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# Beyond the European Union's Neighbourhood: Liberation Geographies in the Mediterranean

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## ABSTRACT

The notion of a *Mediterranean Neighbourhood* points to how a specific geopolitical space is scripted, imagined and then translated into practice through the European Union's foreign policy towards this region. I contend that the *Arab Spring* took place within this European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) framework contesting many of its underlying principles. This wave of social upheaval across a marked EU vs. non-EU space enabled a series of geographical imaginations and spatial practices able to rethink the Mediterranean region otherwise. This paper introduces three concepts developed by Hamid Dabashi to the geographical debates rethinking Europe's contours through a post/de-colonial analytical lens. Drawing from the spatial thinking that characterises Dabashi's recent work, this paper contributes to the rich critical literature on the ENP's macro-regional imaginary. Concretely, building on Dabashi's notion of "liberation geographies", I emphasise how recent organising as well as ongoing migratory movements in the region constitute serious geopolitical interlocutors able to produce alternative Mediterranean spaces.

## Introduction

Some people that have analyzed the dynamics of the European Neighbourhood Policy have come here [to Brussels] and said: could this thing... well, isn't ENP imperialistic? [...] Still, when [non-EU] partners choose to modernize; we simply provide the experience and expertise. The obligation to modernize is what is pushing these countries to opt for something like ENP.

(European External Action Service representative, Brussels 2012)<sup>1</sup>

This was an unsolicited response from a member of the European External Action Service (EEAS) as I was conducting interviews in Brussels on the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). My questions to this interviewee did not directly address something like neo-imperialism. Yet I believe this employee of the EU Commission was processing their own understanding of current events. This interview took place in February 2011, at the very same time that the news was filled with the Arab Spring, relevant meetings

and summits of the EEAS were being cancelled or rescheduled, and the slogan of Tahrir Square was going viral on social media platforms: “Ash’ab yurid isqat al-nidham!” (“The people want the overthrow of the regime!”). That same year, a few months later, I found myself walking among the many tents that covered the largest square of Spain, the *Plaza del Pilar* in Zaragoza, echoing the same message, this time in terms of “que se vayan todos” (“they all must go”) and “no nos representan” (“they don’t represent us”). The reference to Tahrir’s organising based on tents and tweets inspired the take-over of squares not only of Sol in Madrid, but cities throughout Spain replicating the urban-encampment landscape and social media-based activism that characterized the *Indignados* or *15M* Movement. While I was at the encampment, the following slogan was said several times: *Todos somos Tahrir* (“We are all Tahrir”)!

This set of almost simultaneous statements speak to conflicting spatial references about and within the Mediterranean. The first one, “when [non-EU] partners choose to modernize; we simply provide the experience and expertise”, speaks to the self-perceived need to look towards the EU as a model and a way to modernise. The second one, a collective cry to “overthrow a given regime”, speaks to the shared feeling of antagonism towards political systems that were considered failing. Ultimately, this was an expression of critique and resistance to a modernisation paradigm, a cry that spread across countries in the Mediterranean and beyond. The third, when additional social movements explicitly acknowledged their inspiration in the Arab Spring, saying “We are all Tahrir”, this reflects how activists in EU countries (and then USA, Canada, Brasil, etc.) were looking towards their (less modern by one account) ‘neighbours’ for models of how to rise up against their own regimes. This series of geographical imaginaries at work (EU-centric? Overthrow? Tahrir-centric?) can affect our geopolitical understanding of the Mediterranean, the EU, North Africa and the Middle East. Particularly, when both shores of the Mediterranean have been sites of convulsive and dramatic events over the past several years, from the Arab Spring and the years of occupied squares, to the ongoing Mediterranean migration crisis resulting in what is popularly known as the ‘wet cemetery’.

My own engagement and interpretation of the Mediterranean comes after a multi-year process of researching and mobilising on migration control questions in the region, specifically focusing on Spain and Morocco.<sup>2</sup> Our interdisciplinary research team centred upon processes of border externalisation by the EU with the following overarching question: what are the current spatial configurations around Europe that have facilitated the current migration and refugee crisis? When looking at migration policy dynamics in the Mediterranean, we inquired into the scripting of southern Mediterranean countries as “neighbours” of the EU, and what this categorisation meant in political and socio-economic terms.

Reflecting on this former work, I offer here a reading of the ENP informed by critical theorist Hamid Dabashi, and the spatial thinking that characterises his recent work. His analyses assisted my questions on the geo-politics of knowledge inscribed into this institutional arrangement in the Mediterranean designated as a “Neighbourhood”: what are the underpinnings of this particular calling into being of the *Neighbourhood* as a specific space that the EU has a right or duty to act in? What does the writing over, via reforms, of other neighbouring countries entail? What other geographical imaginaries are at work embodying a critique? Finally, are there any spatial practices ensuing an alternative to the role of ‘neighbour’ as it is currently articulated?

In the words of Bialasiewicz et al., ENP has helped construct a macro-regional Mediterranean spatial fantasy (Bialasiewicz et al. 2013). While this particular policy has had implementation troubles, ENP should be read as a recent step in a longer (historically) and broader (including actors other than the EU) process of framing the Mediterranean region as space of political action (Celata and Coletti 2016; Jones 2011). Geographical analyses of ENP have advanced a strong critique of the euro-centrism of ENP as the production of a top-down space of modernisation in line with geographical engagements with post-colonialism. There is though a disciplinary lacuna in engaging the spatial thinking advanced by critical theorist Hamid Dabashi and his well-known writings about the MENA region and Europe in both academic outlets and press. I contend that Hamid Dabashi’s writings can aid to build a *pensée autre* (Dimitrovova and Kramsch 2017) by identifying spatial practices that work in spite of the spatialities produced in ENP and the geographical imagining of a “Neighbourhood”.

Overall, Hamid Dabashi’s work engages cultural production as well as political and philosophical thought of the Islamic world while bringing it out of a strict Area Studies focus. This epistemological positioning, not only helps to breakdown dichotomies like ‘Islam and the West’ but also provides a unique source or site of analysis to shed light into current affairs beyond the Islamic world. In this paper, I draw from concepts Dabashi develops particularly in his books *Arab Spring: The End of Post-Colonialism* (2012), and *Can Non-Europeans Think?* (2015).

This paper engages three main concepts from Dabashi pertinent both for a *critical* appraisal of the ENP as well as for an *encouraging* reading able to take into account recent social struggles and migratory movements in the region-(s) as serious geopolitical interlocutors. The paper is structured in three parts, each one corresponding to three concepts advanced by Dabashi. The first part briefly introduces ENP and some of the critical literature that frames it as an attempt to decode and recode non-European spaces into an EU readable space, what Dabashi refers to as Europe “reading back unto itself”. The second part builds on Dabashi’s notion of “alternative geographies”. This is a warning to not read a particular geographic scripting of a region,

in this case that of a consolidated, democratic, free ‘EU’rope and a Neighbourhood that needs to “make progress” and “harmonize”, as a given, or as being the only possible way to imagine the region. What other imaginaries of the region exist or existed? Were they fundamentally different or simply a flipping of the hierarchical binary set up by a neo-imperial space? I engage at that point Dabashi’s critique of post-colonialism. The paper then moves onto the third concept, “liberation geographies”, that Dabashi raises in trying to interpret what may be emerging in the context of the Arab Spring. Here, a liberation geography is radical in that it not only rejects neo-colonial projects and what he sees as hollow post-colonial regimes, but rejects the binary division –a/b- that permeates both neo- and post-colonial politics.

Furthermore, while “alternative geographies” designate previous or subsisting alternative spatial arrangements, “liberation geographies” signal spaces in the making, an imminent reading of current processes that signal future possibilities. In this paper, the three sections are then not quite equivalent. Parts I & II are building up towards the concept of liberation geographies, which I suggest provides a venue for advancing not only a critique of ENP, but ways of imagining the regions of ‘Europe’ and ‘the Mediterranean’ differently, via an engagement with recent events. In this way, Dabashi could contribute to the already significant corpus of work critically analysing the ENP including that work which uses critique of the ENP to think post-colonialism differently (Dimitrovova and Kramsch 2017).

