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Beyond the Idea of "Fortress Europe" or the Challenges of Good Neighbourhood and Integration Policies

Images of sub-Saharan immigrants climbing by force high barbed wire fences in Mellila and shot at by Spanish and Moroccan "border"[1] forces have made the news for days in October 2005.[2] Fished bodies of sub-Saharan and North-African illegal immigrants have become routine images in our menu of daily news all around the globe. Make-shift pateras[3] that brave Mediterranean and Atlantic high waters and are rounded up by Moroccan, Spanish or Italian coast guards are images to which we have become desensitized to such a point that they have become less and less newsworthy the more TV channels show them. The thousands of "would-be" immigrants who languish in Tangiers, Nouadibou, Nador or Benghazi waiting to find an opportunity to cross to Europe or are detained in Spanish and Italian centres waiting to be deported to their country of origin[4] is now a common image in all documentaries about illegal immigration from Africa to Europe.[5] Underage unaccompanied children deliberately "smuggled" or "trafficked" by their families from Morocco with the help of trafficking ring leaders, to Spain or Italy so that they be would be kept in special centres till they come of age is now the new trend in the unrelenting attempt of thousands of families to have one of their children on the European side of the Mediterranean.[6]

All of these images refer to an idea of a fortress Europe[7], barricaded, fenced, guarded and secured, in dire need for immigrants but nervous about xenophobic and extreme right backlash. The paradox is that the higher the security walls become, the more enchanting, inviting, and luring for thousands of disenchanted, disillusioned and disenfranchised individuals from Morocco all the way to Egypt, from Mauritania all the way to Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, from Mali to Nigeria and the Sudan. The fortress is more coveted and desired the more it tries to become forbidden and forbidding. Many Europeans feel besieged by the thousands of poor immigrants trying desperately to cross, while on the other side, Europe is the only recourse for so many young men and women uprooted from their traditional ways of life by drought, wars, and government ineffectiveness in combating poverty and the failure of both the educational system and the economy to provide employability and jobs to them. The only winners in this medieval image of the besieged fortress are traffickers, smugglers, and mafia leaders who keep inventing more creative ways to defeat the miradors, the barbed wires, the high tech

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[1] The city, along with Ceuta, are controlled by Spain but claimed by Morocco as part of its national territory.
[2] Nicholas Mead, "Mellila: bloodbath on the Africa-Europe Frontier" Open Democracy, 10th October 05.
[3] « La tragédie de Sidi Taïbi plonge les Marocains dans l'émoi: Les pateras de la mort » Maroc Hebdo International - N° 477- Du 14 au 20 septembre 2001.
[4] « [Le] nouveau rideau de fer n'est pas constitué que de barbelés. Il a son mur (dans les enclaves espagnoles, au Maroc, de Ceuta et Melilla), ses camps de détention (jusqu'en Libye, un pays à qui l'Europe verse des compensations pour sa gestion très répressive de l'immigration en provenance d'Afrique noire), son industrie de l'expulsion (hôtels-prisons, avions, trains et bateaux), ses déserts mortels (dans tout le Sahara)." Philippe Rivière, « Xénophobie européenne », Le Monde Diplomatique, (Mai, 2005).
[5] See for example, Sorious Samura "Living with Illegals". Channel 4: 27th March 8 pm.
[6] "Nowhere To Turn: State Abuses of Unaccompanied Migrant Children by Spain and Morocco", Human Rights Watch, May 2002.
[7] Meike Dülffer "Vers une "Europe forteresse" ? » Euro/Topics, 27th Août, 2007

fences and the border control systems. The besieged fortress, the besieger and the trafficker: a triangle of characters in a saga of post-colonial displacement and suffering that is still unfolding as we speak.

At the same time that Europe was fortifying its borders, building sophisticated air control systems, and erecting high wire fences around Ceuta and Mellila, it put in place an ambitious partnership process, called the new "Euro-Mediterranean Partnership" -- as embodied in the "Barcelona Declaration", whose goals was to "promote partnership, democratisation, security and economic growth in the countries to Europe's south and east".[8] Thirteen years after, the results of this process are quite meagre: the "area of shared prosperity", the "common area of peace and stability" and "promoting understanding between cultures" remain at most wishful thinking; on the contrary, economic growth at the southern bank of the Mediterranean has been systematically timid (even in oil producing countries like Algeria, Libya and Nigeria), and cultural understanding has been hostage to age-old cultural stereotypes that the events that followed the publication of the Danish cartoons and the banning of the veil in French schools only exacerbated; stability is threatened by the continuous actions and terrorist acts of extremist groups both within Europe, in the Maghreb and in the Grand Sahara. Most of the aid that went southward was conditional upon the ability of North African countries to act as a gendarme against sub-Saharan Africans trying to illegally migrate to Europe or upon the opening of its waters for European fishing boats regardless of whether this would lead to a depletion of fishing resources or not. Farming products from Morocco, Tunisia, Turkey and the Palestinian territories have been subject to stringent quota systems that generally favor European farmers.

