Imperial Pasts in the EU's Approach to the Mediterranean

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Colonialism is silently inscribed in the genes of the European integration project since its origins (Sébe 2015). This is nowhere clearer than in the incorporation of the French *départements* in Algeria in the European Community or EC (the precursor to the European Union or EU) since the Rome Treaty, and even more in their subsequent disappearance, leaving virtually no traces, following Algeria's independence in 1962. In 1987 Morocco applied to join the EC but was rejected on the grounds that it was not considered to be a 'European country' and hence could not join (Pace, 2006). This geographic membership criterion was later enshrined in the Copenhagen criteria, the rules that define whether a country is eligible to join the EU. As recent research has shown (İpek 2015), Morocco's rejection was expected because then King Hassan II's informal approach two years earlier had received a similarly negative response.

Despite the centrality of the Mediterranean to this foundational symptom, the vast majority of the literature on the role of memory in the process of European integration has predominantly had an inward focus (see Sierp & Wüstenberg 2016, and also Sierp in this special issue), and has thus failed to adequately gauge the weight of the colonial legacy of some of the EU's member states on the EU's external relations. This point is best expressed in Sierp's contribution to this special issue, which argues that 'the EU remains curiously quiet about the memories of imperialism and colonialism' (3, this special issue). When the outward implications of Europe's past have been addressed, attention has mostly focused on Europe's relations with sub-Saharan Africa, either in the form of the 'Eurafrica' project (Hansen & Jonsson 2014), or on the impact of colonial legacies on European military intervention in African conflicts (Gegout 2017).

This special issue aims to fill this gap by assessing the weight of Europe's colonial past on the EU's relations with the Mediterranean region. This is a timely intervention, at a time when we witness a concerning revival of the positive case for colonialism and its legacy, both in academia (as witnessed by the controversial article by Bruce Gilley in *Third World*

1

Quarterly in 2017, subsequently withdrawn) and in mainstream political discourses of many European countries. For example, one of the most ghastly comments made by the then new Foreign Secretary (formerly London Mayor Boris Johnson, and since July 2019 British Prime Minister) related to England's colonial history in Africa. In a 2002 commentary in *The Spectator*, Johnson argued that: "Africa is a mess" …

The continent may be a blot, but it is not a blot upon our conscience. The problem is not that we were once in charge, but that we are not in charge any more … The best fate for Africa would be if the old colonial powers, or their citizens, scrambled once again in her direction; on the understanding that this time they will not be asked to feel guilty (Johnson 2002).

This special issue vehemently rejects such views, and shows that, even when it brought about modernizing tendencies, colonialism in Africa or the Mediterranean was first and foremost a violent historical example of political, economic and social subordination.[1] The denial of such history is also instrumental, as it facilitates the continuation of discriminatory policies towards the Mediterranean, arguably most visible today in the manufacturing and handling of the so-called migration 'crisis' (Jeandesboz & Pallister-Wilkins 2016).

By shedding light on how the EU today is trying to deal (or not to deal) with part of Europe's past, this special issue not only contributes to the literature on European memory (Müller 2002; Eder & Spohn 2006; Sierp 2014), but it also broadens debates on the EU's relations with the Mediterranean in two directions. On the one hand, it promotes a deeper appreciation of the similarities and differences between the EU's contemporary approach to these states and that held by European colonial empires in the 19th and early 20th century. This in turn also permits a fruitful engagement with the literature that presents the EU as an empire, be it in Barroso's formulation as 'non-imperial empire',[2] Zielonka's 'neo-medieval empire' (2006), or more recently Del Sarto's 'normative empire' (2016). On the other hand, some contributors to this special issue advocate a relational approach to history, which takes into account the perceptions, strategies and actions of Mediterranean states towards the EU, in order to assess the extent to which these are shaped and structured by the colonial entanglements of some EU member states in the region. In so doing, the special issue explores the nexus between contemporary European as well as local discourses and practices, and how these are embedded in, and transmitted through (see Haugbølle 2017), asymmetric power relations with a clear colonial lineage.

