

REVISITING AL-IDRISSI: THE EU AND THE (EURO)MEDITERRANEAN ARCHIPELAGO FRONTIER

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ABSTRACT

This contribution has three overarching objectives. First, it seeks to describe the logics of fracture and cohesion governing current geopolitical dynamics in the Mediterranean. Second, in the face of these contradictory tendencies, it proposes the notion of archipelago-frontier as a concept for deepening our understanding of an ever more dispersed and ubiquitous geography defining the Southern border of the EU. In this light we draw on the contemporary resonances of the destabilising cartographic imagination of Al-Idrissi (1100-1165). And we argue that, read today, it helps us rethink the current symbolic, terminological (and hence geopolitical) abduction of the Mediterranean by the European Union, which the very term ‘Euromediterranean’ encapsulates. Finally, the paper underlines the necessity of forging new vistas on the Mediterranean engendering perspectives that are more dialogical, plurivocal and sensitive to permanent transformation, as evoked by a long-term spatial as well as political horizon of struggle.

Key words: Mediterranean, European Union, Al-Idrissi, archipelago-frontier, fracture, cohesion, borders, cartography

[The Mediterranean] is not dogmatic or a priori, but syncretic and a posteriori, living from translations. It does not call out to burn its own roots, but to renew them through comparison with the other (Cassano 2010, p. 219; translated from Spanish by authors).

[Maps] empty out with age. Die and rise again, accordingly invested with new meanings, and always equipped with a secondhand memory (adapted by authors from Minh-ha 2006, p. 246).

INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, EU attempts to shape a more fluid model of co-operation and inter-

action with its so-called Southern neighbours have intensified, as evinced by the European Neighbourhood Policy (hereafter ENP) and its imbrication in the inertias of the Barcelona Process-Union for the Mediterranean. In parallel fashion, surveillance and fortification practices *vis-à-vis* the Southern external perimeter of the EU have also multiplied significantly. Both tendencies give rise to a dual spatial logic of cohesion and fracture, which extends over the entire Mediterranean border scenario.

Our observations of these apparently contradictory developments around the ‘Inner Sea’ are not isolated, of course. Critical scholarship tracking the contemporary transformation of Mediterranean space has been well underway

for the better part of the same decade (Albioni *et al.* 2008; Barbé *et al.* 2009; Jones 2011; Bicchi 2014; Buoli 2015). Recently, in charting the ‘spatial imaginations’ underpinning the European Union’s macro-regional planning visions for the Mediterranean, Bialasiewicz *et al.* (2012) have insightfully pinpointed the double-logic of both ‘hard’ and ‘aspirational’ approaches to territoriality governing the current re-making of Mediterranean space, tensions which they identify in the anatomy of the European project *tout court* (Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2012). While we are in general agreement with their description of the contradictory impact of EU action in/towards the Mediterranean (in terms of both the cohesive and fragmenting nature of EU policy in the region), we cannot subscribe to their causal analysis, one which attributes the ‘ambivalence’ between hard-territorial and boundary-transcending approaches to EU policy-making in the Mediterranean as an outcome of ‘often contradictory understandings of what regions are or may become’ (Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2012, p. 61; drawing on Braudel 1972). Such diagnoses, we argue, can shunt from view more historically rooted and structurally determined forces that have long shaped so-called (or better, wrongly called) Euro-Mediterranean relations, most notably that of European colonialism and empire. A deeper engagement with European empire and colonialism in/across Mediterranean space, as well as its ongoing postcolonial inflections, might offer a more normatively charged and politically productive imagining of a ‘Mediterranean alternative’ and complement one which notably gestures to ‘sinister echoes’ of twentieth century fascist and totalitarian regimes (Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2012).

Of course we are also not alone in signalling such a ‘postcolonial alternative’ for the Mediterranean’ (Giaccaria & Minca 2011; drawing on Chambers 2008; Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2012). But whereas Bialasiewicz *et al.* (2012) define the Mediterranean as an endless and inherently unmappable ‘field of tensions’, one ruled not by the laws of regionalisation-homogenisation but those of ‘pluriversality’, we suggest the Mediterranean today can be represented cartographically, its pluriversality expressed in maps, but not in the sense attributed by the modern cartographical imagination. To set the stage for such an alternative cartographical imaginary of the

