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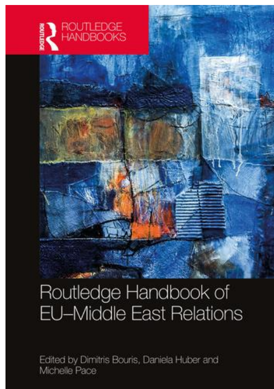

Routledge Handbook of EU–Middle East Relations

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Postcolonial theory and EU–Middle East relations

Publication details
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429317873-13
Nora Fisher-Onar
Published online on: 31 Dec 2021

How to cite :- Nora Fisher-Onar. 31 Dec 2021, *Postcolonial theory and EU–Middle East relations from:* Routledge Handbook of EU–Middle East Relations Routledge
Accessed on: 28 Mar 2023
https://www.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429317873-13

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11
POSTCOLONIAL THEORY AND EU–MIDDLE EAST RELATIONS
Recognising co-constitution

Nora Fisher-Onar

Introduction

On a June day in 1798, Napoleon addressed French troops gathering to invade Egypt and the Levant. "Soldiers", the Corsican commander declared, "you are about to undertake a conquest the effects of which on the civilisation and commerce of the world are immeasurable" (Cole, 2008: 11). Accompanying the fleet was an ancillary force of 151 scholars tasked with recording the natural and archeological wonders of the presumptively virgin wilderness whose unruly warlord defenders declared "will no longer exist" a "few days after we arrive" (ibid.). The expedition secured initial victories but a series of missteps led to French retreat by 1801. The experience – especially the brutal massacre of some 4500 surrendered defenders at Jaffa – and the descriptions which Napoleon's savants produced on the region, lingered ambivalently in French and Egyptian/Levantine collective memories for several generations.

With the collapse of the French empire in the aftermath of World War II, however, the Egyptian expedition was erased from the metropole's collective memory. This reimagination of France as a discreet nation-state – and founding member of a *sui generis* European integration project – served to absolve Paris of linkages to and responsibility for its colonial past (Stora, 2006; Nicolaïdis, 2015). The logic of erasure was evident in the rationale offered by François Furet, an influential historian: "I will omit the Egyptian expedition . . . because it forms a special history of its own, independent of French events, but essential to an understanding of the Eastern question in the nineteenth century" (cited in Cole, 2008: 246). Yet, as Edward Said (1979), among many other critical scholars of the (post-)colonial Middle East have shown, Napoleon's misguided venture reveals a paradigm which continues to shape how Europeans read and engage Middle Eastern neighbours.

At least three patterns with echo to this day surface by the story. First, the Egyptian escapade attests to the asymmetric military power which enabled French, British, Italian and German, among other European states, to dominate the region during the "long nineteenth century" and well into the twentieth. Today, the primacy of European security vis-à-vis the MENA is less overtly or consistently coercive, not least because EU actors tend to play good cop vis-à-vis Washington's hard power when it comes to Western engagement in the region. Nevertheless, in addition to intermittent military interventions by Member States, the EU's

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overriding security goal appears to be insulation from the region's real and perceived instability. This is evident in securitised border and migration policies, and cooperation with many of the region's repressive governments (Wolff, 2008; Zardo and Cavatorta, 2019). If one is oblivious to the legacies of colonialism, such patterns can and often are described in realist terms as power political pursuit of self-interest.

Second, the Napoleonic invasion fused military goals with economic ambitions (like disrupting British trade routes, and securing an agriculturally lucrative new colony given recent losses in the Americas) (Cole, 2008). EU policies today emanate from the nineteenth century colonial "incorporation of the region into the global division of labor" through:

> the break-up of the large Ottoman market, snapping [of] regional interdependencies, and reorienting economic links to the imperial core. The role of MENA colonies was to supply raw materials to and serve as markets for Western industries.
>
> *(Hinnebusch, 2012: 19)*

This characteristically imperial "hub-and-spoke" structure of trade, energy and labour relations – and its maintenance through the co-option of local notables and minorities – persisted after decolonisation. The pattern is evident from the 1956 Suez crisis to prevent nationalisation of key trade routes, and recurring interventions in oil rich states, to post-1980 neoliberal policies which disproportionately favour EU trade and investment balances. These patterns suggest that policies framed by the mutually empowering logic of liberalism – like the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP) of 1995 which sought a region-wide free trade zone by 2010 – also overlook echoes of colonialism in regional engagement.

