The Mediterranean Question

Iain Chambers
Marta Cariello

THE MEDITERRANEAN QUESTION

Fig. 1. Detail from Hieronymus Bosch, *Ship of Fools* (1490–1500)

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Contents

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Initially written in Italian and published in 2019, the text has undergone significant changes during its journey in translation, involving re-elaborations and further extensions. We believe it has benefited from this movement and mutation.

Naples, July 2025

Fig. 1.1. Cover of the Tomb of the Diver, Paestum. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

Introduction

Thinking with the Diver

The diver is dark-skinned. He defies the modern European version of Mediterranean figures like Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary, along with Greek gods and heroes, all white and purportedly "Aryan." His body descends gracefully through the air some two thousand five hundred years ago. This famous figure is painted on the inner lid of a sarcophagus that is known as the Tomb of the Diver (fig. 1.1). It comes from the Greek site of Poseidonia, better known by its Roman name, Paestum, situated on the Tyrrhenian coast south of Salerno, close to the mouth of the Sele. The painting, destined for perpetual darkness, was unearthed and opened in 1968, and is visible to us now.[1] The figure in full flight is surrounded on the four sides of the tomb's interior by reclining men in a symposium. The diver and these figures interrogate our constitution of the present.

As a Greek colony, Paestum was part of the expansion of the city-states of the Peloponnese peninsula that extended across Homer's "wine-dark sea" to Asia Minor, north through the Black Sea to the steppes, and west through Sicily and southern

1 Paul Carter, *Metabolism: The Exhibition of the Unseen* (Lyon Housemuseum, 2015).

Italy to the coasts of modern-day France and Spain. As with all colonialisms, indigenous populations were conquered, subdued, and enslaved. The land was never empty. Control had to be wrought from local authorities, blood would have been shed, and lives arbitrarily terminated.[2] This involved an uninvited political imposition on the territory and the import of foreign memories and culture.

Today, most of these details disappear behind modern Hellenism, lost in the myths of a European nostalgia for the presumed purity and nobility of its origins. Here, the discipline of archaeology has often been involved in cleansing the past of undesired accretions and foreign bodies (such as removing Muslim tombs from the Acropolis or the continuing cancellation of Arab settlement in Israel).[3] The palimpsest of historical sedimentation and stratification is stripped away, returning us to the pristine moment of presumed origins. History is annulled, and ruins and relics are transformed into modern nation-building resources from Athens to Jerusalem. The nation is narrated through ethnic cleansing and the racialization of the past (and present). The recall of this white-washed past in modern imperial ambitions is constantly exposed in the neoclassical architectural grammar of contemporary Occidental capitals: from London, Paris, and Berlin to Washington and Rome. The authority of those buildings proposes an invented and homogeneous past. However, the temples and statues of the ancient world they sought to emulate were not white but decorated in vivid colors. The world they are presumed to represent is fabricated through European humanism and nineteenth-century Hellenism. The diasporic cultures of the ancient world that formed a creolized Mediterranean long before the building of the Acropolis and the founding of Rome have been supplanted by an invented classi-

2 Gabriel Zuchtriegel, *Colonization and Subalternity in Classical Greece: Experience of the Nonelite Population* (Cambridge University Press, 2020).

3 Rafael Greenberg and Yannis Hamilakis, *Archaeology, Nation, and Race: Confronting the Past, Decolonizing the Future in Greece and Israel* (Cambridge University Press, 2022).

cism proposed as an autonomous moment and entity.[4] The Italian poet and filmmaker Pier Paolo Pasolini, on the other hand, understood and proposed an altogether wilder, simultaneously indigenous and foreign articulation of antiquity in his film *Oedipus Rex* (1967). Shot in the Moroccan desert, it was motivated by prophecy, magic, monsters, and shamans: all on the edges of "civilization."

Pushing time out of joint in this manner is to repurpose it. Transforming the past into a living interrogation of the present opens up other possibilities and other versions of time. It is to think without the separation and distance imposed by the linearity of "progress" and confront the constant violence of the latter's global imposition. Dismantling what Denise Ferreira da Silva calls the "lethal abstraction" of Western thought that sustains its accumulative and extractive logic, this has less to do with a desire to correct the record and instead returns us to recognizing the colonial constitution of the present.[5] To open this archive is to suggest an additional set of connections with which to navigate the African–Asian–European matrix of the Mediterranean. While not abandoning the disciplinary competencies that have brought this past to light, it means refusing to reduce such material to a single inventory of time. We adopt a more ironic relation to origins. In a sort of archaeology of archaeology, the invitation is to sift the sediments and unearth another genealogy, one that does not simply reflect a European will to power. Drawing from the heart of so-called European civilization, from its Greek and Mediterranean "origins," while raising another set of questions, we encounter other geographies of comprehension and other lines of interpretation. These render

4 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization,* vol. 1: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785–1985* (Vintage, 1991), and Daniel Orrells, Gurminder K. Bhambra, and Tessa Roynon, "Introduction," in *African Athena: New Agendas,* ed. Daniel Orrells, Gurminder K. Bhambra, and Tessa Roynon (Oxford University Press, 2011).

5 Denise Ferreira da Silva in conversation with Maria Thereza Alves and Camila Marambio, "Cumbre Aconcagua. Part Two, El Robo (Theft)," *MOMA,* August 25, 2020, https://www.moma.org/calendar/events/6683.

the distant past proximate and potentially disruptive. The flat taxonomy of time, in which everything is in its chronological and cultural place, is sharply interrupted and fractured, ready for another assemblage of comprehension. Like the painting of the diver, executed for unseeing eyes but now recovered and exposed, we too can consider the hidden and sedimented elements that suggest other evaluations of spacetime.

All of this involves questions of entitlement: Who has the right to narrate and why? According to what type of genealogy is memory possessed and authorized? Trying to answer these questions leads to shifting the premises of the existing humanities and their rule on such questions and perspectives. We assume a more profound responsibility in breaking apart the philological imperative and reassembling its elements in another configuration. This is to acknowledge language's precariousness and constant vulnerability to a past we can never fully recover nor possess.

This also implies returning objects to the thickness of their cultural lineage and the resonance of their historical memories in archival connection to a time to come. A history still being collated and registered continues to invest us from the future. The aim, then, is to return history to another history and disband the naive and unquestioned link with scientific neutrality as the guarantee of our language and knowledge.[6] As Jean-Luc Nancy once put it, this would be to release history from the stranglehold of time and causality and return it "to community, or to being-in-common."[7] It would contest the hierarchical colonization of time and space with the challenge of the commons. This is to take responsibility for both language and

6 Roland Barthes, "The Discourse of History," trans. Stephen Bann, *Comparative Criticism* 3 (1981): 7–20; Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2015); and Claudio Fogu, "Figuring White in Metamodernity," *Storia della Storiografia,* 65, no. 1 (2014): 47–60.

7 Jean-Luc Nancy, "Finite History," in *The States of "Theory": History, Art, and Critical Discourse,* ed. David Carroll (Columbia University Press, 1990), 149.

memory. If, for instance, we receive Greek colonization in the Mediterranean not only as an antique thalassocracy but also as evidence of the diasporas and migrations from Greek cities that inaugurated a colonial enterprise, then a gap in time is opened, rendering that past close to contemporary concerns. Establishing an emporium, practicing colonization, disciplining a territory according to a specific cultural order, experimenting, contesting, and absorbing hybridization were all central to the experience of Paestum some two and a half thousand years ago, just as they are to modernity. This perspective outlines a critical archipelago, which is not simply spatial and geographical but also temporal. It allows us to jump across time. In the undeniable specificities of each historical moment and locality, we can simultaneously acknowledge commonalities and differences that compose a constellation whereby the past becomes comprehensible to present concerns.

If the diver in the tomb is proof of a migratory and hybrid culture — the Greek settlements of Magna Graecia in southern Italy bordering and in contact with the Tuscan, Roman, and Lucan worlds — it also points us to the migrating Mediterranean. This sea has offered hospitality to many peoples traveling in diverse directions: Phoenician, Greek, Carthaginian, Roman, Byzantine, Arab, Norman, Genovese, Catalan, Venetian, Ottoman….To think in such terms means to insist on the fluidity of a complex geo-history that spills over the borders of what today is essentially a collection of national narratives. Furthermore, it implies bringing into today's symposium, intoxicated by the deterministic liquor of neoliberalism, more profound debates that shift the question of modern migration from its frequent marginalization in socio-economic or securitization terms to its role as the driving force of Mediterranean cultures and modernity itself. More extensive claims of belonging here cross our legal, cultural, and historical borders and largely remain unanswered when access to citizenship, the right to narrate, and what

Hannah Arendt called the right to have rights, disturb the existing political order.[8]

The title of this book draws direct inspiration from the noted essay known as "The Southern Question" by the Italian politician and intellectual Antonio Gramsci. In that unfinished essay, Gramsci emphasized that the presumed neutrality in measuring space confirms a distance that guarantees the existing exercise of power.[9] To consider who gets to map, frame, and configure the world, to understand geography as the historical exercise of power, is also to ask who has the right to narrate. The spatial organization of knowledge is also a temporal device that logs, writes up, and chronicles time's political, cultural, and philosophical administration. The distance of the Italian south from the north and the rest of Europe was not only physical; it was, above all, cultural and political. It constituted a cartography of historical relations that secured structural inferiority and implicit colonization.[10] Gramsci's considerations can be extended to consider how modernity continues to map the Mediterranean and the diverse souths of the world as subaltern and marginal. Rendering explicit the spatiality of power invites us to understand how the Mediterranean is culturally and politically produced; it is never simply a geographical given or historical fact.[11] The modern Mediterranean has seemingly been

8 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Schocken Books, 2004).

9 Antonio Gramsci, *The Southern Question,* trans. Pasquale Verdicchio (Bordighera Press, 2015).

10 Evan Calder Williams, and Alberto Toscano, "The Southern Line: The 'Meridione' and the Limits to Periodization," *Estetica: Studi e ricerche* 2 (2017): 233–54.

11 Some of the arguments in this book were originally explored in English in Iain Chambers, "Maritime Criticism and Theoretical Shipwrecks," *PMLA* 125, no. 3 (2010): 678–84; Iain Chambers and Marta Cariello's "At History's Edge: The Mediterranean Question," *New Formations* 106 (2022): 6–24; Iain Chambers, "Learning from the Sea: Migration and Maritime Archives," in *Sea of Literatures: Towards a Theory of Mediterranean Literature,* ed. Angela Fabris, Albert Göschl, and Steffen Schneider (De Gruyter, 2023); and Marta Cariello, "The Edge of Continents, the Insistence of the Sea: Narratives of Mediterranean Migrations," in *Bloomsbury Handbook of Literature and Migration,* ed. Simona Bertacco and Nicoletta Vallorani

captured by contemporary European culture in a combination of judgments and geographies.

The idea that this body of water is only defined by those who presume to possess it emerges in its very name: For whom is the Mediterranean the "Mediterranean," and not *Baḥr al-Rūm* (the Sea of the Romans), or *al-Baḥr al-Shāmī* (the Syrian Sea)? An "Arabic Mediterranean," in the manner we Europeans are accustomed to considering it, does not exist. The term *al-Muttawassit* only began circulating in Arabic at the beginning of the twentieth century.[12] Europe has imposed unity on what elsewhere carried multiple names. This distinction and potential fracture draw attention to a more open archive: one whose languages are not merely of European provenance. Such complexities take us to the underside and unconscious dimensions of the Mediterranean, which, when laid out flat as a map, betray all the limits of its modern European inscription. Further, they lead us to question what is Europe. Entangled through what Jacques Derrida calls "heterogeneous foliations" connecting the Mediterranean to Asia and Africa, an assumed European purity does not provide the answer.[13]

The recent arrival of so-called illegal immigrants, accompanied by the ghosts of thousands of bodies consigned to its depths, has dramatically pierced an exclusively European image of the sea. A repressed complexity now resurfaces. The unauthorized migrant has reopened invisible archives. They have torn the maps that had once confirmed precise limits and locations — their once being firmly positioned elsewhere, on the

(Bloomsbury, 2025), while considerations on the art of Baya Mahieddine were initially explored in Iain Chambers, "It's About Time: Some Notes on Quantum History," *Postcolonial Studies* 26, no. 4 (2023): 487–507. Unless otherwise stated, all translations from Italian are ours.

12 Nabil Matar, "The 'Mediterranean' through Arab Eyes in the Early Modern Period: From Rūmī to 'White In-Between Seas,'" in *The Making of the Modern Mediterranean: Views from the South,* ed. Judith E. Tucker (University of California Press, 2019).

13 Jacques Derrida, "We Other Greeks," in *Derrida and Antiquity,* ed. Miriam Leonard (Oxford University Press, 2010), 31.

other side, certainly not in Europe—and have exposed the Mediterranean and modernity to unexpected prospects.

This present-day interruption overlaps and interconnects with other interrogations. Recent revolts against authoritarian regimes in the Arab world, the deadly conflicts in the 1990s in the Balkans, and the colonial war conducted by the state of Israel since 1948 against the Palestinians pose intensive questions emerging from the renewed centrality of the Mediterranean. The latter insist not only in immediate political terms but also in juridical and philosophical definitions of citizenship and residence rights. Along these borders, with the emergence of other maps of belonging, the constrictions of a preceding, strictly European frame fall apart. The cartography of our geopolitics, claiming to manage and explain these complex processes, requires revision. Otherwise, it leads to accepting only the history of those seeking to arrest (and thus refuse) history and impose their point of view as the only acceptable one.

Thinking with the historical and cultural formation of the Mediterranean and trying to respond to its configurations, we are struck by the need to overcome not only disciplinary and national borders (and here the challenge of cultural, postcolonial, and decolonial studies comes forcibly into play) but also to disorient and reorient the epistemological coordinates that we are accustomed to applying. In this manner, the study of the Mediterranean provokes the chance to experiment with a series of arguments that challenge the rationalizing representation of reason as capable of making the world fully transparent to its will. To insist on the historical and political value of life and culture that escape the rationalist cage, where everything is reduced to the grammar of a single mode of being, is to propose another Mediterranean and another manner of operating in the world. Here, the visual, musical, and literary arts teach us something. They offer diverse languages to map and register the Mediterranean with lines of movement that propose further critical passages. Here, the presumed dialectics of historical progress come undone, not through an erasure of history, but rather in an explosion of narratives interrupting a single sequence. This

takes us into material and temporal stratifications that reassemble the presence of the past in the present. In this key, the Mediterranean becomes a laboratory, leading to new interpretations of modernity.

We are working with the material available, the historical evidence, concepts, and definitions of the Mediterranean inherited within our specific linguistic and cultural limits. We also find ourselves adopting a critical skepticism fostered by the knowledge of the colonial construction and European invention of the Mediterranean, which draws in turn upon the *mare nostrum* myth of an imperious classical, Latin, and Christian order. The definition of the Mediterranean's historical, political, and imagined borders almost always turns out to be an exclusively European issue. In other words, the space geographically defined as Mediterranean does not coincide with a fixed historical or cultural unit; European perspectives overdetermine it. This friction between a shared space and its differentiated histories is significant. Without seeking to close the gap, the Mediterranean floats without immediate accommodation in the available definition. Recognizing it as an integral part of the modern European and Western imperial order in the current relations of power also exposes the profound colonial architecture of that political arrangement. In coming to recognize the crossing and inhabitation of the Mediterranean by subaltern histories and subordinated cultures, we begin to plumb the deeper sediments of this geo-historical constellation.

This critical undertaking is reflected in our deliberately episodic, even fragmented, style in the following pages. On another occasion, following Theodor Adorno, we have insisted on the disruptive heresy of the essay form as a necessary antidote to the stultifying premises of the scientific paper.[14] A unique rationality ruling the world, cultivated and extended by Occidental

14 Theodor W. Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in *Notes to Literature,* vol. 1, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (Columbia University Press, 1991), and Iain Chambers, *Postcolonial Interruptions, Unauthorised Modernities* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 13.

hegemony across the globe, results in an absolutism that historically coincides with particular geo-philosophical and cultural concerns. Against the claims of the universal Subject, what Sylvia Wynter calls the "coloniality of being," the persistence and resistance of other bodies in diverse localities interrupt such a framing.[15] Reduced through racialized pecking orders to anthropological footnotes, the silenced histories of those other practices and lives nevertheless live on. They consistently return to interrogate the purported transparency and inevitability of modernity's "progress," deviating and destabilizing its premises. Rather than fighting toe-to-toe with the scientific claims of the existing social and human sciences, the arguments in this book have chosen a deliberate detour through the languages of the arts. This leads to unpacking the aesthetic attributes of the self-determination of Man whose sensibilities constitute the Western subject and the "regulative discourse of the human."[16] It is what escapes capture by such reasoning — sustained in music, the visual arts, and the poetics of language — that disseminates the dissonance of an alternative historical order and cultural score.

Mediterranean Blues

Blue veins coursing through the urban body: These could be tracks recorded by the Neapolitan dub group Almamegretta, or those found in the intense vocals of James Senese with the group Napoli Centrale, in Pino Daniele's voice and guitar, in Enzo Avitabile's saxophone. Visceral intensities inscribed in the sliding notes and unstable intonation in what Houston Baker, Jr. called the "matrix of the blues" find resonances, repetition, and dissemination amongst these modern Neapolitan musicians, and

15 Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation — An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 257–337.

16 David Lloyd, *Under Representation: The Racial Regime of Aesthetics* (Fordham University Press, 2019), 3.

their stories diffused in the obstinate relay of the bass.[17] Born on the other side of the Atlantic, in the Caribbean, in the slavery of the plantations and the ghettos of segregated cities, such sensibilities and suggestions also unfold in the depths of the city beneath the volcano. Against the rigidity of institutional framing, reinforced by the certainty provided by local and national mythology, the fluidity of the sounds proposes an altogether more frayed and unstable series of maps. These allow us to consider how the multiple histories of the Mediterranean are suspended and conveyed in sounds that render a complex texture momentarily audible.

From Giordano Bruno's mnemonic tools and Sigmund Freud's mystic writing pad to standard technologies such as the novel, the photograph, the record, smartphones, televisions, and hi-res audio files, memories are dispersed in space by cultural machinery that "allows the anticipation of various historicities."[18] In the web of sounds, a song is continually inhabited by other songs and rhythmic transcription is achieved through repetition. As a trace, sound prefigures and configures our bodies. The past invades the present with the promise of the future. "It could be said that the body remembers everything, but in terms of codes and folds and capacities […] the hand that has learned to play a musical instrument is no longer the same hand."[19] Crossing and compressing time, the past continues to speak, shattering the desire for certainty. Here, we sense the critical need not to resolve or cure the past but to recognize its material insistence in the immanent freedom of new beginnings.

Music invites us to travel. Sounds circulate, stretching and transforming the claims of local, linguistic, and national communities. They are equally saturated with historical time and cultural tensions. Against the barely concealed positivism of

17 Houston A. Baker, Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (University of Chicago Press, 1984).

18 Patricia Ticento Clough, *Autoaffection: Unconscious Thought in the Age of Teletechnology* (University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 29.

19 Couz Venn, *The Postcolonial Challenge: Towards Alternative Worlds* (SAGE, 2006), 116.

presumed progress and its confident arrangements, music disseminates an altogether more subtle historical score. Suspended in sound, the past is not yet finished nor ready to be consigned to the canon, museum, or textbook. In its perturbing refusal to die, auditory history introduces a "blue" note, ambivalent, resonant of an elsewhere, into the disciplined orchestration of institutional modernity. These blues hark back to the deliberate dissonance of the African American diasporic cultures of the modern Atlantic world. United by the violence of slavery, such sounds were subsequently distilled into the urban soundtrack of the contemporary metropolis under the brutal marginalization exercised by racism. Blues, jazz, R&B, soul, funk, reggae, rap, and their descendants have constantly traversed, creolized, and destabilized Western coordinates. The singularity of this mobile, rhizomatic ensemble of histories sustained in sound suggests a critical openness resisting the desired closure of fixed identities and stable roots. The routes suspended in the sounds reorient the coordinates of home and belonging in a manner that is both deeper and more dispersive: This is not so much about accepting a home in the world as about creating a world in which to feel at home. Remaining unsatisfied — blue again — offers a mode of remembering that redefines the very idea of history.

Such a practice of thought moves along the passages and through the intervals established by the sounds themselves. It introduces us to a politics of interruption, a critical disposition that suggests a different arrangement of the present. Here, the binding force depends precisely on the contingent instability sustained by sound. We are encouraged to renegotiate imposed coordinates. Beside the sea with maritime thoughts, uprooting and mourning for forgotten lives, listening to archives… uncertainty, these elements draw us into such a constellation. Music is not simply a metaphor, temporarily capable of netting the world it passes through. It references a material event capable of enfolding and unfolding our understanding of time. It alludes to a spacetime beyond immediate representation. Sounds are condensed "time crystals" in which there is "indiscernibility between real and imaginary, or between present and past, actual

and virtual."[20] As sensual and affective geography, music probes space, configures time, and inscribes life into place. It proposes a *nomos* quite distinct from the more rigid referents of terrestrial dwelling. It is generally ineffable and beyond immediate rationality. Suppose we accept its indefinable quality not simply as a sensual escape but also as a critical challenge. In that case, we can begin to suggest a significant shift in what stands for cultural understanding and historical significance.

Along with other artistic practices, music proposes images saturated with time. This is not the empty homogeneous time of historical continuity but the materiality of time that lives in immediate occurrences. These flow physically and psychically into the unconscious constellation of the present. Once again, the force of this proposal lies in the undoing of established hierarchies of truth, as if the historian's version was automatically considered closer to reality than that of the poet or musician: hence Walter Benjamin's well-known propensity to bring together the sociologist and the surrealist, the art historian and the botanist on the pavement. In the montage of this disjunctive present, a discontinuity is disseminated against the synthesis that an epoch considers indispensable for the conformation of its will.[21]

The guitarist and singer–songwriter Pino Daniele, as a Neapolitan version of the Europeans who discovered African American music in the post-war years and crossed it with local sounds and accents, also alerts us to further musical mapping of the Mediterranean emerging in recent decades on its African and Asian shores. The deliberately experimental and hybrid music of Dhafer Youssef and Kamilya Jubran, like that of their older predecessors Anouar Brahem and Rabih Abou-Khalil, has proposed the classical Arab tradition, embodied in the centrality of the oud and taken it on a journey through the sonic possibilities

20 Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time-Image,* trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta (Continuum, 2005), 84.

21 Homi K. Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration,* ed. Homi K. Bhabha (Routledge, 1990).

of the present. Beneath more immediate contaminations in the ubiquity of Arabic rap, rock in the casbah (Rachid Taha, Kasbah Rockers), and blues in the desert (Tinariwen, Tamikrest), there lie further encounters and entanglements.[22] While U-Cef's digital travels from Morocco through New York and London have mined and circulated the sounds of the Atlantic of the Atlas mountains, the crossovers and innovative sounds of Brahem, Khalil, Youssef, and Jubran have broken genre distinctions (is it jazz? fusion? electronic? avant-garde?) and the restricted sense of geographical locations. In a profound but still largely unacknowledged way, the shores of the Mediterranean intertwine in this music, creating unexpected proximities and maintaining the promise and potential of the mix.

Returning to the past and its constitution of the present in this manner, rather than seeking to master it, is to exercise critical freedom. We are involved in recognizing an unguaranteed relationship with another spacetime that, in its alterity, is also ours. Rather than rushing in to fill it with meaning, we remain challenged by what existing definitions fail to explain. Images and sounds are experienced and explored not as representations of reality or history (with all the uncertainty about their being faithful to life, true to the facts) but rather as the felt insistence of a vital poetics: a "sculpture in time," to use the expression of the Russian film director Andrei Tarkovsky. This prompts us to consider the more than ourselves that the visual or sound image announces but can never fully represent. It is an inscription of the world in the world that explodes its immediacy, not to destroy it but to make it, and us, anew.

Mixing seawater, memories, and sounds to fold and tear the inherited maps of the Mediterranean means intentionally crossing, contaminating, and disturbing established languages, genres, and their institutional direction. To emphasize this quantum

22 Mark LeVine, *Heavy Metal Islam: Rock, Resistance and the Struggle for the Soul of Islam* (University of California Press, 2022), and Mark LeVine, *We'll Play till We Die: Journeys across a Decade of Revolutionary Music in the Muslim World* (University of California Press, 2022).

approach is to promote new ways of conceiving and experiencing a complex spacetime where Europe, Asia, and Africa intersect and overlap. Critical nets cast into such a sea are inevitably woven from intertwined cultures, histories, and lives. Such nets are limited in what they capture; they are also full of holes.

Deploying this perspective and unlocking the hegemonic European shaping of the sea and its histories does not mean proposing a monolithic subaltern alternative. Other colonialisms, regimes of violence, and subjugation have also been part of its history, for example, the Arab Caliphate and the Ottoman Empire. However, the dangers of a comparative approach, when the adjudicator of the comparison is not inserted into the analysis, is to lose sight of the asymmetrical powers involved: The territorial continuities of the Ottoman and Russian empires in the eastern Mediterranean, for example, are not of the same scale and potency as their Western seaborne counterparts contemporaneously establishing the planetary coordinates of capitalism. If we add the increasingly insistent souths of the world to that formula, then the seemingly neutral reasoning and comparative rules of the liberal academy are left in intellectual tatters. To acknowledge that the European colonial imperative has become the template for a planetary order is to confront the normalization of global hierarchies established by *that* hegemony and its production of politics, the social and human sciences, and associated understandings of history and progress as a universal measure.[23] This also means recognizing both the location and limits of postcolonial criticism. Insisting on historical specificity and the non-universality of our languages and sciences is to provincialize the disciplines and humanism that sustain the opposite. It is to acknowledge forms of knowledge not necessarily yoked to the parable of European progress and its claims on the world. If we cannot speak for, or in the name of, what

23 David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

exceeds our provenance, we can, as Assia Djebar suggested, at least begin an apprenticeship in speaking in the vicinity.[24]

In the reacquired centrality of the Mediterranean as one of the leading global migration sites and its identification as a crisis hotspot, the northward crossing of its waters transforms certain human beings into mere objects of European legislation and politics. Simultaneously, however, the migrant scars the political body of the West, forcing a re-examination of the very premises of its citizenship and democracy. In the gap between objectification and emergent political prospects, between the hegemony of the northern shore and heterogenous subaltern subjects arriving from the south of the world, the institutional stability of the European archive and its documents are set adrift. This colonial feedback forces a reshuffle of the critical pack, even abandoning some of the cards. The "imperial technology" of the colonial regime, confirming its history and self, snarls up in what it fails to register, digest, and incorporate. The formula is broken, and its particular order is exposed at the point where,

> scholars are caught in the circularity of the archive and continue not only to operate within it but *to operate it*. The documents they find were produced, classified, and preserved according to an imperial temporality, spatiality and body politic, but they are led to believe that these documents represent the missing pieces of incomplete puzzles, telling the true story of imperial regimes which only they can assemble after mastering the archive itself.[25]

Caught and foreclosed in the coloniality of power, we often cannot acknowledge the ontological challenge of those who refuse to be objects of our history.[26] In this sense, as a discipline and modality of knowledge, history itself continues to be a colo-

24 Assia Djebar, *Women of Algiers in Their Apartments,* trans. Marjolijn De Jager (University of Virginia Press, 1992), 2.

25 Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso, 2019), 556.

26 Ibid., 568.

nial enterprise. For the Occident, "historicity cannot dissipate its own effects of power; it cannot institute subjects that signify otherwise."[27]

Registering such limits and moving along the edges of authorized spacetime, what many call modernity, involves recognizing that our inherited conceptual frame is now robbed of its conclusions and the satisfaction of a homecoming. A regime of representation, where the presumed distance from the messy heterogeneity and differentiated materiality of the world guarantees its universal neutrality, is threatened by unsuspected proximities and unplanned encounters. The will to categorize, classify, and pathologize the rest of the planet is increasingly challenged by other lives that matter.

To reintroduce what is excluded in mapping and explaining the Mediterranean is to resist the temptation of completing the picture that permits a particular reason to continue colonizing historical and cultural explanations. It implies, instead, seeking to snap the chains of the reasoning that always confirm our hands on the wheel and our lines on the map. In our terrible world, something always breaks through and proposes to draw us elsewhere. It is precisely here, in a critical sublime that remains intractable and refuses to confirm me, us, and the others as stable and formed, that we seek to situate our analyses and develop our critical inquiry.

27 Denise Ferreira da Silva, *Towards a Global Idea of Race* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007), 50.

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Maps

This book intends to challenge the conventional presentation of the Mediterranean. It requires thinking in a multilateral fashion. The sea and its manifold histories resist reduction to a unified object. So, our critical work proposes to combine different maps and trajectories to produce a semantic density that responds to a Mediterranean that is neither homogeneous nor exclusively the mirror of inherited understandings. The search for a complete picture, ultimately the expression of cultural arrogance and destined to critical failure, is abandoned for the historical value of following a series of itineraries that contest a single and conclusive approach. While intent on working beyond established disciplinary borders, we are also profoundly aware of our limits. Our restricted knowledge of historiography from the Arab world, coupled with the linguistic impossibility of reading Ottoman archives or having the competence to comprehend the musical and literary poetics coming from the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean, are all significant limitations. However, these are also limitations we can work and reason with.

Recognizing our particular location, we can better comprehend the urgency of histories and lives still to be acknowledged. The reference points we have inherited in the records of the *longue durée* proposed by Fernand Braudel, Peregrine Horden,

Nicholas Purcell, and David Abulafia, but also, differently, by Edward Said, Predrag Matvejević, and Franco Cassano, provide a platform for taking a further step.[1] Registering the radical re-evaluation of the premises of Western modernity induced by cultural, postcolonial, and decolonial studies, we insist on the need to operate a cut, or an interruption, in the existing narrative. Focusing on the historical and cultural processes that constantly transform the Mediterranean into a living and open archive, the site of heterogeneous modernity, we suggest breaking with the teleology of a unique version.

These prospects may seem abstract, but the situation is clarified once applied to the languages and disciplines that habitually define and explain the Mediterranean. Here, the design of political science and international relations, for example, subsequently applied via area studies and geopolitical analyses, reveal their inadequacy. When the validity of analysis functions through the methodological reconfirmation of the premises deployed, its assumed scientificity invariably represses what it claims to represent and explain. A unilateral logic imposed on the spacetime of others is an inevitable part of the hegemony of those seemingly authorized to map and explain this moment in time. This touches on the largely unquestioned historical formation of the presumed objectivity of the social sciences. It is where Occidental research paradigms and executive political powers mesh in a manner that involves more than academic issues of stereotypes or cultural chauvinism. In the purported neutrality of the social sciences lies a methodological racism that ultimately arrives at "a colonial technology of life and premature

1 Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II,* vol. 1, trans. Siân Reynolds (University of California Press, 1995); Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Blackwell, 2000); David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (Pantheon, 1978); Predrag Matvejević, *Mediterranean: A Cultural Landscape,* trans. Michael Henry Heim (University of California Press, 1999); and Franco Cassano, *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean,* ed. and trans. Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme (Fordham University Press, 2012).

death built on ideologies of whiteness and white supremacy."[2] The critical, and therefore epistemological, problem lies in recognizing these parameters, that is, registering and re-elaborating them in the layering and complexity of a far wider historical–cultural formation, which is ultimately planetary and does not simply reflect the claimed universality of Western knowledge. This urges us to think *with* the Mediterranean rather than remain embroiled in debates on establishing its status as a stable research object of verification. As a fluid, conceptual space responding to mutable connective relations and practices, it constantly queries and escapes both methodological nationalism and the hegemony of a knowledge formation of exclusively Occidental provenance.

If a specific vision of the Mediterranean has dominated modernity, violently imposed through the European appropriation of the planet — from the *Reconquista* in Spain and the taking of the Americas to the Napoleonic seizure of Egypt and the parceling out of Africa and Asia between European colonial powers — we can no longer ignore the presence of subaltern and silenced histories in this assemblage. The ready reply is that these are now moments lost in time, such as a thousand years ago, when the Arab world from Baghdad to Cairo, Palermo to Córdoba, was considered one of the epicenters of the then civilized world, or when the Ottoman Empire dominated the Mediterranean and European politics in the sixteenth century. If we accept this verdict and the accompanying oblivion, we embrace a unilateral history that takes us forward without appeal. At this point, even the need for historical analysis is ultimately demolished, reduced to the propaganda of inevitable progress.

These moments, however, are not lost in time. They persist in the languages and arrangements of the present. They are sedimented and inscribed in the historical and cultural orders that

2 Olivia Umurerwa Rutazibwa, "Why Is Mainstream International Relations Blind to Racism?," *Foreign Policy,* July 3, 2020, https://foreignpolicy.com/2020/07/03/why-is-mainstream-international-relations-ir-blind-to-racism-colonialism/.

accumulate in the composition of the contemporary world. The Islamic Mediterranean, or the colonial Mediterranean, are not simply closed chapters, detached from actuality; that past has deposited linguistic, culinary, musical, and cultural traces that continue to interrogate us. In its shifting configurations, the illumination offered by such a historical constellation changes but does not disappear.

Registering diverse moments in the multifarious history of the Mediterranean, when other concerns and prospects mobilized its organization and fueled its interpretation, suggests a more stratified and composite scenario. It also provides us with other languages to comprehend the current order. To bring the past into the present in this way is to insist on the critical force of anachronism: The intersecting of history and the present implodes temporal linearity and the seeming neutrality of spatial coordinates. The necessary heresy resides in the insistence that historiography is exercised, consciously and unconsciously, not in the presumed facts of the past — as if they were pure and not already contaminated by our gaze, language, and intellectual desire — but rather through respecting the difficulties seeded in the interpretative rigor of the present. Here, the method lies not in an academic discipline's rational and abstract premises carving out reality but in interpretative reason sustained by a world that precedes and exceeds any conclusive discourse. In this way, the past is still possible.

Departures

Although the Mediterranean has historically been considered the source of philosophical thought and European culture, this heritage has, in modern times, been pushed aside. If the Occidental logos and the rationalizing procedures of its subsequent modernity seemingly originated there, the shift of power to the Atlantic world in the seventeenth century, preceded by the circumnavigation of Africa, subsequently displaced the Mediterranean's centrality. Yet, this manner of following history's course is too flat and narrow. While Charles V ruled over his empire in

the Americas, he also disputed the most significant European power of the time in the Mediterranean: the Ottoman Empire. The latter dominated not only the Asian and African shores but also the Balkans and Hungary while constantly threatening to capture Vienna.

One hundred and fifty years later, a revolt in the British colonies of North America announced the beginning of what Eric Hobsbawm called the Age of Revolution. It united the old continent with the so-called new world, where we can track the crossing of the French revolutionaries with the extended struggle (1793–1804) of the Black Jacobins in the slave rebellion led by Touissant L'Ouverture in Saint-Domingue/Haiti.[3] Here, we also catch the connections of the alliance between Catholics and Protestants in the Wolfe Tone Rebellion in Ireland (1798) and the short-lived Parthenopean Republic in Naples in 1799.

