



**DECOLONISING (KNOWLEDGE ON)
EURO-MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS:
INSIGHTS ON SHARED HISTORIES AND FUTURES**

**edited by
Daniela Huber and Lorenzo Kamel**

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Edizioni Nuova Cultura

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Series Editor

Lorenzo Kamel

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Contributors

SELIN ÇAĞATAY is a postdoctoral researcher in the ERC-funded international project “ZARAH: Women’s labour activism in Eastern Europe and transnationally, from the age of empires to the late 20th century” at the Department of Gender Studies and Department of History, Central European University, Austria. Her research concerns gender politics and equality struggles in Turkey from historical and transnational perspectives, with a focus on activist agendas, organisational forms, and political strategies. She authored collaboratively with Mia Liinason and Olga Sasunkevich a monograph titled *Feminist and LGBTI+ Activism in Russia, Scandinavia, and Turkey. Transnationalizing Spaces of Resistance* (Palgrave Macmillan 2022).

ROSITA DI PERI is Associate Professor of Political Science and International Relations at the Department of Culture, Politics and Society at the University of Turin. Her research interests are democracy and authoritarianism in the Middle East with a focus on Lebanon. She is the scientific coordinator of the Summer School “Understanding the Middle East” and member of the board of SeSaMO (Italian Association for Middle Eastern Studies). She published several articles in Italian and international journals. She authored two books (in Italian) – one about Lebanon politics (*Il Libano contemporaneo*, Carocci 2017), the other about Middle East politics (with Francesco Mazzucotelli, *Guida alla politica mediorientale*, Mondadori 2021) – and co-edited several books and special issues.

TAMIRACE FAKHOURY is Associate Professor of Political Science at Aalborg University in Denmark. She is also the Scientific Advisor to the Kuwait Chair at Sciences Po in Paris (2020–2022). Prior to joining Aalborg University, Tamirace was an Associate Professor at the Lebanese American University in Beirut/Byblos and the director of the Institute for Social

Justice and Conflict Resolution (ISJCR). From 2012 until 2016, she was a visiting Assistant Professor in the summer sessions at the University of California in Berkeley. Her core research and publication areas are: power-sharing and ethno-sectarian conflicts; social movements and contentious politics in the Middle East; migration and refugee politics in conflict areas, and the European Union's external migration policy.

DANIELA HUBER is Head of the Mediterranean and Middle East Programme at the Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI) and Editor of *The International Spectator*. She is also Adjunct Professor at Roma Tre University where she teaches a M.A. course on International Politics. She has won and scientifically co-coordinated the European Commission funded Horizon 2020 Project MEDRESET between 2016 and 2019. Among her books are *The International Dimension of the Israel-Palestinian Conflict. A Post-Eurocentric Approach* (SUNY Press 2021) and the *Routledge Handbook of EU-Middle East Relations* (co-edited with Michelle Pace and Dimitris Bouris, 2021).

LORENZO KAMEL is Associate Professor of Global History and History of the Middle East and North Africa at the University of Turin, director of IAI's Research Studies series, and a faculty member of the PhD programme in Global History of Empires. Among his books: *The Middle East from Empire to Sealed Identities* (Edinburgh UP 2019) and *Imperial Perception of Palestine: British Influence and Power in Late Ottoman Times* (I.B. Tauris 2015), winner of the 2016's Palestine Academic Book Award.

MICHELLE PACE is Professor in Global Studies at Roskilde University (RUC). She is also Associate Fellow at Chatham House, Europe Program. Michelle serves as Associate non-resident Member at the Middle East Studies Forum, Deakin University; Member of the Management Committee of COST ACTION CA20107 (Connecting Theory and Practical Issues of Migration and Religious Diversity), as well as of the Scientific Advisory Board at the Centre for Advanced Middle Eastern Studies, Lund University and of the editorial board of the journal *Mediterranean Politics*. Her research areas of interest include: migration studies, emotions in IR, democratisation and de-democratisation in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and decolonisation.

LARBI SADIKI is Professor of Arab democratisation at Qatar University. He is editor of the series, *Routledge Studies in Middle Eastern Democratization and Government* (<https://www.routledge.com/Routledge-Studies-in-Middle-Eastern-Democratization-and-Government/book-series/RSMEDG>). He is also editor of the new Brill Journal Protest (<https://brill.com/view/journals/prot/prot-overview.xml>).

1.

Pasts, Presents and Futures of Mediterranean Relations: The Role of the European Union

Daniela Huber

Over the past few years European colonial statues and monuments have been torn down or painted in red in an attempt to force European societies to reckon with their violent past and the present legacies of colonialism. This movement is of particular relevance to Mediterranean relations, as the Mediterranean space has been at the interface of European colonial and imperial history in Asia and Africa. However, as Michelle Pace and Roberto Roccu have shown, the European Union practises amnesia and redirection rather than genuine atonement – and, alongside this, redressing and proactive rebalancing – about the European “colonial past” in the Mediterranean.¹ It thus continues to exist in a self-constructed image of an “immaculate conception”,² which silences crude realities such as the fact that Algeria was still controlled by France, and thus by the European Community, at the latter’s birth via the Treaty of Rome in 1957. To this day, the EU includes territories such as Ceuta and Melilla (as part of Spain).

This amnesia and redirection is, however, proving increasingly difficult to sustain. In the Arab world, as part of a more than decade-long

¹ Michelle Pace and Roberto Roccu, “Imperial Pasts in the EU’s Approach to the Mediterranean”, in *Interventions*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (2020), p. 671-685, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1749702>.

² Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica. The Untold History of European Integration and Colonialism*, London, Bloomsbury, 2014, p. 5.

uprising, citizens are demanding their agency and genuine right to self-determination,³ overcoming “the notion, and the condition, we had code-named postcoloniality”.⁴ This development is matched by a growing quest, particularly among the younger generations in Europe, to shed a stronger light on Europe’s colonial past and legacy and to decolonise our knowledge. This engagement is still at an early stage, and yet it is of crucial relevance if we are to put Mediterranean relations on a more equal footing while setting the stage for a future of mutual understanding in a space that is growing ever more conflictual. This endeavour is also of chief importance for the future of the EU as it finds itself at a crossroads after the eurozone and Brexit crises, accompanied by the rise of an ethnocentric nationalist populism that presents a threat to the very founding values of the Union. At the same time, the Conference on the Future of Europe has been initiated by the European Commission and Parliament – but can Europeans truly move into the future without engaging with the past and present?

This is where the current collection of essays comes in. While in academia the debate on decolonising knowledge, the curriculum and the university is already taking on a critical mass,⁵ there are only sparse conversations between the academic and policy worlds on what it actually means policy-wise.⁶ These texts aim to give us instruments with which to *unlearn knowledge* in order to set the stage for reflecting on new ways of relating to each other in the Mediterranean region – including from a policy perspective.

In order to do so, this collective volume is organised into three parts. Lorenzo Kamel opens the stage for reflections on decolonising knowledge from a *historical* perspective. This is followed by three contributions that focus on the *present agency* of the “East” or the space “in-between East

³ Rami G. Khouri, “A Decade of Arab Protest Caps a Century of Erratic Statehood: Part I”, in *The New Arab*, 15 December 2020, <https://english.alaraby.co.uk/node/247859>.

⁴ Hamid Dabashi, “The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism”, in *Al Jazeera*, 8 May 2012, <https://aje.io/zv7gk>.

⁵ Suhraiya Jivraj, “Decolonizing the Academy – Between a Rock and a Hard Place”, in *Interventions*, Vol. 22, No. 4 (2020), p. 552-573.

⁶ See however Rosa Balfour, “Against a European Civilization: Narratives About the European Union”, in *Carnegie Articles*, 6 April 2021, <https://www.carnegieendowment.org/publications/84229>; Hans Kundnani, “What Does It Mean to Be ‘Pro-European’ Today?”, in *The New Statesman*, 4 February 2021, <https://www.newstatesman.com/?p=3659>.

and West” (Eastern Europe, Turkey, the Arab world) – which is often sidelined, as the focus in the study of Mediterranean relations is typically on the agency of the “West” (Western Europe or the United States). Tamirace Fakhoury highlights the agency of refugees and Arab host societies; Selin Çağatay, the agency of women; and Rosita Di Peri, the need to focus on socio-economic micro-practices in various state contexts. This is then followed by the *future*-oriented contribution of Larbi Sadiki, who makes the case for freeing former coloniser and colonised alike from the “phantasm of democracy promotion” – moving instead towards a new “democratising pedagogy”. Finally, Michelle Pace draws overall conclusions from the collection of essays, arguing for the need to turn to “Arabopolitanism”.

Before delving into the past, present and future of the question of decolonising (knowledge about) Mediterranean relations, this introduction briefly highlights *how the EU has positioned itself as dominant in these relations*. It does so by drawing on Meera Sabaratnam’s work, which “identifies White subject-positioning as patterned by interlocking epistemologies of immanence, ignorance, and innocence”.⁷ “Whiteness” is understood as a “superior entitlement” in “a hierarchy of human significance”⁸ that justifies European privilege in Mediterranean relations. Traits of epistemologies of ignorance, immanence and innocence are briefly identified and counterposed to EU practices of dominance in the economic, migration and military spheres in Mediterranean relations, before conclusions are drawn on a more constructive way forward.

1.1 THE EU’S SUBJECT-POSITIONING IN MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS

Epistemologies of ignorance are “representations that obscure, exclude or exceptionalise the central role of racialised dispossession, violence, and discrimination in the making of the modern world”.⁹ Since the end

⁷ Meera Sabaratnam, “Is IR Theory White? Racialised Subject-Positioning in Three Canonical Texts”, in *Millennium*, Vol. 49, No. 1 (September 2020), p. 3-31 at p. 3, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0305829820971687>.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 10, 12.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

of World War II, European memory has largely focused on Europe itself – while the continent’s overseas colonial past has been silenced. As Aline Sierp has pointed out, the “EU remains curiously quiet about the memories of imperialism and colonialism”.¹⁰ But it is not only the memory of colonial/imperial violence that has been thus forgotten. Also disregarded are the historical, cultural, political and religious entanglements on all shores of the Mediterranean; Europe’s oriental roots and connections (Lorenzo Kamel, in this volume); and the ways in which the “East” has contributed to the progress of the “West”, which directly leads us to epistemologies of immanence.

Epistemologies of immanence are essentially rooted in the “claim that ‘modernity’ is *immanent* or endogenous uniquely to the ‘West’ [...], which is seen as the primary agent and subject matter of politics”.¹¹ They have been present in Euro–Mediterranean relations since the then European Community launched its “Global Mediterranean Policy” in the early 1970s. As Rosita Di Peri’s contribution shows, the deterministic and normative “modernisation theory has had an important influence on the EU’s political and economic strategies and its ‘developmental’ policies towards the Mediterranean”. However, the epistemology of immanence arguably became even more evident in EU discourse and practice in the 1990s and 2000s. In 2001, for example, the European Council argued that Europe as the “continent of humane values” has “a leading role to play in a new world order, that of a power able both to play a stabilising role worldwide and to point the way ahead for many countries and peoples”.¹² The Euro–Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) both made the EU the author of progress and the “other” was to be fashioned in its image – that is, the image either of a European-style security community (EMP) or the European model of liberal market-democracies (ENP). As Larbi Sadiki points out in this volume, the “‘knower’ of democracy remained the European side” while “local repositories of

¹⁰ Aline Sierp, “EU Memory Politics and Europe’s Forgotten Colonial Past”, in *Interventions*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (2020), p. 686-702 at p. 688, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1749701>.

¹¹ Meera Sabaratnam, “Is IR Theory White?”, cit., p. 13.

¹² European Council, *Presidency Conclusions European Council Meeting in Laeken 14 and 15 December 2001*, https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/DOC_01_18.

imaginaries and experiences” were written out of EU policymaking. The ENP, in particular, treated Arab citizens as subjects of European policies designed for them in Brussels – just as they were treated as subjects by their own autocratic regimes,¹³ with which the EU cooperates in terms of “security”, “anti-terrorism” and containing migration. By treating them as subjects of European policies or as “policy vessels rather than policy shapers” (Tamirace Fakhoury and Michelle Pace in this volume), they are not seen as the authors and agents of their own past, present and future. This European epistemology is resisted in the Arab uprisings. As a Moroccan human-rights activist interviewed in the framework of the MEDRESET project has pointed out,¹⁴

Europe holds a culturalist view towards countries of the south in general, and towards us specifically. It is thought that we are not fit for the human rights culture under the pretext that Islam is [an] impediment. Hence, Europeans think that we are establishing human rights institutions because they force us to do so. It does not occur to them that the *human rights issue is our fight because it is we who have suffered and been put in jail*. It is both founded on a superiority point of view and contempt towards what we are trying to achieve.¹⁵

Epistemologies of innocence are seen here as those practices which sustain not only the myth of the “EU as a pure origin and new start”, as well as an unalloyed force for good, but also the parallel myth of “decolonization as a rupture” that provided the formerly colonised with parity and agency.¹⁶ Such practices need to answer the question of whether the post-

¹³ Charles Tripp, “From Subject to Citizen – And Back: Crises of the Republic”, in *Fred Halliday Memorial Lectures*, 22 March 2021, <https://www.lse.ac.uk/Events/2021/03/202103221830/From-Subject-to-Citizen-and-back-crises-of-the-republic>.

¹⁴ MEDRESET was a consortium of research and academic institutions focusing on different disciplines from the Mediterranean region in order to develop alternative visions for a new Mediterranean partnership and corresponding EU policies.

¹⁵ Khalid Mouna, “The Role of Civil Society in Morocco: Towards Democracy or Autocracy?”, in *MEDRESET Working Papers*, No. 13 (June 2018), p. 15, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/9316> [italics added]; Khalid Mouna, “Civil Society Versus the State. The Case of Morocco”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 25, Special Issue (2020), p. 67-86.

¹⁶ Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, cit., p. 258.

colonial was really “post-” or whether it has, rather, exacerbated the colonial by negation?¹⁷ Practices of dominance and subordination continue, while their colonial nature is negated. This is particularly evident when it comes to EU economic, migration and military practices, which will be examined next.

1.2 PRACTICES OF DOMINATION

Coming to *economic practices*, the idea of a rupture in relations between former coloniser and colonised had already been questioned by the time of the Rome Treaty.¹⁸ For Mediterranean relations, the EMP and the free-trade area that it envisaged have arguably frustrated other regional free-trade areas or similar schemes, as states in the southern Mediterranean had more incentives to engage with the powerful economic bloc of the EU than with their neighbours, setting up a hub-and-spokes structure in the region.¹⁹ Furthermore, as Nora Aboushady and Chahir Zaki have pointed out, “Arab countries’ exports remain concentrated in low-value added sectors, such as fuel and minerals, or traditional exports such as textiles and garments”. Indeed, integration policies “have mainly targeted ‘traditional’ trade facilitation with Arab countries rather than addressing industrial development, upgrade, diversification, or deeper integration including trade in services. In this context, there is little room for job creation, since Arab countries’ exports are often capital intensive.”²⁰

Moving to *migration governance*, Arundhati Roy has pointed out that colonialism “needed to move large populations of people – slaves and indentured labor – to work in mines and on plantations. Now the new

¹⁷ Hamid Dabashi, “The Arab Spring: The End of Postcolonialism”, cit.

¹⁸ See, for example, Kwame Nkrumah in Peo Hansen and Stefan Jonsson, *Eurafrica*, cit., p. 270.

¹⁹ Ferdi De Ville and Vicky Reynaert, “The Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area: An Evaluation on the Eve of the (Missed) Deadline”, in *L’Europe en Formation*, No. 356 (2010), p. 193-206, <https://doi.org/10.3917/eufor.356.0193>.

