

## Introduction

### *The “Mare Nostrum” Belongs to Everybody*

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The movie *Alexander* starts with the image of a huge mosaic, representing the Mediterranean basin centred on its central-oriental part, off the coasts of the Gulf of Sirte, between Greece, Middle East and Egypt. On the mosaic it is readable the writing “Mediterranean Sea”, in English. It is a fabrication of history that – like in other cases, such as the final scenes of *The House of the Spirits* and the demonstrations against the Pinochet’s dictatorship in Chile – reproduces in English what is written in other languages: Greek in the first case, Spanish of South America in the second. But it is also, legitimately, a process of appropriation of a space, the Mediterranean, that for centuries has been representing a fertile crossroad of knowledge and trade, exchanges, as well as a tragic core of economic interests and bloody conflicts. Nowadays it is the theatre of the routes of desperation of people who escape from hunger and tries to overcome the “liquid border” between an atrocious death and the hope of a better future.

This part of the world, between North and South, between Europe, Asia and Africa, that shall be again able to elaborate its own autonomous thought, like when it was the centre of prominent civilizations, can turn into a resource.

A part of the world that includes the southern Atlantic coast of the continent. It is in interesting to note what Orlando Ribeiro, one of the major Portuguese geographers and intellectuals of the 20th century wrote about the Mediterranean. After saying that this sea has always appeared as one of the most ancient and constant features of the globe’s physiognomy, its shores woke at an early stage to civilization that during centuries developed around this interior sea. It was by the intercourse with this area, that the rest of Europe improved its ideas and believes, so that afterwards she was able to spread them all over the world. This author claims that this very small piece of the earth’s surface played one of the most important roles on the globe’s and humanity’s History (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 19).

As far as Portugal is concerned, Orlando Ribeiro quotes another 20th century Portuguese author (Pequito Rebelo), who wrote that Portugal is by nature, at the same time, Mediterranean and Atlantic, because of its location. In fact, Orlando Ribeiro completely agrees with this view and in his opinion the Portuguese territory has the same characteristic aspects of the riverine countries of the Mediterranean, with which Portugal is connected by flagrant and deep affinities. However, due to the country's geographical position the climate is already influenced by the influx of the Atlantic, making it more moderate and humid (Ribeiro, 2011, p. 63).

Finally, in a book entitled *O Problema do Mediterrâneo*, published in 1943, the author, Jorge Alarcão, speaking about the geographical, economic, political and intellectual complex, that is the Mediterranean, wants to show that the mutual incomprehension between the peoples does not derive from any geographical fatalism unsurmountable by human will and that the great stages of mankind's are coincident with the fall of great geographical barriers. The Mediterranean is seen as the cradle of western civilization, as well as the most fecund communication link between the western civilization and all the others (Alarcão, 1943, pp. 7-8).

Franco Cassano, in order to define the geographical, mental and cultural field of his "meridian thought", writes that it is «quel pensiero che si inizia a sentir dentro laddove inizia il mare, quando la riva interrompe gli integrismi della terra (*in primis* quello dell'economia e dello sviluppo), quando si scopre che il confine non è un luogo dove il mondo finisce, ma quello dove i diversi si toccano e la partita del rapporto con l'altro diventa difficile e vera» (Cassano 2003, pp. 5-6). And he puts an essential issue when states that the separation between "meridian thought" and the whirlwind increase of the accumulation, that is more and more a victim of its own acceleration – an essential feature of contemporary history, as highlighted by Massimo Mazzetti (1969), – aims not only to «custodire forme d'esistenza diverse da quella dominante su scala planetaria», but also to «tutelare la stessa modernità dal suo avvolgimento in una spirale senza ritorno (...), darle generosamente la 'chance' di avere un freno a bordo, di poter ricavare al proprio interno delle catene selettive diverse da quelle vincenti e capaci di bloccare il feticismo dello sviluppo» (Cassano, 2003, p. 7).