The details of 1799 reveal the complexity of a world in which, since 1500, local powers have been fully implicated in global coordinates. The British Navy under Horatio Nelson facilitated the defeat of Republican forces in Naples. The previous year, at the battle of Abu Qir in Egyptian waters, Nelson had destroyed the French fleet that had transported Napoleon Bonaparte's army to Egypt to take the province from the Ottoman Empire. Naples, Cairo, Ireland, and Haiti are links in a network ruled according to the logic that he who rules the seas rules the world (a motto attributed to the English pirate Walter Raleigh and Nelson). French and British maritime empires were simultaneously fighting for world hegemony in the Caribbean and the Mediterranean. In the following decades, the latter would be transformed into a colonial lake: less than a century ago, from the coast of Morocco to Baghdad, the entire southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean were ruled directly from Paris (Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Lebanon, and Syria), London (Egypt, Palestine, Iraq), and Rome (Libya). This suggests a "global colonial archive" that continues to haunt the maps

3 C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L'Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (Penguin, 2011).

and political settlements of the present.[4] With such maps in hand, the Mediterranean acquires another history. Behind and beneath the colonial façade, further histories and cultures have continued to connect and shape the Mediterranean. From the hundred-year-old war and occupation in Palestine/Israel and the similar obfuscation of the Kurdish question to the present European panic around immigration from Africa and Asia, or the events of 2010–12 gathered under the generic term of the Arab Spring, all are symptoms of structural processes that push us to reopen the archives and register the colonial constitution of the present. This allows the Mediterranean to acquire other histories.

Congealed in the European gaze, the wealth of the north of the Mediterranean and the poverty of its south are transformed into a historical and political paradigm. It leads to the marginalization and erasure of other historical moments where such relations were inverted or considered less significant. In the twelfth century, the African and Asian shores were considerably more prosperous and developed than then "barbaric" Europe. In the deeper temporalities and ecologies of the Mediterranean that we have learned from Fernand Braudel, the fourteenth-century Arab historian Ibn Khaldūn, and more recently in the work of Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, the usual chronology of grand events and individuals come to be displaced by the complex rhythms of anonymous materialism and shifting configurations of power. Thinking of the Mediterranean in this light, alongside the spatial sweep of Shalom Dov Goitein's noted studies of the Jewish merchants in Cairo, the expansive universe of Islam in Marshall Hodgson, and the world system before European hegemony in Janet Abu-Lughod, or, to adopt the radically different language of the then contemporary Arab observers of the Crusades and the European invasion of West-

4 Carmine Conelli, "Challenging the Domestic Colonial Archive: Notes on the Racialization of the Italian Mezzogiorno," in *Postcolonial Europe: Comparative Reflections after the Empires,* ed. Lars Jensen et al. (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).

ern Asia (what in our colonial syntax we today call the Middle East), in Amin Maalouf's *The Crusades through Arab Eyes,* means to recognize historical processes that take us decisively into another frame of understanding.[5] Attention to the language deployed opens up a semantic rift. If the Crusaders thought they were waging a holy war on Islam, for the Muslim, Jewish, and existing Christian inhabitants of Palestine, they were marauding "Franks" invading, robbing and destroying their homeland.

And then there is the sea. To register the sedimentation of bodies, cultures, and histories that reside in its waters is to trouble terrestrial certainties and the transparency sought by the social sciences. The movement and opacity of the sea escapes the claims of a single narrative. It is not merely a mercantile or military matter. In its waters float other, often emergent, histories. As Philip Steinberg reminds us, the sea is a social construction, a historical, juridical, political, and…poetical space.[6] Fluid archives suspended in water sustain aquatic memories that connect bodies of water to bodies in the water: from the Black Atlantic to today's Black Mediterranean. Registering the marine world as essential to the making of modernity — from slave ships and sea-borne empires to container logistics, the industrialized extraction of its resources (from fish to fossil fuels), and the centrality of intercontinental migration to the modern epoch — we encounter the brutal consistency of colonialism. It is there in the haunting racism that produces the violent grammar of inhospitality, today etched in the "hieroglyphics of the flesh" on the body of the contemporary migrant.[7] In this reac-

5 S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society,* 6 vols. (University of California Press, 2000); Marshall G.S. Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam,* 3 vols. (University of Chicago Press, 1977); Janet Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World System A.D. 1250–1350* (Oxford University Press, 1991); and Amin Maalouf, *The Crusades through Arab Eyes,* trans. John Rothschild (Al Saqi Books, 1984).

6 Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

7 Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64–81.

tivation of the Atlantic slave trade within the contemporary necropolitics of modern Mediterranean migration, where the historical weight of the adjective "black" stretches back and forth across the Atlantic and into the Mediterranean, we catch the sharp sense of a temporality that refuses to pass.[8] As Avery Gordon has put it: "How do we reckon with what modern history has rendered ghostly?"[9]

Unlike linear chronologies and accredited histories, such rhythms and flows release the recursive dynamics of further inconclusive narratives entangled in indeterminacy and contingency. We find ourselves at sea, a little lost and uncertain beneath more expansive, wilder skies. A necessary reorientation interrupts and reworks the terra-centric Occidental template of historiography, sociology, and philosophy, puncturing their faith in rendering the world transparent to their will. To sow critical language with inconclusiveness and uncertainty is what the philosopher and artist Denise Ferreira da Silva calls reaching for another language and a knowing without being imprisoned in the categories of modernity.[10]

Such complexities challenge the flatness of maps and the chessboard logic of geopolitics and international relations. Registering the specificities of the histories inscribed in the making of the Mediterranean requires an interdisciplinary and transcultural approach. Institutional knowledge and disciplinary authority are not simply erased but instead opened up to the possibility of being traversed in an unauthorized manner. This leads to probing the historical archive, searching for the voices and histories that persist, unheard, unregistered, and repressed. These histories come from the depths and the margins of the narrative that legitimizes the present. They are destined to pierce any car-

8 Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics,* trans. Steven Corcoran (Duke University Press, 2019).

9 Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociologial Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press, 2008), 18.

10 Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Towards a Black Feminist Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness towards the End of the World," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 2 (2014): 81–97.

tography that claims to be able to frame and explain the Mediterranean. What is at stake is not a simple adjustment or the insertion of some missing pieces. The point, instead, is to trace within excluded and marginalized histories the procedures and premises that have produced the very mechanisms of exclusion.

At this point, the Mediterranean becomes a critical space. Traveling in this direction, we propose to explore the perspectives of a postcolonial Mediterranean. What might this mean? We intend to challenge the current system of definitions and explanations by drawing on Antonio Gramsci's analysis of the asymmetrical relations of power that produce a subaltern but structurally fundamental world for the existing exercise of hegemony. The power of geography to map and coordinate the reticular logic that confirms one specific cartography and not another inevitably also reveals the geography of power. Even the more speculative and rhizomatic itineraries of geo-philosophy fail to abandon the obsession with the exclusive grid lines of European thought: from the Greek archipelago to Martin Heidegger and beyond.[11]

Gramsci's analysis of the Italian Southern Question underscored the spatial relations of power that produced a "south." Historically, such procedures have also worked with other coordinates and prospects. In other times and places, the northern and European shores of the Mediterranean were often considered in the same fashion as the south (of Italy, of Europe, of the Mediterranean, of the world) is generally considered today: poor, peripheral, and underdeveloped. What we want to insist on here is not an alternative chronology; instead, we propose to interrupt the narratives and explanations that invariably lead only to confirming the initial point of departure: Europe. Deploying a different compass, we can connect to other histories and archives. It becomes possible to reconfigure the Mediterranean to permit a diverse evaluation of the present. When

11 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Bloomsbury, 2013), and Massimo Cacciari, *L'arcipelago* (Adelphi, 1997).

other histories, geographies, and ways of mapping the Mediterranean emerge, our inherited sense of history is deviated, transformed, and taken elsewhere. An insistent past now presses in on the present with other interrogations.

The continuing consequences of transforming the Mediterranean into a colonial appendage during the nineteenth century means that Occidental interests and powers overwhelmingly defined the area. In the reciprocal entanglement of modernity, colonialism, and capitalism, to be modern was to be colonial. Capital always requires new territories, markets, and resources to reproduce itself. It needs continually to dispossess and colonize the planet. It involves violating the rights of others to extract all that is necessary for its accumulation. The drive is constant. The question today is whether we should continue to work with this order and its languages as if they were inescapable and atemporal or whether there are other social, cultural, historical, and ecological practices and rights to be registered.

While fully aware of the limited appeal of this question in official quarters, it is necessary to seek a paradigm shift that decolonizes this legacy. Rethinking the formation of the Mediterranean simultaneously invests the disciplinary languages that claim to explain it. A particular historical and cultural comprehension is at stake; so, too, is the epistemological assemblage that authorizes the formation of contemporary knowledge, its disciplinary protocols, and its political shaping. Opposed to this hegemonic historical bloc, we have adopted a diverse configuration of the Mediterranean — and modernity in general — by insisting on interruptions, discontinuities, and the return of the refused and discarded. Time is cut up, maps creased and torn, and history synchronized with other rhythms to remain irreducible to a single order.

The Mediterranean's current historical, cultural, and political understanding is sustained by the exercise of powers able to impose their right to map, control, and define it. The realism of geopolitics and its apparent objectivity reveal the deeper concerns and the structural violence of partisan ethnopolitics. Academic work and critical analysis, while attentive to chrono-

logical and empirical details, frequently remain within such parameters. Specialized knowledge and institutional accountability are limited precisely when their particular position in a historical formation is presented as a universal norm. In the following pages, we propose a more undisciplined perspective that seeks to undo and confute the existing arrangement. This is not about solving the problem of disciplinary, historical, and political limits but rather of seeking ways to register and re-elaborate such confines to produce another Mediterranean.

Changing perspective and altering the interpretative axes, we could commence from such medieval cities as Cairo or Baghdad (but, again, medieval to whose measure of time and "progress"?) or consider Islam as a European religion since the eighth century, or, rethink the Italian Renaissance and European Humanism with a broader lens that includes Arab sciences and humanist culture, or consider south-eastern Europe and the Mediterranean commencing from Istanbul at the time of the Ottoman Empire. In all these cases, a very different Mediterranean emerges compared to that proposed by the geopolitical powers of modern Europe. Our proposed Mediterranean deviates from what has today imposed itself as the universal model of comprehension. It is both multiple and more democratic in its considerations. Relinquishing the idea that everything originates in Europe as if it were the point zero of global progress, we might instead provocatively propose that basically, nothing originates in Europe: from the components making up its "Mediterranean diet" (of which almost all the ingredients arrived from extra-European spaces, initially via the Arab world and subsequently through colonial gain), to the architectural language of its Gothic cathedrals and the mathematical logic, from the decimal Hindu–Arabic numerical system to algebra, of its scientific discoveries.

Take the question of perspective, the cornerstone of Renaissance humanism and the subsequent rationalization of time (history) and space (geography). Thinking with Islamic culture as a challenge to the existing Occidental history of art, Wendy Shaw writes: "the West remained mired in a monocular per-

spective of the world" that produced "desire rooted in the eye rather than in the body."[12] This was to be crucial to the subsequent mapping of the globe and the unilateral appropriation of its resources. Abstract perspective, a precise European construction, passes as universal and natural. Yet behind the history of Renaissance perspective lies an altogether more complex web that spans the Mediterranean and leads to the necessary dissolution of what we in the West consider the inaugural moment of "our" modernity.

> Brunelleschi, deviser of the famous Florence Cathedral dome, is known to have read the writings of the Islamic scientist Ibn al-Haytham (965–1040), who worked on the principles of optics at the Fatimid court in Cairo in the early eleventh century. His main work, *Kitāb al-Manāẓir* or the Book of Optics, first written in 1028, was translated into Latin in Spain around 1200 under the title *De Aspectibus* or *Perspectiva.* Many researchers have recognised that Renaissance artists took the scientific principles of the human perspective from his writings, set down on paper four centuries earlier, having read Latin translations of the Arabic.[13]

Configured as the origin of Occidental progress, perspective becomes the unique means to see, frame, and rationally control the world, unfolding in a linear and imperial fashion from the subject toward infinity. It comes with the price of a tunnel vision where history is limited to a unique vision. What it permits is the moral authority to colonize space and annihilate the time of others. Here, again, is Wendy Shaw on the question:

> Perspective symbolises the achievement of modernity because it enables Kantian objectivity to structure knowl-

12 Wendy M.K. Shaw, *What Is Islamic Art: Between Religion and Perception* (Cambridge University Press, 2019), 314, 306.

13 Diana Darke, *Stealing from the Saracens: How Islamic Architecture Shaped Europe* (Hurst, 2020), 215.

> edge. This enables art to function through a critical distance imposed by Hegel, as a sign rather than as mimesis of the absent Real. These analyses propose a binary structure in which perspective becomes the only paradigm for space, and distance the only possibility for reason. The appearance of objectivity through perspective naturalises the assertion of human omnipotence. Thus represented through the distant subject who looks at, controls, and analyses whatever lies before him — landscape, history, or painting — through the model of perspective, the scholarly critic also gains authority through the propriety of distance, disinvestment, and demonstrative rhetoric.[14]

A more extensive series of maps and temporalities that overlap and diverge from a single measure suggest that we turn to the past and the present with different eyes and ears. Our history comes undone and can no longer secure its origin and destination exclusively in Europe and the West.

Fluid Geographies

The limits of knowledge associated with mapping have indeed been acknowledged in the contemporary study of geography. The measurement of the world, the division of territory, and the calculation of distances result not simply from a geometry of space but also, more significantly, from an organization of power.[15] The question of who maps and designates space is not neutral. The historical power of geography is revealed in its ability to reduce the world to a single, universal point of view so that even what is unknown and not yet explored is already framed and arranged.[16] But we know there have been other maps and

14 Shaw, *What Is Islamic Art,* 320.

15 Franco Farinelli, *Blinding Polyphemus: Geography and Models of the World,* trans. Christina Chalmers (Seagull Books, 2018).

16 Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of the Enlightenment,* ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford University Press, 2002).

Fig. 2.1. A 1929 copy, with names transliterated into Latin script, of the 1154 Arabic *Tabula Rogeriana,* with north oriented up (detail). Source: Wikimedia Commons.

ways of perceiving and conceiving the Mediterranean. The most famous is that of Abū ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad ibn Muḥammad ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Idrīs al-Ṣabti, or Al-Idrīsī, made in the mid-twelfth century for the Norman ruler of Sicily, Roger II (fig. 2.1). To our eyes and rules, this is an upside-down world, with the North in the South and vice versa. Apart from the relative marginalization of Europe in this vision (which also corresponds to the historical–economic reality of the time), Al-Idrīsī's map underlines the profound arbitrariness of the cartographic act. However, this arbitrariness is neither abstract nor simply capricious; it responds to knowledge and political and economic coordinates that orbited around centers other than Rome, Paris, and London at the time. Then, the Mediterranean was under the gaze and definitions of Baghdad, Cairo, Cordova, and even Palermo. In this sense, geography, both that of a thousand years ago and that of today, is a device of knowledge and control embedded in a specific history; this invites us to think of maps more as palimpsests composed in the procedures of power that have passed through and across them, and therefore historically elaborated and defined, than as measurements of stable references seeking to fix and control space. Critically, maps provide points of departure, not arrival.

The modern map of Iraq, for example, turns out to be a deeper archive whose fluctuating contours and definitions take us back through the British mandate of the early twentieth century and the colonial creation of nation-states in the Middle East to three former Ottoman provinces, and then through the various shifting powers of the Arab world and the Mongol invasion, to the cultural contours of the Greek and Persian empires, and even further back, to the Sumerians, Assyrians, and Babylonians. None of these configurations corresponds to the mythical Mesopotamia that modern archaeology and colonial rule have imposed, creating an invented unity that has erased a complex past. It provides a space ready to participate in the territorial

nationalism and modern temporality of history.[17] Yet, despite everything, these other histories continue to return and puncture current cartography.

Space is not simply given, uncovered, or neutral. In short, it is a social, historical, and cultural production, a political configuration. Let us listen again to Antonio Gramsci on this issue:

> What would North–South, East–West mean without man? They are real relationships and yet they would not exist without man and without the development of civilization. It is evident that East and West are arbitrary, conventional, that is, historical constructions, since outside of real history every point on earth is East and West at the same time. This can be seen more clearly from the fact that these terms have crystallized not from the point of view of a hypothetical and melancholy man in general but from the point of view of the European educated classes who through their world hegemony have made them accepted everywhere. Japan is the Far East not only to the European but perhaps also to the American in California and to a Japanese person, who through English political culture may call Egypt the Near East.[18]

This critical compass has been taken up in more recent times by the Palestinian critic Edward Said to highlight the partitioning of the world into areas of interest and specialized knowledge, the result of which is the consolidation of the Western point of view as a universal measure of the world that has made the rest of the planet subordinate to its interests. In the wake of Gramsci, who had indicated in the arbitrary distinctions between the North and the South and between the West and the East, the historical elaboration of economic and political powers, Said speaks of the construction of the East and the emergence of the

17 Sophus Helle, "The Return of Mess O'Potamia: Time, Space, and Politics in Modern Uses of Ancient Mesopotamia," *Postcolonial Studies* 19, no. 3 (2016): 305–24.

18 Antonio Gramsci, *Quaderni del carcere* (Einaudi, 1975), 1419–20.

field of knowledge that he called Orientalism. It aims at making the East the supine and silent object of our point of view and subjectivity.[19] Listening to Gramsci and Said, we can begin to uproot the usual map of the Mediterranean and its colonizing imperative.

The colonization of the planet has not taken place exclusively in economic and military terms, but above all through the production of knowledge that justifies and confirms what Heidegger called moral anthropology, in which the elaboration of our subjectivity and our framing of the world coincide.[20] Questions emerge from the suppressed maps proposed by other bodies and cultures circulating in the same spacetime. Investigating the formation of this power structure leads one to confront what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak has aptly called the "epistemic violence" of modernity.[21] Making Europe universal and the only valid measure of the world does not simply correspond to the brutal imposition of a power capable of appropriating the rest of the planet but also to an intellectual and cultural device that renders the claims of the bodies and cultures of others inferior. It makes them subordinate to not only the physical but also the cultural forces of the West. The others are racially reduced to the categories of the "not yet" modern and, therefore, excluded from the rationale of full citizenship and rights. For them, the color line still exists; only the white world is unmarked to remain universal.

Historically, it remains irrefutable that the Mediterranean has been conceived and constructed by other gazes from different places and points of view. All these maps, and not only the last and most powerful Western one, have been produced, as Frantz Fanon would have put it, under the sign of violence. But the latest, where we move and reason today, has most pro-

19 Said, *Orientalism.*

20 Martin Heidegger, "The Age of the World View," trans. Marjorie Grene, *boundary 2* 4, no. 2 (1976): 341–55.

21 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (University of Illinois Press, 1988), 289.

foundly affected the Mediterranean, imposing its economic and cultural hierarchies to incorporate it better into global management.

Any alternative mapping is inherently associated with promoting *discontinuity* and shifting the premises of present pathologies. As Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault insisted, understanding the history of the present is not a question of origins. Breaking the continuity that the present seeks to impose, the categories employed and the affirmation of our subjectivity and its hold on the world are transformed into the open sea advocated by Nietzsche in *The Gay Science.*[22] To insist on shifts, fractures, and contingencies against the stasis of the conceptual order and its naturalization in common (and critical) sense is to historicize analyses in the most profound understanding of the term. In this way, the existing conceptual order is undermined by the insistence that history, its bodies, powers, and arrangements spill over without any designated origin or purpose. The world is in our hands. This alarming responsibility cannot be relegated to final destinies. As Walter Benjamin brilliantly suggested:

> The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance. Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis.[23]

The aim is to open a turbulent and disturbing archive that refuses to stabilize and close to respect the authority of existing agreements. Those denied insist on their right to narrate. The past refuses to pass. Think of Islam as an external historical

22 Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science: With a Prelude in Rhymes and an Appendix of Songs,* trans. Walter Kaufmann (Random House, 1974).

23 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* trans. John Osborne (Verso, 1977), 45.

and cultural force against which Europe has defined itself, particularly in the Mediterranean, for over a thousand years. And then it turns out that all three monotheisms are of Eastern origin, faiths born in the desert of Western Asia and intertwined in such a way as to constitute, especially in the universal design of Christianity and Islam as opposed to the more ethnic exclusivity of Judaism, variations of a unique tradition.[24] The rapid spread of Islam across North Africa and Asia and its apotheosis in one of the most powerful nations in Europe in the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire, is undeniable. Yet, if one looks further into the recesses of the past, a much more complex narrative begins to emerge. Beyond the simple dualism represented by Christianity and Islam, which asserted themselves in mutual opposition, one can also consider how Islam has constantly been an *internal* element in the construction of Europe since the eighth century.

The Order of the Teutonic Knights, although initially founded around 1190 to protect pilgrims in the Holy Land, was soon transferred to Transylvania following the defeat of the Crusaders by Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb, or Saladin. Subsequently, the knights were expelled by King Andrew II of Hungary in 1225. Five years later, the Order launched the Prussian Crusade to Christianize the Baltic (and extend its territorial powers). Even further north, at Uppsala in present-day Sweden, human sacrifices were practiced every nine years until the eleventh century to appease the Norse deities. In 712, Berber troops under Arab command crossed the Strait of Gibraltar. Twenty years later, they crossed the Pyrenees. While at the end of the fifteenth century, Islamic culture had been expelled from the Iberian peninsula, it is also the case that it had simultaneously taken hold in eastern Europe, conquered by the Ottomans, almost reaching the walls of Vienna. Islam was continuously present in large parts of Europe for far longer than Christianity in other areas. This, too, can be called an archive, rarely considered when referring to the complex composition of modern

24 Massimo Campanini, *L'Islam, religione dell'Occidente* (Mimesis, 2018).

Europe and the neurotic reactions to Muslims and minarets in today's Europe.

In the modern narrative of the nation (and in its later distillation into disciplinary protocols), this altogether more tangled and unruly formation is simplified and censored. The retreat of Charlemagne's troops across the Pyrenees in 778 led to the massacre of his rearguard under Count Roland at Roncesvalles in the mountains of northern Spain. It had been attacked and annihilated by pagan Basques and not by Arab forces. Beginning with the eleventh-century *Chanson de Roland,* the battle would later be romanticized into a chivalric clash between Christians and Muslims. The same theme is repeated five centuries later in the epic poem *L'Orlando Furioso* by Ludovico Ariosto. So, what is it all about? To reestablish the truth? No, the intention here is different. Reintroducing the traces of other geographies and histories undermines the authority of a single account of the past that sustains and perpetuates a hegemony in the present. By problematizing and disturbing inherited interpretations, it is possible to disengage this emerging understanding from a predetermined framework. It makes it possible not only to accent diversely accounts of the past and present but also to interrogate the frame itself and the disciplines and consensus that wish the past to be packaged so that it placidly illuminates the current distribution of power.

The Mediterranean in Migration

Listening to a *maqām* played today by Naseer Shamma and composed by Abu l-Hasan 'Ali Ibn Nāfi' (better known as Ziryab), a musician who came to Córdoba from Baghdad in the eighth century, we are drawn close to a moment seemingly lost in time.[25] The proposal of Naseer Shamma, also from Baghdad, is of an invented historical inventory. The music we hear in this case comes from something other than the study of musical notation: no manuscript or document exists of Ziryab's music.

25 Naseer Shamma, *Maqamat Ziryab* (Pneuma, 2005), CD.

Shamma's performance is an artistic invention that opens up a hole in time. It brings together different places and temporalities in a critical constellation that establishes the pertinency of the past in the present. This does not mean erasing inherited knowledge or disciplinary logic but traversing their territories with questions and perspectives they are generally unable to authorize. This exposes them to what their representations suppress to establish their particular truths.

Since the rise and triumph of European nationalism in the nineteenth century, there has been a tendency to view history in terms of national units and modern Mediterranean history as an accumulation of these autonomous elements. This representation of time and space is also an intense instance of repression. What exceeds or disturbs the national narrative tends to be silenced and marginalized. Such a framing of the Mediterranean invariably emphasizes frontiers, borders, areas of national interest, linguistic boundaries, and the record of documented citizenship rather than fluid materialities that can only partially be possessed. The friction between these two dimensions and their growing historical intimacy, provoked by globalization and today's migration processes, proposes an assembly of unequal and antagonistic powers.

There is something particular about what is being drawn together in the traces of contemporary migrations in the Mediterranean. This specificity lies not in uniqueness or novelty; over the centuries, migrations in the same basin of water have moved in many directions (in recent times, the French in Algeria, the Italians in Tunisia, and Libya). Movement has always been the case and is a fundamental element for a critical framing of Mediterranean history. Nor, on the other hand, are contemporary migrations, with their tragic and often deadly consequences, exclusive to the Mediterranean. Suffice to think of the passage of people attempting to reach Australia, the endless crossings of the border between Mexico and the United States, or the mass movements of war refugees toward Lebanon, Turkey, or Uganda, among many other situations.

Where modern migration imposes itself as irreconcilable in the European context is through a reconsideration of the narrative of Europe itself. This narrative is interrupted by human displacement in a continual redefinition of internal and external borders, which, in turn, rewrite the concepts of inclusion and exclusion, of "us" and "them," native and foreign. Today's Mediterranean has become the exposed and explicit site of these practices. The hegemonic narrative of Europe as a political–cultural formation has established the myth of progress, of origin (in the sense of "cradle of civilization"), and the maturation of a so-called peace process that had declared itself definitive and potentially universal after the Second World War. It has turned out to be suffocating in the violence of borders and exclusionary in alliances along the axes of righteous and rogue states. The claimed exclusivity of progress has been turned into the claim of (enlightened) civilization, as proclaimed for instance in the hashtag/slogan "Je suis Charlie" in reaction to the massacre in the editorial office of the Parisian satirical newspaper *Charlie Hebdo* in January 2015 at the hands of Islamic fundamentalists. The defense of the French victims quickly turned into a confirmation of the monolithic distinction between the "enlightened West" and the "backward East." The slogan sparked a heated debate on freedom of expression. *Charlie Hebdo's* ironic slogan played with stereotypes and clichés on a fragile, often invisible, line between the right to satire and the desire to offend. The hashtag "Je ne suis pas Charlie" was born immediately afterward, and then "Je suis Ahmed," referring to the French policeman of Muslim faith, Ahmed Merabet, killed in the street during the same attack.

The narrative of contemporary Europe, held in the self-referentiality of its hegemonic gaze, implies dynamics of inclusion and exclusion from a self-defined West as evolved and righteous. When it encounters migrant bodies (dead or alive), this becomes particularly significant in a process in which the migrant is superimposed on that of the refugee or asylum seeker as an element that confirms or disturbs the border. Faced with the war in Syria, for example, the declared policy of the German

government in 2015 was to take in war refugees in preference to those defined as economic migrants. This type of policy is established at the crossroads of emergency action. On the one hand, it works in a state of humanitarian crisis (evidently now permanent, at least in the Mediterranean), which implements exceptional measures and saves the refugees because they fall into the category of victim. On the other hand, it follows capitalist requirements where the individual (immigrant or native) is measured in labor power. The nature of the intervention in favor of refugees reinforces the apparent need to leave room in the national space of arrival for proven victims of direct violence first, secondly, for those who could be beneficial to the country's economy, and lastly (but evidently with the high risk that there will be no more room), for those who aspire to a better life and are "only" fleeing from difficult or desperate conditions.

The humanitarian logic that governs the management of immigration in the Mediterranean is currently interlaced with the politics of national sovereignty in a Europe that is showing its fragility. This clash has opened up a virulent debate between countries of first arrival, all those washed by the sea, and countries of transit, in the practices of frontiers now being elaborated in Europe. Within its borders, Europe brandishes the universalist ideal of human rights while closing its ports and only accepting dead bodies on its beaches. The limits of the so-called "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine are evident in exercising territorial interests in a manner that can be defined as humanitarian imperialism.[26] The protection of those fleeing misery or war is a different matter when requested physically on European

26 Luca Scuccimarra, "Spazi umanitari: Ripensare la geografia della politica nell'epoca globale," *Politics: Rivista di studi politici 8,* no. 2 (2017): 1–20; Jean Bricmont, *Humanitarian Imperialism: Using Human Rights to Sell War* (Monthly Review Press, 2006); and Noam Chomsky, *The New Military Humanism: Lessons from Kosovo* (Pluto Press, 1999). On the more specific concept of the "humanitarian border," see William Walter, "Foucault and Frontiers: Notes on the Birth of the Humanitarian Border," in *Governmentality: Current Issues and Future Challenges,* ed. Ulrich Bröckling, Susanne Krasmann, and Thomas Lemke (Routledge, 2010).

soil, or in the "protector's" territory. The territorial element (re-) emerges here — perhaps not surprisingly — as fundamental in the age of global capitalism.

In migrations in the Mediterranean, the legal-political doctrine of humanitarianism acts according to emergency protocols. It confirms military humanitarianism and produces a dramatic overexposure of the moment of rescue. This overshadows everything that should then follow, that is, effective immigration policies that put the pitiful conditions of the migrant at the center of care and custody. Emergency procedures, caught between national(ist) logic and the real needs of migrants' fundamental rights, remain at a level of universal abstraction, which endures as the moral weapon of a global imperial order.[27] Of course, the attempt is always to hide the structural logic of the question. There is a deliberate misreading by the authorities as the political economy of modern migration is reduced to trafficking and criminal networks (themselves responding in the best neoliberal logic to the market) rather than considering the migrant and the smuggler (often chosen from among the migrants) as the product of modern capitalism and its ordering of the planet. So, in a typical expression of liberalism, it is all about individual evils rather than structural powers and their effects.

Refugees have become particularly symptomatic of the situation developing in Europe over the last two decades. Initially, the narrative of the refugee or asylum seeker was located in the increasing fluidity of borders within Europe, inaugurated by the Schengen Agreement in 1985. It brought into play the ambiguous relationship between the historical formation of the sovereignty of the nation-states of Europe and the European Union's tendency to demolish internal borders while erecting barriers externally. The latter involved variables in geographical coordinates but firm conceptual and cultural referents. In this framework, regulating refugees (and migrants in general) reinforces

27 Nicola Perugini and Neve Gordon, *The Human Right to Dominate* (Oxford University Press, 2015).

Fig. 2.2. Boat cemetery, Lampedusa. Photo: Iain Chambers.

an individual state's sense of sovereignty via surveillance and security practices while reformulating borders on material and conceptual levels to affirm the "national interest." The modern migrant becomes the very cipher of current politics. In the collective imagination, asylum seekers represent the most obvious threat to the subtraction of public welfare for European citizens. Excluded from productive activities by law, usually during the entire and often extremely lengthy waiting period in the application for refugee status, they necessarily receive minimal state assistance and remain at the lowest stage of economic productivity.

Bringing together the presumed acceptability and usefulness of people arriving in Europe, there are alternative images of representations, sometimes favoring the figure of the refugee over that of the so-called economic migrant and vice versa in other moments. These are not neutral nor random profiles but rather exercises of power rooted in the history of Europe and the Mediterranean. They deploy the racialization of migration. Whether overt in genocides, regimes of segregation, dehumanization of

the colonial other, or as the mundane consequence of institutional operations, racism is an intrinsic feature of the modern state's classification, biopolitics, and governance.[28]

Thinking of contemporary migration in the Mediterranean, the dominant image is of overflowing boats and dinghies from North Africa saved by rescue ships or shipwrecked to become funereal accounts in the news (fig. 2.2). It is an image that rapidly symbolizes the ineffectual compassion invoked by political and religious institutions. It is also a card played on the table of intra-European relations by maritime border countries, such as Italy, Greece, Spain, and Malta. It becomes a litmus test of the unity or solidarity of the shared concerns underlying the European Union toward itself, *not* the migrant. The forces that drive people to migrate, invariably induced directly or indirectly by Occidental politics, are brought to light in the heart of Europe and its border management. Even supranational financial regimes fail to prevail over the contrasting demands for closed borders and cheap labor. At the same time, borders are progressively externalized, pushed out into hotspots in the middle of the sea or toward the countries of origin, transit, or embarkation. Once in Europe, most of the migrants are confined on the outskirts of poverty. The Mediterranean transcribes geopolitical, economic, and cultural borders onto a single map, sprawling and deep, from sub-Saharan Africa to Norway, from Calais to the barbed wire of the Hungarian fence.

In the east of Europe, a particularly significant chapter of what we can call the "migration of borders" opens. Along the so-called Balkan route, a precise map of closures and divisions within Europe has been drawn since 2015, overseen by the racialization of reception. In 2015, with lengthy queues of people fleeing wars, hunger, and misery walking across the borders of the East, there rapidly reappeared the past, present, and future of Europe. The spectrum of families burdened with a few objects,

28 Steve Garner, "The European Union and the Racialization of Immigration, 1985–2006," *Race/Ethnicity: Multidisciplinary Global Contexts* 1, no. 1 (2007): 61–87.

huddled in the cold of the eastern frontier, caught in a snapshot of how European borders rapidly expanded through the absorption of post-Soviet neo-capitalist states and their illiberal democracies. Elsewhere, the Greek alternative to neoliberalism was crushed. At the same time, Turkey, no longer knocking on the doors of the European Union, offered itself as a buffer to the Islamic world to the east and gained international approval for its repressive state policy.

Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson inform us that maps are epistemological devices of profound ontological significance.[29] On closer inspection, they are formidable syntheses of space and time. They contain events, causes, consequences, and representations, apparently held in a single frame. With the image of migrants along the eastern borders being unbelievably followed by journalists as if in a war novel, Europe stared into the face of the ghosts of a not-so-distant past that had returned to haunt the austere winter of Occidental discontent. The lines of women, men, and children not only reshuffled Europe's temporal coordinates but also spread uncertainty in the rapid spatial reconfiguration of the geography of borders.

The Balkan route, with the uncanny familiarity it brought with it, along with the ambiguities of the racist unconscious of Europe in tow, stirred something different from the images of shipwrecks in the Mediterranean. In early September 2015, a terrible image relayed the death of a Kurdish Syrian child in the waters of the Aegean Sea off Bodrum, Turkey. The powerful photograph by Turkish photographer Nilüfer Demir circulated worldwide. The horror that the image provoked influenced the election campaign in Canada, where the child had been heading with his family, and led to a massive increase in donations to associations involved in rescuing and assisting migrants at sea, such as Migrant Offshore Aid Station (MOAS), which in twenty-

29 Sandro Mezzadra and Brett Neilson, *Border as Method, or, the Multiplication of Labor* (Duke University Press, 2013).

four hours saw contributions increase fifteen-fold.[30] This was followed, however, by a major controversy concerning the issues of decency and the legitimacy of showing such a child's dead body. Questions of epistemic violence, the exercise of veiling and unveiling the living and the dead, continued to disseminate disquiet. We will return to this issue when discussing the Ethiopian Italian filmmaker Dagmawi Yimer's short film *Asmat*.

Faced with the difficulty of lucidly deciphering the moral correctness or value of distributing such images, one must consider the gap between this image and the others published weekly in Europe. The narrative of migration in Europe, of which this photograph is one of the most potent symbols, is inseparable from a process of racialization. This is not new; it has been at work in the currents of the collective unconscious of European nation-states since colonialism. The specters of other camps in Europe's recent past also recall a history that has never been buried. National identities consolidated over the last two centuries and bitterly molded and reshaped in the wars fought between European states up to the Balkan Wars of the 1990s consistently recall the racializing mechanisms at work. The power of the dead child's image on the Turkish shore is undeniable. Still, it speaks not only to the drama of death in the Mediterranean but also to the tragedy of oblivion and the degree of empathy granted (sometimes unconsciously) to those who arrive according to a racialized order of compassion and understanding. Migrants attempting to cross Europe's eastern borders double the symbolic weight of the European awareness of evil that Achille Mbembe speaks of as a live replication of disturbing scenes that, in a past not so disconnected from the present, brought the shock of inhumanity to the surface in the heart of Europe.[31]

30 Jessica Elgot, "Charity behind Migrant-Rescue Boats Sees 15-Fold Rise in Donations in 24 Hours," *The Guardian,* September 3, 2015, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/03/charity-behind-migrant-rescue-boats-sees-15-fold-rise-in-donations-in-24-hours.

