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ABSTRACT

The decentring agenda in European Studies has called for turning our gaze from the 'centre' towards the 'periphery'. This essay offers one decentred approach to EU migration governance in the Mediterranean: Studying geopolitical encounters between the receiving and sending spaces as constitutive of the very issues that are otherwise portrayed as autonomously developed. I will do this by adopting Edward Said's method of contrapuntal reading, which involves 'thinking through and interpreting together' narratives from different parts of the world towards recovering 'intertwined and overlapping histories' of humankind. The specific case I look at is the 2015 'migrant crisis in the Mediterranean' and the ways in which women's insecurities were portrayed. While such representations presume women's insecurities to have developed in the South/east and arrived in the North/west via migration, a contrapuntal reading of Fatima Mernissi's writings together with everyday portrayals of the 'crisis' points to the connectedness of otherwise differentiated experiences. What is represented as 'before Europe' (in Bernard McGrane's felicitous turn of phrase) is, at the same time, the 'aftermath of Europe' insofar as geopolitical encounters between North/west and South/east of the Mediterranean have been constitutive of women's insecurities.

Introduction

The decentring agenda in European Union migration governance has involved turning our gaze towards the periphery, away from the centres of power in the EU (see Introduction to the special issue). Understood as such, a decentred research programme may focus on the study of non-state actors in the European Union, or state and non-state actors in the Eastern or Southern neighbourhoods. Accordingly, decentring European Studies is expected to be accomplished by focusing on the peripheries while being mindful of the limitations of those theories that have been developed in examining the centre (see, for example, Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018); Onar and Nicolaidis (2013); El Qadim, special issue; Bialasiewicz, special issue).

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However, there is more to decentring the study of world politics as pursued by critical approaches to International Relations, Political Geography and Postcolonial Studies, where there is an ambition to generate a better understanding of centre and periphery *in toto* (see, *inter alia*, Agathangelou and Ling 2004; Mitchell 2002b; Nayak and Selbin 2010; Sharp 2013; Slater 1997). Following Dipesh Chakrabarty's (2000) call for 'provincializing Europe', the idea is to generate a renewal 'from and for the margins' but not only for the margins. This is because, it is not merely our understanding of the periphery that needs improving, but centre and periphery as a whole.

Drawing on critical approaches to the study of world politics, this essay underscores one way of decentring the study of EU migration governance in the Mediterranean: studying 'geopolitical encounters' between the receiving (North/west) and sending (South/east) spaces as constitutive of the very issues that are otherwise portrayed as autonomously developed.[1] Following David Slater (1997), I understand 'geopolitical encounters' as dealings taking place between economic and political actors over dominating space. I propose that we study 'geopolitical encounters' in the Mediterranean by adopting Edward Said's (1993) method of 'contrapuntal reading', which involves 'thinking through and interpreting together' narratives from different parts of the world towards recovering 'intertwined and overlapping histories' of humankind (Said 1993, 32). In what follows, I submit that decentring the study of EU migration governance in the Mediterranean cannot remain limited to turning our gaze from the 'centre' to the periphery, thereby underscoring the need for designing research to study the two contrapuntally. More specifically, I look at the 2015 'migrant crisis in the Mediterranean' and the ways in which concerns regarding women's insecurities were discussed during this period. While everyday portrayals presume such insecurities to have autonomously developed in the South/east and arrived in the North/west via migration, a contrapuntal reading of Moroccan scholar Fatima Mernissi's writings together with everyday portrayals of the 'crisis' points to the ways in which such insecurities have been constituted through contemporary geopolitical encounters. I chose to look at Mernissi's writings because her sociological analyses of women in Muslim societies across history offer valuable insight into dealings between South/east and North/west of the Mediterranean (see, for Mernissi 1975, 1992, 1991, 1993, 1996a, 2001, 2006). Decentring the study of EU migration governance through adopting the method of 'contrapuntal reading' allows me to underscore that differentiated experiences of women in different parts of the Mediterranean have not come about autonomously but are products of contemporary geopolitical encounters.

Section one underscores the need for decentring the study of EU migration governance by focusing on the case of the 2015 'migrant crisis in the Mediterranean', highlighting the ways in which the South/east of the Mediterranean was portrayed as exporting its insecurities to the North/west

via migration. Section two introduces Said's method of 'contrapuntal reading'. The final section offers a contrapuntal reading of the 2015 'migrant crisis in the Mediterranean' by 'thinking through and interpreting together' Mernissi's writings and everyday portrayals of the 'crisis'. I submit that decentring the study of EU migration governance cannot remain limited to turning our gaze from the centre to the periphery, but calls for employing a different method that explores constitutive relations in between.

