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“Towards an Anthropology of the Mediterranean”

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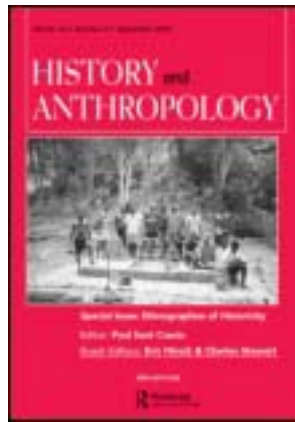
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Contents

[Abstract](#)

[Three Mediterraneans...](#)

[... And Their Pitfalls](#)

[A System of Complementary...](#)

[From Well-meaning Co-existence to Bloody...](#)

[References](#)

[91]

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Abstract

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

Three contradictory images emerge when one examines the disparate works by historians and anthropologists that have taken the Mediterranean world as their subject : a Mediterranean of exchanges and encounters, a Mediterranean of conflicts and hatred, and a Mediterranean made of societies revealing, beyond the schisms that divide them, "family resemblances". In this article, the author proposes another way of seeing and perceiving the Mediterranean world, neither as an entity united by the same culture, nor as a juxtaposition of heterogeneous blocs, but rather as a system of complementary differences that, according to the context, can result in well-meaning co-existence or bloody confrontation.

Keywords : [Anthropology of the Mediterranean](#), [Intercultural Relations](#), [Conflict](#)

How are we to think anthropologically about the Mediterranean world, "this complex, cumbersome, one-of-a-kind entity", to use Fernand Braudel's (1966 : 10) terminology ? It is no simple task and provokes lively controversy among anthropologists. For many, a line obviously must be drawn between the southern and eastern façades of the sea, which come under studies of the Arab-Muslim world, the Middle East, and the northern façade, which is naturally included in the field of European ethnology. This particular choice is encouraged by the old Orientalist tradition, comfortable in its certainty, and by current European rhetoric that lends itself to a withdrawal into the continent.

This scepticism, challenging the pertinence of an anthropology of the Mediterranean, still finds support in the history of civilizations or in current events. Unlike other regions in the world, the neighbouring Iranian territory, for example, the Mediterranean world is not a single unit either by virtue of its languages or its religious traditions. Need one point out that only under the Roman Empire was the region united for several [92] centuries around "*mare nostrum*" by encouraging the flowering of a Greco-Latin culture with a universal vocation, and by developing political institutions modelled on Rome all along its shores ? Since then, the history of the Mediterranean ¹ has been one of divisions, schisms, crusades, wars between empires and colonial conquests that led, after peripatetic violence, to the contemporary situation where three entities, themselves further divided, co-exist : a Latin, largely secularized Catholic Mediterranean, integral part of Occidental Europe ; an orthodox Balkan Mediterranean with its Islamic pockets ; and an Arab-Muslim Mediterranean. The recent grafting of the State of Israel has further aggravated the divisions.

If anthropology must take on as an entity for study a territory endowed with a strong cultural homogeneity, it must then turn towards a horizon other than the Mediterranean. If one were to define a civilization by the awareness people have of belonging to it, the Mediterranean might therefore not be a proper object of study. These days we voluntarily proclaim ourselves "European" ; the awareness of being Mus-

¹ On Mediterranean history, see the synthesis edited by Carpentier and Lebrun (1998).

lim or Jewish is exacerbated by wars and conflicts in the Middle East. In all this brouhaha, who or what claims to be "Mediterranean" ? Nostalgic dreamers, a vacation club, a diet praised from the United States to Australia for being low-fat and low-cholesterol ? In essence, is the Mediterranean just a concept in the marketing sense of the term, an anthropological illusion, a phantasmagorical object ?

This sense of unease is reinforced by contradictory images of the Mediterranean world that emerge in the work of historians and anthropologists, as well as in literature, as an alternative way of seeing the world. Three Mediterraneans, each with its well-chiselled profile, appear when one examines the disparate works that have taken the Mediterranean as subject : a Mediterranean of exchanges and encounters ; a Mediterranean of conflicts and hatred ; and a Mediterranean whose societies bordering it reveal a "family likeness", with underlying cultural complicities beyond the schisms that divide them. I would like to begin by rapidly describing the contradictory portraits of these three Mediterraneans, examine the basis for these contrasting descriptions, and then propose another way of seeing and perceiving the Mediterranean world : neither as an entity united by the same culture, nor as a juxtaposition of heterogeneous blocs, but rather as a system of complementary differences.

Three Mediterraneans...