²⁰ Nora Aboushady and Chahir Zaki, “Assessing EU–Middle East Trade Relations. Patterns, Policies and Imbalances”, in Dimitris Bouris, Daniela Huber and Michelle Pace (eds), *Routledge Handbook of EU-Middle East Relations*, London/New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 432-446 at p. 441.

dispensation needs to keep people in place and move the money – so the new formula is free capital, caged labor.”²¹ Key to this point is the fact that it is still the EU that decides who can move and access what, and on which terms. This does not mean that others do not have agency. As Tamirace Fakhoury points out, Arab hosting states are shaping norms and refugees are protagonists rather than mere beneficiaries. But the EU unarguably sets structures of hierarchy, dominance and subordination.

This is perhaps most evident when it comes to *military intervention* and *the arms trade* of EU member states. While the EU frames itself as a force for good in international affairs,²² this cannot gloss over the military and arms practices of its member states. In terms of military interventions, with “Operation Irini” (previously “Operation Sophia”) the Union itself currently has a military mission active in the Mediterranean. EU member states have been present in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) missions in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya – all countries now in severe security, humanitarian, and/or economic crisis. In terms of arms transfers, as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) has pointed out in its latest report, the biggest growth in arms imports was seen in the Middle East – by 25 per cent from the 2011–15 to the 2016–20 period.²³ At the same time, the “combined arms exports of European Union (EU) member states accounted for 26 per cent of the global total in 2016–20”, with the top five being France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Spain and Italy²⁴ – all of them Western European former colonial powers. France, for example, between 2012 and 2016 supplied more arms to Egypt than it had in the previous 20 years; and in 2017 alone it delivered more than 1.4 billion euros worth of military and security equipment to Egypt – arms used to crush dissent.²⁵ These practices not

²¹ Arundhati Roy and Avni Sejal, “How to Think About Empire”, in *Boston Review*, 2 January 2019, <https://bostonreview.net/?p=105584>.

²² Esther Barbé and Elisabeth Johansson-Nogués, “The EU as a Modest ‘Force for Good’: The European Neighbourhood Policy”, in *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 1 (January 2008), p. 81-96.

²³ Siemon T. Wezeman, Pieter D. Wezeman and Alexandra Kuimova, “Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2020”, in *SIPRI Fact Sheets*, March 2021, p. 11, <https://www.sipri.org/node/5350>.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

²⁵ Amnesty International, *Egypt: How French Arms Were Used to Crush Dissent*, 16 October 2018, p. 5, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/eur21/9038/2018/en>.

only undermine the EU Common Position on Arms Exports but also lead to insecurities in the Arab world and are, indeed, perceived in this way. As the 2018 EuroMed Survey has shown, military interventions and arms exports from some EU member states, as well as support for authoritarian regimes, are seen as having the most negative effect on the stability of the Middle East and North African region (MENA).²⁶

1.3 UNLEARN TO RELEARN

How, then, can we overcome these practices of domination and the epistemologies of ignorance, immanence and innocence that sustain them? How can we find a way forward? As Lorenzo Kamel points out in his contribution, what is needed in Europe is more humility about our past, present and future; “to unlearn in order to relearn, to deconstruct in order to reconstruct”. In this process, all contributors point to the necessity of recentring local knowledge and agency. Larbi Sadiki points out that across the “EU–Mediterranean divide, scholars and practitioners alike must seek out the ‘peoples’ of MENA – not as objects but as agents in the process of transformation”; Rosita Di Peri argues that we need “to consider indigenous debates, desiderata and methodologies”; Tamirace Fakhoury enquires into the amplification of local voices as actors “as protagonists and political subjects”; and Michelle Pace contends that “the recognition of Mediterranean peoples’ way of being” is crucial. This situation ought to be captured in all its complexity, as Selin Çağatay argues, while also bringing the Mediterranean connections and linkages back in to enable “the imagination of fragmented struggles as common struggles”. And putting the “Mediterranean others’ at centre stage”, as Lorenzo Kamel points out, will also help us Europeans to understand ourselves “and the fluid world we inhabit”. The central message of this collection of essays is, therefore, the need to unlearn in order to relearn – acknowledging, at the same time, the mutually empowering potential that lies behind this challenging process.

²⁶ Tasnim Abderrahim, “The Securitisation of the EU’s Migration Policies: What Consequences for Southern Mediterranean Countries and their Relations with the EU?”, in IEMed, *EuroMed Survey 2018: Changing Euro-Mediterranean Lenses*, Barcelona, IEMed, 2018, p. 96-103 at p. 99-100, <https://www.iemed.org/?p=6898>.

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2.

Decolonising Knowledge: A Euro–Mediterranean Perspective

Lorenzo Kamel

How can we decolonise Euro–Mediterranean relations? From a historical perspective, one of the most persuasive, indirect answers to this question was provided by Nicholas B. Dirks: “in certain important ways”, he wrote, “knowledge was what colonialism was all about”.¹ There is indeed little chance to decolonise Euro–Mediterranean relations without first questioning the “colonial echoes” rooted in the process of simplification which, particularly in the last few decades, has often reduced much of the history of the “Southern Mediterranean others”² to a Eurocentric and mono-dimensional narrative.

The analysis firstly focuses on a particularly meaningful example along these lines, shedding light on the largely successful attempt to detach ancient Greece’s legacy from its Mediterranean and “oriental” background,³ with all the “entanglements” that this issue has on a number of cultural,

¹ Foreword by Nicholas B. Dirks in Bernard S. Cohn, *Colonialism and Its Forms of Knowledge. The British in India*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996, p. ix. Dabashi noted that “The anthropologist’s pen was, and remains, mightier than the colonial officer’s sword”. Hamid Dabashi, *The Arab Spring. The End of Postcolonialism*, New York, Zed Books, 2012, p. 52.

² Daniela Huber, Asma Nouira and Maria Cristina Paciello, “The Mediterranean: A Space of Division, Disparity and Separation”, in *MEDRESET Policy Papers*, No. 3 (November 2018), p. 10, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/9668>.

³ According to Park, “The East is not the West because the East lacks what is essentially Western: the ‘principle of individual freedom,’ which is dominant in the ‘Greek element’”. Peter K.J. Park, *Africa, Asia, and the History of Philosophy. Racism in the Formation of the Philosophical Canon, 1780-1830*, Albany, State University of New York Press, 2013, p. 126.

political and religious-related aspects and narratives. Secondly, it critically examines the thesis that posits the existence of a “Judeo-Christian tradition”, a claim which, aside from fostering mental, religious and cultural cleavages, also plays a key role in undermining the possibility of shaping a more balanced Euro–Mediterranean set of relationships. Finally, the analysis moves to address the necessity of encouraging a process of “un-learning”, revisiting the way history, and particularly Euro–Mediterranean connections and relations, continues to be (often) taught and learnt.

2.1 WHOSE DEMOCRACY?

In what is now Lebanon, the Phoenicians “had something comparable to the self-regulating city-state or polis” and there is archaeological and historical evidence to claim that the origins of some of the “Greek political arrangements we most admire” are to be traced to the Phoenicians.⁴ The Tell el-Amarna Letters, whose corpus consists of 382 tablets inscribed in cuneiform characters in around the 14th century BCE, document the existence of Phoenician towns “ruled, at least from time to time, by deliberative forums of a broad cross-section of the citizens”.⁵ Tyre, on the coast of current-day Lebanon, was a republic headed by elective magistrates in the 6th century BCE.⁶ According to Stephen Stockwell, the Phoenicians maintained what we today would consider a “proto-democracy”:

The Phoenicians brought more than just trade into the Greek sphere and they could have quite possibly had a formative influence on Greek political institutions that resulted in democratic configurations equivalent to Kleisthenes’s reforms. Athenian democracy was a complex set of interlocking institutions with regular meetings.

⁴ Simon Hornblower, “Creation and Development of Democratic Institutions in Ancient Greece”, in John Dunn (ed.), *Democracy. The Unfinished Journey, 508 BC to AD 1993*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 1992, p. 2.

⁵ Stephen Stockwell, “Before Athens: Early Popular Government in Phoenician and Greek City States”, in *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations*, Vol. 2, No. 2 (2010), p. 127, <http://hdl.handle.net/10072/37713>.

⁶ Sandro Filippo Bondi, “Political and Administrative Organization”, in Sabatino Moscati (ed.), *The Phoenicians*, London, I.B. Tauris, 2001, p. 153.

There is some evidence that at least Byblos, Sidon, Tyre, Sparta and Chios can match this formulation.⁷

These and many other possible examples are not intended to suggest that the Phoenicians, Carthaginians (who, according to Greek historian Polybius, achieved higher “proto-democratic standards” than the Romans) and other peoples and cultures “invented” democracy. Rather, they suggest that the practices and principles underlying democracy are the result of a process of accumulation too often ignored in the name of an imagined “Jerusalem-Athens-Rome” centred view of history which in many ways conceals more than it reveals.

The issue of ancient Greece’s “oriental” legacy fits into this analysis as well. To cite Ellen Meiksins Wood (1942–2016), “it is even more artificial to detach ancient Greece from, say, Egypt or Persia, as if the Greeks were always ‘European’, living a separate history, and not part of a larger Mediterranean and ‘Eastern’ world”.⁸ Think also of symbols such as the myrtle dedicated to the Goddess Aphrodite and Athena’s olive tree, both borrowed from the traditions of ancient Egypt.

In other words, scholars who link Europe’s roots to Ancient Greece, and thus to many of the previously mentioned concepts and ideas, are simply (more or less consciously) recognising Europe’s oriental connections (in Greek mythology, Europe is the name of the daughter of Agenor’s, king of Tyre, in modern-day Lebanon), dominant religion (Christianity was an Oriental religion) and philosophical roots.

The term φιλόσοφος (*philosophos*) itself, “lover of wisdom”, is drawn from the Egyptian mer-rekh (*mr-rh*), “lover of knowledge”. The most ancient philosophical texts originate precisely from Egypt, beginning with the papyrus on the “Immortality of writers”, (re)discovered in the 1920s and dated 1200 BCE.⁹ As noted by John M. Hobson:

⁷ Stephen Stockwell, “Before Athens”, cit., p. 133. Regarding these topics, see Benjamin Isakhan and Stephen Stockwell (eds), *The Edinburgh Companion to the History of Democracy. From Pre-history to Future Possibilities*, Edinburgh, Edinburgh University Press, 2012.

⁸ Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Citizens to Lord: A Social History of Western Political Thought from Antiquity to the Late Middle Ages*, London/New York, Verso, 2011, p. 26.

⁹ For a translation of the papyrus in English, see Toby Wilkinson, *Writings from Ancient Egypt*, London, Penguin, 2016.

Eurocentric scholars assume that the rise of capitalist modernity was pioneered solely by the Europeans without any help from the Easterners. [...] Deconstructing Eurocentrism [...] enables us to reveal the European West as a *hybrid* entity that has been shaped by the East [...]. Today we take it as axiomatic that Greece was the birthplace of Europe. For it was there where science and rational thinking were allegedly first established, only to be reclaimed after the Dark Age interlude during the so-called Italian Renaissance. But this notion of Greece is a fabrication – an idea that was constructed by European thinkers only as late as the end of the eighteenth century [...]. Greece was linked spiritually and culturally to the East [...]. Moreover, that Ancient Greece owes so much to ancient Egypt (as the Greeks readily acknowledged), wreaks havoc with the notion of a pure Aryan lineage of Europe that is cherished by Eurocentric thinkers.¹⁰

2.2 THE MAKING OF A “JUDEO-CHRISTIAN TRADITION”

Another key aspect directly connected to the debates on democracy, and with wide repercussions on Euro–Mediterranean relations, is caught up with the misleading yet frequently cited perception of a “Judeo-Christian tradition”. Still today, plenty of scholars habitually refer to this supposed tradition as “the cradle of principles of equality and justice”,¹¹ while others focus on “democracy’s biblical roots”¹² and, more generally, the role of Biblical texts in fostering secular political power and its desacralisation. In this case as well, however, such assumptions reflect limited, simplistic and frequently anachronistic perspectives.

Indeed, Atheism, as well as some principles related to secularism, were introduced into Indian traditions long before being introduced in

¹⁰ John M. Hobson, “Revealing the Cosmopolitan Side of Oriental Europe: The Eastern Origins of European Civilisation”, in Gerard Delanty (ed.), *Europe and Asia beyond East and West*, London/New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 109-110.

¹¹ Giuliano Amato e Carlo Cardia, “Carta dei valori della cittadinanza e dell’integrazione”, in Carlo Cardia e Giuseppe Dalla Torre (eds), *Comunità islamiche in Italia. Identità e forme giuridiche*, Turin, Giappichelli, 2015, p. 597.

¹² Mordecai Roshwald, “The Biblical Roots of Democracy”, in *Diogenes*, Vol. 53, No. 4 (November 2006), p. 139-151.

Europe.¹³ Even more important within the frame of this chapter is the fact that, in the words of US Rabbi Danya Rutenberg, “[Judeo-Christian’ [...] a) positions Jews & Christians against Muslims, is Islamophobic, b) elides Christian oppression & murder of Jews over more than 1000 years, & c) ignores Jewish civilization worldwide & facts of key Jewish developments in Middle East & N[orth] Africa”,¹⁴ as well as North America and other contexts.

The earliest communications between Europeans and native American peoples were, for that matter, in “the language of Islam”: when Christopher Columbus’s (1451–1506) interpreter, Luís de Torres (?–1493), a Spanish Jew, approached the indigenous peoples of Taínos (“friendly people”), he did so in Arabic.¹⁵

In addition to being misleading, the widespread tendency to refer to a “Judeo-Christian tradition” risks accentuating dangerous antagonisms and watershed phenomena at the expense of a greater understanding of the shared historical legacy underlying the three largest mono-theistic religions. A powerful confirmation of this fact can be seen in the Epic of Gilgamesh (c. 2100), a literary product of ancient Mesopotamia, the cradle of Sumerians, to whom we owe, among many other inventions, cheques, letters of credit and interest payments on loans. The Epic contains many of the themes – including the myth of the “universal flood”, Noah’s Ark and the Garden of Eden – that were later included in the Bible and other religious texts.

What has just been argued is pertinent to other related issues as well. Think, for instance, of the literary parallelisms of the Song of Songs, that is, compositions of similar topics that existed previously in ancient Egyptian and Sumerian literature: “The love song genre”, as noted by Michael V. Fox, “certainly underwent many changes between its presumed Eryp-

¹³ See Ramkrishna Bhattacharya, *More Studies on the Cārvāka/Lokāyata*, Newcastle, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2020.

¹⁴ Tweet by Danya Rutenberg, 27 January 2019, <https://twitter.com/theradr/status/108958999920660484>. For a more thoroughgoing analysis, see Jacob Neusner and Tamara Sonn, *Comparing Religions through Law. Judaism and Islam*, London/New York, Routledge, 1999.

¹⁵ When Columbus landed on 12 October 1492 on one of the islands of the modern Bahamas he believed he had reached the Indies, and he persisted in this belief until his death. The continent had been inhabited by indigenous peoples – who clearly did not understand Arabic – for thousands of years and was “discovered” many centuries before Columbus by Vikings, Scandinavians and other peoples.

tian origins and the time when it reached Palestine, took root in Hebrew literature, grew in native forms, and blossomed as the song of songs".¹⁶ To remain in the field of literature, it should be noted that 14th-century BCE Mesopotamia was the birthplace of the first poetess in history: the Sumerian priestess Enheduanna.¹⁷

A similar reasoning can be applied to the monotheistic mystery religion known as Persian Mithraism (the term is a modern coinage), whose traditions and ideas were transferred via Zarathustrianism to the three major monotheisms (this includes Ha-Shatan/Satan, the adversary of the God YHVH, which later developed in the Satan-Jehovah dichotomy), and can be seen in some of their current celebrations and rituals. As noted by Joel Wilbush (1917–2012) in a study on the most popular midwinter celebrations in Western Asia, Europe and North America:

all three celebrations are ultimately based on the old original Persian/Iranian ritual interpretation of the winter solstice. The second dating from early in the second century BC represents the efforts by Antiochus IV Epiphanes (175–163) to consolidate his father's conquests by cultural uniformity. Judea's monotheism presented special problems, and its acceptance of the mid-winter celebration of *Shab-é-Chel* [...] must have encouraged him—probably because it was misinterpreted.