The Barcelona process was built on the premise that only Southern countries need to change: they should open up their economies, respect human rights, initiate or reinforce the democratisation process and increase their capacity to control their borders and to maintain stability in the face of terrorism and trafficking mafias. Little change was expected of European countries, except funding efforts and even that stumbled upon so many bureaucratic hurdles on the part of both Brussels and the receiving countries. Demands on Europe were numerous, including reducing farming subsidies, phasing out the quota system for imported agricultural products, managing the brain drain impact on the southern countries' capacity to develop, adopting a sound and rational migration policy, making it easy for southern countries' elites to have access to European research centres and institutions, reducing the stringent visa procedures for people with no intention to illegally settle in Europe, investing in educational programs in such a way as to favor openness on Islam, Africa and the Middle East and favouring a sustainable use of natural resources and marine environment. However, most European countries only paid lip service to these much needed policies, which made the process skewed and unworkable for the very beginning. Concern for security has been a top priority and even migration and cultural exchange were looked at from the narrow point of view of European security.

Security in relation to North and Sub-Saharan Africa has reproduced the idea of the fortress with many layers of buffers that protect Europe. First come the virtual high tech buffer of radars, air control systems and rapid intervention boats and planes, after which we find the barbed wire walls of Ceuta and Mellila, then comes the work of North African security forces to control the flow of their own immigrants and those that come from Sub-Saharan countries and finally the work of Senegalese,

[8] Fred Halliday, "The 'Barcelona process': ten years on", Open Democracy, November 11th - 11 - 2005

Mauritanian, Malian, Nigerian and Chadian security forces to prevent their citizens from crossing to the Maghreb countries or to the Canary Islands. This brings to mind the image of the medieval fortified castle protected by walls, water buffers and peasants or that of the empire protected by vassal states as in Roman times. When Morocco failed to do that, it almost went into war with Spain in July 2002 over a useless rock close to its northern coast.[9] As aid is contingent upon ensuring the security of Europe by its southern neighbours, these very neighbors become in fact backyards where problems are kept at bay, or are solved away from the pressure of European public and extreme right. Local public opinions are irrelevant in this regard, which makes Europe's commitment to democratization in Africa (as expressed in the Barcelona Declaration) hostage to its security policy. Democracy is traded for security and in fact strong, albeit authoritarian, regimes are preferable to progressively democratic but weak ones. Libya and Tunisia can do a better job than Mauritania or Senegal, partly because the democratic process in the latter makes the leaders attentive and responsive to their own public opinions.[10]

The Empire/Vassal state model that European security policy, especially in relation to immigration, underlines is embedded in a post-colonial situation that more or less still reproduces the colonial malleable equation of protector and protégé. During the first part of the Twentieth Century, France asked (or forced) its colonial subjects in Senegal, Algeria and Morocco to fight its wars in Europe, Africa and Indo-China; the colonial systems (at least in Morocco and Tunisia) were called protectorates. The protector was then using its protégés to protect itself against Nazi Germany and Axis forces or against communists in Vietnam, Combodia and Laos. In post-colonial times, Spain bases its allegedly strategic relation with Morocco (its only ex-colony in North Africa that it used to share with France) on the capacity and willingness of the latter to protect it against drug traffickers, terrorist groups and especially the hundreds of Maghrebis and sub-Saharan trying to cross the straits of Gibraltar. The ex-protégé is supposed to protect the powerful protector. Welcome to the State/Vassal model post-colonial version.

The ex-colonies are not only supposed to protect Europe but to provide it with the necessary skilled workers. A good part of North African engineers, doctors, scientists and experts end up in European universities, research centres, businesses and labs. Not only does this deprive these countries of much needed skilled white collar workforce, but it means that the poorer south Mediterranean countries invest scarce funding to educate and train workforce for the richer European partners. When a Moroccan or Tunisian engineer is recruited by a private or government entity in Barcelona or Antwerp or Düsseldorf or Lyon or Zurich, no attempt is made to make up for the loss in investment, in time and in skilled force that his country has suffered. The answer has become almost standard now: "Tough luck! Had they provided him/her with the right incentives, she would not have left". The fact that it's a catch 22 situation rarely bothers. The fact that it's in flagrant contradiction with the basic principles of fair trade does not seem to resonate with decision makers in Brussels and elsewhere.