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

The first Mediterranean is the one of exchanges, encounters, co-existences, harmonious polyphony and conviviality symbolized by places, characters and emblematic objects. This vision, often wildly idealized, is anchored and justified in certain memorable situations and episodes of a shared history : Andalusia, in the time of the Umayyad Caliphate in Cordoba, "whose piled-up ruins and untiring hope we still carry in ourselves" (Berque, 1981 : 43) ; the cultural crossroads of Palermo under the reign of the Norman Roger II in the twelfth century and then, in the thirteenth century, under his grandson the Germanic Emperor Frederic II. The former commissioned the great Arab geographer Al-Idrisi, who had studied in Cordoba, to create a map of the

world accompanied by some 2,500 names—a work that was called “*Al-kitâb al-Rujâri*” (“*The [93] Book of Roger*”). The latter (Frederic II) knew Greek, Latin, Italian, Provençal, *langue d’oïl* (language north of the Loire), Arabic and no doubt Hebrew ; he wrote poems in Italian and in Provençal and a treatise about falconry in Latin. ²

Nearer to us sociologically and historically, we meet a similar Mediterranean of confluences and encounters in the cosmopolitan city-ports and city-societies that existed in the second half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth, before the hardening of nationalism and geopolitical blocs : Istanbul, Smyrna, Salonica, Beirut, Alexandria, Algiers, Trieste, Marseille and so on. Each of these cities had its literary cantor, or even its magazine, such as Jean Ballard’s *Cahiers du Sud* in Marseille, Edmond Charlot and Albert Camus’ *Rivages* in Algiers, Henri Bosco’s *Aguedal* in Rabat ; all of these exalted a Mediterranean as much imagined as real, a Mediterranean, Albert Camus told us in 1937, “where the Orient and the Occident cohabit”. And at the confluence, “there is no difference between the way a Spaniard or an Italian from the quays of Algeria lives and how the Arabs all around them live... We are here, with the Mediterranean and against Rome” (Camus, 1965 [1937]). This is the Rome that in the polemical debates of the 1930s symbolized a Mediterranean anchored in a predominantly Occidental, Latin and classical imperial antiquity. The most startling evocation of these Mediterranean city-worlds, with their *lingua franca*, is no doubt the one that Lawrence Durrell gave us in his *Alexandria Quartet*, whose principal characters are Nassim the Coptic prince, Justine the elegant Jewish woman, Melissa from Smyrna, Darley the Irishman, Clea the Italian, Balthazar the Jewish doctor drawn to the Gnostics who lead a study group on the Cabala, and all the Muslims who surround them. “Five races, five languages, a dozen creeds, five fleets turning through their greasy reflections behind the harbour bar. But there are,” Durrell (1963 : 14) elaborates, “more than five sexes and only the demotic Greek seems to distinguish between them.” Defining itself as “the queen of the Mediterranean”, Alexan-

² Regarding this astonishing monarch, see the classic work of Kantorowicz (2000).

dria was, just before the First World War, a candidate to hold the Olympics.³

From this Mediterranean of tolerant co-existences and encounters, from the intermingling of cultural works emerge certain emblematic characters rightly seized upon by the pioneers in the "dialogue of civilizations", such as the great Orientalist Louis Massignon. We think of course of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), the Andalusian luminary, translator and commentator ("author of great commentary" according to Dante) of Aristotle, whom he transmitted to the Christian Occident.⁴ We must also mention the Majorcan philosopher of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, Raimond Lulle, who learned Arabic at the age of 33 and presented, in his *Libre del gentil e dels tres savis* (*The Book of the Gentile and the Three Wise Men*), three professors, one Jewish, one Christian and one Muslim, each of whom in turn presents the foundations of his faith to a Gentile. "When they parted," Lulle (1968 : 119) tells us, although the Gentile had converted to one of the three faiths, "there was much embracing, kissing, tears and wailing". The author intriguingly, and in a very "modern" way, does not specify to which faith the Gentile converted, thus subverting the surface plot of the text to suggest that what was important not the *superiority* of one faith over the others, but rather their dialogue.

Alongside such intellectual stars, and on a more mundane scale, we must mention the multitude of characters in between : the guides and intermediaries between [94] communities among whom the *dragoman* (an interpreter in the Ottoman Empire) is one of the most significant. In *Vidal et les siens* (*Vidal and his family*), Edgar Morin (1989) brings to life this multifaceted character by evoking his grandfather, a Sephardic Jew, originating from Livorno (Italy) who settled in Salonica, who spoke Italian, French, Turkish and Greek and was a *dragoman* for the French and Belgian consulates. In the longer term, this Medi-

³ Regarding Alexandria in the contemporary era, see Ilbert (1996).

⁴ "It must be repeated," comments Alain de Libera (1999 : 26 ; emphasis added), "it is a translation within the land of Islam, connected to the Muslim conquest, which made possible the return of Greek science into the Latin world. But Greek science did not arrive alone. Arabic science accompanied it. And further, the figure of the Muslim intellectual from whom came, despite what is said and contrary to all expectations, the earliest version of the European intellectual, the university *magister atrium*, the professor of philosophy."

terranean of exchange was also the diffuser of know-how in the Middle Ages in the reverse direction to the contemporary situation : from paper to sweets, innovations came from the Orient, as Jack Goody (2004a) notes in his recent synthesis *Islam in Europe*, in which he inventories the contributions of Muslim civilizations in the realms of agricultural, architectural, musical and culinary techniques.

With all this circulation of objects, ideas and languages, it is the circulation of people that often leads to less radiant perspectives : today's draining laborious movements of millions of individuals from the South towards the North ; pious peregrinations, sometimes belaboured and conflicted, in this land where God, his prophets and his witnesses established their residences ; commercial movements, now with shadowy entrepreneurs performing their activities in transnational spaces and re-inventing ancient routes from Algiers to Istanbul, to Dubai, and to Hong Kong ; ⁵ movements and diasporas linked through exile, but also tourist fluxes on a modern scale (the number of these *outsiders* in Mediterranean countries in 1995 was estimated at 260 million), and Jeremy Boissevain (2001 : 686) indeed tells us that to neglect this component of social life would be as serious as conducting an anthropological study on the Nuer without taking into account the place that cattle raising occupies in that society.

