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Driving Reflections about the Mediterranean Migrations

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Abstract

The present paper refers to the general theoretical framing upon migrations and Mediterranean. It is an example of multidisciplinary view, which intertwines philosophic aspects and sociological requirements in a clearly political context. It mainly calls the attention of the reader to migrations, a topic that has ruled the history of mankind and involved all populations across the world. The current status of the migration in the Mediterranean has its roots in the history of the relations - not only economical, but also cultural and social - among the people living on the shores of this «sea among lands». Today, the ideas cultivated in the past and the exchanges among civilizations can create a situation of conflict, like is often happening, but also a fruitful encounter, making consider migrations not as a burden, but as a resource. Today, the greatest political challenges concerns the humanitarian aspects of integration of migrant population, particularly in the Mediterranean region.

Keywords: Migrations, Mediterranean, Culture, Multidisciplinary, History.

The Mediterranean is not merely geography. Its boundaries are drawn in neither space nor time. There is in fact no way of drawing them: they are neither ethnic nor historical, state not national; they are like a chalk circle that is constantly traced and erased, that the winds and waves, that obligations and inspirations expand or reduce. The Mediterranean shores have seen only the silk route but also the crisscrossing of many others: routes of salt and spices, amber and ornaments, oils and perfumes, tools and arms, skills and knowledge, arts and sciences. Hellenic emporia were markets and embassies; Roman roads spread power and civilization; Asian soil provided prophets and religions. Europe was conceived on the Mediterranean (Matvejević, 1999, pp. 7 and 10).

This idea does not appear to have been forgotten. The Mediterranean, known as *Mare nostrum* by the Romans saw the flourishing of cultures, arts, religions, philosophies. Nevertheless, today the Mediterranean “is no longer a ‘hotbed’ of dialogue but has become a battlefield for a war fought not with weapons but with ‘ideologies’ and where opponents are identified

in Us and Them” (Mangone, 2015a, p. 50). This sea is not a fact, but a process (Ruel, 1991), and it has become a place of closure and not a place of openness to dialogue, which could give an answer to the crisis of European identities and to the pro-independence pressures arisen in this historic moment (think to the United Kingdom with the Brexit and to the Catalonia). This sea of “dialogue and freedom” has become a sea of “closure and death”. Yes, because today the migrants died in the Mediterranean amount to dozens of thousands. Cassano defined the *Mare nostrum* the sea of human beings (Cassano & Zolo, 2007) as it is the place of the encounter of and with the foreigner: today the Mediterranean is a border that separates the good from the evil: in fact, in the imagery of migrants it is both freedom (the good) and “mortal trap” (the evil).

Despite this negative social transformation, the Mediterranean still plays an essential role for the promotion of pluralism, diversity and freedom, because it could transform itself into a table of peace among the West and the Islamic world and could not be just the “border” of the Southern shore of Europe. The latter, must review its relationship with the Mediterranean along with the other political and cultural protagonists living on the Mediterranean coasts, starting from the Arab people (Hadhri & Mangone, 2016). Laying the foundations for a real and concrete multicultural identity, which passes through Europe - part of the West that defines itself as “cradle of democracy” in spite of what is stated by Sen (2003) - must ease the encounter with the Other, with the awareness that only dialogue can make society open up to the re-composition of cultural differences, respecting the peculiarities of each culture.

Depuis le *Mare nostrum* unifié par les Romains jusqu'à la mosaïque contemporaine issue des empires coloniaux européens, La Méditerranée, terre d'échanges et carrefour des civilisations, est riche d'une longue histoire contrastée, faite d'affrontements identitaires aussi bien que de dialogues des cultures, d'exclusion et d'intégration, de clivages et d'interpénétrations. Dans la mesure où les échanges sous-tendent la reconnaissance de l'altérité et impliquent mobilité et circulation, mutations et changements, ils ne sauraient être replacés dans une dialectique de la continuité et de la rupture, de l'ouverture et de la fermeture, avec les risques que cela suppose pour les identités méditerranéennes, oscillant entre continuum anthropologique et fracture civilisationnelle. Qu'il s'agisse d'économie ou de droit, d'art ou de littérature, d'histoire ou de religion, la Méditerranée est un laboratoire

privilegié pour une réflexions sur les processus dynamiques à l'œuvre dans les échanges" (Bernard *et al.*, 2016, pp. 5-6).