31 Mbembe, *Necropolitics*.

For at least twenty years, migrants have been attempting to reach Europe by crossing the sea; they do not trudge in lengthy lines like those in Eastern Europe but move mostly in motorized vehicles on the roads of Ghana, Senegal, Nigeria, Niger, Mali, and Libya through the Sahara Desert, are kidnapped, detained and tortured in prisons, and eventually delivered at a price to fragile boats crossing the Mediterranean with varying outcomes.

The media narrative and reception of these bodies are diversified. There seems to be a differential treatment of migrant bodies drawn along lines in which race emerges as pivotal. In 2007, Steve Garner published an article in which he highlighted a racist underpinning of migration policies that had de facto made it more difficult for nonracialized individuals to enter Europe as whites.[32] As Garner points out, European immigration regulations do not contain any reference to race, religion, or culture, as was instead the case with early immigration laws in, for example, the USA, Canada, and Australia (and was repeated in the bans issued in 2017 by the Trump administration for some Muslim countries). What is termed cultural racism, as a substitute for institutional racism, explains the mechanism whereby certain groups of people remain excluded from freedom of movement (even a hyperbureaucratized and policed freedom of movement), because they are considered less suitable for so-called assimilation on cultural or religious grounds. Garner refers to what Étienne Balibar has called "crisis racism."[33] Here, certain groups of migrants are considered particularly problematic and undesirable and held responsible for difficult socio-economic conjunctures and changes. This is what Stuart Hall and others call scapegoating: the search for the figure that embodies the

32 Garner, "The European Union and the Racialization of Immigration," and Gaia Giuliani, *Race, Nation and Gender in Modern Italy: Intersectional Representations in Visual Culture* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

33 Étienne Balibar, "Racism and Nationalism," in *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities,* ed. Étienne Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein (Verso, 1991), 218.

structural breakdown of society, a subject on whom to direct communal anger, repression, and exclusion.[34]

There are more or less explicit forms of racialization in managing migration flows, largely implicit in Europe since the 1980s.[35] The media and hegemonic narrative of the so-called "migration crisis" that has affected Europe in recent decades occurs within the construction of a differential treatment of bodies. The tens of thousands of deaths in the waters of the Mediterranean somehow arouse less pity and empathy than rows of women, men, and children strung out along the Balkan route that includes the devastating image of the child lying on a Turkish beach. Women, children, and men wrapped in thermal blankets on the decks of rescue ships do not shock; collective funerals on Lampedusa sadden, but not for long. Those funerals are of people belonging to the so-called problem groups; those cold breathing bodies arriving by sea only confirm the outrage toward rescuers who go and get them before they sink instead of waiting for them to arrive dead or alive in Italian, Maltese, and Greek waters. If those desperate bodies on boats are not immediately reminiscent of Nazi deportations, they are a reminder of another repression that Europe also refuses to come to terms with: slavery.

Destitute families walking across Europe through barbed wire, state violence, and police brutality all repropose the unfinished mourning of the Holocaust. The enormous racist violence at the root of the extermination of European Jews lies in the same groove of constitutive racism that underlies the modernization of power. The shock, as Aimé Césaire noted, was that genocide, a typical practice in the colonies, was applied for the first time directly on European soil to a part of its local popu-

34 Stuart Hall et al., *Policing the Crisis: Mugging, the State, and Law and Order* (Macmillan, 1978).

35 Umut Erel, Karim Murji, and Zaki Nahaboo, "Understanding the Contemporary Race–Migration Nexus," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 8 (2016): 1339–60.

lation.[36] The racial logic of colonialism immediately reappears in the images of African migrants at sea, uncovering the racist matrix when the European public fails to respond in the manner they do to the immediacy of the migrants from the East. This difference has been further accentuated by the war in Ukraine and the arrival of blond, blue-eyed refugees. It is worth reflecting on this situation to understand what it permits, what it excludes, and what is submerged in the contemporary Mediterranean. In other words, what past is allowed to permeate the map of the present, and what is not and remains and endures? The graphic concept of "negative space" points us to the intervals on the map. And what lies in between is neither empty nor inert. It speaks of erasures and the voids of history. For the sea contains in its depth the colonial unconscious, sedimented in layers of bodies, histories, and lives, that speak of the slave trade, of the colonial matrix of modernity, of the chains that link epistemic violence with asymmetrical powers for which some lives count more than others. It produces the dead both at sea and in Gaza. The contemporary racialization of bodies, living and dead, reveals, as Giorgio Agamben famously remarked, the stranger in Europe who *"may be killed and yet not sacrificed."*[37]

An Emerging Language

Insisting on this scenario, we discover that the Europeanized Mediterranean is a historical and ethical shipwreck. The cruelest and most immediate evidence is in the loss of migrant lives at sea produced by European legislation. It is also displayed in the laying bare of Europe's supposed ideals when its laws, limitations, and hypocrisies surface on the water and are rigidly upheld along its borders and in its cities. A colonial past, blocked, denied, and rejected, continues to overshadow and

36 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism,* trans. Joan Pinkham (Monthly Review Press, 2000).

37 Giorgio Agamben, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life,* trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford University Press, 1998), 12. Author's emphasis.

double the present. The old -isms and their hierarchical understandings of the world that flourished in nineteenth-century Europe — nationalism, colonialism, racism — have not disappeared. Instead, they have accumulated and been naturalized. The tonality, syntax, and grammar may have changed, but the continuity of their power ensures their largely undisputed authority to explain the present.

It is necessary to speak of a critical counterspace where an interconnected translocality and a rhizomatic assemblage challenge and overcome the boundaries of academic authorization and their methodological nationalisms: French sociology, Spanish literature, Italian history, and their explanations of the Mediterranean. This could also draw on the Atlantic world of the Black diaspora, the Eurasian territory of Islam, and the archipelagos of the Pacific; all propose histories that precede and surpass the authority of the modern nation-state. The critique that commences from the Mediterranean, the sea, and the maritime world impacts the study of static areas disciplined by the Western measurement of the world. It becomes a laboratory that can be extended to intersect with other initiatives to decolonize knowledge. This allows us to consider modernity as a migratory whole that refutes any desire to reduce it to a single location of knowledge in the West. It releases a set of broader cultural and historical coordinates.

Here, critical, artistic, political, and poetic languages overcome the pact between empirical certainty and political realism and become essential practices. Following itineraries that initiate from the south, from the south and east of the Mediterranean, from the souths of Europe and the world, the work of many contemporary artists disorients and reorients our mapping of the planet. Comparing the journeys induced by music and the visual arts, we are invited to look and listen again. This activity is always accompanied by grit in the eye, dissonance in the ear, and scratching the conventional framing and figuration. Art, in its focused attention and affections, is always about the misplaced matter, the anachronism that reconfigures the pre-

sent, pushing it out of its designated space and chronology to interrupt and interrogate our conceptual hegemony.[38]

Here, we move from considering the artwork as an isolated object confined to the history of art and aesthetics to recording it as a critical practice. In the invitation to look again comes the supplement that interrupts the circulation of art to propose the anachronism: the present drawn into a denied past we can never fully recover and a future we do not yet know. Despite the overwhelming consensus imposed by capital and the neoliberal order that insists on the impossibility of an alternative, postcolonial art deliberately works the gap. It sustains the contradictions that make its language critical. If this art does not escape capture within the institutional framework and circuits of commerce, it still disturbs its premises. By inciting a past yet to come, such art and criticism constantly project us into another spacetime.[39]

Considering this art as the index and signature of an inappropriate cut, pushing the consensual image out of the ordinary leads us toward what we have been unable to see, record, and hear. In walking this line, one follows the divide between the Enlightenment of Western modernity and the darkness that sustains and concentrates its power. In historian François Hartog's words, this means breaking "a world so enslaved to the present that no other viewpoint is considered admissible."[40] To interrupt the continuum is to divide time from itself and to force an abstract universality to locate itself. There, we register, in the breakdown, other configurations that come to us from worlds we may not have authorized but which exist, persist, and endure.

The appearance of the migrant in the contemporary visual field deepens and spreads this disturbing and unsuspected quality. The modern migrant is not only the memory of a Euro-

38 Georges Didi-Huberman, *Confronting Images: Questioning the Ends of a Certain History of Art,* trans. John Goodman (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009).

39 Celeste Ianniciello, *Migrations, Arts and Postcoloniality in the Mediterranean* (Routledge, 2018).

40 François Hartog, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time,* trans. Saskia Brown (Columbia University Press, 2017), xiii.

pean colonial past, which powerfully and unilaterally shaped the world in a certain way. The migrant accompanies us like a specter, disseminating what the prevailing sense of modernity seeks to avoid in order to guarantee its particular sense of home and belonging. Drawing on a global colonial legacy, postcolonial art deepens and insists on registering this condition of rejection and removal. Referring to an incurable wound that continues to bleed into the present, such art reopens the archives of modernity. Here, where modern art often seems to revolve only around itself, the critical pace accelerates, threatening to break out of the regulated order of institutional reception to stain the whiteness of the museum and gallery walls with the dirt, death, despair, destitution, and desires of another world order.

Today, the break-up of distance and the insistence on proximity, of the repressed past, of negated bodies and histories, is most persistently pursued in postcolonial poetics. There is a continual mediation on uprooted cartographies, displaced objects, and broken archives. The proximity and promise of other worlds breach the premises of our vision and annul the aesthetic grammar we employ to frame it. Cutting time and refusing established chronologies, this art returns to histories we think are past and concluded.

Today, much artistic activity consistently mines and builds new archives by crossing institutional spaces and official memory with an eye for the telltale details and histories still to be told. The Brazilian artist Maria Thereza Alves, commencing from the neoclassical Villa Pignatelli on Riviera di Chiaia in Naples, has linked colonial Mexico to the present postcolonial Mediterranean. The full name of the building is Villa Pignatelli Cortés. Its name directly connects us to Hernán Cortés's invasion of Mexico in 1519 and the genocidal processes involved in colonizing the Americas. It announces the "connection and flows of monies from Mexico to Naples that began when Hernán's granddaughter, Catalina Vigil de Quinones, married Juan Alonso Pimentel,

Viceroy and Captain of Naples in 1602."[41] In the cloud of colonial amnesia that covers the present, the building is simply known as Villa Pignatelli. From the conquest of Mexico to the gold that adorns the Counter-Reformation churches of Baroque Naples, the sacking and despoliation of Mexico through Spanish administration and the immense riches that Cortés amassed set the conditions for European wealth and indigenous poverty. The publication of Alves's research carries the blunt title *Thieves and Murderers in Naples: A Brief History on Families, Colonization, Immense Wealth, Land Theft, Art and the Valle de Xico Community Museum in Mexico.*

Drawing on the deeper histories that link the destruction of indigenous culture and the continuing ecological damage from the violent dismantling of Aztec land and water management to meet the needs of sixteenth-century transatlantic capitalist accumulation, the artist proposes the Valle Xico Community Museum (on land that the Spanish Crown donated to Cortés) as a critical counterspace. Against the colonization of the present, the struggles of the local community to maintain the museum, which houses over 5,000 pre-invasion artifacts, and through it, their rights and culture, violently contrast with the placid European cosmopolitanism of the exhibits and musical concerts that take place in Villa Pignatelli in contemporary Naples. This is Maria Thereza Alves's reproposal of the past as a critical supplement:

> This is an artist's proposal. Instead of requesting that the Italian state sell the Villa Pignatelli Cortés and use the monies as a symbolic act of colonial reparation payments for the results of the invasion of Mexico by Hernán Cortés, I propose that two members of the Valle de Community Museum be invited

41 Maria Thereza Alves, *Thieves and Murderers in Naples: A Brief History on Families, Colonization, Immense Wealth, Land Theft, Art and the Valle de Xico Community Museum in Mexico* (Di Paolo Edizioni, 2020), 1.

every year for a research and artist-in-residency grant of six weeks at the Villa Pignatelli Cortés in Naples.[42]

Villa Pignatelli Cortés has so far not responded. Returning from Mexico through Naples to the Mediterranean, we can visit the Sea Memory Museum at Zarzis in Tunisia. Here, the retired postman turned artist Mohsen Lihidheb has collected the flotsam washed ashore from the migrants' boats that have attempted to cross the sea toward Europe. Whether thrown overboard or subtracted from the hands of the dead and the dying, we will never know. Along with the bodies washed up on the beach on both sides of the sea, these are traces of memory, both belonging to the individual lives truncated by European law and to the future memory of the refusal of rights that will return to haunt Europe: monuments to a massacre, as the artist puts it.[43] Just as the migrants are themselves mobile memories of a colonized world that Europe seeks to forget and erase, at this point, to echo Tiziana Carlino's analysis, Lihidheb's works collect materials that insist against facile symbolization and push us into a space where the entanglement of aesthetics and ethics crosses and confutes the borders that an art history or political analysis might impose.[44] Following Tina Campt and listening to the grammar of such an assemblage, another critical language emerges where the dismissed evidence of colonialism, suspended in liquid archives, comes ashore to challenge the neutrality of objectivity and the reduction of representation.[45]

Turning to the Iranian Canadian artist Gita Hashemi and following her performative art through southeastern Europe

42 Ibid.

43 *Bastaharraga,* https://bastaharraga-boughmiga.blogspot.com.

44 Tiziana Carlino, "Cultural Memory and Contemporary Migration: A Matter of Shoes?," *Dialogoi: Rivista di studi comparatistici* 5 (2018): 37–54.

45 Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Duke University Press, 2017). On dismissal, memory, and the discarded across the Mediterranean, see Marta Cariello, "Wasting the South: Exploring Narratives of Italian and Mediterranean Dispensability," *Italian Studies in Southern Africa* 35, no. 1 (2022): 41–44.

and the eastern Mediterranean, we catch the aesthetical–ethical force of an artistic practice that simultaneously digs into the sediments of belonging while persistently on the move. In a series of site-specific interventions along the so-called Balkan route and Palestine, the artist explores the issues of rights, displacement, and scarred landscapes. The work *Declarations* (2015–2016) is presented as a diptych. *Declaration 1: On the Move* explores the hypocrisies of the existing exercise of European human rights that produces and subsequently punishes refugees and renders migrants illegal. Moving against the migrants' flow from Germany to Turkey through eight countries and twelve cities, Hashemi interacted with people on the move and the local artists and activists who aided them. Along the journey, she produced handcrafted mail art and photographs. Samples of this work are available online.[46] Combining an eye to detail and locality sustained in what Hashemi calls "enduring transience," the art draws us across the troubled ground of national exclusivity and state violence in Europe and Israel. As the snatched fragments of fractured lives, the work does not seek to explain or represent the condition of the refugees and the Palestinians. Instead, it confronts our responsibility and our place in a world that ensures our benefits while negating them to others. It interrogates that settlement and leaves us with the cut of a persistent wound.

A Return to Maps, Borders, and Another Mediterranean

In this learning from outside the inherited frame, where postcolonial art encourages the reception from below and elsewhere, from the removed, from the subaltern and marginalized, we return to the memories of the sea. We come back to the maritime archives and the essential creolizing lessons of Caribbean poetry and music with their composite challenge to the certainties of terrestrial impositions and their maps. On the one hand,

46 Gita Hashemi, "Artwork," *Declarations Dyptich,* http://declarations.subversivepress.org/artwork/.

white scientific myths inscribed in academic detachment are reduced to applying accredited lexicons and languages. Elsewhere, there is the rigor of the continuous elaboration of critical knowledge that, precisely to remain vital, must navigate and dismantle such presumptions, and disturb the peers, their reviews, and their recognition.

In modern history, not incidentally considered the history of European expansion on a planetary scale, maps represent rules. In this story, power is masked while murder becomes the price of progress, and genocide is the measure of its geometry. Cartography becomes the transposition of the abstract and absolute violence of the commodity form into the relentless material laws of the world market.

In border areas, such as Israel, Gaza, and the Occupied Territories, maps have promoted social and historical practices that lead to what Eyal Weizman calls a "laboratory of the extreme," producing the "dynamic morphology of the border."[47] Territory, Weizman continues, is never flat as a map but striated under our feet (aquifers, property rights, and access) and over our heads (air corridors, electromagnetic waves full of radio signals, mobile phone networks, GPS positioning, broadband communication), and all rooted in multiple conditions and locations. In this context, the historian Ilan Pappe rightly identifies Israel as the ultimate colonizing power.[48] In dispossessing the local population of Palestine through the politics of an ethnocratic apartheid regime, the situation turns out to be exemplary rather than exceptional. Here, we touch upon the imperial prerogative of the West and the hesitancy of modern societies formed by colonial settlements, the United States (or Australia, New Zealand, Canada), in condemning the very practices that produced their sovereignty.

47 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (Verso, 2007), 9, 7.

48 Ilan Pappe, *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* (Oneworld Publications, 2007), and Maxime Rodinson, *Israel: A Colonial Settler State?* (Monad Press, 1973).

Meanwhile, similar procedures patrol the Mediterranean in the same way that the US–Mexico border is patrolled. The maps are multiple, simultaneously vertical and horizontal. They produce a continuously mutating three-dimensional matrix. Flexible and mobile distinctions support invisible lines and shifting zones of material and immaterial territory, labor, wealth, and subsequent management. As distinct frontiers slip into oscillating boundary zones, they are never simply physical or static. On the contrary, they are mutable instances of authority that support the continuous production of interfaced landscapes. The modality the center once assumed to control the periphery through the imposition of a single power and authority now gives way to the flexibility of more diffuse molecular management. The order of dominance is inscribed and articulated to emerge and reproduce itself in multidimensional spaces.

Whether imposed violently or intangibly embedded in the circuits of our lives, borders as mechanisms of power are also critically and culturally productive. They are framing devices that give form and transient meaning to either side: both what they contain and what they seek to exclude. If the border ushers in the state of exception — where one finds one's status and citizenship temporarily suspended before being reconfirmed (or challenged) — it reveals, in the diffuse intensity of its biopolitics, the underlying protocols that define and limit its populations. Borders force one to reconsider the historical, political, and cultural configurations that gave rise to their supposed necessity. They bring back into the picture what was previously designed to be excluded: the vanquished, the subaltern, and the other histories and territories of belonging that oppose this seemingly insurmountable framing. If politically rigid and legally slow to change, borders are culturally fluid and socially multifaceted: for some, they are simply stamps on a passport; for others, a seemingly impossible barrier; yet every day, they continue to be crossed legally and illegally while being confirmed *and* contested simultaneously.

At this point, allowing the Mediterranean to interrogate other narratives we begin to move away from the fiction that

seeks to colonize the world with an unique explanation tied to a defined location. Europe's current borders extend across the Mediterranean and deep into North Africa. Not only is food for European markets grown according to the standards set by EU legislation, but the thousands of migrant deaths in the Sahara and the Mediterranean Sea are directly attributable to European laws. As a commercial, political, and legal space, the Mediterranean, and its European definition, is mobilized along invisible frontiers thousands of kilometers south and east of its shores.

In his classic study, Ferdinand Braudel emphasized that the Mediterranean was sustained and suspended within wider networks.[49] These considerations suggest the adoption of mobile perspectives to understand its recomposition better. Attempts to introduce other, often disruptive, currents into the thinking of its past — for example, the discussion of Europe's Afro-Asiatic roots elaborated in Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* and later dubbed and echoed by the Neapolitan band Almamagretta — have rarely broken disciplinary fences. Still, the Mediterranean's creolized cultural configurations and hybrid historical formations persist.[50] Other cartographies can be traced in food, taste, language, sound, architecture, and music. They suggest a mixture of histories relating to far more extensive geographies. Tomatoes from Peru and coffee from Ethiopia are part of a culinary cartography that proposes journeys on a much broader axis than that assumed by European definitions of the composition of today's Mediterranean. Such geographies offer a complex and multi-scalar sense of belonging. They breach the seemingly stable horizons of existing localisms, nationalisms, and their institutional definitions.

Rather than a single space to be studied, the Mediterranean, an intermediate area between Europe, Asia, and Africa, becomes a multilayered configuration, a point of dispersion and

49 Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II,* vol. 1.

50 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: The Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization,* vol. 1: *The Fabrication of Ancient Greece, 1785–1985* (Vintage, 1991).

dissemination rather than a single, concentrated unit. Yannis Hamilakis, referring to the exclusive claims of modern Western archaeology, calls this perspective an "alternative engagement with materiality and temporality."[51] This means proposing multiple and diverse archaeologies in which Egypt, Greece, and Palestine do not simply exist as Ancient Egypt, Classical Greece, and the Holy Land. They cannot be reduced to pharaohs, Hellenism, and the land of the Bible, nor can they be limited to monuments that only serve as evidence of the later development of European civilization.[52] These multiple archaeologies are not simply a mirror of Europe's past and contemporaneity, largely retrieved to measure its progress. In this parable, the intervening centuries of Arab, Ottoman, and Balkan histories and cultures are reduced to a diversion or an unfortunate parenthesis to be forgotten. This view allows the eastern Mediterranean to be completely Europeanized, reduced, in other words, to an orientalizing gaze. The continuities and the impact on the modern Mediterranean of Islam, Arab culture, and the Ottoman Empire are annulled. Returning these histories to the broader and more complex picture goes far beyond a structural adjustment; it ushers in a radical reconfiguration of the past that declares itself capable of defining the Mediterranean, managing its archives, analyzing its archaeology, and proposing its meanings.

For example, the materiality of memory, those sounds, senses, and flavors sustained in linguistic, musical, and culinary arrangements, suggests a Mediterranean that defies any obvious genealogy. Altogether, more ragged, modest, and incomplete, they are memories that propose a past that, as Nietzsche suggested, cannot be dissolved into pure knowledge.[53] They endure

51 Yannis Hamilakis, "Archaeological Ethnography: A Multitemporal Meeting Ground for Archaeology and Anthropology," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 40 (2011): 409.

52 Basem L. Ra'ad, *Hidden Histories: Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean* (Pluto Press, 2010).

53 Friedrich Nietzsche, "On the Use and Disadvantage of History for Life," in *Untimely Meditations,* trans. R.J. Holliday (Cambridge University Press, 1997).

as cultural and artistic perspectives that record time and space, sustaining locations, archives, and memories, which simultaneously deepen and extend the sense of the past as a connective medium, bringing together in their differences a mobile commonality and potential conviviality.

Disrupting dominant rhythms and figures becomes possible by weaving these languages into multiple conversations. The musicality of memory, of accents and intervals, of resonances and dissonances, undermines the collusions of description with the hegemonic narrative. The complexity of a layered set of languages and aesthetics proposes a different style of recollection and redistribution in the shifting historical and political landscapes inscribed in the construction of the archive. Here, the Mediterranean's conventional historical and geographical map, operating along the two-dimensional plane of sensory indifference, can be perforated, even torn; other paths can be taken to produce further critical possibilities. Such memories promote a poetics that, in turn, leads to very different politics. This additional power, stemming from minor histories and subaltern cartographies, does not merely confound and refute the existing picture but establishes the terms of other maps and further unplanned geographies: a Mediterranean yet to be recognized. The performative power of memory promotes an archive whose coordinates may initially coincide with established referents but ultimately refute them.

Even when thwarted and denied, the colonized world folds back upon the colonizers' homes, intersecting their daily lives with the negated past that haunts the present. In this opening in time, the assured rhythms of the immediate world, dependent on a history sequenced away into linear oblivion, are pushed out of phase and rendered dissonant. If music provides the most apparent soundtrack of this unescapable return — reggae, rap, and the deep currents of Black diasporic sounds scoring the globe and encouraging further subaltern sounds to emerge — the contemporary literary archive also overflows with the rewriting and rerouting of the colonizer's languages and canons. What is most significant here, and pushing the question of the genre

to the limit, is that this expression is never merely musical or literary. The singer Hadj Brahim (formerly Cheb) Khaled and the feminist novelist and filmmaker Assia Djebar have not only proposed Algeria in French and European culture. They have also seeded a history from below and elsewhere, exposing the entangled encounters sedimented in the colonial constitution of the present. The European philosophical agonism and literary angst over the abstractions of "the other" (Emmanuel Lévinas) and *The Stranger* (Albert Camus) find an unsolicited counterpart in the disruptive languages of Khaled and Djebar. The respective trajectories of the two Algerians across the colonial inheritance of modernity supplement and expose cracks in the seamless account of civilization and progress. There remains a cut, perhaps incurable but necessary to attend to. Their work talks not of an alternative alterity but of a complicated deepening and intensification of the idea of difference without separability.[54] Once considered anonymous objects by the colonial gaze and jurisdiction, their artistic exploration and reworking authorizes them as historical subjects to test the claims of a Mediterranean modernity that no longer follows a unique score, leading to an unsuspected opening and mix that is both poetical and political.

54 Denise Ferreira da Silva, "On Difference without Separability," in *Incerteza Viva: 32nd Bienal de São Paulo,* ed. Jochen Volz and Júlia Rebouças, exh. cat. (Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2016).

2

Memories and Archives

Returning to today's migrations from the south to the north of the Mediterranean, we can observe that even in this incessant movement, time takes on other folds and tempos: those of the very long periods before being able to earn money needed for the passage, the pause before embarking, the months, even years, to cross the African continent, and then, for those who apply for asylum, the long wait for an answer. Then there are the days and nights on the boat, the periods of homelessness and homesickness for those who make it to Europe alive. The colonial past is here also present and corporeal in the rhythms of the crossing and in the requests for European responsibility.

Indeed, everything returns from the sea. It delivers the dead; it returns extraneous objects that, through carelessness or disregard, are dropped in its waters. However, it carries them almost always elsewhere, onto another, often distant, shore. There is the precise unfolding of a story, a form of continuous and spontaneous narration, offered by the sea: the person or the thing, the provenance, the path, the changes that occurred during the passage, and the arrival on a shore. The sea writes stories, small and large, sometimes epochal. Perhaps it writes them with a certain "irresponsibility" that swallows us in the anguish of its

depths, as Franco Cassano put it.[1] Without wishing to assign to the sea the power of a mythological entity that acts as a unitary or volitional being, we could focus on the interrogative power of marine materiality and consider the watery abyss and fluid body, which both guards and simultaneously restores. Talking about the Mediterranean as memory means shifting focus from the history of the Mediterranean, from the facts we record or feel obliged to register — the dutiful archive, we might call it — to the processes that, through that liquid body, become narratives. There is a passage from what we think we know about the Mediterranean to how this knowledge is formed, constituted, and organized by the spacetime of the sea. To think, in other words, of histories as individual and collective processes that construct archives diverse from those of intentional historiography.

More precisely, multiple elements and stratifications are always involved in constructing memory. It is undoubtedly a selection process that works by inclusion and exclusion for numerous reasons. The exclusions, the silences, can, however, acquire a different sense from simple absence, becoming, in turn, an insistent presence for the reasons that lie in those silences. The sea carries within it the continuity of the aquatic plane that cannot be contained in the critical gaze on the Mediterranean. The sea composes a network of relations in space and time that sustains a symbolic and material memory continually renewed in the commons of its fluidity.

Rather than talking about the memory of the Mediterranean and thus reading the already written and even rewritten history of the Middle Sea, the invitation is to think of the Mediterranean as a site of memory. Today, the most urgent message that the Mediterranean carries and guards is that of the bodies of migrants who do not arrive on the shores of Europe. The archive of death, the maritime cemetery, is entangled in the complex concession of mourning, specifically connected, as Daniele

1 Franco Cassano, *Southern Thought and Other Essays on the Mediterranean,* ed. and trans. Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme (Fordham University Press, 2012), 60.

Salerno observes, to the political–cultural body of the Italian nation and its necropolitics.[2]

This same archive of death is explored and offered a different kind of custody in Dagmawi Yimer's short film *Asmat-Names* (2014). Yimer was born and grew up in Addis Ababa. He arrived as an "illegal" immigrant in Italy in 2006. His film sets in water the anguished vision of dispersed bodies, combined with the list, at first only oral and then also graphic, of the names of the hundreds of migrants who died in the shipwreck off Lampedusa on October 3, 2013.[3] The filmed images of the bodies of the wreckage are substituted in Yimer's film with watercolor drawings by Luca Serasini. These echo the video footage disseminated by the media in the months following the shipwreck, footage that had been blurred to attenuate its shocking character. Daniele Salerno analyses Yimer's work in a timely and relevant way, reading the use of watercolors as a shift of images to a plane of experientiality and, thus, of testimony:

> It is, above all, a question of the possibility of making the trauma of the massacre of October 3, 2013 watchable through a non-obscene gaze on the victims, of making not so much their deaths as their lives bear witness.[4]

The initial underwater filming, the subsequent drawings, and then the symbolic images of sheet-covered bodies ghostly emerging from the water visually shift the perspective. It produces a subjective view of the shipwreck and the emergence of those who did not survive in the echo of their lives before October 3 that exceeds the images of their death. During the aquatic dance, the list of names of the deceased, otherwise incorporeal, for the mass audience acquires a voice. As Daniela Ricci puts

2 Daniele Salerno, "Stragi del mare e politiche del lutto sul confine mediterraneo," in *Il colore della nazione,* ed. Gaia Giuliani (Le Monnier–Mondadori, 2015).

3 AMM, "ASMAT-Names in memory of all victims of the sea. (Dagmawi Yimer)," *Vimeo,* December 12, 2014, https://vimeo.com/114343040.

4 Salerno, "Stragi del mare," 140.

it, "The sea rediscusses the hierarchy of gazes and the logic of representation."[5] Immersion and inversion of perspective are inherent to the liquid element.

What poignantly characterizes Yimer's film is precisely the recitation of all the 368 names of the people who died in the shipwreck (with twenty more estimated dispersed). The names appear on the screen in Tigrinya and are recited, one by one, in voiceover by Eden Getachew Zerihun, along with their respective translations into Italian and English, in the two versions of the film. It is a recitation, somewhere between prayer and protest, both exhausting and hypnotizing, that acquires the character of a lament. The names evoke narratives, religion is rendered explicit, and while listening, one imagines the moment the parents decide what to call their child. Such memories interrupt history.

Women of the South

In an article published in 1981 in the anthropological studies journal with the evocative name of *Man* (published by the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland), Maureen Giovannini reports the results of her research conducted in a Sicilian village that she calls Garre on the symbolic and cultural meanings conveyed by women and women's bodies.[6] The investigation speaks of the female figure as a symbol of the family, the bearer of metonymies and metaphors of sustenance, protection, and penetrability. The need to defend family boundaries, fundamental to the essentially local agricultural context, was expressed in the female body's defense (and control), a cohesive factor for family unity.[7] Ernesto De Martino's ethnoanthropological studies on southern Italy and magic take us into

5 Daniela Ricci, "Il cinema di Dagmawi Yimer: un nuovo sguardo sull'Italia di oggi," *From the European South* 1 (2016): 224.

6 Maureen Giovannini, "Woman: A Dominant Symbol within the Cultural System of a Sicilian Town," *Man,* New Series 16, no. 3 (1981): 408–26.

7 Jane Schneider, "Of Vigilance and Virgins: Honor, Shame and Access to Resources in Mediterranean Societies," *Ethnology* 10, no. 1 (1971): 1–24.

a dimension that is not very different, where the female body is the bearer of evil (more or less obscure) but simultaneously the holder of the key for eliminating this evil.[8] The role of women is central, for example, in the phenomenon of tarantism, as well as in ritual weeping. The source of social disorder and the keeper of the key to solving it, the southern woman embodies at once a terrifying form of power and a territory to control.

Like many others, the participatory observations of ethnographers and anthropologists reported here and elaborated in the second half of the twentieth century generally give a predictable picture of the so-called "woman" of southern Italy. This cultural construction persists and says much more when placed in a broader discourse on the Mediterranean and power and gender relations within the region and between North and South. Here, by North, we mean the network of hegemonic knowledge production that has constructed not only the South but also the East: south on the border with but also fully enmeshed in the assumed otherness of the Arab world and the Orientalism theorized by Edward Said. The knowledge–power system configuring the "non-European" has also produced the discourses of the subalternity of southern Europe defined by Manfred Pfister as "southernism."[9]

An archaeological look at the discourse elaborated on the female body in the Mediterranean region reveals the impossibility of assigning it to a single shore or cultural and religious formation. What emerges, instead, is the centrality of the three monotheistic religions, implanted in turn in a profoundly misogynistic Hellenistic culture. At the same time, there is a lack of historiographical recording of Mediterranean societies predating monotheisms, in which women appear to play primary

8 Ernesto De Martino, *Magic: A Theory from the South,* trans. Dorothy Louise Zinn (HAU Books, 2015).

9 Manfred Pfister, *The Fatal Gift of Beauty: Italies of British Travellers* (Rodopi, 1996). On "European southernism," see Roberto M. Dainotto, *Europe (In Theory)* (Duke University Press, 2007). On the Mediterranean, see Luigi Cazzato, "Coloniality, Migration and Decolonial Practices," *Politics: Rivista di studi politici* 5, no. 1 (2016): 1–17.

roles (as in ancient Egypt).[10] The claim to roots in Greek antiquity by European Christian culture and the parallel cancellation by Muslim culture of any relationship of descent with the pre-Islamic period (*jāhiliyyah*) have paradoxically also distanced Europe from the so-called Islamic periphery and the erasure of any common matrix. This, in turn, becomes foundational for a split between an image of modernity embodied (invariably) by the proclaimed free and emancipated woman on the one hand and the ascribed backwardness on the other, symbolized by the veiled, captive, dependent female. The "Woman of the South" is a hinge, bringing together archetypes of power and weakness, heroism and oppression.

As Laila Ahmed writes, specialized disciplines and self-referential histories of ancient civilizations in the Middle Eastern and Mediterranean regions have emphasized divisions and separations, obscuring the interconnections and fusions among ancient cultures. In her celebrated *Women and Gender in Islam,* the focus is on the dynamics of Islam's assimilation and appropriation of pre-existing socio-cultural and religious practices in the Mediterranean region through the reaffirmation and reworking of what she calls the "scriptural misogyny" of the Bible.[11] It is true, Ahmed points out, that some customs and traditions were imported by the Greeks and Byzantines from Persia; for example, in the case of Alexander's "decision to have a harem the same size as that of the Persian king he defeated."[12] Classical Greece, however, was organized according to a precise system of separation and oppression of women, which included covering and concealing the female body in public.[13] The conti-

10 Jean Vercoutter, "La femme en Egypte ancienne," in *Histoire mondiale de la femme,* vol. 1, ed. Pierre Grimal (Nouvelle Librairie de France, 1965).

11 Laila Ahmed, *Women and Gender in Islam: Historical Roots of a Modern Debate* (Yale University Press, 1992), 36.

12 Ibid., 28.

13 Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives, and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity* (Schocken, 1975); Helene P. Foley, *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (Routledge, 1981); and Marilyn A. Katz, "Sappho and Her Sisters: Women in Ancient Greece," *Signs* 25, no. 2 (2000): 505–31.

nuities with Byzantine society — where some studies emphasize women's much more active presence in the public sphere — are remarkable. They tell a different story that brings together the roots of ancient Western, Eastern, and Islamic civilizations within the geo-socio-cultural region of the Mediterranean. In this common and ramified history, the ancient sources of female oppression emerge with much greater clarity, codified in the scriptures of the three monotheisms and exercised in socio-cultural norms spanning centuries that continue in the violent battles waged on and over female and queer bodies today.