About two centuries later when the messianic movement precursor of which became Christianity split from traditional Judaism it inherited this "new" holiday, this was the third celebration of mid-winter associated with *Shab-é-Chel*. By then this celebration was drained of its original contents, and the messianic movement took the opportunity to "fill the void" by introducing its own contents—some of which, paradoxically, were also Persian. Interestingly, these three celebrations took different forms, developed differently and are very different today.¹⁸

¹⁶ See Michael V. Fox, *Song of Songs and the Ancient Egyptian Love Songs*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 1985, p. 193.

¹⁷ See William W. Hallo and J.J.A. van Dijk, *The Exaltation of Inanna*, New Haven/London, Yale University Press, 1968. *Genji Monogatari* – the first romantic tale ever written – was authored by Japanese novelist and court lady Murasaki Shikibu (c.973–c.1014).

¹⁸ Joel Wilbush, "Three Midwinter Celebrations: An Exploration", in *Religious Studies and Theology*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2010), p. 231-239 at p. 231.

A further significant example can be found in the “holy city” *par excellence*, Jerusalem. As noted in a study published by the University of Bar-Ilan, “Canaanite Jerusalem had two holy sites; both were above and outside the city walls. Shalem was probably worshipped in the area of the Temple Mount, which later became the holiest site for the Jews and the third most holy site for Moslems”.¹⁹ Also the idea of the rosary was borrowed from Muslims in Spain, who were inspired by the prayer beads Buddhists used in Central Asia, who in turn borrowed the idea from Brahmans in Hindu India.

Christianity itself underwent continuous contamination as it expanded from the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe: during this process, it took on numerous spatio-architectural practices,²⁰ – such as the “Gothic style”, adopted to build many cathedrals in Europe (but also castles, palaces and town halls) – and cultural customs, including traditions typical of pre-Christian Europe that form the basis of some key aspects of the Christmas and Easter holidays.²¹ Like all the themes and aspects mentioned in this chapter, religions are thus the result of human “accumulation”: a process which unfolded in each and every shore of (and beyond) the Mediterranean, deeply entangling and connecting them.

2.3 UNLEARNING

This work started with a simple question: how one can decolonise Euro-Mediterranean relations? In light of what I have argued so far, the concluding answer cannot be but inclusive and multi-layered. It can be done by opposing any form of “epistemic violence”,²² while at the same time en-

¹⁹ Yisrael Shalem, “History of Jerusalem from Its Beginning to David”, in Yisrael Shalem and David Eisenstadt, *Jerusalem: Life Throughout the Ages in a Holy City*, Ramat-Gan, Ingeborg Rennert Center for Jerusalem Studies, 1997, https://www.biu.ac.il/JS/rennert/history_2.html.

²⁰ The Gothic style “arose out of a succession of influences that started in the Middle East and Muslim Andalusia, blending with the earlier extant Byzantine and Romanesque styles; it was a creative combination, a synthesis”. See Diana Darke, *Stealing from the Saracens. How Islamic Architecture Shaped Europe*, London, Hurst, 2020, p. 59.

²¹ See Mark Juergensmeyer (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Global Religions*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2006.

²² “Epistemic violence”, which does not affect different oppressed groups equally, is the “process by which the non-Western peoples are viewed as passive and weak”. See John

abling the retrieval of different ways of knowing and a wider understanding of what de Sousa Santos defines the “epistemologies of the South”;²³ by allowing a much larger number of non-Western scholars to express their own “theories”; by deconstructing and tackling the assumption “that the West represents the center of scholarship and the rest (usually Africa, Asia, and Latin America) fits the margin”;²⁴ by rejecting the mindset that negatively considers doctorates “from a foreign [i.e. non-American or Oxbridge] university”;²⁵ by involving – in line with the ongoing “Why is My Curriculum White” campaign – a larger number of non-Western faculty from institutions around the world;²⁶ by investing more in “denational-

M. Hobson, *Multicultural Origins of the Global Economy. Beyond the Western-Centric Frontier*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2021, p. 23.

²³ Such epistemologies include concepts such as “*ubuntu*, *sumak kawsay*, *pachamama*, *chachawarmi*, *swaraj*, and *ahimsa*”: “a careful and nonmonolithic review of modern Western tradition, that is to say, a review that includes both dominant and marginalized conceptions, will identify in this tradition a complementariness or correspondence with some of these non-Western concepts. For instance, there are affinities between the idea of *pachamama* and *natura naturans* (as opposed to *natura naturata*) in Spinoza.” See Boaventura de Sousa Santos, *The End of the Cognitive Empire. The Coming of Age of Epistemologies of the South*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2018, p. 9-14. De Sousa Santos stressed that we need to pay attention to the “epistemologies of the South”, not least because “there is no global social justice without global cognitive justice”. See *ibid.*, p. viii.

²⁴ See Tite Tiénou, “Christian Theology in an Era of World Christianity”, in Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (eds.), *Globalizing Theology. Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2006, p. 37-51 at p. 47.

²⁵ See Karen Kelsky, “The Professor Is In: You Have a Ph.D. from Where?”, in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, 1 October 2017, <https://www.chronicle.com/article/the-professor-is-in-you-have-a-ph-d-from-where>.

²⁶ The “Why is My Curriculum White” campaign was initiated in the Fall of 2014 at University College London. The “#RhodesMustFall movements” started a few months later (March 2015) at the University of Cape Town. See Francis B. Nyamnjoh, *#RhodesMustFall. Nibbling at Resilient Colonialism in South Africa*, Bamenda, Langaa RPCIG, 2016. According to Nyamnjoh, education in Africa “is still the victim of a resilient colonial and colonising epistemology”. *Ivi*, p. 69. Kehinde Nkosi Andrews wrote that “The walls of the colleges [at Oxford University] are filled almost to bursting with portraits of dead white men. I can only imagine how it must feel, having to spend every day eating under the gaze of people who despised you. Oxford’s monoculture makes the [Rhodes Must Fall] movement even more powerful”. See Kehinde Andrews, “Preface”, in Roseanne Chantiluke, Brian Kwoba and Athinangamso Nkopo (eds.), *Rhodes Must Fall. The Struggle to Decolonise the Racist Heart of Empire*, London, Zed Books, 2018, p. ix-xiv at p. x. In a book in which non-Western perspectives are almost completely ignored or neglected, Prospero claims that movements

ized curricula”, occluded and marginalised knowledges,²⁷ and academic positions which foster indigenous approaches:²⁸

[we] need to integrate non-Western perspectives and values into higher education curricula in a meaningful way, rather than in a dilettante or tokenistic fashion where a few famous non-Western figures are dropped into the lecture slides to ‘spice up’ a course.²⁹

All this requires, first and foremost, the intellectual flexibility and the will to question long-established scholarly traditions. It also demands a process of “unlearning” the way in which history continues to be (often) taught and learnt.³⁰ It is indeed necessary to unlearn in order to relearn, to deconstruct in order to reconstruct. In Susan Buck-Morss’s words: “The greater the specialization of knowledge, the more advanced the lev-

such as #RhodesMustFall “do not talk anymore about memory but [just] about oblivion”. See Adriano Prospero, *Un tempo senza storia. La distruzione del passato*, Turin, Einaudi, 2021, p. 16. Meer argues that education in general, and universities in particular, “need to not only ‘diversify’ faculty and curricula, but also ‘decolonise’, before disciplinary inquiry might be reconstructed with racial equalities as core rather than peripheral concerns”. See Nasar Meer, “Race and Social Policy: Challenges and Obstacles”, in James Rees, Marco Pomati and Elke Heins (eds), *Analysis and Debate in Social Policy, 2020*, Bristol, Policy Press, 2020, p. 5-23 at p. 8.

²⁷ Indian born historian Sanjay Seth stressed the importance of fostering “occluded and marginalized knowledges conducive to a more just, and not merely a more diverse, world”. See Sanjay Seth, *Beyond Reason. Postcolonial Theory and the Social Sciences*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021, p. 211. See also Lata Narayanaswamy, “Why It Is Time to Turn the Decolonial Lens onto the Institutional Structures of Higher Education”, in *Convivial Thinking*, 7 July 2019, <https://www.convivialthinking.org/?p=901>.

²⁸ In Phipps’s words: “Let’s stop pretending our [Western] ways of knowing, our epistemologies, are the only valid ways of knowing something”. See Alison Phipps, *Decolonising Multilingualism. Struggle to Decreate*, Bristol, Multilingual Matters, 2019, p. 2.

²⁹ See Helena Liu, *Redeeming Leadership. An Anti-Racist Feminist Intervention*, Bristol, Bristol University Press, 2020, p. 122. Liu sheds also light on how Gandhi, Martin Luther King (1929–1968) and other non-Western leaders have been appropriated “into tame, neoliberal narratives after their deaths”, reinforcing in this way “structures of power that these leaders fought”. See *ibid.*, p. 135.

³⁰ The process of re-learning is sometimes wrongly conflated with “The destruction of the past, or rather of the social mechanisms that link one’s contemporary experience to that of earlier generations.” See Eric Hobsbawm, *Age of Extremes. The Short Twentieth Century, 1914-1991*, London, Michael Joseph, 1994, p. 3.

el of research, the longer and more venerable the scholarly tradition, the easier it is to ignore discordant facts".³¹

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³¹ See Susan Buck-Morss, *Hegel, Haiti, and Universal History*, Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 2009, p. 22. Gloria Jean Watkins (bell hooks) warned that "professors are unwilling to admit that to teach without biases requires that most of us learn anew, that we become students again". See bell hooks, *Teaching Critical Thinking. Practical Wisdom*, New York/London, Routledge, 2010, p. 31. Ariella Aïsha Azoulay argued that "Unlearning becomes a process of disengaging from the unquestioning use of political concepts—institutions such as citizen, *archive*, *art*, *sovereignty*, and *human rights*, as well as categories like the *new* and the *neutral*, all of which fuel the intrinsic imperial drive to 'progress,' which conditions the way world history is organized, archived, articulated, and represented". Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History. Unlearning Imperialism*, London/New York, Verso, 2019, p. 11.

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3.

Rethinking Coloniality Through the Lens of Refugee Norms and Histories: The Role of the Arab Middle East

Tamirace Fakhoury

A vibrant literature on decentring and decolonising our understanding of migration governance in the Euro–Mediterranean space has recently taken centre stage. The rationale for this development is both epistemological and empirical. Many of our assumptions and established taxonomies on how to *make sense* of migration in the Mediterranean region are Eurocentric.

We need to unpack these assumptions in order to engage with innovative research if we are to pursue different policy pathways.¹ In the context of refugee-producing crises such as the Arab–Israeli conflict, the US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq or the recent Syrian war, neighbouring states are the ones to have taken in most refugees.

Even so, little emphasis has been placed on how host governments and communities have impacted on the global refugee regime, defined as the set of norms and institutions governing refugee flight, rights and protection needs. Against this backdrop, scholars have increasingly sought to flip the narrative – highlighting how refugee norms and practices also travel from the southern to the northern Mediterranean as well as the other way round.²

¹ Federica Zardo, “Decentering the Study of Migration Governance in the Mediterranean”, in *Geopolitics*, 5 October 2021, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14650045.2021.1978944>.

² Tamirace Fakhoury, “Echoing and Re-Echoing Refugee Policies in the International System: The Lebanese State and Its Political Imaginary”, in *DOMES: Digest of Middle East Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Winter 2021), p. 262-269.

In this regard, what vocabularies and sites of inquiry can help us to decolonise the debate on migration governance in the Euro–Mediterranean space? And to what extent has Euro–Mediterranean policy capitalised on the findings of these critical research streams?

This contribution seeks to de-centre and then re-centre the debate on migration governance by shifting the gaze onto how states and societies in the Middle East contribute *on the ground* to diffusing refugee norms and practices. Drawing on the critical juncture provided by the recent Syrian displacement, it takes stock of how such norms and practices have affected the ways in which we understand the governance of displacement in the Mediterranean.

To that end, the contribution approaches the Arab hosting state as a shaper of norms rather than a “refugee hosting vessel”.³ Secondly, it considers the landscape of humanitarianism in the Middle East as a site of inquiry for unmaking coloniality and, thirdly, considers refugees as protagonists of their own plight rather than mere passive beneficiaries. These three levels of analysis can be entry points to decolonise the debate on migration governance. The challenge, however, is how to give greater weight to the policy impact of these considerations than has been afforded hitherto.

3.1 LAYING THE GROUND

The Middle East is host to some of the most protracted refugee and humanitarian emergencies in the world today. Nevertheless, interest in how key regional refugee-hosting states have set codes of conduct in migration governance remains marginal. Prevalent literature has focused instead on how Western states have affected the international refugee regime.⁴ In this regard, Arab refugee-hosting countries have been perceived as “rogue states” in the way in which they implement international refugee law.⁵

This situation partly stems from the perception that the 1951 Geneva

³ Interview with Rawan Arar, April 2019.

⁴ Maja Janmyr, “The 1951 Refugee Convention and Non-Signatory States: Charting A Research Agenda”, in *International Journal of Refugee Law*, 3 December 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijrl/eeab043>.

⁵ Tamirace Fakhoury, “Echoing and Re-Echoing Refugee Policies in the International System”, cit.

Convention is the key authoritative source guiding the global refugee regime. Increasingly, however, the global turn in refugee studies has called for integrating the voices and legal instruments of other world regions.⁶

What can the Arab world tell us about such alternative notions and epistemologies of migration governance? How can we draw on refugee practices in the region in order to “decolonise” the Euro–Mediterranean policy field?

3.2 THE ARAB HOSTING STATE AS A SHAPER OF HISTORIES, NORMS AND POLICIES

Mainstream writings on refugee law have for decades looked at the Arab hosting state through an orientalist lens.⁷ In this line of thinking, the Arab hosting state is deficient in acceding to and ratifying instruments at the heart of refugee protection. What is not duly accounted for, however, is the fact that these states have a rich legacy in shaping refugee norms and practices as well as setting the tone for migration governance in the Mediterranean.

In the context of mass displacement from Syria, countries such as Lebanon, Iraq, Egypt and Jordan have collectively taken in two million Syrian refugees. In the wake of a short-lived open-border policy, these states enforced restrictive measures with a view to curbing the numbers of refugee arrivals.⁸ Still, host societies and faith-based groups, as well as select political actors, have maintained the narratives of *guesthood*,⁹ hospitality and solidarity.¹⁰

⁶ Cathryn Costello, Michelle Foster and Jane McAdam (eds), *The Oxford Handbook of International Refugee Law*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2021; Liliana Lyra Jubilut, Marcia Vera Espinoza and Gabriela Mezzanotti (eds), *Latin America and Refugee Protection. Regimes, Logics, and Challenges*, New York/Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2021.

⁷ Dawn Chatty and Tamirace Fakhoury, *Refugee in the Arab World: How Arab States (re) navigate the International Refugee Regime*, concept note, Paris, SciencesPo.

⁸ Tamirace Fakhoury, “Lebanon as a Test Case for the EU’s Logic of Governmentality in Refugee Challenges”, in *IAI Commentaries*, No. 20|94 (December 2020), <https://www.iai.it/en/node/12523>.

⁹ In this context, guesthood refers to the act of considering and treating displaced individuals as incoming guests.

¹⁰ Aydan Greatrick et al., *Local Faith Community Responses to Displacement in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey: Emerging Evidence and New Approaches*, Refugee Hosts, 2018, <https://refugeehosts.files.wordpress.com/2018/06/local-faith-report.pdf>.