At a deeper level, Europe's relation with Islam and Muslims (and dans la foulée even Africans are also added to the crowd) has been characterized by a constant return of the repressed. The medieval

[9] The Island's name in Spanish is "Perejil" and in Arabic "Leila."
[10] It's also true that Tunisia and Libya have more financial and logistical capacity.

Saracen or Turk figure, schismatic in Dantean terms,[11] and pagan, polytheist and heretic in most Christian literature,[12] always ready to conquer Europe, has become in the 18th and 19th centuries a Mahometan, a lustful and backward eastern naïve believer unbefitting the age of Aufklarüng and ignorant of the ideas of Kant, Voltaire, Montesquieu, Hegel and Auguste de Comte, only to become in the 20th century a combination of Mussulman, Muslim and Arab, with all the connotations of treachery, deceit, lasciviousness and terrorism of course. The Danish cartoons of Mohamed and the events that followed them were only a violent manifestation of this deep cultural mistrust that has characterized both Christian and Enlightenment Europe's relation to Islam. In Spain, the image of los moros, dangerous North African moors that had colonized Spain for eight centuries and are now back as unwanted migrants, is still very much present in both the popular imaginary and even among educated and intellectual circles.[13]

Integration policies were affected by the millennial reservoir of images and set ideas. The émigrés have to always prove they are worthy of the trust of enlightened Europe (that they have cast away the garb and drag of eastern despotism); ethnicity and religion are always ready markers to explain wayward behavior or a terrorist act.[14] Islam remains a shorthand to explain political and social behavior despite efforts at assimilation and integration. As has been proven in psychology, people look up to or look down to the ways they are qualified or treated by others.[15] Integration implies not only the ability of the "integrated" to overcome the way they invoke culture of origin to decipher signs and semiotics of the host land, but the ability of the "integrators" to overcome the cultural reflex of seeing difference always through the lens of religion and ethnicity. The Universal in dominant white cultures always stumbles when difference (the Particular), as manifest in clothes, colour, religion, language and culture, is too ethnographic to bear, i.e. too crude to accept as part of the Universal. But integration is far from being simply cultural or ideological. The politics of integration has always been a negotiated politics taking into consideration extreme right agendas, communitarian demands and relations with countries of origin. Balancing those interests has meant that integration was never a policy with economic, educational and legislative aspects to it but a simple état d'âme, an electoral wish to lure liberal voters among both the minorities and the white majority.

No wonder communitarian thinking has been on the rise at the very moment so many politicians were talking about integration. Far from being a reaction to integration, communitarism was a sign of the failure of the different policies of integration in France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and Germany. However, in the absence of any such policy as in Spain or Italy or where the policy was communitarian for a while as in the United Kingdom, the results were not more brilliant. The

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[11] In La Divina Comedia, Dante put Mohamed in the 9th circle of Inferno with one foot up and another down, a sign that he was schismatic. See Inferno in La Divina Comedia / The Divine Comed by Alighieri, transletd and edited by Charles S. Singleton.

[12] Saint Jerome and John of Damascus for example.

[13] In 2005 about 300 Moroccan intellectuals and artists sent a letter (El Pais, July 17, 2005) to open up a dialogue on so many issues that poison the relations between the two countries like the decolonization process, the Sahara and the Rif war. The reaction of most Spanish intellectuals was dead silence and some of the Spanish media saw in that a desperate attempt by the regime to put pressure on Spanish public opinion.

[14] On the other hand, rreligion and ethnicity are never evoked when the concerned person is non-Muslim; we rarely hear of a Jewish or Christian terrorist.

[15] See Janet Eliott's experiment with third graders in the late sixties captured in the famous documentary film "In the Eye of the Storm". See also Trevor Wilson's use of the same concept in his theory of diversity in the corporate world in Diversity at Work : the Business Case for Equity.

outcome was communities feeling an imaginary bond to the country of origin or to the Umma, a concept simplistically and rhetorically articulated by Arab Gulf satellite channels, and more or less culturally alienated from the context of the "host" country or society where they physically live. These are displaced communities that came in the wake of post-colonial times to what was the colonial metropolis only to be displaced again on an imaginary level: a double displacement that makes them caught in a cultural limbo of desire and nostalgia, of the here and there, of physical being and an idealized "reality" of origin.