This paper then serves as one of the few engagements with Hamid Dabashi’s work in the discipline of geography. While Dabashi does not engage with the academic discipline of geography, his regular work reading against civilisational geographies, and against spatial categories with a load of baggage from an Orientalist era (such as Dabashi’s critique of “Islamic world”, “Area Studies”, the “Middle East”) makes it a bit of a surprise that he has not been further engaged by geographers. Two important exceptions to this are Adrian Smith (2013, 2015), Martina Tazzioli (2013) and Garelli and Tazzioli (2017) who begin to engage Dabashi’s work on the Arab Spring as an important way to de-centre our understanding of the Mediterranean. Other geographers that have brought attention to Dabashi have done so through brief engagements via citations in other work.<sup>3</sup> Little exists which examines or attempts to use Dabashi’s spatial thinking, in particular the ways Dabashi suggests understanding spaces as constituted beyond territorial binaries. In this sense, Dabashi’s work resonates with Derek Gregory in recognising the productivity of imaginative geographies (such as ‘Us/Them’), yet calling to move beyond them. Dabashi signals how other imaginative geographies have existed and continue to be produced. He urges us to look at lines of connection as well as spatial practices that escape the dualism of the colonial-orientalist binary. What Dabashi can contribute here are concepts that highlight the ways that

this binary is subverted and lived beyond in relation to space and time (historically, currently and in the future).

While Dabashi comes from a non-geographical disciplinary background, he deploys theoretically rich spatial conceptualisations. Moving beyond dualist thinking, Dabashi points to how opposing geographies can overlap and coexist. His work is constantly a search for how distinct spaces are produced and enacted in ways that seem incongruent.<sup>4</sup> For Dabashi, the production of civilisational difference is grounded in territory. This territorially based approach to the construction of divisions constitutes one of the main tenants to colonial thinking, which highlights divisive practices and hides other practices that connect places and peoples across those boundaries. Following Dabashi, “Geography is the hidden map of racially profiling and ideologically foregrounding a fictive white supremacy” (Dabashi 2012, 47). The geography of East and West is based on this oppositional thinking in territorial terms. Yet Dabashi at the same time emphasises those spatial practices that criss-cross territorialised binaries and signal not only historic connections between spaces but immanent readings of spaces in the making. Dabashi illustrates this point with historical and current examples ranging from migrations, to revolutionary upswings, to literature and film, as well as theological exchanges. In relation to the protests beginning in 2011, “these revolutionary uprisings prove every theory of modernization, Westernization, Eurocentricity [...] ad absurdum, wrong. Furthermore they pull the rug from under an entire regime of knowledge production” (Dabashi 2012, 15). For Dabashi, this regime of knowledge production not only refers to supremacist readings of this geography, but also to critical work which still inhabits the territorialised binary “resigning oneself to the alternative of the ‘Third World’ as a legitimate geographical allocation. But ‘the Third World’ is itself a creation of ‘the First World,’ of ‘the West.’ Why should we yield and accept [this]?” (Dabashi 2012, 46). My reading of ENP engages three main concepts of Dabashi’s thinking, building towards the third one – liberation geographies – because of its potential for an encouraging reading of the prospects of rethinking the Mediterranean spaces differently, somehow delineating glimpses of hope in the midst of numerous crises in the region.

## Europe Reading Back unto Itself

The ENP emerges as an institutional answer to the “what next” question the EU faced after the enlargement and expansion of the EU towards Central/Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean in 2004 and 2007. In a sense ENP reflects the logic of enlargement to those regions, which entailed a huge number of domestic reforms aimed at turning those countries into legal and political mirrors of the EU. While ENP also refers to parts of Eastern Europe and the Caucasus my interpretation here is based on the ENP’s work re-imagining the Southern Mediterranean as a Neighbourhood.<sup>5</sup>

Since joining the EU is currently out of the question, ENP operates as a form of “non-accession integration” (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias and Pickles 2013), where countries designated as neighbours are written into an EU formulated script of appropriate laws, good governance, ‘shared security cultures’ and “modernised” economic sectors. ENP is thus linked, together with enlargement, into a writing of “other” non-EU spaces into a European norm through laws, infrastructures and markets (Bialasiewicz 2011). Thus, ENP is concurrent to a broader project (such as enlargement) of recoding non-EU legal and political codes into an ‘EU’ image.<sup>6</sup> ENP here is not being judged on its ‘success’ or ‘failure’ in straightforward terms, as I believe this can lead to an impoverished analysis of effects it might have in a longer trajectory of policy frameworks towards the region. Rather ENP is analysed as a current context for the macro-regional imaginaries of EU policy (Bialasiewicz et al. 2013) that attempt to produce “European spaces” (Moisio 2011) in a Mediterranean space that is imagined as ‘natural’ for the EU to operate in (Jones 2011). I caution here, as do Celata and Coletti, that ENP does not ‘contain’ all of the EU’s (or its Member States’) political and economic relations with the designated ‘neighbours’, many of which occur in “wider set of formal and informal venues” (2016, 16).

Building on Dabashi’s criticism of Eurocentric epistemologies (Dabashi 2015), I propose that ENP can be seen as a *geography of coloniality*. The Neighbourhood encrypts spatial logics of teleological development where modern EU countries represent superior models, reading other non-EU spaces as to how similarly they resemble the “metropole” and its standards.<sup>7</sup> Increased aid, support and relationship with the EU is based upon how well partner/neighbour countries do in implementing reforms that make them compatible with the EU and internalising those reforms as domestic priorities.

### ***The Origins and Goals of ENP***

The idea of ENP was that the EU would use its successful export of norms, laws, regulations, values and institutions for accession as a way to engage countries that were immediately adjacent to the EU’s external borders.<sup>8</sup> In this sense, ENP is an extension of the enlargement logic by which countries were essentially made to copy the EU’s structure and its definitions of abstract notions such as “democracy” and “rule of law” wholesale.

Neighbouring countries were to benefit from market access, infrastructural and institutional investment, stronger political ties and in essence being closely linked to the EU. The goal was geographically evoked as creating a “Ring of Friends” around the EU; a zone of “Proximity and Prosperity” (van Houtum and Boedeltje 2011); to avoid “alienated borderlands” (Martinez 1994). One of the main, and often-repeated attractors for neighbours to cooperate was the

“Stake in the EU internal market”, which would be the neighbourhood’s main ticket to prosperity. As then High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Ashton put it: “It is also important to remember ‘why’ we do what we do. We do this to promote and protect human rights and democracy ... to help others obtain what we have” (in Zielonka 2013, 47).

Not only will incentives such as financial assistance or integration into the internal market promote cooperation by partner countries, but also an internalisation of political goals and cultures, such that the difference between EU goals and methods of conducting politics become less and less distinguishable from those of the partner country. It should be insisted this traffic of “internalising” values is one-way. In no place does it say that the Partner countries may suggest significant reforms in the EU itself.<sup>9</sup>

Joining the EU as a “neighbour” is “optional” and official sanctions are limited. Nonetheless, the ENP is a highly conditional policy. The language of “partnership”, “co-ownership” over reforms and voluntary reforms should be qualified with the huge importance of the EU market for many of these countries, and the geopolitical weight of some of its Member States. Members of the EEAS would leverage this in negotiating with Mediterranean partner countries. As one EEAS officer explained:

we started sending messages like: ‘you’re in deep [trouble] partner country! You need to get involved [with the EU] or your in trouble, the gap between the shores if growing’ [...] how to anchor [a] tiny economy to the Internal Market?<sup>10</sup>

Thus it is “partnership” in an unequal relationship (Zielonka 2013). As Jones has pointed out, this view of the Mediterranean “as a space in which the European Union regards itself as having a natural legitimacy to act in order to ensure its own security, promote good neighbourliness, and stave off potential threats to European and global order” (Jones 2011, 41) is not new, but can even be read into the Global Mediterranean Policy of 1972 or the debates surrounding the Treaty of Rome. That problematic “naturalness” leads to ‘macro-regional’ policy debates that seem self-evident and feed into external policy priorities and EU-centric notions of security and good order (Bialasiewicz et al. 2013; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias and Pickles 2013; Moisiso et al. 2013). This EU-driven macro-regional process though is not simply a uni-directional push by the EU. Partner/Neighbouring states are also active participants in the creation of the Neighbourhood both through active cooperation and a push for further integration into the EU (even perhaps more than some Member States of the EU would want) as well as through moments of resistance to or obfuscation of certain ENP policy goals (Celata and Coletti 2016; El Qadim 2010; Jones 2011).