The 'Migrant Crisis in the Mediterranean' as a Threat to Women's Security?

The so-called 'migrant crisis in the Mediterranean' occupied the headlines of news outlets and the agendas of policy-makers during 2015–2016. By late 2015, when the increase in the flow of people came to be labelled as a 'crisis', Mediterranean-littoral members of the European Union had been attending to migrant arrivals via (mostly but not exclusively) sea-routes for more than a decade. What allowed for the events of 2015–16 to be construed as a 'crisis' was not only a steep rise in the figures of sea arrivals in Southern Europe but also a shift in the destinations of land arrivals towards Northern Europe. The crisis construal warranted the 11 November 2015 decision of the European Commission, which allowed member states to put the Schengen Treaty on hold. This decision was swiftly put into effect by several member states, lasting until late 2016 in some cases.

In the absence of a political consensus regarding the best way to respond to the change in the pace and the arrival sites of migrants, some EU policy-makers and non-state actors sought to generate a common ground on appealing to peoples' humanitarian impulses (Pallister-Wilkins 2018). At the same time, some others raised an issue that otherwise rarely makes an appearance on governmental agendas: women's security. The latter's claim being, if the European Union were to let more migrants in on humanitarian grounds, this would likely produce insecurities for women at home. This is because, they contended, migrants coming from the South/east of the Mediterranean did not share the same set of ideas about the status of women in the society and would therefore constitute vulnerabilities for women's security in North/west either directly, as with the 'Cologne incident', or indirectly, by undermining already fragile gender balances.[2] As regards the former,

> Some media outlets framed the incident as a clash between cultures, or as proof that an external force was threatening Western society. The popular magazine *Focus* put a photo of a naked white woman covered in black handprints on its cover. The quality newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* published an illustration of a black arm reaching up between white female legs. An editorial in Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper was headlined 'How long before the women of Cologne are advised to stay indoors, or even cover their heads?' (Brenner and Ohlendorf 2016).

Others were quick to point to hypocrisies involved in above-quoted instances of interest in women's insecurities, thereby contesting the sincerity of concerns expressed regarding the more indirect threats to gender balance.[3] Stefanie Boulila and Christiane Carri noted that the events that came to be referred to as the

> 'terror of Cologne' prompted the political and media mainstream to defend the 'German value' of gender equality, after decades of political indifference towards sexual violence. However, instead of addressing the inadequate laws governing sexual offences, the debate focused on expelling those who were believed to endanger post-feminist Germany (Boulila and Carri 2017).

Such reactions were by no means isolated to Germany. Harriet Gray and Anna Franck's (2019, 284–5) study on British media coverage of the 'crisis' showed that while 'Europe' was portrayed as a "modern' space of gender equality', 'the culture of the refugees [was] derided as innately misogynist and, therefore, 'backwards" (see above the quote from the British daily).

Putting aside hypocrisies involved in concerns raised regarding women's security, or the issue of the veracity of the claims surrounding the Cologne incident (see Brenner and Ohlendorf 2016), what is worth highlighting here is the portrayal of migrants coming from 'beyond Europe' as 'before Europe' to borrow Bernard McGrane's (1989, 94) felicitous turn of phrase. They were portrayed as 'before Europe' not only economically (as per usual in such debates) but also normatively, insofar as they were viewed as carrying values that belong to a past world that 'Europe' is understood to have left behind (also see Freemantle & Landau, special issue).

How to make sense of the eventuality that some of the migrants do not currently share the same set of ideas as their North/western hosts about the status of women in the society? By viewing them as 'before Europe' and therefore deserving of humanitarian assistance by virtue of their 'backwardness'? Indeed, this is one of the ways in which the calls for aiding the migrants on humanitarian grounds were phrased during 2015–16. Yet, portraying migrants coming from 'beyond Europe' as 'before Europe' cuts both ways: it could be used to warrant humanitarian assistance; it could also be used to justify refusing such assistance by virtue of the threat the migrants could pose for women's security.[4] What is more, regardless of the policy recommendations that follow ('help them come here' or 'send them back home'), portraying people coming from the South/east of the Mediterranean as 'before Europe' entails a 'denial of coevalness' to one's fellow human beings, to invoke Johannes Fabian's memorable phrase (1983). It goes without saying that such eventuality is by no means a unique or isolated to the 'migrant crisis in the Mediterranean.[5] Indeed, as Barry Hindess (2007) underscored, 'temporalizing difference' and 'spatialising time' are twin processes often encountered in treatises on world politics (also see Bilgin 2016b).