The social problem is not constituted by the difference, which is ineradicable, but by the meanings associated to this difference: indeed, often the "We" strengthen by defining negatively the Other and this process is particularly significant when individuals stand "in defence of our own world" (Mangone, 2015b). If otherness is an unavoidable dimension of reality, as it establishes processes of identification and recognition, we must promote a reflection on the fact that "difference" cannot be a place of collision, but a basis for a culture of tolerance and respect, also because of the continuous migration flows in the Mediterranean Basin.

Back to the recent history, and although the Mediterranean has a well-defined cultural and historical foundation, World War II created in the region a silent source of political instabilities. Greece and Turkey in the Balkans and Iran in the Middle East should act as barriers to the progress of URSS and the Arab nationalism, not to despise the role of Israel slowly assuming such a task as well. With time, the rise of nationalistic conflicts became evident (of which the case of Cyprus was an example) decreasing the possibilities of a peaceful coexistence amongst the different ethnic groups. Meanwhile, one of the most important steps versus a major step of stability was the integration of some Mediterranean countries in the European concept. Italy, first, Portugal and Spain and finally, Greece, have contributed to change partially some political and economic values that were part of continental Europe (Sappelli, 1995). With this step the Mediterranean region accentuated its gapping conditions and the lack of homogeneity between institutions and structures remains as an obstacle to sustainable development.

Having brought some light into the historical conditions of Mediterranean recent past, it is not surprising that political and economical instabilities have played a major role to determine the delay in many countries development and the consequent desire of populations to search for better living conditions. During the past decades, migration within the Mediterranean region has been accentuating, either because of explicit war or because of increasing poverty, thus stressing the economic wellbeing of

recipient countries but and above all, letting the poorer areas deprived of human resources, capital and hope. Migrations are a consequent of the recent past and the strongest determinant of the future in the Mediterranean region.

Migrations, therefore, are a field of operational work that entails to have a clear framework to calibrate properly the interventions, also trying to interpret the future trends. With reference to the latter action, extremely delicate because it influences the policies on immigration, a choice is starting from a non-ethnocentric reading of immigration, taking into account the diverse territorial areas and individual regions: think, for example, to historic events such as the Arab spring, which have changed flows, channels and even countries of emigration; but also think to a little studied subject, which allows to have an “objective reading” of the other point of view: the social representation of people and society of destination built by the immigrant.

Indeed, if the empirical studies on the point of view of native people on foreigners are numerous, there are few studies that consider the point of view of the foreigner as an actor that, on the one hand, faces the need to keep a tie with the culture of origin, within the resources and constraints provided by the context, and, on the other hand, needs to open up to the values of the society of destination (La Barbera, 2015). The observation of the point of view of the foreigner matches the exigency to join a paradigmatic shift, more and more accepted by researchers, about the way to understand the process inclusion and integration, not seen in a unilateral way, according to the optic of hosting without including and integrating, but, on the contrary, valorising the point of view of who is in conditions of vulnerability and, on the basis of his cultural references, tries to integrate in the Country of destination. In this way, the proposals of the *Action Plan on the integration of third country nationals* (European Commission, 2016) are confirmed: integration is an “evolutional process” and the integration policies - aimed at removing barriers that prevent to live and work in the Member States and to integrate in the hosting society - must be elaborated according to an approach connected to the local realities, so as to ease the access to services, education, learning of language and fight to discrimination.

The formal breaking down of geographical borders that characterizes the global society - think to the Schengen agreement in Europe, at least until the latter has been involved in a wave of terror (Mangone & Pece, 2017), started from the attempt at the Jewish museum of Bruxelles in 2014, considered the first attack of the Islamic State (ISIS) in Europe - should ease the movement of population in voluntary or less voluntary, peaceful or less peaceful, way, but today *de facto* it does not happen (think to the construction of the border between Hungary and Serbia in 2015). This provokes different dynamics, in which different cultures are “forced” to meet and coexist, permeating the social and cultural processes of both societies of origin and those of destination.

