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# BECOMING EUROPEAN? STRANGERS FINDING A PLACE IN THE EUROPEAN UNION

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## Abstract

This article addresses the idea of belonging in Europe from the perspective of postcolonial migrants settling in EU societies. It draws on over one hundred in-depth interviews with Algerian, Ecuadorian, and Indian individuals settled mainly in and around the cities of London, Madrid, and Paris. Rather than investigating migrants' orientations to Europe through a narrow interest in self-identification (feeling vs. not feeling European), it delves into individual migration narratives for evidence of how Europe is imagined (if it is imagined at all) during the migration process and its relation to other physical and symbolic sites. As a frame for interpreting individual migration narratives, I introduce the concept of 'migratory rupture', a dialectical experience of both the disorienting and creative aspects of migration. In excavating some of the reflexive processes involved in constructing symbolic geographies of attachment, I find that regardless of the scales of comparison used to articulate place affiliation across different contexts, e.g. whether small-scale (neighbourhoods or city districts) or larger-scale (supranational or de-territorialized categories), symbolic geographies allow migrants to view their transnational life experience on a single, coherent plane and express a form of global consciousness.

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*Now home to millions of people from non-European backgrounds, and with its many religious and cultural dispositions, Europe is a crossing of transnational networks that incorporate almost all its citizens and residents. It is as much a space of longings rooted in myths of origin and tradition, as it is a space of cosmopolitan identities and attachments, and hybrid geographies of cultural formation.*

-Ash Amin

## 1. Introduction

There is ample public and scholarly interest in the ways native-born and 'majority' segments of European populations experience and position themselves in relation to interrelated globalization and Europeanization process. Recently, greater attention is being paid to the ways in which 'people on the move', including immigrant minorities, view the global processes in which they are enmeshed. Migration is thus seen as the 'human face' of globalization and the migrant as the 'figure of our time' (Nail 2015). Contrary to what one might expect with the advent of European citizenship, European Union (EU) movers are not the most emblematic of these processes. Though intra-EU mobility has been on the rise since the turn of the new millennium, third-country nationals and individuals born outside of the EU make up a larger share of the European population than EU movers (Eurostat 2017; Recchi 2015). To be sure, much of the geographic mobility in European societies (not to mention human and cultural diversity) is associated with 'non-European' migrants and their descendants, a label which can obscure the many cultural and historic ties the latter have to Europe since many of these migration flows are in some way related to colonial and postcolonial contexts.

With respect to the different cultural and social processes that shape the experiences of non-European/postcolonial migrants in the European Union, the specifically European dimension of experience has sparked some scholarly interest. There is growing research into how non-European-origin populations relate to the added European dimension of political and cultural membership. Studies of European identity and support for European integration are increasingly interested in the perspective of minorities (Agirdag et al. 2016; Cinnirella and Hamilton 2007; Dowley and Silver 2011; Erisen 2017; Roeder 2011; Teney et al. 2016; Vieten 2018), as well as the potential significance of 'Europe' in processes of migrant integration (Sperling 2013). Survey research on these issues indicates that minorities support European integration more than non-minorities. The former are less likely to see European integration as a threat to national identity (Cinirella and Hamilton 2007; Dowley and Silver 2011; Roeder 2011). Minorities may also be more likely to see EU law as a potential arena for supranational human rights claims-making when faced with discrimination at the national level (Dowley and Silver 2011). On the other hand, the possibility that EU policy discourse may reinforce perceptions, especially among Muslims, of the EU as a 'Christian club' may lead to more ambivalent relationships with the idea of Europe (ibid.). Qualitative studies on non-EU migrant identification with and understandings of Europe illuminate some of the ambivalence in these attitudes. Experiences of discrimination or marginalization vis-à-vis dominant groups and the increased politicization of migration across Europe may limit the sense of belonging to Europe (Vieten 2018). At the same time, the freedom of mobility associated with the European Union can offer a potentially more 'open' space of belonging and foster cosmopolitan and post-national understandings of membership as well as opportunities for individual growth and freedom (Sperling 2013; Vieten 2018).

Yet, relatively little is known about the ways in which understandings of and identifications with Europe (understood loosely) are articulated in migrants' narratives of mobility and settlement, that is, how Europe is imagined (if it is imagined at all) during the migration process and its relation to other physical and symbolic sites that structure the migratory experience. By approaching the idea of Europe from postcolonial migrants' perspective in a roundabout away that considers Europe as one of several potential spatial referent points, I try to glimpse into the dynamic process of place affiliation in European migration contexts.

This study considers international migration as an intense life experience with the ability to alter one's identity, potentially casting it against a global frame of reference (Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst 2005). It should be noted that the postcolonial relationships that have significantly shaped migration processes in Europe (and which are investigated in this study) have global reflexivity built into them, leading to a degree of familiarity among North African, South American and South Asian individuals with their European societies of destination (and vice-versa). Elements of cultural and linguistic proximity are reinforced by contemporary mediascapes (Appadurai 1996) and other global processes. Yet, postcolonial migrants are equally cast as distant, unfamiliar, and other – as a result of international migration regimes, cultural boundaries, and racializing ideologies. Through this dialectic of 'familiarity and unfamiliarity' and 'nearness and farness', non-European postcolonial migrants settling in Europe can be understood in terms of Simmel's figure of the 'stranger' – "the one who comes today and stays tomorrow" (Simmel 1950) as well as more contemporary accounts of 'strangeness' under conditions of globalization (Amin 2012; Rumford 2013). The North African, South American and South Asian (mainly first-generation Algerian, Ecuadorian, and Indian) participants in this study are not considered 'strangers' merely because they are migrants, newcomers, or minorities in European majority contexts, however. Rather, their accounts of affiliation to place that frequently draw on hybrid and reflexive geographies are relevant to some of the key qualities of the Simmelian notion of the stranger-as-outsider – notably, creativity, improved perspective, and the ability to be a catalyst for change (Coupland 1999; Rumford 2013; Simmel 1950).

Contemporary theorizations that build on Simmel's account emphasise the blurring of lines between 'strangers' and 'neighbours' and associate the global era with a generalized condition of 'strangeness', as argued by Rumford (2013). Through this understanding, the condition of strangeness applies to migrants and non-migrants alike and involves a "sense of disorientation resulting from […] an experience of globalization in which previously reliable reference points have been eroded and we encounter strangers where previously we encountered neighbours" (Rumford 2013, 7). How postcolonial migrants deal with processes of 'disorientation'– both pertaining to the life-changing intensity of migratory experience and to becoming embedded into social worlds that are themselves "on the move" (Bauman 1991, 97) is what this study is about.

As a way of connecting both the classical properties of 'strangerhood' and the contemporary condition of strangeness in an international migration experience, I present the concept of 'migratory rupture'. Through a dialectical experience involving personal rupture engendered by migration and the need to re-establish a sense of continuity during settlement, the concept draws both on the potentially disorientating aspects of the lived experience of migration as well as the creative potential of migrants to regain control of their life-narrative. As a frame for interpreting individual migration narratives, the migratory rupture concept allows me to excavate some of the reflexive processes involved in constructing symbolic geographies of attachment. Regardless of the scales used to draw spatial comparisons or bridge the distance between distinct places, e.g.

whether small-scale (neighbourhoods or city districts) or larger-scale (supranational or de-territorialized categories), I argue that symbolic geographies can serve at least two functions. First, they articulate a migrant's transnational experiences on a single plane of existence and second, they express a form of global consciousness.

## 2. Theoretical framework

### *2.1. Spatial consciousness and identity formation in migration contexts*

How do individual understandings of and attachments to place change in the context of migration and settlement experiences? Specifically, in international migration processes between a non-European country of origin and a destination society in the European Union, how does the supranational European category intermingle in one's expanding spatial consciousness and post-migration identity formation? This study considers international migrants settling in European societies as particularly interesting subjects for investigating: a) how one's geographic imagination expands to incorporate a growing number of potential place attachments; and b) how different scales of attachment, ranging from neighbourhoods, cities, states, and supranational categories, are articulated in these changing geographic imaginations.

