



Mediterranean: Coloniality, Migration and Decolonial Practices

Luigi Cazzato

Abstract

The aim of this essay is to examine the connection, on the one hand, between discursive formations like Mediterraneanism, Meridionism and “coloniality of power”, on the other, between these and the present un/walling of the Mediterranean. The migration question is now offering a historical chance to Southern Europe/Northern Mediterranean to distance itself from the *imperium* of the colonial matrix of power set by Euro-modernity and to refuse to merely become the patrolling army of Fortress Europe. Present-day ethics and practice of Mediterranean hospitality, as exemplified by the Southern radical bishop Tonino Bello, the journalist-blogger and film director Gabriele Del Grande and the activists of “The Charter of Lampedusa” (stating the rights and liberties of migrants) seem to be part of a decolonial strategy that aims at rejecting such a role.

Keywords

Coloniality - Mediterraneanism - Meridionism - Migration - Decolonial Practice

L'Europa che vorrei non ha confini, non ha campi di accoglienza, non ha permessi di soggiorno, non ha barriere, non espelle, non rispedisce a casa i profughi, non li abbandona a morire in mare, non presidia le coste, non spende enormi quantità di denaro per difendersi da nemici che non esistono più.

L'Europa che vorrei si apre sul Mediterraneo come sempre è stato, lo guarda come una porta sul mondo e non come una proprietà da gestire.

(Armino 2014)

Famously, according to Edward Said, Orientalism was the distorting lens through which the West saw the East. «Orientalism was the distillation of essential ideas about the Orient – its sensuality, its tendency to despotism, its aberrant mentality, its habits of inaccuracy, its backwardness – into a separate and unchallenged coherence» (Said 2003, 205). However, according to the historical north-Eurocentric biased perception

not only the Orientals but also the southerners are sensual, backward, inaccurate, lethargic. So, to a certain extent, they are internal Orientals and share the same “oriental” destiny.

Indeed, in the Enlightenment perspective, progress tracked the same route as the sun, from East to West (Voltaire 1773, 377), but it also travelled from the timorous South to the brave North (Montesquieu 1748, XVII, 3). Once this North-West/South-East axis is recognized, the next step is to turn progress into teleology. Hegel, who claimed that the history of the world is the progress of the consciousness of freedom, also claimed, echoing the *Philosophes*, that it «travels from East to West, for Europe is absolutely the end of history, Asia the beginning» (Hegel 2010, 103). It goes without saying that Africa (the South) «is the unhistorical, undeveloped spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature» (Hegel 2010, 99). Hence, these are Jacques Derrida’s conclusions:

Europe takes itself to be a promontory, an advance – the avant-garde of geography and history. It advances and promotes itself as an advance, and it will have never ceased to make advances on the other: to induce, seduce, produce, and conduce, to spread out, to cultivate, to love or to violate, to love to violate, to *colonize*, and to *colonize itself* (Derrida 1992, 49; my emphasis).

But what is South for Europe? South is both the Southern European countries and the whole Mediterranean, of which Southern Europe is a part. And yet, Southern Europe is quite clearly not only Mediterranean. Hence the need to distinguish the different, though related, discursive formations which operate within Europe as far as its South and the rest of the Mediterranean are concerned. I would not speak of Orientalism (Said 2003) but of Meridionism (Pfister 1996) and Mediterraneanism (Herzfeld 2005).

Meridionism or Imperial Difference

Following the practice in modernity of translating geography into a moral space, at the end of the 18th century, the northerners (English and French in particular) began to map Southern European frontiers trying to understand where the advancement of History and Progress stopped. In other words, they were looking for the threshold through which one passed from progress to backwardness, from civilization to barbarism; in short, from proper Europe to the first glimmers of the African continent. Here are a couple of quotations among the many. Napoleon’s official A. Creuzé de Lesser, around the turn of the 18th century, claimed: «L’Europe finit à Naples et même elle y finit assez mal. La Calabre, la Sicile, tout le reste est de l’Afrique» (Creuze de Lesser 1806, 96). While S.T. Coleridge, during the first decade of the 19th century, working in the British protectorate of Malta, wrote: «It is interesting to pass from *Malta* to *Sicily* – from the highest specimen of an inferior race, the Saracenic, to the

most degraded class of a superior race, the European» (Coleridge 1835, 257). Half a century later, the eminent Victorian John Ruskin, while studying «the nature of the Gothic» on Mediterranean soil, opposed the Northern tribes'

strength of will, independence of character, resoluteness of purpose, impatience of undue control, and that general tendency to set the individual reason against authority, and the individual deed against destiny ... to the languid submission, in the Southern, of thought to tradition, and purpose to fatality..." (Ruskin 1925, 202).