Empirically, the special issue tracks down the effects, and hence the legacy, of these imperial pasts across a range of southern European countries. Some of the contributions focus on countries that are part of the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and that do not hold any significant expectation of EU membership (Langan and Price; Salem, this special issue). Two contributions focus on Turkey, possibly the neighboring-'other' *par excellence* because of its size and history, trapped in membership negotiations since 2005 (Aydın-Düzgit, Rumelili and Gülmez; Sen in this special issue). In addition to their location on the shores of the Mediterranean, the case studies discussed here share their common past as colonies of European empires. Karner's contribution sheds light on both continuities with Austria's historically long-established representational regimes of South-Eastern Europe, and novel discursive features. In this respect, the special issue follows a comparative strategy that seeks common patterns across a number of varied cases (Della Porta 2008): if colonial, neo-colonial and post-colonial features are detected across such a different range of countries, we can then make broader inferences about the extent to which the EU's approach towards the Mediterranean is influenced by the imperial past of some of its member states. This means that the legacy of European domination in its former colonies continues – albeit in different manifestations – up to this day.

Imperial pasts in the Mediterranean: an analytical framework

We engage with the Mediterranean as an epistemic and geopolitical site of knowledge production. Thus, we extend our understanding of the Mediterranean by building on previous work that studied the Mediterranean as a represented entity (Pace 2006; Fenech and Pace 2017). While questions about who is making these representations of the Mediterranean, in what context, for which purpose, and so on, continue to be important in shedding light on how power remains at play, within the context of this special issue the main interest is in bringing forth alternative perspectives on coloniality and the postcolonial, inspired by thinkers such as Edward Said (1978, 2003), Kwame Nkrumah (1965), Sekou Touré (1962) and Frantz Fanon (1961, 1967), precisely because these perspectives have been historically marginalised in the study of Euro-Mediterranean relations. By retrieving them, and showing the extent to which they help us make sense of contemporary processes, we also seek to decolonise our own research by systematically exploring the continuing legacy of colonial rule over subordinate countries, territories and societies.

The Mediterranean today constitutes a microcosm of contemporary global politics in at least three important ways. Firstly, in terms of the differentiations and inequalities that have characterized the Mediterranean in the modern era, which are nowadays visible on a global scale both between and within countries (Milanovic 2016). Secondly, and following from this, the Mediterranean has long been perceived as the most salient North-South border for Europe, albeit a 'liquid' one, and thus encompasses countries and regions with extremely different, but unmistakably intertwined, developmental levels and trajectories. Finally, the Mediterranean has also been central to the strategic construction of the 'West' immediately after World War II and throughout the Cold War. This is most visible in the fact that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) allowed Italy, a country hardly 'North Atlantic' in geographical terms, to become a member in 1949, and in the fact that all Cold War enlargements - with the exception of West Germany - were Mediterranean (Greece, Turkey and Spain). Hence, the Mediterranean region has long been affected not only by regional but also by global power relations. One of the constants of this characterization of the Mediterranean is that it has been defined by the powerful, which certainly since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire have been identified with the various manifestations of Europe and the 'West'. One of the tasks of this special issue is thus to rethink the Mediterranean from and through the perspective of silenced margins, creating room for reflecting on the precarity of Europe as a contested space that cannot be understood without taking into adequate account its imperial underpinnings. This is especially important if one considers the extent to which the currently most powerful institutional manifestation within Europe, the EU, often conflates 'Europe' and 'EU' when speaking about itself .[3] If contestations of Europe are an important part of our effort, we cannot but take a comprehensive view of the Mediterranean, which includes also countries with access to the 'Middle Sea' (Norwich 2006), but historically and socially constructed as a region in and of its own, in the form of 'the Balkans' (see Karner in this special issue).

