



Editorial/Introduzione

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To politically and historically conceptualize the Mediterranean in the present conjuncture is very much a crucial exercise in establishing new coordinates and bearings. Habitual understandings, very much stemming from Occidental hegemony and an overwhelmingly European-derived set of definitions and perspectives are clearly insufficient. Events since 2011, and the continuing war in Syria, point to deeper rhythms in the political composition of the present – for example, the rarely acknowledged colonial construction of this geo-political space – and the urgent necessity of elaborating a new lexicon and language with which to interpret it.

Rather than simply seeking to respond to the existing state of Mediterranean affairs and subsequently adjust inherited maps and understandings to meet new circumstances, we perhaps need to change key and shift our critical resources into an altogether less protected space. When events, subsequently known as the “Arab Spring”, broke out in North Africa in 2011, Western government and media were taken largely unawares. Autocratic governments, implementing the neo-liberal directives of the IMF, and fully supported by Occidental power, rapidly and spectacularly came undone. The pressure of public protests, voicing a social and political lexicon through technique and technology that the West could not fail to recognize, disrupted the expectancies of most accredited observers. Insisting on freedom to publicly acknowledge poverty and the negation of civil rights could not be easily disavowed in public cultures that from Berlin to Baltimore were rhetorically steeped in the liberty of expression.

The media scrambled around for labels to frame the events and render them intelligible to Western eyes. Eventually the frames of analysis were rolled out and Occidental definitions once again secured, particularly as events on the ground were eventually pushed back into older political patterns of alliances, partnerships and interventions. Revolt and revolution were set in perspective (whose?) to be defined, disciplined by a dented but still robust Occidental policing and politics.

What is perhaps worth pointing out here is that these recent events – even (with the exception of Tunisia) if they are seemingly rolled back into their older authoritarian coordinates in Egypt or else become a microcosm of a regional war in Syria – open up a far deeper rent in the explanatory tissue than area studies, political science and their *realpolitick* continue to measure and peddle. When the languages, lexicons and technologies of the West are deployed to contest precisely the political arrangements that the West itself has historically and culturally supported and encouraged in the pursuit of allies and its particular interests then the existing coordinates of comprehension can no longer simply pass unchallenged. The maps, the models and methodologies – no matter how “objective” and “scientific” they pretend to be – cannot be permitted to escape reevaluation, even critical dismantling. The waves unleashed by crisis also wash through the languages of apprehension and explanation.

Of course, in critical honesty, we have to register that none of this has publicly been registered. It has certainly not been translated into a significant political or cultural shift. Occidental government continues to treat the multiple souths of the world in a neocolonial manner, betraying the deep-seated colonial configurations of the present. The dismal social sciences continue to exercise their authority untroubled by dissent voices and refusals to respect their verdicts. Europe remains the template, its model of revolution and change (these days monumentalized in the moribund remains of eighteenth century liberal constitutionalism) was not enacted in Egypt. The failures of North African rebellion and revolt (subsequently aggravated by Western intervention in Libya and Syria) only endorse the time scale of “progress”: the time not yet ripe, the actors not yet mature. And yet this linear fashioning of reasoning, charted along the axis of progress and which always finds the Occident at the apex of its development, can no longer hold. For if the West has clearly worlded the world, incorporating it into conflict shared temporal-spatiality, then its measure can no longer be the property of a singular geopolitical provenance. While the languages, lexicons and technologies of the West are ubiquitous, ready to frame multiple diversities and localities, they simultaneously annul any absolute outside or exterior. We are left to move within a differentiated communality, a translated state of transit, together with the associated historical, cultural and political responsibilities for this state of affairs.

The predominant refusal to register and recognize this emerging critical constellation invariably depends on deeply asymmetrical relations of power – political, economical, military, and epistemological. The Mediterranean, particularly its African and Asian shores, remains an object of analysis and intervention: from the economical and the military, to the cultural and the academic. It remains held in the vice of an orientalism that is unwilling to be challenged by other subjectivities, other

histories and cultures. In this sense, we can begin to appreciate that the Mediterranean today resists and persists also as the site of deeper archives whose contemporary presence operates a pressure on our language, potentially disseminating unruly voices in the account. What was assumed to have past and to be locked up in earlier instances of the archive (the pre-modern, the colonial) turns out to be virulently vital.