## **Contested Neighbourhood**

In Early 2011, I was in Brussels conducting interviews and office visits with different EU Commission and Council offices focused on the themes of migration and relationships through ENP. At the very same time these discussions were happening, the protests in Tunisia were continuing after the fall of Ben Ali, and Tahrir square was being occupied and defended. Brief respites between interviews to grab a coffee would be prolonged as I gazed, confused and concerned, at television images of a horse and camel charge by vigilantes against the protestors in Tahrir, the strange flyover by attack jets over the square, and one politician or minister after another making this or that statement on the day's happenings. This news of course affected the tone and mood of my interviewees, many of whom were directly involved in ENP negotiations and were affected by the events. At several points in the interviews, there was a sentiment that more integration with the EU via ENP would have avoided some of the recent revolts or lessened their intensity. One EEAS officer noted:

[EU] Member States have also insisted that conditionality has not been used enough in ENP, for example with regards to human rights not enough has been demanded, respect for international conventions- perhaps some of the events going on now could have been avoided. New [ENP] Action Plans will have more conditions.<sup>11</sup>

Another EEAS officer tasked with a North African unit suggested that the more tied a neighbouring country was to the EU's market the less bloody the uprising there:

Tunisia avoided losing 10's of thousand of textile jobs with the WTO thanks to the FTA with EU, how might this have affected recent events? Compare how it has happened in Tunisia with what is happening in Egypt.<sup>12</sup>

This vision though, posits the EU as an automatic human rights ally of these North African "Neighbours". It assumes the EU's vision and plan for human rights and the economy were equivalent to (or at least beneficial for) that of the people rising up in those countries. This is a problematic equivalent that would need empirical exploration. Furthermore, this particular vision of the ENP seems to collide with support by Member States and EU officers for the pre-Arab Spring political status quo, including initial support for Ben Ali against the protestors.

## **Readings of ENP: Beyond a "Rings of Friends"**

It is at this point when we can say the EU is acting as a centre or *point-zero* ready to evaluate others and/or can be reached by others with assistance (Tlostanova and Mignolo 2012). This zero-point "sees" problems on its outside, but also possibilities to 'fix' them. The EU in this case reads the actions of others back unto itself and judges how 'good' or 'bad' the

neighbours are doing by examining how similar or dissimilar they are from oneself.

The EU, through its strategies of ENP acts as an agent that is given the authority to ‘decode’ and ‘recode’ territories, governments, legal mechanisms and perhaps even cultural values. At the most hum-drum technical levels we can see this in greater detail. In reference to priorities for Morocco to reform its insurance markets:

We had a day long video conference based in the embassy in Morocco where EU-based experts on insurance *acquis* explained how EU *acquis* works; two weeks later another video conference where the Moroccan counterparts explain how they do it; then there’s a period where the “gap” is analyzed– then there are TAIEX and twinning missions<sup>13</sup> where assessments of the gaps also occurs.<sup>14</sup>

The ENP works by promoting *acquis* through a system of searching for potential points of alignment with EU policy and regulatory structures and then engaging in a careful process of reform (recoding) that will make ever-increasing spaces of policy relatively similar or even mirror to their EU counterparts.

While ENP marks a clear ‘end’ of the EU (by virtue of being a neighbour), it is also a clear attempt to expand EU influence and pursue EU interests. “[T]he objective of establishing a ‘*ring of friends*’ may be read as an attempt to buffer, and with it to blur, the EU’s external borders” (Del Sarto and Schumaker 2005, 19). With regard to this ‘blurring’ (or multiplying) of the edges of Europe, Kuus notes that the scripting of ‘others’ as not yet or not fully European plays a role in the geopolitical approach taken by the EU and how the EU defines its external relations approach (Kuus 2005, 570).

The norms of the EU, both technical and more value-laden, and the role these play in the EU’s External Policy have been the subject of much scholarly debate.<sup>15</sup> The values the ENP invokes, such as democracy, rule of law, human rights and the market, are seen as ‘good’ in and of themselves, and as universal. The EU is seen as already having these values creating a perception of the “Neighbourhood” via a “distancing moral superiority,” (van Houtum and Boedeltje 2011, 125). Van Houtum argues the ENP as a “chronopolitics” where the partner is seen as operating in a past that has already been resolved by the EU (rather than the EU being an element in that existing order), and as a b/ordering instrument that clearly defines the EU and its neighbours in an ‘ordered space’ organised along a self-defined hierarchy with the EU at the top (van Houtum 2010). The ‘neighbour’ is distinctively marked as non-European and without medium-term perspective to join. Yet at the same time “Neighbourhood” designates a space for a slower-paced and more conditional “Europeanisation”, in the way that Bialisiewicz highlights that an important part of EU foreign policy is to make non-EU spaces into ‘European spaces’ (Bialisiewicz 2011, 3) or “to

turn ‘less European’ spaces into fully European ones, both within the EU and beyond” (Moisio 2011, 35). Kramersch has attempted to delineate the spatial foundations of such a recoding as one that reduces differences into ‘sameness’ insinuating ‘EU’rope’s inability to address ‘difference’ in any meaningful way other than through epistemic violence (Kramersch 2011).

While the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Mogherini stated in 2016 that ENP needs to be “less centered in Europe” (2015),<sup>16</sup> this is not apparent from the Commission’s or EEAS<sup>17</sup> own documents, nor does there seem to be a fundamental questioning of the ENP, its origins or the universality of the EU’s self-image and definitions of the values it upholds.

### ***Dabashi’s Critique: Erasing Difference and Making Others Legible***

In trying to discern some of the power-knowledge at work in the attempt to create a European Neighbourhood I turn to the work of Hamid Dabashi. The ENP is thus a project, which attempts to code and recode other territories (legally, economically, in terms of security, politics and even cultural values) according to its own episteme (Dabashi 2015). The recoding attempts to make other non-EU territories legible (Jones 2012; Scott 1998). This recoding into an EU-centric episteme morphs into an EU teleology: Europe as destiny; Europe as more advanced. This recoding erases, or attempts to erase, other historical geographical imaginaries (though not without push back) that are not anchored in the European Union.

This recoding also shows the EU as unable to relate to “difference” in any profound way, it can only relate to the “same”.

In his recent work *Can Non-Europeans Think?* (2015) Hamid Dabashi’s first chapter is titled “Can Europeans Read?” Here he makes reference to what seems like an intellectual inability to understand other political and philosophical frames of reference that are not written back into a European intellectual heritage (a “European” that is imagined, spatialised and racialised in particular ways).