Human geographers have developed several conceptual tools for thinking about the meaning people attach both to everyday practical and more abstract spatial forms. The geographic or spatial imagination refers to the ways in which individuals understand and classify places and the connections between them (Agnew and Duncan 1989; Gregory 1994; Harvey 2005). Closely linked is the concept of mental maps which can refer both to processes of storing and extracting meaning from concrete experiences in space as well as imagining unknown places (Tuan 1975). These concepts view human spatial consciousness as shaped by both the material and symbolic realms of personal and collective experience and as relevant to sociological concepts, such as the social imaginary (Taylor 2002). Through a multidimensional understanding of place as constructed by location, social interactions and identifications, Agnew and Duncan (1989) argue for a more systematic focus on the simultaneous engagement between the social and geographic imaginations.

Linking the social and geographic imaginations is also crucial to Harvey (2005), who draws attention to the specific role of space and place in shaping individuals' understandings and experiences of their own biographies and their relationships to the world around them. He writes that the geographic imagination allows the individual to

> *recognize the relationship which exists between him [sic.] and his neighbourhood, his territory […]. It allows him to judge the relevance of events in other places […] – to judge whether [these events] are relevant to him wherever he is now. It allows him also to fashion and use space creatively and to appreciate the meaning of the spatial forms created by others (Harvey 2005, quoting Harvey 1973).*

For Harvey, investigating the relations between social processes and spatial forms is essential in order to develop a fuller understanding of complex global processes, including regional integration and migration. Harvey's emphasis on "consciousness" and "imagination" as well as his references to "geographical knowledges" and mental maps are particularly relevant to the cultural focus of this study. He understands mental maps as repertoires of spatial concepts and geographical understandings shaped by an individual's surroundings, which vary greatly across different spatial and cultural environments. "Such mental maps, once formed, tend to be stubbornly recalcitrant to

change and ill-adapted to the heightened fluidity demanded by contemporary processes of globalization" (Harvey 2005, 236). This relatively static view of mental maps is surprising given Harvey's frequent emphasis on dynamic processes such as relational space. It is also a departure from Tuan's (1975) multidimensional definition of mental maps that includes a highly projective and aspirational element through "imaginary worlds that depict attractive goals that tempt people out of their habitual rounds" (Tuan 1975, 210). Harvey nevertheless challenges overly deterministic notions of the geographic imagination by highlighting the diversity of specialized geographical knowledges, even within a single locality: "the nature of experience as well as of socialization guarantees considerable variation in geographical perceptions according to class, gender, age, ethnicity, religion and lifestyle dispositions" (2005, 236). The emphasis on the complex relationship between individual-level and external factors that shape spatial consciousness is highly relevant to the research at hand, given the multiple spatial and cultural realms of socialization and individual experience that international migrants 'cross' along their journey.

Building on the sociological relevance of this geographical scholarship, Recchi (2015) offers the concept of space-sets: "the complex of physical sites where individuals spend their social existence, stemming from past and present practices, unified by remembering 'togetherness' in a geographical location" (Recchi 2015; Recchi and Kuhn 2013, 192). Similar to Harvey's understanding of the geographic imagination, Recchi and Kuhn (2013) underline the variability of space-sets and liken them to 'personal maps', the components of which differ in terms of *width*, *interconnectedness*, and *salience* (ibid.). These three properties endow the space-sets concept with a more dynamic and context-specific definition than the geographic imagination. Both objective and subjective processes distinguish the characteristics of space-sets, as width is concerned with the totality of places encountered at multiple scales, so that the experience of geographic mobility expands the width of one's space-sets. Recchi and Kuhn's understanding of the interconnectedness and salience of sites, on the other hand, can be likened to the symbolic aspects of the geographic imagination, based on the extent to which one perceives different places as separate or connected and the affective meaning conjured by each. They explore this in relation to the political legitimacy of the European Union in the minds of EU citizens but trace the relevance of the concept to other historical moments of social transformation, such as industrialisation, "which unleashed workers from the countryside and brought them to cities, expanding their space-sets significantly" (Recchi and Kuhn 2013, 192).

The dynamic and interrelated properties of width, interconnectedness, and salience that make up an individual's space-sets and shape the geographic imagination are thus of specific interest to the study of migrant subjectivity and identity formation. Drawing on Gregory's (1994) *Geographical Imaginations*, Robins (2019) emphasises the identity processes that are at stake in the geographic imagination beyond the perceptions and behaviours that shape and are shaped by our spatial consciousness. Individuals and collectives also use the geographic imagination "to imagine and negotiate their identities in relation to wider national and cultural ones" (Robins 2019, 730). In his study of Brazilian migrants in London, he highlights the significance of interconnected frames of reference that define a migrant's spatial consciousness and belonging: "the way the places of origin and destination are imagined occur in reference to each other" (ibid.).

### *2.2. "Migratory rupture" and the dialectics of belonging*

Three aspects of these different theoretical contributions are particularly significant for the study at hand. First, our geographic imaginations, mental maps, and space-sets refer both to our objective spatial knowledge and experience as well as the individual and collective meanings attached to them. Second, these objective and subjective processes not only shape our orientations to spatial forms but also our identity work and other imaginaries (e.g. social, cultural, and political). Third, we mobilize both objective experience and subjective meanings of space inter-temporally and at multiple scalar levels (e.g. neighbourhood, city, state) in connecting or distinguishing physical sites in our personal mental maps. Moreover, though mental maps and geographic imaginations are essential to most human experience, the theories discussed thus far suggest the act of migration and the 'migrant condition' as particularly revealing of the complexity of these processes.

The authors dealing with various aspects of spatial consciousness seem to differ when it comes to the malleability of mental maps and geographic imaginations. Whereas Harvey suggests that one's mental maps, born of context-specific spatial and social experience, are not particularly well equipped to deal with changing circumstances and environments, Tuan (1975) and Recchi and Kuhn (2013) are more inclined to view mental maps or space-sets as continuous processes. The latter approach seems the most appropriate for addressing the geographic imagination and belonging in migration contexts as it puts the migrant actor in a position to take stock of accumulated experiences and desired outcomes related to multiple spatial and social contexts. But how might some of the building blocks of mental mapping - in Tuan's words, the combination of "memory-images and imaginary-images" (1975, 211), or for Recchi and Kuhn (2013), width, interconnectedness, and salience – be felt and experienced by migrants as changing, expanding, and potentially challenging their previous orientations to space? Specifically, if our mental maps are complex by nature, as this conceptual framework suggests, how does the added complexity of socialization in multiple societies – as one becomes dis-embedded or 'uprooted' from one (non-European) society and embedded into another (European, urban one) - affect our spatial consciousness?

If we consider the lived experiences of international mobility as fundamental aspects of a migrant's biography, then the dialectical relationships that inform processes of dis-embedding and embedding – involving both personal rupture and continuity – deserve special attention. Whether we are more inclined to follow Harvey's understanding of recalcitrant mental maps or a more fluid approach to the geographic imagination, the spatial consciousness that informs our identity work does not simply stay put nor expand on its own. Especially in a migratory experience, one is confronted with new social and geographic circumstances which will inevitably lead one to reflect on and question one's understanding of and attachments to place.

The rupture-continuity dialectic can be used as a frame for better understanding some of the particularities of migrant biographies as well as the connected concept of evolving mental maps. As a way of assembling together the different subjective and objective components that give personal meaning to the migrant biography, I offer the concept of "migratory rupture". This concept is based on the premise that the migration experience represents a significant life-event which may cause one to re-evaluate the self-concept in ways that other 'milestones', more in-line with social expectations related to the life-course (e.g. education or fertility decisions), do not. Thus, moving to and settling in an EU context, regardless of one's desire to do so, can be experienced as a form of rupture, both in space and in the life-course. I use the concept of migratory rupture to highlight the feeling of fragmentation of the self in the context of migration and the

subsequent effort to re-establish personal continuity that is coherent and 'makes sense' in the individual biography.