Third, military and economic preponderance instilled a profound sense of cultural superiority. To be sure, French readings of the "civilisation" invoked by Napoleon, and the Enlightenment philosophy from which they derived, were said to be universal: technologies of modernity which peoples everywhere were exhorted to adopt (Toulmin, 1992). Pressure to assimilate spurred regional actors to engage, resist and selectively appropriate European ideas and practices (Fisher-Onar and Evin, 2011). Yet, such efforts were simultaneously stymied by a powerful subtext of the civilising mission: the presumption that "Orientals" were incapable of progress towards European modernity. As seen in Furet's argument for a "special history" of the Eastern Question, this exceptionalist view situated the southern and eastern Mediterranean as temporally and spatially distinct from the northern and western Mediterranean, i.e. "Europe". This framework – and the absolution it offered for military and economic exploitation – was systemised in templates for knowledge production. Subsequent scholarship, especially since the late twentieth-century Saidian turn in the humanities, has sought to expose this epistemological violence. Yet, few such insights have penetrated the intersection of International Relations (IR) and EU Studies (Rumelili, 2012; Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2013, 2021; Keukeleire and Lecocq, 2018; Pace and Roccu, 2020).

This chapter emanates from the view that while amnesia regarding colonial legacies has always been normatively problematic, it is now also practically untenable. We live, after all, at a time of world historic power shifts when what happens to "them" in the formerly colonised world patently impacts "us" in the West – a geopolitical impetus, as it were, to geocultural reckoning which has been brought dramatically into focus by the COVID-19 pandemic.

To support this reckoning, this chapter offers a schematic review of conceptual resources for recognising the mutual constitution of "Europe" and the "Middle East". Applying three analytical moves (Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2013) – provincialising, engagement and reconstruction – it argues that by provincialising liberalism and realism, and engaging alternative

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perspectives which are mindful of hybrid subjectivities, more inclusive and effective policies may be possible.

A clarificatory note on terminology is also appropriate. In this piece, "postcolonial" is used in several registers. Generally, it describes the postcolonial condition of both the formerly colonised and the former coloniser ("post-imperial" also can be used to specify the coloniser's experience).[1] Specifically, "postcolonial" is used to reference clusters of thought and activism like: the Afro-Caribbean, pan-African and Black Atlantic literature (including African American contributions);[2] the critical Saidian corpus on the Middle East and "Orient" more broadly; and Gramscian-influenced subaltern studies in South Asia. Meanwhile, "decolonial" refers both to the empirical process of decolonisation and to subsequent efforts to decouple from social structures and practices with origins in colonialism.[3] "Anti-colonial" likewise refers to activism during the historical era of decolonisation, and endeavours to this day to combat its echoes in thought and practice.

Postcolonial sources for rethinking EU–Middle East relations

Edward Said, who excavated the story of Napoleon's Egyptian invasion as exemplary of the colonial paradigm, was born in British-mandate Palestine in 1935. He came into the world on the eve of a war which would culminate in the end of Italy's colonial experiment in Libya, the collapse of British and French rule over much of the Mediterranean and globe, and the fall of other overseas European empires like the Belgians and Germans in sub-Saharan Africa, and the Dutch in Indonesia. By the time Said died in 2003, over 100 states across the Middle East and North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, Asia and the Caribbean had gained independence from European powers.[4] Yet, as he articulated in *Orientalism* (1979), the production of both knowledge and policy about the formerly colonised world – especially the Middle East – continued to reflect neo-colonial dynamics. Said's *oeuvre* helped to propel a postcolonial turn in the humanities and, to a lesser extent, critical strands of social science, amplifying the work of other scholar-activists before, during and after the era of formal decolonisation. What follows is a sketch of several ideas from that literature, selected for their resonance for students of EU–Middle East relations seeking to make sense of these entities' co-constitution.