By means of this inventory *à la Prévert*, a Mediterranean in motion emerges, one of "travelling cultures", of real networks (and today also virtual), the most salient example of the latter being the creolization of contemporary Mediterranean music. In an important book that turns Braudelian concepts of the Mediterranean upside down, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2000) reflect on the specificity of this world in the very long term. Fusing interactionist and ecological approaches, they characterize the Mediterranean as a bringing together, via the sea, of extremely fragmented territories, and via a "connectivity" facilitated by imperialism, but set to expire by the twentieth century, according to the authors and in my sense incorrectly so. The enigmatic title of their book, *The Corrupting Sea*, draws all its implicit conclusions from this notion : because it creates links, this sea is a menace to social order and to harmony for domestic groups.

⁵ Regarding these contemporary commercial networks, see Peraldi (2001) ; Cesari (2002).

Opposed to this Mediterranean of networks, passages and, in its best moments, conviviality, there is the more familiar and dramatic Mediterranean of conflicts, domination, religious borders, face to face rather than side by side, to use Thierry Fabre's (2005) terms. No one has expressed this Mediterranean of tensions, even of hatred, better than Ivo Andrić in his *Pismo iz 1920* (letter dated 1920) from Sarajevo (Andrić, 1993 : 33–34) :

When in Sarajevo you lie awake all night long in your bed, you hear all the sounds of the night. Ponderously and implacably, the clock on the Catholic cathedral rings two o'clock. A minute later (seventy-five seconds exactly, I counted), in its somewhat feebler but still penetrating tone, the clock on the orthodox Cathedral rings "its" two o'clock. A little later, the clock tower on the mosque of the *bey* in turn rings with a harsh and distant tone ; it rings [95] eleven o'clock, a ghostly Turkish eleven o'clock, conforming to the odd calculations of countries situated on the other side of the earth. The Jews do not have a clock that rings, and only a cruel god knows what time it is for them at this moment, an hour that varies, depending on whether they are Sephardic or Ashkenazy. So, even at night when everyone is asleep, in the detailed account of sleep's slack hours, the differences that divide the sleeping people are awake. People who, upon awakening, are joyful or suffer, eat or fast according to four different and opposing calendars, and who say their prayers to the same heaven in four languages of different churches. This disparity, sometimes visible and open, sometimes invisible and hidden, always looks like hatred and is sometimes confused with it.

That Mediterranean, the one of *eris* (hatred) and not of *eros*, to use Berque's (1997 : 10) terms, is symbolized by competing calls to prayer, the unbelievable cacophony of church bells, muezzins and *shoffar-s* in Jerusalem. This is the Mediterranean of cities and territories broken by religious allegiances, like in the Middle East and the Balkans, where ostentatious rivalry can rapidly become "monumental hatred", where people keep trying to sully or destroy the religious edifices and patrimony of the other side, as François Chaslin (1997) showed for the ex-Yugoslavia. It is the Mediterranean of new walls and destroyed bridges, as in Mostar in Bosnia, the bridge that could connect, but whose destruction was an ostensible sign of separation and a frequent theme in the literature of the Balkans from Ivo Andrić to Ismail Kadaré. It is along religious borders, from Kashmir to Ire-

land, via Checheny, Palestine, Turkey, Cyprus or the Balkans that one finds the principal zones of friction and conflict, where people are eliminated, confined, remanded or banished, and where interminable dramas are played out. We must not describe these conflicts by simple religious geography ; geopolitical strategies, nationalisms exploiting histories for their own ends and social demands all play their part, but this religious component of the conflicts, which sometimes leads to the sacrifice of one's life with the promise of salvation, has been, it seems to me, undervalued to the benefit of sociological explanations that reduce faith and its motivations for action, for loving one's folk and hating all others, to an epiphenomenon. In any case, is it not the spectre of the crusades and the holy wars, incarnated today by the strangely symmetrical figures of Osama bin Laden and George Bush, hovering over our planet ? Once an interior lake, at its best moments a "lake of meaning", according to Berque (1997 : 16), today the Mediterranean resembles instead a frontier of fear that separates and has become, what is worse, a sort of *cordon sanitaire*—a natural unexpected barrier to exclude the poor.