The main argument of *Can non-Europeans think?* is in line with the broader post-colonial critique of a European episteme that seems doomed to needing to assimilate any other space and knowledge form into its own categories and by extension hierarchies. This reading aids to understand the particular geopolitical and historic visions embodied by a policy such as the ENP and its attempt to integrate adjacent regions by “reading back into what they already know and have epistemically pasted upon the world”.<sup>18</sup>

Up to this point, Dabashi’s work, if applied to ENP, fits into a broader critique that appears in much of the existing geographical literature that points out how the ENP produces a top-down view of the Neighbourhood; how it creates a macro-region with the EU at its centre; and how it repeats a

kind of ‘mission civilicatrice’. But with the following concepts, Dabashi adds an important nuance: it is not merely the inversion of the colonial mindset that is the necessary task of critique at this point. Rather, he encourages moving beyond this binary, to see other spatial coordinates in the making and as already having existed. Thus Dabashi points to a resistance to a geography of coloniality that is not merely a rejection of the ‘West’ nor a blind praising of ‘Nativist’ forces. In this sense, there is strong resonance between Dabashi and the work by Dimitrova and Kramsch (2017) where they call for moving beyond a post-colonial theory and critique of the ENP that still leaves the EU and its foreign policy concepts in the centre of analysis. Thus to read past a scripting of the EU/Neighbourhood as superior/inferior, we cannot merely invert that dualism on its head. Dabashi encourages us to be attentive to other spatial formations, both historical and current, that move us away from the mutual exclusivity of the colonial imaginary, including in its anti-colonial interpretation (Dabashi 2008, 2009).

### **Historical Alternative Geographies**

The ENP’s tool of “reading back into itself” (Dabashi 2015) can partly erase other epistemes and potential geographical alignments – both historical and current ones –, which are not centered on the EU. Dabashi introduces the concepts of ‘alternative geographies’ as a way of conceiving of the distinct geographies, and geopolitical imaginaries that have existed, and reorient one away from a “West centered” focus:

Oblivious to those [alternative] geographies because they cannot read any other script, any other map, than the colonial script and the colonial map with which Europeans have read and navigated the world; conversely they cannot read any other script or map because they are blinded to alternative geographies that resistance to that colonialism had written and navigated. (Dabashi 2015, 10)

This ‘blindness’ can also refer to those of us who are critical of the colonial map but have difficulty thinking past it. ‘Alternative geographies’ written either in resistance to, or in spite of the colonial script become a way to move past an all powerful imperial imaginary, and facilitate imagining non-imperial futures.

Historical experiments and geographies such as Non-Alignment, Pan-Arabism or the Tri-Continental Process, fall by the wayside through an integration process (partial or not) into the EU. This integration can limit the multiple and even contradictory geopolitical alignments and geographical imaginaries at work in the regions that constitute the “Neighbourhood”. Granted this potential erasure or limitation is more at work in the minds of EU and Member State foreign policy planners and implementers than in

the Neighbouring countries in question for whom ‘EU’rope is perhaps but one geopolitical orientation.

Recalling other historical ways of envisioning these regions (Dabashi mentions Braudel’s and Ibn Khaldun’s ideas of the Mediterranean or Americo Castro’s attempt to de-link Spanish history from an exclusive European home) becomes central to being able to imagine “alternative worlds” (Dabashi 2016) and to avoid seeing the approximation or accession to the EU as a kind of ‘arrival’ at a ‘destiny’. The recoding of a Mediterranean Neighbourhood can lay to rest other spaces and regional geographic imaginaries that existed or exist in the region, in an EU-centred teleology of modernity, ‘the EU as promise’ if you will. The ‘Europeanising’ of non-EU spaces can also de- and re-normalise where Europe begins and ends, even reading that back (anachronistically?) into the past.

### ***The ENP’s Map and the Erasure of Alternative Geographies***

There have always been multiple worlds. Contrary to the world-destructive projects of anthropology and Orientalism, there have always existed alternative modes of rethinking the world in differential geographies. (Dabashi 2012, 55)

Dabashi points to how a certain episteme that articulates an exclusionary binary – such as Us/Them; West/Rest; modern/primitive –, projects its own map upon the world, and is unable to read spaces outside such a map (other than as aberrations). The imposition of this geography, where the site of the modern is presented as a territorialised telos of progress and destiny, not only imposes a particular way of doing things but also erases other existing or historical geographical imaginaries. Other alignments of territory or politics are rendered invisible, irrelevant or anachronistic. Thus the main contribution of Dabashi’s concept of alternative geographies, for the purposes of this paper, is the ability to read historical spatial orientations of politics that were not organised along a neat coloniser/colonised binary or its simplistic rejection. Alternative geographies also shows us that there was/is no geopolitical ‘destiny’ be it the EU or otherwise, and that other orientations existed and may emerge.

Currently though, other ways of defining democracy; mobility; economy; etc. are precluded in an ENP framework. This is not only achieved due to technical incompatibility regarding *acquis* (though this is part of it), but also through the erasure of memory. If the universal values of “freedom, democracy, human rights and prosperity” were the goal, and if the EU already has them and has had them for some time, then all that orients us towards that site is what matters. The geography of the Neighbourhood, and the types of reforms it envisions are the only ones worth remembering, for before that there was only “lack” of democracy; of freedom; of modernity; etc.

As a mode of illustration, I point to a few telling examples of alternative geographies that call for further historical research. Still, this brief account starting by two islands in the Mediterranean, moving to the Southern shore and then the Northern shore suggests the multiple possibilities of alignment without assuming the current regional geo-politics. I begin with Malta and Cyprus. Upon joining the EU on 1st May 2004, these two republics had to officially leave another international grouping: *the Non-Aligned Movement* (NAM). While often forgotten in the telling of EU history these two Member States were once participants in the ‘spirit of Bandung’. Both struggled for independence from the British empire in the latter half of the twentieth century. Cyprus in particular is often written of in terms of the communal conflict between Greek and Turkish Cypriots and the problematic relations with the Greek junta and Enosis (Boedeltje et al. 2007), joining the EU then as a way to escape from sectarian conflict. Yet Cyprus was also known for figures such as Archbishop Makarios III, an independence leader and first Prime Minister. Makarios tried to navigate the complex state interests at play in Cyprus (such as British, US, Greek and Turkish) partly by internationalising the question and moving the country into NAM membership. He was referred to on occasion as the ‘Fidel Castro of the Mediterranean’ (Stravidis 2008). Besides these two EU members, several neighbours were also involved in the NAM, including Egypt, which under Nasser was a co-convenor of Bandung and an instigator of the NAM. Egypt’s role here also overlapped with developments in Pan-Arabism, particularly the declaration of the United Arab Republic (comprising Egypt, Syria and almost including Libya, three current neighbours).

The case of Algeria, despite its difficult post-independence history, has served as an example of various alternatives. It should be noted that the Algerian war of independence, the struggle in which Fanon participated, was in legal terms a war within France and not with France. When the European Economic Community was founded with the Treaty of Rome (1957), Algeria formed a part of metropolitan France and thus the Algerian war of independence cuts through the EU narrative about being a community of peace that has never suffered internal war since 1957 (Hansen 2002). The programs of worker self-management under Ben Bella, or Algeria’s reputation internationally during parts of the 1960s and 1970s due to its support and hosting of anti-colonial and radical groups from around the world, including rebel groups from Europe (i.e. ETA) and in the Maghreb (i.e. Polisario) further solidified it as a different kind of ‘zero-point’. The Algerian independence struggle served as a reference for much radical mobilising in Europe itself during the 1960s and 1970s. Even internal politics such as the mass uprisings of 1988 that lead to the fall of the government or the 1991 elections that seemed to indicate the FIS (*Front islamique du salut*) was poised to win the general election showed that Algeria continued to be a potential source of

political alternatives with mass support. The tacit support of EC/EU Member States in cancelling the 1991 elections and repressing opposition seem to indicate the lack of tolerance for any significant political difference in their ‘neighbourhood’ that could potentially threaten interests.

Other examples could follow, like the *Tri-Continental Conference* process, largely initiated by Mehdi Ben Barka, of the Moroccan opposition; or the difficult to understand dynamics of the Libyan *Gamaharriya*. Without need to pose any one of these as a “better” or “more real” geography than that of the ENP, what it does demonstrate is that the EU was not simply “destiny”.