Anti-colonial thinkers have long recognised the dialectics which bind the coloniser and colonised while unmasking the profoundly asymmetrical – and violent – nature of this process.

Unpacking its modalities in conversation with European social theory and surrealist art, Aimé Césaire cited the brutal instruments of colonial power from enslavement and torture to appropriation of land and resources to argue that colonialism also "decivilised" the coloniser culminating in "the degradation of Europe itself" (Kelley, 1999). To transform these dialectics of negation, Aimé and Suzanne Césaire edited a journal which helped a generation of Afro-Caribbean intellectuals to explore complex layers of colonised consciousness. They did so via concepts like *créolité*, defined by Stuart Hall as a matrix of "contact and negotiations" between diverse cultural presences (Rodríguez and Tate, 2015: 4). Offering an analytics, ethics and aesthetics with which to dismantle binaries, Suzanne Césaire used *créolité* to suggest that:

> Finally, those sordid contemporary antinomies of black/white, European/African, civilised/savage will be transcended. The magical power of the mahoulis will be recovered, drawn forth from living sources. Colonial stupidity will be purified in the blue welding flame. Our value as metal, our cutting edge of steel, our amazing communions will be recovered.
>
> *(cited in Levisalles, 2009)*

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A cognate resource for conceptualising the predicament of minorities enmeshed in postcolonial structures is the DuBoisian dilemma of "double consciousness".[5] The iconic African American thinker, who was born three years after the US civil war, poignantly described how a childhood encounter with racism catalysed the realisation "that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil" (Du Bois, 2018: 8). He goes on to describe this condition as the burden – but also the transformative power – of the formerly colonised. For, by striving against excruciating odds to close the gap between liberal promises of freedom and persistent inequality, the postcolonial subject drives humanity's advancement as a whole (Du Bois, 1897), an emancipatory teleology that continues to inform strands of anti-racist mobilisation.

How then, as Jabri (2014: 385) asks vis-à-vis international spaces, "does the postcolonial subject enact the interjection" that might meaningfully pluralise? Césaire's protégé, the psychiatrist turned revolutionary Frantz Fanon, sought the answer via Hegelian dialectics with which he mapped how dehumanised "slaves" enriched colonial "masters":

> Europe is literally the creation of the Third World. The wealth which smothers her is that which was stolen from the underdeveloped peoples. The ports of Holland, the docks of Bordeaux and Liverpool were specialised in the Negro slave trade, and owe their renown to millions of deported slaves.

Fanon's argument in *Wretched of the Earth* was that revolutionary violence could break the cycle of exploitation. This cathartic act, according to Agathangelou (2016: 110), confronts "dominant presumptions about a Manichean world" of coloniser and colonised. Fanon's approach resonated with radical movements across the decolonising world from Algerian nationalists to strands of Black power activism in the United States. Calls to arms, in turn, activated long-standing fears among white majorities in Europe and settler societies of violent resistance in the form of, say, Muslim terrorism or Black "looting". Recognising the source of such violence not in "savages trying to steal everything from us", but in postcolonial trauma, the African American author James Baldwin (2017) explained race riots in the 1960s by asking:

> Who is looting whom? . . . [The "looter"] doesn't really want the TV set. He's saying screw you. . . . He wants to let you know he's there. . . . And no one has seriously tried to get where the trouble is. After all, you're accusing a captive population who has been robbed of everything of looting.

Fanon's endorsement of transformative violence was less salient in other writings like *Black Skin, White Masks* where, as Devare (2017) argues, he approached Gandhi's view of violent agitation as self-harm given the mutual constitution of colonial "Others" and colonised "Selves". Gandhi practiced the vision with his "compassionate" (*ahimsa*) "non-violent resistance" (*satyagraha*). Informed by relational ethics within Hindu philosophy, it helped drive very different decolonisation processes in India compared to Algeria (Srivastava, 2010), and inspired leaders of the US civil rights movement. Capturing the mutually impactful threads of anti-colonial discourse across North/South lines, Chakrabarty (2010: 58) observes that Fanon and Gandhi's ideas "traveled back to the West at the same time as civil-liberties movements of indigenous peoples and immigrant groups for cultural sovereignty and recognition" were gaining traction.