Mediterranean, we begin by surveying both the cohesive, boundary-transcending as well as fracturing tendencies operating within Mediterranean space today, the former evinced most recently in the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), the latter expressed in the fortified methods of migration management operating throughout the so-called Euro-Mediterranean (why not Euro-African or simply Mediterranean?) theatre. Embedded within the force-field of these tension-filled dynamics, and the better to transduct their political voltage, we then turn to a ‘premodern’ map-making tradition emerging from the twelfth century Mediterranean, represented in its highest form in the work of the geographer Abu Abd Allah Muhammad al-Idrisi al-Hasani al-Sabti Al-Hashimi, or Al-Idrisi (1100–1165). In Al-Idrisi’s voyage across the Mediterranean to fashion a ‘planesphere’ and world-map (the *Tabula Rogeriana*) for King Roger II of Sicily (1154), we glimpse the lineaments of an alter-Mediterranean imaginary, one which re-positions ‘EU’rope at the margins of world-history, its subsequently subalternised, Southern ‘other’ made central in the proper envisioning of global space. In a second move, we identify the metaphor of the ‘archipelago-frontier’ as a key representational trope of Al-Idrisi’s *Tabula*, one which, we argue, may hold the potential to subvert the disturbing ghosts of the regionalist imagination still at work in EU-led macro-regional approaches to the Mediterranean. In our concluding sections, we draw out the political as well as theoretical implications of such an archipelagic imaginary for future critical geographical work on the Mediterranean. Finally, we argue that, read today, Al-Idrisi’s cartography challenges and helps us rethink what seems to be the current symbolic, terminological (and hence geopolitical) abduction of the Mediterranean by the European Union, which the very term ‘Euromediterranean’ encapsulates.

COHESION AND FRACTURE IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

Cohesion – The welcoming message on the ENP homepage (http://ec.europa.eu/world/enp/welcome_en.htm) emphasises that, since its launching in 2004, the ENP has transformed the relations between the EU and its

neighbours. The official discourse of the Commission emphasises a logic of co-operation, and underlines a willingness to construct bridges across the external borders of the Union, to expand the message of the EU beyond its walls. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the ENP contains an essential contradiction. On the one hand it blurs the limits between the EU and its neighbours by means of a rhetoric of shared geostrategic interests across the external perimeter of the EU. But on the other hand, it constructs and clearly marks the limit between member and non-member states (Anderson & Anderson 2007; Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2009; Kramsch 2011; Casas-Cortes *et al.* 2014). As van Houtum and Boedeltje (2011, p. 121) argue, with the inauguration of ENP 'it was as if the EU, after the enlargement of 2004 with ten new member states, wished to make clear that it had ambitions beyond that, and at the same time wished to make clear that it had no ambition to enlarge the EU beyond the invisible borders with Africa, the Middle-East and Russia. In short, it was as if the EU communicated the end of its membership territory, the end of the EU'.

The ENP represents, at the same time, one of the arenas of political action over which the EU deploys its strategy of externalisation of border/migration controls beyond its territory. Within this framework, neighbouring countries participate in the implementation and dispersion of EU bordering practices, sharing the burden of management tasks of migration flows towards the EU (Johansson-Nogués 2004; Casas-Cortes *et al.* 2013; Castan Pinos 2014; Ferrer-Gallardo & Van Houtum 2014). In this way, the EU's neighbours are invited to contribute to the reinforcement of the external perimeter of the EU – and to internalise, therefore, part of the Schengen agreement – while at the same time remaining on the margins of the regime of free EU internal mobility. In this way, as van Houtum (2010, p. 971) argues, 'in the context of ENP, border control as well as the erection of camps (for migrants) are tasks that are increasingly transferred to neighbouring countries. The Commission has argued on several occasions that it wishes to "share the burden" of migration control with those

countries. In this way, the countries of [migration] origin are converted into accomplices of the protection of the system, of the law and the EU' (see also Del Sarto & Schumacher 2005; Gabrielli 2011; Cassarino & Lavenex 2012; López-Sala 2015). The geopolitical dynamic of desire and rejection from the EU towards its surrounding geopolitical environment can be conceptualised as an assemblage of contradictory logics, one which is most clearly expressed in the wish to reduce 'difference' and homogenise the 'Other' (Kramsch 2011). Within the framework of ENP, the so-called 'neighbours' of the EU are invited to adopt a range of supposedly 'European' values in exchange for receiving preferential commercial treatment. In this context, the way of seeing the European Neighbourhood is unidirectional, given that the EU considers each country as if in an interchangeable series, lacking the reflexive agency to define those 'European' criteria which it purportedly has a monopoly over (Emerson *et al.* 2007; Boedeltje & van Houtum 2011; Kramsch 2011; Scott 2011). Moreover, with the ENP the EU promises to its immediate surroundings a horizon of 'everything but the institutions', in exchange for internal reforms ('good governance', 'rule of law', system of 'liberal markets', etc.). Nevertheless, the vagueness inherent in this vocabulary, the fact that the EU appropriates these terms as if they had their origin and most clear expression from within its territory, has the result of maintaining those countries that are supposedly neighbours 'at the margins' of Europe, without the possibility of acceding to that desired 'Europeanness'. This logic paves the way to what Casas-Cortes *et al.* (2013) have described as Europe's emerging geographies of non-accession integration. In the framework of this process of 'Europeanisation without Europe' (Escribano 2005), in the best case scenario one could achieve (as in the Moroccan case) the granting of an Advanced Status that would guarantee a 'privileged relation' with the EU (Martín 2014). As Castan-Pinos (2014) writes, in addition to gaining political leverage through rewards such as the 'advanced status', the main motivation for neighbours stems from the threat (institutionalised in Seville in

2002) that non-collaboration in the EU's fight against unauthorised migration may jeopardise their relationship with the EU.