In fact, this alternative Mediterranean geography not only comprised of today’s southern Neighbours and the island republics of Cyprus and Malta. The political transitions in Spain, Greece and Portugal<sup>19</sup> (through the Carnation Revolution and its connections to African independence struggles) were periods of intense and radical experimentation. Though it may now seem “natural” to assume these countries as part of ‘EU’rope, this was not always the case.<sup>20</sup>

The erasure of these alternative geographies also implies removing a conflict over decolonisation, and the EU’s role (historically if not currently) in this. Returning to Nasser, Hansen describes how the process of reform in Egypt and the nationalisation of the Suez Canal were important steps toward the Treaty of Rome. A few months after the Suez Canal was nationalised, France, Britain and Israel launched a war to take back the canal and topple Nasser and his regime. The ensuing international political response left Britain and France politically defeated in the conflict. For France, the defeat in Suez was the required push to overcome domestic obstacles to approving the Treaty of Rome. For Jean Monnet, considered one of the founding fathers of the European Union due to his pioneering efforts in establishing the European Coal and steel Community as well as other predecessors of the European Union, Suez was a point of inflection:

Jean Monnet, and his Action Committee for the United States of Europe, would also interpret the Suez Crisis in 1956 as a powerful argument for the furtherance of European integration (Mayne 1970, 239–40). Indeed, during the ceremony following upon the signing of the Treaty of Rome, Louis Armand – a close aid to Monnet and shortly thereafter the president of the European Atomic Energy Community – went as far as suggesting that ‘We ought to erect a statue to Nasser’; ‘To the federator of Europe’ (cited in Bromberger and Bromberger 1969, 176). (Hansen 2002, 492)

In this instance, it was anti-colonial resistance that pushed forward European integration. Nonetheless, Dabashi is also critical of the resultant post-colonial condition as a stagnation of the colonial binary. The next section engages Dabashi’s arguments about post-colonial readings.

## ***Critique of Post-Colonialism***

These very same alternative geographies and geographical imaginaries could often be a response to the colonial geography being imposed which did not fundamentally eradicate the very dividing line being resisted. In a sense the resistant geographies of anti-colonialism, and early forms of pan-Arabism or pan-Islamism could devolve into mirrors of the colonial order that was struggled against. Dabashi is quite clear at various points that his goal is not to simply reject a “Europeanising” geography such as that of the ENP, by flipping it on its head. This is related to a strong criticism he makes of post-colonialism: “The postcolonial did not overcome the colonial; it exacerbated it by negation” (Dabashi 2012, xvii).

The postcolonial subject, which was none other than the colonial subject multiplied by the illusion of emancipation,...[...] For more than two hundred years, ... colonialism begat postcolonial ideological formations: socialism, nationalism, nativism (Islamism); one metanarrative after another, ostensibly to combat, but effectively to embrace and exacerbate, its consequences. (Dabashi 2012, xx–xxi)

Dabashi’s critique of colonial geographies extend not only to post-colonial regimes where anti-colonial movements could become ossified in power structures (such as several of those overthrown in 2011) but also attempts by critical scholars to “decolonise” theory while remaining within the terms set up by both colonial and post-colonial thought. He analyses the practice of putting the ‘West’ in quotes when discussing “Western” theory as a means to explore the limitations this can put on our transformative imaginations<sup>21</sup>:

This is a perfect example of trying to decolonize theory by simply submitting the term ‘the West’ to a couple of compromising quotation marks [...] As long as ‘the West’ and ‘the Third World’ remain categorically viable those borders have not been crossed. They have in fact been thickened and barbed-wired. (Dabashi 2012, 47)

Dabashi further decries the limits of a North/South, First/Third binary geographical imaginary, as having little to contribute to an understating of the current spatial configurations that have led to the Arab Spring and its resonances: “That binary, false and falsifying from its very inception, has epistemically exhausted itself” (Dabashi 2012, 68).

How to interpret then the events of the Arab Spring and its aftermath in a way that can break past the colonial divide: the middle of someone’s East, modern/primitive, European/non-European; becomes key to, but also a challenge for, Dabashi. This is further complicated because despite the exhausting of a colonial/post-colonial framework of reference as master narrative to understand the traces of distinct geographical patterns in the Mediterranean, this does not mean that important political actors no longer operate with those same old frameworks in mind. The Arab Spring is not the end of ENP or the EU’s approach towards the region anymore than it is the

end of distinct interventions of US, Israeli, Saudi or Iranian foreign policy actors. Still, for Dabashi the Arab Spring contributes to creating spatial imaginaries beyond post-colonial solutions:

...[T]he events in in the Arab and Muslim world generically referred to as the ‘Arab Spring’ represent the end of postcolonial ideological formations as we have known them for the past two hundred years. By the end of post-coloniality I mean the cessation of ideological production in colonial contexts and terms- the terms determined by the European colonial domination of the region, and the tyrannical ‘postcolonial’ states left behind when the Europeans collected their flags and left. Anticolonial nationalism, socialism and Islamism are the ideological formations that historically have confronted European colonialism and shaped the modern nation-states that emerged in the former colonial territories. (Dabashi 2012, 139–140)

The processes of the Arab Spring articulated a different kind of ideological formation beyond the modern nation-state reference, with demands not limited to calls for representative democracy. Engaging these uprisings as the end of post-colonialism leads Dabashi to advance the notion of geographies of liberation.

### **Liberation Geographies**

In a critique of EU territorial policy, including EU Cross-Border Regions and ENP Olivier Kramsch states: “what these contemporary initiatives within Europe’s inner and outer borderlands signify is an ongoing and chronic inability to see the ‘Other’ other than as a reflection of the European same” (Kramsch 2011, 203). In this way, both spaces ‘internal’ and external’ to ‘EU’rope are subject to the same sorts of master narratives of territorial ordering and Othering. The heterogeneity within and without, as well as the connections across them, fall by the wayside. Kramsch searches for tools that highlight “the possibilities of cross-cutting trans-border alliances within, across and beyond European space” that can hold in “productive tension, the contradictions inherent to both internal and external forms of European governance.” Kramsch calls for “contrapuntal” research agenda that would be attentive to “intertwined histories and overlapping geographies” (Said in Kramsch 2011, 202) without recourse to a “teleological norm.” Dabashi poses a parallel contrapuntal concept that can signal spaces which challenge both the EU’s macro-regional delimitations as well as a post-colonial flipping of that macro-region on its head without challenging its spatial contours by focusing on what he calls the liberation geographies of occupied plazas and movements of migrations.

The geography of *coloniality* of the ENP is never singular nor is it the only game in town. It is always incomplete and in competition with other spaces, other regional alignments and other practices. This can include push back, or strategic moments of cooperation versus obfuscation on the part of Partner

countries in implementing their Action Plans (El Qadim 2010). But it can also include moments of struggle and opening that force new thinking beyond not only ENP but also other current political arrangements. Hamid Dabashi used the phrase “liberation geography” to refer to what he saw as most exciting in the Arab Spring: a revolt not only against corrupt sclerotic regimes in the region and their neo-colonial allies, but a revolt against a particular regime of knowledge that continued to produce the “West and the Rest”. In this vein, it is important to consider the geography of *Tahrir* or *Bourguiba Avenue* as not only resonating in Arab capitals but also in Spanish and Greek squares. Even Occupy Wall Street and Gezi Park might be part of that geography. The complex resonances and feedbacks between these rebellions could lead to consider for a moment a *Mediterranean Spring* (see Fregonese 2012) of cycles of political experimentation and counterrevolution:

That the Arab revolutions are changing our imaginative geography is already evident in the interaction between the southern and northern coasts of the Mediterranean in terms of modes of protest. (Dabashi 2012, xviii)

To further explore the notion of ‘liberation geographies’, Dabashi sees the uprisings of 2011 onwards as a way to overcome the colonial/post-colonial dichotomy, and how to reframe resistance to projects such as the ENP in ways that are not simply a rejection of ‘Europe’ as an already constituted and existing space, nor as a delayed attempt to emulate it:

