The Mediterranean Alternative

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I Reading the Mediterranean

In the opening pages of his widely cited *Mediteranski Brevjiar* (1999, orig. 1987), Predrag Matvejevic queries the very possibility of defining the boundaries and the limits of the Mediterranean: "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 nor 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" (1999: 10).

Engaging with the problem of the definition of *a*/*the* Mediterranean space today does not necessarily entail finding a 'solution' to this question but, rather, calls forth a critical reflection on the reasons why a stable and reassuring mapping of this sea has never been possible (see Minca, 2003). Indeed, the delimitation/description of the Mediterranean touches upon a broader set of issues at the core of contemporary geographical thought and practice. What this paper will try to suggest is that the Mediterranean, and in particular a specific set of Mediterranean ways of thinking about the Mediterranean space, speaks directly to some of the key theoretical preoccupations of human geography today. There is a vast literature on the Mediterranean in history, anthropology and literary studies, as well as in international relations; the literature on the Mediterranean in Anglophone human and cultural geography, on the other hand, remains sparse, also in comparison to the relevance given to the Mediterranean by geographers in other national academic contexts, in particular in France and Italy. Despite the fact that the Mediterranean is an eminently postcolonial sea, its presence in core discussions in English speaking postcolonial studies is also incredibly modest; the Mediterranean is treated more as a 'regional' subject rather than a key locus in the production of alternative modernities.

This paper aims at re-locating the Mediterranean at the centre of the theoretical reflection on the spaces of European modernities (see, for example, Mignolo, 2000). Mediterranean geographies are, we will argue, the source and the mirror of many postcolonial European geographies (see Young, 2001). We will attempt to show this by drawing from that vast field of literature, mainly in French and Italian, but also in English, that roughly speaking – and with many caveats – is often referred to as 'Mediterranean Studies'. What follows is a critical and selective review of some of that literature. In doing so, our argument is strongly inspired by three main sources: Predrag Matvejevic's philological journeys through the Mediterranean; Iain Chambers' recent theorisation of the Mediterranean as a 'postcolonial sea'; and, more in general, the Italian 'militant Mediterraneanist' literature, in

particular the critical reflections of sociologist Franco Cassano. The intent is to suggest that a deeper engagement on the part of human geographers with some of the key political and cultural questions that emerge from this rather loose (but for this no less stimulating) field of knowledge is to be recommended.

What is striking about the literature on the Mediterranean is an extraordinary (and, in our view, problematic) continuity between the popular narratives that inscribe this sea and the academic/scientific literature. These two fields of interpretation, in fact, speak to each other and influence each other in very significant ways. Such conflation is certainly not limited to this particular object of study; however, in the Mediterranean, this mutual influence tends to translate into the production of a sort of (imagined) topography that too often essentialises it as a mythical space characterised by an extraordinary spatial fixity and historical continuity.

We will contend, however, that the Mediterranean is not amenable to the *reductio ad unum* operated by the (implicitly or explicitly) positivist and/or historicist metaphors and their associated narratives that have for long 'imprisoned' its description. We will claim, rather, that the Mediterranean is a fertile ground for the exploration of 'other spaces', other spatial metaphors, transcending the mere search for boundaries and containers, and capable of recovering those very ambiguities and plurality of voices that make the Mediterranean an invaluable source of inspiration for the experience of 'alternative modernities'.

The conflation of literary elements and academic analysis on the Mediterranean instead does not allow (precisely because of the spurious nature of these discursive formations) for a clear mapping of a 'purely academic' literature on the topic. As is the case with all discursive formations, those related to the Mediterranean are bolstered at the same time by scientific considerations, historical reconstructions, but also by common-places and ontological terrains left unexplored. The task of investigating the far-reaching links between popular literature and academic production on the Mediterranean goes beyond the aims of this paper. What follows should thus in no way be read as a comprehensive review of existing academic literature on the Mediterranean. What we propose, instead, as part of our attempt to begin re-thinking the Mediterranean in geographical terms, is a brief investigation of some of the main tropes/narratives that lie at the base of each and every form of what anthropologist Michael Herzfeld has defined as 'Mediterraneanism'.

We will do so in the next section by briefly exploring the roots of this essentialist tradition and referring to a very specific cartographic way of 'writing' and imagining the Mediterranean. This is followed by a reflection on the 'invention' of the Mediterranean, especially with reference to colonial and postcolonial narratives and their related epistemologies. The second part of the paper is instead focused on some key dissonant voices in the debate, perhaps pointing the way to

overcoming any Mediterraneanist discourses and offering a 'Mediterranean alternative'. In particular, we will engage with ill-defined 'militant' literature of the Italian 'pensiero meridiano', an innovative school of thought led by Franco Cassano, and with the influence of Albert Camus' work on French and Italian Mediterranean studies.

Finally, we argue for abandoning the intellectual apparatus bound to the traditional European-humanist gaze on the Mediterranean and for embracing, rather, Chambers' call for an uprooted geography; that is, a "tentative registration of invisible histories" and of an unfolding spatiality/geography that materializes and "sets Europe and the Mediterranean moving to a diverse set of rhythms" (2008: 18). We try to envisage new ground for a critical reflection on the Mediterranean, refuting all forms of facile Mediterraneanisms and, rather, attempting to *learn from the Mediterranean* and its unstable, but exquisitely modern topologies/geographies.[i]

II Writing the Mediterranean

The above mentioned dialogue (and convergence) between the Mediterranean envisaged by popular narratives and a putative academic 'Mediterranean space' not only feeds a discursive formation exempt from any ontological consideration (in line with the Orientalist tradition), but also implies that any investigation of Mediterranean spatialities must treat the two fields together, as though they were (and perhaps really are) just two manifestations of the very same Mediterranean discourse. A critical engagement with the Mediterranean is thus urgently needed as most of the images and representations mobilised in the conceptualisation of the Mediterranean space *still today* tend to reflect long standing, essentialised interpretations (for a critique, see Jones, 2006). Michael Herzfeld (1984, 1985) has defined this essentialising tradition as a form of "Mediterraneanism". With this term, Herzfeld describes a distinct discursive formation based on, and expressed through, a specific vision of the Mediterranean conceived both as a unified space – that is, conceivable as a whole and driven by a putative centre/core – *and* as an essentialised understanding of its (presumed) natural and cultural 'fractures'; a set of discourses that represents in many ways a form of Orientalism. Dominant expressions of such 'mainstream' Mediterraneanisms tend to oscillate, indeed, between these two tropes. On the one hand, the Mediterranean is represented as a sort of *all-encompassing space*, unified by its geological and historical *longue durée*. This trope is sustained by what are often presented as the 'natural attributes' of the Mediterranean: its specificity as a 'closed sea', delimited by, and isolated from, the Atlantic Ocean, and thus a seemingly irrefutable geographical fact. Such 'geographical evidence' is often supplemented by 'cultural evidence': a product of the European humanist tradition which imagined a necessary link between the Mediterranean's physical geographies and

a distinct historical-cultural trajectory. This coming together of Nature and History, so the argument goes, has produced through the centuries a unique 'Mediterranean identity', consolidated through time and expressed within a characteristic set of 'Mediterranean landscapes'. On the other hand – and this is the second trope – the Mediterranean is presented as a conflictual and fragmented space, as a '*geographie de la fracture*' (Kayser, 1996; Bromberger, 2007). This latter trope, which often implies a somewhat negative/problematic reading of this space, is dominant in the literature that analyses the economic, political and/or social features of the Mediterranean (for instance, work analysing contemporary processes of regionalisation in the Euro-Mediterranean area – see, among others, Bistolfi, 1995; La Parra and Fabre, 2005; Rizzi, 2004;).

