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DECOLONIZING THE SPACES OF EUROPEAN FOREIGN POLICY: VIEWS FROM THE MAGHREB

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Decolonization

Economic development

European neighbourhood Programme

Morocco

pensée autre

Postcolonial horizon

Tunisia

.....

This essay calls for a decolonization of European foreign policy in the Maghreb. Specifically, it identifies neo-Orientalizing dynamics within the EU foreign policy-making apparatus by tracking the contradictory and fragmenting effects of the European Neighbourhood Programme (ENP) on the promotion of economic development in Morocco and Tunisia. Drawing on sustained fieldwork conducted by one of the authors in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in both these countries, and inspired by a mid-twentieth century intellectual legacy emerging in and from the Maghreb, the essay proposes an “other thinking” (pensée autre) capable of refiguring the Europe–Maghreb relation beyond the stalemate offered by ENPI. Such a rethinking, it is argued, would consider more explicitly the presence of political Islam as a vector of economic development in ways that restage the Euro-Maghreb as a postcolonial horizon rather than a fixed border between self-sufficient geopolitical entities.



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Le Maghreb radicale demeure impensé. (Noureddine, Khatibi, and Meddeb 1977, 5)

Decolonizing European foreign policy

Recent years have witnessed an increase in studies on external perceptions of the European Union (e.g. Lucarelli 2007; Fioramonti and Poletti 2008; Laidi 2008; Lucarelli and Fioramonti 2010; Bachmann 2012; Chaban et al. 2013). While this body of literature has opened insightful pathways for thinking about EU external relations beyond earlier territorial determinisms and has undeniably brought valuable insights into the macro-dynamics of EU external policy-making, the approach it deploys, in its overall effect, continues to reinscribe a static, homogeneous and Eurocentric view of that “external” world to which it is purportedly “relating”. An underlying reason for this limitation is that research on EU foreign policy has been heavily influenced by largely inward-looking EU-specific approaches (among them integration, Europeanization or socialization), including concepts of power (e.g. smart, soft, civilian, transformative or normative power) that have crowded out an epistemological terrain without adequately addressing the appropriateness of these indicators for non-western societies (Telò 2001; Smith 2004; Phinnemore 2009).

More recently, a number of scholars working in the field of political geographies of Europeanization, as well as critical international relations, many of whom share a long-standing interest in postcolonial theory, have cast doubt on the usefulness of such Euro-centred concepts (Jones 2006; Bhabra and Shilliam 2009; Nayak and Selbin 2010). In the main, these literatures argue that the above-mentioned approaches, while being sourced originally in western literatures, continue to ignore the vital significance of socio-spatial differences in international relations, particularly when addressing Europe’s current attempts to engage with external territories once constituting its colonial possessions (Inayatullah and Blaney 2004; Edkins and Zehfuss 2009). Despite attempts to train attention on non-western views of Europe, these scholarly movements, we suggest, continue to be plagued by blind spots regarding micro-social factors, postcolonial historical legacies and associated political struggles. As Moisio et al. (2012) have observed in setting an ambitious agenda for mapping external perceptions of the European Union:

Such articulations, often calling upon an integrated/integrating Europe to play a lead role in world politics, tend to forget Europe’s imperial history characterized by the belief that Europe was the “most civilized and best governed of all the world regions” ... and therefore has the right to “teach” its model of political and economic organization to the rest of the world. (Moisio et al. 2012, 747)

This claim resonates strongly with that made a decade ago by Hooper and Kramersch, who, in canvassing lacunae in EU-oriented scholarship, concluded:

The result is a geopolitical analysis which not only precludes recognition of the spatiotemporal complexities of empire, but masks Europe's current complicity in the production of exploitative and oppressive relations within as well as beyond its newly minted frontiers. (Hooper and Kramersch 2007, 527)

These passages suggest that beyond the obvious need to continue mapping external perceptions of the EU's external role and its representations abroad, it is imperative that we develop perspectives from those very "frontiers" that have historically defined Europe's imperial contact zones, the better to identify potential pathways of empowering political transformation in the renewed articulation of "Europe" and its multiply constitutive outsides. Rather than serve only to clarify "what the EU 'is' – and what it is 'for'" (Moisio et al. 2012, 749), thereby recentring Europe as the primary analytical signifier, we strive for a perspective which, from the very borders of Europe, produces an orphan knowledge (*savoir orphelin*) which cannot be tamed as a form of Europe-centred desire and development. This move would of necessity require that we "return the gaze" upon Europe (Biebuyck and Rumford 2012; Nafafe 2012; Andersen, Kramersch, and Sandberg 2015), but this time through the lens of a "double critique" (Khatibi 1983), one which not only problematizes the long-standing Orientalist discourses of the West, but also unsettles identitarian and religious foundationalisms emerging as counter-reactions from the global South.

It is against the backdrop of this wider political-cum-epistemological project that the conceptual contours of our essay are shaped. In so doing, we are inspired not only by contemporary postcolonial theorizing (Chakrabarty 2000; Mignolo 2000; Chatterjee 2004; Abrahamsen 2007; Kapoor 2008; Boatca and Costa 2010; Sabaratnam 2011), but draw as well on the foundations of an older intellectual legacy emerging from the Maghreb in the mid-to-late-1970s, a tradition deeply concerned with the project of intellectual decolonization in relation to European colonial modernity (Khatibi 1977, 1983; Meddeb 1977; Noureddine, Khatibi, and Meddeb 1977; Buc-Glucksmann et al. 1987). The urgency and relevance of pursuing research on EU external relations along these "Maghrebian" lines has been further underscored by the extraordinary events leading up to the Arab Spring in 2011 and the unspooling of its chaotic, repressive aftermath. These events, we argue, have had significant recursive effects on the production of postcolonial theory itself, particularly within critical human geography. Indeed, it is against the backdrop of a global turn towards militarized and authoritarian governance that the "subaltern stakes" of postcolonial theory have recently been questioned *tout court*, leading some geographers to call attention to

“forgotten”, regionally specific postcolonial traditions offering a more grounded perspective than that offered by the increasingly disconnected abstractions of the postcolonial canon (Sidaway, Woon, and Jacobs 2014; see also Brennan 2014). At a moment, then, when the very foundations of postcolonial theory appear to be shaking, our intervention aims to answer that call by offering a regionally inflected, decolonial perspective on European foreign policy, attending to the critical perspectives of those on its receiving end.

