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United or Divided? The Politics of Euro-Mediterranean Regional Identity and Migration Governance

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United or Divided?
The Politics of Euro-Mediterranean Regional Identity and
Migration Governance

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Abstract

Migration management has become one of the foremost global governance challenges facing states today, as the number of people seeking to move across borders continues to rise exponentially. As a result, states have begun to band together into regions to collectively manage the flow of refugees and migrants into their territories. Given that these regions are grounded in the articulation of a common identity among member states, the overall trend of regionalism as it pertains to migration governance represents an interesting point of entry from which to analyze three intersecting dynamics: migration management, regional cooperation among states, and identity politics. The purpose of this project is to study how these three processes interact with and construct one another in the context of the “Euro-Mediterranean” region. This study thus contributes to a more nuanced understanding of regional identity-formation in the construction of migration policies.

Keywords: *migration management, regionalism, identity, cooperation, Euro-Mediterranean*

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Introduction

What compels states to come together as one? In the post-Cold War era of globalization, this is a crucial query to ask. The increasing fluidity of people, goods, and ideas across borders has transformed the issue of transnational cooperation into a critical foreign policy concern for states and a key research topic for scholars. Frequently, states coalesce into “regions” in an attempt to exert control over the cross-border movement of populations and goods. Regions are typically established around a shared cultural history, a significant geographical feature, or a mutual political project (Collyer, 2016; Lehtinen, 2008). While the shape, scope, and dynamics of different region-building initiatives vary greatly around the world, all regions have one thing in common: they are fundamentally political constructions, involving the manipulation of individual and collective identities along with the active articulation and interpretation of shared interests (Collyer, 2016).

The phenomenon of regionalism is especially important for understanding migration governance in the 21st century. One of the foremost issues facing the international community today, migration governance is notable for being a “club good” - that is, “its benefits may well be non-rival but can be excluded from states” (Betts, 2011). As a result, states often turn to regional “clubs,” rather than large organizations of states, in order to pool together their resources and create area-specific migration procedures such as asylum policies, visa facilitation agreements, and border controls, among others. The migration governance regime - the rules and regulations which together control the movement of people across borders - therefore includes the multidirectional, multilevel engagement of a number of actors (Collyer, 2016). A complicated issue which tests the ability of states to cooperate effectively, migration management is thus an

excellent proxy for evaluating the strength of regional identity formation and the dynamics of regional governance strategies.

In this paper, I will analyze migration governance in the “Euro-Mediterranean” region. Comprising EU member states and states from the Maghreb, Levant, and Middle East areas, the Euro-Mediterranean region is significant for discursively bringing together highly diverse nations into a structure of collective action. Migration is a highly salient issue area in the region, with a large number of African migrants traveling through southern Mediterranean states into Europe each year (De Haas, 2008). Given the diversity of Euro-Mediterranean states and their concern with migration, my research will analyze the dynamics behind the creation of a singular “Euro-Mediterranean” identity, as well as the way in which the formulation of this identity structures migration governance in the area.

To that end, this paper uses Morocco as an analytical “guidepost.” At the heart of three separate regional groupings, and as the country through which migration to Europe primarily flows, Morocco is in many ways the perfect starting point from which to examine the intersection of regional identity politics and migration management. Thus, in this paper Morocco will act as the lens through which I analyze my main research question, which is: how is Euro-Mediterranean identity conceived, and how does this identity shape migration governance in the region? This question is important for developing a more nuanced understanding of identity and its ability (or inability) to structure cooperative efforts among disparate states.

The structure of the paper is as follows. In the first section, I will provide an overview of the existing literature on Euro-Mediterranean regionalism and migration governance. I will then explain the theoretical framework guiding my research, before delving into the methodology and key assumptions of this paper. The fourth part of the paper is a critical analysis, in which I

evaluate the reciprocal, discursive relationship between regional identity and migration governance and what this relationship reveals about the efficacy of normative power. I will conclude with a statement of my findings and a brief reflection on how I think Euro-Mediterranean cohesion could be improved in the future.