Although these 'Mediterraneanist' discourses may come from diverse sources, cultural roots and objectives, they nonetheless share an implicitly cartographic vision, through which the Mediterranean space is perceived as potentially mappable and open to a 'full' description. The translation of the Mediterranean into a reassuringly topographic space – whether through appeals to its natural and cultural history, or through more disenchanted (and constructivist) perspectives – leads to that which Iain Chambers (2008) terms the "calm geographies of area studies", whose banal but rigid cartographies allow for a disciplined epistemological framing and political management of that very space and its social and cultural reproduction[ii]. The discursive formations and the imaginations that depict the Mediterranean as the product of a linear history and as a container of certain 'geographical things' (for example, 'Mediterranean landscapes'), result in a number of important consequences of a political and cultural nature. First, they impose a pre-determined set of assumptions on any exploration of the 'Mediterranean space', in this way silencing or marginalising other, alternative, readings – especially those formulated by/from other (often Southern) shores[iii]. Secondly, they take for granted the existence of some Mediterranean permanencies (some 'unifying', others 'divisive'), so that any analysis of the Mediterranean space is mainly focused on the identification of the best possible representation of these supposedly latent forces, dispensing with (and, at times, entirely ignoring) the ontological stance that lies at the root of such a search. Imagining the Mediterranean as a space characterised by the presence of some permanent elements/processes that determine its identity means relying, *de facto*, on a specific grand narrative of its past and present, a narrative that often becomes the key (and sole) referent for the 'location' of this sea and its presumed cultural identity.

And yet, to write of the Mediterranean – of its past, present, and future – is to navigate through an unsettling space, as Chambers admonishes in his *Mediterranean Crossings* (2008: 5), for "the Mediterranean, as both a concept and a historical and cultural formation, is a 'reality' that is imaginatively constructed: the political and poetical articulation of a shifting, desired object and a perpetually repressed realisation" (10). What we contend is that the convergence/conflation between the popular romantic imaginary and academic literature is made possible by the construction of the Mediterranean and its peoples as expressions of a subaltern otherness. This

construction is generated by a paradoxical interplay between different (and potentially conflictual) representations of this sea that alternate narratives of homogeneity and continuity with those of heterogeneity and discontinuity. Such conflictual and contradictory narratives tend to penetrate each other, rendering the definition of *a* Mediterranean cultural space not only paradoxical, but also impossible. However, what characterizes and differentiates the genesis of Mediterraneanist narratives – as compared to the constitution of a generic Orient as an-Other, subaltern space produced by European modernity – is the presumed 'objective' existence of a geographical object called the Mediterranean. As we suggest above, the idea that the Mediterranean exists a priori, *before and beyond any of its definitions*, is based on the 'natural evidence' of its physical geographies – and on an interpretative framework that tends to essentialise and naturalise an otherwise intricate set of spatial processes and understandings.[iv] This is, after all, the implicit aim of every Mediterraneanism: to sustain, through a set of diversified (and sometimes even conflicting) representations, the belief in the existence of *a geographical object called the Mediterranean*, where different forms of proximity (morphological, climatic, cultural, religious, etc.) justify a specific rhetorical apparatus through the production of a simplified field of enquiry, otherwise irreducible to a single image.

A good example is Fernand Braudel's well-known argument that, "it is significant that at the heart of this human unit […] there should be a source of physical unity, a climate, which has imposed its uniformity on both landscapes and ways of life […] it is of great importance that the Mediterranean complex should have taken its rhythm from the uniform band of climate and culture at its centre, so distinctive that it is to this that the adjective 'Mediterranean' is usually applied" (1972: 231). Within this interpretative framework, Braudel's Mediterranean Man (sic.) – the outcome of the joint action of climate and landscape – contributes to producing typically Mediterranean *genres de vie.* The influence of French possibilism and, more generally, of French geography (in particular, the work of Paul Vidal de la Blache and Lucien Febvre) is explicitly laid out by Braudel in the opening pages of his opus magnum on the Mediterranean (1972: 17). French geographer Paul Claval, in his analysis of the understandings of the Mediterranean that emerge in Vidal's geography, notes that "The most consistent and original adoption of Vidal de la Blache's model has been accomplished not by a geographer, but by an historian: the first 300 pages of Fernand Braudel's work, *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philippe II*, give us the richest and the most nuanced enunciation of its *milieu* and of the role that it plays in history" (1988: 401)[v]. Both French[vi] (see for example Deprest, 2002; Fabre, 2000a: 43-47) and German (see Meiering, 2000: 55-63, 75-82) historical reconstructions of the genealogy of the representations of the Mediterranean underline the role played by geographers in advocating an interpretation of this sea as a physically *and* culturally unified, homogenous space. Some recent work still pays tribute to this tradition: we can point, for instance, to Norwich's *The Middle Sea* (a sort of anti-Braudelian history of the Mediterranean) that offers an eloquent evocation of the evident unity of the Mediterranean space:

> The Mediterranean is a miracle. Seeing it on the map for the millionth time, we tend to take it for granted; but if we try to look at it objectively we suddenly realise that there is something utterly unique, a body of water that might have been deliberately designed, like no other on the surface of the globe, as a cradle of culture (2006: 1).

The notion of an evident pattern of Mediterranean unity and continuity, however, is also the source *and* the result of a long standing set of common-places and popular narratives – often drawn from the romantic and travel literature of the past – regarding some eternal and recurrent characteristics typical of the hypothetical *homo mediterraneus*. Arguably, it is such narratives that laid the ground for the diffuse belief in the existence of an essentialised (and exoticised) Mediterranean 'type'/subject and a set of related Mediterranean 'atmospheres' (two themes also evident in contemporary tourist literature - see Obrador et al., 2009), celebrating these latter as a sort of pre-modern and/or late modern sensual horizon, produced by a static cartography of memory. Matvejevic makes a similar point: "Mediterranean discourse has suffered from Mediterranean discursiveness […] such are the commonplaces plaguing the literature, all description and repetition. Mediterranean oratory has served democracy and demagogy, freedom and tyranny […] 'Poetic discourse' on the Mediterranean (sun, sea, sand, etc.) [thus] tends to dissolve into kitsch" (1999: 12, 213).