### *2.3 "Elective belonging" and expanding European space-sets*

Research on how the idea of belonging in urban contexts is changing through globalization processes highlights the importance of reflexivity and symbolic geographies. The concept of "elective belonging" developed in *Globalization and Belonging* by Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst (2005) suggests that individual narratives of settlement may have greater significance than local historic ties in contemporary urban contexts. As a core idea in the empirical study on globalization and local belonging, elective belonging

> *articulates senses of spatial attachment, social position, and forms of connectivity to other places. […] Individuals attach their own biography to their 'chosen' residential location, so that they tell stories that indicate that their arrival and subsequent settlement is appropriate to their sense of themselves. People who come to live in an area with no prior ties to it, but can link their residence to their biographical life history, are able to see themselves as belonging to the area. This kind of elective belonging is critically dependent on people's relational sense of place, their ability to relate their area of residence against other possible areas, so that the meaning of place is critically judged in terms of its relational meanings (Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst 2005, 29, emphasis added).*

The role that critical reflection plays in connecting place to biography – the conscious effort to achieve a coherent sense of self in the context of geographic mobility – is illustrative of the link between our spatial orientations and our identity work. Savage and his colleagues' emphasis on both meaningful and relational senses of place reinforces the theoretical material discussed previously. The multi-scalar interconnectedness and salience of sites (Recchi and Kuhn 2013) and interconnected frames of reference (Robins 2019) that come to structure one's self-understanding are intimately related to the experience of geographic mobility and to the way we imagine and relate our departure, arrival, and settlement stories.

Though Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst's concept of elective belonging draws principally from findings on internal mobility in Britain more than on international migrants, it is relevant to any analysis of the agentic capabilities of newcomers in their own social integration, embedding and emplacement in their new society (Wessendorf and Phillimore 2019). The latter authors have drawn attention to the role of 'superdiverse contexts' (such as the European capitals in this study) as highlighting the still unresolved public and scholarly debates around 'migrant integration' by begging the question of which spatial unit migrants are supposed to 'integrate' into. The study at hand suggests that postcolonial migrants settling in European cities develop symbolic geographies of their settlement contexts that are not necessarily congruent with official spatial units. As will be shown, they develop their own accounts of settlement or 'integration' into the spatial units that are most appropriate for their self-understandings, based on a relational and interconnected sense of space.

Exploring the meanings and salience of Europe in connection to other spatial categories in the context of these processes of elective belonging and changing geographic imaginations allows us to consider the multi-scalar and interconnected properties of these processes to a greater extent than a focus on national or local place attachments would. To what extent do the mental maps of newcomers in European societies, reveal a 'European imaginary' of sorts, whether spatial, cultural, social, or political? The European Union, especially through its regime of free cross-border

mobility, has potentially set the stage for an increased "internationalisation of Europeans' space-sets" (Recchi and Kuhn 2013, 202). Similarly, for Harvey (2005), the political transformations related to European integration have led to a progressive transformation of nationally based geographical outlooks into a more European-wide perspective. It is beyond the scope of this investigation to ask what the effects of citizenship status of non-EU migrants might have on their potential for developing European space-sets, and how these space-sets might be constituted compared to those of 'native' EU citizens. However, given the cross-country comparative research design, it is possible to explore the differences across groups when it comes to the cultural resonance of Europe. The European Union as the common denominator among all possible spatial categories of reference adds an additional layer of complexity to the question of expanding geographical imaginations in the migration context, while at the same time allowing for more robust comparisons of migration narratives.

## 3. Research design and analytical approach

The theory of elective belonging, put specifically in an international migration context, would suggest that newcomers to Europe – as 'strangers' – understand their biography and their sense of belonging in relation to multiple spaces, both in practical and personally meaningful terms. In-line with research on migrants' integration into social networks in the 'new' society, I find that the boundaries between the functions of instrumental and affective relationships (in this case, to space), are fuzzy, rather than fixed (see Wessendorf and Phillimore 2019). I suggest that the comparative evaluation of both the instrumental and affective meaning of different spatial categories encountered during migration and settlement (no matter how directly or indirectly) constitutes a dynamic process through the dialectics of migratory rupture discussed previously. As an interpretative approach to my interview material, I pay special attention to multiple spatial scales and environments as well as the social and cultural imaginaries connected to them, through which the sense of place attachment and belonging is articulated. These include towns, neighbourhoods and districts, landscapes, national territories and supranational categories. The focus is on the way these categories are mobilized in individual migration narratives to make sense of the individual biography in a context of migratory rupture. It should be noted that many of these spatial categories have cultural resonance in one's spatial imagination, without necessarily constituting the most relevant sites of *belonging*, however. They represent the multiple places and spaces that individuals reckon with and negotiate as they engage in processes of elective belonging and become embedded in their new society.

As will be seen in the findings, many questions that probe for images and understandings of spatial forms and cultural configurations associated with urban, national or supranational categories can take respondents off-guard. During the first and most lengthy part of interviews, migration narratives unfolded more on informants' own terms and resembled biographical narratives. In the second phase of the interview, I steered narratives into more specific spatial and cultural units. Moreover, many questions on distinct categories (e.g. France, Madrid, Europe) were formulated in intentionally vague terms. Though this often disrupted the fluidity of the exchange and could even cause confusion or discomfort in some respondents (e.g. "What comes to mind if I say 'Europe' to you?" Or, "Is there something about Europe that distinguishes it from other parts of the world?"), it was important not to overly 'correct' such situations, even where they provoked

silences or reluctance to engage with vague concepts. Such reactions in themselves can be revelatory of how spatial categories are understood and constructed.

### *3.1 Sampling and fieldwork in cross-country context*

This study draws on over one hundred in-depth semi-structured interviews on different aspects of migration and settlement experiences, including identity formation and place affiliation. Three main groups of research participants were selected: individuals born in Algeria, Ecuador, and India[2] who had been living for at least five years in the regions of Paris, London, and Madrid (as well as a few other cities in the UK and Spain). Fieldwork was conducted between 2014 and 2016 and involved a range of participant recruitment methods in each context with the help of the researcher's personal and research network, religious, cultural, and professional organizations, local journalists and 'lucky encounters' during civic and cultural events.

Some key aspects of the cultural and political backdrop at the time of the fieldwork which often shaped the narratives obtained are related to the 2008 Eurozone crisis and its aftermath, the European 'migrant crisis', and the calls for a UK referendum on EU membership. The three principal migrant groups were selected on the basis of their historical and cultural connection with one of the three European contexts under investigation. The sampling logic in each national context was based on the relevant postcolonial migration relationship. Thus, the principal sampling pairs are Algerians in the French context, Ecuadorians in the Spanish context, and Indians in the British context. However, to enhance the comparative dimension of the study, a sub-sample of each migrant group was also constructed in a second context so that roughly ten Ecuadorians were interviewed in London, ten Indians in Paris and ten Algerians in Madrid as well as Valencia. Interviews were conducted and transcribed by the researcher in English, French, and Spanish according to the national context. Interview excerpts in French and Spanish presented in this essay have been translated by the researcher. The names of participants have been changed in order to preserve their anonymity.

### *3.2 Interviewing strategies: 'Spontaneous' Europe vs. Probing for Europe*

About three quarters of the interview schedule was designed to encourage biographical migration narratives (as far as 2-3-hour semi-structured interviews can allow for). Where the sections on the pre-departure and settlement stages of the narrative were concerned, I avoided direct references to specific locations in my questions (e.g. using the names of cities or countries relevant to the migrant's trajectory). I tended more to frame questions on relevant spatial categories using deixis adverbs such as 'here' and 'there' (e.g. "Tell me about your life back there," or "before you came here…"). Only towards the last quarter of the interview were respondents 'led' into specific spatial categories relevant to the specific migration context, with questions such as, "What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Paris/France/Europe? What are the main challenges facing the UK today?" Thus, as a typical interview progressed towards the end, the narrative style became less biographical in scope. My questions became narrower and focused on perceptions of national societies and politics as well as European integration.