In the last years, for example, with the process of Europeanization carried out at economic level as well, many resentments arose toward the Southern Europe, often identified with the Mediterranean, forgetting that the South of Europe and the Mediterranean represents, on the one hand, the gate of Europe (from the Southern shore) and, on the other hand, the bridge between two continents, Africa and Europe. The weight of the Mediterranean component and of the closeness of North-African countries is relevant in the whole Southern Europe and, under several respects, this creates many differences with the rest of Europe. The European identity and its geography must necessarily take into account among institutional divisions of the individual nations and within the nations themselves (see the Brexit in the United Kingdom, the pro-independence movement in Catalonia in Spain and, to a very limited extent, in Veneto in Italy), but also the complex divergences of politics and economy, religion and culture, which constitute real cleavages, often within the borders of the Nation State (Eder & Giesen, 2001).

The problem of cosmopolitanism (Beck & Grande, 2007) and of a cosmopolitan Europe is not the Mediterranean, also because civilizations, religions and philosophies, juridical codes and political systems, including democracy and even science, were born in this sea. All the values and knowledge born in the Mediterranean Basin (South of Europe, North Africa and East) can represent the strategic elements to overcome the European crisis that seems to exist since the establishment of the common Europe. They could also become a thrust to review the policies and provide a solid

basis for the rise of a real common cultural heritage of Euro-Mediterranean knowledge and to transmit it to the future generations.

«Only a Europe able to see in the Mediterranean its cradle and to head again those shores for too long delegated to its forgotten periphery, could really find its “natural” (under the historical-geographical point of view) centre of gravity, that sea to look not only with nostalgic regret for the lost centrality in the history of the world, but with the proud awareness to be a “great space” able to play its own role of neutralization of conflicts, preventing the risk of a clash of civilizations» (Resta 2012, p. 104).

The December 2017 data of UNHCR (2018) show that more than 166.000 migrants landed on the shores of Italy, Spain, Greece and, to a very small extent, Cyprus; some 3.000 of them are lost at sea (Unhcr, 2017). The Mediterranean, however, can assume an essential relevance in promoting pluralism, diversity and freedom, by becoming a place of dialogue and encounter.

It is thus desirable that the Mediterranean may become “reflective knowledge” that promotes the building of relations with the environments of life of individuals and among individuals, easing the encounter between North and South and between East and West.

Culture, indeed, is not an absolute, like identity: both are dynamic. The advantages coming from having a culture depend on the process of rebuilding of that culture, and the dominant discourse of culture as an immutable heritage is only a subcomponent (often conservative) of a process (Buruma & Margalit, 2004; Said, 1978).

It is evident that what we call multiculturalism is a new way of understanding and defining the cultural dynamics: a multicultural system is not the result of a multiplication of the number of “other cultures” present in a territory, but a new way of facing the simultaneous presence of cultural diversity on a daily basis (Hannerz, 1996).

The great challenge that society and social systems face with difficulty (and, among them, we find the European society and those of the Mediterranean basin) is choosing if they should constitute “welcoming systems” or “non-welcoming systems”. Pluralism, and particularly the ethnic-cultural pluralism (Savidan, 2009), is not new in the history of mankind and the reflections on the process of identification and recognition involved in the integration of the “Others” focus on cultural

aspects. Particularly, the debate started by Taylor (1992) and Baumann (1999) on multiculturalism as a new way to understand culture and its dynamics is still appropriate for today, although multiculturalism, in many countries, has provoked negative effects such as the further fragmentation of society (Donati, 2016) and a cultural relativism that favours the separation among different cultures.

The debate is thus based on the search for a new way of life that may ensure justice and equality for all groups (diverse for race, sex, religion, etc.), even if some of them could be defined, according to the common sense, as a culture different from that in which they live. Multiculturalism is a new way to understand cultural dynamics and it must not be applied only to the others, but also to themselves.

Culture, indeed, is made by different elements, which allow to strengthen identity and sense of belonging to the group, but identity is not possible without “recognition”: we do not mean the “policy of recognition” proposed by Taylor (1992) because, if we analyzed such a conceptualization, its limit would unequivocally emerge. Multiculturalism, from which interculturality derives, cannot attribute equal dignity and value to only “selected cultures” and recognized for a long time, but such a dignity must be attributed to all cultures, otherwise we would fall in a more sophisticated and intellectualized form of ethnocentrism, but, in substance, not different from the violent forms of ethnocentrism.