A key role in the production of this Orientalised narrative was played by early modern French and British travellers, who often depicted the Mediterranean as the bedrock "simultaneously of antique civilisations and of the sublime excesses of an untamed nature" (Chambers, 2008: 33). We are, indeed, accustomed to think of the Mediterranean, at least since the 1800s, "within terms overwhelmingly established by the cultural gaze that arrives from northern Europe". The Mediterranean was the privileged destination of the Grand Tour – and remains still today, also in the eyes of contemporary traveller-reporters such as Paul Theroux (1996) – who began their journeys where (echoing Braudel) "the olive tree grows": Catalonia, Provence, the Cote d'Azur, proceeding to Italy, the rest of the European Mediterranean and, eventually, the Middle East/Levant (Chard, 1999; Roth, 2004; Tinguely, 2000)[vii].

The evocation of a nostalgic golden age that characterizes much of this literature (which often consists of an undeclared attempt to identify elements of Mediterranean unity and continuity), bears witness to the actual incapacity of demonstrating the presence of these very elements in the present and, at the same time, tends to deflect reflection on contemporary Mediterranean issues towards questions of the past. However, recalling Braudel (1972: 168-170), Chambers reminds us that "even the most generic of geopolitical definitions that seek to identify the limits of the Mediterranean (the famous palm line to the south and olive growth to the north) find their criteria superseded by the historical waves and cultural fluxes that roll outward towards the Baltic […];

eastward into the Levant and beyond; west out into the Atlantic; and south, over north Africa into the sub-Saharan zone of the continent" (2008: 39). And yet the rarefied image of the Mediterranean, disciplined by the Northern gaze, can unexpectedly open up, exposing a series of questions that, according to Chambers (and, to some extent, Matvejevic) refuse to disappear. If the reassuring trope of an aestheticised Mediterranean heritage is abandoned and we turn our gaze towards the social, economic, political and cultural characteristics of the Mediterranean's unfolding modernities, such composed and pacified images simply fall apart before our very eyes.

III Inventing the Mediterranean

It is widely accepted that what Bourguet (1998) terms *"l'invention scientifique de la Méditerranée"* dates back mainly to the 18th and 19th centuries and finds in Napoleon's Egyptian expedition a defining moment that will helps establish, in the following decades, the idea of a unique and 'observable' Mediterranean culture (Laurens, 2007). According to Chambers, the Mediterranean as an object of study is fundamentally the product of modern geographical, political, cultural, and historical classification: "a construct and a concept that linguistically entered the European lexicon and acquired a proper name in the nineteenth century" (2008: 12). Thierry Fabre (2000a; 2004), in his genealogy of French representations of the Mediterranean, identifies precisely in the Egyptian expedition and in the opening up of a new era of French colonialism in North Africa, the key starting points of the modern re-invention of the Mediterranean. Fabre, however, entirely overlooks the role played by the *voyageurs philosophes* of the 18th century (Bourguet and Licoppe, 1997), who had been enormously influential in the production of a specific Orientalist imaginary on the Mediterranean, closely bound to their search for the Greek roots of European civilisation[viii].

The study of Greece – and, in particular, of the relationship between ancient and modern Greece – becomes, in a certain phase of European modernity (especially after Napoleon's expedition) a key element in the production and popularisation of the *aporiae* upon which all Mediterraneanisms necessarily rely on. Despite the fact that the emergence of 'classical' Greece has been traditionally presented as a defining moment in the cultural contest between Europe and Asia (see Malkin, 2004), João de Pina-Cabral (1989) notes how Mediterraneanist narratives tend to ignore the 'Greeks' of the Asian and African shores while focussing, rather, on the 'deep' nature of Greek and Italian societies, since these were considered the birthplace of European civilisation. In a recent book, Thomas Gallant (2002) traces the development of the imaginaries of the British establishment during their colonial occupation of the Greek Ionian islands, noting how the dissonance between their own, actual, experience of Greece and the Classicist/Hellenistic imaginary led them to adopt tropes deriving from past colonial experiences: for instance, by representing the local population

as "European aboriginal" or "Mediterranean Irish". The mechanisms thorough which cultural and civilisational boundaries in the Mediterranean are continuously modified is also highlighted in Suzanne Saïd's (2005) engaging analysis of the European invention of uninterrupted continuity between ancient and modern Greece: the vices – lechery, laziness, treachery, cowardice, servility, the propensity towards theft and fraud – that 18th century travellers attributed to contemporary Greeks (especially as compared to the presumed civic and military virtues of their ancestors), were progressively 'Orientalised' and ascribed not so much to some 'innate' Greek disposition but, rather, to the Ottoman influence[ix]. With the Romantic turn in the 19th century, a radical shift becomes visible in European travellers' narratives: descriptions emphasising decadence and degeneration (as compared to a glorious Greek past) are gradually replaced by a "repertoire of images and common-places, always positive, sometimes nearly idolatrous" (2005: 271) that present modern Greeks as "miraculously spared by the course of history and uncontaminated by the encroachment of modern civilisation […] transformed into living aboriginal ancestors" (2005: 269). A genuine trans-lation of the categories that discipline European moral judgement of the Greeks thus takes place: re-positioning these latter as victims and, at the same time, inheritors of ancient Greece's glorious past (Guthenke, 2008; Roessel, 2002), while consigning their Ottoman rulers – "the Orientals" – to the realm of blame and condemnation:

> Far from being innocuous, all these metaphors are fraught with consequences. If the remains of the ancient Greek character are museum pieces, they have to be sheltered from corrupting influences and eventually restored. Accordingly, European travellers harshly criticize any acculturation or admixture of foreign blood which would 'pollute' even more the precious remains of pure hellenicity (Saïd, 2005: 280-281).

In this sense, the representation of the Mediterranean as a pastoral and idyllic, not-yet-modern world is functional to a "politics of humiliation" (Herzfeld, 2005: 59-63). The Mediterranean thus becomes both the origin and the contemporary theatre of European power, as Chambers argues: "in this history the Mediterranean comes to be suspended in a net woven by the objectification of alterity and the civilizing mission […] of the rest of the world. Within this frame the Mediterranean is transformed into an aesthetic and cultural measure: its very 'backwardness' and difference hold up to modern Europe the mirror of a lost world of antiquity, uncontaminated nature, and pristine origins" (2008: 12-13). In this way, an implicit but effective dialogue between fictional Mediterraneist literature and the academic (mainly anthropological) literature stigmatised by Herzfeld is established: it is enough to recall the stereotypes of Mediterranean masculinity and their central role in the production of homosexual fantasies about the Mediterranean – fantasies that contributed to the enduring connotation of the Mediterranean as space of alterity and transgression (see Aldrich, 1993; for a fictional account see Aciman, 2008), as well to the well-established anthropological literature on the *homo mediterraneus* centred on gendered accounts of 'honour and shame' (Gilmore, 1991).