Although it was not disclosed to participants, I was constantly "on the look-out" for mentions of Europe, among other supranational constructions. Informants only became immediately aware of

[2] With the exception of a few respondents from other countries in North Africa, South Asia and South America, including Colombia, Venezuela, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Morocco and Tunisia.

this when I deployed the second strategy and narrowed the geographical scope of questions to fit with existing or potential institutional and territorial configurations (e.g. "Can you imagine the countries of your region of origin establishing similar integration patterns as the EU? or "Is it a good thing that Spain/France/UK is in the EU?"). In contrast, as mentioned, the first strategy was concerned with obtaining spontaneous spatial references (potentially, more salient ones). During this phase of the interview, participants would develop different scalar or cultural meanings associated with abstract spatial adverbs (usually at local or national scales). Instances in which respondents spontaneously referred to 'Europe' (e.g. "I came to Europe…", "the European lifestyle is very different from ours…" etc.) gave me the opportunity to probe deeper on the topic of Europe (e.g. "You just mentioned that you had a long interest in moving to Europe. What was your image of Europe at the time of your departure?").

As fieldwork progressed, it became clear that spontaneous utterances on Europe, although not exactly rare (they concern just over one-third of participants), had little to do with a clearly articulated orientation to Europe as a spatial category or as a source of belonging. Still, the relative frequency of spontaneous references to Europe is noteworthy. They were usually located in the context of comparative talk on lifestyles and values between the country of origin and country of residence, or in referring to a European space-set associated with progress, culture, and prosperity.

Probing directly for Europe towards the close of interviews was therefore necessary in order to develop a more complete picture of the various orientations to different spatial categories and how they relate to one another. As my findings suggest, questions on European integration and images of Europe could shed light on respondents' orientations to spaces and sites of collective belonging related to both European and non-European spaces, including places related to the countries of origin and residence. The 'direct probing' strategy was especially relevant in the context of the comparative nature of the study. Putting a common referent 'Europe' to the test in different national contexts among different groups of migrants actually revealed little in common at all. Not only does this reinforce previous research on the particular national frames of interpretation of European integration (Díez Medrano 2003), it also suggests that unique understandings of Europe are emerging among migrant populations as a result of multiple socialization processes related to the country of origin, European societies, and personal experiences of migration.

## 4. Findings

I offer two contrasting scales through which to consider the interconnectedness of spatial reference points articulated as meaningful in individual migration narratives. First, a small-scale, which is developed through emphasis on belonging to specific local or urban settings and conceptions of community as well as distinct physical environments as opposed to more extensive ones. Second, a large-scale, which shifts the focus of the study exclusively onto the Algerian/North African group of research participants based on their extensive mobilization of frames related to the Mediterranean Sea in articulating feelings of belonging that connect contexts of origin and residence. I cannot, within the scope of this essay, explore all of the relevant spatial categories that seem to shape informants' geographic imaginations (whether smaller or larger scale) nor examine in-depth the boundary-drawing and distinction processes that often accompany work of constructing meaningful places of belonging.

However, by presenting a selection of spatial motifs relevant to respondents' discourse on belonging, I hope to achieve two things. First, to shed more light on how migrants experience their own integration, or embedding, into European societies through interpretative 'comparative work'. Comparisons between the different places that have shaped one's biography inevitably draw sending and receiving country-contexts onto the same plane of experience and existence. Thus, whether or not as migrants, we are conscious of the concrete acts or symbolic processes through which we become 'embedded' into the new society or psychologically attempt to resolve the experience of migratory rupture, any perception of the 'new' place is built in relation to perceptions of 'other' spaces of experience, and vice-versa. Thus, and as discussed in the theoretical section, migrants construct spatial categories with cultural and personal resonance through relational processes.

Second, I argue that this emphasis on relational spatial constructs needs to be taken into account in investigations on non-EU migrants' orientations to Europe, no matter how diverse, vague, or ambivalent they may be. To be sure, there are few participants across the three-country study who articulate strong attachments to a supranational European category (whether spontaneously evinced or directly probed for) in the absence of other contexts (social, spatial, cultural, institutional). However, when probed for *in relation* to other categories (e.g. multi-scalar conceptions of sending and receiving contexts), or simply, by paying attention to how mobilizations of Europe occur in participants' narratives, the category can take on unique significance in conceptions of belonging and expanding geographic imaginations.

### *4.1 Small-scale constructions of salience and interconnected spaces: "le bled", "el pueblo", "mini-India"*

One of the more striking aspects of the findings is the multi-scalar, comparative, and relational shape that answers to direct questions on spatial categories of belonging take. Indeed, responding "yes" or "no" to a question on "feeling European" or developing more or less positive or negative orientations to Europe can reveal ambivalent and even contradictory attitudes if not contextualized against specific cultural and social fields. When probing for the degree of relevance of specific spaces to daily life and belonging (whether or not I had mentioned names of cities, countries, or continents in questions) it is remarkable how talk of one's relationship to a place conjured talk of other places and spaces. Reflections of this sort drew equally on material and symbolic realms of experience.

Several respondents claimed a sense of belonging, familiarity or relative ease of acculturation in the host society by mobilizing comparative frames drawing their place of origin and place of residence closer together, suggestive of processes of commensuration (Espeland and Stevens 1998). These instances are illustrative of a degree of global reflexivity, which, in its weaker variant, is identified by Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst (2005) as the ability to draw comparisons between one's city and other cities (nationally or internationally), reinforcing the notion that globalization fosters the "comparative interaction of different forms of life" (the authors citing Robertson 1992, 27). The following interview excerpts focus on the relation between the European capitals under study and how they can be experienced as similar to meaningful places in the sending country (to the extent that the meaning of European places can be quite transformed in a migrant's symbolic geography). These are not meant to be taken as the basis for a general schema of interpreting the relation between distinct spaces in migration narratives. However, the following quotes

demonstrate that the relational nature of place interpretation can be particularly strong in the context of postcolonial migratory processes.

| **Case Study 1: Spatial continuity across disparate geographies (small-scale)** |
|---|
| "**When I saw Paris, I saw Algiers"** *Moussa, Paris*<br><br>*What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of Paris?*<br>When I think of Paris? What do I think of? I don't know how to answer that…in terms of what?<br><br>*It's up to you.*<br>The first time I came…when I arrived in Paris [after having crossed from the south of France and taken a train] … when I saw Paris, I saw Algiers.<br><br>*Yes?*<br>I saw Algiers, directly.<br><br>*Are you talking about buildings? Architecture?*<br>It's the same. The architecture. The same, the same. They [the French] have left their mark [in Algiers]. [As Algerians], we can't get lost [in Paris]. Very quickly, it's as if…we know the streets [of Paris]. It was not a shock [coming here] … Paris, the first time I saw it, I saw Algeria. It's Algiers. The capital. The same. |
| **"The way we live in London, it's like mini-India"** *Abbigail, London*<br><br>*[When you arrived,] Was there anything about life here [in London] that seemed different, new, strange to you?*<br>[No.] Because the way we live [in London], it's like mini-India. I don't know whether you noticed it […] East Ham. It's like mini-India. So, you don't feel lost at all [as a recently arrived Indian] until you go outside East Ham. Other than East Ham, Manor Park…You have to go outside [of those areas] to know what London is. […] When we visited [family] in Oxford, [I understood that] THAT was English countryside. |
| **"I think in terms of India. We can't say that this is Europe…"** *Balavan, London*<br><br>*When you think of your daily life, on what scale are you thinking? For example, are you thinking more in terms of London, the UK, Europe…?*<br>I think [in terms of] India. (Laughter). We can't say that this is Europe […] or the UK […] or, London or anything. […] If I want to feel that this is London, I have to travel from here [East Ham] to… at least to Tower Bridge. (Laughter). I think like... this is South India. And if you go to other side, in Upton Park, it's North India. If you go to Southall, we think like…we are in Punjab! (Laughter). |

**Arriving in Madrid was like being in Quito"** *Santiago, Madrid*

*What felt different and what felt familiar when you arrived in Madrid?*
Let's see, what was familiar is that Madrid looks a lot like the capital of Ecuador. […] When I was 12 years old, I moved [from the countryside to Quito]. So [arriving here in Madrid] was like being in Quito. Even the bridges […] the streets are the same, the architecture and everything is the same as in the centre of Quito.
[…]

*You said earlier [that when you travel to other parts of Spain], you tend to miss Madrid…*
[Yes] And whenever I return [I notice how Madrid] looks a lot like the part of Quito where I used to live, so I feel very close to Madrid, I identify with it and I feel very good. I walk around the streets with ease, I move around with ease, I know Madrid very well.