On Procida, the smallest island in the Gulf of Naples, lives Maria, known as the "fisherwoman" because she has gone fishing every night since she was young. Interviewed more than once on national television and asked, "Why do you do this job, so unusual for a woman?" she has always answered, "Because I like it." Maria the Fisherwoman introduces an economy of pleasure that clashes with socio-economic or historical analyses describing a local reality. Maria's body does not perform cathartic rituals as in the dance of the tarantula or Garre's keepers of family values, except perhaps in the almost ceremonial lowering and pulling of nets, which remain a ritual performed for herself, not for the community. However, Maria brings to mind the tradition of Aeolian fisherwomen, who, until after the Second World War, worked at sea and on land in the entire chain of fishing, processing, and selling the catch.[14] Aeolian women were fishers for subsistence and necessity, given the living conditions on the islands, and therefore would probably not have appealed, as Maria does, to pleasure to explain their activity. However, these are, again, narratives that break the disciplined historiographies of the Mediterranean region. A thread reconnects the Procida fisherwoman with the women of the Aeolian Islands and the latter, in turn, with the other Sicilian women of

14 Evidence of women's active participation in maritime professions in the Mediterranean is rare. See Paul Thompson, "Il potere nel privato: Variazioni esplicative nelle comunità marittime," *La Ricerca Folklorica* 21, (1990): 229–40.

Garre. Older men, interviewed by Macrina Marilena Maffei for her book *Women of the Sea,* recall with a certain suspicion the skill of fisherwomen in navigating at night, and in particular, the Panaraddesi (natives of Panarea) "sometimes symbolically associating them with witches traveling by night on brooms; but also with admiration, because of safety at sea due to their possession of solid skills."[15] Again, women bring danger and salvation, absolute otherness (the witch), wisdom, and nourishment for the survival of society itself.

The symbolism associated with the woman of the South speaks not only to a precise semiotic network in which we are still entangled but also, like every cultural phenomenon, has its particular genealogy pointing to something else. It tells us about a history of the Mediterranean in which women of Garre stand at the center and map misogyny through Hellenistic order to monotheistic religions and narratives of progress. Maria, the fisherwoman at sea who casts the subversive net of an unrecorded (material and symbolic) economy, also stands at the center. This is also Mediterranean history.

It is not a question of formulating a narration from a time that has stopped in its tracks. Instead, the question is that the path, laid out solely within Western humanism, can no longer move undisturbed in its self-legitimizing sciences. A short-circuit has occurred not in the timeline (empty and homogeneous, as Walter Benjamin would put it) but in the episteme. Voices from elsewhere, albeit immersed in the overwhelming dynamics of the late-capitalist (that includes the academic) global market, have introduced languages (in all senses of the word) that undermine the very foundations of Western humanism. Rather than simply including "the other side" of history, it becomes a question of seeking to respond to the practices of women within the cultural–historical formation of the Mediterranean

15 Orietta Sorgi, "Il mare al femminile," review of Macrina Marilena Maffei, *Donne di mare: Una storia sommersa dell'arcipelago eoliano* (Gioiosa Marea: Pungitopo, 2013), *Dialoghi Mediterranei* 9 (2014), https://www.istitutoeuroarabo.it/DM/il-mare-al-femminile/.

between shores and across the centuries. Women throughout the Mediterranean have, until recently, covered their hair, bodies, and faces. This suggests a far more complicated archive of power relations. It offers the possibility of reading history from inside those practices. This would be to record the connections between the female poets of the pre-Islamic period and the subsequent erasure of female voices in the Mediterranean basin or the links between the gestures and bodies of the *tarantolate* with those of women in the centuries after the establishment of monotheisms in the Mediterranean. This reticular narrative, marked by multiple temporalities, is also a history of the Mediterranean.

Again, and to avoid any romanticism, the proposal is not to insist on a celebration of the timeless and ahistorical, where stasis sustains archaic alternatives. Instead, it is important to register that the hegemony that has constructed linear time and Occidental historicism as modern cannot obliterate other temporalities. These, in continually marginalized and ignored forms, co-exist with it. These are the fisherwomen of the Aeolian Islands and the women of Algiers in their apartments, in all their complexity.[16] It is a matter of receiving the connections, obliquely crossing the chapters of history, and discerning the sometimes surprisingly deep points of contact.

Along with the striking insistence in her work on a world of women without men, the art of Baya Mahieddine (born Fatima Haddad, known primarily as Baya), its visual style, form, and use of color, is suspended between worlds. A self-taught artist from the southern shore of the colonial Mediterranean when Algeria was still part of metropolitan France, she and her work crossed the sea to Europe in 1947 for a solo exhibition in Paris. There, she was adopted by the Surrealists. In most immediate terms, this territorial ambiguity challenges the canonical definitions of art history: Is this primitive or avant-garde art, indigenous or Surrealist? Significantly, Baya deployed what Édouard

16 Assia Djebar, *Women of Algiers in Their Apartments,* trans. Marjolijn De Jager (University of Virginia Press, 1992).

Glissant called the right to opacity and rejected all the terms proposed.[17]

Nevertheless, the question ruptures the simple assumption of linear development and relocates such terms in a more inconclusive mix. Her vivid "Berber colors" and patterns may recall a motherless childhood in North Africa, but the Algerian women Baya depicts are not simply down and back there.[18] They look directly toward each other and, refusing the viewer's gaze, propose a wordless autonomy vividly condensed in a questioning presence. The musical instruments in so many of her paintings direct us to bodies of unheard sound, to the sounds of silenced bodies and a persistent, if ineffable, scoring of time. The resonance with Assia Djebar's *Women of Algiers in Their Apartments,* in its detailed response to the eponymous paintings of Eugène Delacroix and Pablo Picasso, and her deliberate disorientation of the Occidental framing of Muslim women and the Maghreb, hardly needs emphasizing. The silence of Baya's paintings interrogates us with unlicensed freedom: "With paper, paint, and water, I am free."[19] Assia Djebar refers to Baya's "visual history," where, to use Anissa Bouayed's phrase, we encounter a "symbolic insurrection."[20] The Algerian artist's work escapes encapsulation in the singular accounting of a unique modernity.

Like Assia Djebar in the hybrid formation of colonial Algeria, Baya also speaks and writes in French. But her language is freed from the function of signification. The birds, the colors and shapes, the flowers, the musical instruments, the women, the women…are saying something, but…as Amirah Silmi, commenting on the writing of Assia Djebar and Adania Shibli, has put it, we can consider Baya's work in terms that "escape any

17 Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation,* trans. Betty Wing (Penguin, 2025).

18 Dalila Morsly, "Je ne sais pais, je sens…: Entretien realisé à Blida en 1993," in *Baya: Femmes en leur jardin,* ed. Claude Lemand, Anissa Bouayed, and Djamila Chakour, exh. cat. (Editions Images Plurielles, 2022), 53.

19 Ibid, 54.

20 Assia Djebar, "Baya, Le Regard Fleur," *Le Nouvel Observateur,* January 24, 1985, in ibid.; Anissa Bouayed, "Baya: Vie et oeuvre," in ibid.

will to knowledge that would produce the voice of the colonized woman as victim."[21] Silmi continues:

> At the same time, free from any claim to truth, the story obliterates the opposition between the factual and the fictional, story and history, truth and lie, leaving us only to confront our will to knowledge, challenging us to see processes of effacement and hear those of silencing, and making visible the will to nonknowledge that constantly underlies the pursuit of rationalized knowledge.[22]

Discovered and cultivated by her mentor, Marguerite Caminat, in Algeria, Baya was sixteen at the time of her Parisian exhibition. André Breton wrote a very orientalist preface to the catalog, considering her indigenous innocence "to be free of the social constraints dominating the modern national subject."[23] It is said that her work influenced Picasso, or he may have borrowed and plagiarized it. This movement between Algeria and France, between the colonial perimeter and the metropole, promotes further prospects beyond the nation and immediate colonization by the categories prepared to accommodate Baya. As Ranjana Khanna justly captures it:

> Her paintings give us a clue for reading the gift: an unparalleled speaking back to the limited narratives that had failed to give space for alterity; a singularity beyond the confining discourses that turn Baya's work into a haunting presence.[24]

More than a simple appropriation of arts in the periphery enriching the cosmopolitan scene with novelty and innovation, we could entertain the deeper consideration of how such

21 Amirah Silmi, "Voice and Silence in Assia Djebar and Adania Shibli," *Critical Times* 6, no. 1 (2023): 59.

22 Ibid., 74.

23 Ranjana Khanna and Julie Singer, "Latent Ghosts and the Manifesto: Baya, Breton and Reading for the Future," *Art History* 26, no. 2 (2003): 253.

24 Ibid.

artistic and aesthetic labor changes the coordinates of evaluation. The colonial splicing together of Algeria and France that is of Algeria as France, but also France (and Europe) as Algeria (and Africa), conjoined in however unequal relations of power, refashion history in an altogether more complicated and inconclusive manner. The colonial cut lacerates both. If the colonized are most obviously the object and victim of its violence, the modern European nation-state is simultaneously constituted in colonial trauma.[25] Baya's work cites and sites this interrogation and its impossible closure. This retracts her art from immediate objectification in an aesthetic, critical, or commercial order. The latter is not canceled; it remains hegemonic. But it is now crossed and confused by the unexpected and unauthorized. Attending to its sedimented formation, her unannounced oeuvre sets another critical agenda. Her work becomes part of a history where detailed locality is irreducible to illustrating the universal. It responds to conditions and coordinates that traverse without settling in the institutional domains of the European codification of both art and history.

From Cosmopolitanism to Local Intricacies

In the broader meshes of the Mediterranean, distant from the urban centers of Europe and the West, it is possible to record the coexistence of coeval temporalities. This is not to propose a discussion about nostalgia and a return to the lost time of ancestral roots but rather about reconsidering the terms of analysis. The Mediterranean rehearses a far wider debate in the slide from historical centrality to its altogether more peripheral role today. Between crowded beaches and abandoned mountain villages, we encounter the peasant with the cell phone whose very presence unpacks the dichotomies between urban and rural life, between the modern and the archaic, the shine of the secular

25 Ranjana Khanna, *Algeria Cuts: Women & Representation, 1830 to the Present* (Stanford University Press, 2008), 147–49.

and the entrails of magic and the religious, between the cosmopolitan and the provincial.

Beneath the veneer of the label, cosmopolitanism is caught between the desire for a universal verdict and the multiple requests for the global recognition of local justice. Drawn together by global violence, they are not the same thing.[26] As Paolo Giaccaria notes, cosmopolitanism, as a concept of Western modernity, elaborates its genealogy directly from Greco-Roman antiquity to Kant.[27] Yet, it also has more extensive philosophical and political implications that reveal the absence of a monolithic West as we veer between worldly uprootedness and a militant insistence on the custody of the local. Walter Mignolo has questioned the temporality proposed by Giaccaria. He sees in the cesura of the sixteenth-century Spanish Mediterranean a specific ending engineered in the subsequent subordination to the "Enlightenment invention" of the backwardness of southern Europe.[28] However, Giaccaria rightly argues that the region's modernity and cosmopolitanism have not concluded, nor has its history.[29] In later becoming a colonial lake, the Mediterranean confronts us, more than any historical chronology, with a Europe increasingly formed through confrontation with alterity.

Further, apart from proximities to Africa and Asia, induced by colonial expansion and the modern infrastructure of privileged travel, the idea of cosmopolitanism in the Mediterranean is simultaneously colonized, exoticized, and authorized by the elites of its metropolises. This is why, for example, Alexandria is narrated as a cosmopolitan center *par excellence,* celebrated in the exotic metropolitan dreamscapes of Lawrence Durrell or

26 Bruce Robbins, *Perpetual War: Cosmopolitanism from the Viewpoint of Violence* (Duke University Press, 2012).

27 Paolo Giaccaria, "Cosmopolitanism: The Mediterranean Archives," *Geographical Review* 102, no. 3 (2012): 296.

28 Walter D. Mignolo, "The Many Faces of Cosmo-Polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism," *Public Culture* 12, no. 3 (2000): 721–48, and Walter D. Mignolo, "Cosmopolitanism and the De-colonial Option," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 29, no. 2 (2010): 111–27.

29 Giaccaria, "Cosmopolitanism."

the films of Youssef Chahine, in contrast to Cairo, considered the center of more rooted, localized, and extraneous formation, altogether much less accessible to the European gaze. This suggests that cosmopolitanism and its disengaged gaze become subtly complicit with colonialism.

In the banal form taken by the media, tourism, and commerce, cosmopolitanism is composed of a series of recurring elements, such as harmony secured in the peaceful coexistence between different religions and customs, a nostalgic representation of an idealized past of the city or place in question, accompanied by the exoticization and sensualization of the multiple experiences offered by the location.[30] The mythical understanding of Mediterranean cosmopolitanism mirrors its positioning within and outside European modernity. Here, literary and cinematic narratives play an essential role: that of Tangier in the novels of Paul Bowles and the writings of the Beat Generation, the Naples of Curzio Malaparte, or Trieste in the works of Calvino and Magris.[31] Mediterranean metropolises propose a litmus test for the projections and constructions of modernity, measured in degrees of acceptability or extraneousness. Such places are themselves marginal relative to hegemonic discourse. If "the invention of Southern Europe" is undeniable, then cosmopolitanism has been its instrument.[32]

The concept of cosmopolitanism cuts across the political, legal, economic, and philosophical spheres. It is also undoubtedly true, as Luca Scuccimarra observes, that an anticosmopolitan perspective, especially at the level of international law, would risk falling back into a,

> rigid conceptual framework characteristic of early modernity, safeguarding what to all intents and purposes represents

30 Dieter Haller, "The Cosmopolitan Mediterranean: Myth and Reality," *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 129, no. 1 (2004): 29–47.

31 Ibid., 33.

32 Mignolo, "Cosmopolitanism and the De-colonial Option," 123.

> its ultimate theoretical foundation: the state's control of space as the "absolute principle" of politics.[33]

However, it is evident that,

> any analysis unable to grasp, alongside the processes of "cosmopolitanization" materially taking place in the context of international politics, also the "inconsistencies," "asymmetries" and "empty spaces" produced by those same processes appears […] far from being capable of understanding the concrete political structure of global society.[34]

The tension between local and global, and in parallel between national and supranational and the meshing of cosmopolitanism and universalism, is complex and multidirectional. Still, it certainly has much to do with the colonial organization of Occidental power. So, any,

> thought that claims universality consistently betrays logics, laws and languages that are intimately located in a historical and cultural configuration that we can call Occidental modernity. Here we confront a *precise* political economy that since the inception of European ascendancy on a global scale has persistently sought to world the world in its image. The outcome is that such concepts as *human, wealth, nature, markets, progress, history* and *development,* while being presented as though timeless and given, are rather the historically situated products of a continual working up of the world into a particular conceptual register that reflects a culturally elaborated set of social relations and powers.[35]

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33 Luca Scuccimarra, "Spazi umanitari: Ripensare la geografia della politica nell'epoca globale," *Politics: Rivista di studi politici* 8, no. 2 (2017): 14.

34 Ibid., 12.

35 Iain Chambers, *Postcolonial Interruptions, Unauthorised Modernities* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 19. Emphases in the original.

This hegemonic cosmopolitanism continues to cultivate in subordinated Mediterranean cities a deep distrust of the asymmetrical relations of universalism. Surprisingly enough, this asymmetry manifests itself even in the protective and equalizing instrument of the "World Heritage" titles awarded by UNESCO. In the 1972 *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,* UNESCO stipulates that each state party has the "duty of ensuring the identification, protection, conservation, presentation and transmission to future generations of the cultural and natural heritage."[36] The sites to be protected are inserted in a list after being nominated and reviewed by a commission. The concept of World Heritage took shape when, in 1960, the Egyptian government gave the go-ahead for constructing the Aswan Dam. This mammoth work would flood the valley of the Nile where the temples of Abu Simbel and Philae lay, along with all the Nubian villages in the area that had to be forcibly abandoned.[37] After an unsuccessful appeal to the Egyptian government, UNESCO decided to finance the relocation of most of the temples, which were dissected and then reassembled on the western shore of Lake Nasser produced by the dam's construction.[38] The concept of a community of nation-states financing the preservation of a site of cultural interest outside their immediate territory would later evolve into establishing the list of World Heritage Sites. UNESCO defines such sites

36 UNESCO, *Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage,* 1972, art. 4, https://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/.

37 On the process of removal and resettlement of the Nubian population, see Thayer Scudder, *Aswan High Dam Resettlement of Egyptian Nubians* (Springer, 2017). On the movement for the recognition of Nubian language, culture, and identity and for the right of return, see, among others, Maja Janmyr, "Human Rights and Nubian Mobilisation in Egypt: Towards Recognition of Indigeneity," *Third World Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (2017): 717–33, and Maja Janmyr, "Nubians in Contemporary Egypt: Mobilizing Return to Ancestral Lands," *Middle East Critique* 25, no. 2 (2016): 127–46.

38 The years and months preceding the construction of the dam and the consequent displacement of the Nubian population that inhabited the region are powerfully and poetically narrated in Jamal Mahjoub's novel *Nubian Indigo* (Actes Sud, 2006; the original English version was published only in 2012).

as belonging "to all the peoples of the world, irrespective of the territory on which they are located."[39]

The *Convention* itself is founded on the principle of the indivisibility of the world, on "humanity in its entirety." It appeals to the international community, consistent with the idea of the universal that underlies the United Nations itself. As Jacqueline Jondot notes, the concept dissociates heritage from the territory in which it is located and shifts the focus from the local to the global, as "the world" replaces a specific place/space/location and "humanity," a specific people or community, "using some elements (artefacts) and discarding others (their creators) that do not serve the purpose of a coherent whole, an artificial global civilization."[40] The control over one's own history is taken away from local communities and handed over to the universal deliberations of the international community, while the (especially initial) emphasis on "tangible" heritage disregarded almost completely the actual people inhabiting or surrounding that heritage. The issue is undoubtedly complex and concerns not only planet Earth's cultural and natural heritage but also a vision of humanism, the possibility and plausibility of universal principles, and the policies for their application. From this point of view, it is significant that the list of World Heritage sites reveals a marked asymmetry between Europe and the rest of the world. The disparity in the number of recognized sites did produce an attempt at correction in 1994 with the intervention called *Global Strategy for a Balanced, Representative and Credible World Heritage List*.[41] This strategy, however, is almost unanimously recognized by observers as having failed so far. It is pretty evident that asymmetry, or rather Eurocentrism, does not only concern the distribution of UNESCO titles, as Corinne Geering observes:

39 UNESCO, "World Heritage," *UNESCO World Heritage Convention,* https://whc.unesco.org/en/about/.

40 Jacqueline Jondot, "World Heritage: A Gateway or a Wall? A Study of Jamal Mahjoub's *Nubian Indigo,*" paper delivered at the Eaclals Triennial Conference, April 26–30, 2011, Boğaziçi University, Istanbul.

41 UNESCO, "Global Strategy," *UNESCO World Heritage Convention,* https://whc.unesco.org/en/globalstrategy.

> It could be argued that the very concept of "humanity in its entirety" is a Eurocentric concept, as it operates from the notion of an encompassing universalism. As for the Eurocentric nature of [UNESCO's] World Heritage inclusion standards, this is also evident in other aspects beyond the overrepresentation of Europe in relation to other regions of the world. Besides the unequal inclusion of different geographical areas, there is also a disparity between cultural and natural heritage, between monumental and vernacular architecture, and the marginal status of intangible heritage.[42]

There is also the critical issue mentioned by Geering of the difference in the number of sites classified as "cultural" and "natural" (and mixed) and their location. In Europe, cultural sites abound, while in the Middle East and Africa, for example, natural areas prevail (many of them are classified as at risk for various reasons linked to conflict conditions, instability, or poverty in the territories where they are located). The distribution between cultural and natural sites certainly speaks of a profound difference in material well-being, other historical relationships of human beings to the environment, and a specific view of the categories of monumental and vernacular. It also mirrors a further dichotomy between urban and nonurban, town and country. And here we come back to the Mediterranean through the bearing of UNESCO policies on the world. It is significant to note that Mediterranean cities (including those not coastal) awarded the title of cultural heritage (usually the historic center or specific archaeological areas incorporated in the city) are almost all concentrated on the sea's northern shore. There is a sort of attestation of "metropolitan" that the southern and eastern Mediterranean cities are not accorded. It perpetuates the dichotomy between the (urban) center and (suburban

42 Clémence Landeau, "'The Eurocentric Nature of the World Heritage List' — Interview with Corinne Geering," *Weber Word Café*, October 28, 2015, https://wwc.hypotheses.org/1324.

or agricultural) periphery, a dichotomy deeply characteristic of the imperial institution.

The use in the twentieth century (especially in French, but also in Italian) of the term *metropolitan* to indicate the territories and citizens of the motherland — from the etymon of the Greek word *mētēr* meaning "mother" — as opposed to the colonies is worth underlining. North and South are, however, continually redrawn. At the same time, the peripheral character of the colonies also emerges in the narrative of cities on the continent's edge, liquidly contiguous to the rest of the Mediterranean. In 1997, Jean-Francois Troin wrote that "the Mediterranean metropolises offer an image of themselves as underdeveloped both in the north (Marseilles, Naples, Athens) and in the south and […] do not arouse, in the case of Europe, anything but a condescending gaze from their opulent sisters in the industrialized north."[43] It is undeniable, however, that the cities of the northern Mediterranean/south of Europe are included in an imaginary and, more importantly, in a market that, although on the fringe, falls within Europe and the so-called West. Eastern and southern Mediterranean cities are far more easily dismissed as other and remote. They are cosmopolitan when required by the tourist market (here, a significant discourse could be made about Tel Aviv), but not processed according to the requirements of being considered a cultural heritage of humanity. Universalism and cosmopolitanism are unbalanced, asymmetrical, or perhaps much more political than they seem and claim to be. It is a globalism that is very close to colonialism. The complicated concept of preservation of the past is articulated in an exercise of power that recognizes the dignity of the existence of subordinate territories only if they are petrified in the past for European universalism. That is to say that the Mediterranean frozen in a museum case has the dignity of recognition and is governable. At the same time, the subjectivity of those who live

43 Jean-François Troin, *Le metropoli del Mediterraneo: Città di frontiera, città cerniera* (Jaca Books, 1997), 83.

in that territory, populate those metropolises, and build other types of monuments is not universal enough.

Signs, Sounds, and Silence: The Maps of Arab Women Poets

Let us commence with Arabic. In all its variations and dialects, it is the most widely spoken language in the Mediterranean basin.

The map of Mediterranean women poets exists in a semi-clandestine topography that has its sources in the epoch of the Sumerians and Babylonians, engraved in the *jāhiliyya* above all, but certainly not exclusively, in the figure of Al-Khansā' (c. 575–664), a poet officially recognized and included in the Arab literary canon. Even later, in the Umayyad, Abbasid, and Andalusian eras, more than two hundred female poets were formally reported in various literary collections and encyclopedias. As effectively summarized by Ashour and others, "one researcher counted 242 female poets, from Al-Khansā' to Wallada Bint al-Mustakfi, and in her study of women in the Abbasid period, Wajda al-Atraqji counts forty-four female poets in the first five hundred years of the period."[44] Several Sufi women poets are also recorded over the course of the different centuries, first and foremost Rābiʿa al-Baṣrī (717–780), and, among others, in the sixteenth century, ʿĀ'ishah al-Baʿuniyya, considered to be the most prolific Arabic-language writer until the twentieth century.[45]

Women writers and poets include the so-called singing slave girls. Rābiʿa al-Baṣrī may have also been one in her early life.[46]

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44 Radwa Ashour, Ferial Ghazoul, and Hasna Reda-Mekdashi, eds., *Arab Women Writers: A Critical Reference Guide 1873–1999* (American University in Cairo Press, 2008), 1. The reference is to Fatma Moussa-Mahmoud's study "North Africa and the Arab Middle East," in *The Bloomsbury Guide to Women's Literature,* ed. Claire Buck (Bloomsbury, 1992).

45 On Rabia al-Basri, see Caterina Greppi, *Rābiʿa: la mistica* (Jaca Books, 2003). On ʿĀ'ishah al-Baʿuniyya, see Th. Emil Homerin, trans. and ed. *The Principles of Sufism: ʿĀ'ishah al-Baʿuniyya* (New York University Press, 2014).

46 Josef W. Meri, ed., *Medieval Islamic Civilization: An Encyclopedia,* vol. 1 (Routledge, 2006), 866, and Kristina Richardson, "Singing Slave Girls

Fig. 3.1. The *Tondo di donna* depicting a woman holding a stylus and a *tabula cerata* (wax tablet), wearing a *palla* together with gold-threaded hair and gold earrings. Museo Archeologico Nazionale di Napoli, inv. no. 9084. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

This phenomenon mainly concerns the Umayyad and Abbasid periods, and biographies of the female singers/poets were collected in the tenth century by the scholar Abū l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī in the collection *Kitāb al-aghānī (The Book of Songs),* which also included excerpts from the poems.[47]

(*qiyan*) of the Abbasid Court," in *Children in Slavery through the Ages,* ed. Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller (Ohio University Press, 2009).

47 Abu L-Faraj Al-Isfahani, *Kitāb al-aghānī,* 25 vols. (Dar Sader Publishers, 2004).

The literary history of Greco-Roman antiquity rarely records the presence of female poets, except that of Sappho and a few other exceptions, such as Erinna of Telo (fourth century BCE), an innovator and among the first of a fertile Hellenistic period, or in the following century Anite of Tegea and Nossis of Locri.[48] From the Roman period, only part of the work of Sulpicia remains documented (first century BCE), whose face is, not surprisingly, identified alternately with that of Sappho in the well-known *Tondo di donna* found in Pompeii and housed in the National Archaeological Museum in Naples (fig. 3.1). It depicts a pensive young woman holding a wax tablet and a pen perpendicular to her mouth. Looking for traces of this type of archive in, for example, Italian school books is a vain undertaking. Except for the interesting volumes by Eva Cantarella — one of which has the *Tondo di donna* on its cover — and apart from Sappho, the poetic map of the Greco-Roman Mediterranean, as it is transmitted and taught, is exclusively male.[49]

The recording of the existence of women poets and their literary presence in the Mediterranean region has to do with the institutional archive of history, written and guarded for centuries by men. It also has to do with the relationship that, depending on the territory and historical moment, literature, particularly poetry, has had with the public and private spheres. The same dichotomous concept of public and private is a widely entrenched control device. The ideas of public and private spheres, as understood in the West, determine the inclusion or exclusion of subjects (women) from the official archive of history: The association of women with the private sphere means that the right of "citizenship" in the cultural and political creation of society is denied (while creation is associated with them as a biological task, if not a duty). Further, as Ellen Greene writes, "the emphasis on women's biographies and on the

48 Camillo Neri, *Erinna: Testimonianze e frammenti* (Pàtron, 2003).

49 Eva Cantarella, *Passato prossimo: Donne romane da Tacita a Sulpicia* (Feltrinelli, 2015), and Eva Cantarella, *L'ambiguo malanno: La donna nell'antichità greca e romana* (Feltrinelli, 2013).

seemingly 'personal' nature of their literary achievements has occluded the highly intricate and complex character of ancient women's relationships not only to their largely patriarchal societies but also to literary traditions overwhelmingly dominated by male voices."[50]

Traced through the female poets of the Mediterranean, a different cartography emerges, where the contours do not indicate separation, but rather nodes that constitute a history: places that contain the silence of women poets and philosophers in school books (at least in the West); locations that, when connected, draw another map and a more complex history. These other topographies challenge, transform, and interrogate the very production of knowledge. In this sense, the proposal here is not to complete a definitive chart but to see, hear, and encounter others; nor is it a matter of limiting the discourse to poets who have been published, but instead of recognizing other languages, including the poetic, ancient, and alogical ones, resistant to the patriarchal archive. The idea, again, is not to draw a standard map of Mediterranean women poets, flattening out the many and even enormous differences between the various territorial and temporal realities, but rather to propose an inverse operation: to complicate the Mediterranean and its spacetime through tracing the topological relationships, the distances, and proximities of these other points of reference. These are women poets who, over the centuries, have populated the Mediterranean with their words, whether recorded or not. And they are voices that, however distant and different, are somehow related to each other. Or rather, the relationship or interruption, or lack of relationship itself, are continuous or discontinuous lines that, in turn, bear meanings. In being remembered, they rewrite an epistemology of the Mediterranean and subvert or blur the boundaries by folding and disrupting the official male archive.

As Fatima Sadiqi observes of the very ancient oral tradition of Berber women:

50 Ellen Greene, "Introduction," in *Women Poets in Ancient Greece and Rome,* ed. Ellen Greene (University of Oklahoma Press, 2005), xii.

> These ancestral forms of expression [orality, ritual, and art] have always been used by Berber women to record individual, collective and universal dreams and instances. Although these forms of expression fall outside conventional knowledge, they constitute a contestation of women's recognised ways of thinking about orality and challenge our belief in the inherent superiority of writing over orality and of the urban over the rural.[51]

Generally speaking, textbooks on the history of Arabic and European literature offer a lengthy silence on women's literary and poetic production. This coincides with a series of factors that differ from region to region but certainly have to do with political dynamics for the literary production of a given territory or language. Also, relations between political power, monotheism, and literature have much to do with the public and private divisions up until and beyond the anticolonial liberation movements of the twentieth century.[52]

We have to wait, with a few exceptions, for the so-called *al-Nahḍah* (Arab Renaissance, commencing in the period between the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century) to find the publication of literary works by women in the Arab world and, in the specific case that interests us, in the Middle East and North Africa. Looking toward the other shores of the Mediterranean, from the twentieth century onward, works by women poets were also published in Europeanized Mediterranean areas in a more substantial and officially visible way. The archive, however, undoubtedly remains male. It is sufficient to recall the recent Italian case of the Einaudi collection *Nuovi poeti italiani 6* of 2012, edited by Giovanna Rosan-

51 Fatima Sadiqi, "Berber Women's Oral Knowledge," in *Women and Knowledge in the Mediterranean,* ed. Fatima Sadiqi (Routledge, 2013), 108.

52 On the poetic production of Ottoman women from the fifteenth to the twentieth century and a reflection on the literary archive, see the excellent article by Didem Havlioğlu, "On the Margins and between the Lines: Ottoman Women Poets from the Fifteenth to the Twentieth Centuries," *Turkish Historical Review* 1 (2010): 25–54.

dini. It included only female poets and triggered fierce criticism and debate. As is rarely the case, the anthology of poems was discussed in newspapers and not only in specialized magazines. The editorial operation was considered particularly outrageous coming from such an authoritative publishing house for the canonical certainties of the usual archive. The fulcrum of the controversy was predictably entwined "between a totalizing, ontological meaning of 'genre literature' assumed in terms of an absolute literary category, and the total denial of any subjective characterization, reproducing the mythical neutrality […] of the writing subject."[53]

In Arabic poetry, the twentieth century saw the rise of free verse, which is generally considered to have been pioneered by the Iraqi Nāzik al-Malā'ika (1923–2007). The entire production of Palestinian resistance poetry also developed over the century, of which the Palestinian poet Fadwa Ṭūqān (1917–2003) is considered a fundamental voice. Her poem"Madīnatī al-ḥazīnah" ("My Sad City") situates the pain of the occupation after the 1967 war within a localized and specific territory, her city, her Nablus, which she does not mention by name, but which she evidences as the deep root and crucial element of the occupied land/territory:

> The day the waves were vanquished, the day
> The ugliness of the abyss revealed its true face,
> Hope turned to ashes,
> And gagging on disaster,
> My sad city choked.
>
> Gone were the children and the songs,
> There was no shadow, no echo.
> Sorrow crawled naked in my city,
> With bloodied footsteps,

53 SIL — Società delle Letterate, "Se i nuovi poeti sono donne," *Società Italiana della Letterate,* November 13, 2012, https://www.societadelleletterate.it/2012/11/antologia-einaudi/.

Silence reigned in my city,
Silence heavy like crouching mountains,
Mysterious like the night, tragic silence,
Burdened,
Weighed down with death and defeat.[54]

The city's narrative as a metonymy, as well as reality itself, is a space much more complex and articulated than the word "nation" conveys in the struggle for Palestine. This seems to join and be amplified in the contemporary echo of Nathalie Handal's work. Handal is a poet from the Palestinian diaspora of Bethlehemite parents who grew up between Latin and North America and the Middle East. She defines herself as profoundly Mediterranean. For Handal, one might say, the sad city is Bethlehem:

I see Bethlehem, all in dust, empty,
a torn piece of newspaper lost in its narrow streets.
Where is everyone? Graffiti and stones answer.
Where is the real Bethlehem — the one my grandfather came from?[55]

In Handal's poetry the land looks at the sea, very often the Mediterranean, from different and mutually communicating shores and perspectives. However, the poet rarely mentions the Mediterranean explicitly in her work. She has chosen to do so in her recent poem entitled "Canto Mediterraneo," in which the vibrations of the word find reverberation in the references to Greek and Arabic rhythms, to the returns and insistences of marine wanderings that fail to find effective form in abstract thought. This is where poetry arrives:

even now
generations later

54 Fadwa Tuqan, "My Sad City," in *The Palestinian Wedding: A Bilingual Anthology of Contemporary Palestinian Resistance Poetry,* ed. Abdelwahab M. Elmessiri (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1982), 67.

55 Nathalie Handal, "Bethlehem," in *The Lives of Rain* (Interlink, 2005), 9.

I return to you, Rebetiko

to your qanun, oud
toumperleki, politiki lyra

and I ask

in what language will I love
in what waters will I breath

in what voice will I find the world
in what sound will I find the beats

in what sun will I learn to speak
in what love will I learn to sing[56]

At the end of the poem, the author inserts an explanatory note with the definition of *rebetiko:*

> *Rebetiko is a Greek urban blues. It fuses Greek, Turkish, Arab and Jewish musical traditions, and the songs deal with themes of exile, loss, longing, love and death. It began in the poorer neighborhoods of Asia Minor and grew in the outskirts of Athens, Thessaloniki and Piraeus after the Greek catastrophe in 1923.*[57]

Handal does not provide a glossary for the *qanun, oud, tuberleki,* and *politiki* (all string or percussion instruments used in West Asian and Eastern Mediterranean music); she leaves them to play within the English language. The sounds and tempos

56 Nathalie Handal, "Canto Mediterraneo," in *Life in a Country Album* (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019), 57.

57 Ibid., 58. On Nathalie Handal's and Etel Adnan's poetry, see also Marta Cariello, "The Edge of Continents, the Insistence of the Sea: Narratives of Mediterranean Migrations," in *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Anglophone Literature and Migration,* ed. Nicoletta Vallorani, Simona Bertacco, and William Boelhower (Bloomsbury, 2025).

bring us to this Mediterranean modernity where Handal relies on Greek urban blues and Kiriakos Kalaitzidis playing the melody of the traveler Marco Polo:

> now I listen to Kalaitzidis
> play *Marco Polo's Dream*
>
> swim back, swim back
> some day
>
> my life
> is in your refrains
>
> listen, listen
> a song can change a people
>
> I'm Venetian and Greek
> I'm Jerusalem in Arabic
>
> I come from the outskirts of cities
> and the sea
>
> and to you, Rebetiko, I return[58]

Nathalie Handal's poetry places Palestine and Jerusalem within the Mediterranean much more effectively than theoretical language. If the Palestine–Israel question is a historical, cultural, and political laboratory of the contemporary Mediterranean, here the waves and rhythms of poetic writing, within which the *rebetiko* vibrates, emerge to constitute the poet who is "Venetian and Greek" but also "Jerusalem in Arabic." The language of poetry explains that cities have suburbs but that the sea has them too, that one can come from one and the other simultaneously, and that the blues displays roots and ramifications that project the Atlantic into the Mediterranean and vice versa.