Finally, there is also a third Mediterranean : that of anthropologists in the narrow sense of the term, these people from afar who have belatedly taken an interest in a nearby region, in these "Others" who did not sparkle in the discipline like the great "Others", the Amerindians, the Oceanians or the Africans. From their new work emerges a Mediterranean composed of societies with "a family likeness" as Dionigi Albera and Anton Blok (2001 : 23), borrowing a concept of Wittgenstein, call it. Horden and Purcell (2000 : 507), connoisseurs of anthropological work, which they nevertheless as historians are wont to do regard with a certain *hauteur*, speak of a "loose unity of family resemblances". If we were to cite two totemic figures in the Mediterranean of life styles and social values, they would be Julian Pitt-Rivers (1986, 1997) and Germaine [96] Tillion (1966), who are essential for an understanding of this "Mediterranean touch" that serves as a background of connivances allowing people to know themselves and to recognize each other. ⁶ This is the Mediterranean (has it been said enough ?) of ostentatious hospitality, of honour and shame connected

⁶ Regarding this anthropological invention of the Mediterranean, see Bromberger (2001, 2002) ; Bromberger and Durand (2001).

to blood and name, of an endogamic vision of the world, of the republic of cousins, a pattern anchored especially on the southern shores and in pre-Christian antiquity, of marriage with one's kin, of Jocasta saying to Polynices : "A spouse taken from outside brings misfortune", of the predilection for "living with one's own", of sexual segregation, "of a certain ideal of virile brutality whose complement is the dramatization of feminine virtue" (Tillion 1966 : 67). This is the Mediterranean of patronage in the agro-literate traditional state and its corresponding cult of saints, these cuddled intermediaries in monotheisms, of factionalism with its opposing leagues and its unique modes of conflict mediation and vindictive practices, or else the Mediterranean of territories of grace, of doleful devotions to virgins and martyrs.

... And Their Pitfalls

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

These are the three points of view, one embodying the side-by-side Mediterranean, the second a face-to-face conflictual Mediterranean, the third a Mediterranean of underlying cultural connivances. These contradictory points of view, or if one wants to be scientifically optimistic : complementary ones, must be singularly refined—especially the first and the third. Yet we must also ponder and reflect on the justifying reasons for the co-existence of such opposite models, those of proximity and of conflict, which leads us to introduce another figure—that of the intolerable twin, the one who resembles us too much.

The first Mediterranean, the one of contacts, exchanges, diffusions, circulation of ideas and goods, constrained or pious movements, the free flow of humans and things, of intermingled arts such as the Arab-Norman architecture of Sicily, has led to the overuse of concepts such as "melting-pot", "cross-culturalism" or "hybridity" to characterize the cultures and societies implanted along the shores. I am not unaware of the syncretizations and cultural inventions that are rapidly evolving today in domains as diverse as cuisine, music, dance, literature, or in what Arjun Appadurai (2001) calls the "mediascapes" (depending on the country, 40 to 70 per cent of Maghrebins receive pro-

grammes on satellite channels). However, nothing seems to me more inappropriate than the terms "mixed blood" ("*métissage*") or "hybridity" to describe Mediterranean societies in which, to be more precise, the translation onto the social level of what the openly hybrid cultural works suggest. *Métissage* presupposes a union of flesh and especially a fusion or at least a reciprocal acceptance of beliefs that would make this social union of bodies possible. Nothing is more foreign to the Mediterranean world, the territory of intransigent monotheisms, than such a fusion of beliefs or compromises regarding allegiances that remain rigorously exclusive. The God of one and of the other is structuralist and does not allow for mixing. We are, in the Mediterranean, an unimaginable distance from the *umbanda* of the Brazilians, this transformation of the *macumba* of Bantu origin, which groups together the *caboclos* (spirits of the Indians), [97] the *orixas* (African divinities) of voodoo, the protective saints of Catholicism, Buddha, Gandhi or Ayrton Senna. We are also an unfathomable distance from Japanese concepts in which one is born Shintoist, one willingly marries Christian and one dies Buddhist.

The notion of *métissage* is incompatible with the logic of biblical religions in which decisions about the allegiance of children yet to be born are not negotiable and in which interfaith marriages are impossible in many Mediterranean countries, or at least socially unacceptable. Sophisticated cosmopolitan milieus do not escape this inexorable rule. "Alexandrian cosmopolitanism", Robert Ilbert (1992 : 28) tells us, does not function as a melting-pot, but as a contiguity constantly renewed by recognized and responsible groups and constituents. No doubt the Greeks in Alexandria were preparing Italian macaroni, Arab *fouls* (fava beans) ; no doubt they painted eggs at Easter in the Occidental way, using all the colours and not just the traditional red as in Greece, but, Katerina Trimi and Ilios Yannakanis (1992 : 85) add, "the only ethnic- religious boundary the Greeks did not violate was endogamy", and let us note in addition that cosmopolitanism, a common source of Alexandrian pride, did not exclude nationalism. There is the same frontier between Copts and Muslims in Egypt, who still more or less share the same ways and customs and participate in each other's festivals in a climate of ostentatious rivalry still frequent in the Mediterranean, with tall minarets systematically overshadowing the bell towers of churches (see, among others, Mayeur-Jaouen and Voile,

2003 : 174). Similarly, in the Balkans, where Jean-François Gossiaux (2001 : 236) tells us "religion is the primary material of ethnic barriers", but should we not say just the opposite ? In all the writing about this complex region, where ethnic and religious adherences often are superimposed, mixed unions, however encouraged by socialist regimes, have remained on the whole very few, just as, in Yugoslavia for example, adherence remained weak to the mixed bag of Yugoslavian nationality that was offered as an alternative to ethnic-religious adherences. "The census," Gossiaux writes (2001 : 238), "allowed for the choice between various national adherences" (Croatian, Serbian, Slovenian, etc.)—we find in this a trace of the Austro-Marxist dream of choice of nationality—but they allowed also the choice of calling oneself "Yugoslavian". In 1981, only 5.4 per cent of the population chose to declare themselves Yugoslavian.