This strange dialectic between homogeneity and alterity (which, as we noted above, is at the origin of the modern and colonial conceptualisation of the Mediterranean), re-emerges in many contemporary representations. Both in the institutional relationships between the European Union and the Mediterranean partner states (Bistolfi, 1995) and in the related academic literature, the Mediterranean tends to be represented as a space of delayed modernisation, lacking 'Western' standards in many fields, if not a potential threat to global order (this is especially evident in recent work in International Relations focusing on questions of terrorism and (in)security). The post 9-11 debates on the relationship between Islam and Europe have, in many ways, revitalised (and legitimised) an image of the Mediterranean as the theatre of real and imagined clashes of civilisation; an image that has resurfaced with a certain degree of regularity in times of crisis over the past centuries.

It is important to note, however, that the process of European integration has served to 'shift' the internal boundaries of the Mediterranean yet again: Greece, Italy and Spain are now, for all extents and purposes, accepted as full members of the 'Western' club and are no longer the object – if not marginally, such as in the Anglo-American anthropological literature focussed on the concepts of 'shame and honour' (see Gilmore, 1987) – of Orientalist imaginations. The 'shadow line' of alterity and (sub)alterity has clearly shifted towards the South, and is increasingly marked by the (presumed) confrontation between the West and the Islamic world. Contemporary representations of the Mediterranean space embrace, accordingly, a vast array of processes and manifestations: from the relationship between the Muslim world and democracy, to questions of gender and human rights, to images of economic backwardness and institutional corruption, to the demographic explosion and the impact of illegal migration between the two shores.[x]

What is particularly interesting for our argument, nonetheless, is the way in which representations stressing the heterogeneous, if not outright conflictual, nature of the Mediterranean space, are often bound to a reflection on the 'homogeneous' elements of the Mediterranean; elements of commonality and continuity that can help pacify emergent tensions. The belief in the existence of a unifying principle here is seen less in terms of a spontaneous convergence between natural environment and *genre de vie* (a convergence erased by the emergence of an increasingly 'fractured' geography) but is rather envisioned as the result of a conscious project, an artificial construction, the outcome of a set of 'Mediterranean policies' aimed at the realisation of a Euro-Mediterranean macro-region.

In a recent article, Alun Jones' (2006: 420) critical analysis shows how "since the 1960s, the Mediterranean has been cast as the most problematic flank of Europe", with the EU's attempts at

regulating the Mediterranean space structured around three key pillars: first, the establishment of "a common Euro-Mediterranean area of peace and stability based on respect for human rights and democracy (political and security partnership)"; secondly, the creation of "an area of shared prosperity through the progressive establishment of a free trade area between the EU bloc and the Mediterranean partners and among the Mediterranean partners themselves"; thirdly, the promotion of "greater understanding between cultures and rapprochement of the peoples in the Mediterranean region as well as to develop free and flourishing civil societies". Most EU Mediterranean policy since then has, accordingly, been focussed on achieving the necessary conditions for long term political and economic stability in this "bitterly contested and fractured geopolitical space" (ibid.). From this perspective, the idea of an 'Euromediterranean' space can be interpreted as a genuine project of Europeisation (Jones and Clark, 2008) of the southern shores, consistent with the lasting tradition of Mediterraneanism. Indeed, the cooptation of Arab elites into the Barcelona process (Pace, 2005) echoes similar debates between different political factions in Egypt at the beginning of XX century[xi] (Al-Kharrat and Afifi, 2000).

Such imaginations reflect, yet again, an essentialised understanding of the Mediterranean, seen as a space that, beyond the contingent heterogeneity of its economic, political and cultural processes, can be 'returned' to a 'natural' historical and geographical continuity. Recent work on Euro-Mediterranean cooperation in many ways reflects this idea: Michelle Pace's *The Politics of Regional Identity*, for instance, opens its reflection on the 'regional' nature of this space with the same eternal question about the possibility of a holistic reading of the Mediterranean – should we think of the Mediterranean as a 'region' (comprised of sub-regions) or rather as an 'interface' between other regions (2005: 1)? The practical policy implications of this dilemma are, of course, enormous. But the 'regional' argument is also one that drives many contemporary historical accounts, including Horden and Purcell's influential *The Corrupting Sea*, presented both as a history of events *in* the Mediterranean but also a history *of* the Mediterranean – that is, a history of this sea as a whole and a history of events that cannot be understood without reference to the Mediterranean in its 'regional' entirety (2000: 2-3, 9).

What these approaches tend to overlook, however, is the fact that the Mediterranean is, by definition, *a postcolonial sea*, that is, an "intricate site of encounters and currents" (Chambers, 2008: 32) where "the complex geopolitical, cultural, and historical space of the Mediterranean concentrates our attention on the question of cultural crossovers, contaminations, creolisations, and uneven historical memories" (2008: 28); it is a space that "proposes a multiplicity that simultaneously interrupts and interrogates the facile evaluations of a simple mapping disciplined by the landlocked desires of a narrow-minded progress and an homogeneous modernity" (2008: 25). The *mediterraneisme de la fracture* tends to rely, instead, on a set of essentialised understandings and to present its 'cadre' as something substantially immutable – a vision that resembles, in many

ways, the cultural 'containers' imagined and celebrated in Orientalist colonial rhetoric and Romantic literature.

What we would like to argue here is that both the narratives that embrace an olistic reading of the Mediterranean and those that support the idea of a heterogeneous space driven by conflict tend to merge within an interpretation of this space as something 'other' compared to the geographies of Western Modernity; a space that can, accordingly, be colonised/modernised by forcing it into a European cultural, political and economic institutional framework; that can be colonised/preserved as an Orientalised realm marked by exoticism and reverie.

IV The Mediterranean Alternative

1 The limits to Mediterraneanism

As we suggest above, every form of Mediterraneanism tends to rely on the belief in the existence of a 'real thing' called 'the Mediterranean' that can be fully described – and whose borders can be, in some way, traced. The spatial containers produced by such topographic understandings are thereafter filled with pacified/pacificatory or, alternatively, conflictual economic, political and cultural geographies. We also noted, however, how difficult (if not impossible), it is to define shared Mediterranean borders; as Matvejevic has perceptively argued "its coasts are the confines of the sea, but not of the Mediterranean" (1999: 17). Borders in the Mediterranean are, by definition, mobile and uncertain, closer to the idea of a 'horizon' than that of a cartographic projection; indeed, the actual experience of these borders reveals all the limits and contradictions inherent in any topographic approach. Mediterranean 'cultural thresholds' escape definition, with each and every attempt at drawing a stable and 'organic' map of its cultural geographies inescapably doomed to failure (see Chambers, 2008; Magris, 1996; Matvejevic, 1999; Minca, 2003).

Nonetheless, our points here do not necessarily translate into a wholesale rejection of the Mediterranean as an interpretative category; quite the contrary. The Mediterranean, whether we like it or not, *is always with us*, either as a discourse or as a project; its practices and imaginations impose themselves as a concrete space of mobility and contact, as a both real and metaphorical space where diverse perceptions of otherness are brought together. Despite its divisions and fractures, despite its tourist kitsch and sentimental historicism, despite even its apparent marginalisation from the grand designs of (Anglophone?) Western geopolitics, despite the impossibility of 'containing' it within certain and fixed

borders, despite all of these constraints, the Mediterranean remains a key referent for those who, from its shores, learn to define themselves through the experience of its uncontainable liquidity.