The passages in Case Study 1 are not merely an illustration of the comparative thought-processes through which migrants arrive at elective belonging across disparate geographic contexts. They are equally revelatory of a pattern in strategies for embedding oneself in the new society (Wessendorf and Phillimore 2019) and may be connected to the psychology of easing the sense of migratory rupture. Indeed, mobilizing comparative frames through figures of speech that establish equivalence or similarity between disparate places seems to be a way of transforming and appropriating local spaces. This is accomplished by drawing on both tangible and symbolic experience relevant to postcolonial legacies. Though many research participants would reject the notions of equivalence between places like Algiers and Paris, Quito and Madrid, or the re-drawing of the map of London based on Indian geography, comparative frames, though not always as striking as those presented above, are ubiquitous in migration narratives.

To the extent that the testimonials in Case Study 1 illustrate a degree of global reflexivity that can be likened to Savage and his co-authors' account, the 'comparative work' of postcolonial international migrants settling in Europe seems to have a stronger impact on their identity formation than that observed by the authors of *Globalization and Belonging* who studied (mainly) British internal movers. Though the latter were frequently able to extract meaning from the city of Manchester against a global context of other cities, these comparisons more often reinforced their local identities and attachments to the Manchester area. Indeed, the authors point out that most of the respondents in their study "did not develop the kind of reflexivity which indicated that their own identity was placed in a global context" (Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst 2005, 191). The comparisons drawn by participants in the study at hand instead suggest that the sense of belonging integrates multiple contexts understood as central to the individual migration story. Indeed, rather than fostering a stronger attachment to one place or another, the global reflexivity of the sort developed in Case Study 1 (and in the section below) can transform the nature of the attachment altogether along the lines of one's symbolic geography.

Even participants who tend to highlight more differences than similarities across spaces of experience and belonging are engaged in processes of social commensuration, through which they are constructing unique scales of value. This is evocative of Boltanski and Thévenot's notion of *grandeurs* (1991) – the common reference points that structure actors' understandings of and justifications for their and others' actions. Talk on tangible experiences in different and multi-scalar environments can provide insights into how one constructs personally meaningful spatial categories of attachment. The extended cases presented below highlight the discursive use of

comparative frames as central to accounts of belonging to particular spaces understood in connection to specific social groups. Whether they span both sending and receiving country geographies or are more restricted to a single territory, what is seen as constituting the most important unit of belonging is articulated in relation to another unit – both socially and spatially constituted.

### *4.1.1. Merging social and geographic imaginaries*

Fadéla, a woman born in 1961 in rural Western Algeria who grew up in the city of Oran, was one of the few Algerians interviewed who struggled with the French language. Coming from a traditional low-income family, she completed only three years of primary education and explains her decision to move to France around the age of thirty in terms of her inability to find work, to marry, or to become emancipated. She settled in the Paris suburb of Argenteuil after having married a Moroccan man she had met during one of her previous family visits. Fadéla, though she displays a great interest in one day acquiring French nationality for practical reasons, but also given her belief that "as Algerians, we are a little bit French," develops a decidedly local-level account of her place attachments. Though our interview generated few rich accounts due to our communication difficulties, she does not limit her responses on identity questions to simplistic national territorial spheres. Though she feels strongly Algerian and not French, she nevertheless distinguishes between multiple scales of belonging in France that have differentiated meanings to her. Crucially, through frequent references to the *bled*[3], she mobilizes a single unifying frame that focuses on her most salient attachments in both France and Algeria.

> *What is the first thing that comes to mind when you think of France?*
>
> I don't understand [the question] … France? That's where I got married, where I live freely. It's calm. It's normal…I live just like in the *bled*. I haven't changed.
>
> *Do you feel at home here, in Argenteuil, in France?*
>
> Yes, yes.
>
> *More than in Algeria?*
>
> Here in Argenteuil, I feel like over there in the *bled*. Paris is different. In Argenteuil, the people are like [those] in the *bled*. It's a lot more working-class. It's a *quartier populaire* [working-class district]. In Paris, I feel a little bit like it's something else. More like France.

A strikingly similar focus on working-class districts as offering the most meaningful and authentic sites for belonging across both sending and receiving societies is offered by Santiago, an Ecuadorian migrant in Madrid who is deeply attached to his rural and indigenous roots in the region of Cayambe. Similar to Fadéla, whose understanding of the *bled* and *quartier populaire* bridge the space between France and Algeria, Santiago offers the *pueblo*[4] frame as an important

[3] *Bled* is a noun with multiple meanings used in both French slang and North African Arabic. In French, it means 'small village' having pejorative or affective connotations (e.g. a 'hole' in the middle of nowhere). In North Africa, it often denotes the country-side. North African migrants in France specifically use *bled* to refer to the country or the village of origin (Cambridge online dictionary 2016; Centre National de Ressources Textuelles et Lexicales 2012).

[4] There are three general meanings of the noun *pueblo*. It can refer to a 'people' or 'nation' in the political sense; to the 'plebe' or 'common people' in terms of social class and to a 'small town', 'village' or 'countryside' from a spatial and cultural perspective (Collins Spanish-English online dictionary 2019).

reference point that transcends the distance between Ecuador and Spain. When asked about which spatial scales between Madrid, Spain, and Europe are the most relevant to his daily life, like many research participants, Santiago chose the local (Madrid) scale. He accounts for this choice drawing on both symbolic and tangible experiences.

> *Why is Madrid the most important level for you?*
>
> Because it has been 16 years… that I have imbibed, as one says… [the surroundings of Madrid] … 21 years in Ecuador, in Cayambe especially, you know? I've spent 16 years here [Madrid]. I've spent almost equal parts of my life in the two cities, in the two *pueblos*. Because this is also the *pueblo* of Madrid. I really like that word, I identify more with it.

When asked to explain his unusual use of the term *pueblo* to make sense of a capital city like Madrid, he specifically emphasizes the working-class sense of the term (rather than the political or geographic sense). That is, his identification with both Madrid and the Ecuadorian city of Cayambe springs from an attachment to places he associates with 'common people'. In contrast, he creates a socially-differentiated map of the city of Madrid when I ask him what comes to mind if I say the word 'Europe' to him:

> I think of London, of Switzerland, of those places. For me, that's Europe.
>
> *Why?*
>
> I don't know…because…You see those people standing out there? [*Motioning from the window of the café we are seated at toward the crowd in the Puerta del Sol square*]. They look more like common people (*más de pueblo*). I've always thought, since they say that the [typical] European is blonder, taller… Even when I find myself in the barrio of Salamanca [affluent district of Madrid], I tell myself, "Now, this is Europe."

Thus, Santiago develops a class-based understanding of what distinguishes the European and non-European sides of Madrid as well as an 'ethnic' component of Europeanness that intermingles with geographic distinctions. The unpretentious and 'common' spaces he associates with the working-class barrios of Madrid – decidedly 'un-European' ones –constitute his primary spaces for attachment in the Spanish context. The previous passage, in which he explains his attachment to Madrid in terms of accumulated life experience, as well as the *pueblo* common denominator to express his relationship to the Spanish capital and Cayambe, illustrate the possibility of experiencing the two spaces as continuous in spite of the distance that separates them.