Conceptually, the special issue draws on Nicolaïdis' seminal contribution in this field (2015), and more specifically on her characterisation of European strategies of dealing with the colonial past. Our SI specifically investigates to what extent the EU's approach to the Mediterranean is informed by amnesia, redirection or atonement. Amnesia towards the colonial past, which many European societies practiced in the immediate postwar era as they prioritized internal reconstruction and development, informs the EC/EU from its very

earliest stages, in the form of a twin desire, on the one hand 'for a radical break with the past, war and nationalism', and on the other hand 'for continuity and collective management of a colonial world […] slipping out of the grasp of its member states individually' (ibid: 285-6). Redirection is understood as the process by which 'European nations learned to redirect their ambition from without to within' (ibid: 288). This occurs not only through the conventional channels of European integration and its deepening, but also as territorial expansion through the incorporation of new member states, as well as the creation of EU-centred forms of strengthened cooperation, from the ENP itself to the externalisation of border management policies (Bialasiewicz 2012), to the promotion of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Areas (DCFTAs) in the Arab Mediterranean (see Langan and Price in this special issue). Finally, insofar as it constitutes a way of dealing with the past through (assumed) forgiveness, atonement becomes the rhetorical setting stone on which the EU can claim its own "difference" in international politics, resulting in an engagement with former colonies that 'systematically favoured diplomatic engagement rather than balancing, containment, or coercive diplomacy' (Nicolaïdis 2015: 290). In this regard, one could identify the foundations of the discourse and practice of 'Normative Power Europe' (Manners 2002), and its limitations (Bicchi 2006; Pace 2007), as the non-linear sum total of these three strategies of amnesia, redirection and atonement (Keene 2013; Staeger 2016).

While inspired by Nicolaïdis' threefold analytical framework, the special issue extends this framework in two ways. First, as mentioned above, it seriously engages with some of the foundational sources of postcolonial studies and anticolonial politics coming from the Global South, more specifically in the work of Fanon (1961 and 1968), Touré (1962), and Nkrumah (1965). Second, the special issue also builds on two bodies of literature from within the fields of International Relations (IR) and International Political Sociology (IPS), thus developing a thoroughly interdisciplinary framing for understanding the relation between Europe's imperial past and the practical strategies of the European project in its construction of the neo-colonial present.

Thereby and firstly, this SI explores the mechanisms through which the EU's strategies of dealing with the colonial past of some of its member states inform its current approach to the Mediterranean. During 2008, on a visit to Libya, former Italian Prime Minister, Silvio Berlusconi, formally apologised for the "deep wounds" inflicted in Libya during Italian

colonial rule. By way of "compensation" Berlusconi also signed a five-billion-dollar investment deal (France 24, 2008). Ten years later, during a handover ceremony held in a Berlin church, Namibian officials received the remains of indigenous people killed in their country by German forces more than a century ago. As Ishaan Tharoor aptly describes:

The remains are a visceral link to a hideous past — what many historians recognize as the first genocide of the 20th century. Between 1904 and 1908, colonial forces in what was then German South West Africa carried out the widespread massacre of Herero and Nama tribespeople. Estimates suggest as many as 80 percent of the nomadic Herero tribe — believed to number around 100,000 a century ago — perished, either killed by German soldiers or left to die of thirst and starvation in the desert (Tharoor, 2018).

More recently, Glasgow University pledged 20 million British pounds for 'reparative justice' for slavery ties. The University is believed to be the first British university to set up a restorative justice scheme (Capella, 2019; Mullen & Newman, 2018).

In spite of all these individual instances of redress, as Sierp clearly shows in her contribution to this SI, Europe as a whole still struggles to atone for its colonial past, and, at the EU level, efforts towards this end are still incipient at best. It follows that this SI is especially sensitive to the patterns of hierarchy and subordination, of domination and exploitation, and to how these are reproduced and challenged over time. Thus, our contributors take seriously the political, social/cultural and economic ramifications of political decisions taken *because* of the past (being abused and misused).

Here, we build on the recent fertile season of publications on the importance and role of hierarchies in international relations (Lake 2009; Bially Mattern & Zarakol 2016; Zarakol 2017). Specific attention is devoted to the scholarship that has approached this issue of hierarchy from a postcolonial perspective (see Anievas, Manchanda & Shilliam 2015). As a result, contributions to the SI engage with the full range of concepts related to the legacy of colonialism, from the discussion of the EU's tendency to promote forms of neo-colonial incorporation of Arab Mediterranean neighbours through its economic policies (Langan and Price), to the constraints that closer engagement with the EU put on postcolonial agency in Egypt (Salem), to the revival of colonial discourses, imaginaries and practices, at times internalized in the local public sphere, at times used to characterize an inferior 'other'

(Karner on Austrian discourses of 'the Balkans'; Sen on European views of Erdoğan), and at times even hailed as a model for the difficult coexistence of Islam and democracy (Aydın-Düzgit et al. on Turkey after 9/11 and before Erdoğan's 'authoritarian turn').

