianism with securitization, and EU decision-makers underscored the point that Triton’s goal of border patrolling was not intended to be a substitute for Italian funding of MNO. Yet those who accused EU officials of abandoning the migrants were incredulous, and dissenters complained that FRONTEX or EUROSUR officials were really more interested in identifying, detaining, and then deporting asylum seekers than they were in carrying out any rescue missions.

The puzzled sailors and captains who were caught in the maelstrom of politicizing the rescues were soon joined by academics who were convinced that Europe needed to become more hospitable.

European and International Academic Critiques of the European Union’s Inhospitability

At least since the mid-1990s, interdisciplinary scholars have tried to point out some of the contradictions that existed in the European Union’s defense of hospitable mobility within EU borders and the inhospitable ways in which some of these same member states have treated the foreign “other.” Meyda Yegenoglu (2012, 49), for example, argued that the liberal, “procedural multiculturalist” approach to contemporary migrations into Europe is limited by the current state of global capitalism. Furthermore, “liberalism has become the regulative principle in many metropolitan countries” (2012, 49), even while non-normative citizens continue to be denied legal rights and rescue—a move considered counter-hegemonic, even by the most liberal of Europeans. Yegenoglu pointed to Derrida’s reading

of Kant's cosmopolitan thesis on universal hospitality. Derrida argued that hospitality as we know it will always be a conditional hospitality until we can undo the concept that certain people always already properly belong and certain people do not (2012, para. 16). Following Derrida's deconstruction of universal hospitality, Yegenoglu argued that conditional hospitality is necessarily a racist hospitality: a relationship that asserts the hosts' superiority and sovereignty—always and in all cases (2012, para. 16).

Another critique that focused on the constitutive crafting of crises and the consequences of failed attempts to deter deaths came from the writings of Jean-Marie Colombani (2015). Colombani averred that European states agreed about the importance of trying to stop deaths at sea, but these same nations struggled to find the most efficient way to bring this about (2015, para. 1). In a Spanish-language opinion piece in *El País*, Colombani argued that the deaths of nearly 800 migrants in a very short period of time had forced the European Union to address this matter. According to Colombani, since 2015 the duties of FRONTEX have tripled. Moreover, FRONTEX was actively "rescuing" migrants along Greece's shores as part of Operation Poseidon, forcing other actors to step in, and these various social actors had different goals and motivations for their patrolling of the Mediterranean. Colombani (2015), like other cosmopolitan critics of restrictive EU migrant policies, noted the involvement of NGOs in rescue operations that work in and around "small" island states along the Mediterranean—spaces and places that could house some 5000 refugees (2015, para. 2). Colombani was bothered by some of the securitized features of Operation Triton. More troubling still was the fact that individuals like Federica Mogherini could send a petition to the United Nations that asked for the authorization of military action against Libyan smugglers, a response that she characterized as exhibiting a "healthy awareness" that Europeans needed to do something (2015, para. 2).

Other academic critiques have come from those interested in postcolonial orientations or critical securities studies in their analysis of some of this illiberal inhospitality. Caterina Miele (2016) recalled that for the past century the relationship between Italy and Libya can be best described as neocolonial. It is not surprising for Miele, and we agree, that Italy would be involved in the restructuring of Libya after the removal of Gaddafi, particularly as Libya is a country full of natural resources whose geographic location is also of strategic importance for Italy. It is no coincidence that in 2011 Italy apologized to Libyans for their past colonial transgressions, and in return the Libyans agreed to do their part to help patrol Libyan shores to cut down on the numbers of Africans who tried to move through Libya on their way to Europe.

For us, the use of militaries in so-called humanitarian campaigns like Triton or bilateral patrolling of "southern" or "central" EU borders is more than an instrumental appropriation of humanitarian creeds. More specifically, we believe that Mogherini's typical neoliberal call for the militarization of migrant issues is at the very limits (if not a perversion) of liberal, humanist, and democratic ideals. Deciding where patrol boats will not venture and deciding to look the other way in the busy Mediterranean is a choice, not a necessity. As several academics have reminded us, the very moment Europe decides who should or should not be rescued, who deserves European hospitality and who does not, is also the key moment these discursive choices have material impacts. It matters a great deal how one decides to preserve the Mediterranean visual landscape as death-free (or corpse-free),

and not all academics are willing to accept the draconian deterrence “pull” theories that blame rescuers for increasing the number of deaths near Libyan or Italian shores.