What is operating here is Quijano's «coloniality of power». To the Peruvian decolonial thinker, «one of the fundamental axes of this model of power is the social classification of the world's population around the idea of race, a mental construction that expresses the basic experience of colonial domination» (Quijano 2000, 533). But this power matrix, which expresses the basic experience of colonial domination, is not exhausted in the problem of "racist" social classification. It pervaded the basic instances of the entire Eurocentered colonial/modern world. As Quijano clarifies, coloniality of power allowed the constitution of «a new geocultural identity: Europe – more specifically, Western Europe [...] as the central site for the control of the world market. The hegemony of the coasts of the Mediterranean and the Iberian peninsula was displaced toward the northwest Atlantic coast in the same historical moment» (Quijano 2000, 537). This moment occurred some time during the 17th century and, importantly, to the detriment both of non-European and European peripheries.

As a consequence, this kind of power does not operate only within the historical colonialist project but also within the broader borders of the modern episteme. Coloniality, as a matter of fact, is the invisible but constitutive side of the whole of modernity. To this extent, the workings of coloniality have also governed the relations within Europe. In short, Europe has constituted itself not only against the Orient but also against its South, which has been the constitutive outside, even though it was and is *inside* Europe. Therefore, we have to speak of Meridionism (Pfister 1996; Cazzato 2012)¹, which, although it shares its rhetoric and a good deal of its repertoire, is not Orientalism. Moreover, both Orientalism and Meridionism are but two of the discursive formations belonging to the progeny of the colonial matrix of power, which was generated with the rise of the Atlantic world. Indeed, to Walter Mignolo: if postcolonialism (as a cultural critique of modernity from the Global South) presupposes Orientalism, «in the Americas the question is "Occidentalism", the very

¹ It is Manfred Pfister who first spoke of about "intra-European Meridionism" as something different to global Orientalism: «This intra-European Meridionism has not had the same far-reaching and devastating political consequences that Orientalism brought upon mankind by legitimising colonialism, the disempowerment, exploitation, and humiliation of almost all non-European peoples, it has played an incisive role in the formation of British and European cultural self-understanding..." (Pfister 1996, 3).

condition of possibility of Orientalism. Without Occidentalism there is no Orientalism». Furthermore, he goes on: «without coloniality there is no modernity. Modernity, Occidentalism and Coloniality are all members of the same club» (Mignolo 2000, 28). To this extent, decolonial thinkers claim that postcolonial thought is not sufficient to deconstruct the entirety of the Western project of modernity, both in historical and epistemological terms². Be that as it may, the colonial discursive club is larger than Orientalism and includes all the discursive formations that the modern episteme has contrived, among which we find Meridionism.

However, not all of them operate on equal terms. Indeed, Mignolo distinguishes between «colonial difference» and «imperial difference». The first difference occurs between colonisers and colonised. The second difference is within the imperial domain and refers to the power relations between European countries which had fully succeeded in building an empire and those which no longer had one or had not succeeded yet, positioning themselves in the lower ranks of the hierarchical ladder of coloniality and lagging behind in the race for progress. As a consequence, Mignolo expounds:

A degree of inferiority is attributed to the “imperial other” that has not been colonized in that it is considered (because of language, religion, history, etc.) somewhat behind (time) in history or, if its present is being considered, marginal (space). (Mignolo 2007, 474)

Therefore, if colonial difference has played, since “the first modernity” (the *discovery* of America), a major role in the construction of European modern identity as a superior civilisation, imperial difference has played the same important role but at the expense of Southern European countries since “the second modernity” (the *discovery* of Reason). In other terms, imperial difference allowed the hierarchical process of distinguishing between “advanced” North-West Europe and “backward” South-Eastern Europe. Therefore, Meridionism firstly operates within the space of imperial difference, where Southern Europe is othered, secondly it relates to but does not overlap with Orientalism, which on the contrary operates in the space of colonial difference. As a matter of fact, Southern Europe:

- is not the Orient, despite its intercourse with the Eastern Mediterranean shores;
- was not the object of historical colonialism but the object of the colonial/modern power matrix;
- is not sheer *otherness*, like the Orient, but deficient *identity*.