Partly as a response to geopolitical upheaval in North Africa (Bauer 2013; Tömmel 2013; Hoh 2014; Jüneman *et al.* 2014), in May 2011 the Commission and the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy presented the joint communication 'A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood' (http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/fule/docs/news/review_en.pdf). The document transmits the Union's wish to deepen the logic of co-operation. Clearly influenced by events in North Africa (although not exclusively motivated by them), it contributes to a discussion on strengthening ties with the neighbours of the Southern Mediterranean already delineated in a prior accompanying communication (A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean; http://eeas.europa.eu/euromed/docs/com2011_200_en.pdf). The communication foresees devoting a large quantity of resources to partners committed to democratisation, aiding economic development more effectively, reinforcing the two dimensions (Eastern and Mediterranean) of ENP, and developing the necessary instruments and mechanisms in order to obtain these objectives. In this conjuncture, key actions considered are: to develop an association with societies, not only governments, and systematically assist civil society organisations; intensify judicial and police co-operation between Member States, in accordance with the Treaty of Lisbon; promote sustainable development and the creation of employment; strengthen commercial ties, by way of free trade areas; facilitate mobility via visa liberalisation; deepen sectoral integration by way of a unified European energy market; and more closely cooperate in critical areas such as environmental protection, climate change, information, communication technology, transport and security (see Beckouche 2008).

Nevertheless, despite the fact that the EU offered greater rapprochement and multi-level support to the Arab Spring in its subsequent communications (<http://ecfrmadrid.wordpress.com/2011/05/27/vecindad-el-desafio-mas-inmediato/>), the European monovision persists in the spatial logics of fracture and

cohesion that are projected onto the Mediterranean. In this light, we could argue that, by way of the ENP and with the Mediterranean as backdrop, the geopolitical practice of the EU demonstrates 'an ongoing and chronic inability to see the 'Other' other than as a reflection of the European Same' (Kramsch 2011, p. 197). We are indeed light years away from that moment, a little over a decade ago, when Strath (2000, p. 37) could confidently define the European Union as a 'set of commitments to redistribution and the environment with no geographical reference', a geopolitical entity ready to 'share these community arrangements [with any nation] provided they are committed to social responsibility and redistribution as well as to human rights'. In light of the foregoing discussion of ENP, such a vision rings increasingly empty; very few are listening south of Malta and Lampedusa. As Giaccaria and Minca (2011) remind us, the dialectics of homogeneity and alterity embodied in the ENP can be found at the origin of the modern colonial conceptualisation of the Mediterranean.¹

Fracture – In October 2005, hundreds of sub-Saharan migrants attempted to reach the EU by way of the land perimeters of the North-African cities of Ceuta and Melilla (see Ferrer-Gallardo 2008). Eleven migrants perished in the attempt, and many more were wounded by the sharp barbed wire that crowned the border fences. What occurred that day represented a historic tipping point *vis-à-vis* EU's immigration and bordering politics. Nowadays the borders of Ceuta and Melilla continue being paradigmatic examples of how the EU tries to seal off its outer perimeter in order to stop the arrival of migratory flows. However, over the recent years, both the landscape of EU border fortification and the number of migrant deaths have expanded. Ceuta and Melilla are not the only worldwide known icons of so-called Fortress Europe. Spaces like the Canary Islands, Lampedusa, Malta or the Evros river have joined the list see (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll 2014; Borg 2014; Cuttitta 2014; Loyd & Mountz 2014; López-Sala 2015). Entry points of irregular immigration have multiplied and diversified along the southern border of the EU.

The creation of Frontex in October 2004 responded to the EU's wish to co-ordinate and assist Member States in the management and control of its shared borders (see Neal 2009; Vaughan-Williams 2008; Van Houtum 2010). The actions of Frontex are inscribed in the logic of what López Sala and Esteban Sánchez (2010) identify as the 'new locus of migration control'. The agency operates in three differentiated spatial areas. First, within EU/Schengen territory; second, on the borders of the EU strictly defined; and, finally, beyond the external perimeter of the EU. The tridimensional nature of Frontex's theater of operations illustrates the complexity of the spaces of intervention and of the practices and policies of control implemented over a segmented, dispersed and archipelagic border architecture. These practices simultaneously expand inwards towards the interior and outwards towards the exterior of EU bordered territory. They take place, therefore, at source of origin, in transit and at point of destination. As described by Gil Arias Fernández, executive director of Frontex:

The integrated management of borders is based on the acknowledgement that what occurs at the border constitutes only a small part of what can be considered effective border management. Knowledge and control of what happens behind the border in neighbouring countries, as well as what occurs in the interior once the border has been crossed, is also of vital importance. Integrated management will only be possible if there exists effective co-operation between the large number of actors involved in the different phases of the process of border management (http://www.frontex.europa.eu/newsroom/press_pack/).