In light of this broader agenda, we argue there is a need for a radical paradigm shift in EU foreign policy, one that would problematize and deconstruct normative assumptions and well-established preconceptions regarding a range of so-called European values, values on the basis of which entire societies located on Europe’s margins are judged and around which preferential relations with the EU are established. Nowhere is this dynamic on display more vividly, we aver, than in relation to the EU’s latest foreign policy initiative, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Our purpose therefore is not to provide an overview of EU foreign policy *in toto*, but rather to examine its economic/development aspects in the Maghreb within the context of its latest foreign initiative, the ENP. Our understanding of EU foreign policy thus extends beyond conventional foreign policy analysis, one which would mainly consider the intergovernmental second pillar of the EU – the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) – while ignoring its other dimensions (trade or development). In light of our conceptual framework, the difference between EU foreign policy and external relations is not important, as they are perceived to be inextricably linked. Whereas EU economic and development policies have evolved within the European community framework, they have also shaped EU foreign policy, and as such represent an important dimension of the latter.

Against the backdrop of the ENP policy domain, we would like to develop our argument beyond the circumscribed limits drawn by European studies, in showing how the EU is reproducing neo-orientalism in its encounter with the Maghreb. We begin by canvassing a conceptual terrain that contextualizes modern practices of EU external governance within a *longue durée* that of necessity implicates European colonial modalities of othering. In order to draw out the socio-spatial consequences of these practices for EU–Maghreb relations more broadly, we begin by exploring Edward Said’s work on the “geographical imaginations” of European colonial power, an imaginative practice which had the effect of folding space into difference along an axis of graduated inferiority. We then address contemporaneous critiques of the Saidian framework, and propose that in order to grasp the stakes of Europe’s contemporary relationship with the Maghreb we must draw on a body of thinking *from* the Maghreb that attempts to work beyond the b/ordered Orientalizing categories of Us–Them, East–West and Occident–

Orient which lay at the heart of the Saidian analytical enterprise. Inspired by the work of Moroccan sociologist/poet Abdelkebir Khatibi, we explore the possibilities inherent in a “double critique” (*pensée autre*) that serves to deconstruct categories emerging from both shores of the Mediterranean. On this view, the articulation of Europe and the Maghreb, we suggest, appears not so much as a reflection that clarifies the nature of a preexisting geopolitical entity (whether it be “Occident” or “Orient”, “Europe” or the “Maghreb”), but as a *dynamic postcolonial horizon* that reawakens on Europe’s southern frontier the promise of a “spatial turn” thus far held in abeyance both in critical border studies and Europeanization studies broadly (Khatibi 1977; Lois 2014; Andersen, Kramsch, and Sandberg 2015).

In order to illuminate the workings of our conceptual framework, we draw on extensive empirical fieldwork carried out in Morocco and Tunisia¹ by one of the authors prior to and after the Arab Spring. Such fieldwork encompassed approximately sixty interviews, including a diversity of governmental officials as well as civil society groups, including political and economic grassroots activists, religious leaders, NGOs and social movements, as well as daily observations. Most interviews were conducted in French, with the exception of Islamic/Islamist informants, who preferred to speak Arabic. The main aim of open-ended interviews was to map the perceptions, attitudes and contestations of Maghrebi elites towards EU/western socioeconomic policies in the region. Due to the aggravated security situation in Tunisia after the Arab Spring, the author had limited access to Islamist informants, who were either under surveillance by the state security apparatus or who no longer trusted any foreign researcher. Fieldwork in Tunisia was influenced by a series of political events, frequent arrests as well as a deep and emerging divide between secular and religious segments of Tunisian society. This situation resulted in an uneven harvest of data from Morocco and Tunisia, perhaps offering the impression of unequal and selective treatment of available empirical evidence. Rather, we believe the available fieldwork material adequately illuminates the problems, contradictions and aporias of European silencing practices in the Maghreb, as revealed in our theoretical framework.

To illustrate our argument, we examine a contested area in which the EU has sought influence in shaping internal societal dynamics across the Maghreb: socioeconomic development. Our findings will be used not only to pose the problem of EU neo-orientalizing practices vis-à-vis Morocco and Tunisia, but also more vitally to clear a new space for thinking the EU–Maghreb relation from the perspective of a “difference” that cannot be recuperated or tamed. It is in revealing the recalcitrant spatiality of that *différence intraitable* or *différence sauvage* (Khatibi 1983, 39) between Europe and the Maghreb that we seal our closing arguments.

1 Bohdana Dimitrovova conducted a first round of interviews in Morocco (= 50) between March and June 2010 and again in April 2013. Interviews in Tunisia were conducted in March 2014. Interviews focused on civil society organizations, political activists, journalists, academics, government officials, parliamentary deputies and staff at EU embassies, as well as the EU delegation.