² As to the main differences between the postcolonial and the decolonial, see Grosfoguel (2011).

Finally, if Orientalism was born as a cultural tool for the implementation of European colonialism, Meridionism was born as a cultural tool for the foundation of modern European identity.

The problem today is that it still works as a tool for the implementation of the colonial matrix of power within contemporary Europe, which is haunted once again by the old stereotypes of corrupt southerners and virtuous northerners, indolent Mediterraneans and vigorous Teutons. Infamously, the acronym P.I.G.S. (Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain) has been used as an abbreviation for Euro-Mediterranean countries since the adoption of the euro as a common currency and, above all, since the implementation of the Schengen Treaty for the abolition of borders was signed and a fear of border trespassing was felt. Indeed, Euro-southerners' "laxity" (case in point towards their Mediterranean neighbours on the other shores) is trifle if compared to their "lower intelligence" as detected by psychologist Richard Lynn through his "scientific" research proving that «IQs decline steadily with more southerly latitude» (Lynn 2010, 99). Why are southerners less intelligent? Because of the diffusion of genes from the Near East and North Africa. We have come, then, to the core problem: the Mediterranean is not *simply but dangerously* the sea between the lands, as the etymology reminds us. Southern Europe is too close to Africa and Asia to be considered "authentic" Europe, the colonial story goes, proving that «the model of power that is globally hegemonic [still] today presupposes an element of coloniality» (Quijano 2000, 533).

Mediterraneanism or Colonial Difference

"Mediterraneanism" is a term first used by Michael Herzfeld to describe the category invented by historians and anthropologists in order to confirm the stereotypes they wanted to study and thus serving, according to him, «the interests of disdainful cultural imperialism» (Herzfeld 2005, 48). To Herzfeld, the move from the ecological unity, that Braudel saw, to the cultural unity of the Mediterranean, that Horden and Purcell (2000) are convinced of, contributed to such discursive formation, above all in the Anglo-Saxon area. According to Herzfeld, by concentrating on supposed Mediterranean values such as honour and shame:

Mediterraneanist anthropology suggests a pervasive archaism. This reinforces the hierarchical relationship between nation-state and village culture [...] The nation-state - by its own reckoning, the ultimate symbol and embodiment of modernity - serves as the touchstone against which Mediterranean society and culture acquire their distinctive characteristics, their fundamental otherness, and above all their removal to a more primitive age (Herzfeld 1987, 11).

It is the other epistemological manoeuvre in modernity, which translates geography (space) in a chronology (time). By the end of the 19th century, the masters of historical time completed the colonial work of reducing everything that did not overlap with their values to a wreckage of time, according to the ideology of linear progress still dominant today. To this extent, Horden and Purcell agree that this Mediterranean is an invention of the 19th-century master narrative of the nation-state.

Nevertheless, they think «honour and shame are indeed deeply held values right across the region», since these values are not only values invented by imperialist anthropologists. To them, the Mediterranean is striking for its otherness, consisting in «the sheer intensity and complexity of the ingredients» (Horden and Purcell 2006, 739), which other similar seas do not have. Predrag Matvejević seems to agree when he writes: «Nations and races have conjoined and disjoined here over the centuries; more peoples have lived with one another and clashed with one another here than perhaps anywhere on the planet» (Matvejevic, 1999, 10). As far as I am concerned here, it is not interesting to verify whether or to what extent these values are real. Indeed, every stereotype as a massive *essentialist* generalisation is a lie, it only tells «a single story», as Chimamanda Adichie (2009) would say. At the same time, though, it may have a grain of material truth connected to history and culture. The real problem is that these single stories mobilise issues of hierarchy, they serve the function of deciding what is modern and what is not; what is superior and what is inferior. In short, they emerge and thrive within the sheer space of colonial difference, where coloniality of power worked and where, «unlike in any other previous experience of colonialism, the old ideas of superiority of the dominant, and the inferiority of dominated under European colonialism were mutated in a relationship of biologically and structurally superior and inferior» (Quijano 2007, 171).