To begin our reflection on the possibility of actually-existing Mediterranean alternative modernities, we return to Predrag Matvejevic, whose work engages both with this sea's cartographies as well as with its mythical horizons. The Mediterranean, he argues, "will not abide a scale incommensurate with itself" (1999: 11); each and every attempt to reduce it to our analytical categories is doomed to failure or, even worse, to making us suspect that, since it cannot be contained within our existing categories, *it might not exist at all*. But what we will argue – following Matvejevic – is that which does not exist (and cannot exist), is but *one* measure of the Mediterranean; the definitions and the routes that we select while navigating *depend entirely on the shore from which we depart* and the *voyage we choose to undertake*:

> Let us begin our tour of the Mediterranean by choosing a point of departure: coast or scene, port or event, cruise or narrative. Eventually the place of embarkation will be less important than the place of destination and what we have seen and how (Matvejevic, 1999: 7)

Yet although the Mediterranean is the product of the experience of its real and imagined navigation, modern cartography has attempted to translate it into abstract code, into a two-dimensional and universalised description. As Marco Antonsich (1998: 100) suggests, far from an innocent move, such attempts to essentialise the 'Mediterranean' within closed and stable categories should be understood as inherently geopolitical, aimed at reducing the cultural complexity of this sea into a simple and ordered scheme. A similar argument is made by Pina-Cabral who notes that "the notion of the Mediterranean Basin as a 'culture area' is more useful as a means of distancing Anglo-American scholars from the populations they study […] than as a way of making sense of the cultural homogeneities and differences that characterize the region" (1989: 399).

According to Herzfeld, "being 'Mediterranean', however changeable its semantic load, is also not without a heavy load of entailments. For those powers for which the Mediterranean has traditionally been the zone of terrorist states, the mafia, and 'amoral familism', all of these characteristics interlinked as the basis of a vicarious fatalism, the two elements of aggressive touchiness and indolent non-involvement are 'proof' of supposedly innate characteristics that justify paternalistic and oppressive responses" (2005: 60). What is often defined as the 'Mediterranean exile' (that is, from mainstream Western modernity and its cartographic logic) is thus translated, on the one hand, into a general weakening (or even disappearance) of the Mediterranean's role in the production and the universalisation of Western knowledge; on the other, into new forms of reactionary Mediterraneanism that recover the 'Mediterranean

experience' as a sort of pre-modern residual, or as a local reaction against globalised forms of modernisation. As Chambers (2008: 14) argues, "the seeming neutrality of archaeology, the study of the classics, and the modern disciplines of geography, anthropology and historiography collated the contemporary sense of the Mediterranean as an integral part of Europe in a deliberate act of recovery and resurrection (2008: 14). Such 'expert discourses' – in which differences in economic, political, and cultural power are flattened out "in the 'neutral' syntax of 'information'" (2008: 142) – became a way of containing (and neglecting) the very porosity of 'Mediterraneaneity' (that which Chambers describes as "the liquid materiality of the Mediterranean" (2008: 5) and its unavoidably transitional (both in terms of *translation* and *transit*) nature. In order to recover this transitional and unstable geography, we take up Italian sociologist Franco Cassano's call to stop "thinking of the South in the light of modernity, but rather [begin] re-thinking modernity in the light of the South" (2000a: 3). In the section that follows we focus, therefore, on the cultural and political implications of an increasingly important field of enquiry dedicated to the idea of a 'Mediterranean alternative'.

2 *Militant Mediterraneanism*

In recent years, the idea of an 'alternative' Mediterranean modernity was the focus of important debates in both France[xii] (Balta, 2000; Fabre, 2000b, 2007; Fabre and Sant Cassia, 2007; La Parra and Fabre, 2005[xiii]; Latouche, 1999;) and Italy (Barcellona and Ciaramelli, 2006; Cassano, 1996, 2000a, 2000b; Cassano and Zolo, 2007; Goffredo, 2000; Guaraccino, 2007; Prete, 2008). A key focus of these discussions have been the 'deep roots' of all Mediterraneanisms: that is, the aestheticised narratives that, in line with the Orientalist tradition, attempted to colonize and marginalize the Mediterranean. Franco Cassano (2000a), for example, has suggested that the cognitive marginalisation of Mediterranean modernity and its cultural expressions from the Western mainstream is one of the main causes of the strategic 'forgetting' of the Mediterranean – but also of the gradual impoverishment of Western culture, dominated as it is by an Anglophone protestant ethic and rationality and its universalizing pretensions. He argues that the apparent 'exile' of the Mediterranean perspective from the rubric of the Modern has also entailed the loss of what he terms '*il ragionevole*' (the 'reasonable') and the imposition of a series of categories that, on the one hand, reduce the Mediterranean to simply a 'backward space', a not-yet-modern geography, on the other, constrain it within spatial containers imposed by an Atlantic and Northern European vision that sees it, at best, as a domain of leisure (a space forcibly frozen within a pre-modern or even anti-modern dimension) or, at worst, a terrain of geopolitical struggle for other, far-off actors and interests.

Decisions regarding the Mediterranean are therefore often taken far from – and frequently without – the Mediterranean: this generates frustration and resentment, as highlighted by Matvejevic in one of his lectures at the Collège de France (1998: 26). What Cassano (2000a:

10) argues is that within this set of representations, the Mediterranean "exist only in terms of negative difference compared to the Modern, they are placed in the territory of the not-yet-there, in the eternal limbo of the transition to modernity". This is what Herzfeld intends by a 'politics of humiliation' (2005: 59) and identifies as the main consequence of the persistence of Mediterraneanist stereotypes. This is a view embraced by Cassano as well: "when the gaze of the Other becomes dominant, a process of progressive 'disaggregation' takes place; that is, a process of the demolition of the self, a process by which you begin to conceive of yourself as a typographical error" (2000a: 10). The aim of 'militant Mediterraneanism' (of the sort espoused by Cassano but also the above-mentioned French school), notwithstanding the diverse 'gazes' that tend to converge within it, is precisely that of rethinking Mediterranean unity through a critical – sometimes even radical – reconsideration of its histories and its geographies. What is at stake in this operation is the attempt to overcome every possible reification of the Mediterranean, and its reduction to an homogenous space driven by narratives of marginality and alterity produced by mainstream Western understandings of a universal and all- comprehensive experience of modernity. Danilo Zolo suggests that "*unity* here does not mean cultural uniformity or monotheism. On the contrary, it [also] entails the inclusion, within the Mediterranean cultural 'pluriverse', of Arab Islamic civilisation" (2007: 18). This critical attitude is echoed by Chambers when he argues that "to elaborate a sense of place, of belonging – that of the Mediterranean – ostensibly implies the registration of borders and limits, as a minimum, between an inside and an outside, between the cultivated place of the domesticated scene and the strangeness and disturbance of the external world. [And yet] the foreign, the repressed, the unconscious manage to infiltrate the domestic space; the door is porous" (2008: 41-42).