These revolutions are not driven by the politics of replicating ‘the West’ – rather, they are transcending it, [...] The mystical consciousness our world has inherited hangs around the binary of ‘The West and the Rest,’ the most damning delusion that the European colonial map of the world manufactured and left behind, with ‘Islam and the West’ as its most potent borderlines. It is precisely that grand illusion that is dissolving right before our eyes. (Dabashi 2012, xviii)

Dabashi dedicates a significant amount of space in his 2012 and his 2015 books to explore, in an almost poetic fashion, one of the main slogans of the Arab revolutions: “Ash’ab yurid isqat an-nidham!” (the people want/demand the end/overthrow of the regime). The end of the regime demanded by protesters is understood by Dabashi as a demand to also end a regime of knowledge which continuously reproduces the ‘Us&Them’ dichotomy kept alive not only by neoconservative forces but also by ideologies that turn that lens around but do not fundamentally undermine it (Dabashi mentions pan-Arabism, Arab socialism, and pan-Islamism in particular). He refers to the post-colonial critique as a continuation of this geography. While the critique is not as racist as its colonial past, it does not undermine the fundamental division, and in seeking to recall the impact of colonialism also recreates it as an overly powerful chimera:

'People demand the Overthrow of the Regime.' This demand for the dominant 'regime' to be brought down is a reference not only to political action but, even more radically, to the mode of knowledge production about 'the Middle East,' 'North Africa,' 'the Arab and Muslim World,' 'The West and the Rest,' or any other categorical remnant of a colonial imagination (Orientalism) that still pre-empt the liberation of these societies in an open-ended dynamic. (Dabashi 2012, 2)

Emergent epistemes, or "liberation geographies" may be signalled by the different protest cycles marked by the Arab Spring as well as by new migratory flows that disturb the Global South to North directionality that predominates debates of the migratory "crisis". Building on the concept of liberation geographies, movements across the Mediterranean (including migratory ones) not only imply a potential change in political regime; they could also mean a transformation in the *regime du savoir* and the language with which to understand and critique events (Dabashi 2012, 75).

In one of the few engagements with Dabashi's work in geography, Adrian Smith elaborates how Dabashi's call requires being attentive to new spatialities in the region. Smith investigates this in the opening article to a special issue that examines precisely new regional foreign policy by the EU, challenges to the EU and Member State centered region-making, as well as the transnational fallout of the Arab Spring and anti-austerity protests:

the Arab Spring requires that we not only understand the profound consequences of revolution but also consider its meaning for how we consider forms of domination. For Dabashi (2012) this requires a transformation in the 'imaginative geographies' we use to represent and analyse places. In undertaking such a transformation we need to move away from the domination of orientalist forms of thought and understand the agency of revolution in the region outside of the hegemony of Western control and of authoritarian domination within the region. This requires a decentring and a re-mapping of the world allowing for a greater space for 'non-European' interests in establishing trajectories of change. (Smith 2013, 5)

Smith in the following quote seems to evoke how the Mediterranean uprisings question the very geographical framework of ENP:

Thus, the Arab Spring represents a movement against 'a vast imaginative [and material] landscape of domination' (Dabashi 2012, 44) which is conjuring into being a 'liberation geography' of protest responding to political authoritarianism and its links to earlier forms of political-economic engagement between Europe and North Africa, and the process of macro-region making in the Mediterranean. (Smith 2013, 5)

In fact, the Arab Spring might be read also as a site for the production of alternative knowledge, a distinct point with which to experiment different articulations of space and society. This trans-Mediterranean and post-domination space was in the making starting with the Tahrir revolts and expanding beyond the Mediterranean contours.

## *Uprisings across the Mediterranean*

The assumption that these revolts are occurring in ‘the Arab and Muslim world’ is of course at once imaginatively productive while factually flawed. African nations from Senegal to Djibouti, the non-Arab nations of Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran and non-Muslim countries ranging from Spain to Greece, and even non-Mediterranean sites, best exemplified in the Occupy Wall Street movements, are in one way or another replicating the phenomenon of Tahrir Square. This very transnational fact is an indication of the transformative geography we are facing. (Dabashi 2012, 46)

While it can appear empirically loose to lump together processes such as the ‘indignados’ in Spain, Occupy Wall street in the US, the Jasmine Revolution in Tunisia and Tahrir square in Egypt, the resonance between one movement and another, in terms of timing and style of protest is difficult to ignore. Activists who participated in different movements of the ‘squares’ (15M Movement in Spain, Syntagma in Greece, Occupy Wall Street in the US, Taksim and Gezi Park in Turkey and Nuit debout in France among others) reflect on how events of the Arab Spring served as inspiration to radically take on their own governments in ways that expanded beyond the traditional forces of opposition in those countries. The liberation geography evoked here is not necessarily that of a new Non-Aligned axis, but more an evocative linking of the sites and practices of the squares. It is more a resonance of desires and practices that can potentially open up new solidarities and challenge hard geographical imaginaries that divide places like the Northern, Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean:

The end of postcolonial ideologies means a return to (and of) history – and not just in the former colonies [...] ‘Democracy’, if it should be called that, ceases to be a form of government or an institutional arrangement and much less the designation of an already existing space. It becomes a yearning and a practice that can bring together the people in Tehran’s Azadi Square and Cairo’s Tahrir Square with those in Madrid’s Puerta del Sol and Syntagma Square in Athens, and with those across the Atlantic in the Occupy Wall Street movement...So the glory of Syntagma and Tahrir come together to rename ‘democracy’ on an Athens-Cairo axis. On that basis, the very idea of ‘the West’ will disappear from the face of the earth. (Dabashi 2012, 144–146)

Sara Fregonese investigates the relation between the spread of mass protests in 2011 with the macro-regional geographic construction of the EU. If the Mediterranean had been a space of power projection for the EU “the uprisings affecting the European Neighbourhood Policy members in the Arab world, and the continuing protests in southern Europe are, today more than ever, disturbing the fragile coherence of ‘EU’rope’s Mediterranean geopolitical vision” (Fregonese 2012, 110). She links this vision to early readings of these protests as an “Arab ‘renaissance’, ‘awakening’, a ‘1989-moment’ recall[ing] an Orientalist and imperialist attitude [...] relegating some places to the

backward stages of the morality play of democracy,” and suggests that attentiveness to multiple transnational lines of connection between these and former upheavals can aid in “blurring the real and imagined boundaries between an authoritarian Arab and a democratic European Mediterranean that is still taken for granted” (Fregonese 2011, 14).

Fregonese argues against a “unique [exclusive] Arab political pivot” to these protests stating that:

There are, instead, myriad heterogeneous, transnational leaderless political spheres (Filiu 2011) that are shaping the revolutions and remaking the political geographies of the Mediterranean...[These spheres] trespass accepted politico-cultural boundaries [...] between the northern and southern shores of the Mediterranean, ... between ‘EU’rope and the southern Mediterranean that Europe feels entitled to ameliorate. (Fregonese 2012, 111)

The political spheres and the trespassing of political boundaries that Fregonese is suggesting are not necessarily articulated in a clear and coherent geographical imaginary counter-posing a different macro-region to counter or to replace either the Mediterranean pretension of the ENP or the particular regimes being challenged in the multiple uprisings that occurred. It is a sphere articulated by direct and indirect communication of peoples, tactics, slogans and the generation of a fragile but common identity of struggle:

The commonality of slogans, the demonstrations of solidarity and the statements of mutual inspiration between different movements in different locations go beyond the ‘domino’ of Arab national populations deposing dictators. They instead signal a more complex network of common demands for systemic changes. (Fregonese 2012, 113)

Romanos has also commented on the careful following of the Egyptian revolution by Spanish activists before and during the 15M Movement. In turn, some of these same activists were then translating material from the Spanish occupations for use by Occupy Wall Street (Romanos 2016). In an even more recent iteration of this, Fernandez-Savater recalls his experience with the 2016 Nuit debout movement in France:

[In Paris] there were constant references to the 15M in Spain. [...] It reminds me most of all of the relation we established between Sol and Tahrir Square: we didn’t know exactly what had happened, but Tahrir served as an example and an inspiring reference. (Fernandez-Savater 2016, 4)<sup>22</sup>

The occupations are delineated in the squares and the spaces may even be renamed (Ramadan 2013). This practice hops from site to site, thus a kind of translocal revolutionary impulse is imagined and demarcated by these protests camps, in a sense, articulating that “Athens-Cairo axis” Dabashi mentions above. Seeing a regional and global geography from these sites and the different movements, actions, processes, cultural production they inspired results in a distinct or even post-‘Mediterranean’ or post-‘Arab’ geography.