The Mediterranean is thus, today, a complex cultural and political figuration, tangled up on the one hand in the web of power relations leveraging on mass migrations, terror, financial hauntings, and the fragile narrative of European identity; on the other, in the rhetoric of Modernity that has confined the region to romantic and orientalist fantasies of opulence and wilderness, or scornful examples of corruption and “backwardness”. Its recent becoming a very visible and unavoidable focus of political action, with military, humanitarian and cultural strategies of securitization implemented along European borders in the face of pressing migrations and disseminated conflicts across the Middle East calls for our attendance, as scholars, to the region *and* the discourse of the Mediterranean: its “unsafe” borders, and its tragic load of desperation and death, its part in the construction of the global, interconnected contemporaneity is material, but also symbolic.

This is why, in proposing a journal issue on the Mediterranean, we feel it is important to extend the conversation to the cultural figurations that are at work today in and around the region, within the tracks laid by Edward Said’s fundamental study of orientalism and the global patterns of imperialism, but also inside forms of resistance that let counter-narratives emerge in composite localities and what Paul Gilroy has recently referred to as “offshore” humanism.

Once again, it becomes imperative to appreciate the necessary disbanding of the spatial-temporal coordinates that endorse the verdicts and authority of the social sciences, and their subsequent application in polity and legislation. The causal linearity of explanation falls into ruins when there is no longer a clear exterior alterity against which to measure its verdicts. Both space – the critical distance between inside and outside, center and periphery – and time (of progress and development) fold into each other. This is not relativism, but rather a theory of relativity and interconnectivity that produces a manifold modernity, one that is simultaneously differentiated and universal. To localize and provincialize the authority of existing explanation, that is, of Occidental hegemony, is to register both its political and epistemological limits and the violence it continues exercises on the world as it pursues its verification.

The undoing of an inherited political order – fundamentally incubated in Occidental colonialism and its mapping of the world – is today underscored when its objects

insist on their rights to narrate as historical subjects: whether on the streets of Cairo or seeking a better life crossing the Mediterranean and returning to haunt that heart of darkness that Conrad rightfully identified in the heartlands of the European colonial enterprise: London, Brussels, Mr Kurtz. The return of those histories, further emphasizing the centrality of colonialism to the making of modernity, bear silent witness to the present institutions of the West – both political and intellectual – as a set of ruins. The contemporary migrant, whose body is declared “illegal” by the political-juridical proceedings of European democracy, and whose history is negated and rendered “clandestine”, is not simply an economic or political refugee. She is also an ontological interrogation. Her presence tears our map, folds our lives and well being into the rougher furrows of an altogether more extensive locality. The latter is too vast to be appropriated or reduced to a single – no matter how powerful – point of view. The very constitution of our very selves, of our knowledge and politics, of our daily lives, is challenged, rendered vulnerable to a world that is never simply ours. What we historically, culturally, politically are depends, according to present government, legislation and political endorsement, on historical and structural exclusion. It depends on the rendering the non-West inferior, reduced through racialized differentiation to a lesser state of being to be dispersed in the anonymity of facile labels: black, Africa, Arab, Muslim, migrant... The critical uncovering of such procedures and politics has perhaps nowhere become so intense in recent years as in the intersecting border zone of the Mediterranean. Here Europe is literally put on trial. Its hypocrisies exposed, its vaunted humanism stained. The limits of its polity and culture, for those willing to register and work these borders, are indelibly marked. Here the modern Mediterranean, reduced in recent centuries to the marginal playground of Western modernity (sun, sea and ruins), unexpectedly turns into a central laboratory in a political modernity yet to come.

