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## **Mediterranean Enlightenment**

### **Introduction**

The essays of this issue are the result of a collective work carried out by scholars from the Mediterranean area, whose constructive dialogue has contributed to the realization of an *authentic Mediterranean critical thinking*<sup>1</sup>.

Our project has started from the studies made by different research groups<sup>2</sup> and aims at setting up a critic lexicon to be used as the basis for a confrontation among all those people who are willing to create a place for sharing. As the Tunisian philosopher Fathi Triki defines it, a place

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. A. Cecere, *Il pensiero critico mediterraneo*, in A. Cecere, L. Paulizzi (a cura di), *Utopia e Critica nel Mediterraneo*, Mimesis Jouvence, Milano 2021.

<sup>2</sup> Antonio Cecere (Università di Roma “Tor Vergata”) is vice-president of the research group *Filosofia in Movimento*. Since 2017, this group has been focusing on Mediterranean studies. This led to the publication of two collective essays: *Lumi sul Mediterraneo* (Jouvence 2019, edited by A. Cecere and A. Coratti) and *Utopia e critica nel Mediterraneo* (Jouvence 2021, edited by A. Cecere and L. Paulizzi). Moreover, in 2018, twenty scholars from Magreb and Italy held a conference at La Sapienza University in Rome aimed at creating new approaches to dialogue and research, establishing a collaboration based on an international agreement between the *Université de Tunis El-Manar* and the Università degli Studi di Roma “Tor Vergata”. This collaboration created a further agreement between the PhD schools of these two universities, made possible thanks to Paolo Quintili. Founded in El-Manar, the *Association Tunisienne des Etudes sur les Lumières* is a group of research in philosophy, literature and art headed by Professor Halima Ouanada and investigating on the Mediterranean with an interdisciplinary perspective. Dionysis Drosos (Aristotle University of Thessaloniki) is head of the *Mediterranean Society of Enlightenment Studies* (MSES), initiated in 2011 under the nomination Society for the Study of Scottish Enlightenment (MSSSE) by an interdisciplinary group of scholars coming mainly from countries of the Mediterranean basin, such as Spain, Italy, Greece, Turkey, and Israel. The members of MSES, scholars in law, philosophy, economics, and history, are bound together by their common interest in European Enlightenment and its relevance and influence to the Mediterranean societies. Our collaboration with OCSM – a research project headed by Ambassador Cosimo Risi and part of the Department of Political Sciences and Communications of the University of Salerno headed by Gianfranco Macrì – was decisive to enlarge the group of scholars in law and intercultural sociological sciences.

where to “live together within dignity”. Triki opened the first conference in Rome in 2018, *Lumières on the Mediterranean*, together with Mario Reale, Stefano Petrucciani, Bruno Montanari and Paolo Quintili.

This dialogue is the meeting point for all those scholars who built up a sharing space of ideas and cultures, moving from their own cultural position. Conceiving the Mediterranean Basin as something more than a merely geographically-delimited area – in its nature of an easing passage for humans and goods – our research investigates the Mediterranean as a critical space: a dimension of *common sense*.

The first philosopher who rethought the role of *space* as a social and political dimension of relations – rather than a physical place – was Henri Lefebvre in 1974. His reflection, however, was part of a greater tradition, from Clistene<sup>3</sup> to Marx, which considered the human space exclusively as an inhabited place: a walled place codified by a common language and a common law. The inhabited space was, to him, the place of sensemaking as well as the place in which men constructed buildings and symbols through their work and culture, creating a privileged and mutually nourished dimension of thought and *polis*. Lefebvre had the intuition of defining space as an instrument of encounter, meaning something never to be *empty* but rather to be used as the basis of a *shared being*: a place where man can produce and learn the languages and symbols of his own experience as a social being.

In accordance with Lefebvre, we interpret that space not as an objective and neutral element, but rather as the result of the human activity throughout time. Every civilization had – and still has – its own spatial conformation, as both a product and a source for inspiration. Even the natural territory has constantly undergone huge transformations made by the human activity, in terms of symbols and morphology.

