

what is worthwhile in the European project. And we need to show how our expertise matters and indeed why facts matter. This does not mean ignoring how facts can be created – one of our specialisms – but let's beware of only deconstructing and ending up in a post-factual world where all inventions are as good as each other.

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Beyond 'the lesser evil': a critical engagement with Brexit

We have every reason to be alarmed about the surge of Islamophobia, xenophobia and racism in the Euro-American world after Brexit, even more so on the eve of a possible Trump victory in the USA. Brexit evolved into a meticulous orchestration of resentment, a propaganda machine, manipulatively encouraging voters to find a righteous pride in their socioeconomic marginalisation and to transfer their injury around this impotence into a rage towards an imaginary enemy. The scapegoat was of course the minorities, refugees and migrants, thus promoting denialism as if all that has befallen Britain came from this diabolical outside.

However, even at this juncture, we should keep in perspective that membership of the EU cannot be championed as a cure of xenophobia, labour slavery, austerity, the right to basic income and restrictions on movement. Such a wounded, and already nostalgic, attachment to the EU ideally promotes it as the centre of all discourse, as the beacon of humanism, democracy and internationalism. The pragmatic and apologetic version of this form of attachment adopts the EU by turning it into the lesser evil. It is worth remembering that, just one year ago, another referendum was announced in Greece that would result in the historic Greek vote against austerity, only to be crushed by the EU. Since the EU signed a migrant deportation deal with the Brexit bogeyman, Turkey, just a few months ago, over 2,000 migrants have drowned in the Mediterranean while trying to reach 'Europe'. While selling Turkey hopes of EU membership in exchange for further border restrictions and isolationism, the EU-Turkey refugee deal also played into the hands of the Turkish government in its authoritarian attempts to crush democratic opposition and pursue a military solution to the Kurdish issue. In light of this short list of recent events, a vote for the EU cannot be assumed to serve as a vote against austerity, policing and militarised borders.

Is our only choice between right-wing populism and condescending Eurocentric humanism of the EU? Is there a constructive way to engage with the popular discontent with the EU, which is articulated by the political right in the idiom of anti-immigration, where the migrant or the refugee stands as the empty signifier of everything that's wrong with neoliberal capitalism? What did the EU mean for anti-racists and anti-capitalists to begin with? What politically empowering modalities are capable of addressing the loss of these original premises?

We believe that both as anthropologists and proponents of social justice we should seriously engage with such complex questions. Anthropology has a lot to offer to the attempt to fathom why contemporary right-wing populisms are so successful in articulating fragmentary and sometimes contradictory forms of political consciousness and mobilising political feelings for their ends. This is not a call for

another rule of experts – one of the main weaknesses of the Remain campaign – but for critically engaged praxis.

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Clashing scales of Brexit

Mainstream newspapers, politicians and commentators across Europe have expressed dejection and bitterness in the face of the Brexit outcome, and avid Brexiteers have typically been portrayed as xenophobes and bigots, Little Englanders or foolish opportunists incapable of understanding the dangerous ramifications and likely Domino effects of their choice. This view is overbearing and inaccurate: complaints about Brussels may be perfectly legitimate, and it is thought-provoking that only right-wing populists have been able to listen to them. Besides, a different perspective may be more enlightening and constructive.

In evolutionary theory, a major transition takes place when smaller entities combine to form an entity at a higher level, relinquishing their autonomy for the greater good. The transition from single-cell to multicellular organisms is the clearest example. The EU holds out a similar promise. The disgruntlement with Brussels witnessed in the British referendum results from weaknesses and failures in the practical implementation of this logic, expressed through an increased distance between power holders and their constituencies – a clash of scales.

Past EU architects have been aware of the dangers of centralisation. In the early 1990s, following the Maastricht Treaty, which aimed at a deeper and stronger integration, a catchword from the Commission was *subsidiarity*. The subsidiarity principle, championed by federalists and Euro-enthusiasts at the time, held that political decisions should always be taken at the lowest possible level, enabling those who were affected by an issue to have a direct influence on its outcome.

Paradoxically, although subsidiarity has subsequently been confirmed and strengthened in EU legislation, it is almost invisible on the public agenda. It disappeared from view around the same time as the Euro was introduced at the turn of the millennium. The perception is that the EU has moved towards centralisation rather than a nesting of scalar levels ensuring local and regional autonomy.

There is a scalar gap between the EU and local communities leading to a feeling of disenfranchisement. This is not merely about immigration to the UK, but about the right to have a political voice. The general formula is this: What is good for Europe is not necessarily good for the UK; what is good for the UK is not necessarily good for Northumberland; and what is good for Northumberland is not necessarily good for the residents of Durham – indeed, what is good for Durham may well be the same as that which is good for Europe. The loss of subsidiarity, sacrificed on the altar of continent-wide neoliberalism and faith in economies of scale, is a major factor in accounting for the strong animosity towards the EU.

Europe is likely to survive as a market place, no matter who leaves. What is at stake is the political project enabling coordination at higher levels and multiple identities at