As a result, both Fadéla and Santiago effectively transform the spaces they inhabit by positioning them in relation to other (socially-differentiated) ones encountered throughout the migratory experience, both European and non-European: Argenteuil as the *bled* vs. Paris as France; the district of Salamanca as 'Europe' vs. the *pueblo* (spanning both Madrid and Cayambe). These individuals are examples of participants who, through their discourse on belonging and various aspects of the migratory story, reveal themselves as 'small-thinkers' when it comes to the construction of socially and spatially meaningful places. It is not that Fadéla and Santiago display limited consciousness of *inhabiting* potentially larger spaces or develop one-sided orientations to territory (e.g. sending- vs. receiving-society). Indeed, they actually consider the multiple units of space relevant to the migration experience and develop unique interpretations of them through comparative frames of analysis. 'Thinking small', for these participants, is the means through which the continuity-rupture dialectic is resolved. For Fadéla and Santiago, 'small-thinking' puts greatest value on local-level working-class spaces of experience in a way that guarantees

continuity of the sense of self across disparate geographies. For other participants that can be described as 'small-thinkers', the value of local and small-scale spaces is not necessarily understood in terms of class. One's attachment (or lack thereof) to local spaces can also be explained in terms of topographical characteristics. Nabil, for instance, an Algerian participant in Paris explains his lack of strong attachment to the French capital in terms of the value he places on a rural existence compared to an urban one. He coins the phrase "topographical exile" to depict his transition from his mountain-top village in Kabylie, Northern Algeria - *ma montagne* ("my mountain") as he calls it, to the Parisian metropolis. The two are inherently incompatible. Unlike for Fadéla and Santiago, who can connect the *bled* and the *pueblo* to specific parts of the regions of Paris and Madrid, *ma montagne* is a contradiction in terms with the French capital.

### *4.2 Large-scale constructions of salience and interconnected spaces: the Mediterranean Sea as a 'bridge' to Europe and other spaces of belonging*

This section shifts focus toward the construction of meaningful and interconnected spatial categories articulated at larger scales. The accounts in this section are germane to Savage and his colleagues' (2005) observations on both the limited and more profound expressions of global reflexivity. They illustrate that large scales of comparison can be used to demonstrate an identity unfolding together with an expanding geographic imagination (akin to feeling one is a 'citizen of the world') while still being anchored in a physically and culturally constituted sense of place. In other words, articulating larger-scale spatial orientations that draw from experiences and perceptions of multiple contexts does not necessarily lead one into abstract notions of 'cosmopolitanism' or rootlessness but in fact can reinforce specific attachments.

One of the most salient 'big' frames for understanding the sense of belonging to receiving-society-relevant spaces (such as the country of residence or Europe) is the Mediterranean Sea. The Mediterranean as a cultural and physical space was remarkably present in the migration narratives of Algerian and other North African participants. A total of twenty-seven informants spontaneously referred to the 'Mediterranean Sea' (or basin) and/or to 'Mediterranean culture' (roughly one-quarter of respondents), most of them Algerians or other North Africans.[5] Indeed, out of the 45 interviews conducted with Algerians (in France and Spain), more than half (24) mobilized this category. More remarkable is the sheer emphasis that many participants put on this category to make sense of the experience of migration and settlement in Europe. Indeed, when compared to the roughly one-third of participants in the study who had spontaneously conjured more or less vague images of 'Europe' in the migration story, the 'Mediterranean' category emerges as a much more clearly articulated space of reference.

Apart from a minority of respondents who were self-proclaimed 'citizens of the world', few other large-scale spatial and cultural frames – apart from Europe – could rival the significance of the Mediterranean space-set. Evidence of a globally reflexive cultural imagination for South American and South Asian participants that could have been used as a bridge between the place of origin and destination, are *la Hispanidad*, the Commonwealth, or other referents that emphasise cultural and historical ties in postcolonial contexts. Such referents were virtually non-existent in testimonials, however. Instead, the spatial and cultural imaginaries of South Americans and South Asians that indicated a large-scale or global consciousness at work in the rupture and continuity dialectics of

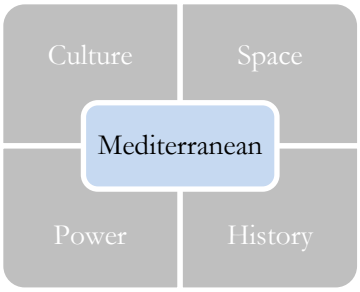
[5] The only other references to the 'Mediterranean' category were by two Ecuadorian participants in Spain and two Indian participants in France.

belonging tended to be assembled in a more dispersed fashion rather than through a single unifying frame. I cannot present this evidence in a detailed manner within the limits of this study but provide a brief depiction in the following paragraph.

Examples of large-scale articulations of belonging include, for South Americans, transnational Evangelical Christian communities as crucial in their understanding of their own social and cultural embedding in Madrid as well as developing or reinforcing their South American/Latino identity as a result of migration and settlement in Europe. For Indians and other South Asians, a large-scale articulation of belonging could emphasise their feeling at home within the Indian and South Asian diaspora in Britain and abroad, including Canada and the United States. Moreover, though the Commonwealth did not appear explicitly in testimonials, it seems to influence some of the boundary-work through which several Indian respondents in London questioned both the moral and historic legitimacy of EU migrants that they saw as displacing the more 'appropriate' relationship of postcolonial migration to the UK. Finally, a number of Indian respondents – both in the British and French contexts – evinced a particularly interesting form of global reflexivity in endorsing the project of European integration specifically in terms of their Indian spatial imaginaries. Indeed, some participants explicitly framed their desire for more integration and a 'truly' borderless Europe in terms of their commitment to Indian nationalism. By comparing the territorial, cultural, and linguistic diversity of India with that of the European continent, they articulated an almost common-sense desire for European federalism based on their strong attachment to the Indian state project.

Turning back to the significance of the Mediterranean for situating North African migrant identities into a large-scale more globally reflexive context, the significance of this particular space-set may lie in its ability to conjure multidimensional imaginaries pertaining to culture, space, power, and history.

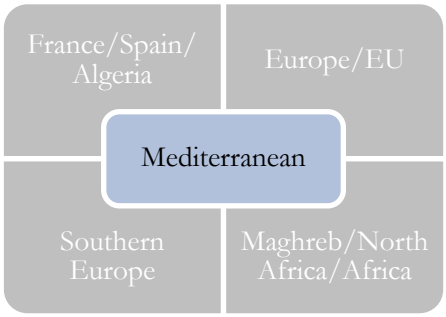
***Figure 1. Different frames of the Mediterranean referent***




The interview data offer four broad articulations of the Mediterranean as a meaningful category (see Figure 1). One is constructed as an adjective for a (spatially situated) common culture – e.g. a Mediterranean culture, lifestyle, climate, family structure, etc. A second meaning is constructed in reference to the Mediterranean as a physical space, e.g. direct references to the sea and the geographical context that connects the different points of the basin. Third, the Mediterranean emerges as a historically situated concept, through references to Mediterranean civilizations and different periods of conquest and colonization (and their legacies) that have shaped the region. Finally, the Mediterranean is frequently mobilized as an image of (unequal) spatial distributions of power. The Mediterranean in this context becomes a frame to symbolize uneven power and status that distinguishes one side of the sea and the other, frequently illustrated by the figure of

*harragas*[6] or the migrant dead at sea. Each category is expressed along different degrees of 'harmony vs. contestation' vis-a-vis more 'official' and existing organizations of culture and power through space and alternative or normative ones.

***Figure 2. The Mediterranean as 'bridge' to other spatial categories***




With respect to the cultural resonance of the Mediterranean for North African participants, it seems to act as a vehicle to maintain an attachment to their native culture while simultaneously facilitating the opening up of the self towards other identity spaces, such as the country of residence and Europe, among others (see Figure 2). Regardless of the specific parameters with which respondents associate Mediterranean culture (or dissociate it from) - e.g. Southern Europe, Europe, Northern Europe, Maghreb, Marseilles, Valencia, France, Spain, etc., claiming a Mediterranean identity is equivalent to establishing oneself as a 'big thinker' or as having developed an extended geographic imagination. To signal the salience of the Mediterranean throughout the migration narrative is to assert that one's geography of belonging extends beyond specific nation states or sub-national regions. In addition, it also allows North African migrants to endorse alternative visions of the spatial and cultural limits of Europe and/or to claim moral legitimacy of belonging to existing organizations of culture and space related to the country of residence and Europe.