For these reasons, however, we conceive space not only as a social product – as the result of balances within and between society and power – but also as a social *producer*, as in the case of the Mediterranean Basin area that, due to its physical conformation, has often been the stage for the huge *opera* of human civilization. The geographical space had been a long lasted fertile ground for those who experienced it throughout the millennia until today. Space, as Lefebvre puts it, is the founding element of our experience

<sup>3</sup> On the representation of space and time from the late-6<sup>th</sup>-century Greece until the death of Plato, see also P. Lévêque, P. Vidal-Naquet, *Clistene l'ateniese*, edited by A. Coratti, Castelvechi, Roma 2020.

of the real, thereby having a huge impact on what we consider ordinary, on our values, on the very way through which we conceive normality and desirability. The Mediterranean space, intended as a *space-movement*<sup>4</sup>, generates an easily shareable experience of languages, knowledge and constant exchanges that have also generated civilizations. There has never been such thing as one single original conscience explaining the foundation of these civilizations. Therefore, the experience of *living together* is examined as an autochthonous concept, which is common to every Mediterranean population, and the *creative exchange*<sup>5</sup> as the historical evidence of the whole Mediterranean culture. It is in the moment in which we pronounce the word “together” that we are able to emancipate ourselves from the interpretation of the Mediterranean area as the place of a necessarily conflictual relationship among peoples and cultures.

On one hand, nations, religious hierarchies, and closed linguistical and cultural groups seem to preserve their differences and keep on with their conflicts. On the other hand, a form of hybridization and sharing is present along with our intellectual and social interactions, leading to an “escape from a minority condition” of the Mediterranean man, who is guilty of having relegated himself to an inferior status, disregarding his own history of civilization.

This story of hybridization gave birth to a gradually and collectively shaped anti-tradition of Mediterranean culture, that we define as *Mediterranean critical thinking*. Our choice to confront ourselves with the other, *on* and *within* the topics treated, aims at replacing the act of *speaking* of the other with the act of *conversing* with the other.

This shift allows us to highlight the existence of plenty of historical currents in the whole Mediterranean culture, which – according to Jack Goody’s study<sup>6</sup> – can be defined as *small*, heretic or simply prevailing

<sup>4</sup> The famous conceptualization of *space-movement* by Fernand Braudel is further clarified as the common origin of the ability of critical thinking by the Mediterranean man in A. Cecere, *Il Pensiero Critico Mediterraneo*, *op.cit.*

<sup>5</sup> The concept of *creative exchange* comes from the Mediterranean poet Mohammed Benis (Fez, 1948). In F. Corrao, M. Donzelli, *Il Mediterraneo e la parola*, Donzelli editore, Roma 2009, pp. 12-13), he states that “la storia e la cultura mediterranea non solo prevede lo scambio ma gli assegna un ruolo di *creazione*. È in questo scambio creativo che colgo ciò che perpetua l’essenza del Mediterraneo in quanto dimora comune [...] la storia dello scambio creativo è sempre una storia in movimento, in cui le visioni si perdono per ritrovarsi nell’alcova [...] della solidarietà”.

<sup>6</sup> J. Goody, *La grande e la Piccola tradizione nel Mediterraneo* in *Antropologia del Mediterraneo*, a cura di A. Miranda, Guerini e Associati, Milano 2007. In his study, Goody highlights the contribute of the so-called “small traditions” to the shaping of Mediterra-

traditions, that were always present in such Mediterranean common conscience. These intellectual experiences are related to all Mediterranean cultures, such as the exegesis of the Holy Scriptures that, from Avicenna to Averroè, until European modernity, gave birth to the idea itself of *critical thinking*, being it an anti-dogmatic attitude.

Throughout history, the Mediterranean rationality is evident in the birth of technology, the birth of writing, algebra and geometry, in the sharing of astronomical discoveries and medical breakthroughs. The critical Mediterranean is, in this sense, a breeding ground for both civilizations and their progress. It is a place for literature and poetry, from Homer to Romans, including Arabic and Pre-Islamic Magrebi literature<sup>7</sup>, which are a key source for human geography, making the Reason separated from the dogmas of the *clash of civilizations*.

A non-Western thinking – encompassing authors such as Sadik J. Al-Azm, Ali Abderraziq, Mahmoud Taha, Fazlur Rahman, Muhammad Ahmad Khlafallah, Mohmmmed Arkoun, Sadek Annayhum, Abdalkarim Soroush, Muhammad Shahrur, Abdou Filiali-Ansary, Nawal Al-Sadawi and many others – is what creates a debate on law, politics, religious themes, and aims at showing emancipation from the dogmas of a closed society, impervious to any cliché of modernity – as both Western culture and Northern Mediterranean culture saw it. On the contrary, the Western thinking views itself as the sole carrier of universal concepts, seeing the other as a static and immobile object of contemplation, useful for a consolatory auto-critic<sup>8</sup>, and conceiving the Mediterranean as a place of resistance to the capitalist savagery.

Escaping these already beaten paths, where prejudices and fashionable ideas put good intentions at risk, we chose to create a group for

nean peoples' identity, pointing out how minor or heretical traditions helped to shape a Mediterranean current of thought throughout history.