Through its Internet home-page, Frontex periodically takes stock of its activities and publishes its annual risk analysis. In parallel fashion, researchers and activists (such as Fort-resseurope (<http://fortresseurope.blogspot.com>), APDHA (Asociación Pro Derechos Humanos de Andalucía) Migreurop (<http://www.migreurop.org/?lang=fr>), Statewatch (<http://statewatch.org/>) United Against Racism ([\[tofdeaths.pdf\]\(http://www.borderdeaths.org/\)\) or the Human Cost of Border Control Project \(<http://www.borderdeaths.org/>\)\) critically survey the development of its operations, and underline that respect for fundamental rights of migrants is not assured at the external borders of the EU. The work of these latter groups enables filling in the gaps of official statistics on illegal crossings detected by border authorities with data on persons who perished in their attempt to cross the external borders of the EU \(data not always available in the official domain\).](http://unitedagainstracism.org/pdfs/lis-</p>
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The official discourse of Frontex and that emerging simultaneously from non-governmental observers conform a complex play of mirrors in the border scenario. This in turn sheds light on the cat and mouse geopolitics whose origins lie in the persistent and tenacious conflict between the controllers of the border architecture and those who seek to subvert it. In effect, it illustrates the power struggle over space established between the practices of sealing the EU's perimeter and the search for and production of openings by those who desire to cross it irregularly (see for example Tsianos *et al.* 2008; Johnson 2014; Casas-Cortés *et al.* 2015). It also reveals how the panoptic vision of the EU encounters its complementary shadow in the action of migrants – and their networks – which operate in the interstices of hyper-vigilant power embodied by the border authorities

An essential element in the development of the activity of Frontex is co-operation with countries over whose territory extend (or serve as points of origin for) irregular migration routes. Indeed, in the last years the policy of externalisation of migration control has effectively transformed countries such as Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia or Mauritania into buffer zones that reduce migration pressure on the external EU border (Wunderlich 2010; Bialasiewicz *et al.* 2012; Casas-Cortés *et al.* 2013; Castan Pinos 2014; López-Sala 2015). Built up largely on the basis of bilateral agreements (i.e. 'migration diplomacy'), the process of externalisation enrolls EU neighbouring countries (or neighbours of neighbours) in the task of protecting/securitising the external frontiers of the EU (Gammeltoft-Hansen 2011). Governed by the

logic of 'remote control' (Zolberg 2003) or of 'surveillance at a distance' (Bigo & Guild 2005), collaboration on matters of migration control takes place in exchange for economic co-operation and a more fluid and privileged bilateral relationship with the EU.² At an ever accelerating pace, the containment of irregular migration flows begins in the countries of origin by way of visa policies and campaigns of dissuasion (López-Sala 2015). Co-operation on migration control also envisions deploying border patrols of European states on the territorial land and/ or waters of third countries.

Together with the physical, bureaucratic and biometric fortification of the EU external border (on the one hand) and the externalisation of border controls (on the other), migrant confinement centres constitute an essential pillar of the current EU bordering regime *vis-à-vis* human mobility (Ferrer-Gallardo *et al.* 2014). These centres are part and parcel of the crafting of a new cartography of territories of exception where the discriminatory granting of access to the EU operates. Altogether, these spaces constitute what we have described elsewhere as an emerging EU-limboscape (Ferrer-Gallardo & Albet-Mas 2013). That is, a constellation, an archipelago of EU and non-EU spaces where EU purgatorial geopolitics *vis-à-vis* international migrants comes into force and where, at the same time, the transformative power of the political agency of migrants confronts the containment strategy of the EU *vis-à-vis* irregular flows (see Johnson 2014).

At the end of 2010, the turmoil of the Arab Spring – and particularly the breaking down of migration control measures that the EU had outsourced to the authoritarian regimes of Tunisia and Libya – changed this tendency. The rise in crossings over the central Mediterranean route (notably arrivals on the island of Lampedusa, see Bialasiewicz 2011), confronted EU policies of border and migration management with a fundamental challenge. As a response, Frontex decided to expand the operational area of Operation Hermes (See http://www.frontex.europa.eu/situation_at_the_external_border/art18.html). Flows across the central route reached their highest point during the second trimester of

2011, coinciding with the reduction of irregular crossings detected along the Eastern Mediterranean route (Frontex 2012). In April 2011, what we might accurately label a border crisis produced by the Arab Spring reached its climax, crystallised in the conflict over the Franco-Italian border crossing at Ventimiglia. Its consequences put into relief the complex nexus between the logic of fortification of the external perimeter of the Union and the logic of free circulation of persons at the interior of Schengen space (see Bialasiewicz 2011). During the same month, Italy and Tunisia accelerated the negotiation of an agreement on repatriation which resulted in a 75 per cent reduction in the flow of Tunisian citizens to Italy (Frontex 2012). This illustrates the crucial importance of bilateral agreements underwritten by different Member States with third countries. As Fargues and Fandrich (2012) highlight, apart from a short-lived movement from Tunisia, migration to the European Union was not accelerated by the Arab Spring. It actually continued along previous trends. Nevertheless, they argue 'migration within the Southern Mediterranean has been deeply impacted by the events as outflows of migrants and refugees fled instability and violence in Libya and Syria' (As Fargues and Fandrich 2012, 5; see also Seeberg 2013). The EU response, Frontex' Joint Operation Triton, (see Carrera & den Hertog 2015) did not stop the flows nor avoided an increasing number of migrant/refugee drownings in the Mediterranean sea.