As the case studies below illustrate, the Mediterranean as a common culture is located frequently in discourse to establish cultural similarities (or few incompatibilities) between Algeria and the country of residence, in this case, France or Spain, e.g. "I'm very Mediterranean, so I felt right at home in Spain," or, "As an Algerian, I feel completely at home whenever I visit Marseilles." Another frequent use of the Mediterranean as a container of common culture occurs in relation to what participants consider as distinct pockets of larger spatial categories. For instance, associating Southern Europe and/or North Africa with a common Mediterranean culture at times presented in conjunction with larger spaces that extend beyond the basin "e.g. I relate to people in Spain and Italy because we are all Mediterranean. I am Algerian, I am African!" But just as it can signal the experience of commonality, it can also be mobilized as an emblem of institutionalised inequality between inhabitants of the Northern and Southern frontiers, resulting in differentiated and fractured cultural and geographic imaginaries. In other cases, the Mediterranean as a common culture can be used to establish continuity and compatibility across different identifications through an extension of scales, including a European level, e.g. "I prefer to consider myself as Euro-Mediterranean rather than Franco-Algerian."

[6] Clandestine migrants, see Abderrezak (2016).

**Case Study 2: The Mediterranean vis-à-vis Europe: contesting boundaries and unequal status**

**Europe as a "great wall"** *Touraya, Madrid*

*Now for an 'out of the blue' question: What do you think of if I say the word 'Europe' to you?*
…A great wall. […] When I came of age and began to dream about travelling, and all young people [in Tunisia] were dreaming of travel, [I realized that] […] one must line-up and request a visa, […] the Schengen visa for Europe. It felt like you were about to enter a perfect world and that you need to be screened in order to enter this perfect world. So, if you don't have the means, the education, if you're not the son of…or the daughter of… [someone with means], all you see is this great wall. So I saw this from the perspective of my generation, of [Tunisian] youth. If I, as a student, can go on [a single] trip, Europeans [on the other hand], they have seen all of Europe, they have the Erasmus scholarship, they have all these possibilities. And we [North Africans] have all the languages of the world, but we are faced with this big wall. A Tunisian like me who has always lived in an environment that's very close to the Francophonie, if not 100% francophone, must request a visa to enter France, whereas a Spaniard, who may not know any languages, is a European citizen, he can enter [France]. … So there is this big wall…so the only thing that's left for you is to look to your right and to your left onto the Arab world …And now that I've crossed this wall, I keep telling them [Tunisian youth], "Don't be fooled. Don't dream about crossing or climbing that wall, because it's all a big lie! Life [on the other side] is not as amazing as you think!" …

*So, as a result of this understanding of Europe [as a 'wall'] should the EU expand to include a country like Tunisia?*
We are in Africa. I am African. I have become increasingly conscious of this and I *assume* my African identity and origins because my country is located in Africa. Clearly. But there is something very important, very influential in the history of the world – the Mediterranean [sea]. And I think that a French [person] is closer to a Tunisian than…a person from Norway. One, there is the language, the history. We overcame a history of war and colonisation and we were able to have friendships or marriages or cultural exchanges between France and Tunisia. When France recognized that one of the main dishes of the French family is couscous, this means that we have overcome the negative part of our relationship. We have this exchange. Even in Tunisia…we make quiche…because it's a very good dish […] We have this exchange, which begins with culture, with tastes, with smells, with colours, with artistic expression, with the [French] language that brings us closer together. And this wall called Europe has been created. This geographical division that completely refused Turkey […] It isn't advantageous to create a barrier between the countries of […] the Northern Mediterranean and of the Southern Mediterranean. We cannot build Europe while forgetting the Mediterranean.

**Stigma and "the other side of the Mediterranean"** *Bariza, Paris*

[*Talking about perceptions of racism as an Algerian physician in the French healthcare sector*]
There is clear racism in the French medical establishment. […] The difference of treatment toward my [foreign] colleagues [who, unlike myself are not white or have an accent] is very clear. There is a huge difference. […] Though [the racism] is never directly expressed. But I think that amongst themselves [native French physicians], they speak about us [non-European physicians] in a different way. They don't have the same rapport with a Polish [physician]. […] The Polish or the Hungarian [physician] with her little accent [in French] …she is a part of Europe. But for someone who comes from the other side of the Mediterranean, they [French] talk about 'blacks'! The medical establishment by definition is a right-wing milieu.

| **Case Study 3: The Mediterranean vis-à-vis Europe: reconfiguring identity horizons** |
|---|
| **"I feel Mediterranean and I feel European…I even feel international"** *Hakima, Paris*<br><br>*[Talking about the experience of becoming naturalized as a French citizen]*<br>I am Algerian and I am French. I have the two cultures in me because when one lives in a country…any country […] no matter where I go, I don't think I would ever ask myself the question of whether I belong or whether I am Algerian or something else. […] [I am drawn to the idea of] the Euro-Mediterranean because I think it is a new identity space. Because I feel Mediterranean and I feel European. […] I cannot say that I am only Algerian or only French. Honestly, I even feel international at times. I would have no problem living elsewhere. In fact, I travel a lot. And wherever I go, I feel at home. I don't know why. |
| **"I am African, you see. I am Mediterranean"** *Lounès, Paris*<br><br>*You have mentioned you are intending to apply for French citizenship. What might be the advantages of becoming a French citizen?*<br>[…] I want to live here [France]. I do exactly the same things as anyone one who is here. I mean, can a nationality really reflect what I am from an identity perspective? There is no nationality in the world that could summarize who I am. Even Algerian nationality. [Even] when one speaks of the three identity dimensions in Algeria: Arab-ness, Islamic-ness, Berber-ness (*l'arabité, l'islamité, la berberité*) … But I feel very close to…I am African, you see. I am Mediterranean. You see, Italians, Spaniards, I really feel very close to their way of being. […] |

| **Case Study 4: The Mediterranean vis-à-vis Europe: Bridging** |
|---|
| **"The Maghreb is Mediterranean"** *Hosni, Paris*<br><br>[*Talking about regional integration processes*]<br>*Where do you see Algeria in the midst of these processes [of integration]? Closer to Europe or closer to the Maghrebi countries?*<br>Both, in fact. Algeria…the Maghreb is Mediterranean. We are Mediterranean. […] [Regional] integration in North Africa would have to be based on [shared] principles. It could be [based] on the land, on language, on history. […] The Maghreb shares the same land, the same history, the same language, the same religion. We are Berbers. […] A strong, united Maghreb […] could become integrated into other groups [in future]. In Europe, in Africa…in the middle. […] If [the Maghreb] had been strong, it could have been a bridge between all of that [Europe and Africa]. Unfortunately, it [Maghrebi integration] is not working and we have many problems. So…And also, the Maghreb is Mediterranean. When you go to Marseilles, or you go to Algiers, it's the same thing. It's the same thing. |
| **"On which side of the sea…?"** *Malika, Paris*<br><br>*If you have children one day, where would you like to raise them?*<br>Not in Paris. I mean, if it's in France, it would be [somewhere else, where life is easier, less stressful, more affordable]. […] Ideally, I don't think it will be in Paris. Ideally, it would be by the sea. I think that [the sea] is a reference point. A visual reference point, for me. I mean, I always grew up by the sea. I would love to live by the Mediterranean. Now, on which side [of the sea would I be living], that I don't know. In which country, I don't know. But the Mediterranean basin is sufficiently large to… [choose]. To be able to see the sea, I would love that. I think it's a lovely thing for children to grow up by the sea, it's a nice horizon. |

Thus, the Mediterranean frame allows many Algerian and other North African participants to establish themselves as simultaneously 'close' to both 'European' (Valencia, Marseilles, Southern Europe…) and 'non-European' (e.g. Maghreb, Berber, Africa, North Africa…) space-culture configurations, as well as de-territorialized global reference points. In addition, by establishing proximity to certain notions of Europeanness and distance from others, North Africans are contesting dominant and mainstream understandings of Europe and European integration.