Postcolonial momentum at the grassroots level coalesced diplomatically when leaders of newly independent states across Asia and Africa gathered in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. To be sure, negotiations towards a joint platform rejecting domination by either the capitalist or

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communist superpowers entailed personal, regional and geopolitical tensions (Pham and Shilliam, 2016). Nevertheless, the "Bandung moment" (Lee, 2010) and its echoes in non-aligned multilateralism shaped the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and a dynamic tradition of South-South summitry and policy coordination (Kiely, 2015). Such energies waned with the rise of neoliberalism in the 1980s. Since the 2000s, however, emerging powers and subaltern peoples have engaged in multilateral initiatives, from the BRICS' institutions to Palestinian activism at the UN. Such efforts speak to the renewed resonance of postcolonial frames in our non-European and increasingly post-Western world.

Meanwhile, South Asia's subaltern studies appropriated the Gramscian critique of capitalist imperialism to advocate for marginalised communities. Among the many productive concepts which the school generated to think through dynamics of co-constitution was Homi Bhabha's "hybridity". The idea captured cross-fertilisation across putatively Western and non-Western sensibilities (albeit in a geneticist idiom that some critics challenge) (Werbner and Modood, 2015). Hybridity, in short, offers a prism with which to think through the intertwined agencies of the colonised and coloniser through practices (e.g. diplomacy, aid, trade), or at embodied and emplaced sites (like the intertwined cultural formations of people and built spaces across "Europe" and the "Middle East").

Yet, as Gayatri Spivak observed, recognising the hybrid formation of "European" selves and "non-European" others does not automatically remedy structural inequalities. As such, she called for "strategic essentialism": strategic appropriation of identity categories forged in the crucible of Eurocentric domination. Postcolonial subjects could thus claim rights as, say, individuals, citizens, women or minorities in a world regulated by European-cum-universal norms. A pioneer of postcolonial feminism, Spivak's work helped to advance intersectional thinking about the interplay of these socially constructed – but historically, legally and materially defining – identity categories.

Many ideas of the subaltern school were informed, moreover, by diasporic sensitivities since several leading proponents wrote from elite universities in the West. This meant that like other cosmopolitans from the formerly colonised world such as Kwame Anthony Appiah, they encountered a tension between their decentring agendas and the privilege attending to their own experiences. This may have piqued reflections on the empowering as well as repressive aspects of the European canon for non-Western subjects, especially regarding human rights. As Dipesh Chakrabarty put it at the end of his influential *Provincializing Europe*: "at the end of European imperialism, European thought is a gift to us all" (2009: 255).

Indeed, postcolonial thinkers have drawn fruitfully on European social theory, especially Marx, Hegel, Gramsci and Foucault, and produced works in symbiosis with prominent Europe-based thinkers (the conversation between an itinerant Fanon and Jean-Paul Sartre, who authored the preface to *Wretched of the Earth*, being a case in point). That said, postcolonial commentators also challenge canonical and contemporary critical theorists. The argument is that even well-meaning calls by figures like Habermas, Beck, Deleuze and Guattari for more inclusive political and economic modernity all too often neglect the contributions of Europe's "Others" to the EU and Member States' histories, cultures and economies (Hobson, 2012). The call for deliberative democracy, for instance, obscures the persistent structural challenges faced by the "post-colonial [citizen] within" and beyond Europe (Kinnvall, 2016; Bhambra, 2016). Similarly, the Habermasian public sphere assumes that the political subject has a voice and resources for self-advocacy whereas the subaltern, by definition, is a person who confronts linguistic and socio-economic, among other, obstacles to being heard. "Why", Spivak asks, "should such occlusions be sanctioned in precisely those intellectuals who are our best prophets of heterogeneity and the Other?" (2010: 67).