Disorienting orientalism

Orientalism can be discussed and analysed as the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient – dealing with it by making statements about it, authorizing views of it, describing it, by teaching it, settling it, ruling over it; in short, Orientalism as a western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient. (Said 1978, 8)

Et nous sommes toujours en train de nous demander: de quel Occident s’agit-il? De quel Occident opposé a nous-meme, en nous-memes? Qui, nous-memes, dans la décolonisation? (Khatibi 1983, 14)

As revealed in the first quotation above, Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism was developed to denote the entire historical range of discursive practices emanating from Europe on/about that region historically constituted as “the Orient” (Said 1978). Through its mobilization of orientalist “imaginative geographies”, Europe would be in a position to render the Orient exotic, strange and mysterious, and thus ripe for conquest by rational, beneficent and disinterested colonial powers. In this way, colonial power/knowledge would manage to fold space into difference along a spatiotemporal axis with Europe placed at its apex (Gregory 1995). Space limitations foreclose a lengthy treatment of the myriad critiques spawned in the wake of Said’s magnum opus, *Orientalism* (1978), including his supposedly insufficient treatment of political economy and class relations under colonialism (Ahmad 1992; Dirlik 1994, 1996), or the contradictions engendered by his privileged location within the very western academy he criticized. For our purposes we focus on the most substantial critique of Said’s *oeuvre*, one which centres on his totalizing, homogenizing and culturalist modes of analysis, which in the words of James Clifford (1980) “sometimes appears to mimic the essentialising discourse it attacks”. It has been repeatedly argued that Said falls into the trap of reproducing the same discourse he is criticizing while inverting the existing hierarchies of knowledge (Richardson 1990). Said did later recognize his tendency to portray Orientalism as a unifying and monolithic concept, while insisting on the reciprocal relationship between colonial knowledge and colonial power (Said 1993).

Significantly, by exposing the essentialist character of power/knowledge production under imperial conditions and by dichotomizing the relationship between oppressed and oppressor, Said would be taken to task for underplaying the myriad ways in which “the West” would be internalized by those non-western peoples on the receiving end of colonialism, as reflected in the second epigraph to this section. On this, Stuart Hall wrote powerfully:

Not only, in Said's "Orientalist" sense, were we constructed as different and other within the categories of knowledge of the West by those regimes. They had the power to make us see and experience *ourselves* as "Other". (Hall 1990, 225)

Hall's Caribbean sensitivity to the Moebius-like psycho-spatialities of colonial power brings us very close to the sensibilities of the Moroccan sociologist, novelist and poet Abdelkebir Khatibi. At the beginning of his magisterial *Maghreb pluriel* (1983), Khatibi writes:

If, therefore, Occident inhabits our most intimate self, not as an absolute and devastating exteriority, nor as an eternal domination, but as a difference, a conglomerate of differences to be posed as such in all thinking about difference from whatever its source; if, then, Occident (thus named, thus located) is not a response to an incalculable exile, then all remains to be thought: silent questions that suffer in us ... (Khatibi 1983, 12; translated from French by authors)

Si donc l'Occident habite notre être intime, non point comme une extériorité absolue et dévastatrice, ni comme une maîtrise éternelle, mais bel et bien comme une différence, un conglomerate de différences à poser en tant que tel dans toute pensée de la différence de d'où qu'elle vienne; si donc l'Occident (ainsi nommé, ainsi situé) n'est pas la réaction à un désarroi incalculé, alors tout reste à penser: questions silencieuses qui souffrent en nous ...

Khatibi's answer to the depressions and humiliations wrought by colonialism's rule is in the form of what he terms a "double critique" (*pensée autre*), which signals a form of thinking that "disorients" the Saidian Orientalist vision:

Let us engage with what is *presented* before us and let us attempt to transform it according to a double critique, that of this western heritage and that of our own patrimony, so theological, so charismatic, so patriarchal. A double critique: we believe only in the revelation of the visible, the end of all celestial theology and of all fatal nostalgia. (Khatibi 1983, 12; translated from French by authors)

Engageons-nous d'emblée dans ce qui est *réalisé* devant nous et essayons de le transformer selon une double critique, celle de cet héritage occidental et celle de notre patrimoine, si théologique, si charismatique, si patriarcal. Double critique: nous ne croyons qu'à la révélation du visible, fin de toute théologie céleste et de toute nostalgie mortifiante.

Through such a double critique – both of western metaphysics and Arab Islamic fundamentalist tradition – Khatibi restages the Maghreb as a

horizon for thought (“comme horizon de pensée”), as a geo-philosophical site capable of taking part in global affairs on its own terms:

We would need to think the Maghreb as it *is*, a topographic site between the Orient, the West and Africa, in such a way that it may world on its own terms. (Khatibi 1983, 38–39; translated from French by authors)²

2 As if to nail home the point, Khatibi adds:

Il faudrait penser le Maghreb tel qu’il *est*, site topographique entre l’Orient, l’Occident et l’Afrique, et tel qu’il puisse se mondialiser pour son propre compte.

qui, parmi-nous – groups et individus – a pris en charge le travail effective-ment décolonisa- teur dans sa portée globale et décon- stitutive de l’image que nous nous faisons de notre domination, exogene et endo- gene? *Nous sommes encore a l’aube de la pensée mondiale.* (1983, 16; emphasis added)

Maghreb-as-horizon, for Khatibi, is that of an “awakened margin” (“une marge en éveil”) (17), a space of untamed difference (“différence intraitable”) and plural thinking (“pensée pluriel”) whose historical determinations can never be returned to any ontological foundations of Being rooted either in western metaphysics or Islamic theocratic traditionalism (“du non-retour a l’inertie des fondements de notre etre”) (12).³

Khatibi, of course, would not be alone in staging the Maghreb as a site of worldly plurality. Writing just a decade after *Maghreb pluriel*, Algerian-born Réda Bensmaïa channels the work of the Algerian poet Nabile Fares so as to speak from an “edge, in a margin or marginality where borderline phenomena ‘open up’ the Mediterranean rather than delineate its closure” (Bensmaïa and Curtiss Gage 1993, 45). Bensmaïa positions Fares’ work within his generation’s collective project of overcoming the “cultural void and blindness” of the postcolonial Algerian state, one which attempts to reduce Algeria to one race, one language, one faith, thus denying the rich and heterogeneous ethnic, religious and linguistic heritage which makes up its “reality”.

More than three decades on from when this sentence was written, we still remain at the dawn of this kind of thinking. The double critique attempted here of EU–Morocco relations is our attempt to “take charge” of the legacy of Khatibi’s grand and generous gesture, albeit in a radically transformed geo-his- torical context, for the Maghreb, and the world.