'Militant Mediterraneanism' forces us to come to terms with the Mediterranean's everpresent ambiguities, confronting these with our core representations of the Mediterranean (and of Modernity). Authors in this tradition argue that no critical discourse *on* and *of* the Mediterranean is possible without engaging the colonial and Orientalist imaginaries within which the modern Mediterranean was born and popularised. Yet although this literature undoubtedly offers a refreshing theoretical apparatus that allows us to begin rethinking the Mediterranean in new terms and according to other, Mediterranean-based, perspectives, it often ends up relying (in quite problematic fashion) on some of the key figures traditionally tied to literary and aestheticised Mediterraneanisms.

Indeed, some 'militant Mediterraneanist' literature runs the risk of essentialising the Mediterranean itself, opposing a radical "*pensiero meridiano* (southern thought)" (Cassano 1996, 2000a) to a presumed rigid Northern rationality. Although the criticism of all forms of Mediterraneanism that marks this tradition is well founded, some of the literature cited above often continues to reify the Mediterranean as 'an-Other-space', centred on a presumably autonomous cultural subject and political agenda. On the one hand, then, authors like Cassano and

Goffredo reject all monolithical definitions of the Mediterranean that envision it as a subaltern entity and that erase its complex and composite nature and its always partial, unstable (and sometimes even conflicting) subjectivities. On the other, however, the radical ideological confrontation between the North and the South, between a presumed Mediterranean 'reasonability' and Northern European rationality, that this literature often takes for granted, leads to potentially new forms of latent Mediterraneanism.

By presenting the Mediterranean as an 'alternative' space/project – as the title of their path-breaking book *L'alternativa Mediterranea* (2007) suggests – Cassano and Zolo hint at a potential space of cultural homogenisation [xiv]. Their otherwise welcomed emphasis on the multiplicity, complexity and plurality of the voices that make up the Mediterranean, when framed in the terms of a 'political alternative' risks producing novel forms of Occidentalism and freezing the Mediterranean into yet another essentialised (albeit sophisticated) image. The role assigned to the writings of Albert Camus in both the French (see Fabre, 2000b; 2007) and Italian approaches (see Cassano, 1996: 81-108; Zolo, 2007: 13-14) is indicative in this sense. In the next section, we interrogate the ways in which Camus' '*pensée du Midi*' (most clearly articulated in the final chapter of his 1951 *L'homme révolté*), has influenced both the work of Thierry Fabre (and of the journal he directs whose title is drawn directly from Camus) – and that of Cassano, the leading Italian theorist of the '*pensiero meridiano*'.

3 *Albert Camus: la pensée du Midi and the ambiguities of Mediterranean(ism)*

Camus' *pensée du Midi* (Chabot, 2002; Mattéi, 2008)) is part of a broader tradition that provides, in many ways, a 'parallel' reading of the Mediterranean and an alternative to the colonial genealogies of Mediterranean studies. Inspired by a number of utopian thinkers and strongly influenced by the ideas of Saint-Simon (for a synthesis see Heffernan, 1999; also Temine, 2002), this tradition becomes first consolidated within the so-called 'Algiers school' (Talbayev, 2007), subsequently intersecting with the experience of the *Cahiers du Sud* (in particular those published in 1943), the journal founded by Jean Ballard and published in Marseilles between 1925 and 1969 (Freixe, 2002; Paire, 1993). The conceptualisation of the Mediterranean suggested by this literature is explicitly opposed to understandings popularised in European totalitarian and authoritarian circles during the 1930s that specified the Mediterranean as the space of the *latinità*: a vision strongly supported by the Italian Fascist regime (Fogu, 2008; Nelis, 2007; Rodogno, 2003) but also many of its French sympathizers such as Louis Bertrand and Charles Maurras (Fabre, 2000a; Lindenberg, 2000).

In *La culture indigène. La nouvelle culture méditerranée*, his inaugural lecture given at the *Maison de la Culture* in Algiers in February 1937, Camus would forcefully argue, indeed, that:

> The Mediterranean lies elsewhere, in the very denial of Rome and the Latin genius. It is alive, and wants no truck with abstractions. […] What we claim in the Mediterranean is not a liking for reasoning and abstractions, but its physical life – the courtyards, the cypresses, the strings of pimentos. We claim Aeschylus and not Euripides, the Doric Apollos and not the copies in the Vatican (1967: 190-191).

In his *L'homme révolté*, he presents a similar argument:

> But the youth of the world always find itself standing on the same shore. Thrown into the unworthy melting-pot of Europe where, deprived of beauty and friendship, the proudest of races is gradually dying, we Mediterraneans live by the same light. In the depths of the European night, solar thought, civilization with a double face, awaits its dawn. But it already illuminates the paths of real masters (1953: 267)

In celebrating Mediterranean moderation and 'the reasonable', French and Italian 'militant Mediterraneanists' echo, in many ways, the conclusions of *L'homme révolté* (Camus, 1953: 246-268). It is important to note, moreover, that Camus' 'Mediterraneanist' anti-authoritarianism was not the sole such voice in those years; we can recall, for instance, the work of Simone Weil comparing ancient Roman conceptions of power with the Greek humanistic tradition (Weil, 1960).

Nonetheless, Camus' Mediterranean vision (and that of his intellectual milieu) was not without its ambiguities. Whilts we do not have the space here to engage with the extensive debate surrounding the relationship between Camus' work and French imperialism – an issue addressed by Edward Said in *Culture and Imperialism* and, thirty years previously, by Albert Memmi[xv] - it is important to note, at least, the variety of Orientalist and Mediterraneanist common-places that abound in Camus' work:

> The Mediterranean, an international basin traversed by every current, is perhaps the only region linked to the great ideas from the East. For it is not classical and well ordered, but diffuse and turbulent, like the Arab districts in our towns, or the port of Genoa and of Tunisia. This triumphant taste for life, this sense of boredom and the

> weight of the sun, the empty squares at noon in Spain, the siesta, this is the true Mediterranean and it is to East that it is closest. Not to the Latin West. North Africa is one of the few countries where East and West live close together. And there is, at this junction, little difference between the way in which a Spaniard or an Italian lives on the quays of Algiers, and that of the Arabs around them. The most essential aspect of the Mediterranean genius may perhaps spring from this historically and geographically unique encounter between East and West (1967: 191-192).