Charles Heller and Lorenzo Pezzani’s (2016) report—which has been used by members of Amnesty and the United Nations—provided one of the most detailed (and damning) illustrations of the inhospitality that is afforded by present EU border management schemes. Shifting their attention away from what others have called a “migration crisis,” Heller and Pezzani argued that we are instead witnessing “the crisis of the current EU border regime,” a problematic that involves selective and strategic interpretations of the “duty to rescue” (2016, 1–2). For Heller and Pezzani, when reluctant EU decision-makers working for FRONTEX or other organizations perform selective rescues, they paradoxically engage in thanatopolitical acts that caused, rather than prevented, countless deaths.

Heller and Pezzani, using “oceanographic” and “forensic” evidence such as interviews, surveillance imagery, and textual analyses, advanced the controversial claim that they could put together interactive websites which would allow viewers to “see” how EU ships, which were supposed to be helping with rescue missions, were actually leaving persons to die in the middle of the Mediterranean. They also noted how the securitization and militarization of this inhospitable environment created situations where commercial ships became complicit in selective rescue and deportation. EU authorities sometimes destroyed some makeshift vessels in their wars against the traffickers.

In fascinating and insightful ways, Heller and Pezzani explained how the EU member states were using a politics of rescue to rhetorically reconstitute the borders of Europe, so that they could off-load responsibility as they negotiated with countries like Morocco or Libya to take primary responsibility for managing the ebbs and flows of human tides. They elaborated by noting that the borders of Europe are reshaped when land “and sea have been locked into a continuum by the Europeanization of migration policies” that involved acts of non-assistance or strategic rescue (Heller and Pezzani 2016, 3).

Unlike other scholars who are eulogistic in their characterizations of Italy’s MNO, Heller and Pezzani were skeptical when they heard that MNO created the hospitable place for which so many were looking. From their vantage point, a heavily funded program that initially aimed to rescue tens of thousands of migrants at the mercy of the elements ended up obscuring “the fact that, while a record number of people were rescued, a record number of deaths were also recorded” (Heller and Pezzani 2016, 10). As readers might imagine, the neo-liberal defenders of EU policies pointed to the numbers saved while liberal critics of those same policies underscored the selective nature of FRONTEX rescuing efforts.

Martina Tazzioli (2016, 2) similarly argued that over the past two years the Mediterranean Sea has been recrafted as a Foucauldian “space of governmentality—a space of intervention.” This recrafting allows for the staging of “*humanitarian, real-time politics of visibility* that does not merely show how mechanisms of rescue and capture operate but rather contributes to the production of a *border-stage*—the Libya-Sicily sea-space as a space of rescue” (2016, 2; original emphases). This governmental space of operation, Tazzioli contended, turns into a performative venture where EU nations spend an immense amount of time and money in media outlets so that international viewers can see them at work.

Vernacular Calls for Hospitality and the Use of Visuals by Journalists and Human Rights Activists

For many dissenting observers who try to point out the contradictions that exist in the ways in which EU decision-makers talk and write about the protection of asylum-seekers' rights, the visual registers created after the death of a three-year-old Kurdish child Aylan (or Alan) Kurdi, had the best chance of raising the consciousness of European voters. The afterimages of Kurdi's passing played a major role in how journalists, NGOs, and special reporters for the United Nations conceptualized the alleged shortcomings of EU border policies. According to a UNHCR (United Nations High Commission for Refugees) study of European press coverage during the early months of 2015, the increase in coverage of the drowning of refugees and migrants who fled for safety against the Mediterranean led to a large public "outcry to increase rescue missions" (UNHCR 2015, 1).

Many of these particular mass-mediated critiques of EU policies began in early September 2015 when a Turkish photographer, Nilufer Demir, saw a dead child, face down, while she visited a beach in Bodrum, Turkey. Readers later learned that Aylan, the dead boy, and his family had traveled from the Syrian city of Kobane so that they could make their way to Europe, and perhaps to Canada. Aylan, a five-year-old brother named Galip, and his parents had boarded a boat from Turkey that was on its way to Greece. They had previously been denied asylum in Canada. Along the way, the boat capsized. Alan's father would become the sole survivor of this particular dash across this body of water. Lifejackets were not available to the victims. When Nilufer Demir was later asked why she decided to take this phantasmagoric image, she explained that she took the picture in order to "express the scream of his silent body" (Griggs 2015, para. 6).