It is easy to dismiss such narratives as mere rhetoric masking a repressive politics of refugee reception. The truth is that informal mobility, open borders and transnational hospitality have deeply characterised the history of the Arab Mediterranean.¹¹ Western-centric attempts to regulate and police mobility through documentary regimes and biometrics have often clashed with such understandings.¹²

In this view, those operating in local policy and social settings do not necessarily feel that the mainstream vocabulary of refugee governance – which relies on labelling, bureaucratisation and management – captures their conceptions of *refugee-ness*. Here, various Arab governments such as those of Lebanon, Kuwait, Jordan, Egypt and Iraq have pleaded for *guesthood* to be recognised in the international community as a core value, underpinning the global refugee regime.¹³

What also remains unaccounted for is how Arab states have shaped debates on global responsibility-sharing – a contentious issue, on which supporters of the international refugee regime have so far been unable to agree. Since the 1990s, Arab governments have voiced objections to the European Union’s attempts at negotiating readmission agreements and the granting of aid in exchange for refugee containment in the region.¹⁴

More recently, during the so-called 2015 refugee crisis, refugee-hosting states such as Lebanon and Jordan drew attention to EU practices of burden-shifting and responsibility-shirking.¹⁵ By contesting the order of things, they have repeatedly highlighted the ever-contested question of why the “Global South” takes more refugees in return for the “Global North” channelling aid and resettling fewer refugees.¹⁶

In this, they have flagged up the transactional logic of governance and

¹¹ Salam Kawakibi, “Migration circulaire des Syriens: état et perspectives”, in *CARIM Analytic and Synthetic Notes*, No. 2008/16, <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/8337>.

¹² Informal conversations with academics in Jordan, Libya, Morocco and Lebanon.

¹³ Interview with UNHCR official, November 2020.

¹⁴ The author’s interviews and field research, 2008-2021.

¹⁵ Tamirace Fakhoury, “The External Dimension of EU Migration Policy as Region-Building? Refugee Cooperation As Contentious Politics”, in *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 16 November 2021, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2021.1972568>.

¹⁶ David Scott FitzGerald and Rawan Arar, “The Sociology of Refugee Migration”, in *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 44 (2018), p. 387-406.

its implications for world diplomacy and politics.¹⁷ Lebanon has pointed to the shortcomings of EU solidarity in sharing the burden – criticising its resilience-building policy, which seeks to enhance the capacity of host states to keep refugees in place. Jordan has questioned asylum reforms when EU member states have been reluctant to take in more refugees.

Hosting states may use such arguments as a pretext to shift the blame. At the same time, however, their critical discourses reflect an attempt at undoing coloniality. More particularly, such discourses provide evidence as to how power differentials turn refugee policy into a question of “complex interdependence” between the two shores rather than a question of norm diffusion from the EU onto its neighbours.

Most importantly, often regarded as policy vessels rather than shapers, Arab states have frequently played the EU’s policy-making game – turning the tables on questions of power in the Mediterranean. In the context of the Syrian displacement, states hosting many refugees have sought to renegotiate “the value of their hosting capacity”.¹⁸ They have capitalised on the EU’s migration fears in order to lobby for more aid or strengthened alliances. In other words, they have optimised their leverage as gatekeepers.¹⁹

Jordan and Lebanon do not share geographical borders with the EU, but the Union’s migration architecture has transcended hard borders. In that regard, EU member states have sought to manage migration beyond their borders through technologies and practices of “distancing”. Examples include striking refugee deals in return for discouraging the departure of asylum seekers or more explicit measures such as turning local authorities into co-managers of borders and waterways.

By leveraging the EU’s aid policies and, more broadly, the political economy of displacement in the Mediterranean, Arab hosting states have recalibrated power asymmetries. In this sense, their capacity to instru-

¹⁷ Tamirace Fakhoury, “Leverage and Contestation in Refugee Governance: Lebanon and Europe in the Context of Mass Displacement”, in Raffaella A. Del Sarto and Simone Tholens (eds), *Resisting Europe. Practices of Contestation in the Mediterranean Middle East*, Ann Arbor, University of Michigan Press, 2020, p. 142-163.

¹⁸ Rawan Arab, “Leveraging Sovereignty: The Case of Jordan and the International Refugee Regime”, in *POMEPS Studies*, No. 25 (March 2017), p. 12-15, <https://pomeps.org/?p=9264>.

¹⁹ Tamirace Fakhoury, “Leverage and Contestation in Refugee Governance”, cit.

mentalise EU policies erodes the foundations of coloniality that shape governance processes in the region.

3.3 HUMANITARIAN GOVERNANCE AS A SITE OF INQUIRY FOR UNDOING COLONIALITY

In the context of mass displacement from Syria, neighbouring refugee-hosting states have become ideal sites for humanitarian agencies. Resilience-building policies promoted by the EU and the World Bank, among others, that sought to build the capacity of host states and refugees have dominated international responses to Syrian displacement.

Ten years after the onset of the Syrian war, however, humanitarian programming has produced dismal results. Underfunded responses and short-term aid programmes disconnected from refugee aspirations have entrapped refugees into a quasi-permanent state of transience. In that regard, refugees and host communities have sharply criticised the turn towards resiliency thinking that international actors have glorified.

This paradigm has not only failed to respond to the misfortunes that both hosting and refugee communities are facing – communities have even flagged it up as a stratagem for governing through shifting responsibility onto the weaker party.

Against this backdrop, the humanitarian-aid terrain in Syria's neighbourhood has become an ideal site for unmaking coloniality through research and critical analysis. Researchers and grassroots organisations have highlighted the way in which humanitarian policy, often set by Western organisations, has preserved decades-old templates centred around the logic of *helper* versus *recipient*.

They have also worked to unravel the ways in which humanitarian-aid agencies perpetuate their logic of control over refugees. In her research, Estella Carpi shows how non-governmental organisations in the poor northern region of Akkar in Lebanon have been seeking refugee approval so that they can legitimise their mandate.²⁰

²⁰ Estella Carpi, "Bringing Social Class into Humanitarian Debates: The Case of Northern Lebanon", in *MEI Articles*, 4 December 2019, <https://www.mei.edu/node/80642>.

3.4 REFUGEES AS PROTAGONISTS

Most importantly, the goal of unmaking coloniality necessitates a lens centred on forced migrants and refugees rather than on the laws, statistical data and policies that govern them.²¹

Syrian refugees, for instance, have faced containment within the region.²² With border restrictions, remote control measures and dwindling options for resettlement, many feel trapped in the countries where they first sought refuge. Depicted on the websites and policy briefs of humanitarian organisations as helpless pawns and grateful beneficiaries of aid, refugees have increasingly challenged such narratives.

More recent, critical approaches to research have instead sought to amplify their voices as protagonists and political subjects. The project “Refugee Hosts” shifts the focus to how Syrian refugees are, at the same time, themselves hosts – challenging the binary of refugee versus hosting communities.²³ Rana B. Khoury has taken stock of the multiple activisms that Syrian refugees in Jordan have engaged in.²⁴ In addition to setting up their own humanitarian projects, they have devised conflict-regulation platforms. Refugee-centric research has also fed into refugee-centric models of humanitarian policy.²⁵ A case in point is the emergence of various refugee-led organisations that have both a research- and policy-based platform of objectives.

3.5 WHAT REAL-WORLD RELEVANCE?

Having charted openings and pathways for viewing migration governance in the Mediterranean through a decolonial perspective, a number of final reflections are in order.

²¹ See Khatharya Um, “Missing in History...”, in *CRG FaultLines*, Vol. 19 (Spring 2017), p. 12-13, <https://www.crg.berkeley.edu/?p=3910>.

²² Dawn Chatty, “The Syrian Humanitarian Disaster: Understanding Perceptions and Aspirations in Jordan, Lebanon and Turkey”, in *Global Policy*, Vol. 8, Special Issue (February 2017), p. 25-32, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12390>.

²³ See the website of the Refugee Hosts project: <https://refugeehosts.org>.

²⁴ Rana B. Khoury, “Aiding Activism? Humanitarianism’s Impacts on Mobilized Syrian Refugees in Jordan”, in *Middle East Law and Governance*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (November 2017), p. 267-281, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-00903001>.

²⁵ See the website of Sawa for Development and Aid: <http://www.sdaid.org>.

First, a decolonial view ought to take a broader look at the push-and-pull dynamics that constitute regimes of migration and refuge in the Mediterranean policy space. In this space, non-Western states and societies have been key protagonists in (un)making norms, practices and policy models. Increasingly, scholarship has focused on their contributions.

Second, research on refugee voices has abounded – especially in postcolonial and transnational literature streams. Researchers on both shores of the Mediterranean have taken a keen interest in decolonising the ways in which we conduct research and policy, calling for a greater integration of refugee voices in order to unpack Western-led humanitarian policymaking.

Notwithstanding this evolution, my core contention is twofold:

- Will unpacking Euro-centric assumptions be sufficient to emancipate Euro–Mediterranean policy from colonial modernities and histories?
- Have our attempts to undo coloniality impacted on Euro–Mediterranean policy?

So far, little evidence points in these directions.²⁶ As many argue, the EU still perceives its southern neighbours as policy *targets* rather than *partners*. Also, it is debatable whether Euro–Mediterranean policies have internalised the aforementioned “refugee-centric” turn.

The EU’s 2016 Jordan Compact, which deploys aid in return for the Jordanian Government issuing 200,000 work permits for Syrian refugees, has excluded refugee aspirations from the outset. In Lebanon, hardly any refugee has even heard of the EU–Lebanon compact (negotiated in the same year), which channels aid to the hosting society in return for easing refugee access to residency.

Decolonising migration governance in the Mediterranean ultimately cannot ignore the impending challenges of real-world relevance and policy impact. As a result, there is still much work to be done to bridge the divide between critical and non-Eurocentric research and actual policymaking – working to promote more genuine and balanced modalities of understanding and cooperation across the shared Euro–Mediterranean space.

²⁶ Lorenzo Kamel, “To Stop Migration, Stop the Abuse of Africa’s Resources”, in *Al Jazeera*, 15 February 2018, <https://aje.io/3rq7g>.

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4.

Turkey and Eastern Europe: Historicising Geopolitical Convergences in Gender Politics

Selin Çağatay

In the wake of Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and anti-gender mobilisations sweeping through Eastern Europe and beyond, feminist and LGBTI+ activists are increasingly directing their efforts towards building transnational solidarity.¹

Previously regarded as belonging to different historical and political geographies, the two contexts are now regarded, by activists and researchers alike, as having much in common.² This recent affinity between Turkey and Eastern Europe is not only a result of similar attacks on gender equality and sexual rights in different national contexts. It also has to do with the rise of authoritarian, ultra-conservative and neo-nationalist regimes led by “strongman” leaders such as Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (Turkey), Viktor Orbán (Hungary), Jarosław Kaczyński (Poland) and Vladimir Putin (Russia), who position themselves as defenders of native values and traditions against their violation by the liberal West/Europe.³

¹ In addition to the many digital activist gatherings concerning the Istanbul Convention, the work of the Essential Autonomous Struggles Transnational (EAST) network is significant. See <https://www.facebook.com/EASTEssentialStruggles>.

² See, for example, Cemre Baytok, *The Istanbul Convention, Gender Politics and Beyond: Poland and Turkey*, Berlin, Hafıza Merkezi, June 2021, https://www.hm-berlin.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/HMB_Pub2_ENG_v2.pdf.

³ I use West/Europe in a way that implies both Western and European, and Western European as opposed to Eastern Europe and Turkey. These categories oftentimes overlap when it comes to knowledge production, e.g. dominant Western European perspectives are westocentric and Eurocentric simultaneously.

Yet, in terms of gender politics, the convergences between Turkey and Eastern Europe have a longer history. Unpacking these convergences can offer views on the decolonising of feminist history by bringing together geopolitical areas that are typically sidelined when thinking about Euro-Mediterranean relations.

Compared with the shared history of Europe and the Middle East and the oriental roots of West/European identity and capitalist modernity,⁴ comparative and integrative approaches to understand the contemporary relationship between Eastern Europe and Turkey have received little attention in historical scholarship. Truth be told, it appears somewhat counterintuitive to associate these two contexts as each has followed a very different path after the dissolution of empires, falling on the opposite sides of the Cold War divide. Turkey, a Muslim-majority country, experienced modernisation under Kemalist ideology,⁵ whereas Eastern Europe, a Christian-majority space with great diversity,⁶ experienced decades of state-led socialism until the fall of communism in the late 1980s and early 1990s. How can the two contexts be approached together?

Below, an attempt to do this is advanced by focusing on two instances in gender politics: Kemalist and state-socialist women's activisms, and the post-Cold War "NGO-isation" of feminist politics. Building on new research in feminist history and recent discussions on decolonising European histories,⁷ the analysis will highlight struggles for gender equality and sexual rights in the semi-peripheries against their fragmentation by West/European frames of reference. This is not to simplistically reduce the differences within and between the two contexts to a semi-peripheral function in relation to the core. Rather, such an approach builds on

⁴ See Lorenzo Kamel in this volume.

⁵ Named after the founder of Turkish Republic (1923), Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, Kemalism remained the dominant state ideology in Turkey up until the 21st century.

⁶ In my usage of Eastern Europe, including the post-socialist spaces in South Eastern and Central Eastern Europe, I follow feminist scholars who use the term to indicate state-socialist legacies and global hierarchies simultaneously. See, for example, Maria Bucur, "Between Regional and Transnational Contexts", in Katalin Fábíán, Janet Elise Johnson and Mara Lazda (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, London/New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 9-17.

⁷ See, for example, the Decolonising Europe lecture series by the Amsterdam Centre for European Studies: <https://aces.uva.nl/events/decolonising-europe-lecture-series/decolonising-europe.html>.

Martin Müller's recent conceptualisation of the Global East as a political category. Problematising the geopolitics of knowledge, Müller uses the term "East" to denote a liminal space between North and South in social, economic and political terms:

The East is too rich to be a proper part of the South, but too poor to be a part of the North. It is too powerful to be periphery, but too weak to be the centre. [...] the East is inferior, but not inferior enough. It is kind of subaltern, but not really. [...] It has some elements of European modernity, but lacks others [...].⁸

Theorising from the vantage point of Eastern Europe, Müller suggests that Turkey and the Middle East should also be considered part of this "Eastness" based on their liminality between North and South.⁹ Despite its critical intervention on North–South differentiation, Müller's idea of Eastness coincides with the transnational feminist notion of the South as an analytical location from which to build dialogue between contexts by tracing connections between them and finding their common differences.¹⁰ Thinking in terms of historical convergences in gender politics between Turkey and Eastern Europe can thus help one to go beyond national and regional exceptionalisms and foster the ground for East–East collaboration.¹¹

4.1 KEMALIST AND STATE-SOCIALIST WOMEN'S ACTIVISMS

In line with their top-down modernisation paradigms, Kemalist and state-socialist governments embraced the idea of women's emancipation.

⁸ Martin Müller, "In Search of the Global East: Thinking between North and South", in *Geopolitics*, Vol. 25, No. 3 (May 2020), p. 734-755 at p. 735-736 and 740, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2018.1477757>.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 749. For other relevant conceptualisations of in-betweenness, see Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans*, updated ed., New York/Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009; Lerna K. Yanık, "Constructing Turkish 'Exceptionalism': Discourses of Liminality and Hybridity in Post-Cold War Turkish Foreign Policy", in *Political Geography*, Vol. 30, No. 2 (February 2011), p. 80-89, <http://hdl.handle.net/11693/11998>.

¹⁰ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders. Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, Durham/London, Duke University Press, 2003.

¹¹ The idea of East–East collaboration comes from our ongoing collaborative work with Dr Adriana Qubaiova based on our ethnographic research in Turkey and Lebanon.

Yet, they were against women's autonomous organising and saw feminism as an imperial/bourgeois residue of the *ancien régime*. Early republican feminists in Turkey were elite women loyal to the Kemalist regime, but the Republican People's Party (1923) did not appreciate their quest for political independence. After the dissolution of the Turkish Women's Union in 1935 under governmental pressure, Kemalist women's activism became the dominant, legitimate and often the only available way for the country's women to pursue gender politics.