### ***Liberation Geographies of Migration***

Dabashi attempts to envision liberation geographies that can think past the seemingly hard and fast borders of a developed and free EU and a messy if not chaotic ‘Neighbourhood’ and point to other ways of imagining these spaces and the way people inhabit them. He mentioned following the ways in which the protests of the Arab Spring have inspired (directly or indirectly) uprisings and movements in other parts of the world, even at times adopting a similar spatiality to the Tahrir camp. While these revolts, protests or camps may be ephemeral and it may be hard to identify a concrete result or victory in many cases, they have served to signal a break with the way a particular country or even entire regions are imagined. Another example, or perhaps better yet brushstroke/flare of these liberation geographies that Dabashi signals are new dynamics of migration: “Extensive labor migrations around the globe will be the defining moment of this new geography” (Dabashi 2012, 56).

Recent dynamics of human mobility in the region may thus be pointing to liberation geographies beyond that of a Neighbourhood with an EU on top looking down. For instance, the recent refugee “crisis” points repeatedly to the fact that “democracy” cannot -today at least, if ever-flourish without freedom of movement. The desire to limit human mobility and to enforce restrictions for ‘othered’ populations will lead to the sorts of scenes in the Central Mediterranean, the Aegean and the Balkan land routes we have been witnessing in a particularly blatant fashion since 2013. One way that the Arab Spring has intervened in this is through the overthrow of regimes that were cooperating on border control with European Union Member States, in this way disturbing the role of North Africa in particular as a ‘buffer zone’ (Dabashi 2012, 197–199). Increased refugee/migrant flows from/through the regions have also disrupted the geography of a ‘Ring of Friends’ to prevent ‘Alienated Borderlands’. These events of course have not lead to an end to border externalisation practices on the part of the EU or prevented the negotiation of new border agreements even with Libyan militias, but the ways that the Arab Spring and its aftermath have been inserted into geographies of migration has forced a reckoning with the exclusionary nature of the European Union’s external and externalised border, even calling into question the EU’s reception of the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize. In particular, the Arab Spring may signal how migration is part and parcel of these struggles, as cause or result.

Garelli and Tazzioli (2017), and Mezzadra (in Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias and Pickles 2011) see one of the implicit if not explicit demands for democracy in the Tunisian Revolution as the demand for a right to migrate, which the EU had clamped down on with the aid of dictator Ben Ali. Arguably, emigration and return migration from countries that were early on in the Arab Spring (like Tunisia and Egypt) played a role in defining the revolutions

that would take shape: “In fact, as some scholars suggest (Dabashi 2012; Kanna 2011) migrants’ movements and migration politics are crucial elements of the cartography of the Arab revolutions” (Tazzioli 2013, 159). Garelli and Tazzioli discuss the idea of a “migration and revolution nexus” (a play on the ‘migration and development nexus’) in their work on Tunisia. This refers to the explosion of out migration after the revolution of 2011 and the idea that this claim of freedom of movement was a key part of the revolt (Garelli and Tazzioli 2017, 2).

The migration story though does not stop there. Dabashi recalls the transformative power of certain migratory flows with distinct directionalities which in turn are shifting the narrative of a straightforward migration from A to B, where A is less developed/democratic/modern and B more so. Dabashi mentions in particular migrations from Southern Europe of un/underemployed youth to places in Latin America, North Africa and the interesting case of Portuguese emigration to Angola (Dabashi 2016). The Eurozone crisis lead to large upticks of emigration from EU countries (such as Greece, Portugal and Spain). Starting in 2012 for example, it became clear that there were more Spaniards migrating (not visiting) to Morocco per year than Moroccans migrating to Spain.<sup>23</sup> These recent migratory flows that violate the dictum that migration is always South-North, always *to* Europe, may lead to new spaces of mingling and imagination, or perhaps ways of de-racialising (or re-racialising) existing lines of difference. This remains to be seen, explored and struggled over.<sup>24</sup>

Almost echoing Dabashi’s idea of a liberation geography via migratory movement, Garelli and Tazzioli state:

We argue for a reading of these [reconfigurations of migration experiences] that would *open up the Mediterranean signifier* beyond the government plan of the policy region and beyond national confines. First, we advocate for an ethnographic and theoretical engagement that would trouble the *cartographic trap* that still underpins accounts of the Mediterranean of migration, fixing the understanding of a spatial process to its edges – and particularly to the borders of countries facing the Basin [...] Third, another cartographic trap that our work has to deal with is the South-North directionality of migration, often posited as *the* migration flow in the region, especially in the central Mediterranean. (Garelli and Tazzioli 2017, 6–7)

In articulating how this migration revolution nexus might ‘open up’ the Mediterranean signifier, Tazzioli describes:

Neither the vocabulary of the uprisings nor the patterns of current migrations from North Africa address the European space as a dreamland, especially after the outbreak of the economic crisis which contributed to dismissing the desirability of Europe. Secondly, migration policies in the Maghreb region need also to be analysed in connection with the political project of an area of free mobility, depicting a spatial economy of revolutionized spaces that goes largely beyond migratory patterns going to Europe. (Tazzioli 2013, 156)

Tazzioli in her work on Tunisia examines the political exploration for a Maghrebian space of free movement in light of the 2011 revolutions. While these have encountered a difficult post-revolutionary scenario especially in recent years, and have had to navigate the tense relations between Maghrebian countries (especially Morocco and Algeria), Tazzioli highlights how these new negotiations for free circulation build upon historical bilateral agreements (Tunisia and Libya in particular) referring back to historical “alternative geographies” as Dabashi puts it that are often overlooked in critical analyses of the politics of migration in the Mediterranean.

More importantly perhaps is that despite the formal agreements on mobility between states in The Mediterranean, the actual practices of mobility (of a lesser or greater legal nature) have proceeded, in a sense articulating complex liberation geographies of mobility that connect intra-African mobilities, (de Haas 2007; Kleist 2011) movement between the southern and eastern Mediterranean and the Gulf, and the resurgence of emigration from Southern Europe.

Key to keep in mind though is that these developments – negotiations for freer movement among Maghrebi countries, or the continued migrations of people into and across these spaces – occur in a context of continued and deepening border externalisation agreements with the EU. In other words, the continuation of the *regime du savoir* and its colonial episteme, signalled by Dabashi, continues in tandem with the emergence of liberation geographies or the reemergence of historical alternative geographies. Nonetheless for Dabashi

[t]hese labour migrations define a global condition that marks ‘post-coloniality’ as a mirage,” and facilitate imagining the world in ways that can move past “the ideological machinery that colonialism let behind [...] the end of the two binary oppositions that had created and sustained it: ‘the West and the Rest,’” (Dabashi 2012, 199)

## Conclusion

This paper has offered a reading of the European Neighbourhood Policy or ENP, as a Eurocentric geopolitical configuration, being questioned – at least in epistemological terms – by anti-systemic social movements and transnational migration practices. The challenges posed by these liberation geographies is their suggestiveness. It is not a question of how hard and fast an empirical fact they are, nor whether they constitute a geographical imaginary that is replacing other imaginaries of these regions and the actors supporting them. Rather, thinking in terms of “liberation geographies” helps in expanding our understanding of the connections between spaces and how the seemingly firm boundaries between regions, worlds and countries are not impervious, nor have they ever been. These liberation geographies also invite

us to think in terms of connection and mutual identification in places where identities are heavily bordered and collective work can often be thought of in a framework of charity with an ‘Other’. Liberation geographies force to question who the “Us” and “Them” are.