We do not want put the issue of a "happy degrowth", in the meaning proposed by Serge Latouche (2007), even if this problem fits into the question of the Mediterranean, of the development models of the coastal countries, of the hetero-direction of economies and productions of goods that redistribute wealth to the privileged few and increase poorness, hunger and, indirectly, the flows of desperate people towards richer regions. We believe, on the contrary, that it is necessary to give a different meaning to the space and the time that we are living, where the border has been, in most cases, a place of encounter, exchange, contamination. This would represent a different order of values, a different hierarchy of rules, but also a rediscovery of a common history – sometimes even tragic – of this part of world between the Mesopotamia and the Pillars of Hercules, from the Southern shores of the opulent Europe to the Northern shores of Africa. The Mediterranean

bathes three continents, which is an unique case in the world; it has seen the birth of three monotheistic religions, has been birthplace of great civilizations and of the modern thought, from the Greeks onwards.

The aim of this book, indeed, is re-reading the history of the Mediterranean basin starting from a double interpretative key: sea and border. In order to avoid possible misunderstandings it is good to clarify the sense of these two words, as the sea – and the Mediterranean in particular – is itself a border.

The starting point is to re-read the past of the Mediterranean and to move the observation point from the land to the sea aims. This perspective wants to carry out a de-construction and to start the cancelation, step by step, of the consolidate ethnocentrism of our analyses, in the sense given to the word by William Graham Sumner (1906). It aims, in other words, at avoiding to look at members, structure, culture and history of local groups, other than one’s own, with reference to their own values, habits and rules, as this interpretation of the other unavoidably spurs to overestimate one’s own culture, devaluating that of the others.

Secondly, after this first approach, it is possible to build an interpretative model able to recognize what is different from one’s own culture – the alien, the stranger – not as an enemy, but simply as “different”. This process has a dedicated place: the border, namely the place where diversities come into contact, where contamination is accepted, a territory where what is different does not scare, as the otherness is lived as an opportunity, the contamination is an occasion of growth, the hybrid is the rule. The border, indeed, is not the furthest limit to reach, but a new point of departure. This “place” is necessarily a “liquid” border, permeable, sometimes violent: the sea. We would just like to remind the Canto XXVI of the *Inferno* of the Divine Comedy: the Canto of Ulysses, who continues his journey beyond «quella foce stretta / dov’Ercule segnò li suoi riguardi, / acciò che l’uom più oltre non si metta» (vv. 107-109). After the Pillars of Hercules - behind the Sun, Dante Says – there is the unknown, «mondo senza gente» (v. 117).

### *Borders and conflicts in times of globalisation*

For this reason the present volume and the Centre that has promoted it want to focus on the Mediterranean, starting from the words borders and conflicts. These two words can be historiographically understood as the paradigm of the rejection of the other.

The sacralisation of the borders, or even their “deification”, has been practised since the classical antiquity, in particular by Romans, in order to make them inviolable. In this way they had tried to deprive, at least ideally, the borders of the idea of removal, revocability or negation to which all human creations are subjected (De Sanctis, 2015). In particular, the relation of Romans with the Mediterranean is full of sense of geopolitical security, because they reached a complete control of the “Mediterranean lake”, so as to they could consider it the *Mare Nostrum*, as it was included

into the empire and the borders were moved to its edges (Canfora, 2009). In the passage from the XX and the XXI century, after that scientific literature has long discussed the “eclipse of the sacred”, we see an «imprevisto ritorno (...) nelle varie forme, suggerite dall'accidentalità del percorso storico» (Ferrarotti, 2002, p. 230).

What is outside borders is the other and, quite often, the enemy, who is dangerous for the “sacred motherland”. Therefore the borders become the ideal place to build and enclose identity and to make contraposition; violence is the tool to defend one's own land or to extend borders, in the name of a superior form of civilization; who dies for defending his motherland or for affirming its supremacy becomes the hero, who shall be reminded and venerated by the future generations. And this is the same for all people living on the borders and participating in the conflicts.