"Humanity had to choose early on," wrote Edward Burnett Tylor (1889 : 237), "between marrying outside the clan or being killed outside the clan." It appears that Mediterranean societies, with their religious barriers including those within Christianity, have more often chosen the second formula. This rigidity is verified when we examine the data, which nevertheless mark a clear evolution of unions in France of young men and women issuing from Maghrebin immigration. According to Michèle Tribalat's (1995) research, there is a sharp difference in behaviour between boys and girls ; 50 per cent of boys of Algerian origin born in France marry a Frenchwoman born of parents born in France (a statistic similar to that of young men of Portuguese origin). On the other hand, only 24 per cent of girls of Algerian origin born in France marry a Frenchman born of French parents, while 47 per cent of young Portuguese women are married to a Frenchman born of French parents. The *fiqh* (the canon of Muslim law) [98] forbids marriage between a Muslim woman and a non-Muslim man : the religious allegiance of the children depends on this. Significantly, the proportion of native-French boyfriends of girls of Maghrebin origin is two times that of their husbands. "This discrepancy," Michèle Tribalat (1995 : 80) comments, "gives an idea of the family and religious pressure controlling marriage for girls." It perhaps also gives us a handle on the xenophobia that surfaces in native Frenchmen when they have to decide whether to enter into a public and long-lasting union. Still, transgressions against this endoga-

mous vision of the world are more and more numerous on the part of young girls, along with at least temporary breaks with families. A strategy to reconcile parental and religious determination with personal inclinations is to accept an endogamous marriage, then divorce and enter into a more personal relationship (Boukhobza, 2001), or else simply to live together, a compromise that avoids the publicity of a socially disapproved marriage and lets everyone wait for the family to calm down. Remaining single, a way of avoiding constraints and conflicts, is over-represented among young women of Maghrebin origin. "Thus," notes Hervé Flanquart (1999 : 128), "only 38 per cent of young women of Algerian origin between twenty-five and twenty-nine years of age are married, as compared to 48 per cent of those of French origin."

This rigid differentiation, which is stricter or more relaxed depending on circumstances, does not exclude a taste for the art of living or practices of the Other. Misuses of the concept of *métissage* and an optimistic appraisal of the relations between different communities often rest on this ambiguity. It was at the very moment the Arabs in Sicily were being violently struck down that the Zisa, a marvel of so-called "Arab-Norman" art, was being built, in 1165 (Puccio, 2004 : 123). *Mudéjar* art spread throughout Christian Spain even while Muslims were persecuted and expelled (Grabar, 1994 : 589). And if the French today count couscous among their favourite dishes, this is still not an indication of Islamophilia. Beyond these cultural encounters and connivances, *métissage* is unthinkable and impossible in societies in which union with the Other is imaginable only if one gives up one's identity or one's religion—in short, if one is no longer Other. The great writer Jean Amrouche, who was Berber, Christian, Algerian and French all at once understood very well the rigidity of this recurring Mediterranean lesson, which is not to take adherences lightly : "Hybrids are monsters... monsters with no future" (quoted in Liauzu, 1998 : 509). They are monsters in the "traditional" Mediterranean system, hardened by nationalism ; they are no doubt less so among the elites and in an alternative system that is slowly inventing itself—a system that will abandon such rigidities through acquired secularism.

A System of Complementary Differences

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

What is there to say about the sometimes-caricatured portrait drawn by anthropologists in which the syndrome of honour and shame and certain other qualities are Mediterranean and the background of a common language in which people recognize themselves ? Several anthropologists, the most prominent being Michael Herzfeld (1980) and Joao de Pina Cabral (1989), have radically called into question the pertinence of the Mediterranean world as a field of study. For them, the ethnological [99] Mediterranean is an artificial object created by Anglo-Saxon anthropologists in order to render exotic a too-close region, thereby conjuring up the distance necessary for the exercise of our discipline. Such an ethnological Mediterranean hides behind several sharply stereotyped federating themes and lends a forced homogeneity to a heterogeneous reality. There is no doubt these censors were right to denounce the quirks of an enterprise that posits the Mediterranean as a cultural territory endowed with stable attributes and limits, but still it does not seem to me that the Mediterranean can so easily be thrown out with the bath water. To tell the truth, what gives coherence to this world are not the many remarkable similarities, but rather the systematic differences. And it is no doubt these *complementary differences*, part of a reciprocal field that allows us to speak about a *Mediterranean system*. Everyone is defined, here perhaps more than elsewhere, in a play of mirrors (costumes, behaviours, affiliations) with his or her neighbour. A neighbour is someone close by with whom one shares one's Abrahamic origins, and his or her behaviour is meaningful only in this relational mirror play.