What is critical for our purposes here is what goes undetected in such debates: what is portrayed as 'before Europe' is, at the same time, the 'aftermath of Europe'. What some depict as perennial characteristics of migrant-sending societies oftentimes turn out to be products of 'define and rule' (Mamdani 2012) policies of earlier geopolitical encounters. Then, if some of the migrants do not seem to share the same set of ideas as their North/western hosts about the status of women in the society, this may not (only) be because some people do not seem to be able or willing to leave their past behind, but (also) because women's insecurities are constituted by aforementioned (and very contemporary) encounters. Yet, as will be discussed below, our conceptual and methodological frameworks do not always allow us to explore constitutive relations between the South/east and North/west insofar as they 'slice' or 'divide' the human experience (Go 2014, 125). In the next section, I introduce Said's 'contrapuntal reading' as a method for decentring the study of EU migration governance in the Mediterranean.

How to Decentre the Study of EU Migration Governance in the Mediterranean?

As noted in the Introduction to the special issue, decentring the study of EU migration governance has involved turning our gaze towards the periphery, away from the centres of power in the EU. However, decentring efforts as such cannot remain limited to turning our gaze from the centre to the periphery, for, it is not merely our understanding of the periphery that needs improving, but centre and periphery as a whole. Indeed, Eurocentrism is a limitation for the study of world politics not only when looking beyond 'Europe' but also within (Halperin 2006). Accordingly, decentring the study of world politics in general and EU practices in particular is about designing a research programme to study 'Europe' and 'non-Europe' as a whole.[6] This is where I turn to Edward Said's method of contrapuntal reading.

Said proposed 'contrapuntal reading' as method in his 1975 book, *Beginnings: Intention and method*, reintroducing it fully in his 1993 study, *Culture and imperialism*. What was missing in literary criticism until then, according to Said, was inquiring into 'involvements of culture with expanding empires'. 'Out of the imperial experiences, notions about culture were clarified, reinforced, criticized, or rejected', he wrote (Said 1993, 9). Yet, until then, connections forged through such experiences were seldom reflected upon by literary analysts who rarely (if at all) made the connection to the imperial context that those authors were writing in or responding to. Yet, as Said underscored,

> To lose sight of or ignore the national and international context of, say, Dickens's representations of Victorian businessmen, and to focus only on the internal coherence of their riles in his novels is to miss an essential connection between his fiction and its historical world (Said 1993, 13).

Adopting 'contrapuntal reading' as a method, suggested Said, is the only way in which 'intertwined and overlapping histories' of the colonizer and the colonized could be grasped.

The colonialism point was previously (and famously) made by Franz Fanon (1963) who highlighted that non-Europe was already a part of European achievements. While Fanon referenced material riches in particular, there is also an ideational dimension that scholars from multiple disciplines have begun to inquire into (see, for example, Buck-Morss 2009; Go and Lawson 2017; Gopal 2019; Gopnik 2009). As Gurminder Bhambra (2016, 2) elucidated in her work on 'modernity', what we see as 'endogenous and independent processes originating in Europe' may actually be 'implicated in already existing historical connections between parts of the world'.

To be able to recover 'already existing connections' as such, argued Said, the researcher needs to be equipped with what he termed as 'contrapuntal awareness'. This is because, he wrote,

> we must be able to think through and interpret together experiences that are discrepant, each with its particular agenda and pace of development, its own internal formations, its internal coherence and system of external relationships, all of them coexisting and interacting with others (Said 1993, 32).

Such sensibility is best found in the person of the 'exile', Said wrote. Most people 'are principally aware of one culture, one setting, one home', the author observed in his 1984 essay 'Reflections on Exile'. 'The exile', however, is aware of at least two: the one s/he left, and the one s/he took refuge in. It is this plurality of vision, highlighted Said, that 'gives rise to an awareness of simultaneous dimensions, an awareness that – to borrow a phrase from music – is contrapuntal' (Said 1984, 172). Contrapuntal reading, then, is offered by Said as a method of doing research as if viewed through the eyes of 'the exile' (Said 1984, 1994). There is, but, an overwhelming irony in suggesting that we adopt Said's method of 'contrapuntal reading' to study EU migration governance in the Mediterranean – a method that involves modelling the sensibilities of those who seek refuge away from 'home'.