As a consequence, on the one hand, Orientalism, Meridionism and Mediterraneanism work in parallel and share the same the colonial logic of power. On the other hand, they need to be distinguished from one another, since the history of the northern Mediterranean shore is not the same history as that of the eastern and southern shores. The Mediterranean Sea is the fracture and suture of continents and civilisations. It is both North and South, both Europe and Africa, both West and East. Its supposed unity is more looked for than found. The Mediterranean Sea is a *pluriverse* rather than a *universe*, a space of negotiation, of encounters and clashes. It is true that the peoples of the Mediterranean are like frogs around a pond, as Plato would have it, and may share cultures and climates. Yet, it is also true that its Northern shores are European and in such a *Prosperian* position they have participated, if to different degrees, in the feast of modernity and colonialism (Santos 2006). But, again, their Europeanness is imperfect, quasi-*Calibanesque*, dangerously near as these countries are to African and Eastern shores, and far from the core of the perfection of “real”

Europe. Therefore, if Meridionism has been a cultural tool that helped to position the core of modern European identity at North-Western latitudes, Mediterraneanism has provided both this cultural tool and the tool for the implementation of European colonialism in the Maghreb and Mashrek.

Migration, Universal Human Rights and the Colonial Matrix of Power

Historically speaking, modernity redefined the movement of people in an extreme way. Colonizers asserted the crucial right to freedom of movement (explorations and settlements) while controlling and determining the movement of the colonized (deportations and slave trade). The present migration movements provide a striking example of the colonial legacy since its direction is South to North, mostly from former colonies (migration source countries) to former imperial metropolises (migration target countries). Above all, the cultural reaction to it is an illustration both of «Europe's undigested colonial history» (Gilroy 2016, XI) and of a neocolonialist politics exerting control on source countries under the pretext of limiting “illegal” immigration at disordered continental borders. Actually, in Giuseppe Campesi's analysis of Frontex³ what emerges is that this agency is

uno strumento pratico di quella che è stata efficacemente definita una “geopolitica dell'incorporazione”, [...] dove incorporazione non significa solo progressiva espansione del confine europeo sino ad inglobare uno spazio formalmente extraterritoriale, ma anche creazione di una struttura istituzionale di gestione della frontiera separata e diversa dalle entità che le danno vita (Campesi 2015, 192).

In short, Frontex is an administrative tool for both a new form of colonial control beyond European borders and a form of post-modern empire with its multi-layered political space (from the countries perfectly integrated in the Union to the cooperating

³ In 2004 Frontex (The European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) was established, in order to patrol the external borders of the Schengen zone. This apparatus, as Campesi points out, «reproduces the paradoxes of a humanitarian policy which is intended to protect the bare life of migrants and asylum seekers, while violating their fundamental rights to escape and find asylum elsewhere» (Campesi 2014, 132). Moreover, the modern-day immigration system is a chance for Europe to extend its control over its Southern neighbours. Maghreb governments act as (cruel) janitors in the service of Europe to restrict migration at their own borders. The Treaty on Friendship, Partnership, and Cooperation between Italy and Libya was a bi-lateral agreement signed in 2008, to allow Libya to control its land borders by a system financed jointly by Italy and the EU. In this way, not only does the EU watch its own borders, but may extend its power of border control to its Southern neighbours, which are, predictably enough, formerly colonized countries. Lately, “Operation Mare Nostrum”, a naval and air operation commenced by the Italian government in 2013 to tackle the ship wreckages off Lampedusa, was superseded in 2014 by Frontex's “Operation Triton”, which unlike Mare Nostrum basically focuses on border protection rather than search and rescue.

neighbour countries), where there are power asymmetries and the neighbourhood policies reproduce the logic of the imperial *limes*. Given this complex context, the migration issue is now offering a historical chance to Southern Europe to distance itself from the imperial-meridionist dicta of Euro-modernity; a chance to refuse to become just the patrolling army of Fortress Europe. Indeed, like a super-Nation-State, Europe has (im)permeable borders⁴ and embodies deep contradictions between the proclamation of universal human rights and the exertion of national sovereignty, to say the least. Or to say more, after Ramón Grosfoguel, on the 1948 UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the concept of «human beings born free and equal in dignity and rights» has:

Universal pretensions but provincially defined and narrowly applied. Without decolonizing the concept of the “human” from a Western-centric patriarchal gaze and without decolonizing the global coloniality of power from the hegemony of Euro-American White Supremacy as the leading country of the postwar Western Imperialist United Front, it was simply impossible to have a more cosmopolitan and multi-epistemic concept of human rights and to even implement the present hegemonic concept of human rights in a fair and coherent way (Grosfoguel 2009, 90).