THE CARTOGRAPHIC IMAGINATION OF AL-IDRISSI (ON THE NEED FOR UNTIMELY MAPS)

What is to be done in overcoming the distorting and exclusionary logics of fracture/cohesion that govern postcolonial Mediterranean space today? How to break out of the monovisual and unidirectional labyrinth of solitude from which the EU increasingly engages in paranoid fashion with the planetary diversity of its contiguous 'Neighbourhood(s)'? One way forward, we aver, is to propose the Mediterranean less as an object to be acted upon by an external power (be it the EU or

any other hegemon), less as a border between sovereign geopolitical blocs, than as a frontier made up of islands, an archipelago-frontier capable of assimilating forces and energies from either side without being reduced to them in any singularity. For us to achieve this vision of the Mediterranean, we further call upon the need to revert to ‘untimely maps’, the better to evoke the *longue-durée* of a Mediterranean horizon whose spatio-temporal limits remain unmappable in the current political conjuncture seen from either shore of the Inner Sea. Recourse to the untimely, as Derrida (1992) reminded us in his use of Valéry for addressing Europe’s conundrum some two decades ago now, is useful in our times as well, as it offers us a vital space to breathe, protected from the ‘urgency’ of spectacular detail, while taking stock of the present from the perspective of potentially revenant ghosts and shadows which may inform the lineaments of our near future. Indeed, there is a temporal and utopian aspect to all islands and thinking about islands; this is a treasure not exclusive to the Mediterranean, but it is an important legacy to which it can lay claim in these difficult times.

The untimely, or utopian, figure we turn to in thinking through the implications of the Mediterranean as archipelago-frontier is the twelfth century cartographer, Al-Idrissi. Al-Idrissi was born in the North African city of Ceuta in the early part of the century (see Figure 1). He studied in Cordoba, and then travelled across the Maghreb, the Iberian Peninsula and Asia Minor, taking notes on the geography and botany of the places he travelled through (Chebel 1993; Ducène 2008; Herrera-Clavero 2011; Brotton 2013). After that, at the age of 38 he was called by the Norman King of Sicily, to his court in Palermo, in the core of the Mediterranean. The King, Roger II, aimed using the scholar’s knowledge and personal experience to further his own political objectives. Once in Sicily, Al-Idrissi was entrusted the task of crafting a world map (or, planisphere) engraved in silver and to write the associated geographical commentary. The geographical compendium was entitled ‘The book of pleasant journeys into faraway lands,’ otherwise known as, *Kitab Ruyar*, or the *Book of*



Source: Keina Espiñeira-González.

Figure 1. Statue of Al-Idrissi in the EU/NorthAfrican city of Ceuta.

Roger. The book draws on Al-Idrissi’s lifetime of nomadic wanderings around the Mediterranean basin, and contains a small world map and seventy sectional maps.

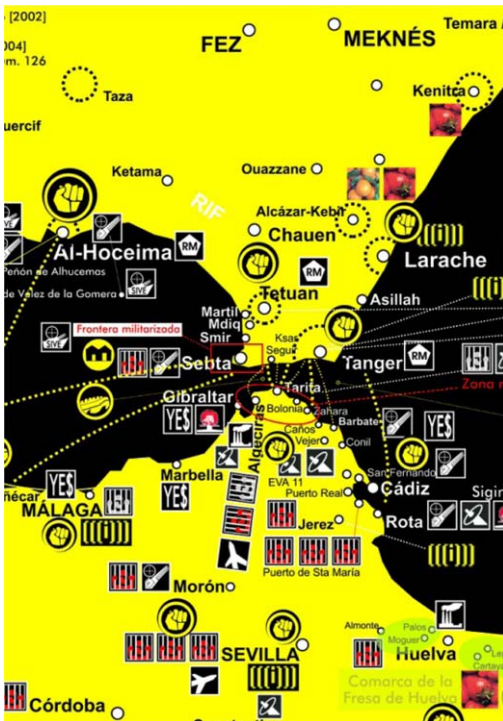
Working in Roger’s court, Al-Idrissi had access to a wide range of sources, and made use of some aspects of both the Balkhi and Ptolomaic cartographic traditions (Maqbul Ahmad 1987). For his *Book of Roger*, Al-Idrissi mostly drew upon an Arabic version of Ptolemy’s ‘*Geography*’. However, noticeably, in this map, ‘south is placed at the top,’ in tune with the trend/method followed by the Balkhi School of geographers’ (Maqbul Ahmad 1987) (see Figure 2). As Brotton (2013, p. 25) underlines, Al-Idrissi’s ‘book and the maps that accompanied it drew on Greek, Christian and Islamic traditions of science, geography and travel to produce a hybrid perspective on the world based on the exchange of cultural ideas and beliefs between different faiths’.

Today, Al-Idrissi’s map continues to speak to our geographical imagination. The image of the Mediterranean obtained in the *Tabula Rogeriana* (the map associated with the *Book of Roger* of 1154) is evocative (see Figure 3). Its orientation inaugurates a retrospective challenge to the contemporary Eurocentric



Source: <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:TabulaRogeriana.jpg>

Figure 2. Al-Idrisi's *Tabula Rogeriana* (1154).