Studying world politics contrapuntally may come across as a daunting exercise at first. There is only so much one scholar can cover as part of their research project. How can s/he be expected to master multiple languages and literatures …towards becoming aware of 'intertwined and overlapping histories'? Yet, attempting a 'contrapuntal reading' of an issue need not be a daunting effort. To begin with, it calls for reflecting on the limitations of our existing narratives while keeping in mind that the point is not to generate

multiple accounts, but raise our awareness of constitutive relations by 'thinking through and interpreting together' those narratives that already exist. What is more, once we raise our 'contrapuntal awareness' as advised by Said, and go looking for different narratives to read contrapuntally, we are likely to see that they are there – not necessarily in 'known outlets' (books, articles, textbooks that 'we' are accustomed to reading within our own scholarly communities), but they do exist. Attempting a contrapuntal reading is about 'thinking through and interpreting together' texts from outside the 'known outlets' with the 'experiences and histories of the privileged' to understand how relations have been constitutive of both 'Europe' and 'non-Europe'. As with contrapuntality in music, the individual narratives make sense by themselves, but they also come together to form a story. It is in this sense that 'contrapuntal reading' is a fitting method to be adopted in decentring the study of world politics (Bilgin 2016a; Biswas 2007; Chowdhry 2007).

Let us consider four studies by scholars who have explicitly or implicitly adopted contrapuntal reading. To begin with Timothy Mitchell's study, *The rule of experts: Egypt, techno-politics, Modernity*, here the author calls for studying 'underdevelopment' as produced through discursive and other forms of practice not only in Egypt but also the United States. Otherwise, Mitchell wrote, students of world politics who seek to understand peasant poverty in twentieth century political economy of Egypt, risk 'ignoring' Egyptian public and private actors' relations with US donors, which, in turn,

> creates the reassuring impression that the poverty of the Nile valley is the traditional poverty of a peasantry that has not yet or had only recently joined the 'twentieth century' rather than very much a product of the political and economic forces of that century (Mitchell 2002b, 223).

Accordingly (and without explicitly adopting contrapuntal reading as method), Mitchell offers an analysis of Egypt's economic 'underdevelopment' as a product of not only colonial but also contemporary geopolitical encounters between Egyptian public and private actors and their US counterparts. Arguing against portraying Egyptian peasants as 'backward', Mitchell (2002b, 242) underscores that such poverty cannot be explained away by portraying it as a perennial phenomenon. Rather, Mitchell suggests that we also consider 'the crisis of American farming and the remedy of subsidized food exports' which shaped USAID's relations with public and private actors in Egypt, and 'the discourse of development' which facilitated and justified the provision of such aid. 'The history of rural Egypt has never been outside of what is called the history of capitalism' and narratives of under/development Mitchell (2002b, 268) concludes.

Staying with the Middle East theme, in his 2004 study, *Good Muslim, bad Muslim*, Mahmood Mamdani has shown that in contrast to popular portrayals that paint a picture of the 11 September attackers as remnants of the past,

'international jihadism' is a product of contemporary geopolitical encounters. It was through the trilateral collaboration between US (CIA), Pakistan (ISI) and Saudi Arabia in Afghanistan during 1978–79 that what was otherwise a disorganized group of anti-communist fighters was 'recast as an international jihad' writes Mamdani, maintaining that

> The question we face today is not just why a radical, state-centred train of thought emerged in political Islam but how this thought was able to keep from the word to the deed, thereby moving from the intellectual fringe to the mainstream of politics in large parts of the Islamic world (Mamdani 2004, 61).

Cultural explanations do not suffice, cautions Mamdani (2004, 61), because they overlook contemporary geopolitical encounters between the United States, its local allies and those individuals who were recruited to fight. It is worth quoting Mamdani in full:

> Political Islam is a modern political phenomenon, not a leftover of traditional culture. To be sure, one can trace several practices in political Islam – opium production, madrassah education, and the very notion of jihad – to the era before modern colonization. In fact, opium, madrassah and al-jihad al-akbar were all shaped and remade within modern institutions as they were put in the service of a global American campaign against the 'evil empire' (Mamdani 2004, 175).