Indeed, notwithstanding what Kant wrote in *Toward Perpetual Peace* (1795)⁵, propounding the universal right to hospitality, universal human rights belong to the Western-centric conception of the human, and behind Kant’s transcendental subject hides the white man and his “coloniality of power”.

As Darko Suvin (2012) puts it, echoing Marx, not even all the nations put together have property rights over the earth’s surface and people should be seen as citizens of a general Nation of Humanity. Yet, in European history, because the rulers drink «injustice like water» (Kant 1983, 119) people have been seen as citizens of a *particular* nation of humanity. As a consequence, contradictions have thrived between the idea of unlimited freedom and the practice of limited forms of citizenship, between nativity and nationality, giving rights, despite universal claims, not to all men but only to some. Hence the postcolonialist and decolonialist disapproval of European universalism as «parochial» (Said 2004, 53) and «provincial» (Grosfoguel 2009, 90). On the contrary, in pre-Nation-State times, merchants, pilgrims, scholars, students, etc. moved more easily across Medieval Christendom or Islam, whose limits were only the

⁴ Actually, the EU calls its borders “smart” because they select *travellers* according to whether they are trusted or not, by a process of profiling and risk targeting (see the paragraph “Identificare e classificare” in Campesi 2015).

⁵ «This right to present themselves to society belongs to all mankind in virtue of our common right of possession on the surface of the earth on which, as it is a globe, we cannot be infinitely scattered, and must in the end reconcile ourselves to existence side by side: at the same time, originally no one individual had more right than another to live in any one particular spot» (Kant 1983, 120).

borders within which the official languages were spoken, regardless of ethnicity. Braudel reminds us that the 16th-century Mediterranean world was still a world of indispensable migrants (Braudel 1995) and John Locke in *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689) extolled the Ottoman Empire for its tolerance. Refugee mass displacements seem to begin with bourgeois Nation-States and their economic and religious wars (from the beginning of 16th century until 1648 – “The Peace of Westphalia” – Europe was plagued by wars of religion and, as a result, by the mass displacement of people).

Therefore, the Southern European shores – shores of historical mass emigration – have in front of them a bifurcation. They may follow the ancient epistemological force of their waters: the Mediterranean has always been «a continual interweaving of cultural roots and historical routes», as Chambers reminds us (2004, 430), turning into a humanist bridge. Or they may go on building the inhuman *wall* against which the migrants crash, as a result, turning itself into a trench where the North-Western fundamentalism of the marketplace and the South-Eastern fundamentalism of religion clash and thrive.

Decolonial practices: Don Tonino Bello, Gabriele Del Grande, and the Lampedusa Activists

The Italian and European walling of the Mediterranean through control apparatuses (migration laws, detention centres, patrolling and “push back” operations – violating the international principle of non-refoulement) is well known: a policy that has brought almost 30.000 victims in the last 30 years⁶, in the attempt to prevent the “wretched” from crossing over the Mediterranean water wall⁷. What are probably less

⁶ According the accurate report of Gabriele Del Grande's blog “Fortress Europe”: «Dal 1988 sono morte lungo le frontiere dell'Europa almeno 27.382 persone [...] Il dato è aggiornato al 2 febbraio 2016 e si basa sugli incidenti documentati dalla stampa internazionale negli ultimi trent'anni». <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/p/la-strage.html>. Accessed 16 July 2016. Here is the heading of the blog in the English version: «Six years of travelling around the Mediterranean along the borders of Europe. In search of the stories that make history. The history that will be studied by our children who will read on the school textbooks that in 21st century thousands died at sea around Italy and thousands were arrested and deported from our cities. Whilst everybody pretended not to see». <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/2006/02/immigrants-dead-at-frontiers-of-europe-16.html>. Accessed 16 July 2016.