Source: <http://fadaiat.net/english.html>.

Figure 3. *Cartografía del Estrecho* by Hackitectura.

visions/perspectives/readings and seeing of Mediterranean space. Adopting the South/North perspective characteristic of the Balkhian cartographic tradition (Maqbul Ahmad 1987), Al-Idrisi's map represents now a compelling visual/metaphoric disorientation of current hegemonic readings of Mediterranean space. Arriving quietly like a migrant at sea, 861 years after its creation, Al-Idrisi's map invites us to re-read the Mediterranean as a space of centrality.

Al-Idrisi's *Tabula* anticipates a broader medieval tradition devoted to the 'Islamic charting' of the Mediterranean (Soucek 1987). Expressed most vividly in the 'portolan charts' or 'portolan atlases' between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries, the 'sailing directions' of Piri Reis or of that of the al-Sharaf al-Sifaqsi family, both made at the height of Turkish naval power in the mid-sixteenth century, provide a rich iconographic imaginary of the Mediterranean that resonates with key features of Al-Idrisi's map while continuing to speak to core features of Mediterranean spatial dynamics today.

Several key features of Islamic charting and its concomitant Mediterranean imaginary can be distilled. First, as was the case with Al-Idrisi, the practice of Islamic charting was conducted through intense dialogue

with other Mediterranean models and methods of map-making, 'although the exact nature of this relationship is undetermined' (Soucek 1987, p. 264). Thus, despite subsequent attempts to shoehorn charts emerging from either shore of the Mediterranean – Catalan, Italian, Maghrebi or Turkish – into distinctive, 'national' traditions, in their criss-crossing, seaborne referentiality they escape any neat territorial ordering by source or origin, the latter remaining a mystery for scholars to this day.

Second, as reflected most notably in the *Kitab-I bahriye* (Book of maritime [or naval] matters), composed 1521 by the Turkish naval captain Muhyiddin Piri Re'is (1470–1554), the visual economy of the map is framed in a tense relationship with surrounding text. Piri Re'is understood that however indispensable a portolan chart could be, it lacked the flexibility of verbal expression. For this reason, he felt compelled to include in his maps discussions of storms and winds, compasses, astronomical navigation techniques, the world's oceans and lands surrounding them, European voyages of discovery, including the Portuguese penetration into the Indian Ocean and Columbus' discovery of the New World (Soucek 1987). In this way, through Re'i's texts the Mediterranean of the portolan charts is yoked to a much more global space, gesturing to other 'seas' that enter into contrapuntal dialogue with the 'inner sea' of the *Kitab-I bahriye*.

In a passage that would surely make Jorge Luis Borges smile (1984; but see also Kramsch 2011), the inadequacies of contemporary charts of the Mediterranean in comparison to their verbal descriptions are stunningly captured by Piri Re'is in his notorious lament over the lack of space for place-names on maps:

It is therefore impossible to include on the map a number of symbols, such as those showing cultivated and derelict places, harbours and waters, reefs and shoals in the sea, on what side of the aforementioned harbours they occur, for which winds the harbours are suitable and for which they are contrary, how many vessels they will contain, and so on.

If anyone objects, saying 'Is it not possible to put it on several parchments?' the answer is that the parchment would become so big as to be impossible to use on board ship. For this reason, cartographers draw on a parchment a map, which they can use for broad stretches of coast and large islands. But in confined spaces they will need a pilot (Piri Re'is, cited in Soucek 1987, p. 277).

Third, contrary to their European counterparts, who often identified themselves as well as the place where the map was completed in the book's colophon, the vast majority of Arab and Turkish artisan chart-makers preferred to remain anonymous, as their primary aim was not pecuniary reward but recognition by some imperial sovereign. Partially as a consequence of this anonymity, false attributions ran rampant, as revealed in the case of one copy of the *Kitab-I bahriye* being produced under fictitious authorship, creating a 'perfect illusion' that confounds scholars to this day (Soucek 1987).

Finally, and most suggestively for our purposes, the tradition of Islamic charts to which we allude took their cartographical 'point of departure' not from surrounding states or coastlines, but from harbours and islands, the latter visually set off from the rest of the map through the use of brilliant pigments (Soucek 1987). Description of the Mediterranean in the *Kitab-I bahriye*, for instance, begins with the island of Bozca (Tenedos), proceeds to canvas the Aegean coasts and islands on the Anatolian side as far as the island of Rhodes, veers west to encompass the islands of southern Greece, then the Adriatic coasts, making a counterclockwise tour of the entire Mediterranean before it returns, via the island of Kerpe (Karpachos) to the Aegean (Soucek 1987). The underlying 'island imaginary' of portolan charts naturally served the needs of the sixteenth century Ottoman war fleet, which relied heavily on the galley (*kadirga*) and the galliot (*kalite*). The very nature of warfare in the Mediterranean at the time of Piri Re'is also dictated by the archipelagic quality of his geographical imagination; Ottoman hegemony in the eastern Mediterranean was accomplished not by fleets facing off at sea, but by

the ceaseless capture of ports and islands (Pryor 1988). Battles usually took place in sight of land, and their success depended less on firepower than superior manoeuvrability (Guilmartin 1974). In sum, the overarching spatial imaginary of the Mediterranean in the medieval Islamic portolan codex is defined not as a region but as vast island-*archipel*.