Indeed, until it was revived by the US and its regional allies, 'the Islamic world had not seen an armed jihad for nearly a century' (Mamdani 2004, 127; also see, Aydin 2017). While the fighters resisting the communist government in Afghanistan referred to themselves as *mujahedeen*, they used the term jihad in its everyday meaning: i.e. 'struggle'. It was not until 1978–79 that the notion of 'international jihadism' was brought from the fringes of political thought to the centre stage, writes Mamdani (2004). Then, contra prevalent portrayal of the US and its allies' support for the *mujahedeen* as merely financial and military, Mamdani's research highlights an ideational dimension. The point being, the trilateral collaboration between the United States, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia did not only provide funding and infrastructure to a pre-given body of ideas and ideals but also constituted international jihadism as an idea and an assemblage of practices.

What is shared by Mitchell's examination of peasant poverty in Egypt and Mamdani's analysis of international jihadism is that they both focus on issues that are ordinarily portrayed as 'before Europe', i.e. as belonging to the past in terms of the under/development trajectory of modernization theories. Yet, the same phenomena transpire to be the 'aftermath of Europe' in that neither peasant poverty in Egypt nor international jihadism was autonomously developed in the 'Middle East', but have been constituted through contemporary geopolitical encounters. Hence, the leitmotif of decentring efforts in the study of world politics: 'Europe' needs understanding contrapuntally with 'non-Europe'.

The final two studies to consider are by scholars who have explicitly adopted contrapuntal reading as a method to study India's responses to 'terrorism' in the post-9/11 period. David Barnard-Wills and Cerwyn Moore's study focuses on the connectedness of representations of and responses to terrorism in India and the United Kingdom, highlighting how 'ideas and representations of terrorism travel across borders' (Barnard-Wills and Moore 2010, 387). While multiple readings of events of political violence in India are possible and available, write Barnard-Wills and Moore (2010, 399), in UK official and popular representations, 'the Indian experience of terrorism is slotted into a broader narrative of the war on terror, with events being linked to al Qaeda through a tenuous chain reliant on apparently similar tactics and nebulous (and un-evidenced) "inspiration". In contrast to UK actors' representations analysed by Barnard-Wills and Moore is Rupal Oza's (2007) contrapuntal reading of Israel, India and US responses to terrorism, where the author highlights shared discourses as well as economic and military cooperation by policy-makers in these three states. Here, Oza emphasizes the agency of the Hindu Right who availed themselves of the international context to forge an 'architecture of alliance' with like-minded actors in Israel and the US. The author's analysis shows how 'US justifications for [Global War on Terrorism] make their way halfway around the world and resonate with discourses of threat deployed by the Hindu Right in India and by the Zionist Right in Israel' (Oza 2007, 10). What they share, writes Oza (2007), is a 'discourse of Muslim terror based on a collapsed understanding of time and history that is then used to justify and deploy violent measures of repression'.

To recap, Chakrabarty (2000) has maintained that 'provincializing Europe' is not about studying events; it is about an idea. Similarly, decentred scholarship as designed by critical approaches to International Relations, Political Geography and Postcolonial Studies aims at a renewal 'from and for the margins' but not only for the margins. This is because, it is not merely our understanding of the periphery that needs improving, but centre and periphery as a whole. As seen in the study of 'development', 'international jihadism' and 'terrorism', empirical decentring (shifting our gaze from the centre to the periphery) can only offer a partial remedy so long as our methods are not designed to allow for 'a historical awareness of the complex interdependence through which the global has been constituted' (Biswas 2007, 131). The specific point here being, decentring the study of EU migration management in the Mediterranean is not only an empirical task; it is also about re-thinking the methodological frameworks through which we explore constitutive relations between centre and periphery.[7] To further illustrate this point, the next section offers a contrapuntal reading of the 2015 'migrant crisis in the

Mediterranean' by 'thinking through and interpreting together' Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi's writings and everyday portrayals of the 'crisis'.

Reading Fatima Mernissi on the Global Constitution of Women's Insecurities

In 1996, Fatima Mernissi published an article entitled 'Palace fundamentalism and liberal democracy: oil, arms and irrationality'.[8] Here, Mernissi (1996a, 264) echoed Said in substance and in style when she wrote that 'dynamics of oil, arms and fundamentalism are not a bad place to start in rendering the relations between the peoples of the West and the Arab world intelligible. We do not live in separate worlds, but in highly interconnected ones'. That said, my reason for choosing Mernissi's works in general and this article in particular is not because they are exemplary of contrapuntal reading, but because they exemplify texts that narrate 'histories of the dispossessed and marginalized'. Mernissi was by no means a marginal figure in her lifetime. For one thing, she was a very well-known public intellectual as well as a scholar in the Arab and Francophone worlds. For another, the journal *Development and Change*, where the article was first published, is a well-known scholarly outlet. What is more, the article was reproduced in an edited volume in 2003. Be that as it may, turning to Mernissi's writings in general and this article in particular constitutes an instance of going beyond 'known outlets' of world politics insofar as her writings seem to have remained undetected in present day accounts by those who are alarmed by a potential threat Muslim migrants could pose for women's security in the EU. Indeed, such accounts have portrayed prevalent views and practices in the Muslim world regarding the status of women in the society as remnants of a past world (presumed to have autonomously developed), thereby betraying no awareness of contemporary geopolitical encounters that have been constitutive of such views and practices.