Literature Review

By virtue of its very nature, international migration demands the use of diverse modes of transnational governance. Lacking a supranational, institutionalized method of cooperation on matters of migration (Betts, 2011), states are left to design their own migration policies with an eye towards balancing the often-asymmetrical interests of “sending” and “receiving” countries (Lavenex and Panizzon, 2013). The term “multilayered migration governance” (Kunz, Lavenex, Panizzon, 2011) captures the depth and breadth of the international migration regime, which consists of an overlapping network of governmental, international, and civil society actors brought together at the bilateral, multilateral, and regional levels to craft effective solutions to migration issues. Often, states integrate multiple - if not all - of the various layers of migration governance into such solutions, according to regional and migratory dynamics. Of course, regional relations and migration patterns are not static, but ever-changing social and political processes requiring a similarly fluid style of governance. Thus, the international migration regime is unique: a collection of norms lacking a formalized institutional structure, it is described in the literature as “substance without architecture” (Chetail, 2019, p. 341).

Before I delve into the connection between migration and regionalism, I would like to specifically define the term “migratory system,” which is “the particular combination of types of population flows between departure countries and arrival countries...with rules or laws which

govern those flows and the bodies intended to implement them” (Berriane et al., 2013, p. 487). Migratory systems are subject to “continued structuring, destructuring or restructuring according to global and/or regional economic changes” (Berriane et al., 2013, p. 487), and most develop within a specific region (e.g. the Middle East, Europe, or Asia). Consequently, the majority of migration governance strategies structure themselves around regionalism. The term “regionalism” refers to “primarily state-led process of building and sustaining formal regional institutions and organizations among at least three states.” Importantly, this top-down approach differs from processes of “regionalization,” which are “bottom-up, spontaneous, and endogenous...[and] involve a variety of non-state actors organized in formal and informal networks” (Börzel & Risse, p. 8). Thus, despite identifying separate locations from which a “region” originates, the concepts of regionalism and regionalization are similar in that they both imply the *construction* of shared political entities, usually through the articulation of a common regional identity. In this paper, I will focus primarily on the top-down process of regionalism as it is used to define and structure the Euro-Mediterranean area.

Morocco is at the forefront of migration management in the “Euro-Mediterranean” region. Its proximity to Spain has transformed it into a *de facto* gateway to Europe, with many nationals and non-nationals attempting hazardous border-crossings every year in an attempt to reach the economic “promised land” of the European Union (EU) (De Haas, 2008; Baldwin-Edwards, 2006). European demand for low-skilled labor fuels a significant part of this population movement, though recent years have witnessed the emergence of other regional migration trends as well. Specifically, the growing number of Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco - a partial result of Libya’s promotion of “pan-Africanism” at the turn of the century - has significantly altered the dynamic of Euro-Mediterranean migration (De Haas, 2011). Often, Sub-

Saharan migrants seeking entry to Europe become stuck in Morocco after their application to the EU is denied or they are otherwise unable to travel onwards. As a result of this trend, Morocco has developed into a country of “origin, transit, and destination,” fundamentally linked to two distinct regions (Europe and Sub-Saharan Africa) through migration (El Ghazouani, 2019).

In the EU’s eyes, migration through Morocco is closely intertwined with concerns about security, as the flow of illegal migrants increases and the perceived threat of terrorism looms (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006). The 2004 Madrid bombings, along with the Arab uprisings of 2011, only served to exacerbate pre-existing concerns about the danger of unrestricted population movements into Europe. Thus, the EU has sought to formulate programs that jointly incorporate North African sending states with European receiving ones in a collective effort to combat irregular migration (De Haas, 2008). To that end, the EU has promoted the image of a regional, “Euro-Mediterranean” identity, couched in terms of cooperation, equality among states, and the preservation of peace and stability. The most recent iteration of this regional cooperation initiative has been the European Neighbourhood Policy of 2003, which articulates the idea of a “circle of friends” bordering the Mediterranean (Collyer, 2016). Much of the literature on this “Euro-Mediterranean” region highlights how this purposefully-crafted regional identity, which associates security with trans-national cooperation, has led to the “externalization of European borders,” pushing the sphere of European authority farther and farther south (De Haas, 2008). In essence, by promoting the idea of a cooperative regional identity, the EU hopes to “responsibilize” southern states like Morocco into stemming the tide of migration within their borders. This dynamic has fundamentally altered the identity of North African states, turning them into “buffer zones” in charge of managing migration into Europe (Gabrielli, 2011). The literature employs a range of illustrative phrases to describe the new identity of these North

African states, including: “staging posts” migration “nets,” “hubs,” and “stepping stones” (Berriane et al., 2013; Baldwin-Edwards, 2006).