THE MEDITERRANEAN ARCHIPELAGO-FRONTIER

The medieval Islamic cartographic legacy, we argue, can now be placed in dialogue with the counter-mapping actions of contemporary critical cartographers (see Herb *et al.* 2009; Dalton & Mason-Deeze 2012). As Buoli (2015) argues, the increasing awareness among civil society organisations of activists, artists and scholars, migrants/non-migrants communities, associations of professionals and traders around dominant European imaginaries, has been translated into complex relational landscapes and transnational social spaces across the Mediterranean. Within these overlying relational spaces, individuals and collectives perform practices of contestation and transgression *vis-à-vis* the external EU border regime.

This is the case of Cartographies of the Strait of Gibraltar, made by a network based in Andalusia and northern Morocco, including groups such as Hackitectura and Indymedia Estrecho. As part of *Indymedia* network (in the shape of *Indymedia Estrecho/Madiaq*) the collective has developed and designed, since 1999, a series of media and cartographic tools, border-specific representations, and on-line and on-site places of encounter and debate (Buoli 2015). This network of activist hackers, artists and architects created a map that rethinks the border between Spain and North Africa. Pablo de Soto, one of the authors argues that they sought to produce a 'magnetic', 'rebel' and counter-hegemonic visual product representing a 'contested' place where it was possible to act (Buoli 2014, pp. 118–119). Also referring to this work, Cobarrubias and Casas-Cortes point out (Herb *et al.* 2009) that instead of accept-

ing the border as a fixed entity that separates 'us' from 'them', this map conveys border relationships. This includes capital flows, policy networks and jurisdictions as well as migrant-flows and activist networks (Figure 2). The map ignores the geopolitical and epistemological borders naturalised as the dividing line of the sea. Instead, particular flows are followed across the Mediterranean, between Europe and Africa: the Moroccan government's foreign debt repayment, immigrant remittances, European corporate investment or cell phone and Internet coverage'.

Reflected in the map by Hackitectura, and as Giaccaria and Minca (2011 citing Chambers 2008) observe, the borders of the Mediterranean are, by definition, mobile and uncertain, more closely related to the idea of a 'European horizon' than that shown by modern cartographic projection, which traditionally places Europe as the firmly delimited centre and *cap* of the known world. Furthermore, standing before the waving, fragmenting and mobile curves of the *Tabula* – where Europe is viewed as merely a small Southeastern appendage of a large land mass attempting unsuccessfully to grasp the North African *massif*, we may well reconsider the nature of the Mediterranean border of the EU. It is notable that, from this perspective, and in contrast with what occurs at the eastern exterior edge, the Southern perimeter of what is now the EU lacks permanent linearity. Its disaggregated and dispersed character (Balibar 2004) obstructs its mappability, at the same time that it complicates its conceptualisation, and as a consequence, also problematises its management from a technical and political perspective. The border projects itself onto a smattering of territorially heterogeneous segments and fragments. In this way, the ever more volatile, liquid (and not exclusively European) character of the EU's southern margin impels us to grasp it as a diffuse chain of territories and to underline the inaccuracy of fixed conceptualisations of EU space. The dispersion that characterises the southern border of the EU invites one, therefore, to explore it from the perspective of an archipelagic optic. That is to say, not as a mere territorial line, but as the sum of disseminated territorial segments and fragments.

The island territories that form the Mediterranean archipelago-frontier constitute a space of (dis)encounter. In and through them, the tensions between the logics of fracture and cohesion which govern the geopolitical actions of the EU in relation to its Mediterranean neighbours are worked through without being resolved in any form of re-totalising unicity.

To help complement our understanding of Mediterranean space as seen from the lens of an archipelago-frontier, we turn briefly to the conceptual tools elaborated by the late political geographer Ladis Kristof. Kristof's work, we argue, helps us to deepen our understanding of Mediterranean space as an inter-cultural and trans-civilisational frontier. In an article written during the height of the Cold War (1959) which subsequently became a classic, Kristof distinguished analytically the term 'frontier' from the term 'boundary'. He referred to the 'boundary' as a juridical entity, 'abstracted and generalised in the national law', and for that matter disincorporated from 'people – people teeming, spontaneous, and unmediated in their daily activities on, along, or athwart the border' (Kristof 1959, p. 272). For the Polish author-in-exile, the term 'frontier', on the other hand, suggests a 'more sophisticated intellectual-political role' (Kristof 1959, pp. 279–280). It constitutes 'a zone of transition from the sphere (*ecumene*) of one way of life to another, and representing forces which are neither fully assimilated to nor satisfied with either [of the two spheres]'. On Kristof's view, frontiers are 'in contact with and willing to internalise currents from both poles' (Kristof 1959, pp. 279–280). 'They are not merely transitive but also transformative: like an electrical transformer they adjust the tensions of the two political voltages to permit at least some flow of current without danger that flying sparks will fire the whole house' (Kristof 1959, pp. 279–280).