In the said piece, Mernissi took issue with rampant portrayal of the Muslim world as 'irrational' and a throwback to the seventh century by virtue of the rise of 'Islamic fundamentalism' (her choice of words). Mernissi maintained that the rise of fundamentalism in the Muslim world did not evolve autonomously, but through contemporary global political encounters between like-minded policy-makers in Western Europe , North America and the Middle East. She underscored that 'liberal democracies in fact have a history of promoting Islamic fundamentalism; and that, in particular, they have made extraordinary profits from Saudi fundamentalism' (Mernissi 1996a, 251). If fundamentalism has been on the rise in the Muslim world, wrote Mernissi, this is owed largely to Saudi practices that were adopted in collaboration with the Kingdom's North American and Western European allies during the Cold

War. It is difficult to understand the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the 1990s independent of 'the liberal democracies' strategic support of conservative Islam, both as a bulwark against communism and as a tactical resource for controlling Arab oil' from the 1950s onwards, she maintained (Mernissi 1996a, 251). Therefore, apparent 'irrationality' in the Muslim world, she submitted, could be understood as a product of decades long policy collaboration with 'rational' allies of Saudi Arabia in North America and Western Europe. Indeed, Mernissi's preferred term 'palace fundamentalism' underscored the eventuality that fundamentalism in the Muslim world is not a perennial but a contemporary phenomenon. Let me elaborate.

'Palace fundamentalism' originated in the 1950s, when Saudi Arabia began to offer support to non-state actors around the world, Mernissi highlighted. In the first half of the twentieth century, commitment to democracy, secularism and women's rights was neither superficial nor unique to a marginal elite in the Arab world in general and Egypt in particular, Mernissi reminded, drawing on Aziz Al Azmeh's findings.[9] For early post-colonial leaders of Egypt, Mernissi (1996a, 258 footnote 7) wrote, 'unveiling women, liberating them from seclusion and educating them, teaching them mathematics and foreign languages, was the nationalist religious authorities' way of engaging in jihad, or holy war, against ignorance'.[10] They were successful in this endeavour insofar as religious authorities also signed up for these efforts, producing 'interpretations of the Quran and Hidith accommodating democratization and secularization' (Mernissi 1996a, 259). The 1930s was a rare moment of pluralism in Egypt, noted Mernissi, a moment which became the shared birthday of Arab feminism and the Muslim brotherhood. The former remained a formidable force for decades, wrote Mernissi (1996a, 259), highlighting that 'the Egyptian feminist movement deserves part of the credit for the fact that the Arab League Charter of the 1940s granted women the right to vote, the right to education and the right to work'. Mernissi's point being, the prevalence of ideas and behaviour that debase women's status in the society are not perennial elements of Muslim 'culture' in the way it is portrayed by fundamentalists (or EU hosts of migrants, see above) but products of contemporary politics (Mernissi 1975, 1991, 1993, 1996b). It was from the early 1950s onwards that democratic and secular ideas and ideals in the Arab world (and beyond) began to be overshadowed by Wahabi style Islamist ideas and ideals in tandem with the flow of Saudi funds into conservative Islamist actors including think tanks (Ghattas 2020; Khalil 2016). So much so that, noted Mernissi, few remember the rationalist tradition in Islam. Whereas 'throughout its history Islam has been marked by two trends: an intellectual trend that speculated on the philosophical foundations of the world and humanity, and another trend that turned political challenge violent by resort to force', Mernissi (1992, 21) wrote. If it is only the latter that is present today, then, this is not because there is no rationalist heritage in Islam, but that it has been

forgotten. And forgetting as such, Mernissi underscored, did not just happen but came about as an outcome of aforementioned efforts. Especially from the 1970s onwards, Mernissi (Mernissi 1992, 37) underscored, 'petrodollars financed the propaganda that encouraged submission and repudiated reflection'. The point being, what comes across as the rise of 'irrational' ideas and practices in the Muslim world has been constituted though geopolitical encounters between the Saudi royal family and its 'rational' allies.