Laying the foundations for a real and concrete interculturality certainly requires considering what happened in the past, what is happening now and what will happen in the future in the Mediterranean. Amartya Sen (2003), Nobel laureate in economics, after the shocking attempts of 11 September 2001 in New York, wrote that the support to pluralism, diversity and freedom is part of the history of many societies and this global legacy is a valid reason to question the idea, often reiterated, that democracy is only a Western system and, therefore, only a form of Westernization. This explains very well why the Mediterranean assumes an essential relevance in the promotion of pluralism, diversity and freedom.

This sea, which is always able to turn the collision in encounter, the *pólemos* in *diálogos*, can provide an answer to the cultural and identity crisis. The legacy of the Mediterranean is a complex combination of ideas, images, feelings cultivated for centuries and still cultivated in this “sea (not ocean)

among lands”; which was called *Mare nostrum* by the Romans and which could again have called in such a way if we interpret *nostrum* as a reference to human beings. A new idea of the Mediterranean can be built with the help of an approach going beyond the classical oppositions: Europe/Mediterranean, North/South, West/East, etc., and able to configure a new dimension of social space, in which the individual lives their daily experience and build the social reality.

In this respect, Edgar Morin, in a conference held in December 2013, underlined how often the Mediterranean is only considered a border (very labile, but in any case, a border between the South of Europe and Africa), rather than a bridge between two lands:

Les pays du sud européen, particulièrement de l'Arc Latin, n'ont pas élaboré une conception commune pour une politique méditerranéenne.

L'Europe ouverte tend à redevenir l'Europe du rejet. Au moment où avait commencé le processus d'intégration européenne de l'Islam, posthume comme en Espagne qui réintègre son identité, son passé maure, moderne comme en France et en Allemagne avec les immigrés maghrébins et turcs, voilà que revient le vieux démon européen : refouler, exclure l'Islam. L'offensive Serbe en Bosnie n'est pas seulement un accident, elle est la poursuite d'une reconquête.

Partout, le partenaire nécessaire est de plus en plus considéré comme l'adversaire potentiel et cela de chacun des quatre côtés de la Méditerranée : nord sud et est ouest.

La Méditerranée s'efface comme dénominateur commun.

Nous pouvons aujourd'hui espérer, sans certitude aucune, en une progressive pacification au Moyen-Orient, notamment par l'accession de la Palestine à l'indépendance nationale, mais le trou noir géo-historique y demeure [...] Pourrions-nous sauver la Méditerranée ? Pourrions nous restaurer mieux développer sa fonction communicatrice ? Pourrions-nous remettre en activité cette mer d'échanges, de rencontres, ce creuset et bouillon de culture, cette machine à fabriquer de la civilisation? (Morin, 2013).

The diverse values and knowledge born and developed in the Mediterranean Basin (South of Europe, North-Africa and East) can represent the strategic elements to overcome not only the crisis of the European identity's but also the conflict of cultures presaged by many mass media. This Mediterranean legacy (ideas, images, feelings, etc.) would configure a new dimension of social space: this is the “Mediterranean approach” or the “Mediterranean mind”, as stated by Barbieri (2016). Three are the ideas from

which to start to put again the Mediterranean in the hearth of the political agenda, but also of the studies of researchers, and to make this sea the main tool for affirming an European identity based on cultural pluralism: a) the open concept of Mediterranean, cultivated and strongly supported by intellectuals such as Camus (1956) and Matvejević (1999); b) the “longue durée” approach to the history of human civilization, which puts aside the contrapositions and rethinks the process of modernization and secularization; c) the new concept of territoriality that is directly tied to the changes in geo-politics and international relations. Rethinking to the “Mediterranean mind” along with the political and cultural actors living on the Mediterranean shores, starting from the Arab peoples and from the representations that they have of the Mediterranean, is necessary.

This “Mediterranean mind” that intercepts social needs and creates new form of social relations - turning in a common practice - allows to rethink the present idea of Mediterranean and Europe: only starting from such a reflection building a real and different European identity is possible. The Mediterranean cultures “must” build the propulsive push to overcome the impasse that involves all Europe; they are the fruitful thrust to review the European policies (mainly those on integration) that allow a new future to emerge from the legacy of different cultures.

In this publication we are opening a major reflection about the Mediterranean region. The chosen topic Mediterranean and Migrations, edited by Teresa de Noronha and Emiliana Mangone searches for an historic and politic justification for the actual migrant phenomena which represents a challenge from the present but that derives from the political past.