In their celebration of a particular *genre de vie*, of slowness, of 'the Arab' and of an essentialised Orient more broadly, Camus' representations of the Mediterranean negotiate a fine line between Mediterranean enchantment and Mediterranean kitsch. Equally ambiguous is Camus' exaltation of 'temperance' – a recurrent theme both in some militant Mediterraneanist writings as well as in some post-development literature, a contact zone that finds in the work of French anthropologist Serge Latouche its clearest manifestation (1999). Crucially, this is also a theme that pervades Cassano's reading of Camus' first book, *L'envers et le droit*, with its evocation of an impoverished (but happy) youth, immersed in the Mediterranean's sunny waters (1996: 98-101). In particular, in Cassano's (1996: 102-105) emphasis on the question of honour in Camus' work, it is easy to see the traces of many common places regarding the cultures of 'honour and shame' favoured by Mediterraneanist anthropology (and famously critiqued by Herzfeld, 1985, 2005).

In many ways, Camus's work evokes the mythological and utopian dimensions of the Mediterranean (see Davison, 2000; Haddour, 2000); it anticipates the 'Mediterraneanist aesthetic' that will indelibly shape the imaginary of this sea in the 20th century, marking both popular accounts and scientific/academic production (as we suggest at the beginning of this paper). This is also extended to understandings of the political: in his lecture entitled *La culture indigène*, Camus argues that "each time that a doctrine has reached the Mediterranean basin, it is always, in the resulting crash of ideas, the Mediterranean which has remained intact, the region which has overcome the doctrine" (1967: 190). Indeed, in drawing a distinction between Italian Fascism and German Nazism, he confronts 'a certain Mediterranean *amabilité*' of the former with the fanatic rationality of the latter. The explicit hostility towards Northern Europeans and their 'predatory attraction' for the Mediterranean expressed by some militant Mediterraneanists draws on just such understandings.[xvi] It is an attitude, however, that runs the clear risk of reducing an otherwise valuable attempt at rethinking Europe and Modernity to simply a Mediterranean variant of Occidentalism (Buruma and Margalit, 2004).

Camus' work is also useful, nonetheless, in illustrating the nature of another fundamental element of militant Mediterraneanism and its attempt to provide a 'Mediterranean alternative'. It is the question of the translation/transition of a distinct form of individual humanism into collective

political resistance. In *L'homme révolté* Camus writes that "it is the common ground on which every man bases his first values. I rebel – therefore we exist" (1953: 28). However, as noted by Ellison (2009: 109-113), Camus' later work (in particular *La chute* and his auto-biography *Le premier homme*) is marked instead by an inescapable tension between the individual subject and all forms of collective action. This is a tension that also marks the work of Fabre, Cassano, Zolo and other militant Mediterraneanists: an often uncritical exaltation of slowness (sometimes even poverty, or at least 'temperance') and of a set of 'moral values' often centred on the self-realisation of the individual. In this sense, it is important to recall that the *Cahiers du Sud*, a primary source of inspiration and a key forum for early 'meridian' thought, were the product of a Francophone literary and artistic avant-garde, not the offspring of a mass movement. Although Cassano (1996: 105-108) is critical of this aspect of Camus' work (as an 'aristocratic perspective' on things Mediterranean) he fails, nonetheless, to suggest how such understandings could otherwise be socialised/translated into collective action.

V Learning from the Mediterranean

In conclusion, we would like to attempt to move beyond some of the shortcomings of the above debates by returning to the alternative modernities envisaged within Chambers' 'uprooted' geography of the Mediterranean. For Chambers, such a geography is articulated "in the diverse currents and complex nodes of both visible and invisible networks", tracing a Mediterranean space "before, between, and beyond the self-serving objectifying logic of European humanism, its modernity and its nationalism" (2008: 68). The spatialities of Chambers' 'Mediterranean crossings' speak directly, we believe, to the parallel histories traced by Matvejevic's philological journeys. They also lead us to query the existence of a specific 'Mediterranean modernity': a question that has haunted recent debates on the Mediterranean in other disciplines, but that has been conspicuously absent from English-speaking human geography.

Chambers' postcolonial geographies inscribe the Mediterranean as a space of/for the continual intertwining of diverse roots and routes; testimony to both "compounded sedimentations and disseminations" (2008: 38). In the perspective of a Braudelian *longue durée*, according to Chambers, it is possible to contemplate something akin to a Mediterranean 'unity', but only within "the historical conditions of heterogeneous networks that extend from North Africa, the Sahara, and the Sahel […] through the Middle East to the valley of the Indus and the Indian ocean, as well as spilling across the high desert plateaus and steppes of Central Asia" (2008: 69). And yet the Mediterranean continually betrays all attempts to freeze its 'compounded components' into a homogeneous image. We should look to its southern shores, Chambers suggests, in order to 'learn'

from the Mediterranean. One such perspective is offered by Gil Anidjar's (2003) 'cross-Mediterranean' understanding that "delivers us over to a fluid geography that ontologically challenges the very being and becoming European and modern": a geography where "the Arab and the Jew are presented as both visible and invisible 'enemies' that have historically and culturally constituted the conditions of Europe […] where the sea, as the site of multiple mediations and memories, *is in Europe but not completely of it*, despite all the attempts of Occidental modernity to colonize and control it" (Chambers, 2008: 131, italics added).

This is, perhaps, the most important lesson in Chambers' appeal for a full engagement with the many 'unsuspected cartographies' of the Mediterranean[xvii]. It is not by chance, we believe, that this appeal comes from a British scholar living and working in Naples, a position that allows him to argue that in order to 'learn from the Mediterranean' we should "think, and read, Jacques Derrida, less as a member of the Parisian intellectual coterie than as a Mediterranean thinker, a philosopher from the Maghreb, a French-speaking Jew from colonial Algeria who, from the margins of the European logos, radically reconfigures its critical syntax" (2008: 133). Arguably, the French-Mediterranean link is also highlighted by Robert Young (2001) in his archaeology of post-colonial thought, reflecting on the significance for post-structuralism of Derrida's and Foucault's Mediterranean travels[xviii]. Marc Goldschmit takes this point even further in reflecting on that which he terms the "*cosmopolitique du marrane absolu*" that brings together Derrida's Sephardic, Mediterranean and Algerian roots:

> The double play of the *marrane* does not signify a dual belonging but, rather, a dual estrangement, an at once dual presence and disappearance […] It is thus that Jacques Derrida was able to recognize, in the figure of the blind witness embodied in the *marrane*, his own unspoken destiny as a blind(ed) Jew, a Jew separated from Judaism and Jewry. Did he conceive of the double play of the *marrane* as the secret register of his philosophical project, presenting us with this improbable figure as his *joker*? (2008: 143).

Such an interpretation, according to Chambers (2008: 142), could also be extended to "Frantz Fanon, Helene Cixous and Assia Djebar – together with Althusser, Bourdieu, Braudel and Foucault"[xix].The aim is not, however, to suggest a novel and 'exotic' intellectual mapping but, rather, "to set such thought, writings, and criticism in movement: a crossing of routes that proposes transversal passages through the Western topos, leading to wider and perhaps unfamiliar constellations".