Our history and that of the others is marked by this logic of contraposition. It is the history of the building of empires; the history of the assault to the goods of the others. Just think to the violent pillaging of Africa, accelerated after the Berlin Conference on Congo of 1884-1885, that imposed a complete European dominion over the continent. Economical interests, will power, political, social and strategic elements are at the root of the European intervention in Africa (Hobson, 1902), so as to the current research no longer believes in the unity of the phenomenon but in a number of imperialisms, more or less different one from another, arisen in the context of different links, competitions and interactions (Speitkamp, 2007).

It is advisable to reverse the perspective from which we observe sea and land, but also present and future, and the concept of “civilization” itself. It is not usual to observe the coast from the sea, as Carl Schmidt (1954) reminds, because our categories of space and time come from the land and consider the sea as the horizon, the extreme infinite, the unknown. The popular tradition and the “common sense” are full of expressions that locate on the land the certainty of existence, the solidity of what is built on the rock, unlike not only the sea – instable element – but also the changing and fragile border between sea and land constituted by the beach. Cassano argues that «l'incontro di terra e mare non è l'idillio che ricompono: esso non è quiete, ma la difficoltà di stare in un solo luogo, non è il ritorno di identità semplici, ma la scoperta che *dopo lo sviluppo*, ritornano utili risorse che si erano gettate via con sprezzo dai finestrini».

The Mediterranean, as highlighted by Braudel (1949), is not even a sea, but a complex of seas, enclosed among jagged coasts, full of peninsulas and islands; its water is mixed with the land, its coasts are marked by olives and grapes; a sea of farmers that share, according to the French historian, its history with that of the land.

A place, physical and ideal at the same time, in which different communities and societies coexist, sometimes in opposition among them, and where the invention of tradition (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) more and more dangerously becomes an “unnatural nature” of clash of civilizations.

In this regard, Anthony Mohlo (2002, pp. 29-30) effectively summarises the “sense” of the Mediterranean Basin: «Il mondo mediterraneo si offre come un punto di osservazione ideale per studiare il problema di come comunità che apparten-

gono a religioni, lingue, culture, etnie e tradizioni diverse possano e riescano ad interagire reciprocamente nel tempo. Poche aree del mondo possono eguagliare la densità storica, l’eterogeneità etnica e religiosa e la complessità dell’interazione sociale che, in conseguenza dell’alto grado di vicinanza e della mobilità geografica, sono emerse nel mondo mediterraneo».

By overturning the view land/sea, indeed, it is possible to determine different perspectives and a different relation with the other, which is an indispensable operation, mainly under the cultural point of view. Alphonse Dupront – developing the thought of André Aymard and presenting it at the XII Congress of historical sciences in Vienna in 1965, in place of the great historian died the previous year – centres his reflection on the concept of “acculturation”, understood as the movement of an individual, a group, a society and also a culture toward another culture. This movement produces a dialogue, an encounter, a mixture, but more often a clash and a showdown (Dupront, 1965). Think to the insertion of western culture in indigenous societies or to the interrelations among groups considered “civilized” and groups perceived as “primitive”. Acculturation is still now an ambiguous words, but in many cases it has represented a process of forced assimilation of a culture by another, through violent conquest and political dominion.

From this point of view it is possible to build a different historiographical sensibility and to re-read, through a different interpretation of the concept of border, the history of the Mediterranean – and of the processes of the acculturation that involved it – not only as a conflict, but also as incorporation of stranger cultural elements by a people through the relations with a close people. It is a different interpretation of the word “acculturation” and, as is evident, is opposed to the violent concept of subjugation.

The need of researching one’s own borders and to re-writing one’s own history, starting from the elements of contamination and hybridization, appears more and more necessary because of two phenomena that involve our contemporaneity. First, the pervasiveness of the mass media and, mainly, of the internet and social networks, that entails homologation at global level and, at the same time, reduces distances and time, redefines the meaning of words such as “public” and “private”. Secondly, the extraordinary and dramatic movement of population started in the wake of the fall of the Berlin wall (Corti 2003, pp. 105-135) and – more interesting for our considerations – now coming from the areas of crisis that encircles the Mediterranean: from the Middle East to the Eastern Africa, to the Equatorial Africa, to the Sahel.