Secondly, the special issue eschews an exclusive focus on European empires. In line with the literature keen on decentring the EU's role and position in international politics through more sustained engagement with its many significant 'Others' (Fisher Onar & Nicolaïdis 2013; Huber & Kamel 2016; Keukeleire & Lecocq 2018), we also aim to gauge European contemporary perceptions of past empires kept at the margins of the European project, and specifically of the Ottoman Empire, given that, with the exception of Morocco, all the countries examined in this special issue have - at some point - been part of the Ottoman Empire. This is a point that is especially central in Aydın-Düzgit, Rumelili and Gülmez's contribution to this issue which connects the colonial past, Islam and cultural hierarchies together. They argue that the way in which Turkey has been rhetorically used as a model is 'reflective of a broader amnesia regarding the instrumentalization of Islam in European colonialism' (3, this special issue). Sen's contribution similarly sheds light on parallels in techniques of negative othering between the Ottoman past and the Turkish present, specifically with reference to how Erdoğan's undoubted authoritarian tendencies are presented as a form of 'sultanism' (see also Cağaptay 2017). This in turn permits those who gaze 'outwards' to 'Orientalise' increasing autocratic tendencies in Turkey and present them as unrelated to similar tendencies in EU member states such as Hungary and Poland (Lendvai 2012; Rohac 2018).

These contributions provide further evidence to a core claim of this special issue: namely, that the legacies of Eurocentrism and Orientalism are resilient and have ramifications beyond those lands that were formerly colonized by European powers. Moreover, by refraining from treating Europe as a monolithic whole and differentiating between the British and French representations of a negative other, Aydin-Düzgit et al show the significance of the national context within which such representations are embedded. They also demonstrate how a certain case of "amnesia" in select European discourses manifests itself by eradicating any conceptual continuity which can only be revealed through a deeper understanding of history.

Thus, attention to non-European empires opens up the space for a more direct appreciation of the geopolitics of memory (and amnesia) of the colonial past in the Mediterranean region.

Combined with the attention to persisting forms of hierarchy and subordination outlined above, these two moves allow the special issue to move away from the Eurocentric inclinations of much literature on the EU's external relations, and the attendant tendency to present as universal values, norms and practices that are very much specific to the EU and to its member states: what Nicolaïdis (2015) aptly calls 'EUniversalism'.

Crucially, decentring our study of the EU in the Mediterranean context also entails eschewing the assumptions of intentionality and all-powerfulness on the EU's part. While this is partly achieved by recovering the legacy and perspective of non-European empires, another dimension of decentring Europe must revolve around the consideration of the impact of processes transcending the European and the Mediterranean scale, such as for instance globalisation. Exactly in light of the centrality given to processes taking place beyond the direct reach of the states and groups of states considered here, this work cannot but be transnational in scope. Equally, insofar as it engages with the contemporary political implications of historical, cultural, social and economic relations, it cannot but be transdisciplinary in orientation. This is reflected in the background of our contributors, coming from as varied fields as sociology, anthropology, political science, international relations theory and political economy. Given the explicit emphasis on 'transversality' in much postcolonial research (Baldacchino and Royle 2010; Basaran et al. 2016; Gutiérrez Rodriguez et al. 2010), the liminality and in-betweenness of postcolonial studies as a field of inquiry (Lisle 2016), and its emphasis on how neglected social and cultural factors play a significant role in shaping (international) politics and power relations (Huysmans & Nogueira 2012), this special issue speaks in particular to debates in the field of postcolonial studies.