Similar developments occurred in state-socialist contexts in which radical changes in class relations accompanied modernisation. In the Soviet Union, leaders of the communist women's movement who were active before and around the time of the 1917 revolution were replaced by Bolshevik cadres who identified with the Soviet regime rather than the preceding feminist struggle.¹² In Bulgaria, the Communist Party abolished the Bulgarian Association of University Women in 1950, claiming that the Party would take care of women as well as their international contacts.¹³ Across Turkey and Eastern Europe, Kemalist and state-socialist women assumed the role of enlightening "backward" women, a group that typically involved those from rural/traditional backgrounds and minority ethnic and religious groups. Kemalist and state-socialist women also supported anti-veiling campaigns directed towards covered Muslim women in the Balkans, Turkey and Soviet Central Asia and the Caucasus as part of governments' assimilatory modernisation efforts.¹⁴

Considering the positioning of Kemalist and state-socialist regimes on opposite sides of the Cold War divide, the similarities between their forms of activism are striking. While an earlier generation of feminist

¹² Elizabeth Waters, "In the Shadow of the Comintern: The Communist Women's Movement, 1920-43", in Sonia Kruks, Rayna Rapp and Marilyn B. Young (eds), *Promissory Notes. Women in the Transition to Socialism*, New York, Monthly Review Press, 1989, p. 29-56.

¹³ Kornelia Slavova, "Looking at Western Feminisms through the Double Lens of Eastern Europe and the Third World", in Jasmina Lukić, Joanna Regulska and Darja Završek (eds), *Women and Citizenship in Central and Eastern Europe*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2006, p. 245-264.

¹⁴ Stephanie Cronin (ed.), *Anti-Veiling Campaigns in the Muslim World. Gender, Modernism and the Politics of Dress*, London/New York, Routledge, 2014; Yulia Gradska, "Women's Education, Entry to Paid Work, and Forced Unveiling in Soviet Central Asia", in Katalin Fábíán, Janet Elise Johnson and Mara Lazda (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, London/New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 227-235.

historians had approached these activisms through West/Eurocentric analytical lenses, recent research by a(n often) younger generation of feminist scholars who – implicitly or explicitly – embrace decolonial approaches has destabilised the persisting Cold War paradigms in feminist historiography.¹⁵

In the case of Turkey, new inquiries into the post-World War II period have revealed a dynamic arena of women’s activism that involved not just Kemalist but also left-socialist and working-class women – one in which demands for gender equality and sexual rights resembled, if not predated, those demands raised in feminist politics of the post-1980 period.¹⁶ As for state-socialist women’s activism, new research shows that the strict governmental control exercised by such regimes over women’s organisation did not hinder the development of a feminist consciousness among women in politics and culture as well as everyday life.¹⁷

Feminist historians are also rethinking the role of Kemalist and state-socialist women’s activisms at the international level and in the making of the global gender-equality regime pioneered by the United Nations through their involvement in international women’s organisations such as the International Council of Women and Women’s International Democratic Federation.¹⁸ Their work de-centres the West/Eurocentric histories

¹⁵ Francisca de Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women’s Organisations: The Case of the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF)”, in *Women’s History Review*, Vol. 19, No. 4 (2010), p. 547-573.

¹⁶ Selin Çağatay, “The Politics of Gender and the Making of Kemalist Feminist Activism in Contemporary Turkey (1946-2011)”, PhD dissertation, Central European University, 2017, <https://sierra.ceu.edu/record=b1318701>; Muazzez Pervan, *İlerici Kadınlar Derneği (1975-1980). Kırmızı Çatıklı Kadınların Tarihi* (Progressive Women’s Association (1975-1980). Red Hooded Women’s History), İstanbul, Tarih Vakfı, 2013.

¹⁷ Zsófia Lóránd, *The Feminist Challenge to the Socialist State in Yugoslavia*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan, 2018; Shana Penn and Jill Massino (eds), *Gender Politics and Everyday Life in State Socialist Eastern and Central Europe*, New York/Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

¹⁸ Aslı Davaz, *Eşitsiz Kız Kardeşlik. Uluslararası ve Ortadoğu Kadın Hareketleri, 1935 Kongresi ve Türk Kadın Birliği* (Unequal Sisterhood. International and Middle East Women’s Movements, the 1935 Congress and the Turkish Women’s Union), İstanbul, İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 2014; Magdalena Grabowska, “From Soviet Feminism to the European Union: Transnational Women’s Movements between East and West”, in Katalin Fábíán, Janet Elise Johnson and Mara Lazda (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, London/New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 145-153; Umut Azak and Henk de Smaele, “National and Transnational Dynamics of Women’s Activism

of global women's movements and serves as a response to anti-gender actors' current defamation of the global achievements in gender equality and sexual rights as West/European imposition and neo-imperialism.

4.2 THE POST-COLD WAR NGO-ISATION OF FEMINIST POLITICS

In the 1980s and 1990s, Turkey as well as many (new) nation states in Eastern Europe went through a significant economic restructuring towards integration into global markets and eventual membership of the European Union. Alongside major changes in state–civil society relations, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) came to dominate the field of civil society. Many of them funded by West/European donors, NGOs facilitated the transition to a neoliberal capitalist economy by initiating or taking over some of the services that had previously been provided (or not) by the state. In Eastern Europe, system change came with a resurgence of traditional gender roles whereby nationalist actors – and, in many contexts, Catholic and Orthodox Churches – reframed female emancipation away from the situation of women having to work the “double shift” (at work and at home) towards restoring their familial duties as primary carers and unpaid houseworkers.¹⁹

In Turkey, political polarisation along the Islamist–Kemalist axis (and, to a lesser degree, Turkish and Kurdish nationalisms) made women's public appearance a highly contested topic in which the headscarf became a symbol of both liberation from forced West/Europeanisation and a revival of Islamist reactionism. As Islamists gained ground in the state and civil society, they took an openly anti-feminist position while reducing the problems of covered women to a matter of public inclusion.

These geopolitical developments in gender politics coincided with the 1995 United Nations (UN) World Conference on Women in Beijing, where

in Turkey in the 1950s and 1960s: The Story of the ICW Branch in Ankara”, in *Journal of Women's History*, Vol. 28, No. 3 (Fall 2016), p. 41-65; Francisca de Haan, “Continuing Cold War Paradigms in Western Historiography of Transnational Women's Organisations”, cit.

¹⁹ Susan Gal and Gail Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism. A Comparative-Historical Essay*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.

women's NGOs were recognised as the main actors in achieving female empowerment through combatting issues such as violence against women and the feminisation of poverty. Striving to find solutions to women's problems other than those offered by the above-mentioned conservative and nationalist political actors in their local contexts, many women in Turkey and Eastern Europe established NGOs within the framework of a global gender-equality regime led by the UN and later by the European Union.

In this global regime, however, gender justice was also separated from social justice and global inequalities;²⁰ gender-only agendas were prioritised and geared towards economic outcomes.²¹ West/European donor agendas with an exclusive focus on gender equality often advanced at the expense of other forms of social inequality. Funded by such donors, women's NGOs in Eastern Europe promoted the figure of a woman who had been victimised by local patriarchies and who was to be liberated through liberal West/European notions of agency.²² Similarly, in Turkey, Kemalist women's NGOs strove to empower covered and Kurdish women in order to "save" them from political Islam and Kurdish nationalism, viewing those women as victims of reactionary and feudal social relations. With its disengagement from the negative consequences of neoliberalism, the victim paradigm normalised the deepening of class divisions between women in these contexts.

Yet, the NGO-isation of feminist politics in Turkey and Eastern Europe is no simple story of co-optation by West/European donor agendas. First, not all donors had a neoliberal agenda and funding processes were often mediated by West/European feminists with varying political programmes.²³ More importantly, in many national contexts a vibrant feminist activism

²⁰ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "'Woman' as Theatre. United Nations Conference on Women, Beijing 1995", in *Radical Philosophy*, No. 75 (January/February 1996), p. 2-4, <https://www.radicalphilosophy.com/?p=4511>.

²¹ Maria Stratigaki, "The Cooptation of Gender Concepts in EU Policies: The Case of 'Reconciliation of Work and Family'", in *Social Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 1 (Spring 2004), p. 30-56.

²² Julie Hemment, *Empowering Women in Russia. Activism, Aid, and NGOs*, Bloomington/Indianapolis, Indiana University Press, 2007; Jennifer Suchland, *Economies of Violence. Transnational Feminism, Postsocialism, and the Politics of Sex Trafficking*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2015.

²³ Eva Maria Hinterhuber and Gesine Fuchs, "Neoliberal Intervention: Analyzing the Drakulić-Funk-Ghodsee Debates", in Katalin Fábíán, Janet Elise Johnson and Mara Lazda (eds), *The Routledge Handbook of Gender in Central-Eastern Europe and Eurasia*, London/New York, Routledge, 2022, p. 28-38.

flourished in the counter-public sphere. Distancing themselves from the state–civil-society–global-governance nexus, which produced short-term fixes for women’s problems as opposed to structural solutions, counter-public feminists organised in small, horizontal, informal structures and pursued agendas that were excluded in the NGO sector concerning labour rights, heteropatriarchy, nationalism and anti-racism, to name but a few.

At the same time, counter-public feminist initiatives often collaborated with women’s NGOs – for example, in campaigns for legal change.²⁴ Therefore, from a decolonial perspective, it is crucial to move beyond a binary approach to co-optation and resistance and to engage in nuanced examinations of how feminists have negotiated West/European donor frames in order to support their local struggles.²⁵

4.3 IMAGINING FRAGMENTED STRUGGLES AS COMMON STRUGGLES

Bringing to light the many struggles that women have waged in order to protect their gender and other interests, decolonial feminist history offers a possibility for contemporary struggles for gender equality and sexual rights to destabilise dominant discourses that reify geopolitical belongings and undermine historical connectivity. “At the semi-periphery,” suggests Marina Blagojević, “empowerment strategy will be largely connected to the revival of positive memory and positive history. Understanding one’s own power is the key to empowerment.”²⁶

²⁴ Agnieszka Graff, “Blaming Feminists Is Not Understanding History: A Critical Rejoinder to Ghodsee’s Take on Feminism, Neoliberalism and Nationalism in Eastern Europe”, in Katharina Bluhm et al. (eds), *Gender and Power in Eastern Europe. Changing Concepts of Femininity and Masculinity in Power Relations*, Cham, Springer, 2021, p. 25-33; Selin Çağatay, “In, Against (and Beyond?) the State. Women’s Rights, Global Gender Equality Regime, and Feminist Counterpublics in 21st-Century Turkey”, in Lena Martinsson and Diana Mulinari (eds), *Dreaming Global Change, Doing Local Feminisms. Visions of Feminism. Global North/Global South Encounters, Conversations and Disagreements*, London/New York, Routledge, 2018, p. 58-80.

²⁵ Victoria Bernal and Inderpal Grewal (eds), *Theorizing NGOs. States, Feminisms, and Neoliberalism*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2014.

²⁶ Marina Blagojević, “Empowerment from the Semiperiphery Perspective”, in *Development*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (June 2010), p. 190-193 at p. 191.

This approach does not set out to vindicate Kemalist and state-socialist women's activisms or to deny the detrimental consequences of NGO-isation for radical politics.

What it does signify, however, is the need to acknowledge women's gender struggles in their own right and to refuse to produce knowledge that takes West/Eurocentric perspectives as a starting point. Importantly, it also means engaging in conceptual interventions with the aim of going beyond critique of the West/Europe and of "produc[ing] new knowledge constructs that powerfully capture the complexity of the different forms of world-making while also bringing these into conceptual existence".²⁷

By tying contexts together – for example, through the political category of "Eastness" – one can take this work a step further. Showing historical convergences across geopolitical divides, activists and researchers can address the fragmentation of semi-peripheral struggles in West/European frames of reference that are often reproduced by dominant local actors whose politics feed on national and regional exceptionalisms. When the structural relations between different locales that are popularly understood as unconnected are identified, this enables the imagination of fragmented struggles as common struggles. Hopefully, in return, this will foster the possibility of producing new knowledge constructs that reflect the complexity, interlinkages and the contextual specificity of different geographies in the Euro-Mediterranean space.

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²⁷ Sumi Madhok, "A Critical Reflexive Politics of Location, 'Feminist Debt' and Thinking from the Global South", in *European Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 4 (November 2020), p. 394-412 at p. 403, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350506820952492>.

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5.

Studying Euro–Mediterranean Relations: A Socio-Economic Perspective

Rosita Di Peri

In her 1999 book *Decolonizing Methodologies*, Linda Tuhiwai Smith highlights the need to decolonise research methodologies by centring indigenous knowledge, thereby offering a clear example of reflection that transcends the boundaries of disciplinary and area studies.¹

Her proposal is in line with a scholarly debate that emerged after the so-called “Arab Spring”. This led some to challenge and reconsider established dynamics regarding the use of local resources in a type of “hit and run” research, the results of which are often only discussed in Western academic institutions in which the production of knowledge is embedded in Eurocentric epistemologies.²

Today, ten years after those Arab revolts, research that bears witness to the insidious relationship, deep asymmetries and unequal power relations between native and foreign scholars, which anthropologists had already denounced decades ago,³ are finally making a comeback in the social sciences.

¹ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies. Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed., London, Zed Books, 2012.

² See, among others, Forian Khostall, “Practicing the Transformation of Social Sciences after the Arab Uprisings”, in *The Egyptian German Science Monitor*, No. 1 (2014), p. 6-7; Rosita Di Peri and Estella Carpi, “Le Liban et la recherche internationale après les révoltes de 2011: une «zone de confort»?”, in *Afriche e Orienti*, No. 2/2019, p. 107-124, <https://doi.org/10.23810/1345.DIPERI-CARPI>.

³ Faye V. Harrison (ed.), *Decolonizing Anthropology. Moving Further Toward an Anthropology for Liberation*, Washington, Association of Black Anthropologists-American Anthropological Association, 1991.

The study of Euro–Mediterranean relations is very important from this perspective. The numerous analytical lenses that have been used to frame these relations have had European “actorness” at their core (with the European Union being variously portrayed as a civilian power,⁴ a normative power,⁵ a hegemon,⁶ an empire⁷ or a pragmatic actor,⁸ among others) but have rarely given voice to Middle East and North African (MENA) states and societies – for example, by analysing the ways in which they perceive European policies or the EU itself.⁹

This methodological approach is rooted in two assumptions: on the one hand, the fact that Euro–Mediterranean relations are based on a profound asymmetry that is evident at an informational; social; and, above all, economic level; and, on the other, a belief that southern Mediterranean countries simply cannot “be masters of their own destiny”. The latter is an evidently orientalist assumption based on the concept of the *Arab mind*¹⁰ – namely, the existence of a specific Arab mentality resistant to progress and modernity.

5.1 ASYMMETRIES, PARADOXES AND MISREPRESENTATIONS

The deep asymmetry that defines Euro–Mediterranean relations dates back to the colonial period, when an orientalist vision and a Eurocentric perspective prevailed.¹¹ This approach sees the region as being marked by

⁴ Helene Sjursen, “The EU as a ‘Normative’ Power: How Can This Be?”, in *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2006), p. 235-251.

⁵ Ian Manners, “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?”, in *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (June 2002), p. 235-258.

⁶ See Hiski Haukkala, “The European Union as a Regional Normative Hegemon: The Case of European Neighbourhood Policy”, in *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 9 (November 2008), p. 1601-1622.

⁷ On this label see Jan Zielonka, “Europe as a Global Actor: Empire by Example?”, in *International Affairs*, Vol. 84, No. 3 (May 2008), p. 471-484.

⁸ Peter Seeberg, “European Neighbourhood Policy, Post-normativity and Pragmatism”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (2010), p. 663-679.

⁹ Daniela Huber and Maria Cristina Paciello, “Contesting ‘EU as Empire’ from Within? Analysing European Perceptions on EU Presence and Practices in the Mediterranean”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 25, Special Issue (2020), p. 109-130.