58 Handal, "Canto Mediterraneo,"58.

This extension of the Mediterranean in a sea (the Atlantic) and land (the Americas) refers to the colonial genealogy of the term Mediterranean. In Olivia Harrison's definition, this is a "particular postcolonial condition and set of problems rooted in the triangular relationship tying Europe (France, Britain, Italy, Spain) to its former Maghrebi and Mashriqi colonies" and, therefore, becomes a condition of coloniality dictated by Europe "in its fullest extension," which includes the United States.[59] In this context, Harrison proposes a cogent reading of Etel Adnan's work, an Arab author of the diaspora belonging to the generation before Handal's. Lebanese-born, she lived for a long time in the United States and later in Paris. Adnan said that she wrote novels in French, poems in English and French, and painted in Arabic.[60]

She is best known for her book (in French), *Sitt Marie Rose* (1978), considered the first literary text written by a woman about the Lebanese civil war. Adnan published numerous works of poetry over the years. She established herself as a painter by producing notebooks and canvases that bear the graphic signs of the Arabic alphabet, her father's language, which the artist declared she never really learned. She speaks of having lived in perpetual suspension between different languages: the Greek and Turkish of her mother, who belonged to the Greek minority in Izmir, the Arabic of her father, the French of Lebanon, the English of the United States, and then the French of Paris. Each language is linked to geopolitical, historical, and personal circumstances, which led to her singularly polyglot production. Adnan recounted having received Arabic lessons from her father as a child; these lessons consisted of first copying a few characters of the alphabet and then an entire grammar book

59 Olivia C. Harrison, "Etel Adnan's Transcolonial Mediterranean," in *Critically Mediterranean: Temporalities, Aesthetics, and Deployments of a Sea in Crisis,* ed. Yasser Elhariry and Edwige Tamalet Talbayev (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 202, 205.

60 Etel Adnan, "To Write in a Foreign Language," *Electronic Poetry Review* 1 (1996), https://www.epoetry.org/issues/issue1/alltext/esadn.htm.

without being able to read.[61] The pleasure of the graphic sign that is barely decipherable and thus open to multiple and transitory meanings remains in Adnan's painting and poetic language. In its wandering, poetry provides a home for an extension of identity through the languages it houses, a continuous transition, and a way of inhabiting Lebanon, colonial France, northern California, and Paris.

Starting precisely from an idea of extension in both Adnan's poetic language and the very definition of the Mediterranean, Harrison traces in Adnan's writing the evocation of a "transcolonial Mediterranean" that is a site of (neo)colonial subjugation and, at the same time of anti-(neo)colonial resistance: "a region that has been and continues to be shaped by overlapping forms of imperial rule as well as by transregional South–South alliances beyond its shores."[62] At this point, the Mediterranean, beyond the strictly geographical or even geo-cultural terms we are accustomed to employing, becomes, in Harrison's words, "a crossroads of anti-(neo) colonial struggles and a decolonized literary topos."[63] This includes the Lebanese Civil War, the Palestinian resistance, the struggles of the Native Americans, and the movements of the 1960s and 1970s against the Vietnam War.

One of Adnan's most complex compositions is *L'Apocalipse arabe,* published in French in 1980 and translated by the same author into English in 1989 under the title *The Arab Apocalypse.*[64] It is a long poem consisting of fifty-nine segments whose thematic focus is the outbreak of the Lebanese Civil War but which touch upon a broader range of conflicts and reflections. Despite the subdivision into segments, the text offers the reader a single narrative, broken up by continuous breaks in syntax, linearity, and even graphics. The sentences and individual words, which are not necessarily in a "logical" sequence, are interrupted by drawings and codes at times similar to hieroglyphics invented

61 Ibid.
62 Harrison, "Etel Adnan's Transcolonial Mediterranean," 202.
63 Ibid.
64 Etel Adnan, *The Arab Apocalypse* (Post-Apollo Press, 1989).

by the writer to form a set of polyvalent ideas and symbols connected in different ways. The graphism acquired in copying Arabic letters returns to exploring the boundaries of sign, meaning, character, and sense. In the case of *The Arab Apocalypse,* it is a text that introduces the impossibility of the written word. This works in the inability to narrate the tragedy of war and queries the logic beyond language (even a poetic one). The invented signs, as arbitrary as any alphabet, are inscribed as an excess of narration that cannot exist. Among these symbols is the sun, often accompanying or replacing the word *soleil*/sun.[65] It has been read as a symbol of colonial power, Israeli or American, by Caroline Seymour-Jorn, who notes its function in the text "as a metaphor for colonial powers that, in their determination to control the earth, decimate much of what stands in their way."[66] The sun appears, however, at other times deteriorating, or even dead, and seems to expand its symbolic construction regarding the impermanence of colonial power and human violence as a universal character.[67] Indeed, the graphic sign not responding to any specific cultural context — such as the sun — reinforces Harrison's evocation of anti-(neo)colonial alliances and thus of the south rooted in the colonial matrix of the Mediterranean, but also constantly resisting. As Harrison writes:

> To visit Adnan's Mediterranean, we need to travel south and east of Paris. The names that reverberate throughout Adnan's war writings, from *Jebu, Sitt Marie Rose,* and *The Arab Apocalypse* to *In the Heart of the Heart of Another Country* and *Jenin,* are those of Palestinian and Lebanese camps, villages,

65 For an excerpt from the work, see Aditi Machado, "On Etel Adnan's 'The Arab Apocalypse,'" *Jacket2,* November 30, 2016, https://jacket2.org/article/etel-adnans-arab-apocalypse.

66 Caroline Seymour-Jorn, "'The Arab Apocalypse' as a Critique of Global Imperialism," in *Etel Adnan: Critical Essays on the Arab-American Writer and Artist,* ed. Lisa Suhair Majaj and Amal Amireh (McFarland & Co., 2002), 37.

67 Ibid., 8–39; see also Marta Cariello, "Etel Adnan's 'The Arab Apocalypse': Self-Translating the Untranslatable," in *Translating East and West,* ed. Oriana Palusci and Katherine Russo (Tangram, 2016).

> and cities destroyed by colonial and postcolonial warfare: Qalqilya, Tell Al-Zaatar, Sabra, Shatila, Jenin, Beirut. As these names suggest, the Mediterranean is a decidedly Arab space. *Arab* here does not denote ethnicity or language alone, far from it. Rather, the word captures a condition, an inheritance, a history structured by and through the experience of colonization.[68]

And yet, as Harrison observes, in the poem *Jebu,* where the Mediterranean is replaced by ancestral toponyms dating back before European colonization, verse again projects the region elsewhere, or rather, exposes it to the violence of seemingly distant imperialism. This is a violence that is traced back to the same matrix when projected onto the walls of Jerusalem:

> The X-ray of his being on the day of Hiroshima
> like a sweat appeared on the Jerusalem Wall[69]

The map becomes ever broader and more complicated: Adnan's voice, the voice of a woman from the Mediterranean, but also from California on the Pacific Ocean, from Palestine, and, again, from Hiroshima, constructs a knot in the linguistic texture. It decentralizes the space of the map and, at the same time, works the verticality of the colonial genealogy of the Mediterranean.

Returning to these multiple temporalities, they speak of a pre-Islamic and Islamic world that was hospitable for female poetry but does not allude to an idyllic world in which women quickly found an equal footing with men in the literary and intellectual sphere. We know, for instance, that in the era of the *jāhiliyyah,* there was the *fuḥūla,* a form of poetic prowess

68 Harrison, "Etel Adnan's Transcolonial Mediterranean," 204. Emphases in the original.

69 Etel Adnan, "Jebu," in *To Look at the Sea Is to Become What One Is: An Etel Adnan Reader,* vol. 2, ed. Thom Donovan and Brandon Shimoda (Nightboat, 2014). For an analysis of Adnan's symbolic use of the biblical figure of the Jebusites, see Harrison, "Etel Adnan's Transcolonial Mediterranean," 205.

closely linked to the dominant sense of virility, which pertained exclusively to men.[70] The widely recognized and respected poet al-Khansāʾ was nevertheless described as insidious, for instance, by the Umayyad poet Jarir, who believed he was the best if it had not been for "that devious woman."[71]

Fatima Mernissi recalls that the poet Al-Jāḥiẓ (ninth century) assigns to the figure of the educated woman the invincible weapon for subjecting man. In her celebrated S*cheherazade Goes West,* Mernissi recounts a discussion with a German journalist about the use and origins of the terms "odalisque" and *jāriyah:* the former of Turkish origin, which refers to the space of a room, *oda;* the latter, Arabic, indicates the action of running, i.e., being at someone's beck and call, running to fulfill their wishes. Mernissi recounts that she wanted to discuss harem-related terminology "to gauge Hans's [the journalist] reactions and learn something about his inner thoughts," and that her German interlocutor helped her to "understand that women's obsequiousness, their readiness to obey, is a distinctive feature of the Western harem fantasy."[72]

In discussing the terms "odalisque" and *jāriyah,* Hans significantly declares early on that he prefers the term denoting the rush to fulfill the master's wishes, as he considers it more accurate. In both definitions, Mernissi points out that the reference is to enslaved women who were bought and acquired skills in music, dance, and poetry to gain visibility and a certain kind of power within the harem. Again, the power of the poetic word and the arts makes the figure of the woman dangerous and, according to Al-Jāḥiẓ, "reduces men to utter vulnerability."[73] Mernissi articulates her reasoning in a brilliant narrative combining theoretical reflections and direct experience. She weaves

70 Marié Hammond, *Oxford Dictionary of Arabic Literary Terms and Devices* (Oxford University Press, 2018), s.v. "fuḥūla."

71 Quoted in Al-ʻId Yumna, "Lebanon," in *Arab Women Writers,* ed. Ashour, Ghazoul, and Reda-Mekdashi, 13.

72 Fatima Mernissi, *Scheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (Washington Square Press, 2001), 36, 26.

73 Ibid., 36.

the two together in constructing a theoretical process that speaks and moves with the writer and never remains in the fixity of the theorem but instead works on unhinging inherited ideas. In the specific case of the discussion on the figure of the *jāriyah,* for example, she tells us that the conversation takes place with Hanz at the entrance of a theater in Berlin, just before attending the ballet *Shahrazad,* which interrupts the dialogue between the two (in Rabat, she observes that she would not have been forced to keep quiet for the duration of the performance). Mernissi makes the genesis and construction of her reflection part of her reasoning. Her words take shape in her actions, in her being in the world. Within the conversation with the journalist, there is the double mirroring of Mernissi exposing herself to European reasoning on Shahrazad and Shahrazad arriving and interacting with Europe, including the version of her that appears on the theater stage.

This opens up a complex debate on the role of female (written and oral) narration as a means of salvation from and subversion of the patriarchal order, which has its central figure in Shahrazad.[74] Her stories, through lines that run across the centuries and the reworkings, appropriations, and claims of her voice, are elaborated and spoken in the clotting of writings and poetics, in a poetics that, in turn, articulates other markings of time. When we talk about a map, we mean a statement on the intersecting of space and time. This proposed map charts languages and temporalities sustained in the poetry of Mediterranean women. It opens up different mythologies and shifts the center from the seemingly stable archives of national knowledge. Poetry as a literary process decentralizes the history of literature, especially

74 In addition to Mernissi, see, among others, Suzanne Gauch, *Liberating Shahrazad: Feminism, Postcolonialism, and Islam* (University of Minnesota Press, 2007); Nawar Al-Hassan Golley, *Reading Arab Women's Autobiographies: Shahrazad Tells Her Story* (University of Texas Press, 2003); Fedwa Malti-Douglas, *Woman's Body, Woman's Word: Gender and Discourse in Arabo-Islamic Writing* (Princeton University Press, 1991); and Lidia Curti et al., eds., *La nuova Shahrazad: Donne e multiculturalismo* (Liguori, 2004).

Western literature, and the recent dominance of the novel. It shifts the axis decisively to the Arab world, where poetry has always had a different role and still has. It is conceived and consumed very much in the public sphere, having a political and social status, rather than the private and intimate dimension of the Western Romantic tradition.

This, of course, is a partial, complex, deliberately disjointed, and mobile map. It correlates spatiotemporal nodes and writings that underscore the opening of passages and gaps: unfilled spaces yet to be traversed, to be explored, and to come.

Sediments, Folds, Ruins, Rhythms

At this point, the coordination of the Mediterranean through the history of Europe reveals a fundamental coloniality of method. Colonialism cannot be restricted to the past. It also constitutes the present. It is inscribed in the very methods and languages of the social sciences that, with their "universal" claims, unavoidably betray the parochial Occidental provenance of their pronouncements. To merely insert other forgotten histories into the narration is insufficient. As we have noted, the very mechanisms that marginalized and effaced such records in the first place require critical attention. Rather than add to the existing picture, fracturing it is critically more significant. Subsequent fragments are then available to be assembled in another montage. This permits multiple and mobile compositions to emerge as time and space are folded into intersecting constellations to escape capture in a single and conclusive chronology.

Yet if we open David Abulafia's *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean,* we read the following:

> The Mediterranean we now know was shaped by Phoenicians, Greeks and Etruscans in antiquity, by Genoese, Vene-

> tians and Catalans in the Middle Ages, by Dutch, English and Russian navies in the centuries before 1800.[75]

Remove the Phoenicians, and all the protagonists are Occidentals. The Arab Berber world and the Mongols, Turks, and Ottomans are excluded, restricted mainly to their military incursions into the European narrative. But can we be so sure? We will see later how the seeming essence of medieval European architecture — the Gothic style, fan vaulted ceilings, and pointed arches — involved "stealing from the Saracens."[76] Behind the screen of European modernity, an altogether more heterogeneous formation continues to seed present complexities. Only in recent centuries has the Mediterranean "we now know" come to dominate perspectives and explanations. Accepting the Mediterranean's existing settlement as the only resolution available proposes a history immune to thinking about the problematic questions of modernity: colonialism, imperialism, the formation of the nation-state, and the contemporary definitions of the very concepts of history and the human. "Ontological realism" and disciplinary "common sense" leave us with a reconfirmation of the status quo.[77]

The Arab crossing of the Mediterranean to conquer Spain and Sicily and the subsequent establishment of commercial and cultural networks that stretched from southern Europe and the Atlantic to Southeast Asia and the Pacific coast of China proposes a set of historical considerations in which the northern shore of the sea played a peripheral and subordinate role until the early modern period. The Crusades (a concept exclusive to Europe; in the Arab world, they were more obviously considered an invasion) and the establishment of transitory Christian kingdoms and the commercial activities of the maritime republics of

75 David Abulafia, *The Great Sea: A Human History of the Mediterranean* (Oxford University Press, 2011), xviii.

76 Diana Darke, *Stealing from the Saracens: How Islamic Architecture Shaped Europe* (Hurst, 2020).

77 Ethan Kleinberg, Joan Wallach Scott, and Gary Wilder, *Theses on Theory and History,* May 2018, http://theoryrevolt.com.

Venice, Genoa, and Pisa in Palestine lasted effectively for barely a century before being expelled by Saladin. The subsequent challenge of the Ottoman Empire, both in the eastern Mediterranean and in the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, continued to contest the ascendancy of European sea power until well into the seventeenth century. Giving more weight to such histories propels us into broader currents to pursue interpretations that circulate in more extensive orbits than those shackled solely to the rise of the West. They suggest that the forging of modernity moved along axes well beyond those restricted to Europe and its emerging nation-states. Interpretation is pushed out of the singular narrative of exclusive European progress and its timescale.

This suggests deeper critical temporalities than mere chronology allows. At this point, we could bring in two figures from the fourteenth century to contemporary debates on the present-day demise of Occidental metaphysics and the necessary undoing of the empirical and positivist premises of the European social sciences. They are both male, North African, and Muslim. One is the traveler and geographer Ibn Baṭṭūṭah, and the other is the historian and sociologist we have already briefly encountered: Ibn Khaldūn. Contemporary understanding of the terms — geographer, sociologist, historian — open an unsuspected door on the past. Their place in a typical understanding of historical time is out of sync. "Medieval Islam" was well in advance of the European time scale. The depth of argument and spread of attention that both men ask us to consider is remarkably modern. Inducing a fold in time, their writings and observations are remarkably proximate and pertinent to the present. The very scale of Ibn Baṭṭūṭah's journeys throughout North Africa, Iraq, Persia, the Arabian Peninsula, and the Swahili Coast (that is, from Fez to Shiraz to Zanzibar), and then the Black Sea, Anatolia, Central Asia, India, South East Asia, and China, finally going to Spain, then crossing the Sahara to Mali and Timbuktu, is genuinely astounding even by today's standards. Moving by camel, in caravan, on ship, across the breadth of much of the then-known world, Ibn Baṭṭūṭah's peregrinations are similarly matched by the historical and sociological reach of

Ibn Khaldūn's slightly later analyses of the complexities of the Muslim universe stretching from the beaches of the Atlantic to the steppes of Central Asia.

Both the physical and intellectual journeys of Ibn Baṭṭūṭah and Ibn Khaldūn propose an oblique cut across our maps of understanding. Traveling east and northeast from North Africa, the distinctions between north and south that today are welded into the asymmetrical relations of power through which the First World subordinates the rest of the planet, are rolled back. This allows for a moment of critical reflection. Our very language, which itself betrays the powers of these histories in our largely unquestioned mapping of the planet, is challenged. Forced to turn in on itself, we can begin registering historical limits and cultural boundaries. In the case of Ibn Khaldūn, these fourteenth-century routes take us from Al-Andalus to Morocco and North Africa, to Cairo, and then into the Middle East and Syria. This is the Mediterranean world viewed from the south and from within an Islamic hegemony that was shortly to be reinforced by the rise of the Ottoman Empire.

To be lowered over the walls of Damascus to encounter Timur (or Tamerlane) allowed an aged and apprehensive historian in January 1401 to meet the contemporary protagonist of his theory of the growth and fall of sedentary communities under the devastating impact of nomadic society.[78] Timur was the Tartar lord of the Asiatic steppes who claimed descent from Genghis Khan. Three years earlier, he had sacked Delhi after ravaging much of central Asia, southern Russia, Anatolia, and the Middle East. A year afterward, he was to interrupt the rise of the Ottomans at the Battle of Ankara. Ibn Khaldūn sought, to no avail, to save Damascus from being plundered and its inhabitants massacred or dispatched with their artisan skills to Samar-

78 For Ibn Khaldūn's own description of this encounter, see the translation by Mohamad Ballan, "The Scholar and the Sultan: A Translation of the Historic Encounter between Ibn Khaldun and Timur," *Ballandalus,* August 30, 2014, https://ballandalus.wordpress.com/2014/08/30/the-scholar-and-the-sultan-a-translation-of-the-historic-encounter-between-ibn-khaldun-and-timur/.

kand. However, Ibn Khaldūn's historical theory was not simply a banal exposition of the rise and fall of empire. His argument on history's cyclical dynamics and environmental coordinates goes below the surface of events to disturb assumptions of time sedimented in the sequential accumulation of progress.

In a reading that renders Ibn Khaldūn proximate to the languages of Gaston Bachelard and Michel Foucault, Ali Benmakhlouf considers Ibn Khaldūn's writings and research an "epistemological rupture."[79] His establishment of the consequences and centrality of urban life to the making and movement of civilization establishes a new field of study. Insisting on political power in terms of genealogies rather than an essence, Ibn Khaldūn proposes a historical method sensitive to the collective dynamism of social and economic forces rather than the chronicle of influential figures and dynasties. He "speaks of history as a new tribunal that relativizes the powers of the elite."[80] Attention to political power as a series of processes in time and space implied the removal of metaphysical explanation and an implicit secularization of historical understanding in the absence of teleological finitude.[81]

So, in place of a history of events, dynasties, and immediately identified protagonists, Ibn Khaldūn proposed a structural understanding of historical processes. In his *Muqaddimah,* the *longue durée* conjoins social, cultural, economic, and environmental dynamics in a dialectic between rural existence and urban community life. Through comparative method, empirically grounded considerations, and a labor theory of value, Ibn Khaldūn's interactive reasoning on power, the environment, and history anticipates much of Fernand Braudel's reflection on the reciprocal interplay between geographical, social, and ecologi-

79 Ali Benmakhlouf, *Pourquoi lire les philosophes arabes* (Albin Michel, 2015), 177.

80 Ibid., 178.

81 Massimo Campanini, *Ibn Khaldun and the Muqaddima* (Edizioni La Vela, 2019), 110.

cal temporality by some five centuries.[82] Drawing directly on the historical landscapes of North Africa, Andalusia, and the Middle East, Ibn Khaldūn considered pastoral nomadism as the motor of historical change. In due course, it led to more settled communities and cities, then to the latter's expansion and subsequent decay into sedentary indulgence. This explanation of the cyclical rise and fall of culture and society, anticipating in a perhaps more rational fashion a central argument in Giambattista Vico's *Scienza nuova* (1725), remains of value in a world ruled and continually renewed by the unrelenting planetary aggression of inherently nomadic capital.

If Ibn Khaldūn's prioritization of reason and speculative criticism challenged a theocratic understanding of history, he always stopped short of querying his faith. But, again, this is not far from Vico's proposal of a civil theology reasoned from divine providence. And then objections to tenets of belief might equally be applied to the disenchanted social sciences of modernity when voicing our skepticism toward their unreflexive beliefs in scientific neutrality and an unexamined faith in secularism. What most forcibly emerges from Ibn Khaldūn's work is the contemporary insistence on the necessity of a science of human society to comprehend and study history. Today, we would call this a problematic.[83] All of this brings us to the relevance and valency of Ibn Kahldūn's work today and his anticipation of many of the questions of modern historiography and sociology.[84]

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82 The contemporary valency of Ibn Khaldūn's thinking, linked to Aristotelian rationality and the later works of Baron de Montesquieu, David Hume, Adam Smith, Émile Durkheim, March Bloch, and the Annales school, is explored in convincing detail in Stephen Frederic Dale, *The Orange Trees of Marrakesh: Ibn Khaldun and the Science of Man* (Harvard University Press, 2015). However, the modern pertinence of Ibn Khaldūn's thought is also forcibly contested through sceptical irony in Robert Irvin, *Ibn Khaldun: An Intellectual Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2018).

83 Louis Althusser et al., *Reading Capital: The Complete Edition,* trans. Ben Brewster and David Fernbach (Verso, 2015).

84 Syed Farid Alatas, *Applying Ibn Khaldūn: The Recovery of a Lost Tradition in Sociology* (Routledge, 2014).

In the *Muqaddimah,* Ibn Khaldūn sets out the conceptual tools of historiography in terms of a critical undertaking, what he refers to as "an entirely original science."[85] Contrary to nineteenth-century positivism that subsequently infected the question, he understood history to be "firmly rooted in philosophy" and its truth established through "enlightening speculation."[86] This, for instance, suggests an understanding of history proximate to the perspectives of Walter Benjamin. Ibn Khaldūn's resistance to chronological explanation also anticipates the Derridean idea of still-to-be-registered archives arriving from the future. Time is folded, contrasted, and compared: "The past resembles the future more than one drop of water another."[87] While not following a uniform beat and direction, history is located in the multiplicity of empirically grounded and theoretically registered contingency. Further, the method of inquiry is not, as in the case of the certitude of Western social science, restricted to empirical demonstration and deduction but includes logic, dialectics, poetics, speculation, and rhetoric. The reasoning embodied, and not merely transmitted, in language is an essentially interactive component of Ibn Khaldūn's sociological research and history.

History is always located in geography. Time acquires form in space. Ibn Khaldūn was well aware, informed by the geographies of Ptolemy and Al-Idrīsī, that the Earth was a sphere. Maps were themselves historical and framed time and explanation. This was sedimented in his central idea of the necessity in social organization, society, and state formations of what he called *'aṣabīyyah* (solidarity and group consciousness), which in a different lexicon we might call ideological consensus.

The *Muqaddimah* is a highly theoretical text on the political economy of power and settlement, on their cycles of production and reproduction. In chapter 5, Ibn Khaldūn illustrates the role

85 Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History,* trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton University Press, 2005), 39.
86 Ibid., 5.
87 Ibid., 12.

of prices in the accumulation of capital and property. He identifies the diversification and specialization of urban artisan skills, commerce, and cuisine. He proposes a labor theory of value in understanding profit as value realized through human labor. In chapter 6, he argues that knowledge arrives from the practice of instruction and critical engagement with paradigms and problematics. Understanding is not acquired through memory and mimicry; it is produced in processes that include study, travel, and encounters with other scholars. This draws us into the Mediterranean's geography and historical configuration that runs along very different lines from today. As Marshall Hodgson observes of the "medieval" Islamic world:

> The Mediterranean and the Nile-to-Oxus regions were always more closely linked together than the other core areas of civilization. Even on a high-cultural level, they shared both the monotheistic religious tradition and a common scientific and philosophical heritage.[88]

He goes on to note:

> The peculiar notion of some modern Western writers, that before the sixteenth century other societies, such as the Islamicate, were "isolated" and were brought into the "mainstream" of history only by such events as the Portuguese invasion of the Indian Ocean, is of course ridiculous: if there was a "mainstream," it was the Portuguese who were coming into it, not the Muslims; the Muslims were already there.[89]

While against simple comparisons and evaluation, he insists:

> Compared with the Occident, in the High Caliphal Period, when the Occident was still rather a backwater, Islamdom

88 Marshall Hodgson, *The Venture of Islam* (University of Chicago Press, 1977), 2:71.

89 Ibid., 2:331.

> looks magnificent; but such a comparison says nothing about its relative position in the world; the Baghdad of the caliphs was merely on a plane of relative equality with Constantinople in eastern Europe and with the metropolises of India or China. […] The well-known cultural superiority of Islamdom, then, was not absolute in the world at large (in the Earlier Middle Period, surely it was in China, if anywhere, that would be found the maximum economic and cultural prosperity); it was relative to the developing Occident.[90]

In this altogether more worldly frame, Renaissance Europe and the rise of the West become part of the shared history of Afro-Eurasia. The powerful axes of great trade routes across the Sahara and the steppes of central Asia, together with nomadic invasions initially from the southern shores of the Mediterranean and subsequently from Transoxiana, only began to come undone at the beginning of the sixteenth century. As Marshall Hodgson suggested, it was the powers of Islamdom that sent the Occidentals out into all the oceans. It was only at the end of the eighteenth century that Europe became the dominant actor on a world scale, exceeding the Ottomans and China. Sea-borne empires and the rise of nation-states then increasingly came to channel the flow of goods, culture, and capital. At the same time, frontiers and the nationalization of identity rigidified the previously less restricted traffic over the surface of the globe.

We could here shift such arguments about historical time, negated archives, and marginalized cultures nearer to our present and move to another part of the Mediterranean to consider the largely overlooked region of southeastern Europe: the Balkans. How to think of the Balkans? Again, we mean less to identify an often overlooked object of study. Instead, we consider the critical transformation of the historiographical, cultural, and political languages that have identified, explained,

90 Ibid.

constructed, and marginalized this part of Europe.[91] So, how to think with the Balkans? Exiting from their exotic construction, supposedly cut off from modernity in the mountainous margins of southeastern Europe and home to archaic rites and tribal traditions, requires us to abandon a subgenre of the othering and subordinating mechanism that Edward Said called Orientalism, itself part of altogether more extensive concerns with the impact of colonialism on the political and intellectual making of the modern world. Melodramatically proposed in Bram Stoker's noted novel *Dracula* (1897), this representation of the Balkans has been reconfirmed more recently in the ethnic wars in ex-Yugoslavia. So, how do we respond to Maria Todorova's request to contest this frozen image that refuses to die as though it were a vampire? Insisting on the Balkans as a European component would mean denying the simplicity of its presumed Oriental character and underlining Europe's historically heterogeneous and culturally unruly making. The question of Balkanism then lies not in the abstract clash of the conflicting totalities of West and East but in the concrete powers of Occidental hegemony to frame and identify what it seeks to dominate and discipline through separation.[92]

Geographically, politically, historically, and culturally, the Balkans are part of Europe. After all, in geological and geopolitical terms, they include the presumed source of European civilization: Greece. Why are they so rarely taken into consideration and persistently marginalized? Here, a postcolonial perspective, that is, the revisiting of the historical and cultural formation of the Balkans in the light of their subordination and repression, acquires critical weight. But more than establishing the colonial status of the region, historically crisscrossed by diverse empires and religions, and most obviously in recent centuries by that of the Ottomans, this also means considering the exercise of power that permits particular centers to create peripheries to

91 Larry Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment* (Stanford University Press, 1994).

92 Maria Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans* (Oxford University Press, 2009).

subordinate and colonize. Historically, the Balkans were far less peripheral to the Ottoman capital of Edirne (Adrianople) than they have been to the West. The peninsula acquired its name from the Ottomans, and "it seems that the conclusion that the Balkans are the Ottoman legacy is not an overstatement."[93]

However, today, with growing nationalisms and a renewed drive to establish homogeneity and historical purity, this heritage is deliberately ignored and expunged from textbooks and public recognition. Despite five hundred years of Ottoman rule, no mosque existed in the Greek capital until only a few years ago, and only one survives in Sofia. In the Bulgarian capital, the minarets of more than forty other mosques were blown up by the military engineers of the Tsarist army in 1878. At the time, half the inhabitants of the new nation of Bulgaria were Muslim, ninety percent of whom spoke Turkish; the latter remained an official language of the state, alongside Bulgarian, for another four decades. "In the winter of 1984–85, the names of 800,000 Turks were Bulgarianised by force, so the last communist census, conducted in 1985, could 'prove' that only ethnic Bulgarians lived in Bulgaria and that no national or ethnic minorities remained."[94] The following year, 370,000 Bulgarian Turks were expelled to Turkey (recognized by the Bulgarian parliament in 2012 as an act of ethnic cleansing).[95] Such mythical and homogenous nationalisms are fundamentally a modern European invention.

At the battle of Ankara in 1402, where the Timurud army overwhelmed the Ottomans, Sultan Bayezid I's right wing was composed of Serbian forces in black armor under the command of Stefan Lazarević. Half a century later, when Constantinople

93 Ibid., 12.

94 Tomasz Kamusella, *Ethnic Cleansing During the Cold War: The Forgotten 1989 Expulsion of Turks from Communist Bulgaria* (Routledge, 2018). The details are drawn from Tomasz Kamusella, "Bulgaria's Denial of Its Ottoman Past and Turkish Identity," *New Eastern Europe,* March 24, 2019, https://neweasterneurope.eu/2019/03/24/bulgarias-denial-of-its-ottoman-past-and-turkish-identity/.

95 Kamusella, *Ethnic Cleansing during the Cold War.*

had become the new capital of the Ottoman Empire, Sultan Mehmed II sent his friend and probably lover, Radu the Fair, against his elder brother Vlad III (more widely known as Dracula) to bring Wallachia under Ottoman control. Both brothers had been brought up at the Ottoman court in Edirne. Radu was likely also with the Turks in the taking of Constantinople in 1453. This complex world is riven by power struggles and shifting alliances that befuddles attempts at establishing sharp divisions between Occident and Orient, Christian and Muslim, Europe and Asia. Yet what emerges most forcefully, both in the historical perspectives of Maria Todorova and Mark Mazower, and in the more personal and poetical, but also profoundly political, accounts of Daša Drndić and Kapka Kassabova, is the Occidental and nationalist refusal to register and digest the Balkans' Ottoman imprint and inheritance where complex historical and cultural fluidities embedded in place and practice threaten the simplicities of national identification.[96] The Balkans and Ottoman Europe remain absent from the prevalent European narrative of its formation and history. They are externalized. Recognizing their internal presence produces a very different Europe and understanding of modernity.

Looking to transform the Balkans from a seeming periphery into a pertinent critical space, we could draw on the cultural fluidities proposed in the films of Theo Angelopoulos. Here, we confront a twisting physical and metaphysical passage into modern Greece's historical and cultural archives, accompanied by the recall and reconfiguration of the Balkans. The journey renders visible the violence of catastrophic cartographies and deliberately unties the rigid confines of ethno-nationalism. Such an entwining of narratives, secured in a poetics that is also a poli-

96 Todorova, *Imagining the Balkans;* Mark Mazower, *The Balkans* (New York: Modern Library, 2000); Mark Mazower, *Salonica, City of Ghosts: Christians, Muslims and Jews, 1430–1950* (Random House, 2006); Daša Drndić, *Trieste,* trans. Ellen Elias-Bursac (MacLehose Press, 2012); Kapka Kassabova, *Border: A Journey to the Edge of Europe* (Granta, 2017); and Kapka Kassabova, *To the Lake: A Balkan Journey of War and Peace* (Granta, 2020).

tics, suggests an altogether more gregarious and freer unpacking of the peninsula. It proposes a remembering through resistance, assembling fragments where the return to the past spirals into another unauthorized topography. It leads to an uncoupling of chronology from the nationalist clock and the implacable teleology of progress accumulating capital from the extraction of time. Refused histories and subaltern temporalities exceed the empty prescriptions of modernity to produce discomfort in the established story. In the cinema of Angelopoulos, and thinking in particular of *Ulysses's Gaze* (1995), *Eternity and a Day* (1998), and *The Weeping Meadow* (2004), we move through bleak landscapes, for they figure the tempos of the oppression of those robbed of their history, of being colonized or eliminated by a unique finality.

Nationalist myths purport to comment on natural coherence. Angelopoulos reminds us that other tales of an altogether more jagged character exist. The deliberate slowness of his films unwraps time and frees it for another narrative. The peregrinations of the filmmaker and male poet, the female body, the ethnicized community, and the racialized other continually queer any idea of neutrality. Incomplete and unredeemed, such critical spaces need to be set against the vicious grain of narrow nationalism, exclusionary geographies, and illiberal regimes of citizenship that run across Europe, from the English Channel to the Black Sea.

Similarly, the sounds of the Balkans spill out of all attempts at national framing. Whether in dance, *rebetiko,* and Romani music or the voice of the itinerant Sephardic singer Rosa Eskenazi, who recorded songs in Greek, Turkish, Arabic, Hebrew, Italian, Ladino, and Armenian in both Istanbul and Athens, we find musical cartographies that crisscross borders and stretch from Anatolia to the Danube. The passage of images and sounds touches local singularities ultimately suspended in wider networks and relations, deeper histories, and overlapping archives. The local turns out to be both deeper and more transnational than the nation; it challenges chauvinistic recruitment to the

violence of the state seeking its place in the planetary management of economic inequalities and social injustice.

Of course, reasoning in this manner implies refusing, or at least complicating, the monodimensional logic of center and periphery. Here, where the multiple "peripheries" of the metropoles of Constantinople/Istanbul, Vienna, Budapest, Venice, and even Moscow, overlap, the local acquires all the density of a historical black hole: sucking histories, cultures, and lives into a bewildering density. There is no simple stratification that mirrors the chronological passage of time but rather a vital and volatile sedimentation. Opposed to the national containment of history and the linear steps toward the European legislation of progress, we discover the unruly archives of creolization. Against the seeming security of stable identities, the latter suggests the discomfort of cultural agonism attendant on belonging and conviviality where historical processes continually interrogate and register the limits of any conclusive accounting of time and place.

Considering modernity and its capitalist motor not as an internal European affair but as a more extensive and planetary one, we see this running through the Balkans and their histories. This involves tracing the conflictual forces of empire (Byzantine, Habsburg, Ottoman, Austro-Hungarian, Russian) and religious affiliations (the Eastern Orthodox Church, Islam, Catholicism, together with their innumerable splinters and sects) while acknowledging their traversal by global routes running north and south, east and west. In other words, even the most overlooked and underconsidered region of southeastern Europe is not so much a periphery as a nodal point in a planetary network impacting both locally and globally.[97]

To bring the Balkans back into the picture, then, is to insist, against autochthonous figures of impenetrable mountain passes, blood feuds, Byzantine, Ottoman, Slavic, Albanian,

97 Manuela Boatcă and Anca Parvulescu, "Creolizing Transylvania: Notes on Coloniality and Inter-imperiality," *History of the Present* 10, no. 1 (2020): 9–27.