Furthermore, while the Euro-Mediterranean framework is ostensibly regional, policy formulation is never conducted with all the members of the “region” at once. Instead, my research shows that migration agreements are usually negotiated at the bilateral level or among small groups of states (Collyer, 2016). This fractured migration governance structure is primarily due to tensions between Maghreb countries, particularly Morocco and Algeria, who maintain a regional rivalry largely centered around the issue of the Western Sahara are therefore loath to attend conferences together. The collapse of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) in 1994 provides further evidence of fragmentation among states of the Maghred. Modelled after the EU and intended to integrate the North African states into a regional bloc, the AMU suffered from lack of economic and diplomatic cooperation and eventually became impotent (Willis, 2014). Euro-Mediterranean relations today reflect the capricious relationship among Maghreb states. Thus, one research paper notes the consistent overlap of supposedly collective “Euro-Mediterranean” conferences, highlighting the fact that between the years of 2005 and 2014, there were “five simultaneous processes between the EU and the Southern Mediterranean” on the topic of migration (Collyer, 2016).

While the literature on the intersection of migration and regionalism identifies how the Euro-Mediterranean regional identity is instrumentalized, it fails to adequately explain *why* the political tool of regional identity is used to incite cooperation in the first place. Why does the EU feel it was necessary to craft a specific regional identity in order to engage with southern states on the issue of migration? What demands do claims to identity make in a governance setting, and how strong are they when applied to multiple states at once? Furthermore, the existing literature

does not analyze how the notions of regional identity and regional migration governance inform one another. The relationship between the two is not linear, but rather multidirectional and highly dynamic. This dialectical relationship between regional identity and migration governance in the Mediterranean will be the focus of my paper. I hypothesize that identity politics at the regional level fundamentally alter the modes of migration governance adopted at the domestic level, which in turn strengthen or deteriorate a given collective identity, and so on. I see my work as a refinement of the existing literature, which I use as a foundation to dig even deeper into the modalities and consequences of identity politics within the sphere of migration governance in the Euro-Mediterranean region. This relationship is important to study because identity structures how governments and people conceive of themselves, their obligations, and their opportunities; it also expands our understanding of the limits of cooperation. I think it is especially important to analyze this dynamic from the perspective of Morocco, given that the country is firmly situated at the heart of multiple regions and multiple migration systems. Thus, the next sections will use the existing literature as a framework from which I will examine the intersection of identity and regionalism.

Theoretical Framework

Traditional studies use the realist framework to explain the emergence of security communities and the particularities of state to state relations within them. Realists emphasize the importance of material power (primarily military and economic) to explain a state's actions vis-à-vis other countries. The realist paradigm, therefore, views cooperation among states as a securitization technique: "weaker" states will form alliances or pool their resources in order to balance against a more powerful hegemon.

Constructivists, on the other hand, emphasize the importance of identity in the formation of a state's foreign policy towards other states. Constructivists "suggest that social norms, values and beliefs shape the self-understanding of the state, that is, its identity. In turn, a state's identity affects the perception of other states, and with it, of national interests" (Del, 2006). Thus, constructivist approaches are much more focused on normative power rather than hard power, and how the use of normative power influences the shaping of foreign policy. Both theoretical frameworks, however, are similar in that they use the state as the main unit of analysis.

In this paper, I will employ a strand of constructivism adopted from Pace (2006), called the "discursive constructivist approach." This theoretical framework emphasizes the use of dialogue in creating regions and therefore uses "discursive practices of regionalism" as the main unit of analysis. The discursive constructivist approach is fundamentally process-based and takes into consideration the reflexive relationship between power and social construction of identity. Because the "Euro-Mediterranean" region is so clearly a politically-engineered construct reliant upon the articulation of shared norms to create policy, I believe the discursive constructivist framework is the perfect lens through which to analyze its creation and perpetuation.

Methodology

This paper is based upon online academic research collected with reference to key themes. I started with the assumption that migration governance in Morocco was linked to regionalism in some way, given my prior research on migration systems in other areas of the world.

Furthermore, I came into the research believing that identity politics fundamentally shape a state's foreign policy preferences, migration included. On a related note, I operated under the idea that Morocco's affinity to one region would be unclear, given its multifaceted "identity" as a

majority Islamic country with ties to the West and its economic links to various regions of the world. Thus, the first question guiding my research was: to which region does Morocco belong, and what is its place within that region? In asking this question, I assumed that Morocco - as a nation and as the focal point of a complex migration system - could be situated neatly within *one* region. This assumption quickly turned out to be false, as my research revealed the stunning intricacy of Morocco's political, economic, and cultural relations vis-à-vis other states, all of which inform its approach to migration governance on the ground.