¹⁰ Raphael Patai, *The Arab Mind*, New York, Scribner, 1973.

¹¹ Anna-Lena Hoh, “Voir l’Autre”? Seeing the Other, the Developments of the Arab

historical backwardness – a reading that has clear cultural and socio-economic roots, and that translates into a sort of tendency towards authoritarianism and subalternity compared with Europe and the “West”.¹²

When combined with the difficulties of decolonisation and the subsequent evolution of Middle Eastern politics, this reading has fuelled an image of the MENA as a region dominated by political and economic instability and saturated with violence and permanent clashes.¹³

All of these aspects (or misrepresentations) have reinforced the asymmetry in relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean. After decolonisation, “privileged relations” were established between European countries and former colonies or mandated territories.¹⁴ These “privileged relations” have heavily favoured European countries in commercial and economic terms.¹⁵

EU strategies and policies towards this region have also been impacted upon by modernisation theory. The development and expansion of this approach coincided with the process of European unification and, above all, the advent of a Euro-Mediterranean policy during the 1960s and 1970s.

In the 1970s, a unitary approach to the issue of Euro-Mediterranean policy (i.e. the European Community’s “Global Mediterranean Policy”) emerged in order to improve export trade from North Africa to the European Economic Community (EEC); sustain economic, financial and technical cooperation; and provide institutional assistance. This approach was in line with the dictates that modernisation was imposing worldwide: an unstoppable and immanent undertaking that, in short, would lead to the

Spring and the European Neighborhood Policy toward Algeria and Tunisia”, in *Journal of Borderlands Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (2014), p. 203-216.

¹² Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, New York, Vintage Books, 1979.

¹³ Rolf Tanner, “Narrative and Conflict in the Middle East”, in *Survival*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2014), p. 89-108; Dag Tuastad, “Neo-Orientalism and the New Barbarism Thesis: Aspects of Symbolic Violence in the Middle East Conflict(s)”, in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (2003), p. 591-599.

¹⁴ Brieg Tomos Powel, “A Clash of Norms: Normative Power and EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia”, in *Democratization*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (2009), p. 193-214.

¹⁵ Alfred Tovias, “The Economic Impact of the Euro-Mediterranean Free Trade Area on Mediterranean Non-Member Countries”, in *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1997), p. 113-128; Rosita Di Peri and Federica Zardo, “Changing Perceptions of the European Union in the MENA Region before and after the Arab Uprisings. The Case of Tunisia”, in Manuela Ceretta and Barbara Curli (eds), *Discourses and Counter-discourses on Europe. From the Enlightenment to the EU*, Abingdon/New York, Routledge, 2017, p. 249-260.

“Americanisation” or “Europeanisation” of most states and societies the world over.

Being strongly deterministic and normative, modernisation theory has had an important influence on the EU’s political and economic strategies and its “developmental” policies towards the Mediterranean. Here, modernisation theory was also one of the instruments that some scholars, like Daniel Lerner, used to justify their view of the region as inherently backward.

Lerner promoted a narrative of opposition that exacerbated the contrast between “us” and “them” by claiming that only by promoting “their” modernisation could they become like “us”.¹⁶ Despite much criticism, modernisation theories have had a strong impact on the analysis of the region (and beyond), offering fertile ground for neoliberal policies that encouraged the exportation of Western modernity in order to restore order and foster development.¹⁷

This approach was augmented by US policies, additionally conducted through international and financial institutions (for example, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, with their “Washington Consensus”), which influenced relations between the European Union and the MENA region – including in the Euro–Mediterranean Partnership of the 1990s.¹⁸ After the failure of these efforts – and especially after 9/11, the invasion of Afghanistan and then the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003 – European cooperation policies (at the economic level, at least initially) were established in the form of the European Neighbourhood Policy with the aim of stabilising the MENA region and containing those forces that were seen as destabilising Europe (mainly migration and terrorism).¹⁹

Consequently, a focus on security issues has become increasingly central to the EU over the years. In this context, attention to the economic dimension as a means of producing indirect effects on EU security is es-

¹⁶ Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society. Modernizing the Middle East*, Glencoe, Free Press, 1958.

¹⁷ Nicolas Guilhot, *The Democracy Makers. Human Rights and International Order*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2005.

¹⁸ Maria Cristina Paciello, “The EU’s ‘Pragmatist Turn’ and the Struggle for Social Justice and Human Rights in the Arab World: A Decentring Framework for Analysis”, in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 25, Special Issue (2020), p. 1-24.

¹⁹ Patricia Bauer, “European–Mediterranean Security and the Arab Spring: Changes and Challenges”, in *Democracy and Security*, Vol. 9, No. 1-2 (January-June 2013), p. 1-18.

pecially clear. For the European Union, it was more important to preserve its economic privileges than insist on negotiations in the field of human rights and democracy promotion. All in all, democracy promotion has been considered a corollary of EU economic and strategic interests.

This approach was particularly evident in the aftermath of the Arab revolts, when the EU further strengthened its securitised approach to the MENA. This was perhaps most palpable in terms of discourses and practices/policies in the field of migration (i.e. the Mobility Partnership agreements), but also in the control of energy sources and anti-terror co-operation.²⁰

As a result, the EU saw the creation of business-friendly environments as a means of maintaining stability and, at the same time, safeguarding its own interests. Over the years, this strategy has contributed to an increase in asymmetry in EU–MENA relations, including from a methodological point of view.

5.2 THE 2011 ARAB REVOLTS: A METHODOLOGICAL TURNING POINT?

Although the Arab revolts did not produce a turnaround at the political level, they gave input to rethink approaches and decolonise methodologies for framing Euro–Mediterranean relations – especially in the socio-economic field.²¹

More recently, the need to study evolving socio-economic phenomena, better comprehend local necessities and not merely comply with the requests of international financial institutions has led to renewed criticism of not only the economic dictates of the Washington Consensus but also the methodologies used to analyse the unfolding of certain socio-economic processes.

²⁰ Andrea Teti, Darcy Thompson and Christopher Noble, “EU Democracy Assistance Discourse in Its New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood”, in *Democracy and Security*, Vol. 9, No. 1-2 (January-June 2013), p. 61-79; Stefania Panebianco, “Conceptualising the Mediterranean Global South: A Research Agenda on Security, Borders and Human Flows”, in *De Europa*, Vol. 4, No. 1 (2021), p. 17-34, <https://doi.org/10.13135/2611-853X/5514>.

²¹ For a complementary perspective, see Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night. Essays on Decolonization*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2019.

For the MENA region, the pre-2011 focus directed at macro-economic growth indicators, exports, foreign direct investment and privatisation processes, among others, completely distorted the representation of the region by ignoring (or underestimating) other elements such as unemployment, social inequality and the disappearance of trade unions. This focus led to an erroneous reading of what was happening on the ground, found the EU unprepared and contributed to distorting Euro–Mediterranean relations.

A different methodological approach, like the one that Gilbert Achcar suggests, would have highlighted the changes to a socio-economic system that foreshadowed the wave of protests that erupted in 2011.²² Or, as Adam Hanieh points out, a more careful analysis of the class dimension could have highlighted the misrepresentations of the working sector and the suffering of the less-privileged strata of the population.²³

Indeed, the attention now paid to the economic causes of the 2011 uprisings has favoured the emergence of a series of approaches and methodologies that are looking at the socio-economic *micro*-practices in various state contexts. This approach is producing a clearer picture but has also made it possible to connect that picture to the social forces (movements, associations, etc.), intellectuals and political parties that, prior to the revolts, had been considered marginal to the study of socio-economic and political dynamics in the region.

5.3 A NEW METHODOLOGICAL RESEARCH AGENDA

Deconstructing research methodologies in the case of Euro–Mediterranean relations means decentralising the gaze and focusing on the socio-economic policies and practices of the southern shore rather than only on those of the northern.²⁴ It means thinking synergistically and trying to develop policies that consider the profound asymmetry between the two

²² Gilbert Achcar, *The People Want. A Radical Exploration of the Arab Uprising*, Berkley, University of California Press, 2013.

²³ Adam Hanieh, *Capitalism and Class in the Gulf Arab States*, New York/Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillian 2011.

²⁴ Daniela Huber and Lorenzo Kamel, "Arab Spring: The Role of the Peripheries", in *Mediterranean Politics*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (July 2015), p. 127-141.

parties: the uncritical embrace of neoliberal policies by the region's authoritarian elites has helped to increase this asymmetry.

It means very pragmatically admitting that, overall, the European Union's policies and strategies have not strengthened cooperation and development among its neighbours but have contributed to nourishing "networks of privileges" and corruption. Finally, it means admitting that there is still a colonial rationale at play when looking at the "other" – from which, for historical and political reasons, it is still very difficult to decouple.²⁵

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith's book suggests, there is a long way to go to consider indigenous debates, desiderata and methodologies – the only way, according to her, to rethink Western epistemologies and knowledge production. If an assessment of the 2011 revolts and the way in which they have reverberated on the reframing of Euro-Mediterranean relations is not yet possible, the uprisings have at least revamped reflections on these issues from methodological, epistemological and ontological perspectives.

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²⁵ Michelle Pace and Roberto Roccu, "Imperial Pasts in the EU's Approach to the Mediterranean", in *Interventions*, Vol. 22, No. 6 (2020), p. 671-685, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2020.1749702>.

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6.

Decolonising Democratic Knowledge in Euro–Mediterranean Relations: Towards New Pedagogies

Larbi Sadiki

Dominant knowledge practices are located in the “West” or the “Global North”, leading to the exclusion of other forms of knowledge-making. Gatekeeping, principally in academic institutions, helps to police and maintain the lines between authoritative knowledge and any challenges that it might face.

Transatlantic *democratic* knowledge-making, in particular, is taken to be the standard bearer – universal, as it were – to be emulated by countries in the formerly colonised world, variously known as the “Third world”, “developing world”, “Orient/East” or the “Global South”. Iterations of the “coloniality of power”¹ in institutions and practices of governance that maintain asymmetrical political, social and economic relations feature in social-sciences and humanities research carried out and published in the “Global North”. Academic disciplines (e.g. International Relations and Comparative Politics) that speak to the political–economic interests of the “Global North” acquire hegemonic status, being disseminated also throughout the “Global South” at the expense of home-grown knowledge-making practices and institutions. The latter are considered “local” expressions in, or adaptations to, a wider context of the “global” circulation of Western ideas, norms, practices and institutions.

The decolonising of knowledge-making and knowledge production is, however, not merely concerned with transforming inequalities rooted in gate-

¹ Walter D. Mignolo, “The Geopolitics of Knowledge and the Colonial Difference”, in *South Atlantic Quarterly*, Vol. 101, No. 1 (Winter 2002), p. 57-96.

keeping institutions in particular geographic locations. Basic epistemological and ontological assumptions related to democracy and its promotion from the “Global North”, specifically by the organs of the European Union, need to be critiqued and “provincialised”.² Alternative traditions or sources of knowledge-making with universal import can be brought to the foreground. Such a project can combine an ethic of political responsibility, seeking emancipation from Western hegemony, and indigenous research agendas, focusing on the informal and the grassroots. Thus, the recurring dyads of state–society, individual–society, academic–activist, nature–science and structure–agent that inform most social-science scholarship are disrupted through a resort to different, if not conflicting, conceptions of thinking, being and acting.

Putative claims of objectivity are shown to be embedded in particular national and civilisational imaginaries that should be historicised. Homi Bhabha, for instance, has famously written of the “ambivalence” of such “narratives”, arguing that the meaning-making involved is subject to “negotiation” within and between “nations and peoples”.³ An increased emphasis on shared, intersubjective worldviews can then pave the way to identifying how knowledge is produced in a variety of settings. Moreover, “universal” claims can be traced through a genealogy of specificity.⁴ A critical unpacking of Western knowledge, and its hegemonic status,⁵ can thus generate opportunities for recovering indigenous knowledge traditions, reformed and modified in new contexts.

6.1 DECOLONISING THE “DEMOCRATIC MIND” IN EURO–MEDITERRANEAN RELATIONS?

Approaching democracy decolonially in EU–MENA relations,⁶ also referred to as Euro–Mediterranean relations, thus entails decolonising the

² Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe. Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2000.

³ Homi K. Bhabha, “Introduction: Narrating the Nation”, in Homi K. Bhabha (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, London/New York, Routledge, 1990, p. 1-7.

⁴ Hamid Dabashi, “Can Non-Europeans Think?”, in *AlJazeera*, 15 January 2013, <https://aje.io/rx57b>.

⁵ Jack Goody, *The Theft of History*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2006.

⁶ MENA is a much-problematised label referring to the Middle East and North Africa.

“democratic mind”. Here we can invoke Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s *Decolonising the Mind*,⁷ and Paulo Freire’s *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.⁸ Both seek to normalise the idea of self-determination for (formerly) colonised or oppressed peoples. For them, questions concerning the mind – cognitive or ideational models – must be localised. Ngũgĩ’s quasi-Fanonian take prompts him to ask metaphorically why the colonised are forced to wear “white masks”, with implications for self-other conceptions.

Extended to EU–MENA relations, why are “EU masks” imposed upon Arabs – from development to democracy? How are alternative ways of knowing democracy thus excised?⁹ Eliminating or “transcending” the resulting artificial “identification”¹⁰ with the coloniser can be accomplished for Ngũgĩ only by reclaiming native (African) languages. This is a precondition for engagement with other languages and cultures in ongoing struggles towards postcolonial emancipation. Freire’s interest is not explicitly in coloniser/colonised relations but in those between oppressors and oppressed. Yet he hints that the oppressors hail from the West – replete with its technological, economic and military prowess.

With respect to democracy, taking cues from Ngũgĩ and Freire spurs a return to a moral standpoint. The project of democracy cannot be grounded within polarity or top-down tutelage. Democracy is principally about pluralism and plurality, not singularity. As a normative–political project, it must incorporate bottom-up needs, experiences, repertoires and knowledge emanating from local contexts. Viewed thus, the enterprise then becomes one of democratising the democratic mind.

See Silvia Colombo, Eduard Soler i Lecha and Marc Otte, “A Half-Empty Glass: Limits and Dilemmas of the EU’s Relations to the MENA Countries”, in *MENARA Working Papers*, No. 32 (March 2019), p. 3, <https://www.iai.it/en/node/10141>.

⁷ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind. The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London, James Currey, 1986.

⁸ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed., New York/London, Continuum, 2005 [1970], <https://envs.ucsc.edu/internships/internship-readings/freire-pedagogy-of-the-oppressed.pdf>.

⁹ Martin Bernal, *Black Athena. The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization*, New Brunswick, Rutgers University Press, 1987.

¹⁰ Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, *Decolonising the Mind*, cit., p. 28.

6.2 DECOLONISING EU “DEMOCRACY” PRACTICES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

The type of democratisation inaugurated by the 1990s Barcelona process, “bridging” the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, romanticised the idea of democracy without grounding it in equal terms of cross-cultural exchange. The “knower” of democracy remained the European side. So the residue of Barcelona and its subsequent versions (the European Neighbourhood Policy – ENP – in particular) is geared towards *conditioning* the Arab/Mediterranean side to deal with a number of issues – e.g. migration, security, the market, even the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. While that emerging “blueprint” spoke the language of democracy, it did not shy away from working with, coexisting with and even sponsoring dictatorship – or, at best, “competitive authoritarianism”.

This may be why the events of 2011 – the so-called “Arab Spring” revolutions – shocked the EU as much as they surprised Arab dictators. Since the 2011 uprisings and a decade of mostly frustrated aspirations across the Arab geography, what have we collectively learned?