These liberation geographies point not so much to a direct “confrontation” with ENP but they signal the many spatial configurations that are possible. The ENP is then a context, reflecting an old way of viewing those regions defined as ‘non-European’ within which these challenges exist. The attempted recoding afoot in ENP according to the “map and script” of an imagined zero-point or centre, the inability to see things other than ‘problems’ in the Neighbourhood, suggest that ENP is unable to accommodate or allow for any sort of radical difference to its own image. It thus cannot be in ‘partnership’ with anything other than a recognisable copy of itself. This perhaps seems most clear in the apparent contradictions between ENP’s calls for improvements in democratic governance and human rights in its Neighbourhood and the consistent support and pressure by the EU and its Member States for border externalisation policies that displace the more exclusionary side to EU migration policy to non-EU sites. Thinking through Garelli and Tazzioli’s ‘migration and revolution nexus’, would the EU be able to tolerate a Right to Migrate operating between all shores of the Mediterranean?

In tentative, more than systematic terms, this paper has sought to build upon and link three sets of analyses on the Mediterranean by providing a theoretical framework to think them together. One set reads the formation of a spatial imaginary of the ENP challenging how the Neighbourhood is constructed in binary terms and the putative goals of designating a region as a neighbour according to the EU’s definition. The other two sets of readings reflect on the histories and possibilities of geopolitical disruption and connection in the Mediterranean. With alternative geographies, our attention is brought to historical spatial processes that undercut the exclusivity of orientalist binaries. Moreover those histories influence the present because “new emancipatory geographical imagination doesn’t come out of nowhere” (Dabashi 2012, 55). Liberation geographies, on the other hand, move our attention to a reading of recent events that challenge inherited categories. For instance, the resonances of the Arab Spring and movements occupying squares that erupted in 2011; as well as the shifting yet constant flows of transnational migratory movements in all directions. The contribution of this piece is to start bringing these together via a reading of Hamid Dabashi’s work: how to begin to think both the geographical imagination and implementation of an EU ‘Neighbourhood’ space as well as its discontents side by side with the political turbulence of mass uprisings, migration shifts as well as the unsettling conflicts that have arisen in the region. In this sense, it is important to note that the protests of the Arab Spring, or the shift in

migratory flows are not necessarily directly confronting the geography of the ENP by enunciating it. Rather in the framework of Dabashi's liberation geographies they are ignoring the 'West and Rest' or 'Developed/Developing' geographical divide envisioned through the ENP and enacting other spaces.

## Notes

1. European External Action Service (EEAS) interview 1: February 2011.
2. This field research took place between 2010–2015 as part of NSF Grant No. BCS-1023543.
3. Examples of these other engagements by geographers with Dabashi include: Sidaway's (2012) critique of Area Studies; Gregory's (2015) comments on the Fall 2015 terror attacks in Paris; as well as reference to the Arab Spring in its global ramifications (Springer 2014) post-secular geographies (Cloke, Sutherland and Williams 2016; Williams 2015) and shaking up of regional economies (Smith 2015b). Mamadouh's (2013) review of books on the Arab Spring (including Dabashi's 2012 work) is one of the longer engagements besides the work of Tazzioli (2013), Garelli and Tazzioli (2017), and Smith (2015).
4. Examples of this work include research on the global production of a nationality beyond statehood such as in *Iran without Borders: Towards a Critique of the Postcolonial Nation* (London: Verso, 2015); or the communication between Persian and Italian Renaissance literatures in *Persophilia: Persian Culture on the Global Scene* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2015).
5. Currently ENP applies to 16 of the EU's immediate neighbours by land or sea, including countries from the Maghreb (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya), Mashreq (Egypt, Occupied Palestinian Territory, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Syria), Southern Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia), and Eastern ex-USSR republics (Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus).
6. The EU Global Strategy, an update to EU foreign and defence policy released in 2016, appears to place less emphasis on this 'recoding' than its predecessor, the European Security Strategy. It remains to be seen how markedly different this strategy will be.
7. Indeed, historical colonial regimes have enacted this principle of ensuring resemblance/difference within hierarchical relationships through top-down enactments of superiority and erasure of alternatives. Thus Dabashi and some authors informed by critical post-colonial theory use the term *coloniality* in order to point how the Eurocentric logics underpinning the colonial framework used in the past to understand and relate to difference, resonate and inform current practices articulated in the present towards diversity (for example see Quijano 2000, 533–580). In this case, the EU, challenged or uninterested in coping with distinct understandings of economic relations, democratic practices, religious and cultural imaginaries, projects a common space termed "Neighbourhood" where the EU is the norm upon which the rest of bordering countries are expected to be tested.
8. It should be noted this adjacency is contingent on the European continent and does not include countries adjacent to the "overseas possessions" of EU Member States, for example: Canada to France and Denmark; or Brasil and Suriname to France.
9. A previous framework of EU Mediterranean relations, the EuroMed Process (founded in 1995), did include discussion of creating joint regulatory bodies, standards and pan-

regional dialogues between the EU and Mediterranean partner countries. The introduction of the ENP marked a more explicit shift towards integration into “EU” ways of doing things and pursuing EU interests. See Del Sarto and Schumaker (2005).

10. European External Action Service (EEAS) interview 2: February 2011.
11. EEAS interview 1 (note 1).
12. EEAS interview 2 (note 10).
13. These are missions where EU or Member State civil administrators are sent to train and help manage the administrations of partner countries as they reform.
14. European External Action Service (EEAS) interview 3: 2011.
15. See Manner’s (2002, 2006) work on ‘normative power Europe’ and the debates this provoked.
16. While the EU Global Strategy (2016) does seem to indicate a more practical approach to neighbouring countries, it does not look like a fundamental questioning of the basis for relations between regions nor an approach ‘less centered in Europe’, other than there being less discussion of direct value promotion (see <http://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en>).
17. EEAS: European External Action Service, the primary diplomatic and foreign policy arm of the EU. Though now distinct from the rest of the EU Commission, there are still areas of shared competency, notably with regard to neighbouring countries.
18. This is consistent with Dabashi’s regular engagement with both policy positions and statements by political leaders, statements by intellectuals that support or are integrated into those political power operations (via think-tanks, policy design institutes, etc.), as well as media representations.
19. It should be noted, Portugal is often referred to as a Mediterranean country, though it shares no coast on the Mediterranean and is often considered geographically ‘Atlantic’.
20. As point of interest here, as Spain negotiated its possible entry into the EEC and NATO, it also participated as an official invitee in the summits of the NAM (especially the Havana summit and New Delhi summit) (Viñas 2004, 11). The head of the Spanish diplomatic mission at the time in fact stated how Spain could align itself with the “global objectives” of the NAM without renouncing the “occidental” vocation of Spanish diplomacy, and that while understood as a “western European country” Spain was “not identified” as a “neocolonial country” (Puente Ojea 1983). While this language reflects a certain amount of rhetorical flair from the diplomat, it also signals the positions being navigated within the Spanish foreign policy establishment, newly orienting itself in the post-Franco transition period. The language used indicates a desire to articulate a geopolitical position and space that was not beholden to an exclusive view of the world.
21. Although, in the process of struggling to find other ways to speak, Dabashi can also have a hard time avoiding scare quotes.
22. It is of course important to recall that these sorts of transnational resonances of struggle are not unique to the period following 2011 or the Arab Spring. The transnational or global resonance and communication of struggles does not preclude its regional or national specificities, but rather highlights the hybrid spatialities at work.
23. For example see: de Haas (2012). It is unclear for how long this migratory dynamic persisted, or if it continues.
24. As an early exploration of these questions see Cobarrubias (2017).

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