⁷ In 2004 Frontex (The European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders of the Member States of the European Union) was established, in order to patrol the external borders of the Shengen zone. This apparatus, as G. Campesi points out, «reproduces the paradoxes of a humanitarian policy which is intended to protect the bare life of migrants and asylum seekers, while violating their fundamental rights to escape and find asylum elsewhere» (Campesi 2014, 132). Moreover, the modern-day immigration system is a chance for Europe to extend its control over its Southern neighbours. Maghrebian governments act as (cruel) janitors in the service of Europe to restrict migration at their own borders. The Treaty on Friendship, Partnership, and Cooperation

known are the attempts at Mediterranean dialogue and the practice of hospitality in the space of imperial difference, where the condition of imperial otherness (the southerner as the imperial other) may help to deconstruct colonial otherness (the Mediterranean as the colonial other). These practices implicitly denounce the common colonial matrix that governs, if differently, all Mediterranean shores. It is a cultural-political dimension that sees, for instance, radical bishop Antonio Bello, the “Charter of Lampedusa”, and media activist Gabriele Del Grande, as part of a Mediterranean strategy of de-imperial and de-colonial thinking and practice. Indeed, if Quijano’s conceptual frame is to be accepted, the only way to interrupt Western vertical monologue and start a horizontal one would be to finish the 20th century’s incomplete project of decolonisation, commencing *within* Western (epistemological) borders.

Antonio Bello (1935-1993, known as Don Tonino) was a bishop in the Apulia region. He loved to be driven integrally by the Gospel “sine glossa”. He dedicated his entire life to the “wretched of the earth”. The first thing he did when he was appointed bishop was to receive in his bishop's lodgings the dispossessed (Albanian and Africans migrants, prostitutes, homeless people, etc.). His homilies could not but touch dramatic events such as the mafia killing of the town mayor or the commemoration of the killing of the Salvadoran Liberation theologian, Mons. Romero. During the Eighties and Nineties he was in the front line against all wars. The only thing that could stop him was an unyielding cancer that caused his death in 1993. His death arrived just four months after the last courageous achievement that he inspired: a peace mission to Sarajevo, in former Yugoslavia devastated by war.

Going back to his actions, he was imbued by what he used to call «the conviviality of differences». In his homily in Milan (1989), “A Welcoming City”, he started by quoting another bishop who had emigrated to Milan, the African St. Augustine. Speaking of the elected gathered for the final judgment, St. Augustine offered his audience this icon of solidarity:

Adamo significa in greco tutto l'universo. Il suo nome si compone infatti di quattro lettere: A, D, A, M. In greco, appunto, i nomi dei punti cardinali cominciano con queste quattro lettere. *Anatolé* significa l'Est. *Dysis*, l'Ovest. *Arktos* il Nord. E *Mesembria* il Sud ... Per questo Adamo è sparso su tutto il globo terrestre. Una volta si

between Italy and Libya is a bi-lateral agreement signed in 2008, to allow Libya to control its land borders by a system financed jointly by Italy and the EU. In this way, not only does the EU watch its own borders, but extends its power of border control to its Southern neighbours, which are, predictably enough, formerly colonized countries. Recently, “Operation Mare Nostrum”, a naval and air operation commenced by the Italian government in 2013 to tackle the ship wreckages off Lampedusa, was superseded in 2014 by Frontex's “Operation Triton”, which unlike Mare Nostrum basically focuses on border protection rather than search and rescue.

trovava in un solo posto, poi cadde e finì in cocci che cosparsero di sé il globo terrestre. Ma la misericordia di Dio raccolse dappertutto questi cocci e li fuse nel fuoco dell'amore e rimise insieme ciò che era stato diviso (Bello 2007, 37).

This passage contains an image of humanity as a migrating species and of migration as an ontological human feature, thanks to which mankind has spread all over the planet, roaming towards each cardinal points, and reunited in the figure of Jesus Christ, the new ADAM.

Don Tonino's question was: can Milan become «una grande palestra spirituale dove genti di estrazione diversa si allenano a vivere quella “convivialità delle differenze”, sulla cui tavola si sperimenta la pace?» (Bello 2007, 40). At the end of his speech, he turned his question into a wish: may the new ADAM – «in whom not only the West and East, but also the North and the South reunite» – give Milan the honour of introducing itself to Europe «come luogo di pace, dove si svolgono le prove generali di una nuova solidarietà planetaria» (Bello 2007, 43). For him, Southern Italians, as a people belonging to the global South, cannot play «un ruolo che non ci appartiene né per vocazione di Dio, né per tradizione degli uomini», according to which they have to be «gendarmi di rincalzo nel Mediterraneo per il servizio di controllo, se non di repressione, sulle folle disperate del terzo e del quarto mondo» (Bello 2007, 20). To Don Tonino, as a man of the South, *planetary* solidarity meant first of all southern *local* solidarities: «questa porzione di terra è quasi il *luogo paradigmatico* dove si svelano gli stessi meccanismi perversi che, certamente in modo più articolato, attanagliano tutti i Sud della terra» (Bello 2007, 55).