<sup>7</sup> Pre-Islamic poetry has been studied and seen as laying the Mediterranean cultural roots by M. Bennis and the Egyptian scholar Taha Hussein (1889-1973). Hussein's philological work confronted the Pre-Islamic oral tradition with the Mediterranean and Greek tradition, finding out common points within the traditional popular narratives.

<sup>8</sup> We agree with Francescomaria Tedesco (Tedesco F., *Mediterraneismo*, Meltemi, Milano 2017.) in his arguing that Western thinking seeks to “solve its own inadequacies” (our translation) and has a static and traditionalist idea of the Mediterranean as a paradigm to counter the injustices produced by modernity in the contemporary world. In accordance with Tedesco, we agree on the fact that “Agli occidentali piace sentirsi rassicurati da un’alterità ‘controllata’ (nel senso di ‘guidata’, che non sfugge di mano, che non produce effetti eccessivi o indesiderati, come un incendio i cui margini vengano battuti continuamente per evitare che si espanda oltre il consentito)” (F. Tedesco, *op cit.*, p. 10).

discussion with good-willing Mediterranean scholars. Therefore, a free dialogue on re-discovering Enlightenment, not intended as a “Western State” or as an Arabic modernism, but rather as a “constant fight always to be carried out”<sup>9</sup> – to put it with Colas Duflo – was built.

During these last years, we have set up study groups, conferences, publications, all aimed at discovering the complexity of Mediterranean world in a radical way and at building up a new critical lexicon, as an actual reasoned vocabulary encompassing all those concepts that many scholars will be able to put together.

This issue includes the research on many themes shared by scholars from Athens, Cartago and Rome.

In her paper “National State, Postnational Constellations and democracy: Kant after Habermas?”, Fotini Vaki looks into the recent texts of J. Habermas, which serve as a critical “commentary” on globalization. Avoiding both its uncritical doxology as well as its “autistic” demonology, Habermas’s attitude towards globalization and, more specifically, towards the democratic content of today’s “post-national constellations” – to use his own term – is characterized by a certain moderation and a restrained optimism. Habermas’s source of hope regarding the physiognomy of the current “post-Enlightenment” era is paradoxically supplied by the Enlightenment tradition itself: particularly, by Kant’s famous essay “Perpetual Peace”.

The paper will demonstrate that the relevance and re-appropriation of Kant’s political thinking lies in determining a critical potential against globalization and in assessing today’s political practices. The concept of the Cosmopolitan Law, especially developed in Kant’s essay *The Metaphysics of Morals*, contains an anti-paternalistic or, even more so, an anti-imperialist dimension argued both by Kant’s theory of property as well as by a somewhat peculiar conception of the social contract.

Maria Kavala and Dionysis Drosos’s essay “Sympathy and Prejudice. Decivilization and the Limits of Smithian Moral Sentiments: Jews and Gentiles in Axis-occupied Greece” questions the limits of the Smithian conception of sympathy as a civilizing process, in an historical context severely challenging human capabilities for empathy. The occupation of Greece by the Axis Powers is key. It was as if the conditions of hun-

<sup>9</sup> Our translation.

ger, oppression, terror, fear of imminent death made the individualistic acts of survival prevail, causing the spontaneously-functioning “circuit of empathy” to collapse. As a result, a vicious-circle of de-civilization, dehumanization, and disintegration of society was established. In such circumstances, what Adam Smith names as “soft, gentle, and amiable” virtues, based on the recognition of the “other”, would be totally mortified, without the movement of Resistance. In other words, the “circuit of empathy” could not stay alive, unless strongly supported by what Adam Smith calls the “great, the respectable, the awful virtues”, the virtues of self-denial and self-sacrifice. Thanks to the mortally dangerous exercise of such virtues, a minimum of communal bonds was safeguarded, survival, and a regrettably small part of the persecuted Greek-Jews were saved.

In her essay, “Islam, Europe and Democracy. Seeking answers in an ongoing discussion”, Angeliki Ziaka observes and raises questions to overcome the apparent assumptions on Islam, Europe and Democracy, being this a discourse on two different worlds that the author proposes to the general audience. The first is a secular and democratic one, the second is a religious and authoritative one. Through different historical and politico-religious examples from the Medieval period up to the present time, Ziaka unfolds the complexity, the diversity, and the dependence of these two “worlds”. By going through several references, Ziaka tries to show that a careful and penetrating look at the historical course of these “entities” is needed. This demonstrates the various communication nets that have existed for centuries beyond current border understandings. She criticizes several approaches to the issue, so that old assumptions and divisions that do not reflect the reality of things, but rather reserve segregation policies and replace them by an unprejudiced and pragmatic approach. Ziaka, driven by her scientific field and her work, considers that education (in particular a religious one) would be an excellent tool of a mutual understanding.