Rather than affirm Kabyle identity as an indissolubly minoritarian difference, counterposed to a majoritarian state, Bensmaïa supports Fares’ attempt to craft a “third” position, a “middle ground, the grey areas between these poles” (1993, 53). For Bensmaïa, this space is constituted by “the Neutral”. The Neutral represents a “position that calls into question the forces that lock Master and Slave into a fight to the death”. It is also a position that keeps a certain “distance” from everything that tends to characterize protagonists rigidly and definitively as “adversaries or predetermined subjects in opposition: Algerian vs. Kabyle, European vs. Oriental, man vs. woman, Self vs. Other” (53; for use of *le neutre* in an Amazonian setting, see Kramsch 2012). In dialogue with Deleuze, but more significantly forming a *bloc d’alliance* with other minoritarian movements – black Americans, Sah- raouis, opponents of Franco, Algerian émigrés, Palestinians – Bensmaïa, like Khatibi before him, argues for “the simultaneity of a double movement” (1993, 63), one which allows him to escape both the majoritarian pressures of his own ethnic community (Kabyle as well as that of the majoritarian Algerian

3 Drawing on the work of Tahar Ben Jelloun, Jacques Derrida and Boualem Sansal, the Utrecht- based scholars Birgit

Kaiser and Kathrin Thiele have recently recuperated the idea of “the possible horizon of an other of the heading” for Europe (2016, 273), one which resonates strongly alongside Khatibi’s notion of the Maghreb as a “thought horizon”. In both instances what is yearned for is “another ‘logic’ ... that departs from (this or that) direction, without falling for yet (merely) another heading” (Kaiser and Thiele 2016, 273). In this double movement, perhaps

state). Bensmaïa names the resulting identity “becoming minoritarian” of the Algerian subject, one which has as end goal “separating Algeria – and the entire Maghreb – from its ‘major identity’, which for him is but a ‘borrowed identity’, a treacherous fabrication ... which does harm to Algeria and the Maghreb” (1993, 61).

By contrast, Bensmaïa and Fares’ vision of the Maghreb–Mediterranean is no longer one of majoritarian states and subjects, but as a “boundary/liminal phenomenon”, a lived space considered as a “zone of intense proximity or co-presence” (Bensmaïa and Curtiss Gage 1993, 69). Their Mediterranean is one of “circulation, passage, not from one culture or country to another, but from one margin to another, from border to border, edge to edge: never ‘in’, but always ‘in between’” (69). At this point, we are far, indeed, from Saidian essentialisms of the sort expressed in the idiom of Us–Them or West–Orient. We now enter a twilight desert space, one which, like the horizon of a receding mirage, challenges us to recast the specific “reality” of the Euro–Maghreb relation today on the basis of a rejuvenated *bloc d’alliance* with the wider world.

Desert thinking

we are now witnessing for the first time an intellectual framing of the Mediterranean as a postcolonial horizon from either side of its shores, whose vanishing point remains the site for a future-oriented politics.

Indeed, Khatibi’s thought horizon, its very “face” (“le visage de la pensée, en retrait, se met à regarder l’autre en lui même éloigné”), involves a form of “desert thinking” (“la pensée de l’être et du désert”) (1983, 23), one which finds its spatial resolution at the meeting point of three major “transformations” seen to be at work in the Maghreb. The first axis, labelled Tradition (*traditionalisme*), refers to metaphysics reduced to theology (“la métaphysique réduite à la théologie”). Here, Khatibi identifies a form of theological thinking rooted in an embrace of One and Being as primal cause, both of God and the world (25). A second major transformative axis is located by Khatibi in what he calls Salafism (*salafisme*). Here, the Moroccan essayist designates a metaphysics turned doctrine (“la métaphysique devenue doctrine”): a morals, a political habitus, a social pedagogy, a reconciliation of science and religion, of *techné* and theology (25). Finally, a third axis of change is constituted by what Khatibi calls Rationalism (*rationalisme*), which is defined as metaphysics gone technical (“la métaphysique devenue technique”). In dialogue with Heidegger, Khatibi here names an ordering of the world (“mise en ordre du monde”) according to an as-yet unsurpassed will to power which draws its force from scientific development.

Rather than address these three transformative axes “psycho-ideologically”, Khatibi posits that the specific articulation of traditionalism, salafism

and rationalism should be embedded within a wider analysis of “structural solidarities” (*solidarités structurelles*) which must be taken into account when considering the Arab world in its entirety (“le monde arabe dans sa globalité”) (25). At stake for Khatibi is not just a descriptive empiricism of the Arab world, but its “historical destiny” (*destin historial*), a destiny which of necessity implicates the expansion and decline of Arab countries, including the gap (*chiasme*) which connects Arabs to the world beyond (“occidental ou autre”) (26).

If we are to “take charge” of the Saidian, Khatibian and Bensmaïan conceptual legacies in making sense of the Maghreb today, we must update and adjust it to the current geopolitical and geo-economic setting. This is meant to question neither the significance of Said’s notion of Orientalism nor Khatibi and Bensmaïa’s dialogical critique, but to provide a fresh set of coordinates for the Euro-Maghreb relation, the better to grasp the changed geo-historical circumstances within which the three transformative axes of Khatibi’s critique meet and interlace within the current conjunctures of the Maghreb. This task, we believe, would do honour to Khatibi’s call to listen to the Maghreb in its plurality (“écouter le Maghreb résonner dans sa pluralité”) (1983, 39), while rethinking it “otherwise” and from its “outside” (“dans l’ébranlement de n’importe quel au-dela et quelle que soit la détermination de cet au-dela”) (14).