A response to these phenomena and to the problems induced by them can be the construction of walls and barriers, re-proposing the borders as impassable limits and searching new forms of sacralisation. Think to the xenophobic and ultra-nationalist reactions of the Hungarian leader Viktor Orbán and, more in general, to the anti-immigration movements arisen in Europe. Alternatively, there is the way – that is much more difficult and, in some respects, can strike fear – of accepting the challenge coming from the presence of the other.

*Borders and conflicts in the Mediterranean basin*

Also this book originates from the first International conference organized by the ICSR Mediterranean Knowledge in October 2015 on the topic of borders. Like the first volume of the series, the work does not include only the papers presented by historian on that occasion, but also proposes the essays of other scholars that contribute to widens the range of the topics, of the methodological approaches, of the historiographical interpretations. The chapters combine the analysis of single problems with a reflection on the historiography concerning the Mediterranean basin, with a long-term perspective (from the middle age to the most recent times). If ideas, research, analysis and conclusion could be triangulated, it would be easy to observe that the prospective angle move from that individual of each scholar to a common and shared point, that is no longer located on the land, but in the middle of the “Internal Sea”. This is, indeed, the aim of the ICSR Mediterranean Knowledge: rethinking the borders between Europe, Asia and Africa, as well as «the boundaries means rethinking the current idea of Europe and the Mediterranean. Only from such a rethinking can the foundations for the construction of a real and different European identity be laid. The knowledge and cultural values of the Mediterranean can be the driving force to overcome the impasse of which Europe cannot free itself» (Benguerna M. & Mangone E., 2016, p. 7).

The book is organized in three parts that structure the reflection on borders and conflicts around three topics: the historiography on the idea of Mediterranean; the cultural aspects in the historical and historiographical interpretation; the combination of the words “conflicts” and “borders” realized in the wars that have caused bloodshed in the area.

The book starts with a chapter by Mohieddine Hadhri, Emeritus Professor at the University of Manouba (Tunis) and now Professor at the University of Qatar. Hadhri reflects on the concept of Mediterranean, both as a bridge between the Arab-Muslim Orient and the European-Christian Occident and as a space of East-West cultural confluences. Hadhri argues that, contrary to the tendentious theories of Samuel Huntington, the Mediterranean has always been a place of exchanges and proximity between Orient and Occident, both during the ancient eras - the Egypt of the Pharaohs, the Phoenicia (motherland of the princess Europe kidnapped by Zeus and brought to Crete) Greece, Carthage, Rome – and during the Middle Age through Spain, Sicily and Levant, which were real bridges between Islam and Christianity. Actually the examination of history easily shows that the Mediterranean has been a cradle of civilizations and a crossroad of cultures. There is no doubt that the dawn of the third millennium, with its tragedies, misunderstandings and intolerance, contributes to give a greater role to culture, among the nations of the Mediterranean and in the world.

The first section of the book collects chapters on the Mediterranean borders between pope Gregory the Great and Fernand Braudel, thus analysing the problem of the borders during the centuries.

The chapter of Claudio Azzara (University of Salerno), titled *Rebuilding a Lost Unity. Pope Gregory the Great, the Empire and the Regna in the Mediterranean Space of Early Middle Ages*, considers the very articulated international relations of Gregory the Great. The pope, indeed, was at the same time leader of the Christianity and a political man engaged in a continuous diplomatic action toward the emperor of Constantinople and the kings of the *barbarae nationes*. Taking into account important works of the pope (mainly the *Regula Pastoralis* and the *Register epistolarum*), Azzara provides a short, but clear, framework of the international relations and of the thought of the pope, also proposing a discussion about the different interpretations of the papacy of Gregory the Great.