From 31 January to 2 February 2014, the organization “Melting Pot” called for a meeting on the island of Lampedusa, the destination for most smugglers' boats leaving Tunisia or Libya. A large number of North African and European associations, movements and networks concerned with migration issues met to put together a charter stating the rights of migrants and, in the long-term, to hopefully change European policies about migration⁸.

The island was chosen for the meeting after the refugee tragedies of October 2013, when at least 366 migrants died, thus underlining the political decision to actively engage with the island's population. The preamble reads that the charter does not want to be a law or a petition to Governments, but a constituent pact of commitment among those who produce and sign it. In this sense, it is clear that grass-roots subjects will give life to its chapters by taking action against the current policies managing people's movements.

⁸ <http://www.lacartadilampedusa.org>. Accessed 16 July 2016.

The assumption of the charter is that humans are born migrant and the Earth is a communal space to be shared. As a result, it considers the whole planet as the space of implementation of what it sanctions, the Mediterranean as its place of origin with the island of Lampedusa right at its centre. The European politics of migration have forced upon this island the role of border-wall, on the one hand, and the position of compulsory crossing space, on the other: conclusively, a space that has become a watery cemetery. The charter has two sections: the 1st section sanctions a series of principles regarding several freedoms; the 2nd section faces the many issues connected with migration, such as the militarization of borders, racism, exploitation, inequality.

Among the principles included in the first section, it recalls the freedom of movement in a world where migratory policies have become the main expedients through which social (class) divisions and colonial (race) disparities have re-emerged. Another principle is the necessity of basing the relationship between institutions and persons not on national belonging but on dwelling (a citizenship based on *ius soli*), thus overcoming the incongruity between human rights and citizenship rights (Agamben 1995). Finally, another principle I wish to recall, is the freedom of resistance:

The Charter of Lampedusa affirms everyone's Freedom to resist policies which foster inequality and disparity, intended to create divisions, discrimination, exploitation and precariousness of human beings, and which generate inequalities ("The Charter of Lampedusa", I.6-Freedom to Resist).

Probably with this idea in their mind, an Italian journalist and a Palestinian poet decided to help five Palestinians and Syrians in Milan, who in 2013 landed on the Italian island of Lampedusa as survivors of the tragic October 2013 shipwreck, after fleeing the war in Syria and heading for Sweden. This decision implied the violation of European law and at the same time the enactment of the not yet written Charter, at that time, of Lampedusa. They resolved to do so by faking a wedding, a kind of masquerade that helped them cross the frontiers. They also thought to film their journey and turn it into a movie, called *Io sto con la sposa/On the Bride's Side* (Augugliaro *et al.* 2014).

The movie is a kind of "reality show" about migration, a sort of masquerade in opposition to the masquerade of politics, which turns a continent into a fortress and in opposition to the masquerade of media communication, which spreads alarming fake figures on migration, while hiding the numbers of deaths in the Mediterranean because of inhumane laws and procedures. Finally, it is a political reality show on migration in opposition to the reality show of national and continental politics as a whole. It is a work of art that resists the policy of walling the Mediterranean, thanks to

the representation of the world through a decolonial practice, in that what triggers action is not “our” pity towards “them” but solidarity “among us”, where any hierarchy has been erased. As Del Grande states in an interview:

To me it is very simple. If my neighbour’s home is burning, I open my door. There’s nothing to consider – you let them in and figure out how you can share what you have later. If you shut the door, the neighbour is going to die. We have the war in Syria, war in Gaza, war in Libya, the war against the Islamic State. The region is in a perilous state. I’m not just an Italian; the Mediterranean Sea is part of my identity and it has two shores: north and south. It’s my sea, these are my people, and we have to show solidarity (Zafeiri 2014).