Thus, the second phase of my research focused more prominently on migration governance dynamics in and around Morocco, which helped to narrow down my findings and better elucidate the motivations behind certain policy programs related to migration. Furthermore, this line of research allowed me to develop a more nuanced understanding of the regionalism-migration nexus by revealing the states involved in Euro-Mediterranean migration dialogues, the power imbalances inherent in agenda-setting, and the various factors incentivizing states to (ostensibly) cooperate. From material on these topics I came to better understand the mechanics of migration governance in the Euro-Mediterranean area. Nevertheless, I felt that a proper analysis of the underlying process of identity negotiating was missing from my research. In other words, I understood the *how* but not the *why* of regional identity formation with respect to migration in the Mediterranean area. My research is an attempt to address this gap in the literature, by analyzing the themes of identity, migration, and regionalism and revealing the reciprocal and highly nuanced relationship between regional identity politics and regional migration governance.

Admittedly, there are a couple of major shortfalls in my methodological approach to this topic. First, most of my research was conducted online instead of in-person, which raises some

questions of accuracy and authenticity with regard to the conclusions drawn here. Ideally, I would have been able to interview Moroccan government officials to get a better gauge of what they feel their relationship to other Maghreb states and the EU is. Nevertheless, since the thrust of my argument is focused at the supranational level, I feel that I was able to get a good grasp of the most salient dynamics of the topic through online research alone.

The second issue in my methodology is related to language. Although a considerable amount of sources were written in English, I encountered some papers written in French, which I cannot read at an academic level. I am sure that there were also relevant sources written in Arabic which I would have been unable to read. Thus, I feel that my research may not be as nuanced or comprehensive as it could be given access to further research.

Analysis

This section will be a critical examination of the reciprocal relationship between “Euro-Mediterranean” identity politics and regional migration governance within the Mediterranean region, using the discursive-constructivist perspective as an analytical framework. I will begin by illustrating the ways in which identity discourse and governance strategies fundamentally structure one another by shaping ideas of “self” and “other” and concomitantly altering domestic foreign policy preferences with regard to migration. I will then analyze how this interaction between identity and governance relates to and reveals dominant power relations among various states in the Mediterranean.

The Relationship Between Migration Governance and Regional Identity

The notion of a “Euro-Mediterranean” region links Europe with several southern states, namely: Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Mauritania, Egypt, Israel, Palestine, Jordan, Lebanon,

and Syria (European Commission). It is promoted through the 1995 “Barcelona Process,” also known as the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), as well as the 2003 European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). Both of these instruments were created to further the EU’s goal of “achieving stability and prosperity in Euro-Mediterranean relations” (Adler et al., 2006, p. 3). To this end, the EMP and ENP articulate a notion of Euro-Mediterranean identity that is grounded in a regional commitment to “common values,” including “democracy and human rights, the rule of law, good governance, market economy principles and sustainable development” (European Commission). Thus, the EU harnesses *normative power* to discursively bind together states bordering the Mediterranean, who otherwise vary widely in terms of their socioeconomic status and religious ideology. In other words, the norms articulated in the EMP and ENP draw together Mediterranean states into a security partnership that is framed as being mutually beneficial to all states of the region, with the ultimate aim of “pluralistic integration” – that is, the free movement of goods and peoples between the EU and its southern “neighbors.” This entire process of constructing a Euro-Mediterranean security region therefore constitutes the “development of collective ideational and material resources for dealing with security challenges.” (Adler et al., 2006, p. 5).

Migration is one of the security challenges with which the EU is most concerned. Thus, cooperative migration management is inextricably linked with, and indeed central to, the formation of a Euro-Mediterranean identity. Importantly, the idea that this region is a *security community* presupposes that “the security of its members is indivisible,” which 1) generates a sense of “we-ness” among partner states that transcends their national identities, and 2) imposes certain responsibilities on these states commensurate with that identity (Del, 2006). On the European side, these responsibilities primarily include the formulation of free trade agreements

and visa regulations aimed at benefitting southern partner states by more firmly integrating them into the European economic and cultural system. In return, southern states – including Morocco – are expected to contribute to regional security by increasing their border regulations to stem the tide of illegal immigration to Europe (Adler et al., 2006). This dynamic demonstrates the power of identity in shaping migration governance. By establishing the notion of a Euro-Mediterranean region centered around the preservation of peace and stability, the EU inherently articulates a set of responsibilities incumbent upon all member states, including the adoption of heightened migration measures (in southern states) as a mode of regional cooperation (Laenex & Panizzon, 2013).