I summarized Mernissi's argument in a detailed manner because it is an example of insights to be gained by looking at dynamics in the North/west and South/east of the Mediterranean (and beyond) with an eye on constitutive relations. Unless the connections between the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in one part of the world, Cold War efforts of the United States and its regional allies, and commercial agendas of global corporations are traced, the source of Mernissi's frustration regarding representations of the rise of fundamentalism in the Muslim world as an instance of 'irrationality' cannot be located. Whereas a contrapuntal reading of narratives on women's status in the Muslim world reveals global political encounters through which 'liberal democracies' economic and political strategies tilted the balance against civil society in the Arab World', thereby 'making the life of the average Arab citizen in general, and the lives of women and minorities in particular, a terrible field of insecurity' (Mernissi 1996a: 261).

But then, is not the Cold War collaboration between the United States and Saudi Arabia already well-documented? What is to be learned from a 'thinking through and interpreting together' Mernissi's scholarship and aforementioned portrayal of women's insecurities? I will make two points.

First, on the one hand, Cold War collaboration between like-minded policy-makers in North America, Western Europe and the Middle East is not unknown. Secular nationalism was viewed, at the time, by both US and Saudi leadership as destabilizing for the purposes of regional and Saudi regime security. Encouraging a form of fundamentalism that would be hospitable to US interests was viewed as a solution (Mamdani 2004). That is to say, fundamentalism in the Muslim world did not develop autonomously. It was constituted through Cold War geopolitical encounters between Saudi Arabia and its allies. It is in this sense that Mitchell suggests that we label this collaboration 'McJihad' (invoking Benjamin Barber's (1992) 'Jihad versus McWorld' article). Mitchell (2002a, 11) wrote:

> The political economy of oil did not happen, in some incidental way, to rely on a government in Saudi Arabia that owed its own power to the force of an Islamic political movement. Given the features of the political economy of oil ... oil profits depended on working with those forces that could guarantee the political control of Arabia, the House of Saud in alliance with the *muwahiddun*. The latter were not incidental, but became an internal element in the political economy of oil.

Second, on the other hand, is Mernissi's singular contribution to the analysis of contemporary encounters between Saudi Arabia and its allies: that prevalent ideas and behaviour in Muslim societies *vis-à-vis* the status of women were constituted by these encounters. While Mamdani and Mitchell seem to consider women's vulnerabilities as an epiphenomenon of US-Saudi policies seeking to weaken nationalist and/or secularist movements during the Cold War, Mernissi maintained that the debasing the status of women in the society was not incidental but central to Saudi efforts to secure the monarchy. The 'veiling of women' proved 'strategic', Mernissi wrote, to 'petro-dollar engineered Islam and the interest of the oil countries, with Saudi Arabia in the lead, in the strengthening of conservative, extreme right-wing movements, as a way of weakening civil society' (Mernissi 1996b, viii; also see, Berg 2018). In a series of studies from the early 1990s onwards, Mernissi meticulously documented the ways in which the debasing of the status of women in Muslim societies was no mere throwback to the ideas and practices of the seventh century, but was constituted through geopolitical encounters that made sure that it was the 'Islam of the palaces, bereft of its rationalist dimension that has been forced on our consciousness as the Muslim heritage today' (Mernissi 1992, 37; also see Al-Rasheed 2010).

To conclude this section, in the absence of contrapuntal readings that reveal the connectedness of North/west and South/east of the Mediterranean, many have readily accepted the present-day portrayal of the vulnerabilities of women in Muslim societies as a perennial 'cultural' characteristic. Rather unthinking acceptance of such portrayal by present-day analysts has had consequences for human mobility around the Mediterranean insofar as host societies have come to worry about welcoming Muslim immigrants in case their arrival constitutes a source of insecurity for women in the EU. Reading Mernissi's studies contrapuntally, I submitted, allows going beyond everyday portrayal of human mobility in the Mediterranean as a 'crisis' that threatens women's security in the EU, and helps to highlight the roles played by geopolitical encounters across the Mediterranean in the (re)production of women's insecurities on both shores of the Mediterranean. Hence, Said's (1993, 81) counsel that we go beyond the 'rhetoric of blame' and study 'the interdependence of various histories on one another'.