The second chapter, by Luca Zavagno (Bilkent University di Ankara) is titled *Islands: not the Last Frontier: Insular Model in Early Medieval Byzantine Mediterranean, c. 650- c. 850* and focuses on the byzantine historiography. The author highlights that the great Mediterranean islands have been often regarded as mere peripheral additions to the Byzantine heartland and on the different interpretation given, for example, by Fernand Braudel, according to whom the system makes up a coherent human environment in so far as similar pressures are exerted upon them, making them both far ahead and far behind the general history of the sea.

Author of the third chapter of the section, titled *From Permeable Frontiers to Strict Border Divisions: The Geostrategic Construction of the Mediterranean on the Ruins of the Ancient Narrow Seas* is John Chircop (Mediterranean Institute of Malta). In his work Chircop underlines that by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, rival Western European powers – particularly the British and the French – projecting their imperial strategies/operations in the region, came to construct homogenised (unidimensional) geostrategic representations of the Mediterranean Sea. These ascending Eurocentric Mediterranean vistas accompanied the Western industrial powers’ financial, commercial and colonial projections, legitimising the complete dislocation and devastation of the various, overlapping, ancient narrow-sea complexes as that in the Central Mediterranean. Against this background, he will direct attention to, and build on, that historical literature which engages with these issues in order to at least reconstruct *the central Mediterranean narrow-sea nexus*.

The second part of the book “Borders and conflicts between culture and history” examines the issue under the cultural point of view, focusing on the relations/conflicts present in different areas of the Mediterranean. The section includes four chapters.

The first, written by Elisa Vermiglio (University “Dante Alighieri” of Reggio Calabria) is titled *A fertile border: the Mediterranean in Sicily. Ethnic Components and Social Stratification in the Sicilian Urban Realities of the Late Middle Ages*. Vermigli explores the different urban realities of Sicily between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries, as a result of the historical layers of the dominations that alter-

nated (sea as a battle vehicle) and of the shopping immigration (sea as a culture and economics vehicle). A particular attention is paid to the major port cities, now border towns, now military outposts, now a vehicle for trade of people and goods, highlighting how the sea has conveyed short and long-range migrations and shaped the *facies* of the territory.

The article by Massimo Siani (University of Salerno), *From the Middle Ages to the Modern Age. The "Royal City" of Cava: Power and Privileges in the Formation of the Borders. A Research Approach* addresses a specific, but emblematic, subject: the city of Cava de' Tirreni in the late medieval centuries. Siani shows that the political and social transformations, started between the end of the XIII and XIV centuries, have made Europe, even in the XV century, a combination of several overlapping layers, where the territory and jurisdiction hardly coincide and where any institution rarely spread over a contiguous area. Therefore will be better to study it like a mind-border or even as an identity devised by different actors. Discussing about the history of Cava in the XV century shows how both characters interacted each other, how created their identity and how everyone of these survived and contributed at the birth and growth of the Kingdom of Naples.

Maciel Morais Santos (CEAUP - Centro de Estudos Africanos da Universidade do Porto), in his work about *The Suez Crisis seen from a Minor Imperialism. Portuguese Diplomacy in Egypt (1956-1957)*, deals with the Suez crisis of 1956, as seen by a minor imperialism and analyzes the Portuguese policy in 1956-57. According to Santos, the Egyptian revolution of 1952 and the anti-colonial policies followed by the new Egyptian government did not take long to become a target for the old European imperialist powers. The nationalisation of the Suez Canal made them decide to act – some of them directly as Britain and France, others indirectly such as Portugal. The essay exploits the records of the 1956-57 Portuguese diplomacy towards the Egyptian government in several European capitals and as part of the SCUA – the international organisation of “users of the canal” (meanwhile created to sabotage the Egyptian nationalisation). It aims to show the contradictions of minor colonial power, not flexible at any of its own decolonisation processes but forced by the circumstances to be especially attentive to every subtle change of the general political environment.