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The time is ripe to challenge such omissions as prospects for meaningful multicultural democracy come under siege in and beyond Europe. The ideas invoked here in a highly schematic fashion – *créolité*, double consciousness, hybridity – are among many conceptual resources offered by postcolonial theory which, as I will show in the following section, can help to recognise the co-constitution of "Europe" and the "Middle East", confront the asymmetric violence by which this process has been characterised, and begin reconstructing relations on a more equitable plane.

Recognising co-constitution: a three-step rubric for decentring

A flourishing corpus increasingly aggregated under the rubric of "global" or "post-Western" IR seeks to ground our ways of thinking and acting in the world on more pluralistic foundations (e.g. Shani, 2008; Nayak and Selbin, 2010; Acharya, 2014; Tickner and Smith, 2020). Under this umbrella, Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2013; see also Keukeleire and Lecocq, 2018) proposed that decentring EU external engagement – especially relations with southern and eastern neighbours – can be pursued via three steps: provincialising, engagement and reconstruction. Logically, these steps unfold in sequence but in practice they reverberate off each other, such that provincialising Eurocentric frameworks while engaging "Other" perspectives can help to develop better policies. In this section, I apply the heuristic to liberal and realist frames for EU–Middle East relations, arguing that their neglect of colonial legacies and the hybrid co-constitution of the EU and the Middle East is problematic. By provincialising these frameworks and engaging a plurality of views articulated by leftist, women's and Islamist groups – who tend to be mindful of the asymmetric legacies of colonial co-constitution – relations can be reimagined.

To "provincialise" Europe is to recognise that despite strong universalising reflexes, European experiences, including the EU's much touted model of normatively enlightened political and economic organisation, offer but one set of approaches with which to navigate global modernities (Lenz and Nicolaïdis, 2019; Manners, 2015). Recognising the specific – but hardly transcendentally unique – nature of EU frameworks for governance can help to understand why policies envisaged as radiating in concentric circles from a (north-western) European core reproduce colonial hierarchies (Nicolaïdis et al., 2014). The upshot is to subvert the EU's stated goal of supporting grassroots democracy (Dandashly and Noutcheva, 2019).

To provincialise "European" perspectives is also to recognise that Europe is not monolithic, nor a hermetically sealed category. "Europe", in other words, is not impervious to what postcolonial theorists of *créolité* saw as diverse cultural and material "presences" and "movements" across the Mediterranean. Students of the EU are already well aware of the constitutive complexity of the Union and its shifting roster and levels of association. It should therefore not be an epistemological stretch – persistent amnesia notwithstanding – to also acknowledge the constitutive contribution of people and resources from formerly colonised lands over the past four centuries. The erasure of colonised people's agency in the exceptionalist story of European ascendance since the early modern era is all the more remarkable given countless streets, statues, parks and edifices that honor empire builders, as if they conquered an empty world and miraculously extracted its riches through sheer force of vision. Like the slave docks of north Atlantic powers cited by Fanon, Europe's very built spaces are hybrid constructions of coerced and co-opted labour and resources. The postcolonial subject, in short, was a viscerally present, foundational participant in European modernity. Recognising this can help to provincialise the liberal view of the EU as a unique agent of material and political emancipation in the Middle East and beyond.

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By thus recognising that European perspectives are neither universal nor uniquely European, analysts can start internalising why the EU's interlocutors in the Middle East widely read its liberal narrative as riddled with double-standards, even among groups generally sympathetic to the EU (Aydın-Düzgit, 2018). This tension between normative power and strategic interests (Youngs, 2004) and its imbrication in imperial legacies (Behr, 2007) entails, in Staeger's words, a "false dichotomy of 'power' and 'norms'" which overlooks the Enlightenment provenance of EU norms and their role in colonialism (2016: 983). EU promotion of (neo-)liberal economic policies also leads observers in settings like Egypt or Israel/Palestine to argue that "norm promotion", cloaks "hard economic interests" (Lazarou et al., 2013: 175). Del Sarto's characterisation of the Union as "normative empire" vis-à-vis the MENA region – an argument sustained via observation of post–Arab Spring policies – likewise leads to the conclusion that "the EU's (allegedly) norm-based behaviour is in itself a utility-maximising strategy" (2016: 215).