Bulgarian, and Hellenic violence, on the trans- and international coordinates of its composition. It is to steal away from the national domus and its mythical scaffolding and liberate the local into a more comprehensive, less guaranteed world. This, in turn, impacts the presumed centers of progress and development. The refused margins and absent peripheries now acquire a sharper presence. Their claims on the narrative cut into, and cut up, Occidental ascendancy and its presumed claims on the world. In different ways and with other effects, the rural peripheries, the pale of Eastern Europe, and the global colonies, once considered external and subordinate to the West, now enter the equation. Every urban center needs a rural periphery, and every north a south, and every metropolis a colony. We are not simply talking of historical and cultural discrimination but instead of the structural distribution of power. A closed understanding of modernity being endogenously generated solely on West European soil and then moving outward to englobe the rest of the planet falls apart. The economic, cultural, and historical conditions for the rise of the West were always far more extensive. Africa, the Americas, and Asia were always essential to the modern constitution of European culture, capitalism, and power in the "intimacy of four continents."[98] As Frantz Fanon famously said, "Europe is literally a creation of the Third World."[99]

While, as we have noted, the principles of the Renaissance perspective were first explained in eleventh-century Cairo, the rise of capitalist enterprise and banking in Italy was not unconnected to trade routes, mathematical principles, commercial practices, and technological innovation that ran under Islamic hegemony from south India and China to the Atlantic coast. Meanwhile, the unification of the Asian landmass under the *Pax Mongolica* promoted a nascent world economy that directly

98 Lisa Lowe, *The Intimacies of Four Continents* (Duke University Press, 2015).

99 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Constance Farrington (Penguin, 2001).

encouraged European enterprise.[100] Oriental powers — Arab, Mongolian, Ottoman — initially facilitated and subsequently pushed a peripheral but burgeoning Europe westward to circumnavigate Asian hegemonies and accidentally "discover" the Americas. The essential conditions of the modern capitalist political economy were planetary from their very inception. They involved factors coming from as far afield as the steppes of Central Asia and the jungles, forests, and prairies of the Americas. If so, it is also necessary to recognize that these conditions do not follow a smooth temporality. They are involved in uneven and combined developments over the globe. The heart of darkness of this civilization not only lies in the violent exploitation of labor in the slave plantations of the Americas, but also in the factories of Manchester that were directly dependent on it. Meanwhile, the lights of London and Paris, which seemingly illuminated the "backwardness" of the Balkans, actually cast far darker shadows over these Occidental metropolises. Dracula, like Africa, was a cosmopolitan European invention.

Perry Anderson once suggested that nomadic invasions were "one of the basic coordinates of the formation of Eastern Europe."[101] To this day, in Kraków, a bugle is sounded on the hour from Saint Mary's Basilica to signal the arrival of the Mongols under the city's walls in 1241 before it was sacked. The sound ends abruptly, purportedly signaling the moment a Mongolian arrow pierces the bugler's neck. Again, these are not archaic phenomena of nomadic incursions breaking into the inevitable progress of urban settlement but reconfigurations of power and possibilities. The Mongols created a world system that shattered European insularity. Just as later, the Ottoman state's highly centralized management, reflected in its war machine's logistic efficiency and paid standing army (distinct from the feudal bonds and aristocratic obligations then operating in Europe), was more modern in anticipating the European absolute state.

100 Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (Pluto Press, 2015).
101 Quoted in ibid., 72.

The Desert

The desert has long been one of the central tropes of Orientalism, the site of an apparent emptiness that encompasses perturbing immensity, sublime beauty, incalculability, frightening sterility, untraceable tracks, and always exotic and impregnable dangers in Western narratives. It is also associated with disastrous colonial and contemporary wars.[102]

The desert constitutes a significant space in terms of the articulation of borders and border relations. In particular, this untraceable zone exposes the nerves of European borders and their degree of fixity. Materially and symbolically, the desert participates in what Charles Heller and others have termed Europe's "volatile border practices."[103] Practices that are strongly challenged not only by the liquid character of the Mediterranean Sea but also by the elusiveness of the political and cultural custody of the desert borderlands. The desert appears to have no internal limits but constitutes a zone between controllable lands and undomesticated territories. In the Western imagination, the desert proposes an irreducible otherness, ready to be filled with Orientalist projections, as in the films of David Lean (*Lawrence of Arabia,* 1962) and Bernardo Bertolucci (*The Sheltering Sky,* 1990). But the desert is also an immense and irrepressible border, a challenging, brutal, and deadly passage in the current migratory journey from sub-Saharan Africa to Europe.

It is not by chance that the so-called migratory crisis that has affected the Mediterranean in recent years has also witnessed an increase in the rhetoric of responsibility assigned to former

102 Douglas Kellner, *The Persian Gulf TV War* (Westview Press, 1991), and Paul Virilio, *Desert Screen: War at the Speed of Light,* trans. Michael Degener (Continuum, 2005).

103 Charles Heller et al., "Crisis," in *Europe/Crisis: New Keywords of "the Crisis" in and of Europe,* ed. Nicola De Genova and Martina Tazzioli (Zone Books Near Futures, 2016), https://nearfuturesonline.org/europecrisis-new-keywords-of-crisis-in-and-of-europe-part-2/, and Linda T. Darling, "The Mediterranean as a Borderland," *Review of Middle East Studies* 46, no. 1 (2012): 54–63.

European colonies as attempts are made to push the borders of migration further south into Saharan Africa. In what can be read as an attempt to convert the European crisis into a neoliberal test of postcolonial responsibility, the legitimacy and sovereignty of African nation-states are ultimately recognized through their diligent service to the mandates of fortifying European borders.[104] In this sense, the desert offers itself to the Western imaginary as the ultimate border, where nothing is, or nothing can be born, an undisciplined hinterland beyond the liquid ungovernability of the Mediterranean.

The desert inhabits the Northern European projection of the Mediterranean imaginary on at least two levels. On the one hand, the Orientalist/Romantic narrative of the Mediterranean landscape as dangerous and exotic, which incorporates the desert as a fundamental element of the pernicious and elusive character of the Orient, corroborated by travel narratives and myths of the life of Bedouins, alongside the deep-rooted and persistent obsession with harem women and the unveiling of the Muslim body. On the other hand, the hundreds of thousands of migrants arriving from Africa on the southern shores of Europe carry with them the tragic and devastating crossing of the Libyan desert. In the ongoing wreckage of today's world system, this journey concludes on the northern shores of the Mediterranean. The (primarily unheard) stories of the survivors graft the desert and its savage terrors into the heart of Europe.

Rethinking the North African desert in this manner makes it possible to undercut and reassess the cultural and historical construction of the Mediterranean from another shore. It also allows us to register its present situation as a basin of movement and refuge — but also of rejection and death — with people crossing vast distances to reach Europe. That no-man's-land is often the first and crucial border for migrants, extending, and not for all, to the *terra firma* of the northern shore. This movement of people across borders, deserts, and seas proposes maps that are different and far less fixed than the contours of official

104 Heller et al., "Crisis," 9.

geography; here, "the map becomes, as a whole, a more fluid and fluctuating composition."[105] The desert of the Western imaginary is now intersected by the traumas of those migrants who cross it to reach the sea. In narratives and critical reflections, we find a retracing of unexpected territories by complex desert semantics, as in the concepts of nomadism and the interrogative sedimentation of routes and ruins.

Raji Vallury recalls Walter Benjamin's reflections on ruins and history in his analysis of the Algerian writer Tahar Djaout's novel, *L'Invention du désert* (*The Invention of the Desert*).[106] She notes Djaout's difficulty in finding a suitable form of writing to convey the content of Berber history within a national cartography and historiography of Algeria. The writer's words are lost in an allegorical desert. As Vallury observes, Benjamin's reflection, placed within the tension between allegorical ruin and history, is beneficial for thinking about the past that becomes present in the remains: "Allegories are in the realm of thought what ruins are in the realm of things."[107] The desert is an allegory of the uncontrolled and ruined nature of boundaries, of uncontrolled and unforeseen confines, the site of the stratification of unknowable pasts. We need to think of the symbolic and material synthesis of the Mediterranean, not just as water but also in terms of stony deserts and sand.

Reading Juan Andrés's ambitious *On the Origin, Progress and Present State of All Literature* of 1792, a seemingly insignificant passage reveals a related and particularly relevant semantics of sea and desert.[108] Andrés counts the compass among the important inventions to be attributed to the Arabs (as we know, it

105 Iain Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2008), 2.

106 Raji Vallury, "Walking the Tightrope between Memory and History: Metaphor in Tahar Djaout's *L'Invention du désert*," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 41, nos. 2–3 (2008): 331.

107 Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama,* trans. John Osborne (Verso, 1977), 178.

108 Juan Andrés, *Dell'origine, progresso e stato attuale di ogni letteratura,* 9 vols. (Stamperia Reale, 1792).

was invented in China) and emphasizes the documented use of the magnet as early as the tenth or eleventh century, as well as the use of the compass by Muslims to orient themselves during prayer, mentioning the specific term *kebletan*.[109] In illustrating his point, the author emphasizes the primacy of the Arabs in nautical science, in orienting themselves in the sea and the desert. Andrés's work is interesting because the seven volumes, which were a massive success at the time of publication, are based on the firm belief that Greco-Latin culture is the basis of all European culture, tracing only two moments of revival: the Arab presence in Spain and Italian humanism. Andrés's work was intended to be an encyclopedic contribution along the lines of the French model and contains explicit evaluations of the peoples and cultures it deals with, including attempts to rehabilitate the culture of the Arabs. Indeed, from this point of view, the context in which it was written, including the relationship with the so-called East and what would become European colonies, is very explicit. In the passage mentioned above on the question of the compass, the author formulates an overlapping of the sea and the desert achieved by the Arabs:

> It is no less favorable to the cause of the Arabs to see the great use they make of the compass. The other nations only make use of that instrument for navigation on the seas; but the Arabs also use it for journeys by land, and they also make use of it for their superstition. Leonicus Calcondila, in his third book, *De rebus turcicis,* describes the journeys that the Arabs make through long and vast sandy countries to visit Mecca. He says that in those immense seas of sand, they regulate their path with the directions of the magnet.[110]

109 *Kebletan* is dual form of *kebleh* and means "the two temples," i.e., Jerusalem and Mecca.

110 Andrés, *Dell'origine, progresso e stato attuale di ogni letteratura,* 1:245. Emphasis in the original.

The Arabs navigate the desert like the waters of the sea. It is a perspective that is almost incomprehensible to the European view. The unfathomable desert becomes traversable but also a perturbing space because only the others have this knowledge: the bizarre aptitude of orienting themselves in the "immense sea of sand." From the arid vastness of the Sahara to the sea, deadly crossings and exotic fantasies encourage the colonial desire to control. But the stony desert and wind-swept sand, like the liquidity of the sea, dissolve territorial ambitions and sustain ungovernable borders.

Thinking at Sea

Familiar Mediterranean landscapes are today challenged by illicit and perilous journeys in small boats crossing the sea. The southern shores of Occidental modernity are beached by uninvited guests, by the arrival of histories and cultures that exceed its desires and augment its fears. The migrant has resurrected the unsuspected centrality of the Mediterranean as a multifarious border zone and an ontological challenge to our habitual terrestrial coordinates. Like a nemesis, the interrogative presence of the migrant arriving from the sea announces planetary processes that are not merely ours to manage and define. They draw Europe and the West to the threshold of a modernity that exceeds itself. Frequently arriving from the debris of Occidental empires and the colonial constitution of modern nation-states in Africa and Western Asia, the increasing refugee status of the migrant reopens the colonial archive.[111] In Isaac Julien's video installation *Western Union: Small Boats* (2007), the cruel passage of northward migration — across the inhospitable desert and perilous water — proposes a dramatic poetics that seeks to force apart the conclusive synthesis of an existing political, cultural, juridical, and historical settlement. Contorted Black bodies gasping in the foam, abandoned on the beach in silver body

111 Lucy Mablin, *Asylum after Empire: Colonial Legacies in the Politics of Asylum Seeking* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2018).

bags amongst the sunbathers, traversing the aristocratic and cinematic spaces of Palazzo Gangi in Palermo (the ballroom scene of Luchino Visconti's *The Leopard,* 1963), replay the Black Atlantic, memories of slavery and racial oppression, in today's Mediterranean. As we encountered in Dagmawi Yimer's visual work *Asmat,* the sea as an opaque but irrepressible archive sustains the testimony of the violence of unplanned encounters, displacements, and sometimes premature death. It reminds us of those histories that lie beyond the borders of institutional confinement. These exist in the mess of bodies, detritus, and discarded materials that compose the unruly and unregistered sites of memory that pile up in the present while pursuing another future.[112]

What is the Mediterranean today: a solid sea, liquid frontier, barrier, or bridge? Gazing southward from within the realm of fear that sustains so much of the political rhetoric of Europe and the West, it turns out increasingly to be a wall, a frontier, and a cemetery.[113] Legal movement on its waters is today restricted to military, mercantile, and tourist traffic along the latitudes. In contrast, the south–north traffic is largely illegal when not composed of authorized foodstuffs or newly sought-after gas provisions for the European Union after Russian supplies were curtailed. A body of water that provided the principal pathway between Europe, Asia, and Africa, establishing many of the premises and practices of Occidental modernity, has been shut down. Any reopening now depends on European largesse or on European needs and the subsequent revival of a *mare nostrum,* which, turning into a liquid graveyard, threatens to become a *mare monstrum.* Here, the unwanted matter of alien bodies is rapidly identified and criminalized in the intensified political configuration of its waters. Once again, the erasure of the colonial past ensures the continuing reproduction of the colonial

112 La Vaughn Belle et al., "Experimentations with the Archive: A Roundtable Discussion," *Feminist Review* 125 (2020): 17–37.

113 This was the theme of the multimedia installation *Solid Sea* of the Milan-based collective Multiplicity at Documenta 11 in Kassel, 2002.

present.[114] We are directed toward the intersection of the commons and colonialism at sea, where the Mediterranean, as with all waters, has been fully enclosed by juridical powers. Constructed as a stable territory, rights at sea have been transformed into economic and political capital: fishing rights, drilling rights, and rights to access its waters and beaches.[115] The more fluid right of passage and migration have correspondingly been regulated, reduced by juridical imperatives to the law of some and not all. The presumed freedom of the sea has not escaped being caught in the net of powers that govern present inequalities. Under technological surveillance and pushback policies, the Mediterranean has become the liquid wall of a European apartheid regime.

Nevertheless, as the migrant's activities and agency daily remind us, the net is also full of holes, and aquatic liberties are difficult to constrain. They continue to sustain the promise of another order. Fishermen and independent rescue operations still save lives, and the migration of bodies, cultures, and histories on and across its waters persists despite the frequently terrible price.

At the water's edge, we confront the limits of a European polity, its vaunted humanism and universalist philosophy. It is where the biopolitics of a white racial order, stripped to Giorgio Agamben's abstract category of "bare life," has to engage with a contemporary necropolitics seeking to reject the processes of an Occidental becoming that also includes the postcolonial return of being Muslim and being nonwhite. European philosophers are left on the beach to contemplate the paleness of their thoughts. There, they could register the colonial constitution of the state of exception that produced the progress of the West and its productive dispossession of the planet now reduced to a vast plantation of capitalist accumulation. Cast adrift, they

114 Eli Jelly-Schapiro, *Security and Terror: American Culture and the Long History of Colonial Modernity* (University of California Press, 2018).

115 Philip E. Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge University Press, 2001).

might learn to swim in waters where others "refuse to remain prisoners of their philosophy, aesthetics, and art."[116] Colonial ghosts confront Europe, contesting its prerogative to speak in the name of human rights and the world. Foucault is traversed by Fanon, Agamben by Sylvia Wynter, the West by the Rest.[117]

This leads to an altogether less self-assured code of navigation where other considerations splash the cargo of the European Enlightenment. It is where the journey toward a decolonized Europe crosses the horizon of what Achille Mbembe calls the becoming Black of the world; that is, the agonistic production of subjection and subjectivity that provokes alternative knowledge, practices, and politics in an emergent planetary formation.[118] Such a turn in thought is succinctly caught by the Italian philosopher Donatella Di Cesare: "A philosophy of migration would, then, be a philosophy that questions itself as well as its long-incontestable foundations."[119] We are taken to the edges of our cognitive empire to venture beyond Agamben and much of modern philosophy, for which philosophy is the West and the West is philosophy. For the migrant, the nonwhite body, even if mute and lifeless, strips away the political and philosophical paradigm of Europe. Their presence interrogates my authority in the world. This explains the fear and the violence of the response. Today, the autonomy of those practicing all the difficulties of "freedom," below and beyond the brutal confines of the nation-state, bends and breaks the established frontiers of identity and citizenship. The migrant, like indigenous resistance, nonwhite native life, and the poor of the planet, reiterates Fanon's request to demand human behavior from the other. We are that other. Against the limited adjustments of multicultural

116 Houria Bouteldja, *Les Blancs, les Juifs et nous* (La fabrique éditions, 2016), 93.

117 Lewis R. Gordon, *What Fanon Said: An Introduction to His Life and Thought* (Fordham University Press, 2015).

118 Achille Mbembe, *Critique of Black Reason,* trans. Laurent Dubois (Duke University Press, 2017).

119 Donatella Di Cesare, *Resident Foreigners: A Philosophy of Migration,* trans. David Broder (Polity, 2020), 19.

liberalism, this evokes the further skies of a radical and planetary humanism that, Aimé Césaire and Fanon insisted, is to be measured against the world, not merely Europe and the West.

The unilateral European conception of the modern Mediterranean — reduced since the mid-eighteenth century to the bucolic ruins of superseded origins, a crumbling and overgrown antiquity turned into the garden, the museum and tourist playground of northern, industrial, and postindustrial society — now becomes altogether more disquieting. The political, historical, and cultural import of the contemporary Mediterranean continually punctures its postcard image: the mortal dangers and denigration of illegal maritime migration, the explicitly violent colonial powers of Israel rendering Palestine an irreparable home, increasing (and increasingly repressed) resistance to Western-supported dictatorial regimes in the Arab world, the heightened criminalization of poverty and resistance to a particular global order, all bleed incessantly into the current account. Once a disparaged, even "underdeveloped," version of contemporary Europe, the Mediterranean becomes a region that potentially provides the passage for other uninvited versions of modernity.

And then there is the sea: its seemingly anonymous materiality resonates with postrepresentational understandings, anchorless images loaded with time. If, for Zygmunt Bauman, the idea of liquidity indicates the latest phenomenological forms of global capital, the instability of waves, waters, and currents suggests further critical depths. The insistence on the sea promotes ontological criteria to reconfigure our landlocked theories. No longer considered a merely instrumental adjunct, a source of food, a passage for trade and foreign conquest, a site of intercultural and international exchange, the sea, as the Caribbean poet Derek Walcott put it, is history. Against the metaphysical desire for certitude and control, invariably rooted in terrestrial and territorial order, we find ourselves provoked by a marine horizon. This combats what Marcus Rediker, the historian of ships,

slavery, sailors, and the seas, calls "terra-centrism."[120] Confronting undulating seascapes leads to rethinking time, space, and change. Kären Wigen asks whether seascapes might "yield new constructs and new metanarratives to frame our social imaginations? Or will their value lie rather in replacing such fixed categories in favor of discrepant temporalities and amphibious identities (both inside and outside modernity, as well as on and off the sea)?"[121]

The idea of the sea as a site of non-guaranteed contingencies and unregulated potentiality constitutes what Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would call a "plane of immanence."[122] It proposes the site of another modernity: The hegemonic organization of time and space is now viewed askance, crossed and plumbed by other accounts. The sea becomes what Foucault called a counter-site or heterotopia of modernity. Following Foucault and Paul Gilroy, Cesare Casarino has argued that the centrality of the sea and the ship to the making of the West propels us to set modernity on floating foundations. Folding modernity's assumed stability back upon itself (reading Karl Marx's *Grundrisse* through *Moby Dick,* and vice versa) creates an "interference between representational and nonrepresentational practices."[123] Aboard Herman Melville's and Joseph Conrad's vessels, but also in the wake of slave ships tacking back and forth between Europe, Africa, and the Americas on Paul Gilroy's Black Atlantic, "the sea narrative questions not only its own foundations but also reaches beyond itself to question the foundations of a world that for several centuries had been run in all sorts of ways from ships — in questioning itself, it ques-

120 Marcus Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail* (Beacon Press, 2015).

121 Kären Wigen, "Introduction," in *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures and Transoceanic Exchanges,* ed. Jerry H. Bentley, Renate Bridenthal, and Kären Wigen (University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 17.

122 Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia,* trans. Brian Massumi (Bloomsbury, 2013), 266.

123 Cesare Casarino, *Modernity at Sea: Melville, Marx, Conrad in Crisis* (University of Minnesota Press, 2002), 11.

tions the whole world."[124] Alongside John Akomfrah's destabilizing montage in *Vertigo Sea* (2015), amongst the most profound artistic interrogations of the centrality of "the sea, the forgotten space" to modernity is Allan Sekula's exhibition and book *Fish Story* (1989–1995) that pursues across the oceans a critical realism "not of appearances or social facts but of everyday experience in and against the grip of advanced capitalism."[125]

For if Ulysses is the archetypical Occidental hero who purposefully crosses the Mediterranean on an unknown path toward home, that same sea has also hosted Polyphemus and Circe, Medea and Calypso, Caliban and Sycorax, who have "spoken of reasons that are inexpressible in the rationale of the *logos* that triumphs in the Occident."[126] In the tempest of the modern world, where the mythical Mediterranean is brutally reduced to the fraught journeys of anonymous migrants, William Shakespeare's Caliban returns as an undocumented immigrant, and Prospero's island, midway between Naples and Tunis, becomes modern-day Lampedusa. The language that frames the world always remains susceptible to appropriation by monsters, enslaved people, Black people, women, queer folk, witches, and migrants: the excluded who speak of unexpected, hidden things that have not been authorized and whose ghosts politically interlace the passage of poetics, creating powerful and disturbing images, challenging both to ignore and to digest.

This uncontrollable space is what the implacable conservatism of Carl Schmitt sought to confront in *Land and Sea* (1942). Through his brutally clear understanding of the economic, political, and legal order of European colonization and imperialism, Schmitt anticipated the planetary scale of the historical processes of globalization. Examining the sharply contrasted force fields of terrestrial and marine power in the making of the modern world (and foreseeing being overtaken by global power sustained in the air: planes, missiles, and, above all, the elec-

124 Ibid., 12.
125 Allan Sekula, *Fish Story* (Mack, 2018).
126 Monica Centanni, *Nemica a Ulisse* (Bollati Boringhieri, 2007), 47.

tromagnetic waves of modern communications), he incisively argued that sea travel and oceanic voyages have led to a radically new understanding of planetary space. Schmitt's *nomos* and the tradition of the *ius publicum Europaeum,* for which there is no law without terrestrial footing, register a tendentially lawless place in the sea: the site of unruly forces and the potential interruption of the European narrative.

Omnipotent rationalism, Ulysses, plowing the waves, forever homeward bound, seeks to avoid the sea, even when it is seemingly mastered and tamed by technology. Out on the water, the customary coordinates of home, territory, and the familiar ground beneath our feet slip away, reduced to a distant shore. Not to cross, but to inhabit this space is to abandon the reduction of the world to a single order. The philosopher's map, secured in concern with philosophy as philosophy, indifferent to the critique of the self-sufficiency of thought (as though the intrusions of colonialism, racism, and sexism, together with the ubiquity of asymmetrical powers and regimes of truth, do not exist) is here perforated and torn by more worldly winds. Far from land, forced to navigate in an unpredictable archipelago, and subject to uncertified currents, theoretical drift is exposed to more than scholarly protocols and the overdeveloped world's obsession with itself.

To think, to philosophize, in this historical constellation — whether acknowledged or not — is clearly to unchain thought from its earlier anchorage in a Western harbor and to drift in altogether broader currents. Here, the repressed colonial archive and the secret histories of modernity's making can no longer be evaded or marginalized. A land-locked logos is confronted with the liquid archives of the sea.[127] Adrift in unknown waters, the provincialism of philosophy cannot engage, except in the absolute abstraction and ontological directive of a metaphysical "truth," with the non-European world. Yet today, we know that other currents have always washed those origins in

127 Miriam Cooke, "Mediterranean Thinking: From Netizen to Medizen," *Geographical Review* 89, no. 2 (1999): 290–300.

the Greek archipelago. Nearly half of the nine books of Herodotus's *Histories* are occupied with the Egyptian and the Persian worlds, as well as Arabia, Libya, India, and Scythia: an ancestral foretaste of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena.* The telling of the tale now reveals further uncharted dimensions. If, for some, the idea of European philosophy is simply a tautology, for philosophy — certainly for Edmund Husserl and Martin Heidegger, but also probably for Gilles Deleuze and Alain Badiou — can only be European and Occidental, property of a white Athena, then here we register the tragic presumption to be a superior rationality.[128]

To return to the sea, to a maritime discipline, is to unhook a particular language and its explanations from the chains of authority, setting it afloat so that the locality and provincialism of its previous home can be registered, even repudiated. From such a prospect emerge diverse cartographies where the presumed stability of the historical archive, its associated "facts," national museums, and territorial interpretations is set afloat, susceptible to unplanned contacts, even shipwreck. A hegemonic temporality is intersected by other times, by the times of others. Édouard Glissant reminds us that if, as Schmitt argued, the sea was the royal highway for the expansion and conquests of the West, the sea is more about depth than an extension for the rest of the world. Others have always crossed it. On its invisible bottom, histories have also deposited unacknowledged passages marked by slavery, drowning, brutality, death, and the wrecked lives of ferocious migrations.[129] As Cristina Lombardi-Diop puts it: "The sea, in its spatial dimension, is a flat and homogeneous stretch of water. Yet, in its depth, it reveals the discontinuities of real-time events."[130]

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128 Giancarlo Magnano San Lio, "Il Mediterraneo tra Oriente e Occidente: Appunti sul Dibattito in Germania attorno alla metà del Novecento," *Civiltà del Mediterraneo* 12–13 (2008): 49–63, and Julian Baggini, *How the World Thinks: A Global History of Philosophy* (Granta Books, 2019).

129 Édouard Glissant, *La cobée du Lamentin — Poétique V* (Éditions Gallimard, 2005).

130 Cristina Lombardi-Diop, "Ghosts of Memories, Spirits of Ancestors: Slavery, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic," in *Recharting the Black Atlantic:*

The Mediterranean Sea provides both a passage and a bridge, a *pontos* as Massimo Cacciari suggests, that links together a complex heterogeneity in an *archē-pelagos:* "The idea of the Archipelago is not that of a return to origins, but rather that of a counter reply to the history-destiny of Europe."[131] The Mediterranean proposes a polyphonic multiplicity in this arduous combination of communication and caesura, encounters and distinctions, resonance and dissonance. The overlapping histories of Africa, Asia, Europe, Islam, Judaism, Christianity, the Orient and the Occident, and north and south, unravel Europe as the home of a homogeneous culture. The historical and cultural need to externalize Islam and Judaism and transform them into an enemy is perhaps the sharpest symptom of a felt inferiority that nurtured Europe's turbulent formation and subsequent aggrandizement.[132] It also avoids acknowledging that Christianity itself originated as an external, Oriental religion. Food, language, religion, science, and sounds betray the inherited coordinates of understanding, suggesting that the transit and aperture afforded by the Mediterranean are of greater cultural and historical significance than a limited knowledge that seeks confirmation in a provincial locality.

Thinking with the sea, we are carried beyond the human plane into a space where "man" and European humanism are not unique. As Cary Wolfe suggests, what is taken for granted as a constant terrestrial background can be foregrounded and lead to the dispersal of the liberal agenda in which "ethical standing and civic inclusion are predicated upon rationality, autonomy and agency."[133] Inscribed in the landscape and sedimented in the sea are historical configurations that precede and exceed

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Modern Cultures, Local Communities, Global Connections, ed. Annalisa Oboe and Anna Scacchi (Routledge, 2008), 168.

131 Massimo Cacciari, *L'arcipelago* (Adelphi, 1997), 35.

132 Gil Anidjar, *The Jew, the Arab: A History of the Enemy* (Stanford University Press, 2003).

133 Cary Wolfe, "Learning from Temple Grandin, or, Animal Studies, Disability Studies, and Who Comes after the Subject," *New Formations* 64 (2008): 110.

the shape we believe we bestow on them. Like Captain Ahab, we seek to strike through the "unreasoning mask" and render the world transparent to our will. We pretend its opaqueness is a senseless resistance rather than an ontological interrogation. The sea turns out to be a screen, reflecting us back to ourselves while challenging our limits with its infinity and the darkness of its depths. The sea is traversed, harvested, and sacked, but its "dumb blankness, full of meaning," to quote Melville again, speaks of a disturbing ecological indifference to our presence.

Like the cinema screen theorized by Deleuze, the screen of the sea proposes the liberation of images and the possibility of being winnowed from the exclusively human. As Claire Colebrook glosses Deleuze, the visual is freed from the subject and released to yield its autonomous powers.[134] The instance of a contingent, temporal relation confronts us with the multiplicity of a present that is irreducible to its representation. For Deleuze, this is the prospect of a "more radical Elsewhere, outside homogeneous space and time."[135] Time exists beyond the linguistic act of nomination, beyond the subject that produces its image. This is why, for Deleuze, and here we can return to the immediacy of the visual artworks we have discussed, art is irreducible to the expression of humanity. Instead, it releases the imagination from an exclusively functional human home. Impossible, we might say, and yet a threshold that a non-representational and affective art seeks endlessly to cross.

The image's veracity is no longer a simple support (realism, mimesis) for narration but is instead the narrating force itself. There are no visual and auditory images of life, but images as life, a life already imagined, activated, and sustained in the image. There is not first the thought and then the image. The image or the sound is a modality of thinking. It does not represent but proposes and registers thought. This potential dynamite resides within the image, the sound: It marks and detonates time. This is the unhomely insistence of the artwork, its critical cut, its inter-

134 Claire Colebrook, *Deleuze for the Perplexed* (Continuum, 2006), 43.
135 Ibid., 17.

ruptive force. Denomination is sundered from domination as it races along an unsuspected path through the folds of a dispossessed modernity. And in the trauma of displacement, caught in those itineraries of sight and sound that exceed domestication and refuse a familiar order and coda, the historical and cultural score is voiced anew.

This is the post-*anthropos* confirmation that what we see commences not from the eye but from the external light of the world that strikes it; that is, not from the mind, but from the images and the sounds that affect the body. This is an ecocritical perspective. Here, to be "human" takes us beyond the human to confront our limits. We do not inaugurate the movement and mutation of the world; it is we who are inaugurated by it. Similarly, we do not research the past; the past researches us.[136] This is to engage with a history composed of intervals and interruptions. Delineated in the tempestuous explication of time, history suggests a modernity that constantly mutates and migrates. This is a discontinuous narration, always out of joint with the synthesis required of an epoch that seeks only the self-confirmation of its will.

At Port Bou, in Spain, is a window on the sea. It is a memorial by the Israeli artist Dani Karavan to Walter Benjamin, who, on the run from fascist Europe, took his life in this Catalan village. It is entitled *Passages–Walter Benjamin*. Two steel walls, rusted red by the sea air, plunge downward toward the rocks and blue of the Mediterranean. A glass panel suspended between the walls intersects our gaze; on it is inscribed a modified citation from Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History":

> Schwerer ist es, das Gedächtnis der Namenlosen zu ehren als der Berühmten.
>
> Dem Gedächtnis der Namenlosen ist die historische Konstruktion geweiht.

136 Ibid., 97.

> (It is more arduous to honor the memory of the nameless than that of the renowned. Historical construction is devoted to the memory of the nameless).

A window on the sea, open to the storm blowing in from oblivion, sustains an aperture on a justice yet to come.

3

Time and Place

We currently find ourselves with the Mediterranean elaborated in a modern European order and the legacy of a colonial configuration. We are used to conceiving this sea and its shores uniquely determined by Occidental concerns. Today, it is globally caged by the relentless languages of neoliberal capitalism, where a universalizing history and world market reinforce each other in every corner of the planet. Historically and culturally, however, other maps and orientations continue to run beneath the surface. Here, the existing geography of power meets resistance and subversion in different configurations of time and space, and alternative perspectives emerge.

In this spirit, we would like to propose five instances — the Islamic world system of the thirteenth century, the Ottoman Mediterranean of the seventeenth century, its transformation into a European colonial lake two centuries later, the construction of the Levantine area and the "Middle East" in the early twentieth century, and its current neoliberal geography — which in their mutual intertwining disturb and question the linear "progress" of a unilateral explanation. Such instances subtract us from a simple chronology of dead matters when they accumulate in the present with their critical insistence. The chapters of the past remain open. Their narration is neither complete nor conclusive. While time is curved and decanted in space, it

Fig. 4.1. The Arab fortress and Roman amphitheater at Málaga. Photo: Iain Chambers.

is also subject to localized configurations. There we encounter the intersection of forces, powers, and structures that point in different directions and disseminate questions that prevent the arrival of a linear arrangement of historical "facts" to complete the picture. The Mediterranean archive is multiplied and diversified in a quantum arrangement. Emerging from the resonances and dissonances of the five constellations proposed here are a series of critical cuts that seek to suggest the layered density of the past that constitutes the complexity of the present.

Again, this bending and shaping of historical time has no pretense to be exhaustive. It serves, above all, to chart the paths of a different historiography, less bound by national obligations and more open to transcultural intricacies. The usual unity of analysis provided by the nation-state and its canons is limited. It is now imperative to cross these political and cultural boundaries.

The thirteen-century Mediterranean seen and experienced from Palermo or Cairo, from within the hegemonic civilization

of Islam, clearly does not correspond to that of six centuries later when the basin became the European scene of the struggle between France and Britain for domination of the planet. At the same time, the legacy of previous moments does not disappear. The sedimentation of earlier historical configurations, the impossible disposal of that body by the victors who map the world, remains and resists, destined to disturb the present (fig. 4.1). The historiographical act renders these pasts, both the acknowledged and the denied and forgotten, invariably proximate. They are the specters in the margins of the text sustaining the insistence of the past. We move from the tyranny of chronological history producing victims and objects of a monumental past, chiseled in irreversible time, to the dispersion of its unity into different genealogies. The latter proposes shifting assemblages, constantly under review in the process of being elaborated.

The domination of the European perspective can be dated from Napoleon's conquest of Egypt and the subsequent transformation of the Mediterranean into the theater of Europe's struggle for world hegemony, the colonial partition of Africa, and the imperial invention and construction of the Middle East. But there were and are other forms of the Mediterranean that resist that monochromatic vision. The colonial invention of the Middle East, despite promises made to the local Arab populations, was arbitrarily produced in the Sykes–Picot agreement of 1916 and later transformed into the British and French mandates after 1920. Setting foot in Damascus in 1921, French General Henri Gouraud triumphantly kicked the tomb of the Kurdish leader Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn Yūsuf ibn Ayyūb to announce the West's return and the cross's victory over the crescent. It was a return after eight centuries of interregnum following Saladin's expulsion of the Crusaders from Palestine. Other Mediterraneans, shaped by powers and perspectives from Damascus, Baghdad, Fustat/Cairo, Karakorum, Samarkand, and Istanbul, had emerged in the intervening period. If the subsequent mapping of European ambitions led to the invention of modern nations and borders — Syria, Lebanon, Iraq… Israel — negated maps

continue to challenge that resolution. The past does not settle so quickly; it often refuses to settle altogether. And so, beneath these shifting categories of power, everyday intersections are produced by different maps and the ways they are experienced and traversed, by how they are made meaningful and translated, by how their points of reference are dislodged from one explanation and reassembled in another.