While defenders of status-quo policies in the European Union tried to appropriate the image and argue for more deterrence policies so that fewer Syrians would try to make these dangerous treks, others tried to use the evocative feelings that came from viewing this necropolitical representation as an entrée point for more radical social, legal, or political critique. "Perhaps it was the innocence evoked by the body of a light-skinned child," speculated Nadine El-Enany (2016, 13), "that enabled the temporary, fleeting awakening among white Europeans to a refugee movement that long-preceded the media spotlight on that photo." Heather Snell hypothesized that:

as a symbol of all child migrants, Kurdi [was] available for benevolent appropriation—we cannot save Aylan, but we can save children like him by donating to the refugee cause. In doing so, we take up the role of rescuer. (2016, 10)

Regardless of why the image of Kurdi's lifeless body so outraged a global public, there can be little question that this viral, perhaps even iconic, photograph galvanized public support for Syrian refugees in the European Union—at least for a little while, and at least in some places. According to the *Guardian*, within 24 hours of Kurdi's image being published, thousands of British citizens formed and signed petitions, donated to NGOs, readied truckloads of supplies to Calais, and volunteered to take asylum-seeking refugees into their homes. The charity group Calaid reported being overwhelmed by the sheer quantity

of incoming aid and volunteers. James Fisher of Calaid lauded the hospitality of the British public, saying: “The generosity here has been so massive that we are having to put emergency storage procedures together now. Around three or four cars arrive each day filled with aid, the majority from the UK” (Henley et al. 2015, para. 21). British and international charities reported a surge in donations, with Save the Children reporting a 70 percent increase in a single day. The Migrant Offshore Aid Station, a group dedicated to rescuing migrants off the Mediterranean, received 15 times its normal donations in 24 hours. Nick Pascoe of Malmesbury, Wiltshire, attempted to sum up the impact of Kurdi’s image on British hospitality: “I’m just fed up with what I see on TV, the negative rhetoric about desperate people. Seeing the drowned toddler was a final straw” (Henley et al. 2015, para. 36). According to Snell (2016, 6), this *Guardian* article exemplified the UK citizenry’s revolt against its government’s lack of hospitality, drawing on discourses of “hospitality, humanitarianism, and global citizenship” and national values of “respect, dignity, and kindness” to honor Kurdi’s passing.

De Andrés-del Campo, Nos-Aldas, and García-Matilla (2016) concluded that Kurdi’s photograph was a determining factor for EU states taking immediate actions in support of refugees. The photograph appeared in a majority of international media outlets, often as a front-page image, and the term “Syria” quickly started trending on Google (2016, 31). Sympathetic publics forced state action. Angela Merkel, for instance, vowed that Germany would take in 800,000 migrants that year. In Spain, Madrid city hall displayed a large banner reading “Refugees Welcome” (*El País* Staff 2015). A nonprofit organization of the same name emerged simultaneously in Germany, offering refugees “a sort of philanthropic Airbnb” marching host families with refugees in need of shelter. After all, claimed the founders of Refugees Welcome, “Why shouldn’t refugees in Germany be able to live in shared flats (or other normal housing situations) instead of mass accommodation?” (Strochlic 2015, para. 11). Meanwhile, in Iceland, 10,000 residents volunteered to house Syrian refugees, which the *Daily Beast* described as an “outpouring of basic, decent hospitality from this tiny nation” (2015, para. 2). The Vatican also joined the conversation, with Pope Francis calling upon men and women of faith to host a family (the Vatican would host two families itself). Per Francis, “Before the tragedy of tens of thousands of refugees fleeing death in conflict and hunger and are on a journey of hope, the gospel calls us to be close to the smallest and to those who have been abandoned” (Farley 2015, para. 4). Religious journalist Robert Azzi implored EU residents to engage in a “radical” hospitality: “Practice hospitality. Radical hospitality. Invite, receive, and minister to strangers. Challenge the conventional orthodoxy of believing The Other as threatening and unwelcome” (Azzi 2015, para. 20). Hospitality, be it “radical” or otherwise, surged in the liberal portions of the EU in the immediate aftermath of Aylan Kurdi’s abject photograph.