“La pensée du desert”: if this form of thinking from a reawakened *marge* still has meaning half a decade after Khatibi’s death, we believe such thought can take place most productively by centring our analysis on the transformed conditions for postcolonial agency in the contemporary Maghreb (Dabashi 2009). Indeed, as we think and write from a European heartland but through a reformulated alliance with the Maghreb, we join up with Étienne Balibar’s recent call to think “Europe at the limits” (2016), and in so doing crossing that disciplinary threshold within postcolonial studies that has heretofore bifurcated it between the effects of decolonization on European metropolises, on the one hand, and on formerly colonized societies on the other. At that very moment where postcolonial studies “is paradoxically dissolving or being altered *before* it had been entirely mapped and acknowledged”, Balibar argues, it is time to recognize that in a time of economic austerity and rising xenophobia within Europe and bloody wars raging without, the outer border of Europe “has migrated ... from the African deserts to the middle of Europe” (Balibar 2016, 168).

Thinking through the “postcolonial entanglements” (Ponzanesi 2016) of suffering, agency and resistance linking Europe and the Maghreb today, we argue, requires engaging with a novel, deterritorialized and multifaceted form of neo-Orientalism which finds expression in an evolving process of

modernization (or “Europeanization”), one which we suggest lies at the heart of EU foreign policy-making.⁴

4 As eloquently mapped by Hansen and Jonsson (2014),

The re-orientation of EU–Maghreb relations

the fascinating yet largely “hidden” genealogy of the EU’s postcolonial entanglement with the Maghreb, as well as the wider Arab world, reaches back as far as the moment of its institutional foundation as an integrated community of states.

5 The countries that make up Europe’s new-found “neighbourhood” are Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Palestine, Lebanon, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine and Moldova.

Current EU–Maghreb relations are governed by the ENP, a foreign policy initiative which, in the memorable words of the then-EU Commissioner Romano Prodi, set out to create a “ring of friends” around the European Union, creating a sphere of security and prosperity that would diminish the risk of creating new dividing lines between the EU and its new-found “neighbours” (European Commission 2003).⁵ In setting guidelines for ENP “partnership”, potential candidate countries are offered “everything but the institutions” under principles of conditionality outlined in the “Copenhagen criteria”. “More for more” is an incentive-based approach: those who go further and faster with reforms are promised greater EU support (European Commission 2011, 5). The ENP thus provides a framework of possibilities and obligations which are in turn negotiated and specified in bilateral Association Agreements (AA) between the EU and individual ENP countries. A list of priorities is specified in the ENP Action Plans, and its implementation is closely monitored and evaluated in the progress reports which are annually issued by the European Commission.

Within this novel geopolitical frame, the image of Occident and Orient initially proffered by Said and Khatibi needs to be revised and adjusted to the contemporary processes of EU-sponsored *othering* (or *re-bordering*), one which entails a nuanced neo-orientalizing terminology constructed largely out of technical and managerial “empty signifiers” denoting ideal-type values, terms which the EU arrogates unto itself with the force of a monopoly (“democracy”, “good governance”, “human rights”, “rule of law”, “liberal market”). The much celebrated and praised adoption of putatively technical and value-free European norms and values often promulgated within European studies (best expressed through the notion “Normative Power Europe”) is not politically innocent, however. Firstly, mobilization of these terms as well as material resources allows EU foreign policy officials to assess and rank ENP countries along a continuum of progress defined by categories such as efficient–inefficient, organized–corrupted and democratic–autocratic. It is precisely here that we can illuminate the neo-colonizing logic of the ENP, according to which the Maghreb is categorized in terms of progress, development and performance. Echoing imperial geopolitics, the EU confirms its privileged status through its benchmarking and evaluative mechanisms, including rewards and punishments, depending on an individual country’s compliance with European regulations and norms, as well as its geopolitical importance for the EU and its allies in the Maghreb.

Secondly, the EU shapes the discursive strategies of domestic actors and their perceptions of what is permissible and acceptable by the West. It is in this sense that Morocco and Tunisia can be understood as postcolonial horizons of a European project of modernity, in which the EU extends a form of western reason (Khatibi's *rationalisme*), a technical metaphysics whose will to power expands its influence, while ordering contiguous worlds (Khatibi 1983, 25). Through its normative power narratives, the ENP encodes an "epistemic and ontological violence", one which in the Maghreb produces a range of "silent questions" (*questions silencieuses*) (Khatibi 1983) that have the potential to erupt into the open when they fester long enough, as is the case with political Islam (see the next section on Islamic economic development).

We have argued elsewhere that through the ENP the EU seeks to homogenize and codify its neighbours into self-managed neighbouring units (Dimitrova 2010; Kramsch 2011). The normative discourse of the EU provides opportunities for the proponents of ENP to further enhance their universalizing mission. As such, Khatibi's notion of Maghreb-as-horizon, as a postcolonial space of contending metaphysical systems – in this case the universalizing "rationalism" and "will to power" of EU bureaucratic norms and their ambivalent encounter with the "traditions" of political Islam – can be useful for understanding why Arab societies may at one time consider ENP's norms as objects of admiration, while at other times Islamists and radical Left groups may critically or uncritically engage with their pasts to recover their (post)colonial agency and possibilities for resistance. The desert encounter between Khatibian *traditionalisme* and *rationalisme*, we believe, is supremely staged over the vital issues surrounding socioeconomic development in the Maghreb.

Decolonizing economic development

After more than a decade of EU-sponsored efforts at fostering socioeconomic development in its Maghreb neighbourhood, the desired results remain elusive: there is soaring unemployment, limited access to basic services, growing social inequalities and persisting illiteracy and poverty. The EU's agenda of socioeconomic reforms is premised on a particular view of rational economic behaviour characterized by self-disciplined, entrepreneurial and competitive calculation guided by neoliberal principles of effectiveness, productivity and profit-making. In cooperation with other powerful proponents of neoliberal reforms (the IMF and the World Bank), the EU – through its financial packages, trainings and twinning programmes, as well as more subtle forms of assistance – has actively supported regional governmental

and non-governmental elites upon which a certain epistemic rationality has been applied and tested. Despite these attempts, however, the EU has not managed fully to transform the Maghreb's *home economicus* according to its neoliberal visions and expectations. Lacking social and material foundations, the EU's top-down approach to socioeconomic development has further alienated the average Moroccan or Tunisian, who has gained very little from EU-directed reforms.