An Islamic World-System

Eight centuries ago, the world of the Mediterranean followed different axes than today. While one can speak of the European presence with the maritime republics of Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa, and Venice, the focus of commercial and cultural activity was elsewhere. Europe, though growing economically, was the periphery. The Crusades, inaugurated in 1051 by Pope Urban II to open routes to the Holy Land then in Muslim hands, also sought to appropriate the wealth of the eastern Mediterranean, which relied on mercantile circuits passing through Cairo, Damascus, and Baghdad. This reality, well documented in the historiographical research on the Jewish merchant community in Cairo by Shelomo Dov Goitein and in the analyses of the density of commercial circuits (which are also cultural and political) elaborated by Janet Abu-Lughod, invites us to question the parabola of modern Mediterranean history restricted to the northern shore for which the other two-thirds remain an appendix. With different approaches and details, both Goitein and Abu-Lughod show that the heart of the mercantile world was located in Western Asia, which linked the Mediterranean to the Indian Ocean, connecting North Africa and Europe with China. In this perspective, the Arab conquests of the eighth century and the Mongol conquests in the thirteenth century are not to be seen simply as interruptions of the Mediterranean world inherited from the Roman Empire, as the historian Henri Pirenne famously argued, but instead propose new orientations that relocate the gravity of the Mediterranean further south and east.

Introducing these other coordinates not only serves to extend the map of our understanding of yesterday's Mediterranean. They also invite us to think of historical processes more in terms of flows and their confluence into currents rather than separate historical blocs struggling with each other to maintain autonomous identities. It is not simply a matter of recording the empirical evidence of Umayyad Spain and the musical–cultural axis of Abu l-Hasan 'Ali Ibn Nāfi' or Ziryab that takes us from Baghdad to Cordova, or the Norman court of Palermo with its Arab geographers, architects, poets, and craftsmen, but also of understanding why silk cloaks produced in Byzantium and the Islamic world circulated among military and ecclesiastical potentates in medieval Europe, or how dinars arrived in Scandinavia, or why the Anglosaxon king Offa in England minted coins that had a legend in Latin and Arabic (perhaps to trade with Islamic Spain).[1] This interweaving proposes a different collocation of the world and the Mediterranean at the time. The ascribed external elements constituted by the Arab, Persian, Turkish, and Mongolian worlds and Islam, their economic, cultural, and intellectual wealth, were structurally integral to forming the internal European universe. Thinking in this way, beyond the borders of "our" Mediterranean one can even discern the polyrhythmic origins of capitalism in the steppes of the *Pax Mongolica* and the contribution of the Ottoman Empire.[2] This opens up pathways that allow us to break the simplicity of the idea that the history of the Mediterranean (and of modernity) reflects only the parable of Europe.

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1 Claudio Lo Iacono, *Storia del mondo islamico (VII–XVI secolo),* vol. 1: *Il Vicino Oriente da Muhammad alla fine del sultanato mamelucco* (Einaudi, 2015), and Sharon Kinoshita, "Almería Silk and the French Feudal Imaginary: Towards a 'Material' History of the Medieval Mediterranean," in *Medieval Fabrications,* ed. E. Jane Burns (Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). King Offa's coins can be found in the British Museum in London. In 1999 a large Viking treasure trove was discovered at Spillingsskatten in Sweden, with more than 14,000 coins, almost all of Muslim origin.

2 Alexander Anievas and Kerem Nişancıoğlu, *How the West Came to Rule: The Geopolitical Origins of Capitalism* (Pluto Press, 2015).

If, for example, we dig a little deeper into the languages of medieval European architecture, we discover that its Gothic style betrays another history. Diana Darke in *Stealing from the Saracens: How Islamic Art Shaped Europe* draws out the crucial contribution of the Arab world to the cathedrals and palaces of Europe.[3] Just listen to Sir Christopher Wren (the seventeenth-century architect of St. Paul's Cathedral in London):

> Modern gothic is distinguished by the lightness of its work, by the excessive boldness of its elevations, and of its sections […] by the delicacy, profusion and extravagant fancy of its ornaments […] it can only be attributed to the Moors; or what is the same thing, to the Arabians or Saracens.[4]

Darke carefully excavates this affirmation to trace the lineage of the Orient impacting the West, both its Islamic architecture and earlier Christian styles. We tend to forget that the most prominent Christian communities in the early centuries of the faith were in the Orient, in what we today call the Middle East. And "when Muslims first encountered Christians, they did not meet Greek-speaking Christians from Constantinople, or Latin-speaking Christians from the western Mediterranean. Rather, they first encountered Christians from northern Mesopotamia who spoke the Aramaic dialect of Syriac."[5] The origins of all three monotheisms were oriental, and if Judaism was primarily reserved for a specific ethnic group, Christianity and Islam were universalistic in their scope.[6] According to Darke, the twin towers flanking a rose window, the typical style of the cathedrals of Notre Dame, Chartres, and York, imitates the Syrian fifth-

3 Diana Darke, *Stealing from the Saracens: How Islamic Architecture Shaped Europe* (Hurst, 2020).

4 Quoted in ibid., 176.

5 Michael Philip Penn, *Envisioning Islam: Syriac Christians and the Early Muslim World* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 2.

6 Khaldoun Samman, "The Social Origins of Universalistic Monotheism: A Comparative Analysis of Paul and Muhammad," *Journal of Religion and Society* 8 (2006): 1–24.

century church of Qalb Lozeh that, in turn, initiated the earlier European Romanesque style.

In the wake of encounters realized through trade and war, merchants of the Italian maritime republics, Crusaders from northern Europe and men of the cloth collected ideas and models from the eastern Mediterranean and the then-hegemonic culture of the Arab world. The arches of the tenth-century Basilica of Amalfi, the later cloisters, and the bell tower of its cathedral resonate in styles imported from Cairo and the Middle East, developed for Islam. Pointed arches, cupola vaulting, stained glass windows, and fan vault ceilings — the very essence of the later European Gothic style — were all initially developed in Western Asia, sedimented in the crucible of Roman–Byzantine architecture and subsequent Islamic innovation and refinement, and later transmitted to Europe. As we have seen, this was explicitly acknowledged by Wren, who consistently criticized the Gothic for its approximations compared to the mathematical and geometrical precision of Islamic architecture that he synthesized in his design and execution of St Paul's Cathedral (1675–1711).[7] A comparative study of Wren's work and the Ottoman architect Mi'mār Sinān (1488/90–1588) deepens these connections.[8]

Beyond European languages, cultures, and realities, the Mediterranean also proposes a space not hegemonized by a single power. In the thirteenth century, we can record a series of encounters, clashes, and exchanges that made Arabs, Berbers, Europeans, Turks, and Mongols interact in a scenario never entirely dominated by one or the other. Until the eleventh century, the sea was controlled by Muslim forces but still permitted the voyages of merchants from Amalfi, Pisa, Genoa, Venice, and Barcelona.[9] After this period, there was an increasing prevalence

7 Darke, *Stealing from the Saracens.*

8 Along with Darke, see Gülru Necipoğlu, *The Age of Sinan: Architectural Culture in the Ottoman Empire* (Reaktion Books, 2005).

9 Christophe Picard, *Sea of the Caliphs: The Mediterranean in the Medieval Islamic World,* trans. Nicholas Elliott (Harvard University Press, 2018).

of Latin powers until the rise of the Ottoman Empire. Despite their defeat at Lepanto in 1571, the Ottomans returned to command the sea, particularly in the eastern Mediterranean, until the end of the seventeenth century and the arrival of the Dutch and English.[10]

While the Europeans lost to the Arabs the conquests of the Crusades in Palestine, the Genoese, with the decline of the Byzantine Empire and the blessing of the Mongolian Golden Horde, established commercial settlements and fortresses on the north shore of the Black Sea and in the Crimea. They also managed the slave trade with Mamluk Egypt, while the Turks (first the Seljuks and then the Ottomans) threatened Byzantium.[11] The Mongols, after conquering Persia, destroyed Baghdad, the capital of the Caliphate, in 1258, and later Timur, in alliance with Constantinople and Genoa, halted Turkish ambitions with the defeat at the Battle of Ankara in 1402 when Sultan Bayezid I was taken prisoner. In this mosaic of forces, cultures, and religions wars were waged and trade conducted. Alliances were forged that linked the Asian steppes to the China Sea and the Mediterranean. It would be more meaningful for this period to speak of the opening of the Mediterranean to the East through the routes supported primarily by Dar al-Islam, or the House of Islam. In this scenario, "the Western historiographical model can only serve in part [.... I]t is certainly limiting to consider this long historical epoch as a Middle Ages in the sense attributed to this phase in the West."[12] These words by Michele Bernardini, an expert on the Islamic world of Central Asia, suggest not only the restrictions of predominantly European considerations on the complex formation of the Mediterranean and the known world

10 Gigliola Pagano de Divitiis, *Il Commercio Inglese nel Mediterraneo dal '500 al '700: Corrispondenza consolare e documentazione britannica tra Napoli e Londra* (Guida, 1984).

11 Virgil Ciocîltan, *The Mongols and the Black Sea Trade in the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Centuries,* trans. Samuel Willcocks (Brill, 2012).

12 Michele Bernardini, *Storia del mondo islamico (VII–XVI secolo),* vol. 2: *Il mondo iranico e turco* (Einaudi, 2015), ix.

of the time but also point to an interrogation of the dominant historical tendency that only reflects the passage of the West.

The histories of the Mediterranean inscribed in the Islamic world that have been obfuscated or marginalized are not reproposed merely to fill the gap between the fall of the Roman Empire and the emergence of modern Europe. It is not simply about correcting the narrative but reconfiguring it to propose a more profound set of questions that challenge supposed Western superiority over the rest of the world. As already suggested, the then-contemporary European Renaissance did not usher in modernity; instead, it signaled the entry of the western periphery of the Afro-Eurasian world into the complexity of a much larger cultural constellation.

Remaining in this historical moment, we can accept the invitation to adopt another compass that allows us to trace the Mediterranean from the south and the east. If, toward the end of the fifteenth century, we record the beginning of the shift of economic and political powers to the West, a shift that definitively breaks the axis that ran from Spain to southern India via Cairo and Baghdad, we also find the Mediterranean brought within an ever-widening series of circles that sees the arrival of the Portuguese fleet in the Indian Ocean and the so-called discoveries of the Americas and the New World. On the brink of the modern era, the Mediterranean, soon to be governed by Madrid, Amsterdam, and London and embedded in increasingly global networks, will also witness the birth of modern nation-states that will replace the heterogeneity of languages, ethnicities, cultures, even religions of the Arab, Mongol and Ottoman empires, with the concerted push toward homogeneous membership. The expansion of physical horizons will paradoxically accompany the increasing restriction of vision that requires the world to reflect a single point of view claiming universal value.

The year 1492, apparently pivotal in establishing the beginning of Western modernity, marks not only the discovery of America but also the expulsion of Muslims and Jews from Spain. Western modernity begins with this unilateral framing of the world and the ethnic cleansing of its population. This runs deep,

from Granada in 1492 to the conquest of the American frontier from the seventeenth century onward to the atrocities committed in colonial jungles and deserts, to return via the genocides practiced by Europeans on other Europeans — the Shoah, the fratricide in the Balkans a few decades ago — to contemporary Israeli settlers and the Gaza genocide. This modern narrative of belonging, with its violence of discrimination and publicly imposed, frequently mortal, hierarchy of values, contrasts with the earlier period that was not without outbreaks of ethnic violence and pogroms but nevertheless sustained heterogeneity. Perhaps the demand for a stationary and transparent identity that supports and seals the physical and metaphysical boundaries of the modern nation, which also pressed Istanbul in 1915 to eliminate the Armenian population to affirm a new national Turkish identity, has been an extremely high price to pay for progress.

This modern identity leaves us with many painful historical traces. Following 1492, the Jewish Sephardic diaspora was welcomed by the Ottoman Empire in North Africa and the Middle East. This diaspora settled into the layered complexities of the Levantine world, so well described by Ammiel Alcalay.[13] Such a rich and complex inheritance finds no home in the settler-colonizing imperatives of the present state of Israel. To speak the Ladino (Judaeo-Spanish) of the Sephardic diaspora or the Arabic of the Mizrahi arriving from local Jewish communities established for millennia in North Africa and the Middle East runs counter to the manufactured requirements of homogenous national identity.[14] Israel was established by the hegemonic European-derived Ashkenazi culture and the imposition of a deliberately revived Hebrew, although the Ashkenazim constitute only 30% of its population. A colonial apparatus divides internally and rules externally in the name of "Zionism — a fin

13 Ammiel Alcalay, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (University of Minnesota Press, 1993), and Ammiel Alcalay, *A Bibliography for "After Jews and Arabs"* (punctum books, 2021).

14 Ella Shohat, *Taboo Memories, Diasporic Voices* (Duke University Press, 2006).

de siècle European ideology of Jewish nationalism with a main goal of colonizing Palestine to establish a Jewish state."[15]

The Ottoman Mediterranean

In 1552, Sorrento was sacked by the Turks. They were most likely Berber corsairs from Algiers operating under the protection of Istanbul, then in alliance with France against the Kingdom of Spain (which then included southern Italy in its empire). With the refusal of the Spanish authority in Naples to pay the ransom, the women and children were sold in the slave markets of Algiers and Istanbul. Eight years earlier, the same fate had befallen the population of the island of Ischia. The present-day remains of the watchtowers along the coastline of Sorrento, Amalfi, and the Gulf of Naples attest to that moment. This event was a link in a chain of raids in southern Italy that included the Ottoman occupation of Otranto in 1480, which was retaken the following year by soldiers from the Kingdom of Naples and a Hungarian contingent, while the Venetians, who had just concluded a costly treaty with Istanbul, did not respond to the Pope's appeal. Gedik Ahmed Pasha, the leader of the Ottoman expedition that took Otranto, was probably of Albanian origin. Albania was already part of the Ottoman Empire and was only eighty kilometers away across the Adriatic. Also in Europe, but on that other coast, was the vast Ottoman territory of the Balkans, destined to incorporate Hungary and besiege Vienna in the following decades, opening the passage for introducing coffee, the "Muslim drink," into Europe.

Again, to bring the Ottoman Empire back into the history of the formation of the Mediterranean and modern Europe is to shift our sights further east and south (Egypt and the entire north coast of Africa up to the Moroccan border were incorporated by the Ottomans during the seventeenth century). The Barbary corsairs that sailed throughout the western Mediter-

15 Smadar Lavie, *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture* (Berghahn Books, 2014), 15.

ranean (but also reached Ireland and Iceland) had their bases in the ports of Tunis, Tripoli, Algiers, and Salé on the Atlantic coast of Morocco. The most famous of these was Khayr al-Dīn, or Barbarossa, who operated from Algiers in the first decades of the sixteenth century on behalf of the Ottoman Empire. He would later become Kapdan Pasha, or great admiral of the Turkish fleet. The empire's greatest architect, Mi'mār Sinān, would build his mausoleum in Istanbul. Privateers were not simply pirates. They never attacked Muslim vessels. They were agents commissioned by their governments to attack enemy vessels (like the buccaneers who preyed on Spanish ships in the Caribbean in the seventeenth century and to whom the British government offered Port Royal in Jamaica as a base for their activities). In the Mediterranean, this license from Muslim authorities was directed against the ships of European Christian states to capture people at sea (and also ashore) and accumulate wealth by selling them into slavery or ransoming them for liberation. This system operated in both directions. Hundreds of enslaved Muslims taken in the expedition of Charles of Bourbon in 1739 against the Barbary Coast would work on constructing the Royal Palace of Caserta, designed by Luigi Vanvitelli as a counter to the architectural extravagance of Versailles. The commodification of human beings in this period was, in any case, overwhelmingly handled by Europeans in the Atlantic slave trade and the brutal exportation of millions of Africans to the plantations of the Americas.

Looking at the slave trade in the history of Euro-Atlantic affairs and in Mediterranean and north–south relations, Jeffrey Flynn-Paul suggests that it should be analyzed in the context of the regions in which it had historically been practiced since antiquity.[16] This perspective shifts the geo-historical axis and invites us to consider the Atlantic slave trade as part of an "extended Mediterranean" system of slavery from western India

16 Jeffrey Flynn-Paul, "Empire, Monotheism and Slavery in the Greater Mediterranean Region from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era," *Past and Present* 205 (2009): 5–40.

to much of Africa and the whole of Europe. The invasion of the lands beyond the Atlantic fits into an already existing system in which the Mediterranean was central. This system included slavery. It is essential not to forget that slavery in the Mediterranean continued well into the nineteenth century, not only in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire but also on the European shore and in the Americas.[17]

The novel by the Moroccan American writer Laila Lalami, *The Moor's Account* (2014), rewrites an interesting page in the history of the Spanish expedition to La Florida in 1527, led by Panfilo de Narváez. It ended in disaster, with only three survivors besides the commander. Among them, there was an enslaved Moroccan man.[18] In the account of the event by one of the survivors, Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca, which has come down to us under the title *Naufragios de Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca* and was first published in 1542, the enslaved person Estebanico (whose real name is Mustafa ibn Muhammad ibn Abdussalam al-Zamori) is only mentioned once, despite having lived through the journey and the incredible six years of existence on the other side of the ocean with the others, until they all returned. Lalami rewrites the story from Mustafa ibn Muhammad/Estebanico's point of view, starting from his childhood in Morocco and the (economic) circumstances that led him to sell himself as a slave and then his return to Europe. The narrative offers a long reflection not only on the right to speak and the right to narrate but also on the dynamics between victim and perpetrator, on the cultural constructions of the categories of good and evil, and above all, on the power relations underlying the colonial project, contiguous and mixed with the slave system. Lalami's account brings the Mediterranean into the map of the Atlantic triangle, evidencing the Middle Sea as a primary, and not secondary, participant in the relations of power that

17 Giulia Bonazzi, *Abolitionism and the Persistence of Slavery in Italian States, 1750–1850* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

18 Laila Lalami, *The Moor's Account* (Pantheon, 2014).

were drawing the cartography of the modern world system with the labor power of slavery.

Returning from the Americas and traveling from west to east, we find the bridge of Mehmed-paša Sokolović, the protagonist of Ivo Andrić's famous novel *The Bridge on the Drina* (1945). The bridge in Višegrad in eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina was completed in 1577 by Mi'mār Sinān (Mi'mār Hayruddin, a pupil of Sinān's, designed the well-known Mostar Bridge, built in 1566 and destroyed by Croatian artillery in November 1993). The Grand Vizier Mehmed-paša Sokolović responsible for the project, was Bosnian, spoke Turkish, Serbian, Persian, Arabic, and Venetian, and, like Sinan, was born a Christian (his brother was a monk at the Hilandar or Chilandari monastery on Mount Athos) and had converted to Islam. It is said that after the Ottoman defeat at the Battle of Lepanto on October 7, 1571, Mehmed-paša Sokolović told the Venetian ambassador that with the Turkish conquest of Cyprus in the same year the Ottomans had cut off an arm, while with the defeat of the Ottoman navy at Lepanto the Christians had only cut off a beard, which was destined to grow back thicker. Indeed, the Ottoman fleet was rebuilt within a year. Christian ships could not counter its supremacy under Admiral Uluç Ali Reis (another renegade, Giovanni Dionigi Galeni of Calabrian origin) in the Mediterranean. Again, as with Radu the Fair, Dracula's brother, these individual biographies reveal extensive historical relationships: Long before our time, these were complex, fluid, hybrid societies.

My Name Is Red, a novel published by Orhan Pamuk in 1998, relates a different kind of biography, an imaginary construction in this case, but no less important for reflecting on the combination of narratives.[19] It offers a glimpse into the late-sixteenth-century Ottoman Empire, concentrated on the infinitesimal details of the miniatures painted by the protagonists. The subject in the book's title is not a person but a color. The story cent-

19 Orhan Pamuk, *My Name Is Red,* trans. Erdağ Göknar (Faber & Faber, 2001).

ers on the commission by Sultan Murad III to his miniaturists for a book commemorating the millennium of the Hegira. However, the request is that the miniaturists use the method and style of European realism to make their Venetian rivals envious. This request provokes disagreements. It leads to the murder of the best gilder, whose corpse is found at the novel's beginning, followed by the search by his nephew Nero, also a miniaturist, for the murderer. The narration is choral, with different voices alternating in the first person; not only the human protagonists have a voice, but also objects or, as in the case of the title, colors. The absence of a single, omniscient narrator subtracts the narrative, which in many ways has the connotations of a historical novel, from any claim to objectivity typical of a common understanding of historical description, even in the literary sphere.

The novel is stratified and offers multiple reading planes. In this context, we are particularly interested in the investigation that the writer undertakes into the networks of influences that were articulated in that period between the iconic and idealized representation of the Islamic tradition and European realist art, found, for example, in the portrait of Mehmed II painted in Istanbul by Gentile Bellini and now in the National Portrait Gallery in London. The Ottoman tradition of miniatures, derived from the Persian school, consisted of the reproduction from memory of the ancient masters' drawings. The method was so absorbed in the artist's memory that the latter did not fear the blindness to which such meticulous work could lead (the picture, in case of blindness, comes from an inner eye, closer to the divine than of the sight of the material world). On the other hand, European Renaissance realism introduces a pictorial perspective and, thus, a hierarchy of objects represented according to an "objective" and not inner, ideal criteria.[20] Here, too, there is a more complex genealogy, as we have seen with the premises

20 Iconography, forbidden in Islam because it was a harbinger of idolatry, did not concern the ancient art of miniatures, because they were considered a corollary to the text itself, part of the writing and not an image in their own right.

of perspective first elaborated on the other side of the Mediterranean, in Cairo in the eleventh century by Ibn al-Haytham, known in the West as Alhazen (965–1040).

The interplay of influences and contrasts recur throughout Pamuk's novel. There is also the unusual prospect of colors, objects, and even somewhat abstract concepts such as death narrating certain moments in the first person. They provide a viewpoint situated in a precise historical moment engaging with reflections on the relationship between power and modes of representation. For Pamuk, these are not only aesthetic but also profoundly political issues. The dilemma over which methods of expression should dominate in a given place and at a given historical moment and the relationship between the production of knowledge and power are continually present in the novel. It expands from the rich but restricted spacetime of the miniatures to questions of representations, meaning, and the interpretation of reality. An epistemic question finds, in that historical moment in the heart of the Ottoman Empire, a short circuit that *My Name Is Red* restores in a relevant manner. The narrator of the last chapter is Sekure, with whom Nero is in love and, in the novel, is Orhan's mother. She recounts that she would have liked a portrait of herself as a young woman, freezing her beauty as she was then in a portrait of happiness: a mother with her children, caught in the eternity of happiness. But her son Orhan explains to her that the painters of tradition, who know how to freeze time, cannot paint her portrait, and the painters of realism, who commonly paint mothers and children, do not know how to stop time:

> My son Orhan, who is foolish enough to be logical in all matters, reminds me on the one hand that the time-halting masters of Herat could never depict me as I am, and on the other hand, that the Frankish masters who perpetually painted mother-with-child portraits could never stop time. He's been

> insisting for years that my picture of bliss could never be painted anyhow.[21]

In the epistemic short circuit between the terms of tradition and modernity, neither is sufficiently independent of the other to interpret reality or describe and understand the meaning of the world.

The Colonial Lake

This is how the poetic journey of Assia Djebar, who brings to life the French fleet's attack on the city of Algiers in 1830, commences:

> Dawn on this thirteenth day of June 1830, at the exact moment when the sun suddenly burst forth above the fathomless bowl of the bay. It is five in the morning. As the majestic fleet rends the horizon the Impregnable City sheds her veils and emerges, a wraith-like apparition, through the blue-grey haze. A distant triangle aslant, glinting in the last shreds of nocturnal mist and then settling softly, like a figure sprawling on a carpet of muted greens. The mountain shuts out the background, dark against the blue wash of the sky.[22]

In the following days, the bombardment by the French fleet continued, anticipating those shells lost in the vastness of the African continent fired from another French war vessel, described by Joseph Conrad's Marlow in his journey to the mouth of the Congo in *Heart of Darkness.* Eventually, the Ottoman possession of Algeria was conquered by France. The colonial occupation would last 132 years. During the nineteenth century, the Mediterranean was transformed into a colonial lake under the

21 Pamuk, *My Name Is Red,* 503.

22 Assia Djebar, *Fantasia: An Algerian Cavalcade,* trans. Dorothy S. Blair (Heinemann, 1993), 6.

management of France, Great Britain, and then Italy following the invasion of Libya (1911–1913).

In this historical phase, *systematic* European colonialism is elaborated. It is not simply a matter of military conquest and the economic appropriation of other people's territories but of making the conquered spaces, histories, cultures, and lives *transparent* to the eyes of the occupier and thereby directly incorporating them into the elaboration of a European historical formation. Napoleon brought with him to Egypt not only soldiers but also the heirs of the Enlightenment *savants* who had already attempted to systematize the world's knowledge in the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* (1751–1766). Colonialism, at this point, was not only about violent robbery. It was also the exercise of knowledge as power, an epistemological violence that sought to unveil the colonized world and bring it within its measure. Colonialism was central to realizing European identity and exercising its subjectivity on a planetary scale.

From 1800 onward, all shores of the Mediterranean were embedded in the interweaving between European nationalisms and colonial enterprises. Between 1880 and 1920, we encounter the triumphant globalization of the West in the European division of Africa at the Berlin Congress of 1884–1885 and the construction of the Middle East in the following decades. Arthur James Balfour's declaration in 1917 provided the preconditions for creating a home for European Jews in Palestine: a "solution" that allowed anti-Semitism, far removed from its foci on the old continent, to be dumped elsewhere in the Arab world. This process would lead in 1948 to the realization of the state of Israel as the final elaboration of Occidental colonial settlements in the Middle East. This period also saw the European mapping of Syria, Lebanon, and Iraq and the imperial organization of Persia/Iran and Egypt. At the same time, Tunisia, Libya, Algeria, and Morocco were managed directly by Paris and Rome. A colonial continuum emerged, stretching from the Atlantic to India and Afghanistan (and from the Mediterranean to South Africa). The fallout of these colonial appropriations and the anticolonial

struggles they engendered has continued well into the present. This leads us back to considering the modern Mediterranean as a European and colonial formation sustaining modern European identities. Colonial spaces, where the tools and techniques of modernity were most clearly displayed and refined — from the racialization of ruled peoples, genocides, and military violence (all those aerial bombardments in the early twentieth century in Libya, Iraq, and Ethiopia) to modern architecture — were, along with the violent extraction of human and material resources, central to the making of modernity. These were constituent, not peripheral spaces.

Although we are accustomed to thinking of colonial spaces in terms of distant realities, always far away and down there in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, and back there in time, the history of the modern Mediterranean offers a proximity that cancels attempts to expunge colonialism from our horizons. All contemporary movements for change on its southern and eastern shores are inherently anticolonial.

Mass migration is a central part of the history of modernity (think of the colonization of the Americas, parts of Africa, then Australia and New Zealand). The movement across the waters of the Mediterranean, both *south to north* and *north to south,* is part of a matrix driven by a transnational political economy and the globalization of the world by capital. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Algeria's European population was nearly one million, most French, plus a sizable component of Spaniards and Italians. Tunisia, next door, was home to 100,000 Italians, while the number of Italians in Libya peaked in the 1930s at around 13% of the total population. The latest episode in a deeper history is what is happening today with the migration northward. From the transatlantic slave trade to contemporary migrations, there are clear differences but also profound continuities that would allow us to write the history of modernity as the history of forced migration and movement.[23]

23 Gabriele Del Grande, *Il secolo mobile: Storia dell'immigrazione in Europa* (Mondadori, 2023).

Through these perspectives, we can highlight Europe's direct involvement in the historical-political formation of North Africa and the Middle East and record how these historical–cultural spaces are constructed and often invented to reflect the needs coming from the northern shore. Looking at the case of Italy, we find at the beginning of the twentieth century the seductive idea of reclaiming the Mediterranean as the ancient *mare nostrum*. The invasion of the Ottoman province of Libya was prepared by using popular media to construct the image of an elsewhere that reflected Italy in a positive and progressive light. After all, to be modern was to be colonial in aspiration. In the intersecting of national and racial discourses (justified "scientifically") on the superiority of Europeans over Arabs and Turks, the southern shores of the Mediterranean were considered spaces that Italy should claim. A constructed national imagination was transformed into consensual facts.[24]

Thinking *with* the Mediterranean, the currents and depths of the marine world offer a critical interruption. Going beneath the surface permits an exit from the seeming inevitability of the technological conquest of space that unfolds in the empty abstraction of universal historical time, welded into fixed coordinates guaranteed by the modern state. Beneath the waves, on the other side of official design, anonymous processes and people create the contemporary world from below. These clandestine stories sign the unsuspected register of heterotopic modernity irreducible to a unilateral geopolitical framing of the planet. As Ranajit Guha suggests:

> For, since Columbus, Europe had been obsessively engaged in voyages of self-discovery requiring it to try and meet the coordinates of intercontinental space by those of universal time — geography by history.[25]

24 Gabriele Proglio, *Libia 1911–1912* (Le Monnier–Mondadori, 2016).

25 Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (Columbia University Press, 2003), 12.

The reopening of this archive from the subaltern side (where the "south" is a mobile signifier) sheds a different light on the present.[26] It provides another key to reading the contemporary moral panic over migration and its political proposals of new walls and barriers.

Digging for identity always leads to the transformation of found and studied items into objects of conflict. It remains impossible to maintain a critical distance from interpretation. Rather than lamenting the loss of an object untainted by our languages of appropriation, it is more meaningful to acknowledge the unstable limits of representing the past in archaeology and history. Paraphrasing Thomas Kuhn's classic text, registering the confines of the standard paradigm of science (historiography, international relations, sociology…) and its community of consensus renders current knowledge more complex and fragile.[27] The latter becomes susceptible to transformation. How the past is seen, experienced, and transformed in an analytical framework and eventually represented cannot be considered an innocent operation. Consulting Arabic-language archives, the scholar Elliott Colla has carefully examined the extent to which the archaeology of Pharaonic Egypt is a process where claims of scientific neutrality were woven into colonial seizures and national constructions, both European and Egyptian. The script of the national narrative is staged in museum spaces in London, Paris, and Cairo to represent different histories and identities, where each — the archaeologist, the curator, the visitor — finds in the exhibits the mirroring and confirmation of their subjectivity.[28]

The museums of the Western world are full of these objects and often insist that they alone have the expertise to curate and cultivate their histories. Remains excavated in Egypt during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries are not returned, nor are the

26 Roberto Dainotto, *Europe (In Theory)* (Duke University Press, 2007).

27 Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (University of Chicago Press, 1962).

28 Elliott Colla, *Conflicted Antiquities: Egyptology, Egyptomania, Egyptian Modernity* (Duke University Press, 2007).

Parthenon marbles that were obtained in a legally ambiguous manner from the hands of the Ottoman authorities in Athens in 1811 by the British Lord Elgin and then purchased by the British Museum. According to Byron, this was an act of vandalism (the Acropolis had already been heavily damaged by Europeans with the Venetian bombardment and looting in 1687). Despite the Greek government's constant requests to the British Museum to return them, London has justified its refusal by stating that it is not a local or national but a "global museum."

The museum as a machine for meaning is just one of the national pedagogical apparatuses that, through apparently neutral and scientific arguments, contribute to that cultural sense of identity that permits us to draw boundaries between ourselves and others, consolidating a particular mode of knowledge over another.[29] The archaeology that excavates the past does not simply accompany the symbolic construction of national identity, as much in Italy as in Israel, for example, but is also part and parcel of the apparatus of knowledge that carries out the elaboration. It is directly involved in the colonization of the world, defining, cataloging, controlling, and rendering it transparent to the specific will of a cultural and political order with respect to another. If, as Nadia Abu El-Haj notes, Israeli archaeology has historically provided "a privileged ground of national identity," the fervor of the discipline practiced in that manner is not detached from the modern nation-building cultivated in the incubator of colonialism everywhere in the West.[30]

Naming and carving up the land to possess it combines the practice of archaeology with architecture; these also constitute the "geometry of occupation" in Palestine. This phrase by Israeli architect Eyal Weizman introduces us to the construction of the land, which simultaneously is the realization of the nation's home, elaborated in multiple and sinuous ways. We discover in

29 Iain Chambers, Giulia Grechi, and Mark Nash, eds., *The Ruined Archive* (MeLa Books, 2014).

30 Nadia Abu El-Haj, *Facts on the Ground: Archaeological Practice and Territorial Self-Fashioning in Israeli Society* (University of Chicago Press, 2002), 1.

the ongoing appropriation of Palestine that borders are fluid, territories mobile and multidimensional, and powers elastic.[31] Illegal hilltop settlements dominate the surrounding landscape while Israeli helicopters and jets easily identify the houses of the settlers by the red tile roofs. The architecture here, where any distinction between military and civilian is surpassed, seeks to shape the territory totally.[32] Occupying the land to build and extend one's control over the region means controlling the water springs, occupying the air and managing the electromagnetic waves and cellular networks, and creating the apartheid roads reserved for Israelis that run over the jurisdiction of still nominally Palestinian land. Compared to a static model of the territory and its borders, space here is crumpled along horizontal and vertical axes in a continuous and dynamic manner, governed by multi-directional interventions of different intensities (from rationing water, electricity, and foodstuffs to aerial bombardment, military incursions, and ethnic cleansing).

This manner of constructing, controlling, and managing spacetime in Palestine has much more to do with managing our European borders and the unilateral European control of today's Mediterranean than we would like to believe. We, too, impose our walls, permits, and the militarization of our borders and public spaces. In expanding European jurisdiction that reaches far beyond the African shores of the Mediterranean to regulate agricultural cultivation for the European market and finance camps outside Europe to control migratory flows from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe continues to wage a daily war against the global south. In both cases, territories are revealed as archives of colonial violence that secures its interior — the nation and its presumed identity, European culture, and its sciences, knowledge, and confines — while subjugating and

31 Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel's Architecture of Occupation* (Verso, 2007).

32 Samera Elmeir, "To Say and Think a Life beyond What Settler Colonialism Has Made," *Madamasr,* October 14, 2023, https://www.madamasr.com/en/2023/10/14/opinion/politics/to-say-and-think-a-life-beyond-what-settler-colonialism-has-made/.

subordinating its supposed exterior: the non-Western world. This dualism is an illusion sustained by force. In the interconnectedness of today's planetary scenarios, there is no outside. While Palestinian aspirations for a national home are denied, every day in the diasporic archipelago of social media and the internet, alongside those in the extremities of Gaza and the West Bank, they exist and resist. It is an opposition that challenges the future valency of the stable idea of nation-states and fixed identities for all of us.[33] Meanwhile, the migrant who chooses the perilous crossing of the Sahara, the Balkans, and the Mediterranean moves in the shared landscape of the imaginary proposed by world capitalism, simultaneously confirming and contesting its powers.

Postcolonial Routes

Like the nation and identity, the modern state is neither given nor natural. They are constructions elaborated in complex cultural–historical processes. They are not products of natural procedures or consensual arrangements. They emerge from histories marked by death and bloodshed, from the physical and metaphysical, invariably brutal and arbitrary, exercise of power. While we speak of lengthy processes of realization in Europe, elsewhere in the world, we deal with procedures far more concentrated in time, almost always induced by European models and imposed via colonialism.