The most obvious takeaway from these events points to the extreme distortions of the first version (pre-2011) of democracy promotion. However, policies, including resumed democracy (or governance, or “resilience”) aid to the Egypt of Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi, indicate that the lesson has not been internalised. Also, the code of Euro–Mediterranean coexistence continues to centre around *EU-defined* self–other reproduction. On what terms and codes and signs does it do so? On “European” imaginaries of development; of aid; of democracy promotion; of visa laws; of security; of migration; of trade exchange, tariffs and quotas; and of stability.

Abstracting and generalising the “Southern neighbourhood”, the South Mediterranean or MENA helps to mask the pains (marginalisation, socio-economic exclusion, political repression) and social-justice longings simmering within MENA’s “interior”. This positioning of democracy promotion within the specificities and particularities of the EU is a problem. It ignores or neglects the Union’s “others”. It overlooks structural power dynamics and relations, pitting the EU as the owner of democracy (with its attendant aid, morality, history and cultural kudos) against the MENA “other”. Such generalisation misses the details of local struggles and knowledge, effacing civilisational continuities. Local repositories of

imaginaries and experiences are written out of EU policymaking such as the Barcelona process, the ENP or migration policies. These processes are imbued with a brand of coloniality of power,¹¹ the constructs of which are prescribed in texts and subtexts naturalising the “MENA” in Eurocentric power relations and knowing.

Despite disparities and disagreements among EU members, we can identify the Union partly through its institutions: a Council, Parliament, courts and a foreign-policy apparatus. The EU’s “others”, however, are lumped together in so far as blanket democracy-promotion policies imply that all Arabs want or need the same thing – and this while EU “interests” retain primacy. A quasi-absence of contextualised policies grounded in localised understandings of the *internal, societal* dynamics among each of the EU’s “Southern Neighbours” foments processes that are almost anti-thetical to democracy.

What we see is, in effect, a co-optation desired by dictators who turn to the EU for a legitimacy that they lack domestically, precisely through democratisation policies that are formalised mainly with (mostly authoritarian) states to the neglect of important internal socio-political dynamics. It is as if the EU and Arab-state leaders are united in denial of such strains: the bottom-up pressure of protests, travails of refugees, dreams of migrants, miseries of the marginalised. The language of “stability” and “marginalisation” and sometimes amorphous “dialogue” prevails. There appears to be a kind of determinism built into the itinerary of EU-led democracy promotion. Conditionality is over-determined by the needs, instrumentalities, modalities and rationalities of the former coloniser. This perpetually delays the possible democratic futures, ways of knowing and attendant questions that persist, unresolved – namely, social justice via democratic pursuits.

The discourse and signage of democracy promotion may frame it in a fantasy of equality, mutuality and cooperation. These positive inflections sweep other problems such as unemployment, underdevelopment, trauma and repression under the carpet. Positioning democracy promotion as smooth, with achieved outcomes (water dams, training sessions, an-

¹¹ Anibal Quijano, “Colonialidad del poder y clasificación social”, in *Journal of World-Systems Research*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Summer/Fall 2000), p. 342-386, <https://doi.org/10.5195/jwsr.2000.228>.

ti-corruption campaigns) edits out polarities, oppositions and struggles. But the identities and strivings of the (formerly) colonised MENA are not neat. The world of the excluded is very chaotic indeed – heaving under the weight of inequality, sexism, elitism, nepotism, corruption and more. Decolonising democratic knowing necessitates a kind of disaggregation and socio-political contextualisation of the MENA: war-torn (Libya, Syria, Yemen), occupied (Palestine), monarchical (Morocco, Jordan, Arab Gulf states), militarised authoritarian (Egypt), transitional (Algeria, Sudan), “bankrupt” (Lebanon), and nascent democratiser (Tunisia, albeit with extreme setbacks since 25 July 2021).

6.3 TOWARDS A NEW “PEDAGOGY OF DEMOCRATISATION”?

What would a “democratising pedagogy” look like? This enquiry mandates questioning who owns democratic knowledge, what type and to what end. Only the oppressed can, after freeing him/herself, go on to free the oppressor, says Freire. To decolonise democratic knowing, therefore, both the former coloniser *and* the colonised must be liberated from this phantasm of democracy promotion.

The true question is: How do we denaturalise prevailing democratisation efforts in which the EU (or, analogously, the US) is the sole arbiter of democratic knowledge? For scholars, this means expressing and writing a new paradigm of democratisation with the benefit of over a quarter-century of hindsight. It means integrating critical input and critical creativities. The lynchpin of this type of search is *local democratic knowledge*.¹² For this, we require a “rupture” with the prevailing order – a state of affairs that suppresses the internal, holds endless summits and photo ops, and rolls out aid, tepidly allowing MENA “partners” a derisory share of the market (strawberries, tomatoes, visas, a few factories).

In order to do this, we must subvert the existing paradigm of democratisation and democracy promotion. Across the EU–Mediterranean divide, scholars and practitioners alike must seek out the “peoples” of MENA –

¹² Larbi Sadiki, “Towards a ‘Democratic Knowledge’ Turn? Knowledge Production in the Age of the Arab Spring”, in *The Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 5 (2015), p. 702-721.

not as objects but as agents in the process of transformation. Here, we must tap into the full gamut of organisational, mobilisational, ideational and material resources. We have all witnessed the rich panoply of agents; needs; and modes of agency, action and affect arising out of the Arab Spring. Scrutinising these collective experiences will be crucial to charting a new pedagogy of democratic consciousness – not a blueprint, but pressing questions provoking a guide map of sorts. This is the necessary “part two” of the decolonising trajectory, supplementing the critique of the Barcelona-era policies comprising “part one”.

It is by now widely acknowledged that the uprisings and revolutions of 2011 exposed the gap between the EU’s democracy-promoting rhetoric and its practical policies. The lapses, regressions and downward spirals seen since then further highlight the disjuncture between variegated popular yearnings and struggles confronting authoritarian recuperation and reactionary EU policies. Moreover, the Union seems to have no coherent strategy to confront democratic backsliding – from Egypt’s full-on military coup under Al-Sisi to Algeria’s containment of revolutionary actors and demands, to the Tunisian president’s consolidation of power and suspension of the constitution.¹³ Is this resignation to setbacks deemed somehow inevitable? As some of its member states criminalise assistance to “illegal” migrants,¹⁴ where do the MENA’s worsening structural, socio-economic and political inequalities fall on the EU’s radar? From Freire, we grasp the necessity of local knowing and the value of the informal. It is not enough that money flows to Arab non-governmental organisations in the context of the Arab Spring. Deep and bi-directional mutual engagement with (organised and less-organised) civil society is key. “Twinning” partnerships between cities and universities provide some examples that can be further developed and adopted.

It is time to revise not just the EU’s democracy-promotion “paradigm”/model but also its underpinning ontology and epistemology. The latter forms part and parcel of the pathology of democratisation, as theory and as practice. Admittedly, a new democratisation pedagogy faces long odds

¹³ Larbi Sadiki and Layla Saleh, “Tunisia’s Presidential Power-Grab is a Test for Its Democracy”, in *OpenDemocracy*, 28 July 2021, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/north-africa-west-asia/tunisi-as-presidential-power-grab-is-a-test-for-its-democracy>.

¹⁴ “Migrant-Friendly Italian Ex-Mayor Sentenced to 13 Years in Prison”, in *Deutsche Welle*, 30 September 2021, <https://p.dw.com/p/416nA>.

and immense challenges. These include the deep, structural power imbalances (economic, military, political) between the EU and the MENA. Resurgent authoritarianism in the latter region further complicates such a quest. However, such obstacles only make the democratic pedagogical imperative more pressing. Democratisation in the MENA did not yield outcomes and scenarios as per scholars' scripts and transcripts. Wouldn't it be wiser for us to ask whether EU-framed democracy promotion in the region has actually failed? If so, what is needed today is a bottom-up brand of a pedagogy of democratisation – one delineated by local dynamics that tap into *shared* spaces of deep learning and knowing of democracy. Scholars writing MENA-specific democratisation stories should draw insights from locales of struggle, resistance and democratic knowing – founded on a decolonising of monocultural and ahistorical conceptions of democracy.

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7.

Concluding Reflections: Decolonising Knowledge on Euro–Mediterranean Relations

Michelle Pace

When British rule began, says the Colonial Office, Palestine was primitive and underdeveloped. The population of 750,000 were disease-ridden and poor. But new methods of farming were introduced, medical services provided, roads and railways built, water supplies improved, malaria wiped out.

Daily Mirror, 14 May 1948.¹

Every year, on 11 November – the anniversary of the signing of the Armistice that marked the end of World War I in 1918 – commemorations take place across Britain. Remembrance Sunday – as this yearly commemoration is called – gives the nation a chance to honour Britain’s war dead.

But there remains a lack of an official, public commemoration of a legacy of World War I that devastated the Middle East: Britain ignores / forgets / chooses not to commemorate the end of its Mandate for Palestine in 1948. Britain’s role in the Palestinians’ *Al-Nakba* (or what for Israelis is remembered as the War of Independence) was pivotal. In the December before the Armistice was signed, General Sir Edmund Allenby’s troops captured Jerusalem and, following the end of the war, the League

¹ Quoted in James Rodgers, “Palestine and Britain: Forgotten Legacy of World War I that devastated the Middle East”, in *The Conversation*, 12 November 2018, <https://theconversation.com/palestine-and-britain-forgotten-legacy-of-world-war-i-that-devastated-the-middle-east-106408>.

of Nations handed over Palestine to British rule. However, in 1948 Britain withdrew, leaving the region's Arab and Jewish populations to fight it out. Jewish forces triumphed and the State of Israel was declared on 14 May 1948.

Although the Nakba is forgotten at state level, rallies and demonstrations have been held annually in cities across the UK and the Republic of Ireland to mark its anniversary. A lack of public commemoration suggests shame. After all, as Ramzy Baroud – who as a child grew up in a Gaza refugee camp – expresses it, “Balfour² had pledged my homeland to another people”.³

In the Maghreb, Algerians celebrate their independence each year on 5 July while recalling the heavy price that they had to pay in their quest for freedom from French colonial rule, which had left 1.5 million people dead. Algeria – a North African country with a Mediterranean coastline – provides a stark reminder of how the Mediterranean used to be a structuring feature of the French Empire.⁴ But have Algerians truly overcome the past, or does French influence still loom large in this North African country?

Similarly, as Western military forces withdrew from Afghanistan during the course of 2021, their departure raised long-term questions about Western foreign policy and its place in the world. The 20-year occupation of the Central Asian country drained its resources and left a legacy of energy shortages, economic crises, increased sectarianism and violence. Afghanistan has become a country of mass displacement: 10 percent of the world's refugees come from there.⁵

In the light of such amnesia, this conclusion draws three key reflections from this collection. First, how can Europe *unlearn* its underlying assumption about Middle Eastern and North African (MENA) countries

² The Balfour Declaration was a public statement issued by the British Government in 1917, pledging support for the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine. Arthur Balfour was, at the time, Britain's foreign secretary.

³ Ramzy Baroud, “How Britain Destroyed the Palestinian Homeland”, in *Al Jazeera*, 10 April 2018, <https://aje.io/harjf>.

⁴ Salim Hamidani, “Colonial Legacy in Algerian–French Relations”, in *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (2020), p. 69-85.

⁵ Lindsay Maizland, “The Legacy of the U.S. War in Afghanistan in Nine Graphics”, in *CFR Articles*, 17 August 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/article/afghanistan-war-taliban-us-legacy-graphics>.

– as primarily lacking their own agency – in order to learn how much Europe actually owes the Arab world (Daniela Huber [Introduction] and Lorenzo Kamel and Tamirace Fakhoury, this collection)? Europe clearly lacks a much-needed “openness” to learn (Rosita Di Peri’s contribution) – but with what consequences, and for whom? Many economically powerful Western countries made a good deal of money in Afghanistan, and have now washed their hands of the country and are looking for the next opportunity – to the detriment of the people of Afghanistan, especially women (Selin Çağatay’s contribution). Second, undoing coloniality will require a shift in recurring patterns of hierarchy and subordination, of domination and exploitation and the continual reproduction of these. Third and finally, what might such an atonement look like? One place to start is to turn our gaze towards “Arabopolitanism”: the manner in which people in the Mediterranean continue to decolonise Europe’s past. Can past and present models be reset in order to address the everyday life-worlds of the people of the Mediterranean in the future? This will require going beyond atonement towards a redressing and proactive re-balancing in future Euro-Mediterranean relations.

7.1 FROM AMNESIA TO RE-BALANCING?

What does it mean for the “West”, and Europe more specifically, to truly atone for its colonial past? And, can we imagine a non-colonial Europe in the Mediterranean region? These questions lie at the heart of this important collection of essays. Lorenzo Kamel concludes that to practically address these questions Europe needs to go through a process of “un-learning”, by which it revisits the manner in which history – and Euro-Mediterranean relations in particular – has been taught and learned. This will in turn require a humility in the manner in which the European Union now views the current global order. In this respect, it is quite telling that, in February 2020, Josep Borrell – High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Vice President of the European Commission for a Stronger Europe in the World – chose the language of geopolitical and geostrategic power to locate the EU’s role as a global actor when he stated, “Europeans must deal with the world as it is, not as they wish it to be. And that means relearning the language of power

and combining the European Union's resources in a way that maximizes their geopolitical impact."⁶

"Unlearning" from Europe's mistakes of the past will also entail an appreciation of the continent's "Oriental" connections: after all, it was the Phoenicians who had a profound and formative influence on Greek democratic configurations. In our exchanges with policy-makers, we therefore need to emphasise the distortions inherent in European assumptions that MENA countries somehow and somewhat lack democratic institutions – and that "they" rather than "we" are responsible for halting the process of democratisation in the region. We must facilitate questioning and raise curiosity about the way in which such assumptions ignore the historical trajectory of these nations and their colonisation by the "West" and its attendant legacies, as well as the consequences that this common colonial and imperial experience among MENA countries has had: stagnation at the moment of national independence with no progress towards liberation.⁷

Another European (orientalist) assumption about the MENA that requires serious unpacking is embedded in the idea of the *Arab mind*. As eloquently elaborated upon by Rosita Di Peri's contribution to this collection, this concept refers to an understanding of "a specific Arab mentality resistant to progress and modernity". By turning this assumption on its head, history teaches us that Western relative dominance of *policy-implementing* institutions (rather than *policy-making* institutions) lies at the heart of the MENA region's lost rendezvous with modernity. The eruptions of popular anger witnessed since the start of the Arab uprisings in 2010/11 were triggered by long decades of economic inequality in the MENA – significantly influenced by World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF) dictates – and testified to a broken social contract. The WB and IMF debt has been, and is still being, used as an instrument of subordination of MENA debtor countries.⁸ Moreover, since their creation, the IMF and WB

⁶ Josep Borrell, "Embracing Europe's Power", in *Project Syndicate*, 8 February 2020, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/embracing-europe-s-power-by-josep-borrell-2020-02>.

⁷ Mohamad G. Alkadry, "Reciting Colonial Scripts: Colonialism, Globalization and Democracy in the Decolonized Middle East", in *Administrative Theory & Praxis*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (December 2002), p. 739-762.

⁸ Ali Awdeh and Hassan Hamadi, "Factors Hindering Economic Development: Evi-

have not hesitated to support authoritarian regimes. Yet, despite the resulting police brutality, arbitrary arrests, intimidation, assassinations and smear campaigns, young people continue to return to the streets of cities like Algiers and Beirut to demand their basic human rights.