Significantly, the failure of EU development policies is attributed by the EU and the wider international community to the corruption, bad governance, clientelism and/or the lack of social capital of Arab Muslims. This powerful narrative has in turn been appropriated by different western actors (EU institutions, civil society organizations, media and western academics), including regional elites located within domestic Arab societies. Considering that the EU is one of the main protagonists of neoliberal reforms in the Maghreb, its role as external observer and judge is problematic because it shunts aside its own responsibility when things go wrong (Mitchell 1991). The purpose here is not to blame the West entirely, but rather to highlight its inextricably entangled complicity in the reform process (Ponzanesi 2016).

As a result of this complicity, we argue we are now observing in the Maghreb a hybridization and pluralization of socioeconomic space located at the interface of competing metaphysical systems – in this case the universalizing “rationalism” and “will to power” of EU bureaucratic norms on the one hand, and their ambivalent encounter with the “traditions” of political Islam and what remains of the radical Left, on the other hand. In what follows, we focus our analysis on two reemerging paradigms – political Islam⁶ and the radical Left – each of which, in different ways, has sought to transform socioeconomic space in the Maghreb by contesting the EU's monopoly over the development of Maghreb societies. In so doing, we are aware of the limitations in fully addressing the complexity and heterogeneity of these movements which, despite their common objectives of social justice and human dignity, their shared experience of severe repression and more importantly their anti-capitalist stance, have not transcended their ideological differences, notably the role of religion or atheism in Maghreb daily life.

Here again, we observe that the EU has been complicit in sustaining and reproducing divisions between secular and Islamic forces by discursively and financially favouring the former over the latter. In effect, the EU's roadmap for socioeconomic development has been problematized mainly by Islamists and the Left, albeit for different ideological reasons. In both Morocco and Tunisia, their criticisms were directed against unconditional economic liberalization with few obligations and regulations for foreign investors. The representatives of the main Islamic political parties – the PJD in Morocco and Tunisia's Ennahda – were in general more in favour of privatization and foreign investment than the Left. Yet unlike other proponents of

6 In 2009, 2010 and 2013 Dimitrovova interviewed several deputies of the Party for Justice and Development (PJD), as well as senior members of unrecognized Islamist movements: the Association of Justice and Charity (ADW), Badil Hadari (Alternative Civilization) and Umma (Nation). In 2014 she interviewed members of the Tunisian Islamic party Ennahda, as well as influential Salafists.

neoliberalism, their support for privatization and foreign investment has been limited to certain sectors and conditioned by principles which at first glance align with Left-oriented groups.

For Islamists, more equitable development is rooted first and foremost in the recovery of moral values and Islamic principles. Social justice, human dignity and social solidarity are also central to the Islamic paradigm of development. For Islamists, however, the goal of economic development is to encourage private property and nourish the creation and accumulation of wealth, while respecting and defending private ownership if obligations to other members of society are respected through payment of *zakat*. In this sense Islam is highly favourable to commerce, private property and the free market if Islamic principles and values are upheld in practice. The underlying idea is that Islam should counteract the negative consequences of the free market, expressed by heightened levels of alienation, greed, selfishness and family decomposition. The Left, however, distances itself from the moral critique of capitalism (as espoused mainly by Salafists), as well as its emphasis on spirituality.

Islamists are primarily concerned with the destructive effects of western modernization/economic liberalization on Muslim societies, exemplified through excessive consumerism, the decomposition of family life and decadent individualism. Islamist criticism does not aim at rejecting modernity itself, but rather seeks accommodation through the recovery and preservation of Islamic values (solidarity, modesty, family) and Islamic principles. As explained by a senior member of Morocco's largest Islamic Association of Justice and Charity (ADW):

It is not a matter of going back in time and rejecting all that comes from the West. This is an image produced by the West and reproduced by the monarchy to demonize us as an anti-progressive, irrational, backward force. What we reject is the western monopoly over development in Morocco, to decide for us how and when we should reform. (Author interview, April 2013, Morocco)

Drawing mainly on Marxist and Leninist doctrines, the primary concerns of the radical Left in Morocco and Tunisia are class struggle, continued exploitation by capitalist elites, economic reliance on a low-paid Moroccan labour force, indecent working conditions, the abuse of human rights (including the right to work) and the exploitative practices of multinational corporations. General criticism is directed against Morocco's unconditional integration into the global liberal economy. In this respect, the opening of the Moroccan economy with few obligations and regulations for foreign investments is perceived by the Moroccan Left to bring short-term benefits for some, while having an overall negative effect on socioeconomic development. When grassroots organizations such as labour unions or associations of unemployed

students resort to methods outside democratic procedures (such as hunger strikes) they are accused of demagoguery and irrationality by pro-reform groups.

Given the foregoing, the right to work has frequently been mentioned as one of the main demands of leftist movements in both countries, and has become the main slogan of the Arab Spring. Islamists have stressed not only the right to work but also an obligation to work for the Muslim community, which does not intervene or contradict the duty to pray or spend time with family. This is an important observation to bear in mind, otherwise the right to work can easily be deprived of its original essence and emphasis on self-fulfilment, creativity and human dignity. As pointed out by one participant of daily sit-in protests organized by the Association for Unemployed Graduates in Morocco (AUGM), “we are demanding a right for decent work. We are protesting against indecent working conditions, inadequate wages and one day employments” (interviews with protestors in Rabat, Morocco, June 2013).