How is one to understand, for example, eating habits if not within this relational system of reciprocal oppositions ? Alcohol and pork remain the base of the triangle of differentiation between Jews, Muslims and Christians. In the third century, the consumption of pork was recommended to Christians during the Council of Antioch with the explicit goal of differentiation from the Jews. "The Christians will not imitate the Jews in regard to abstinence from certain foods but will eat pork because the synagogue of the Jews execrates pork" (quoted in

Fabre-Vassas, 1994 : 13). The symbolic status of blood, lurking in the background of eating behaviours, is a powerful relational demarcation between co-existing traditions on the shores of the Mediterranean. The contrasting attitudes of Jews, Christians and Muslims form, here again, a kind of triangle. In Islam, blood is seen as the impure substance par excellence that one must get rid of at any cost, which it is unthinkable to ingest (the simple mention of a blood sausage can provoke retching) and whose metaphorical equivalent (wine) is prohibited. This schema is rigorously opposed to the one that prevails in Christianity : the miracle of Cana, the transformation during the Last Supper of wine into blood, the ritual absorption of this blood during the Eucharist, or even the metamorphosis of wine into water to wash away sins—these are unbelievable and repulsive episodes for Muslims. And while in Judaism the sacrificial blood is destined for God, in Islam only the thought of the offering is destined for God, the blood being the impious food of evil genies (*jnun*).

The same sort of observations could be made about the permanent mirror-game of identities in regard to the structural dialogism between cousin and neighbouring societies in reference to appearance. The treatment of body, facial and head hair appears in symmetrical and opposing configuration from one religious tradition to another. The desire for differentiation in hair treatment was clearly demonstrated by clerics and commentators. In the Epistle to the Corinthians (11 : 3–10), Saint Paul noted the faithful male's obligation to pray bare-headed : "Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered affronts his leader." This usage was in opposition to the Jews and Romans (whose pontiffs covered their heads during sacrifices). The fathers of the Church would remember this demarcation requirement, not only in regard to Jews, but also Egyptians and barbarians. In the fifth century, Saint Jerome prescribed that "we must have neither [100] shaved heads like the priests of Isis and Serapis, nor allow our hair to grow long, which is the habit of the debauched or of barbarians". The schism at the heart of Christianity would also find its expression in terms of hair treatment, with Oriental clerics wearing long hair, beards and moustaches, unlike clerics in the Roman Church. "The Byzantine clergy," writes Marie-France Auzépy (2002 : 9), "faced with Latins who practiced the opposite tradition, wore beards as a fundamental element of their church tradition, and hair, defended

by the Greeks, held in contempt by the Latins, was a de facto essential argument of the schism between Orient and Occident." The same urgent concern to distinguish seems to have weighed on the honing of appearance in Islam. "Distinguish yourself from the Mages", "do not imitate either Jews or Christians", said the Prophet. Wearing a strictly codified beard and moustache and removing body hair figure among the ranks of strong demarcation, with small nuances for those belonging to the same community. Bernard Lewis (1990 : 265) reminds us of the medieval vigour in this play of oppositions that has lost none of its virulence in our time : Harun ibn Yahya, a prisoner in Rome in the ninth century, noticed that the inhabitants of the city "young and old, shave their beards completely, do not miss a single hair. 'The suit of a man,' I told them, 'is his beard !'." A Roman questioned about this subject by another Arab answered : "Hair is superfluous. If you people remove it from you private parts, why should we leave it on our faces ?" This desire for community-wide demarcation is explained by a contemporary commentator, the Ibadite Shaykh Bayyudh, an ardent propagandist for the religious obligation to wear beards : "Muslims are asked and even ordered to give themselves a specific personality with the goal of differentiating themselves from those who are not of the same faith, to make themselves recognizable by others and among themselves. This personality must be their coat of arms and the trademark that is unique to them" (quoted in Benkheira, 1997 : 92). Must we emphasize, in this system of differences, the place held by Jews following the prescriptions of Leviticus (19 : 27 ; 21 : 5) not to shave the corners of their beards ? No doubt this interdiction originated, like the wearing of a beard, as a distinctive function as compared to Egyptians with their hairless faces and to Babylonians and Persians with their skilfully curled beards.

The status of images has also been subject to a similar differential treatment, and it is probable that the iconophobia of Islam, which turned towards calligraphy and arabesques, was in response to the iconophilia of Christianity, itself originally iconophobic. "The reasons for the prohibition of wine and the interdiction against images can be found in the conflict between practices at the heart of the two religious communities, Christian and Muslim, backed up against each other," comments Jean-Baptiste Humbert (2001 : 154), who, via his archaeological digs in northeastern Jordan, followed this process of differenti-

ation in the seventh and eighth centuries. "We know," he continues (Humbert, 2001 : 155), "that the mosaics and frescos served as expressions of catechism. The iconoclasm thus had a doctrinal foundation." Indeed, the same author notes that the first destructions of images, aside from those of human figures, were of representations of animals of high symbolic value for Christianity (the lamb, the fish, etc.). Jack Goody reminds us of the contemporary vitality of this opposition between iconophiles and iconophobes when he evokes his memories of Greeks and Turks in Cyprus during the Second World War : "The former made countless images of saints [101] and of the Holy Trinity, which they adored, bending over them, kissing them. The latter (the Turks) were horrified by the barbarity of such acts" (Goody, 2004b : 5).⁷ This quarrel over images also passed through Christianity, the Protestants manifesting a rigorous iconoclasm against what they perceived as idolatry. Elisabeth I, Goody (2004a : 160) reports, had her Ambassador to the Sultan of Istanbul say that Islam and Protestantism were alike in this rejection of icons.