Larbi Sadiki's contribution to this collection draws our attention to precisely the urgent need for policy-makers to derive insights from the locales of such struggles, resistance and resilience. Such a move should in turn lead EU policy-makers in Brussels to revisit and reset the paradigms underpinning their MENA policies. Could Europe ask: what would it take to support active citizens in the MENA region? An inward looking, self-critique of the Eurocentric vision that looks at the Arab world as exceptional would be a good start here – as well as a critique of approaches and policies that are incapable of reading the historicity of Middle Eastern societies and the political actions of their actors. This will require an understanding of the logic of practice among ordinary people – in the MENA and in their everyday life – to survive and enhance their life chances. Protestors across the various Arab uprisings were not thinking in terms of revolution but largely in terms of reforming old structures and systems, and ways of doing politics.⁹

Selin Çağatay's contribution highlights ways in which such empowerment strategies must – out of necessity – be connected to MENA citizens' revival of positive memory and positive history, echoing Tamirace Fakhoury's reflections on refugees and their own positive agency. In other words, understanding MENA peoples' own power is the key to their empowerment. In terms of ruptures in colonial patterns of power and hierarchy in EU-MENA relations, a decolonisation of curricula and policies will necessitate the rethinking of binaries (margin and centre, north and south, developed and developing, etc.). To what extent do EU policies reproduce or challenge Eurocentric tropes in their treatment of the MENA region and the countries therein? If the MENA is accorded little agency in the making of the global political economy, the global society and the global political scenario, then the region is largely absent from our poli-

dence from the MENA Countries", in *International Journal of Emerging Markets*, Vol. 14 No. 2 (2019), p. 281-299.

⁹ Asef Bayat, *Revolution without Revolutionaries. Making Sense of the Arab Spring*, Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2017.

cies. Do EU policy-makers continue to exceptionalise the region as a failed one in terms of too little by way of democratisation, gender equality, economic growth and too much conflict, war and violence? How, then, can policies foster “ecologies of knowledge”¹⁰ in order to de-provincialise the Middle East?

7.2 ENTRAPPED IN AMNESIA AND NO WAY OUT?

EU policy remains amnesiac about the past history of colonialism: continual patterns of hierarchy and subordination, of domination and exploitation, and about how these are reproduced and challenged over time – not least, through the Arab uprisings since 2010/11. This is a less-than-ideal status quo, but a status quo nonetheless – and is obviously still preferable (to the EU) to rapid systemic changes. Although the European policies stemming from this status quo cannot be sustained in the long run, they are precisely the policies that Europeans continue to support in varying degrees – for example, when it comes to civil society or migration.

As the work of Saba Mahmood has taught us,¹¹ key transformations in societies happen when the drivers of such transformations do not self-consciously and avowedly aspire for “rights” and “freedom” in a Eurocentric, liberal sense. One area in which Europe could start would be the financing of non-governmental organisations (by European donors) that at the same time are subject to the surveillance of their own governments. Egyptian President Abdel Fattah Al-Sisi continues to engage in unprecedented domestic repression: Egypt is now the third worst jailer of journalists in the world, and is estimated to hold tens of thousands of political prisoners.¹² Thus, a decade after the Arab uprisings and the accompanying

¹⁰ Boaventura de Sousa Santos, “Beyond Abyssal Thinking. From Global Lines to Ecologies of Knowledges”, in *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)*, Vol. 30, No. 1 (2007), p. 45-89, <http://hdl.handle.net/10316/42128>.

¹¹ Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety. The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2011.

¹² Tamara Cofman Wittes, *Hearing on Egypt: Trends in Politics, Economics, and Human Rights*, Testimony before the US House Committee on Foreign Affairs, 9 September 2020, <https://www.congress.gov/116/meeting/house/110989/witnesses/HHRG-116-FA13-Wstate-WittesPhDT-20200909.pdf>.

domestic and regional unrest, the EU remains a crucial partner for Egypt (together with the US) – and this, in spite of Egypt’s rejection of paternalistic practices by any of these Western partners and allies. Herein lies a case of amnesia of empire – visible in the way in which the EU’s funding (for instance) seeks to restructure MENA civil society in ways reminiscent of colonial “social engineering” – and an amnesia of radical critique, stymied by both donor and governmental pressures. What Egyptians end up with is Al-Sisi’s counter-revolution with limited transformations, symbolic acts of economic liberalisation and a deep securitisation of Egyptian society.¹³ As Tamirace Fakhoury highlights in this collection, the EU’s migration governance in the Mediterranean, and its externalisation of border-management policies, is the current example *par excellence* of a re-direction strategy and the creation of an EU-centred form of “co-operation” that has been underpinning the Union’s Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, its European Neighbourhood Policy and its Union for the Mediterranean, to mention some cases in point. As witnessed since August 2021, human beings, including children, have been dying of cold and hunger at the Poland-Belarus border – a doorway to Europe for people fleeing war and persecution – as a result of “Fortress Europe”. People on the move are depicted as “being a crisis” for EU host nations – rather than finding themselves, as they truly are, “in a crisis”, mainly triggered (not just now but historically as well) by powerful Western nations themselves. And to add insult to injury, instead of atoning for its past mistakes the EU signs migration-mobility partnerships with authoritarian regimes in order to stem the flow of people seeking safety in Europe. Europe has in this way turned people into human currency: its power has become transactional. And MENA states hosting refugees have sought to negotiate “the value of their hosting capacity”¹⁴: they capitalise on the EU’s explicit policy of outsourcing asylum applications to its neighbours by lobbying for more “aid” or strengthened alliances, optimising their leverage as gatekeepers. President Alexander Lukashenko in Belarus has been watching and observing this situation – and has learned fast. States do, in fact, learn from

¹³ Giuseppe Dentice, “Egypt and the West: A Smarter Authoritarian Approach in Cairo”, in *Aspenia Online*, 13 November 2021, <https://aspeniaonline.it/?p=50573>.

¹⁴ Rawan Arar, “The New Grand Compromise: How Syrian Refugees Changed the Stakes in the Global Refugee Assistance Regime”, in *Middle East Law and Governance*, Vol. 9, No. 3 (November 2017), p. 298-312, <https://doi.org/10.1163/18763375-00903007>.

each other – especially those run by dictators. But even long-standing democracies like Denmark now seek to have “zero” asylum seekers and they dress up their policies in humanitarian language, claiming that they aim to prevent people from attempting the dangerous journey across the Mediterranean Sea to reach Europe and to undermine traffickers who exploit the desperate and vulnerable. In this manner, European countries continue to seek partnerships with countries in the Global South, which are seen as policy vessels rather than policy shapers.

A decolonisation of knowledge on Euro–Mediterranean relations necessitates calling urgent attention to such EU practices of burden-shifting and responsibility-shirking. Undoing coloniality requires shedding light on evidence as to how power differentials turn Euro–Mediterranean policies into questions of “complex interdependence” between the two shores rather than turning the mirror onto the EU project itself and what is happening *within* in terms of the Union’s normative foundations. On the one hand, the EU has an ongoing battle with Poland over the latter’s rule-of-law situation; on the other hand, the EU supports Poland in the latter’s violation of the principle of *non-refoulement* under international human-rights law. EU Commissioner for Home Affairs (2019–24) Ylva Johansson’s recent call for “more predictability and less of an ad-hoc approach” in member states’ migration and asylum policies¹⁵ is a telling depiction of both the challenge and urgency of implementation of the EU’s *acquis* for asylum (and associated safeguards) by member states and proper monitoring/enforcement by the EU of migration management. With member states going it alone in the area of asylum and migration policy, the EU is in danger of losing its global image as a normative, international organisation that embraces a rules-based cooperative framework. EU member states must work together to invest in a series of pragmatic, clear-headed measures for an effective migration and asylum policy that will ensure that those who are in need of international protection have the chance to escape dangerous and life-threatening situations.

¹⁵ Ylva Johansson, “Providing Protection to Afghans, Protecting Our Borders and Reacting to Reports of Pushbacks – A Week in EU Migration Policy”, in *#TimeToDeliverMigrationEU*, No.17 (10 October 2021), <https://europa.eu/!xMMhYp>.

7.3 TURNING TO “ARABPOLITANISM”: CITIZENS ARE DOING IT FOR THEMSELVES

In alignment with Daniela Huber’s articulate Introduction to this collection, on the EU’s own subject-positioning in its relations with the Mediterranean, I would like to conclude with a few reflections on what I will term the need for academia, the media and policy-making communities to turn our efforts onto Arabpolitanism – that is, the agency of MENA citizens in decolonising Europe’s past. From refugees in European host societies helping other newly arrived refugees to the increasing volunteer and activist initiatives led by “ordinary” citizens, our focus needs to be directed towards the emerging trend of citizen-led forms of helping others at, within and beyond the borders of Europe. What is happening exactly in these spaces? In her 2005 short essay “Bye-bye Babar (Or: What is an Afropolitan?)” (published by *Lip Magazine*), Taiye Selasi gives a face to a class of sophisticated, cosmopolitan young Africans who defy downtrodden stereotypes. Similarly, people across the Mediterranean – from Beirut to Algiers, from Rabat to besieged Gaza¹⁶ – continue to express their life and the resulting creativity and political attitudes in spite of the generational harm caused by direct colonisation and imperialism in the lands of their forefathers and foremothers. In their striving towards a radical critique and openness, Arabpolitans continue to produce diverse and creative visions in which people of Arab origin belong everywhere *equally* – including in Europe. What is crucial here is the recognition of Mediterranean peoples’ way of being.¹⁷ Young people across the Mediterranean need European countries to identify as former colonial powers that left a legacy of harm and violence in Europe’s southern neighbourhood; such atonement will encourage Mediterranean youth to rally, to argue and to hope for better societies. That is what has driven prior historical moments of global protest and democratic reform. Only when wealthy, former colonial powers like some of the European Union’s more prominent member states begin to nurture hope, rather than fear, will we see the re-

¹⁶ UNESCO, *Gaza’s Rising Stars Unleash Their Artistic Potential Through Theater*, 11 October 2021, <https://en.unesco.org/creativity/node/30078>.

¹⁷ See Achille Mbembe, *Out of the Dark Night. Essays on Decolonization*, New York, Columbia University Press, 2021.

naissance of youth creativity in Mediterranean politics and societies that Euro-Mediterranean relations, and the world, so desperately need.

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Abstracts

1. Pasts, Presents and Futures of Mediterranean Relations: The Role of the European Union

There is a growing quest, particularly among the younger generations in the Arab world and Europe, to shed a stronger light on real self-determination in light of Europe's colonial past and legacy, and to decolonise our knowledge. This engagement is still at an early stage, and yet it is of crucial relevance if we are to put Mediterranean relations on a more equal footing while setting the stage for a future of mutual understanding in a space that is growing ever more conflictual. This contribution investigates *how the EU has positioned itself as dominant in Mediterranean relations*. It does so by drawing on Meera Sabaratnam's work, identifying European epistemologies of ignorance, immanence and innocence and counterposing them to EU practices of dominance in the economic, migration and military spheres. The central finding is the need to unlearn in order to relearn – acknowledging, at the same time, the mutually empowering potential that lies behind this challenging process.

2. Decolonising Knowledge: A Euro–Mediterranean Perspective

It is time to foster a more entangled knowledge, to place also the 'others' at the centre stage, and to better understand 'ourselves' and the fluid world which we inhabit. How to do so? By analysing the process of accumulation ("knowledge piece by piece") which underpins some of the major achievements in human history; by opposing any form of "epistemic violence", while at the same time enabling the retrieval of different ways of knowing and a wider understanding of what de Sousa Santos defines

the “epistemologies of the South”; by allowing a much larger number of non-Western scholars to express their own ‘theories’; by deconstructing and tackling the assumption ‘that the West represents the centre of scholarship and the rest (usually Africa, Asia, and Latin America) fits the margin’. This chapter provides a brief contribution in these directions.

3. *Rethinking Coloniality Through the Lens of Refugee Norms and Histories: The Role of the Arab Middle East*

A vibrant literature on decentring and decolonising our understanding of migration governance in the Euro–Mediterranean space has recently taken centre stage. Even so, little emphasis has been placed on how host governments and communities have impacted on the global refugee regime, defined as the set of norms and institutions governing refugee flight, rights and protection needs. Against this backdrop, scholars have increasingly sought to flip the narrative – highlighting how refugee norms and practices also travel from the southern to the northern Mediterranean as well as the other way round. This contribution seeks to de-centre and then re-centre the debate on migration governance by shifting the gaze onto how states and societies in the Middle East contribute *on the ground* to diffusing refugee norms and practices. Drawing on the critical juncture provided by the recent Syrian displacement, it takes stock of how such norms and practices have affected the ways in which we understand the governance of displacement in the Mediterranean. To that end, the contribution approaches the Arab hosting state as a shaper of norms rather than a “refugee hosting vessel”. Secondly, it considers the landscape of humanitarianism in the Middle East as a site of inquiry for unmaking coloniality and, thirdly, considers refugees as protagonists of their own plight rather than mere passive beneficiaries. These three levels of analysis can be entry points to decolonise the debate on migration governance. The challenge, however, is how to give greater weight to the policy impact of these considerations than has been afforded hitherto.

4. *Turkey and Eastern Europe: Historicising Geopolitical Convergences in Gender Politics*

In the wake of Turkey's withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention and anti-gender mobilisations sweeping through Eastern Europe (and beyond), feminist and LGBTI+ activists invest their efforts in building transnational solidarity. Previously considered as belonging to different geographies historically and politically, the two contexts are now regarded, by activists and researchers alike, as having a lot more in common with regards to the status of gender equality and sexual rights. This contribution historicises the geopolitical convergences between Turkey and Eastern Europe by focusing on two instances in gender politics: (1) women's activism in Kemalist and state socialist periods, and (2) the NGOisation of post-Cold War feminist politics. Thinking the two contexts together through these convergences can help to go beyond national and regional exceptionalisms and foster the ground for East-East collaboration. The contribution highlights the need for developing in both contexts decolonial perspectives in researching struggles for gender equality and sexual rights against their fragmentation by Northern/Western European frames of reference.

5. *Studying Euro–Mediterranean Relations: A Socio-Economic Perspective*

The study of Euro–Mediterranean relations has been marked by a profound asymmetry due to the colonial past but also an orientalist assumption rooted in the concept of the *Arab mind* – namely, the existence of a specific Arab mentality resistant to progress and modernity. To contrast this assumption in order to reframe Euro–Mediterranean relations it is necessary to de- and re-construct research methodologies, a process that gained new impetus after the 2011 Arab uprisings. This process, we contend, is necessary not only to produce a clearer political and economic picture of the MENA region, but also to connect that picture to the social forces – movements, associations, political parties, but also intellectuals – which had been considered marginal before the uprisings. In so reframing Euro–Mediterranean relations, this view could also help thinking

synergistically to develop policies that consider the profound asymmetry between the two parties.

6. Decolonising Democratic Knowledge in Euro–Mediterranean Relations: Towards New Pedagogies

Democratisation calls for interrogation. The field, when applied to the Arab region, remains rooted in Euro-American knowledge practices. Widening the search, by considering it beyond the context of the Eurocentric reigning wisdom, warrants rethinking its use and utility via a decolonising brand of knowing, with special reference to democratic pedagogies in the MENA setting. Developing a critical account of democracy-making, the appropriation of democratic knowledge, this intervention seeks an epistemological dialogue with potentially useful strategies to decolonise democratisation, conceptually and practically. To this end, it attempts to contribute to denaturalising Euro-American assumptions and hierarchies. Such assumptions and hierarchies continue to be reproduced through brands of research practices of democracy pivoted around global, not local agendas.

7. Concluding Reflections: Decolonising Knowledge on Euro–Mediterranean Relations

In light of Europe's amnesia about its colonial past in the Mediterranean, this conclusion draws three key reflections from this collection. First, how can Europe unlearn its underlying assumptions about MENA countries in order to learn how much Europe actually owes the Arab world? Europe clearly lacks a much-needed "openness" to learn, but with what consequences and for whom? Second, undoing coloniality will require a shift in recurring patterns of hierarchy and subordination, of domination and exploitation and the continual reproduction of these. Third and finally, what might a reconstruction of relations look like? One place to start is to turn our gaze towards "Arabopolitanism": the manner in which peo-

ple in the Mediterranean continue to decolonise Europe's past. Can past and present models be reset in order to address the everyday lifeworlds of the people of the Mediterranean in the future? This will require going beyond atonement towards a redressing and proactive re-balancing in future Euro-Mediterranean relations.