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Engaging with the fine grain of the power dynamics at play in the region, we decided to look at the “Mediterranean at Large”^{*}, in a paraphrase of Arjun Appadurai’s famous work, encompassing the “political” and the “cultural” into one larger – and yet more detailed – picture, that is also an elusive one, “at large” from definitions. It is, indeed, a picture with no frame, whose margins overflow in the un-fixedness of definitions and disciplines. To speak of politics is to speak of power relations, and the terrain for such relations and negotiations is always (also) cultural; it is always a

^{*} Per il titolo in italiano abbiamo scelto di mantenere la traduzione dello stesso titolo di Appadurai, a cura di Piero Vereni (Meltemi, 2001): “Mediterraneo in polvere”. Si tratta di un’immagine non necessariamente aderente (la traduzione è feconda proprio perché riscrive sempre) all’espressione inglese, ma che evoca (appunto, in modo fecondo) un “supplemento” di esplosione, di frammentazione e di disseminazione, che si aggiunge all’elusività del Mediterraneo “at large” ovvero fuggito via.

struggle over language, over narratives, over what is made to constitute “the common sense”, as Antonio Gramsci wrote.

This is why this issue of *Politics. Rivista di Studi Politici* contains two sections that speak of the Mediterranean in different critical languages, and that also speak to each other, underlining the mutual relevance of history, political theory, grassroots movements, literature, cinema, the arts in general. The Call for Papers for this issue received 18 proposals, of which 10 were accepted and have become issue 5 (1/2016).

Part I opens with Luigi Cazzato’s discussion of the Mediterranean “as discourse”, analyzing colonial and de-colonial politics and practices in and of the region. Cazzato’s article focuses on what he calls, after Michael Herzfeld “Mediterraneanism”, parallel to but different from Orientalism and Meridionism. The three categories do share the same the colonial logic of power, but whereas Meridionism can be distinguished from Orientalism in that it indicates the way the South has been the constitutive other *inside* Europe, Mediterraneanism is read as providing both this same cultural tool, and the tool for the implementation of European colonialism in the Maghreb and Mashrek. Cazzato offers examples of counter-narratives and de-colonial thinking in the ethics and practice of hospitality of a Southern Italian bishop, in *Io sto con la sposa*, a 2014 docu-film by Antonio Augugliaro, Gabriele Del Grande and K. Soliman Al Nassiry, and in the “The Charter of Lampedusa”, a set of rules of hospitality sanctioned in the island that has become materially and symbolically crucial for present-day Mediterranean crossings, and that, somewhat symbolically, also closes the second section of the journal issue (see Carotenuto).

Antonio Iodice addresses the space of the port, looking in particular at the institution of the free port in the Mediterranean area between the XVII and XIX centuries, and the way this institution, born out of economic interests, favored politics of exchange and hospitality. The Mediterranean free ports brought in fact a great number of ship owners, traders or salesmen to relocate to the region with their families, helpers and employees, while maintaining relations with their motherlands. It is indeed significant that the free ports began their decline with the affirmation of the nation-states, whose protection interests clashed with the principle and practice of the free port itself. The peculiar regulations governing these ports can be studied as a composite system that at the time contributed to the overcoming of social, cultural, linguistic and political barriers within the Mediterranean space.

Caterina Miele’s article takes us from a history of miscegenation to the re-writing of the colonial matrix of inter-Mediterranean relations, analyzing the historical events that have taken place in the Mediterranean area between Libya and Italy, from the

colonial war, to anti-colonial resistance, decolonization, the rise and fall of Gaddafi's regime. The author's theoretical proposition is that the current grammars of exclusion and of subversion within the Mediterranean area do not respond to any binary (neo)colonial logic, but rather that the region (both on the ground and in its aerial space) is a political space crossed at once by multifarious and multi-directional conflicts and processes of resistance that challenge the representation of the past. In particular, Miele points to the "oil for borders" pact between Libya and Italy as relocating the border of the colonial world and fragmenting the European juridical space, through the institution of "the camp", a "force field" that generates differential access to citizenship.