The first and introductory chapter, by Teresa de Noronha and Emiliana Mangone, refers to the general theoretical framing upon which this volume is built. It is a great example of multidisciplinary view, intertwining philosophic aspects with sociological requirements in a clearly political context. It mainly calls the attention of the reader to migrations, a topic that as ruled the history of humankind and touched all populations across the world. Today's greatest political concerns focus on the humanitarian aspects of integration of migrant population, in particular in the Mediterranean region, as one of the greatest challenges in the world.

In the second chapter, by Anna Maria Brancato, the author aims to demonstrate how the settler colonial concept of the transfer of the native

population, immanent in Zionist thought, has been translated into narrative and underpinned by historiography. Moreover, it was further investigated on how the official historiography succeeded in remaining predominant over the time since the creation of the state of Israel in 1948, influencing the political and social perception of the Palestinian issue all over the Western world.

Gabriella D'Ambrosio and Veronica Pastori wrote the third chapter, relating some indicators for the investigation of interculturality in Italy. The goal of this study was the analysis of migration's phenomenon in Italy from 2007 to 2014. By focusing the attention on four specific dimensions of the daily life such as: citizenship, education, labour market and marriage, the process of integration of migrants in Italy has been followed. This research emerges from the European migration context and calls for a real policy of inclusion, based on dialogue and interaction among autochthonous and foreigners.

A final, fourth chapter by Fisseha Mehari, confronts the different roles of the civil society and international humanitarian organizations in managing refugees' crisis in the middle east and North Africa region. This is a major topic in what concerns the present global priorities and the author emphasizes how Civil Society Organization (CSO) can become so helpful in the growth and prosperity of every contemporary democratic society. This paper will historically and critically analyze efforts and works of the both of them in managing the catastrophic Refugees crisis in this region; as well as the dynamics of the region's Refugees crisis. Roles like providing humanitarian assistance and helping the refugees in building their lives in their new locality by bringing their needs to public consciousness have been critically looked at. As well as an examination of how they contribute to the international efforts propelled by the UN and their cooperation with other state and non-state actors in addressing the Refugees crisis. Their successes and challenges would be brought to light. Key emphasis would be placed on Libya, Syria and Yemen as case studies.

These reflections, which define the space of movement within the intercultural relations in the Mediterranean, allow to propose some deductive observations - not real conclusions - in order to draw the theoretical and methodological challenges that the scholars of cultural process have to address in future: a) the Mediterranean, or better, the

countries of its Southern shore, are loss-making within the cultural relations, in spite of the efforts made in the last years; b) the consolidation of the basis of the “Mediterranean mind” passes through a deep work in the Arab-Mediterranean societies and their élites, toward a concrete and open North-South dialogue; c) the great challenges of these first decades of the XXI century for all the Mediterranean and European people is synchronizing their own cultural legacy within the globalization of ideologies, economies and cultures in order to preserve a Mediterranean cultural heritage as a basis for the identification and recognition process.

One of the goals is the reduction of the distance between the Mediterranean countries (both European and African) and those of the rest of Europe. Such a distance grew in the wake of the modernization process of the 1950s and of the post-colonial policies of the last century (Young, 2001). Because of this process, the communities distorted and emptied, incorporating the exterior forms of modernity in a passive or imitative way, without activating path of internal development in the process of growth and valorisation. We are not in conditions to give an answer to the question if this happened because of a weak, non cultivated, identity or, rather, because of an identity lost for the habit of considering the culture tailored by others (colonizers) as their own culture; in any case working together (politicians, researchers, public and private actors, citizens, etc.) is necessary and urgent to rebuild the communities and allow them to face the confrontation within them and the encounter-collision on the outside. The final target would be exactly achieving a better perception of the Other, rediscovering the Other within a new path of intercultural dialogue, sincerer, dispelling misunderstandings, rusting passions and opening the door of hope to a better future of the Mediterranean.

Finally, and as a concluding remark, a major topic that this publication was not able to develop, thus remaining as a challenge for a next volume, is related to the dynamics of growth and development of the region, for which knowledge production and its management are crucial. Under an economic point of view, knowledge is an asset to be produced and used. Supplying knowledge, or producing it, remains as the most efficient tool for social awareness and progress, for sustainable development, equitable rights and political participation of migrant population as well.

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