It is interesting to note how colonial legacies factor into this dynamic. It may be argued that colonial relationship is propagated through the “quid pro quo” agreement wherein North African states increase migration controls in exchange for development aid, free trade agreements, and/or migration agreements benefitting their citizens. However, the EU’s systematic articulation of a Mediterranean identity actually seems to be a purposeful attempt to underemphasize imperial relationships (Collyer, 2016). Hence, the notion of a semi-homogenous Euro-Mediterranean identity seems to couch migration governance in terms of equality among partner states, although the actual power dynamics involved in this process may be more asymmetrical, as will be discussed later.

Nevertheless, the formulation of a security-based regional identity tangibly structures migration management in the Euro-Mediterranean. This is most notable by looking at the various regional consultative processes (RCPs) which have proliferated in the region since the 1990s (Lavenex & Panizzon, 2013). RCPs are informal, non-binding, dialogue-based fora that have emerged in recent years as crucial mechanisms in consensus-building and information exchange

(Collyer, 2016; Wolff, 2015). In the field of Euro-Mediterranean migration governance, the most prominent RCPs have been the Tripoli Process (2001) and the Rabat Process (2006) named after the cities in which they were held. The fact that these RCPs are based in North African countries is intended to emphasize and reify the notion of a Euro-Mediterranean identity founded on the norm of equality among states. Another one of these dialogue-based forums in which migration is a key agenda component is the 5+5 Dialogue, which brings together ten countries from both parts of the Euro-Mediterranean region: Algeria, Spain, France, Italy, Libya, Malta, Mauritania, Morocco, Portugal, and Tunisia (Wolff, 2015). All of these RCPs are supposed to “project commonality and shared interest among states” (Collyer, 2016). To this end, they bring states together to forge a consensus around best practices in the field of migration management. Thus, RCPs in their ideal form are manifestations of regional identity as it is instrumentalized to foment collective action. But RCPs are also a crucial medium through which regional identity is actively *reproduced*, not just articulated. Thus, RCPs are included in the reciprocal, discursive formation of regional identity as crucial intermediary mechanisms translating supranational identity discourse into actionable policies on the ground.

Migration-based RCPs in the Euro-Mediterranean act as a medium of regional identity reproduction through their organizational structures. The fact that many of these RCPs overlap with one other is a salient illustration of this point. For example, tensions between Morocco and Algeria have made it necessary to create both the Rabat Process and the Tripoli Process, despite the fact that these forums discuss the same issue: migration. Thus, the Rabat Process includes Morocco but not Algeria, while the Tripoli Process involves Algeria but not Morocco (Collyer, 2016). This redundancy articulates an image of Euro-Mediterranean identity that is much more fragmented and messier than what is projected in the official discourse. Moreover, this example

illustrates the difficulty of bringing together diverse states into a cohesive “regional” dialogue. Contentious “sub-regional” or inter-state relations such as the rivalry between Morocco and Algeria are both reflected in and reified by RCPs, effectively tearing apart the notion of a cohesive “Euro-Mediterraneanism.” In theoretical terms, this phenomenon speaks to the modes by which institutions inform the further consolidation of regional identity.

These identity fractures within the Euro-Mediterranean region in turn reshape the limits of regional cooperation - further perpetuating the reciprocal relationship between regional identity and migration governance. Specifically, the existence of balancing tendencies and destabilizing rivalries between Maghreb states, along with conflicts in the broader Middle East (most notably the Arab-Israeli conflict), weaken the cohesiveness of the Euro-Mediterranean region as a whole. The relative capriciousness of this regional identity fundamentally informs how future attempts at collective migration governance are to be structured. For one, fragmented articulations of identity increase the prioritization of national self-interests and thus increase the likelihood that later cooperation agreements between the EU and North Africa on migration will be bilateral, not multilateral, and certainly not regional (Collyer, 2016). Furthermore, these agreements are more likely to be short-term instead of long-term in scope, as the weakening notion of a stable “Euro-Mediterraneanness” makes it harder to construct prolonged regional agreements (De Haas, 2011). Since the identity of the region is so strongly influenced by outside political dynamics, long-term agreements simply lack feasibility, and thus it makes more sense for states to work cooperatively to formulate *strictly temporary* foreign policies on migration (Gabielli, 2011).