Findings and contributions

This postcolonial orientation is also visible in the three main contributions that this special issue makes to scholarly literature. The first is to existing debates on European memory, which have hitherto been mostly shaped by looking at the EU's attempts to construct a 'community of memory' that devises ways of dealing with its own past (Assmann 2007). As amply argued by Sierp in the first substantive piece of this special issue, the EU's approach to its past has been highly selective, privileging the memorialization of events and processes internal to Europe over the effects of European empires in the wider world. Sierp's contribution also explores the extent to which the neglect of Europe's imperial and colonial

past might be 'preparing the ground for the recreation and consolidation of asymmetries and hierarchies produced by former colonial empires in the Mediterranean' (4, this special issue). By closely deconstructing European Parliament, Justice and Home Affairs, Council and European Council documents dealing particularly with the commemoration of human rights abuses and violations that took place on EU territory, Sierp systematically reveals how EU strategies for dealing with the colonial past of its member states contains elements of amnesia, redirection, and atonement. This in turn helps us contextualise the relative neglect towards the colonial legacy in wider debates around EU memory politics. Sierp shows how - when it comes to atonement - the forgiveness that is meant to underpin it - is more *assumed* by Europe than actually 'granted' by former colonies. This suggests that Europe's own emotions and perceptions are still valued more than the actions (in the form of forgiveness or otherwise) on the part of those who were at the receiving end of the brutalities of colonial rule. Furthermore, Sierp shows how institutional attempts at dealing with the colonial past are still in their infant stage, and the resources that the EU has hitherto devoted to related projects are minimal. It is thus both in the scholarly literature but even more starkly in the EU's practice that we find a neglect of Europe's colonial past and of its contemporary legacies.

Building on this retrieval and critique of Europe's neglected colonial past, the second contribution is to debates on the EU's approach to the Mediterranean, which through the findings presented throughout the special issue are expanded in three different directions. First, Langan & Price and Salem's contributions permit a deeper, historicized appreciation of the neocolonial features of the EU's approach to the Mediterranean. Langan & Price focus more specifically on how the EU's pursuit of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTAs) with North African countries seeks to re-establish, under the liberal jargon of 'complementarity' and 'interdependence', a pattern of highly asymmetrical trade and aid arrangements that might be characterized as neocolonial, following Nkrumah's seminal theorization. Salem draws on Fanon's work to show how elite agency in postcolonial Egypt is still very much shaped by relations of dependency, which became evident in the 1970s in the wake of the economic liberalization pursued by Sadat. These continuities between the colonial and the neoliberal era are explored especially with reference to the EU's role in reshaping Egyptian civil society. Insofar as NGOs are thus increasingly financed by foreign donors, but at the same time are subject to the surveillance of their own government, and especially so since the 2013 coup, they provide a very clear

example of the two types of amnesia that Salem sees as characteristic of contemporary Egypt: an amnesia of empire, visible in how the EU's funding seeks to restructure civil society in ways reminiscent of colonial 'social engineering'; and an amnesia of radical critique, stymied by both donor and governmental pressures.

Second, the special issue also contributes to decentering the EU's view of the contemporary Mediterranean in two ways. On the one hand, it takes seriously the perspective of the EU's respective 'others', as visible for instance in the piece by Aydın-Düzgit, Rumelili and Gülmez, which draws a parallel between the European and Western discourse portraying Turkey as a model country for the Muslim world in the wake of 9/11 and a similar discourse visible especially in the French and British press in the 1920s that opposed the secularizing trends in the nascent Turkish Republic. On the other hand, this decentering also presents itself as a critique of the European historical, as well as the EU's contemporary, characterization of specific Mediterranean countries. In this respect, Turkey is once more an ideal case study, especially if one thinks of how the 'Turkey as a model discourse' highlighted by Aydın-Düzgit, Rumelili and Gülmez was quickly replaced by a reframing of Erdoğan as a 'bad' leader. This is the theme of Sen's contribution, which shows how the discursive construction of a deplorable 'other' underpins the reaffirmation of the EU's moral superiority. Drawing among others on Edward Said - arguably the first to propose that Europe has achieved its identity as a purveyor of universally "good" politics by inventing a "bad", non-European Orient against which this "goodness" is rhetorically realized - Sen makes a poignant point about how the emergence of a more authoritarian Turkey has strengthened Eurocentric tendencies in how the EU conceives of, and communicates about, its role in the neighbourhood and in the broader international system.

