

INTERVIEW WITH BARIS CAYLI MESSINA

Baris Cayli Messina is associate professor of Criminology at the University of Lincoln, in the UK. He is also one of the editorial board members of *The Sociological Review*, which is a world-recognized journal in the field and the oldest sociology journal in Britain; a steering committee member of ECPR Standing Group on Organised Crime; a peer reviewer for book projects and proposals for reputable publishers such as McGill-Queen's University Press, Edinburgh University Press, Temple University Press, Cornell University Press, Routledge, Palgrave Macmillan, and Brill as well as a regular reviewer for journals such as *The Sociological Review*, *Sociological Inquiry*, *Cultural Anthropology*, *Journal of Historical Sociology*, *Gender & Society*, *International Political Sociology*, *Crime, Law and Social Change*, *International Journal of Law, Crime and Justice*, *Feminist Criminology*, *Critical Criminology*, *International Journal of Communication*, *Ethnic & Racial Studies*, *Violence & Victims*, *California Italian Studies Journal*, *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*; *Criminology & Criminal Justice*. He serves as a founding member of *I.S. Med. Interdisciplinary Studies on the Mediterranean*. Among his many publications are the recent "Breaking the Silence on Femicide: How Women Challenge Epistemic Injustice and Male Violence" in *The British Journal of Sociology* (2022) and *Environmental Injustice and Catastrophe: How Global Insecurities Threaten the Future of Humanity* (2023).

Q. This year has been particularly abounding with fires, unbearable hot temperatures (according to *The Guardian* 3 June 2023, "The Mediterranean basin is a global heating hotspot. While the world is now about 1.1C warmer than it was in the 1970s, the region is already up 1.5C and on course for 3C by the end of the century"), extreme floods and flash floods (in May, the Italian region of Emilia Romagna experienced some deadly cases), earthquakes (the horrible earthquake that struck Turkey and Syria in February). What are your thoughts on the reasons and the impacts that all of this is having/will have in the Mediterranean region?

A. Climate change has rendered the Mediterranean region vulnerable to various climate change-related hazards such as heatwaves, droughts, wildfires, and extreme weather events. These hazards have not only caused significant damage to the natural environment but have also had severe social and economic consequences for the communities in the region. One of the key impacts of climate change in the Mediterranean is the increase in temperatures as well as the intense rain. The region has been experiencing rising temperatures, leading to more frequent and intense heatwaves. These heatwaves have had severe health implications, especially for vulnerable populations such as the elderly and children, as well as in poor neighbourhoods where the local infrastructure is not designed to be resilient to extreme climate conditions. They have also had significant economic consequences, as heatwaves impact agriculture, tourism, and energy systems.

Another major impact of climate change in the Mediterranean is the changing precipitation patterns. The region is witnessing shifts in rainfall distribution, with some areas experiencing more intense and prolonged droughts while others face increased flood risks. The recent intensive rains on September 6-7, 2023, resulted in serious infrastructural harm in Greece and Istanbul. These changes in precipitation have had adverse effects on agriculture, water availability, and ecosystems. Droughts have resulted in water scarcity, affecting agricultural productivity. On the other hand, increased rainfall intensity has caused flash floods and landslides, causing damage to infrastructure, and posing risks to human lives.

Climate change has increased the frequency and intensity of wildfires in the Mediterranean region, which we have bitterly witnessed in the summer of 2023 in Sicily, Greece, Turkey, and Spain. Hotter and drier conditions, combined with strong winds, have contributed to more severe and widespread wildfires. These wildfires not only pose significant risks to ecosystems and biodiversity but also threaten human settlements and infrastructure. They have caused the displacement of communities and had long-lasting impacts on the affected areas.

Addressing the challenges posed by climate change in the Mediterranean region requires a multi-faceted approach. It involves implementing measures to mitigate greenhouse gas emissions and reduce the region's contribution to global warming. It also requires adaptation strategies to enhance the resilience of communities and ecosystems to the changing climate. These include measures such as sustainable land and water management, improved infrastructure planning, early warning systems, and community-based approaches to disaster risk reduction.

The Mediterranean region is experiencing severe impacts from climate change due to its unique geographic position. Yet it is also important to emphasize that the main reasons for these heatwaves are directly related to globalisation, uncontrolled economic growth, the severe impacts of neo-capitalism, and the unjust distribution of wealth in the world. The increase in temperatures, changing precipitation patterns, and more frequent and intense wildfires are posing significant challenges to the communities in the region. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive efforts to mitigate and adapt to climate change, ensuring the well-being and resilience of both human and governance systems in the Mediterranean.

Q. We know that you have recently published a fascinating volume on environmental catastrophes. What are some of the topics covered in the text? Could you give us a summary?

A. *Environmental Injustice and Catastrophe: How Human Insecurities Threaten the Future of Humanity* has been recently published by the leading German publisher, De Gruyter. There were limited scholarly outlets reflecting the views of academics and practitioners in the fields of the humanities and social sciences. This is how I aimed to bring scholars from different disciplines such as philosophy, history, cultural studies, political science, sociology, and art together to address this increasingly important topic by bridging the humanities and social sciences. The book explores the role of power relations, social structures, and cultural contexts in perpetuating environmental injustices. It emphasizes the need for interdisciplinary collaboration and social change to address these challenging issues.

The eight chapters in this book examine human and environmental insecurities in which disasters, various forms of violence, catastrophes, and environmental risks have plagued our planet on multiple levels. In daily life across different regions, environmental injustice has manifested itself similarly, albeit with different rhythms, and the most vulnerable communities have been those at the bottom of the social stratum. The book expands our inter-disciplinary understanding of environmental injustice and global insecurity by focusing on the disasters and hazards that threaten our lives and the future of humanity. Different chapters in the book pay attention to the importance of factors created by humans, the global forces of non-state institutions, as well as the organization of society and the state both economically and politically.