According to the AUGM, in the absence of labour regulations that protect workers’ rights, the EU should reconsider its strategy that the private sector will provide new job opportunities if, in the end, these measures result in greater employment insecurity, inadequate wages for sustaining basic living standards and poorer working conditions (European Commission 2011, 7). For instance, AUGM members argue that in many cases foreign investors as well as domestic private-sector companies do not respect the basic labour regulations stipulated by the International Labour Organization,⁷ something which would be unacceptable in EU member states. If the EU continues blindly to promote investment without considering the double labour standards of European investors, it becomes indirectly complicit in accepting such abusive practices/double standards, thus providing a unifying rallying point for both Islamic and radical Left movements, while opening a space for each group to radicalize their respective positions, both domestically vis-à-vis one another, as well as globally in relation to the EU.

The production of an increasingly hybridized and pluralized space of socio-economic development in Morocco and Tunisia can be most vividly observed in the contested arena of Islamic financial reform. On this front, newly elected Islamist governments in both countries have recently proposed two products: Islamic banking, which prohibits the setting of interest rates, and the formalization of *zakat*,⁸ the only tax permitted by the Qur’an. Both provisions are considered to be a cornerstone of the Islamic economy, where individuals are guided in their economic decisions by a set of behavioural norms derived from the Qur’an. According to Morocco’s Party of Justice and Development, *zakat* could help finance social services in the fields of education, health and poverty if it was collected and supervised by an independent institution.⁹ This view was shared not only by Islamists but also by those who pay *zakat* out of personal conviction. In the view of the PJD, if *zakat* were collected

7 Both Morocco and Tunisia joined the ILO in 1956.

8 *Zakat* is identified as providing the basis for achieving social solidarity and social welfare in Islamic countries and should not replace the secular tax of the modern state.

9 Author interview with a high-ranking official from the PJD, April 2013, Morocco.

and supervised by a central institution it could be used to support social welfare in Morocco. With the introduction of the tax system by the modern Arab state, *zakat* has become a voluntary charity, although differences of opinion exist among Islamic scholars as to what degree this is a voluntary act or an obligation for Muslims (Bonner 2005). The question of the voluntary nature of *zakat* and the conditions under which such contributions should be made are important because they relate to the broader Islamic conceptualization of poverty, social justice and progress, all of which are defined by moral criteria that cannot be easily accommodated to the norms of a western, neo-classically defined market economy.

The question of Islamic banking has triggered numerous controversies and debates across the political spectrum of Moroccan society. On the one hand there are those who refer to the Islamic prohibition on the setting of interest rates or profit-making (*riba*), while pointing to the instability of a western/modern banking system based on speculation and profit-making (a point raised by both the radical Left and Islamists). Others, such as economic elites and the monarchy, consider any changes to the banking system as a threat to their power. The Moroccan Central Bank has banned using the term “Islamic banking”, referring instead to “development banking” or the use of “alternative products”, while avoiding any Islamic references which could distinguish between legal (*Haram*) and illicit (*Halal*) practices. As an indication of the political sensitivities involved, Islamic Sharia scholars who could familiarize Moroccan citizens with the concept of Islamic banking were not allowed to intervene in debates organized by the monarchy around Islamic banking products (Boudad 2012).

Both *zakat* and Islamic banking are viewed by the EU and Moroccan secular actors (i.e. domestic elites and the radical Left) as utopian, irrational and in tension with the private lives of citizens. Whereas the EU’s economic developmental model is taken for granted and assumed as universal, any “alternative” propositions need to be supported by clearly measurable and quantifiable data, as evidenced by neoclassical economic indicators such as self-interested, maximizing behaviour, market equilibrium and individual preferences (Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela 2004). Lacking these preconditions, both *zakat* and Islamic banking initiatives are ignored or (in the worst case) silenced by western-based officials who claim to have economic authority. Neither Islamic banking nor *zakat* are mentioned in any ENP document, including the EU–Morocco Action Plan. They were rarely discussed in the Brussels-based interviews conducted for this essay. EU officials who were aware of such proposals quickly dismissed them on the grounds of their “religious”, and therefore “archaic”, nature.¹⁰

10 Author interviews with officials at DGDevco and

In sum, the authors encountered mistrust in the corner offices of the European Commission towards non-profit and non-market forms of Islamic banking and *zakat*, as well as their perceived instrumentalization by Islamists.

DGMarket, Brussels,
December 2012.

In this context, the EU considers itself best equipped to provide “free” advice because of its self-representation as a rational and neutral actor, including its capacity efficiently to rationalize, standardize and produce quick technical fixes. As a consequence of the stigmatization of Islamic banking and *zakat*, the Moroccan PJD (as well as Umma and ADW) have revised their discursive strategies to mitigate the potentially negative consequences of using such terms. Whereas in 2009 representatives of the PJD spoke openly about Islamic banking, Islamic legislation and other Islamic principles, these concepts have been replaced by the more innocuous sounding “development banking”. In the same vein, *zakat* is often compared to a more secular tax on capital. To reiterate: our intention is not to suggest that Islam rejects capitalism *tout court*, but rather to show that other developmental paradigms are emerging within the Maghreb that contest the West’s monopoly on the term “market economy”. Many scholars, including members of the Moroccan Islamist political class, characterize Islam as highly favourable to commerce, the circulation of goods and the encouragement of private property (Tripp 2006).

At stake in the semantic struggles over economic development in Morocco, we argue, is the delineation of a spatial horizon of postcolonial difference between the EU and the Maghreb. This postcolonial “difference”, however, is “untamed” (*intraitable*) due to its thoroughly processual nature; it does not claim an *a priori* “essence”, emerging as it does in a fully dialogic relation with ENP assessment criteria – “good governance”, “liberal market economy”, “human rights”, “rule of law” – themselves “empty signifiers” and strategically devoid of substance. Thus, local struggles over the proper spatiotemporal conditions for the use of *zakat* can be read as a move on the part of progressive Moroccan Islamists both to counter the EU–ENP’s monopoly on the term “market economy”, while simultaneously opening a space for development that avoids either the secular critique of the radical Left or the rigidity of backward-looking, traditionalist (i.e. Salafist) dogma.