Kurdi’s image temporarily shifted the tenor of the discourse surrounding the Syrian crisis. Instead of using the word “migrant” to describe the boy, journalists, activists, state representatives, and even ordinary citizens searching Google for information on Syria preferred the descriptor “refugee,” which de Andrés-del Campo, Nos-Aldas, and García-Matilla (2016, 35) asserted was a “term of salvation.” To mark one as a “refugee” instead of an immigrant demands hospitality because the difference between the two concepts “assumes a political shift in the treatment and understanding of the problem of displaced

people because the idea of refugee implies an active institutional approach to sheltering such people” (2016, 35). A similar discursive shift occurred when describing the housing of refugees, with a sudden favoring of the word “shelter” instead of “asylum.” This shift is significant because, according to de Andrés-del Campo, Nos-Aldas, and García-Matilla (2016, 35–36), the latter suggests a right whereas the former defines an attitude of hospitality and a voluntary program of assistance regarding the treatment of “othered” subjects. In sum, the visual power of Kurdi’s lifeless body forced many in the European Union to confront their own morality (and mortality), leading to a linguistic shift that favored a rhetoric of hospitality in the backdrop of such a deadly image of the Syrian refugee crisis.

However, despite the photograph’s initial rhetorical and moral force, not all observers were convinced that Demir’s photographs of Aylan Kurdi would lead to substantive, progressive changes in EU migration, refugee, or asylum policies. Snell explained the problematic potential of sentimentalism:

Kurdi’s image may move many to tears, but its repetition signifies an obsession with sentimentalized childhood, which in itself detracts from any real analysis of politics while providing reassurance that morality continues to thrive despite the hegemony of a neoliberalism that shrinks everything down to its value on the market. (2016, 14)

Similarly, Tanja Müller (2015), who has written about other iconic images—including the photograph stills and videos that became a part of the commentary on Michael Buerk’s famous report from Korem, Ethiopia, during a major famine in 1984—is one of the skeptics who worried that even Demir’s evocative image of Aylan Kurdi would do little to actually alter Europe’s inhospitable practices. While she recognized that some historical or contemporary pictures of humanitarian compassion resonated with international populations and helped with charitable giving, she was nevertheless convinced that the circulation, and rhetorical framings within empowered circles of decision-makers, would not significantly alter the treatment of migrants or refugees, especially in the United Kingdom. She explained the reductionist ways that motivated social agents to take advantage of the polysemy of the Demir photograph:

The picture of Aylan, possibly because he was put into focus not as part of a wider refugee movement but as a single, dead, innocent soul, has united even the formerly hard-core anti-immigration press in the UK—and so even the *Sun* has come down on Aylan’s side. In addition to a headline that demands “Bomb ISIS so that Aylan didn’t die in vain” more in line with its usual political stance, the *Sun* has started a campaign in support of foster homes for orphans combined with a fundraising effort “to help save kids like Aylan.” Money donated will go, rather unsurprisingly, to the Save the Children appeal that not only has in its mandate the exclusive focus on children but in traditional fundraising manner uses photographs of individual children singled out through their unique story of suffering to secure donations. (Müller 2015, 7)

An image that could have been used to alter EU laws for aiding those seeking legal entry was instead recontextualized to become part of conservative UK commentaries on terrorist threats or other domestic and foreign policy topics.

In some rhetorical framings of the Demir photographs, Aylan's passing was used to provide one more rationale for the break-up of the European Union or the massive funding of restrictive border policies. Bush (2016, 17), writing in *The New Statesman*, argued that sooner or later "the crisis that hit the shores of Italy and the streets of Turkey will come to the coast of Dover." Bush wrote several op-eds before the historic British vote to leave the European Union, commonly referred to as Brexit. For Bush (2016), the decision to vote "leave" had everything to do with the existence of foreign bodies on the shores of Turkey, Greece, Italy, France, and Spain. Many months after Aylan Kurdi's death, Bush warned readers that:

the prospect of bodies washing up on English beaches this summer is a real one and, regardless of the last days of the referendum campaign that will take place against a drumbeat of public fear—some real, some conjured up by the Leave campaign—about a migrant crisis on British shores. (2016, 17)

According to Bush, those who were working for Vote Leave, the cross-party campaign that orchestrated Brexit, impacted this decision when they strategically focused on immigration in the final days before the vote (2016, 17). "Last summer," explained Bush:

when photographs of Aylan Kurdi, a Syrian boy who had drowned and washed up on a Turkish beach, appeared on front pages around the world, the reaction in Britain was not a conversation about opening borders or of greater compassion but an increase in support for a Brexit vote. (2016, 17)

The Brookings Institute summarized the complexity of the Syria situation:

The EU refugee crisis needs to be seen against the background of the failure of the international community to help share the burden with these neighboring countries that are hosting the bulk of the Syrian refugees. After all, the international refugee system was set up on the shared understanding that refugees are an international responsibility, not just the responsibility of the country where they happen to arrive. (Kirişci 2015, 6)

In other words, we could agree that Kurdi's image was provocative, but it might only symbolize the need for more recognition of EU disagreements.