The rise of the extreme right in France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark and recently in Italy as well, was also based on another fantasy, another imagined community, that of the pure national race or blood or history, of the pre-lapsarian moment of ethnic purity, something the Serbs under Milosevic understood only too well. Two grand narratives at work among migrant communities and among extreme right circles; when they clash as it happened in Holland in recent years, host societies become polarized over so many issues and extremists of all kinds gain more power and set the agenda for the cultural wars of migration. Europe's cultural wars have only started and the more they are waged by fundamentalists and right wing circles the more the idea of Europe, the enlightened space of willing and responsible citizens, becomes itself a chimera. The extreme right sets the agenda because it builds on the European population's fear of foreigners and émigrés and the traditional right wing and left wing parties cave in because it eats off their constituencies, especially when it paints them as connivers in the Third World and Islamic alleged conspiracy against the nation. Fundamentalists set the agenda when they tap into the disenfranchisement and cultural isolation of immigrant communities and provide them with imaginary outlets in universal Islam or in militant and jihadist rhetoric and acts.

By setting the agenda, the extreme right and fundamentalists make the civilisational clash happen. It's a self-fulfilling prophecy par excellence: the extreme right sees the clash as a continuation of the eternal struggle to keep the imaginary purity of Europe intact. The émigrés are a blemish on the aesthetic immaculateness of race and should therefore be prevented from changing the demographics and the cultural make up of Europe. In fighting them the extreme right brings to the surface and foregrounds the eternal fight against malign forces including Islam, Africanness, Arabness, Jewishness or any marker of deviation from the original purity of the tribal coming into being. The clash has always already been inevitable to protect the singularity of the idealized moment of ethnic existence. Fundamentalists see the clash in the attempt of the migrant community to protect itself from the tempting sirens of rationality, democracy, free thinking, licentiousness, immorality and infidelity. The ostentatious conservatism through the veil and the beard and the Jihadist ideology are rhetorical walls that serve to shield the "believer" from the corrupting values of Western civilisation and to keep afloat the idea of the imaginary Umma. The clash is inevitable since the host culture is totally indifferent to fundamentalist's values and ideas and the latter views his/her role in protecting the community from the corrupting attractiveness of Western life and culture.

In conclusion, while it's not easy to go beyond the Fortress Europe mind set, especially in a context rife with cultural wars and ideological realignment around migration and multiculturalism, Europe could still think through real policy changes that will help ease the tension inside and put less pressure on its southern neighbors, especially that the latter face serious problems related to endemic high unemployment, growing drought and climate change, poverty and serious security problems coming from terrorist groups freely roaming the grand Sahara desert. A fair policy of good

neighbourhood and a sound and clear immigration policy are the first steps in the right direction. Good neighbourhood means that North African and Sub-Saharan countries' problems i.e. drought, terrorism, desertification, poverty, lack of infrastructure, unemployment, indebtedness and timid economic growth become Europe's problems itself. If Europe's peace and security depends on stability of the countries south of the Mediterranean then it is only normal that investing in the southern partners' problems is the way to go. The precedent exists in the huge effort Europe did in the eighties to bring Spain, Portugal and Greece up to the level of northern countries. Fair trade, reducing farm subsidies and opening European markets to African goods are necessary steps if Europe is really serious about the sustainable development of its southern partners. A clear, open and rational immigration policy that provides much needed labor to Europe and eases off the unemployment syndrome among its southern neighbors but at the same time does not drain its brains should be a priority in any fair partnership agenda. Reducing stringent visa procedures will make the circulation of people equally fluid and will favour easy movement into an back from Europe; the more Europe makes it difficult for people to come in the more people will be tempted to stay and settle albeit illegally.

In the end, everyone should move to idea of shared Europe:[16] a cultural and ecological space to which different people, different religions (including Islam) and different national experiences (including those of Arabs, Africans and Berbers), whether in the form of majorities and minorities in Europe or subjects of empires, colonizers and colonized alike, have contributed. A shared Europe can never be a fortress, open to some and closed to others; North Africans and Sub Saharans need to feel they have a stake in Europe the same way east Europeans do now. A shared Europe is not built on race or religion as the debate over the possible access of Turkey makes us believe. A white and Christian Europe is an ethnic fantasy that is at odds with the open and multicultural society Europe has always been but has not yet come to terms with on a political level yet. A shared Europe is the Europe of the future: it's the most sustainable way of ensuring a future for all those who have a stake in Europe, citizens, partners, intellectual, cultural and economic stakeholders and just simple neighbors.

[16] I borrow this idea from the Berlin British Council project by the same name which aims to open a dialogue among the different multicultural components of Europe as well as among its southern partners.