

Does the 'Mediterranean' still exist?

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The scientific concept of the Mediterranean was mainly developed by the French school (Reclus and Vidal de la Blache) and the German geographical tradition (Ben Artzi 2004; Dupres 2002; Claval 2007), followed later by the vidalians, who influenced Braudel's work.

The scientific 'invention' of the Mediterranean built a unified and unifying narrative of the Mediterranean. The latter has been firstly broken by the disruptions of 'genre de vie' stemmed out from droughts lands cultivation and nomadic herding, gradually dissolved by a (lack) of modernization path with common connotations, even differentiated, in Southern Europe in the South shore (Claval, 2007).

The myth of a unitary Mediterranean essence produced by a vernacular knowledge has been challenged and discredited because it refers to a geographical imaginary which has been coalesced after trips mainly practiced by (Northern) Europeans, and also by their paintings. It entails a geographical imaginary sedimented in the culture of the Northern European *Grand Tour* (Howard 2007). Therefore the Unitary Mediterranean may represent a mirror of the Europeans or 'Western' travelers only.

The 'invention of the Mediterranean' has been challenged because of its mythical essence, a quasi fiction, a geography of permanencies which have been not detected also by the 'South'. Therefore the essentialist interpretation on the Mediterranean cannot be accepted and discredited as Mediterraneism, a peculiar form of Orientalism (Herzfeld 1984, 2005).

Moreover in many cases it presents the features of a post-colonial sensitivity, a post colonial sea (Chambers 2008). This construct is also echoed in the rhetoric for a Euro-Mediterranean cooperation stemmed from an 'EU-ropeization' of the Southern Mediterranean and Middle East (Jones 2006, Jones A., Clark J. 2008, see also Celata 2012).

At the same time, the colonial imagination has not vanished; it continues to shape popular Mediterraneism (from Club Med to the Mediterranean diet revival).

Indeed, it is not a coincidence that neo-liberal discourse and practices run through Mediterranean urban and regional planning, simultaneously adopting Western models *and* adapting Mediterranean stereotypes.

By affirming the interests of oligarchies and elites, including local ones, neo-liberal planning disintegrates social, human tissue and thick locations, exacerbates economic inequality, and subsequently increases globalization and people sufferance by deterritorialization and dispossession.

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Actually in this frame it can be challenged and contested also a rhetoric from the so called South anti the so called North and West when it appears not adequately critically self-reflexive about the own societal non inclusive or discriminative paths in self-government and politics.

On the other hand, the classical Mediterranean geography à la Kaiser, pointing out the discontinuities and, in different terms, the post 9/11 rhetoric and recent political turmoil and conflicts emphasize blocks and clashes of civilizations that do not properly account for the countless streams, meetings, cruises, contact points, and at a large the porous nature (the *chora*) of the Mediterranean. It is a geographical object that is not reducible to easy interpretations in an essentialist immutable framework (Giaccaria, Minca 2012). The conceptual framework should thus pertain to a geography of threshold rather than to a geography of fractures (Conti, Giaccaria 1998) or better to a critical geography of a variety of power strategies and confrontation?

All this increasingly manifested in ‘urbicides’, ‘diversitycide’, masses of refugees, de-bordering, re-bordering, and cross bordering instability, inequality, pain.

In my opinion, the metaphor of mobilities and networks challenge the fixity of North-South schemes, of the Mediterranean as an immobile entity, and the paradigm of clashes of civilizations. The current emerging geographies of interconnections call for a geography more accentuate based on networks and mobilities ranging from Diasporas, Internet, FDI included Arab sovereign funds and new tendencies of exchanges, large infrastructural projects and hegemonic attempts; they suggest a delimitation of the Mediterranean Region expanded to the Gulf with new trajectories to and from the Orient.

The Mediterranean has nowadays a new centrality of interconnections Euro-Africa-East and above all a new self awareness which is not only that one of capitals (oil and élites ones) but of new arising citizenships in the Arab, Muslim world as well as in Europe and their quest for equity and justice.

Probably, it is time for a real Mediterranean Region far from the periphery vision or assumed being far from the big economic power.