Of course, these massive and founding oppositions were, in the various registers we have just noted, sometimes transgressed according to context and periods of history and it would be reductive to see unvarying fixations. Princes, whatever their dogma might be, have rarely given up their visibility, with the exception recently of Mullah Omar, commander of the faithful in the Emirate of Afghanistan, a rigorous iconoclast who has never allowed his image to be recorded (Centlivres, 2003 : 121). If the Taliban burned images and destroyed statues, the glorifying iconography of Saddam Hussein is particularly rich. A poster, which would delight amateurs of "travelling cultures", represents him on a white horse carrying a standard on which is inscribed "*Allah o akbar*". This representation is directly inspired by the painting of David showing Bonaparte at the head of his troops crossing the Great Saint Bernard Pass. Let us remember, as an anecdote and, on this occasion, for lovers of invention of traditions, that Bonaparte in reality crossed over the pass on a mule behind his troops, guided by a Valaisan shepherd (Centlivres, 2003 : 124).

⁷ On the subject of iconophobia, see Goody (1997) ; Centlivres (2003).

From Well-meaning Co-existence to Bloody Confrontation

[Retour à la table des matières](#)

Let us return to more serious matters. Between these separate yet neighbouring communities, what are the rules of the game? And what factors can transform sympathetic curiosity or well-meaning co-existence into bloody confrontation? In the ordinary practice of intercommunity relations in the Mediterranean, a comprehensive contiguity dominates, marked almost everywhere by the same gestures of civility, neighbourliness and small exchanges. From medieval Andalusia to the contemporary Balkans, Egypt, Jordan or Lebanon, we find the same more or less intense attentiveness, even willingness to participate in the rituals of the Other. "Is it not a surprising thing," Al 'Azafi, Doctor of Law in the thirteenth century wrote, commenting on life in Andalusia, "to see Muslims calculate the dates of Christian holidays and to concern themselves with when they will take place? They consult each other many times regarding the nativity of Jesus, or the holiday of *yannair*, the seventh day after the day of his birth, or the *ansara*, the day of John's birth." And the same chronicler continues: "Not just content with worrying so much about these holidays, welcoming them properly, they also introduced novelties. On tables prepared by the children and women are found all sorts of fruits and precious objects. During the Christian holidays, they offer gifts of great value to one another", among them "sweet candies" (quoted in Bolens, 1981 : 343). One finds this same mediating role of holiday greetings and sweets in all corners of the Mediterranean. In Lebanese bi-faith (Shiite Muslim and Maronite) communities studied by Aïda Kanafani-Zahar (2001), the Shiites participate in Assumption, the holidays of Santa Barba and the Epiphany, preparing sweets, [102] attending the ordination of priests, while the Maronites participate in *fitr* (the celebration at the end of Ramadan) and the holiday commemorating the birth of the Prophet. More significant still, Christians, at the ceremony beginning Lent, delegate to the Shiites the task of cutting the sacrificial sheep's throat so the Shiites can participate comfortably

in the ritual without the least doubt about the purity of the meat eaten. The *slava*, the celebration of the local patron saint, was the occasion for Serbs to receive their Muslim neighbours (Gossiaux, 2001 : 467). These traditions of civility, of table companionship, of mutual exchanges are designated in Bosnia-Herzegovina by the term "*komshiluk*" (derived from the Turkish word "*komshila*", "neighbour") (Claverie, 2004 : 22). As for mixed pilgrimages to "ambiguous sanctuaries" frequented by the faithful of different religions, they exist on all shores of the Mediterranean (Albera, 2005). This opening to the Other sometimes goes further, all the way to temporary transgression of a taboo : the Sephardic Jews in the Maghreb, like the Muslim Pomaks in Bulgaria, agree to eat ham when they are received by Christians ; among themselves, no longer with the Other, they scrupulously respect the interdiction. This is doubtless one of the most significant examples of the tension so characteristic of the Mediterranean world between fidelity to correctness within one's group and the trend towards cosmopolitanism on the outside.

How to understand then that the neighbour of yesterday is transformed into a torturer or a devil to be struck down and these violent outbursts of hatred that lead to deportation or to collective murder ? Anthropologists, attentive to daily life, tend to go for a portrait of good people co-existing and to explain away these explosions of violence. They invoke, and correctly so, strategic interactions between nation-states, social crises, imperialist and economic aims, manipulations of populist politicians who set fire to powder kegs, but, in so doing, they do not take into account processes that transform one's office or bistro colleague into a torturer, a rapist or a killer.

The concept of "cascade", invented by James Rosenau (1990) and used by Arjun Appadurai (2001 : 209–213), can help in this regard. Cascades, connecting micro- and macro-politics, link disputes and local incidents to larger causes and interests less tied to context. They furnish material to players' imaginations to find generalized meanings in contingent events and thus connect global politics to the micro-politics of the street or neighbourhood. Mediterranean societies, where constitutive adherences and oppositions hardened by history overlap, no doubt furnish a choice terrain for the unleashing of these disturbances. Yet this is once again saying too little. The memory of past atrocities, of crimes, the images that they propagate, the rumours

that feed on them and become exaggerated as they pass from one person to another contribute to this feeling of fear that makes people tip over the edge into crime on the pretext of heading off crimes of the Other. Within the same individual, these attitudes of tolerance or of hatred can vary of course, according to "cascades" of the moment, but also according to certain annual times of ritual, when adherences are exalted and reawaken memories, or again, according to stages of life.