The chapter by Erminio Fonzo (University of Salerno) – *A Historiographical Border. Use and Abuse of History in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*–, is dedicated to the public use of history within the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Fonzo shows that the two parties in conflict use to propose an one-sided narrative of the conflict and of the history of Palestine. Indeed history, along with religion, is an important motivator for the two contenders, as both want to be recognized as the rightful «owners» of the disputed territory, and it also serves to seek support on the international scene. The most popular media (textbooks, press, television, public ceremonies, museums) of Israel and Palestine often propose a quite biased narrative, aimed at strengthening the reasons of one side rather than to offer a fair knowledge. In that context, indeed, history and memory have immediate political consequences and

directly affect the life of millions people. Frequently scholars and historians follow this trend but in recent decades some intellectuals have analyzed in a more critical way the history of the «Holy land».

The third section addresses the topic of the conflicts – at least some of them – that have affected the Mediterranean, taking into account the combination peace/war, but also social, cultural and economic aspects.

The first chapter is *Fragile Borders Beyond the Strait. Saracen Raids on the Italian Peninsula (8th-11th century A.D.)*, by Giuseppe Perta (University Dante Alighieri of Reggio Calabria). The author highlights that the incursions of the Saracens in Italy have rarely achieved territorial gains. Yet the Saracen presence on the mainland was consistent, invasive and wide-ranging. It was not the result of a rhapsodic policy, but the consequence of political and economic conjunctures that involved the entire Mediterranean arena. Autonomous territorial entities were founded in the West as real Muslim enclaves. Apart from Bari, the Muslim presence was widespread in Campania (from Agropoli to the Garigliano river), Calabria (from Reggio to Amantea), in Basilicata (through the valleys of its main rivers) and in the north-western part of Peninsula as well. The Arab presence was not limited to mere military actions, but contributed to increase the internationality of the Italian cities.

The second article, *Conflict and Peace in the Mediterranean. Barbary Privateering in the Late 18<sup>th</sup> and Early 19<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, deals with a similar theme, but seen in a different time and from a different perspective. Jorge Martins Ribeiro (University of Porto and CITCEM - Transdisciplinary Research Centre of Culture, Space and Memory) shows that by the end of the 18th century the young independent United States, suffered attacks from the denominated “*Barbary pirates*”. There existed both European and North African privateers, although nowadays we tend only to consider the Barbary corsairs, which is true for the epoch the author deals in the paper. For the United States merchantmen, the Mediterranean was not an unknown ground, but after the treaty of 1783, by which Great-Britain recognized the independence of her North American colonies they could not count any more with the protection of the Royal Navy. The Portuguese fleet, however helped to protect both its ships and trade. After 1801, however, American policy changed and they sent war vessels to the Mediterranean which led to attacks to Tripoli and Algiers. After 1816, the corsairs ceased to be a threat to United States ships, and only a few vessels were stationed in the area for patrolling purposes until 1830, when France occupied Algiers.

Caterina Miele (Independent Researcher) dedicates her chapter on *Colonial Enclosures. Notes on War and Peace, Land and Modernity in the Italian Colonization of Libya* and shows that the Italian implemented in Libya processes of enclosures, expropriation, separation of workers from their means of production, accumulation and production of subaltern subjectivities, exploitation of natural resources. Within the colonial context of the “pacified” Libyan colony (1932-1943), “peace” is represented both as result and continuation of the war. In a short but crucial phase of the

Italian colonial rule in the Mediterranean basin, the epistemological and material conflict between colonized and colonizers was played around the notions of land and labour, so contributing to shape the final transition of the two countries to capitalist modernity but also to strengthen the imaginary boundary between the human being and its environment that characterizes the global present.

The final chapter, *Old Conflicts and New Borders: Chronicles from the Zones of the Anglo-American Landing of 9 September 1943*, by Giuseppe D'Angelo (University of Salerno), focuses on the reconstruction of the events of 8 and 9 September with a micro-historical view, reporting what happened in the places of the landing in the hours before and after the beginning of the "Operation Avalanche", with some digressions that better delineate the conditions in which the Italian soldiers operated, the local population lived and the way in which they react to a new, unexpected and dramatic event such as the armistice with the Anglo-American forces.

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