The geography of Crisis in Europe and US thus anticipates a new world order(s) where networks of common people and money-power flows constitute new geographical dialectics.

An exploration of contemporary Mediterranean, having no pre-plotted routes, or bushes at this stage is based on a Ariadne’s thread that refers to general themes, or typical ones of the Mediterranean, or arising ones which appear indicatives of emerging Mediterranean geographies: a narrative and conceptual structure that digs and questions constructs of unity / fragmentation / subordination / alterity, unveiling the rhetoric of power / distinction in the Mediterranean from one side and that explores and digs new experiences based on new navigations and interconnections (Giaccaria, Paradiso 2012).

The exploration, therefore, in my setting, it must avoid the Scylla and Charybdis of a fiction Mediterranean unity and the impossibility of the Mediterranean as a category of interpretation.

On the other hand, the Mediterranean and Southern scholars have glimpsed one of the causes of the impoverishment of the representation and interpretation of the Mediterranean in the ‘imposition’ of categories and interpretive sensitivity created for other contexts. The so called Anglo-Saxon rationality and 'Western' one, and functionalism based on an idea of European and North Atlantic progress of the Modern which causes separations of production and the human, the materialist deployment of an Ego which is far from affectivity, solidarity, sense of community and belonging to a place, and that marginalizes some of the geographical expressions of alternative realities in a sort of cage (Paradiso 1998, for a review and discussion of an alternative thought on Mediterranean from the South, about Cassano, Alcaro, Amoroso

and in the debate animated by the Neapolitan Journal 'Meridione. Sud e Nord nel Mondo' ('South. South and North in the World').

Contemporary tracks (or routes) for Mediterranean geographies may suggest the idea of a horizon of view rather than a more or less cartographic account which ultimately produce cartographic 'mediterraneisms' (Giaccaria and Minca 2012). Claval explicitly points out to the horizons of people's expectations in helping contemporary geographical studies of the Mediterranean beyond the approach of development/developing (2010).

The missing point in the traditional literature on the Mediterranean lies on its 'iconographic characterization' (to use a Gottman's concept, 1966) which neglects the complexity of an interplay of spatial fixity and countless circulation à la Gottman: the iconographic characterization from a postcolonial perspective, and an orientalist approach lead to a marginalization of the Mediterranean construct and realities, an 'interpretation to Mediterranean with no 'perspective' and without appreciation of changes or appreciable changes (Campione, 1998 p. 7).

If we look at the Mediterranean only as a space, a dissonant geography is thus obvious and its diversity is mistakenly reduced in a process of 'diorthosis', a cognitive and operational approach which set the nature of things and functionality modes before realizing a proper image (Farinelli, 1998, p.58). More complicated, since a new wave of field studies is required, it is a study of flows, of *networks*, the circulation of ideas, people, finances etc that challenges the continuous representation of the Mediterranean between homogeneity / alterity, both as post-colonial imbricate site of encounters and currents (Chambers, 2008) and also as a site of new hegemonic and counter powers discourse(s) and alliances.

In my approach, the 'mobility' paradigm is explored (see par example Giulia De Spuches on the topic Diaspora, 2012, and Maria Paradiso and Massimiliano Tabusi, on the Internet and militants' networking or human mobility across Mediterranean 2012) as a stimulating approach to contemporary geographies of the Mediterranean. Contemporary geographies are created by everyday people's interethnic, intercultural, emotional interactions in places and wires. They are indeed also characterized by blockages about interethnic or inter cultures exchanges. They present and discuss initial paths of new encounters structuring North-South and vice versa but also circular ones and East-West based on personal and virtual mobility which are typified in a variety of mobilities, also circulation for origin/destination, gender, motivations, emotional geographies, impacts...

The Mediterranean thus appears as a global hot spot of confrontation, emulation, opposition, dialectics, and change. Places, flows, wires and digital TV are the loci for all this.

It seems to me that the Internet and people's spatial mobility underline a deep process of changes. A dialectic of change and healthy modernization despite evidences is under process.