Otherness, “Mediterranean-ness” and citizenship are the three concepts revised by three Tunisian intellectuals under a new critical perspective. These three concepts, despite their apparent difference, are strictly bound by their being in relation with the other. They imply, demand and question the fact that the other exists as having a human, cultural, and gender meaning. Through these concepts, the authors propose a new relationship with the other, and so with life itself. Moreover, as Michel Foucault writes, “Formare concetti è un modo di vivere e non di uccidere la vita; è un modo di vivere in relativa mobilità e non un tentativo di immobilizzare la vita.” Questioning long-term static concepts allows us to imagine a possible renewal, to break down the walls and suggest

alternative perspectives for discussion and agreement. This dialogue will never be real until prejudices, paradoxes and myths will be overcome and a sincere opening will be made with neither an assimilation nor a reductionist approach to diversities. In his essay, Khadija Ben Hassine examines the relation with the other from a philosophical point of view. Starting with a disadvantageous relation to the other because of the lacking of the possibility to communicate, the author invites the philosopher to reflect deeply on the real issues onto which the philosopher must suggest tools of analysis, question old categories and elaborate new categories of thoughts that push towards comprehension, openness and to the establishment of a real discussion among cultures. Investigating the philosophy of the two exponents of Neo-Kantianism and of Phenomenology Ernest Cassirer and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the author suggests to re-think the present time. The writer, professor and researcher of French Language and Literature Mansour M'henni elaborates original concepts by re-thinking the East-West relationships from the concept of *becoming* – being it the core point of Mediterraneanness. This is a concept that still struggles to emerge as pivotal in this topic. Accordingly, reflecting on his long-lasting work, M'henni seeks to distinguish the idea of “Mediterraneanness” as a synonym of the Mediterranean are from that of “Mediterraneanness” as a universal concept bearing the hope for a new Humanism.

The professor and researcher in French Language and Literature Halima Ouanada examines the concept of citizenship, intended primarily as being in relation to the “immediate other”, the woman, and to her rights, based on the Tunisian historical context. Starting from the Myth of Foundation – a women myth *par excellence* – Ouanada questions the political use of history and the process of invisibilization women went through, especially when they have been actors for change. This process should be re-examined and questioned in order to detect any flaws and eliminate ambiguity. This is because, in such a conflictual and violent context that we witness today, before thinking to any possible dialogue with the other, who is far from us, it is more urgent to make a journey within oneself, to free ourselves from the myths and prejudices that keep us away from *living together*, respecting each one's own citizenship.

The essays written by the four Italian scholars are driven by an historical-critical as well as judicial sensitivity. Accordingly, they analyze the political role of the nation-states, as well as the political and geopolitical transformations from the 20<sup>th</sup> century up to today. Coratti's essay is a critique on the colonial culture in the post-war French debate, as it questions the language of a still immature thinking in order to illustrate the theoretical perspectives for a critical Mediterraneanness, which is the

focus of our research group. Bilotti opens up a vast study on the juridical and political tradition of the republic as the most common form of government in the Mediterranean area. These premises are pivotal to interpret the *republican paradigm* as that common ground onto which a critical lexicon must be built, for the purposes of a safe cohabitation of the Mediterranean peoples.

Lo Giudice's essay argues that the normative idea of Sovereignty as an absolute, independent, and exclusive center of power emerges from the Mediterranean world and originates in a complex case of philosophical hybridity. It is the outcome of the alternation between the conception of the Sovereign as *representing* the supreme power (the indirect theory) and the conception of the Sovereign as *directly containing* that power (the direct theory). The former conception is usually associated with the history of Western political culture and the passage from Greek to Roman ideas of public authority. The latter conception is typically associated with the understanding of supreme political power found in Eastern culture, as exemplified in Persian kingship and the Byzantine theocracy. Lo Giudice aims to show how the modern concept of sovereignty has emerged from a mixture of these two conceptions. In fact, the early philosophical structure of sovereignty in both its monarchical and its democratic versions can be summed up in the notion of secularized transcendence.

Just starting from this notion of secularized transcendence, in his essay Magri asks himself whether the genesis of Sovereignty from the Mediterranean legacy gives us the hope of sharing today the values of democracy, political freedom and secularism. His answer is dubious: in fact, he emphasizes that a *certain* idea of "subject" and a *certain* idea of political autonomy were born together, in a philosophical, theological and legal tradition that is proper to Christianity; since Islamic traditions do not have the conceptual tools to elaborate *those* ideas, they cannot but arrive at democratic praxis in different, endogenous ways. After all, that democracy that today the West recognizes as its own is the democracy required by the free capitalist market: and it no longer needs either the subject or a secularized transcendence.

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