The EU–ENP would do well to pay greater heed to debates over the proper role of *zakat* and Islamic banking in Moroccan society, as this constitutes not just a local Moroccan, or even “Muslim” issue, but a strategic space of enormous significance in the contemporary rearticulation of developmental relations between Europe and the Maghreb. In spite of the EU’s discursive efforts to distance itself from past mistakes by placing greater emphasis on local partnerships with ENP candidate countries, thus recognizing their specificities (Emerson, Gergana Noutcheva, and Popescu 2007), recent EU recommendations simply repeat stale prescriptions of economic liberalization along standard, World Bank-derived neoclassical lines (European Commission 2011).

The argument that market-driven liberalization and economic growth would lead to stability and democracy has been most recently problematized by the Arab Spring uprisings. There is a risk, moreover, that sooner or later

the social and economic concerns raised by the Arab Spring will vanish, and Arab governments will return to the same neoliberal economic prescriptions and programmes which have been agreed to by previous regimes. If this were to occur, as seems likely with the post-Spring ascendancy of secular and/or military-backed political forces in Tunisia, Libya and Egypt (Cambanis 2015; Filiu 2015; Worth 2016), the societal dynamics at play in the redefinition of Islamic economic development would become, once again, one of the great “silent questions” (*questions silencieuses*) of the Arab world (Khatibi 1983, 18). The chance to think the Maghreb as an open horizon (“comme horizon de pensée”) capable of an autonomous worlding (“qu’il puisse se mondialiser pour son propre compte”), as a space of untameable difference and plural thinking (*pensée pluriel*) will, once again, bide its time in the desert (Meddeb 1977, 44–5).¹¹ And for Europe, an opportunity for a truly “worldly” engagement with this vital, crossroads region will, once again, have been lost.

11 As if heeding Khatibi’s call to think the Maghreb from its multiplicitous plurality, Rachid al-Ghannouchi, founder and chairman of

Vanishing point

Tunisia’s Islamist Party, Ennahda, recently stated that the solution for Islamist movements across the Maghreb/Mashrek now was not to enter armed struggle, but to further embrace pluralism, tolerance and compromise. “The cure for a failed democracy is more democracy”, he asserted, because “dictatorship disguised in religion is the worst kind of dictatorship” (cited in Kirkpatrick 2014, A1). On hearing these words, we can imagine Khatibi’s Cheshire-cat smile.

Given the recent and profound changes in the Maghreb, it is worrying that there has not been an accompanying shift in European foreign policy. It is no longer sufficient to admit previous errors and explain the EU’s foreign policy failures in terms of security interests versus values, internal divisions or incoherence. The mapping of external views of the EU has showed how European foreign policy can have destabilizing effects if local contexts are ignored and, more importantly, if the voices of “others” are not heard. In the foregoing, we saw that there are different manifestations towards socioeconomic development in the Maghreb: those who would question the good intentions and sincerity of the EU; those who would react in defensive ways by stressing independence, integrity and domestic resources; and those mimicking western norms. All our interviewees questioned the relevance of European experience for their present and future prospects. Our findings call for a broadening of western norms, which have been reduced to legalistic and formalistic categories with clearly separated public and private spheres, while excluding religion from the public sphere. The EU’s incapacity or unwillingness to reconcile these competing aspirations or hegemonic political projects has proven to be problematic. It is in this context that the recognition of difference becomes essential for the EU, together with the learning process this will inevitably entail.

In order to address the deficiencies outlined in this essay, we call for a decolonization of European foreign policy. Postcolonialism can help us to

move beyond the limitations of Normative Power Europe in order to identify the tensions and contradictions that lie behind different manifestations of “Europe” in its former colonial peripheries, as expressed in the Maghreb today. Rather than root our conceptual frame in a Saidian intellectual legacy that runs the risk of essentializing Europe/West and the Orient, we draw instead on a critical, late twentieth-century theoretical repertoire emerging from the heart of the Maghreb, exemplified in the work of Moroccan socialist/poet Abdelkébir Khatibi. Following in Khatibi’s sandy footsteps, we attempt an updated double critique of European values and Arab Islamic tenets through a *pensée autre* between both worlds, one which seeks to destabilize metaphysical givens on either shore of the Mediterranean by revealing the extent to which both are dialectically enmeshed as a dynamic, postcolonial horizon. Such a *pensée autre*, we argue, spatially restages the Maghreb as a geo-philosophical site capable of autonomous “worlding” from an “awakened margin”, a space of “untamed (or savage) difference” that cannot be reterritorialized onto any ontological foundations, either putatively “western/European” or “Islamic”. Thus, rather than illuminate what the EU “is” or what it is “for”, thereby recentring Europe as a primary analytical signifier, it aims for a decolonized perspective, one which – from the very borders of Europe – produces an orphan knowledge (*savoir orpheline*) that cannot be re-domesticated as a form of Europe-centred desire and development (Khatibi 1977; Meddeb 1977).

This move has consequences not only for our critical understanding of the EU’s foreign policy but also more importantly for those on its receiving end. For, as we have seen, the failure of the EU’s foreign policy apparatus to engage with the masses of the Maghreb on issues of socio-economic development; its lack of knowledge of Islamic principles and traditions; and its incapacity to open communication channels with Islamic groups reproduces internal splits within domestic societies of the Neighbourhood, while undermining the legitimacy of its own foreign policy agenda. In so doing, the EU may once again miss from view a large segment of Moroccan and Tunisian societies unless its instruments become inclusive of both secular and religious grassroots organizations and social movements, which still remain off the radar of the European decision-making apparatus. To avoid complicity in this vanishing point, the decolonization of European foreign policy will require a form of “desert thinking” whose intimate contours it will be the task of future generations of border scholars jointly to explore, decipher and make their own. This essay constitutes a modest impetus to that future-oriented and worldly project.

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