The fact that the Mediterranean and its connection to Europe resonates almost exclusively among North African participants and is conspicuously absent in the narratives of Ecuadorians settling in Spain, for instance, reinforces the significance of the dialectical relationship of rupture and continuity in the context of migration and settlement. Objectively speaking, the Mediterranean coast is closer to Madrid (303 km via Valencia) than to Paris (660 km via Marseilles). Yet, the Mediterranean as a meaningful way to articulate spatial reflexivity scarcely surfaced in narratives of migration and settlement among Ecuadorians interviewed in Madrid, in contrast to Algerians in Paris (and Valencia). Therefore, my findings provide some support to Harvey's understanding on the 'stickiness' of mental maps and can be connected to Savage, Bagnall, and Longhurst's conclusions on the nature of global reflexivity – namely, that it "does not seep into people's lives because of the pervasive power of global idioms and cues, but rather it depends on particular, indeed local and personal circumstances" (2003, 202).

Perhaps the desire for continuity, after all, overpowers the experience of rupture in the migration experience, as 'strangers' categorize their new experiences in ways that are legible from the perspective of previous spatial orientations. Algerians' frequent interpretation of France, Spain, and Europe through the Mediterranean lens may be more illustrative of the current stakes surrounding Algerian and North African identity formation[7] than of French, Spanish, or European identity construction. Other spatial themes that emerged frequently in Ecuadorian participants' migration narratives, though not explored in this study, may also lend support to the recalcitrance of geographic imaginaries. They invite us to reconsider the theme of 'topographical exile' used by an Algerian Kabyle respondent to describe his experience in Paris. Indeed, the discourse on roots (*raíces*) and land (*tierra*) that surfaced frequently in the accounts of Ecuadorians is evocative of certain aspects of the geographic imagination that may not 'travel' as well as others, especially where the journey begins in a rural and developing space and ends in a major European capital. For Ecuadorians intent on returning to their place of origin, the use of such vocabulary illustrates both the distinction between one's 'true home' and the place of residence as well as the salient markers of Ecuadorian geography – highland and coastal regions – that shape their sense of self.

## 5. Conclusion: Toward a migrant's cartography of Europe

My use of the 'thinking small' vs. 'thinking big' trope should not be seen as an assumption on the limited cognitive resources for spatial abstraction of some research participants. I am not making an argument premised on cognitive mobilization theory (Inglehart 1970) that would assume lower-

[7]Algerian research participants draw attention to the multiple and often conflicting identity narratives in contemporary Algerian society that have to do with French colonial legacies (e.g. the continued relevance of the French language in national administration and education as well as the cultural divisions between more Arabic/Islamically-oriented and French/secularly-oriented segments of society); the status of Berber languages and culture marginalized by the state, as well as a general sensation of Algerian culture and civil society being stifled by heavy emigration trends and a political regime dominated by an elite and military caste.

educated participants are less inclined than higher-educated ones to perceive the relevance of becoming embedded into larger socio-spatial categories. Indeed, the cases discussed in some depth as well as the interview fragments presented in the case studies find that small-scale motifs are not synonymous with limited spatial imaginaries. Instead, participants who make use of smaller spatial frames are simply emphasising the higher degree of relevance of these spaces, both in material and symbolic terms, to their daily lives and migratory experiences, compared to other, often larger spatial categories.

Articulating notions of belonging, membership and identification in the context of different spatial scales, whether small or large, seems to bridge distance between distinct spaces and may ease the multiple transitions inherent in migratory rupture. For example, talk on the transformation and appropriation of official units of urban space in the country of residence (using vocabulary such as *mini-India*, *bled*, or *pueblo* to make sense of attachment vis-à-vis London, Madrid, and Paris) reflects perceptions of shifting multi-scalar boundaries. Whether between diaspora and 'mainstream' society or between working-class and affluent urban and sub-urban spaces, the process of appropriating local spaces, even from a small-scale perspective, involves the blurring of boundaries between sending-and receiving-societies. Thus, migrants are able to re-draw boundaries in the receiving society (through expanding spatial consciousness) in a way that nevertheless preserves elements of the mental maps acquired prior to migration. With respect to understandings of the physical environment, such as architecture that reminds individuals of former colonial relationships (e.g. Paris=Algiers, Quito=Madrid) or topographical characteristics which act as evidence of the disjuncture between one's life pre- and post-migration (e.g. *ma montagne*≠Paris), migrants frequently judge the relationship between distinct spaces when they provide accounts of acculturation processes. This alerts us to the significance of connecting multiple urban and physical environments as Savage et al.'s work on elective belonging and global reflexivity already suggests.

In *Globalization and Belonging* (2005), Savage, Longhurst, and Bagnall remarked on how the minority of research participants they interviewed in the Manchester area who were not brought up in Britain or whose life experiences abroad were not limited to the beaten track of the 'white British diaspora' seemed to possess the most developed forms of global consciousness. Though the authors effectively challenge abstract notions of cosmopolitanism that have tended to confuse global cultural processes with the de-territorialization of attachments, they nevertheless view the 'strangers' in their study as the most authentically cosmopolitan. These are the only individuals who "place their identities in some kind of explicit global frame" (Savage, Longhurst, and Bagnall 2005, 197), compared to the majority of respondents for whom global reflexivity is more limited to understanding their urban environment (and their attachments to it) in a broader context of national and international cities.

My findings to a certain extent challenge the assumptions these authors make about global reflexivity – both in its more limited and profound versions. I do not view small-scale reflexivity (e.g. comparing neighbourhoods or cities in different places) as reinforcing a primary local attachment, as may be the case for non-migrants. Rather, I show how drawing these comparisons allows migrants to: a) create symbolic geographies that bridge the distance between 'here' and 'there', and b) convert these symbolic geographies into the basis for belonging. This inevitably leads to an extended form of global awareness, even if one does not proclaim oneself to be a citizen of the world. The ability of international migrants to set their place of settlement in Europe in a broader context that is significant to their sense of self, whether this occurs at a small or at a large

scale, need not result in strengthening one local attachment over another. Instead, this reflexivity is what allows them to ease the migratory transition and draw together multiple spheres of experience into a coherent life-narrative.

With respect to reflexivity through larger-scale forms of bridging, my exploration of the Mediterranean frame of reference highlights how extending one's spatial and cultural imaginary is nevertheless rooted in a particular sense of place. Moreover, my findings suggest that the migratory experience, though it constitutes a form of "extreme life experience", in the words of Savage and his colleagues, is not *on its own* what "recruits" individuals into developing more global awareness (2005, 202). Though I have argued that the act of migration certainly contributes to expanding and unsettling previous orientations to space, my findings emphasise the important role of previous imaginaries and the embodied cultural capital that migrants 'carry' with them along their journey.

This essay stops-short in developing an account of the degree to which non-European migrants understand themselves as 'becoming Europeans' as they settle in the different EU cities under study. Though the European category is the focal point of the investigation, it is premised on the idea of connecting images and experiences of Europe to *other* geographies and spaces of belonging. Since the interviewing and data analysis approach paid attention to both 'organic' (spontaneous) constructions of meaningful spaces as well as reactions to spatial categories that were 'forced' upon participants, the question "to be or not to be European" altogether loses relevance, compared to: *To what extent is there a place for Europe in your geographical imagination?* As I have tried to show, asking postcolonial migrants about their relationship to Europe is a loaded question. International postcolonial migrants are not 'clean slates' or 'complete strangers' to Europe, contrary to what one might expect. Rather, they are strangers in the Simmelian sense of embodying the synthesis of proximity and distance relationships. Multiple processes of socialization that occur at different space-time junctures (before and after the act of border-crossing) and the will to re-establish internal consistency in what may be a radically different environment turn migrants into cartographers of sorts. More than constructing unique cartographies of Europe, however, the accounts developed in this study speak to a broader research agenda that questions implicit spatial assumptions in concepts such as 'culture' and 'society'. Following Gupta and Ferguson (1992), in an effort to de-naturalize cultural and spatial divisions across peoples, this study reinforces the need for further research into

> *the ability of people to confound the established spatial orders, either through physical movement or through their own conceptual and political acts of re-imagination, [which means] that space and place can never be a 'given,' and that the process of their sociopolitical construction must always be considered (1992, 17).*

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