The ultimate result is a range of domestic migration policies which vary widely in structure and effectiveness. For example, short-term migration measures in Morocco

fundamentally ignore the root causes of mass migration and are instead highly security-focused, restrictive, and ultimately inadequate (Gabrielli, 2011). Migrants do not stop moving; they simply devise new migratory routes and turn to more dangerous methods of travel, such as smuggling (Baldwin-Edwards, 2006). Moreover, regional failure to address the underlying causes of migration (such as unequal economic opportunities between Europe and North African states) translates into blatantly racist attitudes towards Sub-Saharan migrants in Morocco, as these migrants compete with native Moroccans for already scarce economic resources (De Haas, 2008). All this means that limited regional cooperation produces ineffective policies which only serve to heighten national identities at the cost of a strong, Euro-Mediterranean consciousness.

To summarize, then, the EU's strategic articulation of a regional Mediterranean identity inherently responsibilities states such as Morocco to cooperate on the issue of migration. This regional identity (which emphasizes the importance of security) facilitates the creation of RCPs designed to structure inter-state cooperation in the Mediterranean. RCPs, in turn, reframe the meaning of regional identity through their organizational structure. In the case of the Euro-Mediterranean region, RCPs tear apart, rather than reinforce, a cohesive regional consciousness. They do so by indirectly communicating a fractured sense of identity which contributes to the short-term, bilateral nature of migration governance strategies. It is thus clear how identity and governance are engaged in a reciprocal, discursive relationship wherein each fundamentally reshapes the other over time. Analyzing this process is important not just because it leads to a more nuanced understanding of migration governance dynamics, but also because it reveals underlying power relationships which are crucial for understanding the region as a whole. These power relationships will be explored in the next part of this section.

Analyzing the Effectiveness of Normative Power

Given that the idea of a Euro-Mediterranean region relies on the power of norms to bind disparate states into a stable partnership, what do the above dynamics reveal about the strength of normative power as it pertains to the Mediterranean? The previous section analyzed the reciprocal relationship between identity politics and migration governance; in this section, I will look at what the outcome of that relationship reveals about Euro-Mediterranean power structures and the efficacy of normative power as a supranational binding mechanism.

Constructivist theories of international relations emphasize the importance of norms and the construction of shared identities in the shaping of political agendas. This paper has relied heavily on a variant of the constructivist framework - the discursive constructivist approach - to explain initial efforts at creating a Euro-Mediterranean security region. The extent to which the EU articulated and promoted this regional identity shows 1) its reliance upon normative power to link together relatively different states and 2) its ability to set the terms of region-building and policy creation. Indeed, cooperation in the Euro-Mediterranean region was always structured around the EU's main goal of security, with the EU Commission acting as mediator between the EU member states and southern Mediterranean states in the formulation of bi- or multi-lateral migration agreements. This fact reveals the EU's asymmetrical power in the region insofar as it can act to "unilaterally craft consultation" between supposedly equal states (Lavenex & Panizzon, 2013). The EU also exercises its economic dominance by funding most of the discussions among member states, further displacing the center of regional power northwards. Realists would point to this asymmetrical dispersion of *material* power as a token of EU hegemony vis-à-vis southern states and, consequently, a source of instability for the Euro-Mediterranean region as a whole.

In fact, material disparities between the EU and its southern neighbors fundamentally influence the efficacy of normative power to bind the region together. The problem with the European Neighbourhood Policy was that it initially failed to adequately incentivize Maghreb states to increase security at their borders. Thus, it became necessary for the EU to negotiate several bilateral “Mobility Partnerships” with states like Morocco. These Mobility Partnerships sought to overcome the incentive problems of the original ENP by linking increased migration management with the delivery of development aid and the creation of “new legal migration channels” for Maghrebi countries (Lavenex & Panizzon, 2013). The EU continues to use visa and free trade agreements as incentives to reward states who implement border controls. This system elevates the status of a “compliant” country like Morocco over its neighbors and highlights the differences among them (Collyer, 2016). The conditionality of this partnership framework thus speaks to the weakness of using normative power alone to construct a regional identity and policy agenda when the states included in that region vary widely in terms of their material capabilities. In such a situation, discursive commitments to ideas like democracy and the rule of law are not enough to precipitate a true security community. Rather, regional material power imbalances must first be taken into consideration and solved before stable cooperation can unfold. This conclusion contributes to a more nuanced understanding of international relations as a whole by combining different theoretical frameworks into a sort of “power hierarchy,” wherein normative power achieves influence only after material power imbalances are mitigated.