One response to the double-standards critique is simply to shed liberal language and acknowledge the rather "sophisticated realist model" which animates security, migration and border policies (Pace et al., 2009). Yet, recognition of a realist calculus hardly voids postcolonial critique. This is because realism, belying its proponents' claims to ahistoric universality, acts like liberalism by bundling in assumptions forged in the crucible of European state- and empire-building since the early modern era. Realism, after all, entails a unitary reading of (white male) political subjects as sovereign entities who – in aggregate – underwrite both state sovereignty and the Westphalian international system. Yet, the same sovereigntist logic has led to realist domination and erasure of postcolonial subjects, statehood and international actorhood during and after colonialism. One upshot of this two-tiered system (Keene, 2002; Anievas et al., 2014) is that the weak, postcolonial states of the Middle East form a fragile and fragmented state system (Del Sarto and Soler i Lecha, 2018). Instability, in turn, impels EU actors to support strong regimes to contain regional insecurity (Hinnebusch, 2012). Yet, paradoxically, by privileging generals or monarchs over the diversity of stakeholders on the ground, European actors continue to negate Middle Eastern agencies, exacerbating the temptation of disruptive radicalism for the persistently disenfranchised.

In short, to recognise that liberal and realist frameworks deny the constitutive role of colonialism in shaping both "Europe" and the "Middle East" paves the way to *engagement* of new interlocutors. Given painful histories of entanglement and their imprint of structural injustice today, such engagement can be uncomfortable. It requires recognising past and present violence and confronting the – oftentimes unwitting agents – who perpetuate neocolonial dynamics (Hobson, 2012).[6]

For starters, relations with Middle Eastern regimes and capitalists could be supplemented by more sustained engagement of actors concerned with social and redistributive justice. Doing so can offer insights into the destabilising fallout of neoliberal economic policies on national and regional governance (Tansel, 2019). The positive role which can be played by trade unions, for example, is attested to by Tunisia's transition – fledgling to be sure – towards pluralist democracy (Beinin, 2015). To listen to left-leaning actors also entails engagement with colonial legacies (Anievas and Nisancioglu, 2017): the persistent core-periphery structure of economic ties which privilege European capital and appropriate MENA resources and labour. To listen to subaltern voices, in turn, demands that we hear when they are silenced, not least by the waters of a Mediterranean that has become an "open-air grave" (Wolff, 2015: 444) for so many from the MENA following in the footsteps of ancestors who helped to build Europe.

Similarly, when it comes to women activists, EU engagement has favoured secular feminists who use universal rights' frameworks to confront pervasive forms of indigenous patriarchy, even as they are enmeshed in ethnic, sectarian and nationalist struggles (Hyndman-Rizk,

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2020). Their predicament and responses evoke Duboisian "double consciousness": awareness of a complex set of disciplining structures, and innovative strategies for converting vulnerability into strength. The predicament is arguably amplified in "alternative" frameworks for "empowerment" articulated by pro-religious women theologians and activists (Mahmood, 2011; Fisher-Onar and Müftüler-Baç, 2011) who embed their projects in an Islamic idiom that they likewise seek to redefine. The conversations of Middle Eastern gender activists – secular, Islamic and otherwise – thus offer a vital prism onto how to negotiate contested cultural inheritances and hybrid realities towards overlapping visions of empowerment (Fisher-Onar and Paker, 2012). Gender activists' insights and strategies, in turn, stand to help Europeans of diverse cultural backgrounds navigate intersecting challenges and aspirations.