As we have seen in the foregoing sections, we acknowledge that the currents of fracture/cohesion collide within the constellation of forces that constitute Mediterranean space today. But, following Kristof's 'frontier thesis', we must also recognise how the Mediterranean as frontier-archipelago absorbs a polyphonic constellation of strategies, desires and energies of multiple and various origin. The

reality of the Mediterranean archipelago-frontier, therefore, is forged on the basis of the spatial dialectic between cohesion and fracture, but is achieved on the basis of a plurality of views and interpretations which the EU's Mediterranean frontier itself conjures up as its very medium and presupposition. The interplay between the geopolitical practices of the EU on these territories, as well as the multiply constituted responses to those practices from an '*au dela*' of plural relations (Khatibi 1983), are crucial for understanding how the ocular regime³ of the EU with respect to its external Mediterranean frontiers is assimilated, refracted and transformed. This is indeed the hope and promise of the Mediterranean as archipelago-frontier: a space of transformation, whose long-term spatio-temporal-political horizon is open to a future which can only come about in dialogue with Europe's extra-territorial Other.

CODA ON EDGE

After the outbreak of the Arab spring, the EU continued adding layers to its discursive palimpsest of cohesion/assemblage *vis-à-vis* the southern shore of the Mediterranean: New and ambitious European Neighbourhood Policy (http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-11-643_en.htm), Partnership for Democracy and Prosperity Shared with the southern Mediterranean (http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-11-268_en.htm). The EU also reshaped its Global Approach to Migration (http://ec.europa.eu/home-affairs/news/intro/docs/1_EN_ACT_part1_v9.pdf), thus renamed Global Approach to Migration and Mobility (GAMM) (see Collyer 2012), emphasising the need to encourage certain forms of mobility through its external borders. On the other hand, these strategies were coupled with a harsh and discriminatory realpolitik of border reinforcement and the obstruction of free mobility to the vast majority of citizens of neighbouring countries. In this light, in this contribution to the dossier we have argued that the perpetuation of the EU's opposite but complementary logics of fracture and cohesion, and most importantly its

uncritical unidirectional vision and discourse have a direct consequence: the reinforcement of an ossified/rigid imagination of the Mediterranean which betrays a long plural historical tradition of cultural and political fluidity.

This is why we argue that Al-Idrissi can help us recall that our own intellectual production as border scholars of/on the Mediterranean is located within a set of contradictory space-time relations which striate our work with important political as well as theoretical effects. For, as in the time of Al-Idrissi, viewing Europe through a 'Southern optic' today does not come without its own difficulties; just as Al-Idrissi's book was subsequently instrumentalised by Roger II in the service of anti-Muslim geopolitical objectives both on the Iberian Peninsula and in North Africa, we need to be perpetually attentive to the ways such views can be manipulated, eviscerated and detoured so as to strengthen Eurocentric policies and practices. The danger remains: as much as we seek to give voice to that 'old Southern feeling' (Dainotto 2007), to Europe's eternal 'Other, such a move can only too easily be recuperated as simply the latest and most advanced edge of a supremely centred form of European self-understanding, in which Europe's margins are, once again, made derivative and dispensable.

So, in this light, revisiting Al-Idrissi's cartography is useful in order to actively disorientate European monovisual practices expressed in the contemporary geopolitical action of the EU onto Mediterranean space. Al-Idrissi helps remind us of a heritage of trans-Mediterranean movement, cultural encounter and intellectual cross-fertilisation that risks being lost in the rush to assert a new global epistemology of/from the 'South', with the attendant risk of creating new problematic hegemonies that do nothing to overcome the Mediterranean's seemingly eternal binary enframing. Finally, Al-Idrissi helps us keep the space of the Mediterranean open as an unfinished horizon, whose long-term spatio-temporal lineaments we cannot yet imagine, but which remain for the imagining.

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Gallardo & Kramersch (2012). The authors would like to thank the editors of this special issue for the opportunity to join in the endeavour.

Notes

1. But as early as 2000, even Strath was aware of this danger. At the end of his Europeanist, *bien pensant* and 'institutionalist' introduction (generously funded by the European University Institute), he wonders aloud: 'In what respects is the new wave of moralism different from the old colonial/imperial gunboat diplomacy?' (Strath 2000, p. 191). In what respects, indeed?
2. On the basis of the revolts and revolutions initiated in North Africa in October, 2010, such bilateral agreements, especially those reached with Tunisia and Libya, have had to be reconfigured/renegotiated.
3. The term 'ocular regime of modernity' finds its origins in the work of critical theorist Martin Jay. Jay is inspired by the term to describe the ever more diffused power in eighteenth century Europe of a political rationality of the state in relation to the citizen (Jay 1993). This power would express itself most succinctly in technologies of surveillance, directed as much at individual bodies as society in its totality. In this theorization, the work of Michel Foucault would have an enormous influence.

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