Amidst the innumerable contestations within and among the EU states regarding who should shoulder the burden of hosting Syrian refugees, Aylan Kurdi's iconic photograph appeared as a possible panacea to these border wars. However much Kurdi's body reminded concerned citizens about the importance of hospitality, the image was ultimately appropriated by both pro-refugee and anti-refugee forces to explain the significance of the boy's death in vastly different ways and for dramatically different ideological purposes.

Conclusion

Only time will tell if the vocal critics of EU border “management” policies, armed with liberal ways of thinking about mobility, will be able to alter the rhetorical horizons of a neoliberal Europe which fears that too much “hospitality” may lead to shrill demands for open borders and equal treatment of foreigners. Here we want to make explicit what we have been implying throughout this article—that those who want to use inhospitality as a deterrent cure for perceived “crisis” are going down the wrong path. Countries like Jordan and Turkey—which already provide havens for millions of refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers—bear the heaviest burdens in all of this complex of rescue, but many Europeans are convinced that their populations are the ones being threatened by migrant flows. Their unique neo-liberal mix of humanitarian and securitizing rhetorics focuses on the efforts of smugglers, naïve denizens from “the South” or capitalistic opportunists who are said to be forcing the hand of EU officials. Only vocal dissenters are willing to admit that economic dislocation or episodic wars in places like Syria or Iraq have anything to do with the structural after-effects of colonization and imperialism.

Ironically, there once was a time when Europeans asked the colonized in many parts of the world to view Europe as a hospitable place, the “motherland” that brought *mission civilisatrice* (civilizing mission). Europeans did not give a second thought to defending their rights to move overseas as they settled countless colonies and dispossessed the “other.” The postcolonial bonds of language, culture, and economic desire have encouraged many in the “South” to migrate to the “North” in search of a better life.

As long as EU officials refuse to alter their domestic laws for asylum seekers while “outsourcing” some of these problems to places like Morocco, Libya, or Turkey, the European Union will continue assiduously to avoid coping with the real structural and material causes of these perceptual crises that are linked to foreign affairs issues. The more the European Union and nations like Italy attempt to deter the foreign flows of people—the metaphorical “tides”—the more desperate refugees will find ways to circumvent these controls. Illegal smuggling and human trafficking became a problem when legal pathways were closed. The failure to take into account the vaunted principles of “hospitality” have not only put on display the limits of European humanitarianism—they have also rendered visible the impoverished nature of illiberal policies that criminalize the efforts of those who continue to risk their lives crossing a thanatopolitical Mediterranean.

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Note

1. The terms “liberalism” and “neo-liberalism” are polysemic and polyvalent, so here we need to explain our particular usage of these terms in EU migration or refugee crises contexts. When we use the term “liberalism” we are referring to the old Reformation and Enlightenment principles which assumed that moderate and nonviolent societal reforms could take place only when rational human beings were allowed entry into economic marketplaces as well as the marketplace

of ideas. These ideals were once considered to be the progressive ideas that helped liberate various European peoples from the autocratic and draconian powers of monarchs and churches. “Neo-liberalism” refers to the appropriation, and resurgence of some of those ideals that are now associated with various forms of *laissez-faire* economic liberalism, which influences the ways that EU member states grapple with the expenses associated with the rescue of refugees or the austerity measures that are put in place to justify the termination of Italy’s *Mare Nostrum* Operation. Sadly, the older liberal notions of hospitality that helped all sorts of refugees and migrants before 1990 have morphed into inhospitable neo-liberal ways of controlling foreign mobility across the Mediterranean. For an insightful discussion of the contradictory nature of some of the neo-liberal appropriations of the more traditional principles that are used to defend various EU migration and immigration policies, see Hafner (2016).

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