The chapters in the book delve into various case studies and theoretical frameworks to provide insightful analysis and recommendations. Col-

leagues examine topics such as the impact of climate change on indigenous communities, the role of social movements in addressing environmental injustices, the politics of pollution and waste management, and the implications of environmental disasters on public health. By bringing together scholars from diverse disciplines, the book aims to foster a deeper understanding of the complex dynamics of environmental injustice and catastrophes. It encourages readers to critically uncover the underlying causes and consequences of these issues, as well as explore potential solutions for a more just and sustainable future.

I believe that *Environmental Injustice and Catastrophe* is a timely and important contribution to the field of humanities and social sciences. It sheds light on the urgent need to address environmental injustices and the insecurities they create for individuals, communities, and the planet as a whole.

Q. Are you optimistic or pessimistic about the future, particularly for the Mediterranean peoples?

A. The Mediterranean region has a rich cultural heritage and has made significant contributions to history and civilization. From influential thinkers like Plato and Hypatia to renowned artists like Vincenzo Bellini, the region has produced some of the world's most important scholars and artists. Its geographical position has also made it a central hub for trade and commerce. However, the region's natural beauty and fertile lands have also made it a target for colonization and competition between ruling forces. Throughout history, the Mediterranean peoples have experienced the hardships of foreign invasion and colonisation. Unfortunately, in the current social and political climate, the region faces new challenges such as the severe impacts of climate change, socio-economic decline, and migration issues.

Migration has led to tragic consequences, with the Mediterranean Sea becoming a graveyard for those who have been forced to flee their homelands due to war, conflict, and violence. Economically, the countries in the region have struggled in comparison to their North European counterparts. Despite these challenges, I choose to be optimistic about the future of the Mediterranean region and its peoples. As scholars, we should pay attention to the social, political, and cultural issues at hand and work towards finding sustainable solutions. By addressing these challenges, we can create a better future for the next generations and transform the Mediterranean region to serve as a model for other regions. The Mediter-

anean region should take pride in its cultural heritage and contributions to history. While it faces numerous challenges today, there is hope for a brighter future. By addressing social, political, and cultural issues, the Mediterranean peoples can pave the way for a more sustainable and prosperous region.

Q. If one can speak of solutions, could you share your insight on possible tips to better the circumstances?

A. A neglected issue is the lack of self-confidence of the communities in the Mediterranean regions. And there are serious social, economic, and political reasons why the inhabitants of a heavenly-looking region may find their circumstances to be quite dramatic. In order to tackle the low self-confidence of peoples in the Mediterranean region, it is crucial to address the underlying issues. One of the main reasons for people's pessimism is the corruption and clientelism that are prevalent in many Mediterranean countries. This erodes trust in the political system and hinders social progress. By working towards eliminating nepotism and consolidating a culture of lawfulness, the region can create a more transparent and accountable governance structure.

Another key aspect is promoting socio-economic development, particularly in regions with a poor economic record. By investing in these areas and creating opportunities for growth, the people in these regions will have more hope for their future. This includes focusing on improving the health and education systems, which are important pillars for development. Additionally, creating an environment that encourages young people to stay and contribute to their own countries is vital. Currently, many young individuals dream of working and living in North European and North American countries due to the lack of opportunities and limited prospects in their home countries. This brain drain demoralizes the people and hampers progress. By providing better job prospects and fostering an environment that supports the aspirations of young people, the region can retain its talented individuals and benefit from their skills and dedication.

I believe that achieving a sustainable future for the Mediterranean region is possible if concerted efforts are made to address corruption, promote socio-economic development, invest in health and education systems, and create opportunities for the younger generation. These solutions not only offer a better future for the people in the region but also contribute to the overall prosperity and well-being of the Mediterranean region as a whole.

Q. You define yourself as a British-Italian-Turkish scholar. Do you see any differences in approaches from the citizens and governments of these three different countries regarding the environmental injustices incurred in recent years?

A. In Italy, environmental injustice is particularly prevalent in the Campania region, where the mafia has been involved in the illegal dumping of toxic waste. This problem has been ongoing since the late 1980s and has resulted in serious health and environmental concerns for the local population. In Turkey, the issue of environmental injustice is even more severe. The country has a poor track record in terms of human rights and civil society suppression. This makes it difficult for environmental activists to raise awareness and take action against such injustices. Forest fires are often followed by the construction of hotels, indicating a disregard for environmental regulations in Turkey. The UK, on the other hand, has a relatively better record in terms of environmental protection. However, the Brexit process introduces risks as the strong environmental regulations mandated by the EU can potentially be weakened or changed by politicians. This highlights the need for continued attention and vigilance to ensure that environmental protections are not compromised. While environmental injustice exists in various forms across different countries, it is particularly serious and widespread in Turkey, followed by Italy. The involvement of both state and non-state actors, such as politicians and mafia groups, contributes to the persistence of these injustices.

Q. Any last word of wisdom?

A. Embrace the vastness of the Mediterranean's rich cultural tapestry, for its shores contain enduring tales of civilizations and the flow of history. As readers and scholars of Mediterranean studies, keep in mind that understanding this rich and diverse region requires empathy, an open mind, and a profound appreciation for the interconnectedness of its people. Seek not only to decipher the past, but also to illuminate the complexities of the present, fostering dialogue and unity across its shores. May your pursuit of knowledge in this field be fuelled by insatiable curiosity, and may you inspire others to walk the path of understanding, paving the way for a better future in which the positive aspects of the Mediterranean's heritage are celebrated and cherished by serving as a source of inspiration and a model for other regions and peoples in the world.