Conclusion

When the European Union first began to extend its externalization practices towards its neighbourhood, the literature was characterized by a dearth of information about and/or reflection upon the Mediterranean state and/or non-state actors' perspectives on EU security policies. Since then, there emerged a growing body of scholarship cognizant of the need to decentre

the study of migration through studying the Mediterranean neighbours' practices <u>and</u> reflecting on their perspectives (see, for example, Cassarino 2018; İşleyen 2018; Bouris and İşleyen, 2018). This special issue is an instance of such recognition and effort.

Drawing on critical approaches to the study of world politics, I underscored yet another ambition of the decentring efforts: to generate a better understanding of centre and periphery *in toto*. I suggested that so long as our conceptual and methodological frameworks are not re-worked, shifting our gaze from state to non-state or from the EU to non-EU actors (empirical decentring) can only offer a partial remedy to the limitations of the literature. For, it is not only our understanding of 'non-Europe' that has suffered but also 'Europe'.

Adopting Said's method of 'contrapuntal reading', I attempted one way of decentring the study of EU migration governance in the Mediterranean: studying geopolitical encounters between the receiving (North/west) and sending (South/east) spaces as constitutive of the very issues that are otherwise portrayed as autonomously developed. I did this by 'thinking trough and interpreting together' Mernissi's writings (as exemplary of outlets that remain unnoticed by students of world politics) and prevalent portrayal of the 2015–16 'migrant crisis in the Mediterranean' as a threat to women's security in the EU. I suggested that while prevalent accounts presume such vulnerabilities to have developed autonomously in the South/east and arrived in the North/west via migration, a contrapuntal reading highlights the ways in which they are constituted through contemporary geopolitical encounters. It is in this sense that what is portrayed as 'before Europe' is, at the same time, the 'aftermath of Europe'. A contrapuntal reading, then, allows us to see that what some depict as perennial characteristics of migrant-sending societies (as with the status of women in Muslim societies) are products of contemporary geopolitical encounters (between the United States and its allies in search for regional security in the Middle East and regime security in Saudi Arabia).

Notes

1. On the place of assumptions of autonomous development in the study of world politics, see (De Carvalho, Leira, and Hobson 2011).
2. Needless to say, everyday representations of migrants were gendered in more than one way. For an analysis of the UK context, see (Gray and Franck 2019).
3. This is not to underplay the vulnerabilities women experience (as migrants and as hosts). For instance, when Syrian women and young girls who have fled to Turkey during the civil war marry to Turkish citizens (illegally) as second or third wives, all women suffer, although in different ways. See, 'Syria's refugees: fears of abuse grow as Turkish men snap up wives', *The Guardian*, 8 September 2014 https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/sep/08/syrian-refugee-brides-turkish-husbands-marriage. (Accessed 26 July 2019).

4. Pitting citizens' security against that of migrants has been going on for more than a decade. For a discussion, see (Ibrahim 2005).
5. On the portrayal of migrants in the United States, see (Doty 1996, 1999).
6. I refer to 'Europe' and 'non-Europe' knowing fully well that the dangers of essentializing. I also use 'Europe' as a short-hand for political actors in North America and Western Europe.
7. Keukeleire and Lecocq (2018) identify five dimensions of decentring for European Studies: temporal, normative, polity, linguistic, disciplinary. Without wanting to underplay the significance of the agenda they set for European Studies, I wish to underscore that all are focused on empirical decentring and leave untouched the concepts and categories informed by the aforementioned narrative on 'Europe' and its place in world history (cf. Halperin 1997).
8. Mernissi (1940–2015) was a sociologist. She was very well-known in the Arabic- and French-speaking worlds. She was also well known in the English-speaking world by virtue of all her works being translated into English. Yet, this article is also one of the least cited among her otherwise well-cited body of work. Google Scholar figures suggest that the 1996 edition was cited 8 times and the 2003 edition was cited 20 times. These figures are in contrast to thousands of citations some of her other work has received.
9. Mernissi cites Aziz Al Azmeh's 1992 book *Secularism in the Arab world*. The book's English translation was published in 2020. Also see, (Dabashi 2012).
10. Mernissi (1996b, xi) is quick to note that she is 'not talking about a woman deciding for herself, without any pressure from a politician or a husband, to put a scarf on her head and cover her hair and face … The veil I am referring to … is an intrinsically political one, it is that head-covering forced on women by political authority such as Imam Khomeini's July 1980 'Hijab law' which ordered women working in the state sector to veil, or the Saudi police-enforced veil'.

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