We return thus to our original question: what can geography learn from such 'liquid' spatialities – and what can Mediterranean Studies learn from geography? Faced as we are

with the ossified geographies of the Mediterraneanist tradition, (cultural) geography can perhaps help 'rethink' the Mediterranean by emphasizing those elements and manifestations of the Mediterranean that escape the rationality of continental cartographic modernity; by illustrating how a 'Mediterranean gaze' can unveil a set of non-topographic geographies that 'actually' make this sea and the everyday lives of its inhabitants. It is, therefore, not merely a question of contesting essentialised geographies but, rather, a broader attempt "to puncture the hegemony of a humanist paradigm and realign its declared ethics in a more problematic critical space." Mediterranean Studies need just such a critical space - and perhaps this is what geography can learn from – and offer to – the Mediterranean experience.

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[i] The academic discussion on the Mediterranean should be also linked to the cultural histories of grand maritime spaces, often inspired by Braudel's work; see, among others, Chauduri on the Pacific Ocean (1985), Roding and van Voss' on the North Sea (1996); and, more recently, historian David Abulafia's work (2005) on the term "mediterranean" intended as a metaphor for maritime space beyond the Mediterranean Sea and the existence of six other "mediterraneans". On the social and cultural construction of maritime space in Anglo-American geography see Steinberg's work on the Atlantic Ocean (2001, 2009).

[ii] For a review of the debates on Mediterranean history (and historiography) see Harris (2005).

[iii] The series of volumes published in 2000 by Maisonneuve et Larose under Thierry Fabre's supervision offers a comprehensive overview of the perceptions and representations of the Mediterranean space in selected countries of the Southern shore: Egypt (Al-Kharrat and Afifi, 2000), Morocco (Berrada and Kaddourci, 2000), Tunisia (Belhaj and Boubaker, 2000) Turkey (Cicekoglu and Eldem, 2000) and Lebanon (Khoury and Beydoun, 2000). For a more 'cultural' perspective, see Renard and de Pontchara's *L'imaginaire méditerranéen*, a reader collecting both Northern and Southern perspectives (2000).

[iv] For an ecological history of 'Mediterranean nature' (from a European perspective), see Vita-Finzi (1969) and Delano-Smith (1979) and, more recently, Grove and Rackham (2001). It is also important to note that through the merging of an historical and an ecological perspective the Braudelian *longue durée* imagines the existance and the persinstance of a unique and unified Mediterranean space (Braudel, 1998).

[v] The Vidalian influence is evident also beyond French accounts of the Mediterranean. See, for instance, Orlando Ribeiro's work (1963) on the Atlantic-Mediterranean interplay in defining Portuguese identity.

[vi] This is not only the case for mainstream Vidalian French geography but also for "outsiders" such as Jean Brunhes (Claval, 1988; Clout, 2003) and Élisée Reclus (Ruel, 1991; Arrault, 2005).

[vii] Travel literature has always been particularly important in crafting hegemonic interpretations of the Mediterranean: it is enough to recall the influence of Lawrence Durrell's work in creating the literary myth of the Greek Islands (Keeley, 1999) and of Alexandria during the belle époque (Decker and Womack, 2003; Dunn, 2006), or Pierre Loti's exoticised Mediterranean wanderings (see Gemie, 2000; Vercier et al. 2000).

[viii] This question reflects a more general preocupation with the introduction of modernity to the Middle East, from Napoleon's expedition onwards (Ze'evi, 2004).

[ix] It is useful to recall how Bernal's controversial book "Black Athena" (1987) deeply challenged the myth of the Greek and Mediterranean roots of European civilisation, by asserting that this was the product of a narrative conceived in order to support the idea of a unique, distinct and superior Western modern culture (see also Berlinerblau, 1999; Bernal, 2001).

[x] See also Balta (2000); La Parra and Fabre (2000a); for a critique of President Sarkozy's initiative for the constitution of the *Union pour la Méditerranée* see Patrie and Español (2008); on Turkey's accession to the EU Vitkus (2003); on contemporary Mediterranean geopolitics, Brown and Theodossopoulos (2004); Tekin, (2008) and the contributions in Bialasiewicz et alia (2009).

[xi] In particular Taha Hussein, Minister of Education in the last years of King Faruk's reign, played a key role in developing and defending the project of tracing the origins of Egyptian identity back to the Greek and Roman past, mainly in his 1938 programmatic book *The Future of Culture in Egypt* (1975).

[xii] The French debate on this topic was centred in large part on the journal *La pensée du Midi*, and within a series of workshops entitled *Les Rencontres d'Averroes* that take place every year in Marseilles. Both initiatives are directed by Thierry Fabre, who represents a key figure in what we define here as French 'militant Mediterraneanism'.

[xiii] Translations of some of these essays were published on a special issue of *History and Anthropology*, 18, 3, 2007.

[xiv] In this paper we deliberately limit our analysis of militant mediterraneism to its theoretical underpinnings and to its relationships with the history of the representations of a Mediterranean space. However, this

literature is also strongly engaged with important political issues, from the Palestinian question to humanitarianism, to the role of women, to democratisation (see in particular Cassano and Zolo, 2007).

[xv] See Memmi (1957); also O'Brien (1970) and Said (1993) (in particular, ch.10). On the presence of colonial stereotypes in Camus' work, see Tayeb Bouguerra (1989), including the representation of Algerians as '*Arabes*', as mute and nameless *indigenes*. For a feminist critique of representations of both women and natives in Camus' imagination, see Margerrison (2008). For a more favourable view of Camus' Mediterranean writings, see Foxlee (2006); Leblanc (2002); Lorcin (2002). Recent postcolonial criticism of Camus is summarised by Toumi (2004); for an analysis of Camus's work in English, with special reference to the 'Algerian Question', see Carroll (2007). On the relationship between the Algerian civil war and Camus' Mediterranean project see Gonzales (2007).

[xvi] Anti-German accounts of Mediterranean civilisation go far beyond Camus' and Weil's understanding of the Greek-Roman tension, encompassing ethnographic and racial discourses about the existence of a 'Mediterranean race', differing from both the Nordic and the Semitic (Orsucci, 1999). Moreover, the anti-German polemic was an integral part of Catalan *noucentisme* and *mediterraneisme* during the first decades of the 20th century (Vallcorba, 1994; Gonzalez Calleja, 2000: 64-90). The echo of such debates is still alive in contemporary Spanish and Catalan reflections on the Mediterranean (see, for instance, Racionero Grau, 1986).

[xvii] For a similar perspective, see also Epstein (2007); Dakhlia (2008), Albera and Couroucli (2009); Heyberger and Verdeil (2009).

[xviii] See also Almond's interpretation of postmodern representations of Islam as a "new Orientalism" (2007).

[xix] This reading of Anidjar and Derrida opens the field to a broader re-consideration of the long standing relationship between Arabs and Jews (see Alcalay, 1993; Hochberg, 2007), and between Israel and the Mediterranean (Ohana, 2006; see also Shohat, 1988, 1999); a relationship that has assumed a very important geopolitical dimension in the Mediterranean, especially in a moment in which the Mediterranean identity of Israel is becoming an increasingly relevant political topic in that country (Del Sarto and Tovias, 2001; Del Sarto, 2007).