These moments of tipping over the edge sometimes take on a seemingly paradoxical aspect. A simplistic vision would lead one to think that the closer or nearer cultures are, the more harmony will reign among those who desire it. If this were the case, harmony [103] would have reigned for centuries between Jews and Muslims. How to imagine closer religions ? Observing Sabbath, eating kosher, fasting for Yom Kippur, being circumcized, distinguishing the pure from the impure—this looks like kin to a Muslim. Commandments and nit-picking legalism also weigh heavily on the two traditions. Must we point out the paradoxes of such essentialism ? In fact, if we had to look for a general rule, it would not be so much the clearly assumed differences, but rather the excess of proximity—"the fact of becoming too close" (Simmel, 1983 : 265)—that is perceived as intolerable attacks on the honour of the Other. Often, in the genesis of conflicts, we do not take into account the role played by what Freud called "the narcissism of small differences",⁸ a theme Anton Blok (2001) recently revisited using contemporary supporting examples. Sometimes the preoccupation with maintaining a good distance from a close Other

⁸ Freud used this concept three times in his work : in *Psychologie des masses et analyse du moi (Massenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse)* (Freud, 2003 [1920] : Vol. 16 : 40) ; *Le tabou de la virginité (Das Tabu der Virginität)* (Freud, 2002 [1918] : Vol. 15 : 86) ; and *Malaise dans la culture (Das Unbehagen in der Kultur)* (Freud, 2002 [1930] : Vol. 18 : 473–474). In the last work, he wrote :

It is always possible to link people to each other in love in a big enough crowd of people, if only there remain others to whom one can show aggression. Once I studied the phenomenon according to which, precisely, neighbouring communities, also close to each other, fight and make fun of each other, like the Spaniards and the Portuguese, the Germans of the North and those of the South, the English and the Scots, etc. I have given this phenomenon the name "narcissism of small differences". ... One recognises in this a commodious and relatively anodyne satisfying of the penchant for aggression through which community cohesion is more easily assured.

takes on the ridiculous form of ethnic jokes and turf wars. Sometimes there is the imposition of a specific apparel or body marking, to put the Other in his place, as was the case for Jews whose appearance did not separate them out. In the Sicily of Frederic II, as in the Spain of the Reconquista (see Horowitz, 1994), Jews were required to wear beards to remove any doubt about their adherence. In societies that are rigid in their theological or ethnic certainties, anyone suspected of trickery or fraud regarding their identity is tracked maniacally—the neo-convert whose sincerity is doubted, the foreigner who ends up looking too much like us, even more like us than we do ourselves.

When differences are erased, they are brought back, re-created, for oneself and for Others in an exaggerated way. Is it not striking that observance of Ramadan is increasing, that headscarves are appearing even as religious practice is decreasing, as life styles are becoming uniform, as if it were necessary to mark the boundaries that are fading away? Is it not striking, on another front, that among soccer matches the strongest emotional exuberance is expressed by supporters of two teams from the same city, who outdo themselves to emphasize their distinctive personalities? Is it not striking, generally, that feelings of identity are exacerbated when the real substance of identities fade away? Is it not also striking that master and student become exasperated when they end up resembling each other? And what to say of the accomplished interpreter or ethnologist, these Others who sometimes are not Other anymore, who know too much and, no longer set apart from their subject of study, become unclassifiable, intolerable, and are invited to keep their distance.⁹ It is not so much the differences as their loss that can arouse rivalry, even violence. Twins have difficulty affirming their existence and have little to say to each other. They are left with creating differences or killing each other in order to experi-

⁹ The *dragoman* (interpreter in the Ottoman Empire) incarnated both the positive figure of a cosmopolitan guide and a tragic hero. "The Empire was suspicious," comments Ismail Kadaré (2003 : 13). "To them, the knowledge of two languages introduced the unavoidable possibility of cheating, and the masses, from whom the interpreter often came, considered him a 'collaborator'. One suspects the interpreter of betrayal : those who are dominated suspect him of being an accomplice of the dominant, and the dominant of conniving with those they are subjugating."

ence the feeling of existing. Mythology, the Mediterranean past and present overflow with these stories of tragic twins.

I wish to make it clear that I do not pretend to explain conflicts in the Mediterranean, and perhaps elsewhere, by the intransigence of monotheisms, with their parade of certainties and their consubstantial hostility to all form of mixing, or by the "narcissism of small differences", but certainly these two mechanisms contribute to the hardening of antagonisms and the multiplication of "cascades".

Finally, to think anthropologically about the Mediterranean world is to show at the same time the constitutive relationships and contradictions, to analyze the play of reciprocal differences that sometimes harden and sometimes lighten, to represent [104] simultaneously the bridge and the wall, the passage and the blockage, the encounter and the break, the borrowing and the rejection. To understand the genesis and the functions of the complementary differences that fashion this world is certainly not pointless for putting the breadth of frictions and antagonisms in perspective. "If ethnology, which is a matter of patience, of listening, of courtesy, and of time, can still be of use for something," Germaine Tillion said (2000), "it is for learning to live together."

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[Retour à la table des matières](#)

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