Is there a Euro-Mediterranean Region?

Given the structure analyzed above, it appropriate to speak of a Euro-Mediterranean region in international politics? As much as an answer in the affirmative would suit EU interests,

I conclude that such a region does not exist in any meaningful sense. The dynamics of migration governance in the area seems to affirm this conclusion. Although there exist agreements and various fora linking Europe with states in the Maghreb, these remain highly EU-centric and fundamentally fragmented. The redundancy of the Rabat and Tripoli processes is case in point: the EU is clearly not concerned with fostering “regional” cooperation if it is willing to overlook Moroccan-Algerian tensions in favor of merely cobbling together overlapping platforms to further its security interests. One cannot speak of a supranational regional identity when such rivalries are ignored and one-sided foreign policies so clearly prioritized.

Furthermore, there is a noticeable lack of any supranational regional mechanism which would help to define and reify the region’s identity by monitoring compliance with stated normative goals. While such mechanisms do not demarcate regions *ipso facto*, they nevertheless help to strengthen ties between different states seeking to form a cohesive whole. Not only does the “Euro-Mediterranean” region lack such a body, it is so clearly dominated by European interests and material resources that the creation of one would probably only serve to institutionalize existing power asymmetries. As it is, states in the Euro-Mediterranean region are left to implement migration agreements however they see fit, resulting in state-sponsored human rights violations, such as Morocco’s forceful expulsion of migrants from Ceuta and Melilla and its attempt to leave some 2000 migrants in the Algerian desert (De Haas, 2008). These actions severely undercut the image of a regional identity based on a shared normative commitment to the rule of law and human rights. If we use migration management as a proxy for analyzing the strength of a region and its identity, it is clear that the idea of a “Euro-Mediterranean” region is debilitatingly weak and therefore effectively nonexistent.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have analyzed the relationship between regional identity politics and migration management. I have shown that the construction of a specific regional identity fundamentally structures the modes of migration governance adopted at the domestic level by imbuing member states with a responsibility to uphold regional norms. Migration governance structures in turn reify regional identities by either encouraging cooperation among states or heightening existing fragmentations - a process which eventually defines the limits of long-term regional cooperation. Thus, identity and migration governance are engaged in a discursive relationship, wherein each plays an active role in constructing and reshaping the other. Neither concept is static, nor does one stem from the other; rather, they both contribute to an ongoing and dynamic conversation. It is this discursive relationship that ultimately defines the process of “regionalism,” which is not just the sum of policies but the continuous back-and-forth between identity negotiation and governance.

The Euro-Mediterranean “region,” as it is defined in this paper, is a fundamentally European identity construction designed to encourage links between both sides of the Mediterranean in order to foster a sense of peace and stabilization. The construction of this regional identity arose out of the EU’s rising security concerns about illegal immigration, terrorism, and conflict in the Middle East, and accordingly EU discourse on the topic revolves around the commitment to key norms such as the rule of law, democracy, and human rights. However, as is discussed in the analysis section, the way in which this regional identity actually interacts with migration governance structures reveals how weak it actually is. Underlying tensions between member states, combined with fundamental power asymmetries between the EU and its southern “neighbors,” undercut the cohesiveness of a “Euro-Mediterranean” identity,

which in turn subverts the creation of long-term political cooperation in solving key issues such as migration. Thus, I conclude that, at this point, it is inappropriate to talk about a “Euro-Mediterranean” region. Apart from sharing a proximity to the Mediterranean Sea, the states included in this partnership have shown their unwillingness to engage with each other in any meaningful way at the regional level. This fact seems to suggest that normative claims alone are not enough to sustain a regional identity in the face of glaring material imbalances between member states of a given region. From a theoretical perspective, it is clear that a full portrait of regional cooperation can only be given when combining realist and constructivist points of view.

Further research on this topic may include a deeper analysis of the dynamics of regionalization from a bottom-up, rather than a top-down perspective, and how processes of regionalization inform collective governance. Civil society plays a large role in articulating key issues and shaping policy, so a deeper examination into the intersection of regionalization and preference-formation would certainly be appropriate and useful for expanding the body of knowledge on this topic.

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