The section ends with a view of the North African region, opening up the difficult debate on the revolutionary movements of the past years in a number of Arab countries and the role of history and locality in political and cultural transformation. Norbert Bugeja explores the relation between Tunisia's post-independence political legacy and a political memory that appears to be strategically sabotaged. Through Balibar and Rancière, and through the analysis of party-formation and democratic practice in Tunisia, the author maintains that a "Tunisian exception" today necessitates modes of civil-society organization within the legacies of Arab-Muslim reformist praxis, as well as its post-independence implementations.

Part II seeks to assemble "visions" and narratives that speak from, to, and sometimes against the discourse on and around the Mediterranean. With regards to the specific politics of "Hellenism" and its connected mythology, Simos Zeniou proposes a particularly interesting aspect of cultural construction in relation to the figuration of the Mediterranean, through the reading of P. B. Shelley's lyrical drama *Hellas* as a critical encounter with early XIX century philhellenic discourse. Zeniou challenges the dominant interpretation of Shelley as an archetypal idealizing philhellenist, maintaining that the poet instead underscores the appropriation of Hellenism by hegemonic political and cultural discourses and its entanglement with imperial politics.

The section also offers a composite look at the cultural politics of othering, as well as literary and cinematic practices of commonality and resistance inside and from the Mediterranean. Aneta Lipska's analysis of E.M. Forster's "Italian" novels adopts a Levinasian perspective to reflect on the Mediterranean as locus for narratives of othering. In particular, Italy is read in its "alterity" to the British narrative of the turn-of-the-century (though the "Italian" novels look more to the XIX century), against its own present-day projection of alterity on the migrants arriving on the shores of the Mediterranean. In this sense, the literary characters of Forster's novels serve as metaphor for the national constructions of "self" and "other".

Robert Watson turns his gaze on the way Francophone Tunisian Jewish and Muslim film-makers deal with the contradictions of the Jewish presence and role in post-revolutionary Tunisia. The author maintains that these contradictions are dealt with by agreeing to enter into a new kind of nostalgic co-production, in a form of “postcolonial triangulation” that refers to the ways that Tunisian Jewish identity has been situated on screen, in Jewish-Muslim collaborations, between various other, external forces, especially France and Israel, rather than as an internal question between Jews and Muslims.

Claudio Masciopinto offers a gaze on the contemporary Mediterranean as a laboratory, this time through an analysis of port cities as social spaces marked by the constant flow of people, objects, ideas and meanings. With a look at the history of port cities and their continuous contact with specific issues such as immigration, economic development and identity crisis of sea communities, the author brings to the fore the peculiar nature of such locations, with a specific look at the port city of Bari (Italy) as a space of territorial, communication and intercultural experimentation.

Elisabetta Serafini, in a sense, also situates the Mediterranean discourse on the Italian shores, this time under a historical and literary perspective, tracing in what terms the region was experienced by Italian travellers before national unification. In this sense, an interesting “Italian Mediterranean” emerges in the XIX century until the unification, in a literary construction of the region that is clearly imbued with orientalist notions, and interlaces with the official, colonial narrative describing those leaving the peninsula in those decades as “men of the Risorgimento”, while they were mainly exiles, escaping prosecution, though also partaking in the colonial practice and action.

Exiles and the sea are the closing images that come, at the end of this issue, almost as homage to the dead and dying today in the attempt to cross the Mediterranean. Silvana Carotenuto reads two creative renderings of the migratory events taking place in the contemporary Mediterranean, namely *Les Clandestines* by Youssouf Amin Elalamy (2000), and *Trilogia del Naufragio* by Lina Prosa (2013). Carotenuto brings to the fore the painful question of testimony, taking narration, theater and visuality to bear personal and collective involvement and the possibility of elaboration of human suffering and mourning. Through the Derridean deconstruction of the holocaust (not capitalized, as Derrida wrote it) and its ashes, this labor of pain and connection is shown as working also – or only – in the respect of alterity, and the promise of a different future.