Third, this special issue also contributes to existing debates on the EU's approach in the Mediterranean insofar as it shows the performativity of re-enacted colonial narratives (see also Pace & Sen 2019), which affect the prospects of political transformation and reform in Mediterranean partner countries, candidate countries, and member states alike. Sen's contribution speaks to this theme, which is arguably even more visible in Karner's article on the contemporary construction of narratives of exceptionalism and difference in Austria with reference to the Balkans. He persuasively shows the extent to which in the past decade representations of the Balkans in the most widely circulated Austrian newspaper, the *Kronen Zeitung*, have fallen back on the rhetorical tropes used during the Habsburg era to

speak of imperial possessions in Southeastern Europe. In other words, the unexamined and forgotten ruins of past narratives and practices have, in the Austrian case, produced a revival of both 'frontier Orientalism' and increasing xenophobic nationalism.

The third contribution of this special issue is of a more general nature, and has to do with providing a perspective from the social sciences on the emerging literature on the postcolonial Mediterranean, which has hitherto received more attention in the humanities (Chambers 2004, 2008; Proglio 2018). If, as argued above, the Mediterranean is from the EU's perspective the most salient North-South border, it becomes imperative, especially in the wake of the implementation of ever more exclusionary migration policies on the part of the EU and its member states (Palladino & Gjergji 2016), to explore what a postcolonial gaze tells us about the political, economic and social hierarchies that still structure relations between the North and the South of the Mediterranean.

By probing the connections between the history of European empires and the EU's more recent 'meddling' with the Mediterranean (Pace 2006), this special issue is but a first step towards adequately historicising the genesis of the EU's approach to the region. Hence, this special issue aims to constitute an entry point for historians interested in exploring more systematically how the legacy of French, British, Italian and more generally European imperialism in the Mediterranean still reverberates both in the perception of former colonies and in some of the EU's practices. Individual contributions show that these reverberations can be detected irrespective of whether the 'other' under consideration is a third country, a country seeking accession, or also in some cases an EU member state. Conversely, this special issue will also be of interest to scholars of the EU's external relations, and especially to those discussing to what extent the EU may be understood as 'an empire of sorts' (Del Sarto 2016: 216), as it permits an exploration of historical precedents of European empire-building, as well as of the insoluble contradictions that it generated, and which the EU may well be replicating in the contemporary era. Due to its interdisciplinary nature, the special issue allows for a broader perspective – drawing upon international political sociology and postcolonial studies amongst others – on the place of 'postcolonial Europe' (Bhambra 2009) vis-à-vis the Mediterranean in a globalized world. For, as Assmann poignantly points out, 'Europe is still far from being "a happy country"' (2007: 11).

Finally, for academia this special issue presents some probing questions about how we go

about conducting our research. In this respect, the special issue speaks especially to researchers and students currently involved in efforts to decolonise the curriculum in our universities (Hussain 2015; Swain 2019). However, our considerations here take more the form of questions rather than answers. How do assumptions about power affect what we select as problems for research? Who pays for this research? And what purposes does the research serve? What relationship does the researcher have with those being researched? What responsibilities stem from this relationship? What are the power relations that we establish and reproduce when we rely on local research assistants or translators? How can we disrupt and challenge them? It is not only these questions that we should always keep in mind, but also the colonial roots of these relations of subordination. Decolonization entails first and foremost centring the perspectives of those subordinate groups whose voices and concerns are usually not listened to, and at times not even heard. As it focuses more specifically on an institution, the EU, especially reluctant to engage in these considerations, and which has just appointed a commissioner for 'protecting our European way of life' (Herszenhorn & De la Baume 2019), we hope that this special issue contributes to enabling a broader discussion on the politics of doing research on institutions that are oblivious of their own entanglements, direct or otherwise, with the histories of the states, societies and peoples that they engage with today.

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Endnotes

[1] For the more general case on the exploitation of colonial territories and how the associated power structures have been sustained beyond formal decolonization, see Jensen et al. 2017.

[2] Mahony, H. (2007) 'Barroso says the EU is an empire', *EU Observer*, 11 July, available online at: https://euobserver.com/institutional/24458. Last accessed on 14 January 2019.

[3] The opening statement given by Jean-Claude Juncker (2014) before he was confirmed President of the European Commission is emblematic of this conflation from its very title.