As with Don Tonino and the activists of The Charter of Lampedusa, no asymmetries are allowed here. The journey was performed by both Middle-Eastern and European travellers and the “action-movie”, in the true sense of the term, was directed by two Italians and a Palestinian. There is no contrast between “us” and “them”, but only an enlarged, Mediterranean, decolonized “us” on the bride’s side, whichever nationality she is; a bride who, in a scene from the movie, wonders why the moon and the sky belong to everybody but this is not the case as far as the earth is concerned.

This is the unity the Mediterranean can think of and look for: the unity of solidarity with the «wretched crowds» (Don Tonino Bello) or with those whose «home is burning» (Del Grande). What is important here is to stress, with regard to Don Tonino Bello’s thoughts, the Lampedusa Charter’s claims and Gabriele Del Grande’s activism, their shared grass-roots attitude: the commitment among people to erase the hierarchies of coloniality and act in solidarity, regardless what the new forms of colonialism sanction and perform.

Mongrel Mediterranean: Living on the Border

This approach leads to what the Mediterranean waters have taught their people for centuries: that «cultures are intertwined and can only be disentangled from each other by mutilating them» (Said 2004, 52). Therefore, what Europe has before itself is either mutilation or supplementation. If it chooses the second, the “intrusion” of the global South into Euro-North, far from being a negative contamination – as the supporters of walling apparatuses would have it – may offer the chance for European culture as a whole to expose and amend its insufficiencies through the others’ culture. If taken differently, the other is a source and a resource for a better and more critical understanding (supplementation) of the self. Secondly, Southern Europe may have a chance to be seen as no longer an imperial periphery, but the centre of a new creolizing world, in which the Mediterranean may retrieve its ancient role of cultural and economic crossroads. Paradoxically, thanks to the traffic of human beings towards

Europe, the Mediterranean finally has the chance to re-experience its *pluriverse*. Its many peoples are incurable mongrels: their identity is full of alterity, Franco Cassano claims. The latter may utter the final words here:

Mediterranean today means putting the border, that line of division and contact between people and civilizations, center stage [...] We do not go to the Mediterranean to seek the fullness of our origins but to experience our contingency. The Mediterranean shows us the limits of Europe and of the West (Cassano 2012, xlvi).

In other terms, the Mediterranean can teach what Walter Mignolo, following thinkers such as the Chicana Gloria Anzaldúa, calls «border thinking»: the epistemic response of the subaltern to the Eurocentric colonial project of modernity, still working today (Mignolo 2007, 455). Decolonial thinking and practice may be the means for a double resistance. They can resist the Prosperian Meridionist discourse, which sees the Euro-South as a sort of semi-Caliban, a not-North yet. They can resist the neocolonialist politics that the Euro-North, and Europe as a whole, are implementing in the Mediterranean anew, hazardously triggering what Said's contrapunctual critical approach wanted to avoid: the «destructive politics of confrontation and hostility» (Said 1994, 18), or the tragic end of the smiling woman in the limerick:

There was a young lady of Niger
Who smiled as she rode on a tiger;
They returned from the ride
With the lady inside,
And the smile on the face of the tiger⁹.

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⁹ Limerick generally attributed to Cosmo Monkhouse, English poet (1840-1901), cited in *The Yale Book of Quotations*, New Haven and London: Yale UP, 2006, p. 531.

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Luigi Cazzato teaches Literatures and Cultures in English at the University of Bari. He is the author of several essays on the re-reading of the cultural relations between England and the South from a postcolonial and decolonial perspective. Recently, he has edited the following multidisciplinary volumes: *S/Murare il Mediterraneo - Un/Walling the Mediterranean*, Pensa 2016; *Orizzonte Sud: sguardi studi prospettive su Mezzogiorno, Mediterraneo e Sud globale*, Besa 2011, and *Anglo-Southern Relations: From Deculturation to Transculturation*, Negroamaro 2011. His books include: *Metafiction of Anxiety: Modes and Meanings of the Postmodern Self-Conscious Novel*, Schena Editore, Fasano 2000; *Laurence Sterne: Cock and Bull Stories*, ETS, Pisa 2004; *Sceptical Fictions. Introduction to the History of Modern English Literary Self-Consciousness*, Aracne Editrice, Roma 2009.

Email: luigicarmine.cazzato@uniba.it