Similarly, EU actors could learn from – at the least – listening to actors across the region who identify with variants of political religion. Among some Islamists, for example, democracy has become a norm at the grassroots level even as visions of what it ought to look like are circumscribed by majoritarian and socially conservative mores which mesh uncomfortably with post-Christian, secularised liberal individualism (Fisher-Onar, 2021; Volpi and Stein, 2015). Other strands of Islamism have long intersected with leftist critiques of global capitalism. Turkey's "Muslims against capitalism" movement, for instance, champions cross-subaltern solidarities via a radically pluralistic interpretation of the Islamic canon (Sarfati, 2019). Finally, unlike liberal and realist views of radical Islamist violence as a regressive revolt against the West's values and power, a postcolonial prism offers a plausible explanation, if not an excuse, for revolutionary violence in the attempt to confront legacies of domination. Thus, postcolonialism can help to demystify the jihadist fringe. Doing so, in turn, can help analysts to desist from the analytically sloppy, ethically problematic and practically counterproductive projection of radicalism onto the Middle East and Europe's millions of Muslims.

Learning about others' views, including perspectives which entail their own forms of hegemony and violence, is not to relativise or uncritically celebrate all agendas. The goal is simply to better understand, to generate insights, ideas and interlocutors for a "multilogical" conversation (Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis, 2021). As Huber and Kamel put it, "focusing on the voices of peripheries" offers a "powerful tool" with which to complexify readings and "reshape paradigmatic schemes" (2016) of a vibrant and troubled region whose past, present and future are intrinsically interconnected with "Europe" (p. 12).

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that legacies of colonialism continue to echo in EU–Middle East relations, from liberal attempts to project normative power to realist prerogatives which often inform policy. Invoking a postcolonial toolkit for recognising the hybrid co-constitution of the putatively "European" and "Middle Eastern", the chapter also emphasised the profoundly asymmetrical and violent process of mutual constitution. Applying a three-step heuristic for decentring Europe, it called for *provincialising* exceptionalist frameworks like liberalism and realism which erase the constitutive role of Middle Eastern "Others". By instead *engaging* a wider set of actors attentive to fraught processes of co-constitution, we can begin to *reconstruct* relations.

Today, growing numbers of scholars, policymakers and publics are awakening to the decentring imperative, albeit in dialectical contestation with a likewise increasingly vocal group of actors seeking to negate – and celebrate – the legacies of colonialism. This dynamic may be boosted by the recent wave of solidarity with Black Lives Matter protests against systemic racism in the United States which has led to the toppling of statues of prominent European colonialists in public spaces. Such awakenings can contribute to a long overdue conversation

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which, ultimately, may help to reconstruct EU–Middle East relations on more equitable – and sustainable – foundations.

Notes

1 For more on Europe's "post-imperial condition" and the utility of distinguishing between "post-"colonial as the reproduction of colonial logics versus "post-"colonial as the struggle to transcend see Nicolaïdis and Fisher-Onar (2015) and Fisher-Onar and Nicolaïdis (2021).

2 See Gilroy's seminal *Black Atlantic* (1993) which draws on the pioneering ideas of African American sociologist W.E.B. Du Bois. There remains, however, a divide between the rather American-centric literature on critical race studies and anti-Eurocentric, postcolonial approaches.

3 Some analysts privilege a "decolonial" rather than "postcolonial" agenda (e.g. Mignolo, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2013). Decolonialism resonates especially with indigenous and minority activists in the Americas and Oceania seeking to decouple from capitalist and nationalist structures that serve white settler privilege. Decolonial endeavours de facto acknowledge the co-constitution of the colonial and colonised while seeking to recover non-Western systems of knowledge, belief and practice. When it comes to the EU and MENA, proximity and intense interpenetration arguably render a "postcolonial" frame more resonant.

4 This figure reflects states which gained independence in the twentieth century; most North and South American states were colonised earlier and became independent by the late eighteenth century.

5 Anievas, Manchanda and Shilliam have helped to launch a long overdue conversation on the erasure of race in IR theory drawing on Du Bois's notion of the global "colour line" as demarcating a racialised structure of global governance with a "democratic face" at home but "stern and unyielding autocracy" in the colonies (2014: 1).

6 For the analytical and normative trade-offs of emphasising structural versus agential forces in anticolonial reckonings see Sajed and Inayatullah (2016).

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