Raja Shehadeh poignantly outlines that walking in Palestine today means walking in a landscape about to disappear.[34] In a series of short stories, the author records his walks over twenty-five years in a land that every day is being reduced more and more to almost total incarceration, decided and managed by the Israeli authorities. This cultural and symbolic violence, where

33 Olga Solombrino, *Arcipelago Palestina: Territori e narrazioni digitali* (Mimesis, 2019).

34 Raja Shehadeh, *Palestinian Walks: Notes on a Vanishing Landscape* (Profile Books, 2008).

non-Israeli inhabitants are neither consulted nor recognized as having rights, elaborates maps of legal and political territories where certain people are identified and others are rendered invisible and annulled. If history tends to tell the versions and visions of those who see in the maps the reflection of their will, the bodies, cultures, and histories of others nevertheless insist. How can we plot a path out of this cruel dialectic? Dealing with the constant structural violence that shapes and manages the situation in Palestine–Israel requires elaborating a different narrative. This involves a critical disposition inclined not so much to see in the conflict and the wounds inflicted on bodies and land the brutal pragmatism of power and the violence exhibited both in imposing and resisting but to consider another genealogy of the present. To establish this other vision, we Europeans and Occidentals cannot remain horrified or, worse still, passive observers but must first acknowledge our direct responsibility and involvement.

We suggest that the Palestine–Israel question is a historical, cultural, and political laboratory, not only restricted to the contemporary eastern Mediterranean but also exposing Occidental modernity's very heart. As such, it is a laboratory of modernity. The supposed detachment of our languages of analysis — historical, sociological, archaeology and area studies, political science, and anthropology — finds here all its limits. The bodies expelled, subordinated, and erased from the exercises of our knowledge and politics challenge us. Finding no space, legibility, or legitimacy in our narratives, these others, in this particular geography represented by Arabs, Armenians, Kurds, Bedouins, as well as Middle Eastern Jews not considered fully Europeanized, underwrite the limits of our rationality: they exist lifeless in our reasoning. Let us revisit the historical and cultural construction of the Middle East as a space imagined and invented by Europe over the past two centuries. At this point, we also need to listen to deeper rhythms and more extensive narratives. The explanations provided by the social sciences and their sustainment of the claims of the white Western liberal subject need to be confronted. Shadows and specters, debris and waste (human and

nonhuman), acquire unforeseen powers in complicating and unraveling current historical and critical explanations. To insist on this point with Denise Ferreira da Silva:

> This requires that we release thinking from the grip of certainty and embrace the imagination's power to create with unclear and confused, or uncertain impressions, which Kant (1724–1804) postulated are inferior to what is produced by the formal tools of the Understanding. A figuring of The World nourished by the imagination would inspire us to rethink sociality without the abstract fixities produced by the Understanding and the partial and total violence they authorize — against humanity's (non-white/non-European) and physical (more-than-human) "Others."[35]

Returning to Palestine, once an Ottoman province, then under British control, and later handed over to an organized group of European Jews, today we find an ongoing colonialism presenting itself as the only democracy in the Middle East; this despite the obvious juridical and political conflict between totalitarian control, an apartheid regime, ethnic cleansing culminating in genocide and claims of democracy. This scenario is not only pursued in the colonial violence of a militarized society acting with impunity beyond the reach of international law. The West, silenced by the shame of the historical obscenity of the Shoah, colludes in a further imperial gesture by uncritically dispatching its heritage of centuries of antisemitism, colonialism, and genocide elsewhere. The picture, as always, seems complex. But a political and cultural logic, explicitly structured in a grammar of racial power — us modern Europeans and those underdeveloped Arabs whose lives count for less — persists in sustaining the circuits of modern-day coloniality behind the theological fog of claiming indigeneity so that Zionism denies being colonialism.

35 Denise Ferreira da Silva, "On Difference without Separability," in *Incerteza Viva: 32nd Bienal de São Paulo,* ed. Jochen Volz and Júlia Rebouças, exh. cat. (Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, 2016), 58.

Instead of being confined to an asphyxiating situation where the rationality of power and nationalism abruptly neutralizes any possibility of reasoning, it is necessary to change languages and coordinates. This would mean ripping the term "Middle East" out of the lexicon created by international relations based on the distance from the imperial center of London to its possessions in India and the so-called Orient. One could propose a less loaded term, such as Eastern Mediterranean, as Basem L. Ra'ad suggests.[36] Or we could adopt the decolonializing term of West Asia and North Africa. This change would allow us to unlock other perspectives and calibrate different critical paths without deluding ourselves that a seemingly more strictly geographical concept is necessarily more neutral. Insisting on the weight of language helps us reassess the assumptions of its neutrality.

Narratives always reveal both a political and cultural orientation. The voice of disciplinary, political, and legal authority is always locatable. We can dislocate these premises and decide there are other ways to narrate this space and its history. As Olga Solombrino observes so well:

> In this sense, the publication of *The Question of Palestine* […], a still topical contribution by the late and unforgotten Palestinian intellectual Edward W. Said, has the merit of lighting the way by proposing a different approach that diverts the focus from that of war to the problematic of the clash between different experiences: Palestinian consciousness versus the Euro-western ideology of Zionism. In his famous volume, Said returned to the question of Palestine, revealing its historical–cultural formation, emphasizing the need to narrate — and the Palestinian community's permission to narrate itself — as a colonized state, insisting on the need […] for a critical evaluation of the world that produced colonialism and that can, indeed must, develop and emerge

36 Basem L. Ra'ad, *Hidden Histories: Palestine and the Eastern Mediterranean* (Pluto Press, 2010).

> even from within a purely colonial situation, such as the one in which Palestine is framed.[37]

Critically intercepting objects of the past that seemingly confirm the hegemonic narrative of the present and the disciplinary procedures and protocols that produce a murky dialogue between theology and science, between biblical references and the impositions of nation and ethnicity, takes us elsewhere. It undoes any possibility of reading and interpreting the objects unambiguously as the property of a single political entity or people. The ruins, languages, and histories sedimented in the space known as Palestine–Israel are layered, its places have been traversed, renamed, and inhabited in many ways. The stones and soil have been reworked and recycled. The terrain is not pure but a palimpsest. While considering academic work and scholarship inscribed explicitly and implicitly in nation-building would take us all over the globe, the particularly violent intensification of modernity's spacetime in the contemporary context of Palestine–Israel reveals the deepest cut.[38]

We have tried to show how the Mediterranean's historical, political, and cultural elaboration involves the configuration of the past, its explanation, in a series of anachronistic acts. It is an assemblage realized through the languages and techniques made available by the present. At the same time, reopening the past and moving into its archives allow us not simply to retrieve dimensions obfuscated and removed from the reasoning that governs the present but also to interrupt and interrogate available sense with what has not been authorized, but persists and defies oblivion. In other words, the past we have tried to bring into view from different moments in the historical constellation of the Mediterranean also proposes a profound reassessment of its current configuration. A series of echoes and reverberations, often rendered structurally mute, allow us to hear voices that,

37 Solombrino, *Arcipelago Palestina,* 17.

38 Suad Amiry, *Nothing to Lose but Your Life: An 18-Hour Journey with Murad* (Bloomsbury, 2010).

despite everything, continue to traverse and probe today's Mediterranean to arrive at a more open critical horizon.

Returning to the transformation of the Mediterranean into a colonial lake after 1800 allows us not only to trace developments from the demise of the Ottoman Empire to the settlement of European colonies in North Africa and, later, the French and British custody of the founding of the states of Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, and Israel but also to confront *the colonial constitution of Western modernity itself*.[39] From this matrix, we retrieve the critical idea that colonialism is not a historical event which, like racial slavery, the West might wish to relegate to a closed chapter, but a power structure that continues to shape the European and Occidental sense of the present.[40] Colonialism, as the extraction of human and material resources, is central to the current neoliberal political economy. The direct management of overseas territories has been largely superseded by other modalities of domination over the planet. But the deep tracks and profound lacerations produced by the aggressive expansion of Occidental capitalism since 1500 have not disappeared; on the contrary, they continue to condition the present, consistent with the advanced stage of unbridled global capitalism today.

Appropriating the territories of others through the violent imposition of cultural and political forms that transform the world into private property and increase one's individual gain is the driving force of the history of Western modernity and its liberalism. It is not simply an abstract idea but rather an active biopolitics, articulated in multiple ways according to different contexts and instances. These are procedures and practices that organically depend on the racial and racist hierarchy that justifies the moral and cultural supremacy of the white colonizer over the natives. This legacy persists and remains shamelessly explicit in the contemporary world, from the daily fate of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and Occupied Territories to Islamo-

39 Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present* (Blackwell, 2004).

40 Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387–409.

phobia, anti-Black racism, and the pervasive xenophobia that characterizes current political and juridical practices in the West. Everywhere, private property rules with an iron fist that allows no trespass on its claims and wealth.[41]

The colonial archive of modernity and the Mediterranean formed in its image prompts us to consider previously hidden connections. In recent times, critical discussion of modern Western colonialism has highlighted a significant distinction between classical and "settler colonialism."[42] In the former case, it was a matter of subordinating the colony to the economic and political needs of the colonial metropolis without excluding the Indigenous population, which often also provided labor and part of the ranks of local political and military management, as in British India and Egypt. In the case of settler colonialism — whether we are talking about the United States, South Africa, and Australia, or Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Palestine — it was a matter of supplanting the local population (even via ethnic cleansing and genocide), to relocate Europeans in the spaces wiped clean by conquest. The construction of the Middle East and North Africa by European colonial authorities granted Paris, London, and Rome absolute power over the territories and their inhabitants. While North Africa experienced settler colonialism (with the exception of British Egypt), the French and British approach to the Middle East after 1920 was based on classical colonialism and was designed to protect European interests in the region by establishing pro-Western states.

In 1915, in an attempt to open a new front against the Ottoman Empire — Germany's ally during the First World War — the British encouraged a revolt in the desert, promising the Arabs an independent state stretching from the Red Sea to Damascus and from the Persian border to the Mediterranean. This new political entity included Palestine. The following year, the Sykes–Picot Agreement, a secret pact between the British and

41 Nick Hayes, *The Book of Trespass: Crossing the Lines That Divide Us* (Granta, 2020).

42 Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native."

the French, formalized the division of the Ottoman provinces in the Middle East in order to secure control of the Suez Canal and access to India. This occurred at a time when oil resources were becoming increasingly important for war machines and civilian life in the West. Then, in 1917, in response to a request from the British Zionist Federation, the British government issued the Balfour Declaration in favor of establishing a "national home" for Jews in Palestine, provided this would not harm the "civil and religious rights" of non-Jewish communities already residing there. These developments contradicted the initial promise made by the British to the Arab leaders. Put bluntly, the Arabs were betrayed. The ability to draw borders and allocate land was an absolute European prerogative. Local populations were rendered invisible as the maps of the eastern Mediterranean were redrawn. There was no consultation; their leaders were merely informed of decisions made in London and Paris. Indigenous populations were not considered evolved enough to decide their own future, a future which would have conflicted with the interests of the Western powers anyway.

Although the practice of rendering the native population mute and invisible accompanies all processes of European colonialism, with settler colonialism this logic is perpetuated until any Indigenous resistance is nullified by confinement in reserves, camps, ghettos, mass graves, and extermination. Settler colonialism demands the native's territory and land as its principle. The natives, even when reduced to cheap disposable labor, must disappear. There must be no physical reminders of another management, another historical and cultural cultivation of the occupied and appropriated space. Names are changed. One starts from year zero of the new nation. It is no coincidence that the Jewish intellectual Albert Memmi, born in colonial Tunisia, believed that every system of colonialism was a form of fascism.[43] While classic colonialism formally implemented the process of decolonization, often maintaining remote control through other instruments of power (primarily financial

43 Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Profile Books, 2021).

and economic), settler colonialism has historically often failed: Algeria, Tunisia, the British settlements in Kenya and Rhodesia, the Portuguese colonies in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau, and in the case of Italy, Libya, Eritrea, and Somalia. Resistance and the refusal to disappear, despite the high price paid in wars, eliminated lives, and deeply damaged societies, survives and keeps the door of the colonial archive open on the "collective silence and amnesia" and its continuing interrogation of the present.[44] Further, these responses sustain interrogations in the very seats of contemporary power, both in the old imperial centers of London, Paris, Berlin, Rome, Brussels…and in their settler-colonial offspring in the Americas and the Antipodes. From this perspective, the exception of the state of Israel today lies not in its supposedly democratic status in the Middle East, exercised through the incarceration of the Palestinian population and a political theology that explicitly denies civil rights to different beliefs and cultures, but in being a political monstrosity whose violent logic nakedly reveals the brutal continuity of the colonial constitution of the modern world.

Locating the Palestine–Israel question in the making of the contemporary Mediterranean and reconnecting the global colonial threads that continue to stitch us into the present, leads to another critical plane. It frees us from the cul-de-sac of liberal reasoning that speaks in terms of actors formed in the presumed neutrality of the rational exchange of points of view as if we could stage a discussion between equal powers and histories. The profound asymmetry that characterizes colonial relations yesterday and today does not permit the luxury of such a fantasy. We are dealing with the violence of domination and the survival of those who resist. Here, we touch on the proper limits of European humanism, as Frantz Fanon noted so well from his experience of the Algerian War of Liberation, where he talks of a humanism that proclaims universal human rights while mas-

44 Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, *Genocide in Libya: Shar, a Hidden Colonial History* (Routledge, 2020). See also Neelam Srivastava, *Italian Colonialism and Resistances to Empire, 1930–1970* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

sacring human beings in every corner of the planet.[45] As part of the modern European settlement, the Mediterranean, even today, confronts us with a racist agenda. The Arab, the Black, and the native, like the migrant, are not considered fully human. The anonymous body killed by the French Algerian Meursault in Albert Camus's *The Stranger* remains the "Black" as the silenced object described by Fanon and James Baldwin, which confirms the subjective superiority of the white man and the invisibility, or hypervisibility, of Muslim women. Such limited and preferential protocols can only be supplanted by what Aimé Césaire called a "humanism made to the measure of the world."[46]

When you think of Gaza, an urban ghetto that under total Israeli control has become a death camp, it is hard to imagine that much of the population and the streets and buildings no longer exist.[47] They have been destroyed by one of the world's most powerful war machines. Gaza has gone from being historically one of the planet's biggest concentration camps to its largest desecrated cemetery. Only gun fire and the buzz of drones disturb the silence. This is colonial violence. There is no other explanation. History did not begin on October 7, 2023. That was the moment of a brutal breakout from the Israeli prison, matured after more than seventy-five years of colonization and military occupation. In the powers and maps that feed this deeper story, the history of Palestine fundamentally exposes the history of Europe and the constant denial of Western responsibility.

This is the global scenario today where we confront unwanted populations and the surplus of human lives considered unnecessary for neoliberal capitalism. Capital constantly seeks to reproduce capital. So, this surplus is not simply a static reserve that lowers the cost of labor. It is also inherent to the dynamics of accumulation where new surveillance methods and technolo-

45 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth,* trans. Richard Philcox (Grove Press, 2004).

46 Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism,* trans. Joan Pinkham (Monthly Review Press, 2000), 73.

47 Iain Chambers, "The Ghosts of Gaza," *Media Theory* 8, no. 2 (2024): 105–26.

gies can be tested to extract further wealth, support the increasingly militarized police departments of US cities, perfect digital software for control and communication, and then be advertised and resold on the global security market. Israel, a walled and militarized society, extending by its land-grabbing colonists into the Occupied Territories, draws us into the dark night of modernity. It is a prospect that is thoroughly threaded through Occidental humanism and its humanitarianism, including in its reception of migrants who are reduced to objects of our moral sovereignty and economic benefit.

The connections between the Black Lives Matter movement in the US and the Palestinian cause disseminate a counter-narrative. In Raoul Peck's film *I'm Not Your Negro* (2016) addressing the civil rights struggle of the African American community in the United States, James Baldwin says: "Now that you no longer need us, what are you going to do? Exterminate us?" There, where an attempt is made to eliminate the populations whose presence and survival expose the wounds of modernity, we can also detect the depth of the proposal to call today's Mediterranean the Black Mediterranean.[48] Between the plastic, the debris, the ecological disasters, and the bodies denied, rejected, and thrown away, the dark matters of history become interchangeable. At this point, we find ourselves shifting the premises that have managed and explained the modern Mediterranean. Opposing a single, one-sided register, while respecting the complexity of a historical and cultural formation, implies not simply reintroducing denied histories and voices or opting for the other side and believing ourselves capable of seeing the world from the perspective of the subaltern. Instead, it pushes us to dismantle the assumptions of knowledge and languages that have brought us this far, not to erase them but to expose

48 Initially developed in the context of the long, deep history of the Mediterranean by Cedric Robinson in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (Zed Press, 1983). See also Alessandra Di Maio, "The Black Mediterranean: A View from Sicily," *Transition* 132 (2021): 34–53, and Gabriele Proglio et al., *The Black Mediterranean: Bodies, Borders and Citizenship* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

them in another configuration and begin to learn to speak in an emergent space.

Although F16 fighter planes and Apache military helicopters do not control our daily skies, the construction of modern Western society is nonetheless shot through with a political discipline that makes individual and collective life increasingly subordinate to demands to conceive the world uniquely, as if there were no alternative. We, too, experience the unequal power relations so dramatically displayed every day in contemporary Palestine, obviously at an altogether less dramatic and lower intensity. There is an ongoing war to establish a particular and uncontestable order. Everything is sealed by the seemingly implacable laws of the market and its management by Western values. As a transcendental force, the economy commands the field of legal recognition and appropriation. It is a "freedom" restricted to those with the rights (ownership) to exercise it and is, therefore, intrinsically connected to the dispossession and unfreedom of others. We are offered liberty, philosophically and legally established in the history of European individualism and liberalism, built on planetary inequality.

The Planterary Mediterranean

In today's neoliberal world, the liberal lexicon becomes sharper, without shame or pretensions of social programs promising equality. Everyone must take responsibility for their destiny as an individual subject in the global market. Any attempt to defy this violent logic that benefits only the interests of the few while reducing the majority to a state of precariousness is punished and excluded from public reasoning. In this scenario, events such as the Arab Spring or the Greek debt crisis, with appeals to an idea of freedom not confined to the laws of the market or subordinate to hegemonic geopolitics, are considered isolated cases and disturbances inimical to the existing order. They are quickly brought back into the only language of governance deemed valid and, therefore, universal. Thomas Lemke

calls it "the universalization of the entrepreneurial form."[49] This avoids confrontation with deeper social rhythms and historical structures. Meanwhile, in dismantling the welfare system, old patterns emerge in which xenophobia, provincial wisdom, and common sense secure the coordinates that promote radical populism that pulverizes critical thinking. The profit of capital continues without contestation.

Today, every city in the Mediterranean basin is supported and suspended in this web. Urban spaces are increasingly divided and transformed into places for private profit extraction on the one hand and places of public waste on the other. Between gentrification, tourism, Airbnb, Ikea, restaurants, shops, abandoned suburbs, and toxic waste dumped in the ground, the rivers, the sea, and under the open sky, cities become transnational nodes for commerce that "have the specificity of articulating economic development between formal, informal and criminal."[50] In this political reconfiguration of public life, the state now serves not so much to protect citizens as to promote an arrangement where the distinctions between politics and economics vanish, and the differences between culture and capital, politics and property, lawful and unlawful, become increasingly difficult to discern. In these flows of money, where the grey and obscure dimensions are substantial and constitutive, the management of the *res publica* has shifted from the public and debated search for social justice to the closed and unilateral clarity of the brutal directive of private profit. Crises no longer register the symptoms of social maladies but offer the operational mode to manage economic accumulation and financial flows while overseeing growing inequality and precarity.

The cities that seemingly appear on the edges of Europe and modernity — Naples, Marseille, Athens, Tunis, Tangier, Istan-

49 Thomas Lemke, "'The Birth of Biopolitics': Michel Foucault's Lecture at the Collège de France on Neoliberal Governmentality," *Economy and Society* 30, no. 2 (2001): 190–270.

50 Michel Peraldi, "Città frontiere euromediterranee, capitalismo mercantile transnazionale," in *Città mediterranee e deriva liberista,* ed. Salvatore Palidda (Mesogea, 2011), 27.

bul — expose all the mechanisms of mercantile capitalism (from the street to the skyscraper, from the undocumented migrant to the entrepreneur tycoon, all caught in financial flows on the computer screen). They are central to the world to come. It is precisely in this sense, as Antonello Petrillo has argued, that the city of Naples, generally condemned to be degenerate, not yet modern, backward, emerges instead as a global city:

> Naples appears far less out of touch with the contemporary world than current publicity rhetorically suggests. Instead, it reveals itself to be a paradigm of the globalized world. With its dissipating use of land, its incessant destruction of natural resources, the barbarization of industrial relations, the increasingly sharp polarization between income from work and speculative income, the centrality accorded in the territory to the functions of consumption and the transport of goods, far from bringing back to the surface the mythical anthropological background forever abandoned by the West, the city seems instead to indicate the future of the globalized planet and quietly repeats, for those who want to hear it, the *de te fabula narratur.*[51]

Here, existing rights and freedoms can be undone. Nothing is guaranteed. Revolutionary change in Egypt can be reversed and suppressed in a spiral of military dictatorship. We, too, on the northern shore of the Mediterranean, can be taken hostage by the logic of security and the laws of the market. What happened in the Arab Spring and continued in the Syrian war casts a questioning light on the West. It is not simply a question of a colonial past, traced in the current borders of the North African and Eastern Mediterranean states, which continues to survive as a ghostly colonial presence in the dramatic violence of the present. There is also the continuity of Western-directed and disciplined explanations of Islam and the Arab world to be

51 Antonello Petrillo, "Global Naples: Discourses, Territory and Power in the 'Plebeian City'," in *Città mediterranee e deriva liberista,* ed. Palidda, 70.

considered. In his text *Covering Islam: How Media and Pundits Determine Our View of the Rest of the World,* the precise political and cultural cage of such constructions is photographed by Edward Said in all its crude historical pressure.[52] Beyond these borders, the West is confronted with a modernity that is not just "ours" to manage and define. Unexpected and unsolicited versions are bound to emerge in the transit of translation.

The conditions of precariousness, youth unemployment, and unrepresentative governments are increasingly part of a global condition and are not restricted to a generic global south. There are specificities and differences that, at the same time, remain within the procedures of a neoliberal international order. This is amplified by the arrival of migrants to Europe, many of whom insist they are refugees fleeing our wars and the decay of the European colonial legacy in Syria, Afghanistan, and the Horn of Africa. Here, we touch the present paradoxes: There are demands for change and requests for democratic governments in the Arab world and elsewhere, while in the West, these prospects are frequently being dismantled. Registering the proximity of these processes on the Asian and African shores of the Mediterranean exposes Europe to broader interrogations. Massacres, street protests, authoritarian governments, and appeals to Occidental political traditions exhibit situations where our language travels to be further radicalized in its return to its presumed sources in the West. In other words, it exposes our hypocritical reactions and disquiet when our declared political and ethical "values" are adopted and exercised without our authorization.

What has emerged in the struggles of recent years against the autocratic states of North Africa and the Middle East is also about a profound challenge to neoliberalism, to its fundamentally antisocial and antidemocratic logic. This challenge to the modern state, which only considers the welfare of its elite, emerged in the Arab world, particularly after the financial collapse of 2007. The majority of the population is excluded from

52 Edward Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (Vintage, 1997).

the equation. There is a significant planetary commonality here. The public financing of stability rather than change, the bailout of banks, and the protection of corruption rather than people, are part of a global push toward the privatization of profits and the socialization of losses. Ultimately, the ongoing (though currently suppressed) struggles for change in the Arab world are deeply linked to issues of democratization everywhere; they concern processes that are not simply local but also at work at a planetary level. While Egypt and Tunisia have experienced neoliberal governments for decades in the context of the so-called Arab "third way," the systematic conflict of business and politics is typical of the situation in "advanced Western democracies." The proximity of the Arab leadership to Western administrations is reflected in public figures (including the military leadership in Egypt) who have one foot in politics and one in business. In both situations, with all the differences on the ground, the government is there to defend free-market fundamentalism, to divert funding from the public to the private sector, to privatize and plunder public resources, and to ideologically block any public discussion on issues of poverty and social and economic justice. All of this is part of the emerging perpetual state of war on the world's poor: Those without property are, according to classical liberal ideology, ultimately without rights.[53]

This also reflects how our current political and cultural parameters can become unhinged as they are stretched (as Frantz Fanon would have put it) into the novelty and unexpectedness unleashed by revolt and revolution. The singularity of such events and their refusal to respect Western-sourced premises (while the Western model is always present in the counterrevolutions that reimpose political stability for economic productivity and the status quo) reinforces the urgency for modalities of thought divorced from the triumphant confirmation of Occidental authority. In this sense, the everyday practices of implementing political processes capable of negotiating and shaping life's historical and cultural conditions in North

53 Arundhati Roy, *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (Verso, 2014).

Africa and the Eastern Mediterranean pose questions that go to the heart of the global claims of democratic thinking. The assumption that the institutions and philosophy of democracy is forever Western in origin, practice, and participation (and thereby ready for export) is necessarily annulled. In transit and translation, the worlding of Western modernity also means this.

Conclusion

Most Italian cities are full of fascist architecture. Apart from the obvious case of Rome, look at Naples with its curvilinear Post Office (with the inscription "XIV ANNO DELL'ERA FASCISTA" on its side), the police headquarters, other local public and administrative buildings around the same Piazza Matteotti, the Stazione Marittima, and the gigantic Mostra d'Oltremare in Fuorigrotta (with murals depicting colonial conquest led by Mussolini on horseback).[1] Not only do these examples of modern rationalist architecture promoted by the fascist regime remain standing, but they are still adorned with the political symbols and proclamations of that period. No one seems to read, hear, or challenge this history inscribed in the material fabric of their cities. This architectural language also links Italian cities directly to the colonial spaces of Eritrea, Ethiopia, and Libya. In Asmara, Addis Ababa, and Tripoli, other buildings signal the nearness of seemingly distant African localities to modern Italy's architectural, cultural, and political constitution. Italian street names and monuments to military victories and defeats echo in the colo-

1 Celeste Ianniciello and Michaela Quadraro, "Emancipatory Archiving Practices: A Renovation of Social Theory through Art," *Quaderni di Teoria Sociale* 1 (2019): 157–78.

nial matrix of the present.[2] In August 1936, Le Corbusier offered his services to Mussolini to judge which projects were most appropriate for the new cities in Italian East Africa. He wanted to parachute concrete skyscrapers into the existing urban fabric of the Ethiopian capital, turning it into a *tabula rasa* on which to build modernism from scratch. The plans for Addis Ababa, although never realized during the four years of Italian occupation, sparked an international debate on architecture and colonial modernism (published in magazines such as *Casabella*), involving Le Corbusier and the Italian architects Ignazio Guidi and Cesare Valle, whom Rome had already appointed. Colonial spaces have always been experimental laboratories for modernity, allowing the European imagination to find more "radical" administrative and architectural solutions than those permitted by the cumbersome tradition of the homeland.

The sheer quantity of these architectural monuments dating back to an authoritarian regime and the most significant urban planning intervention in modern Italy prevents them from being demolished. But they can be reworked, recoded, and culturally recycled. In some ways, this has happened in Asmara, where local Italian architecture has been absorbed into the nationalist fabric of the Eritrean capital. This entwined history also takes us back to when the indigenous soldiers of Eritrea (and later Somalia), called Ascari, were deployed by the Italian government in its African colonies as early as the last decade of the nineteenth century. If the colonial legacy is inscribed in buildings in Palermo, Naples, Rome, Algiers, Alexandria, and Asmara, few opt to see or experience their city in this way. Despite the recent attention of some historians, that archive

2 Rino Bianchi and Igiaba Scego, *Roma negata: Percorsi postcoloniali nella città* (Ediesse, 2014), and Mia Fuller, *Moderns Abroad: Architecture, Cities and Italian Imperialism* (Routledge, 2009). On the question of historical reparation and cultural recycling of these buildings, see the work of the Decolonising Architecture group with Alessandro Petti and Sandi Hilal in Stockholm: http://www.kkh.se/en/education/decolonizing-architecture/.

remains relatively untouched.[3] Yet it persists in the materiality of public buildings, railway stations, courthouses, banks, schools, street names, university classrooms, and residential buildings. It remains an archive to be received and read.

It is important to emphasize that this amnesia does not simply concern the erroneous insistence that Italian colonialism had only to do with fascism and, therefore, represents a short and shameful but now-closed chapter in the national narrative. Italy, like all modern European states, has been involved in colonialism since its inception precisely in order to render itself up-to-date. Some also argue that the military management, summary executions, repression, and occupation of southern Italy in the 1860s by government troops after the defeat of the Bourbon monarchy represented internal colonialism. It was accompanied by the criminalization of southern Italy as the site of an inferior "race" through the anthropology of Cesare Lombroso and others. Italian colonialism as an overseas enterprise began in the Horn of Africa less than twenty years later. The first recorded aerial bombardment in modern history occurred near Tripoli in 1911 during the Italian attack on Libya. The colonial archive is much deeper and broader than we would like to acknowledge. Not only does it contaminate the understanding of the birth of the nation viewed in exclusively autochthonous terms, but it also refuses to remain a peripheral and marginal issue. As we have insisted, colonialism remains essential to modernity and the realization of the modern nation-state.

Highlighting the importance of the colonies in the elaboration of national identity, Italian postcolonial thinkers and historians have recently begun to highlight the intersecting links between military campaigns and colonial administrations (Eritrea, Somalia, Ethiopia, Libya, Albania, Yugoslavia) and the image of a modern nation. Like the rest of Europe, Italy struc-

3 Important work has been done here by Italian historians such as Angelo Del Boca, Giampaolo Calchi Novati, Nicola Labanca, Silvia Palma, Alessandro Triulzi, Valeria Deplano, and Claudio Fogu. An exploration of the contemporary impact of this heritage can be found in the film essay by Luca Guadagnino, dir., *Inconscio italiano* (First Sun, 2011).

turally depended on these practices and processes while denying and marginalizing their centrality to the composition of the present.[4] Today, European political resistance against trans-Mediterranean travel and migration, accompanied formally and informally by growing racism, is reopening this archive. A confrontation with constructions of memory does not stop at an alleged racist pathology, for attempting to dismantle the claims of the exercise of white supremacy takes us deep into the historical structures of the powers that sustain colonialism in the present. In this breach, a significant resonance also emerges between subaltern and postcolonial studies developed in the anglophone world and the figures of Antonio Gramsci, Ernesto De Martino, and Pier Paolo Pasolini. Pasolini, in particular, with his political–poetic language that mixed the southern question with those of sexuality, subaltern cultures, and the advent of consumer society, disseminated a disturbance, an alienation or "queering" of official Italian culture, which continues to resonate. From these authors emerges the marginalized and subordinated south that the national narrative has never managed to absorb or register in its profound criticality; like the denied Mediterranean, it continues to circulate as a specter in everyday life.

In these deeper and largely unacknowledged connections, disturbing proximities insist that the past, which we had thought to be closed and concluded, refuses to pass. The North and East African Italian colonies were proposed and pursued in terms of settler colonialism. They involved the transfer of peasants and artisans, engineers, architects, and administrators. The colonies were not simply seen as a potential relief valve for poverty and unemployment. They also represented the extension and implantation of Italian identity and so-called European civilization abroad. Such a project connects this moment in Italian history not only to earlier European colonialism in the Americas, Africa, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand but also to the

4 Cristina Lombardi-Diop and Caterina Romeo, eds., *Postcolonial Italy: Challenging National Homogeneity* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

continuing colonial violence in the Middle East, inaugurated by European imperialism and Zionism and perpetuated in the ethnocratic and undemocratic policy of the current state of Israel. Once again, these connections have not been, perhaps never will be, fully registered and received.

This colonial past also accumulates dramatically every night in the news. The hundreds of thousands of people fleeing wars and structural inequalities produced by Western hegemony, often dying at sea (or completely removed from our eyes in the deserts and prisons of North Africa), are the most urgent reminder of the European colonization of the planet, which is now folding in on itself. The racism, deaths, discrimination, brutality, economic and social slavery, and the sliding scale of who can live and who must die, which violently shaped and disciplined the colonies, has now entered the lexicon of our daily lives. Not only are the inhabitants of former Italian colonies seeking moral and economic repatriation from a culture they have historically shared and formed, but the entire ex-colonial world, in insisting on the "right to have rights," is undoing the arrangement that sought to keep it in its place. Of course, global capital can also work with these flows, extracting from every specificity a further opportunity for profit, from undocumented labor to managing refugee camps and developing sophisticated surveillance technology and software. Meanwhile, Occidental nation-states are increasingly imposing limits. White supremacy, implicitly codified throughout its long history in the civilizing imperative of European colonialism, transforms its racist premises into white panic, fears of "ethnic replacement," and the amplified discourse of taking back control of "our" borders: Brexit, the US administration, the European Union, the juridical construction of "illegal" migrants.[5]

5 To think of migrants as travelers, as Shahram Khosravi suggests, is to underline the arbitrary imposition of their "illegality" and returns us to the violence that suffocates mobility despite its structural centrality to the making of the modern world over the last five hundred years. Shahram Khosravi, *"Illegal" Traveller: An Auto-Ethnography of Borders* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

We have inherited the Mediterranean that seemingly follows a single understanding of history drawn on a unique map. The arguments in this book have sought to pull other maps out from under that oppressive weight. With these in hand, we have sought other coordinates and further cartographies of time and space. This does not mean simply stating that there are different histories, other cultures, and lives that have been rendered subordinate, even invisible, by the map that governs our time. It suggests that these elements are not marginal but that in resisting a single chronology and measurement of spacetime, they reveal matters that refuse to be tied down, identified, and rendered transparent. Many times in these pages, we have suggested that poetry and the poetics of sound and vision best register this critical possibility. We have insisted, against a placid historiographical narrative, that anachronism, considered out of time and place, provokes a necessary cut, an interruption, and an interrogation of the established pattern. There is a demand to look and listen again. In this sense, recent migration literature (largely Afro-descendant) in the Italian language, for example, proposes an unlicensed and innovative national language, literature, history, and culture, now crossed by other bodies, voices, and stories. Broken and repositioned in a profound decolonization of the national narrative, Italian literature and culture are themselves justly rendered migrant.[6]

Reopening the archives of the Mediterranean and modernity in this manner allows us to organize another scoring of its spacetime. This enables us to challenge and surpass the actuality of institutional verdicts, political conclusions, and cultural consensus. Attending to the Palestinian *oud* player and singer Kamilya Jubran, we are pulled out of ourselves.[7] A modern

6 Lidia Curti, "Female Literature of Migration in Italy," *Feminist Review* 87, no. 1 (September 2007): 60–75; Caterina Romeo, *Interrupted Narratives and Intersectional Representations in Italian Postcolonial Literature* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2023); and Graziella Parati, *Migrant Writers and Urban Space in Italy: Proximities and Affect in Literature and Film* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

7 Kamilya Jubran, *Makan* (Zig-Zag Territoires, 2008), CD.

Mediterranean musicality, sung in Arabic, pushes us beyond the limits of our language to the threshold of another and challenges our reasoning. Or, in listening to Etta Scollo's *Il fiore splendente,* we enter a gap in time.[8] The songs and melancholic sentiments of this Sicilian female voice, based on eleventh-century Arab-Sicilian poets, do not propose an exercise in romanticism or cultural nostalgia. The music is contemporary. The poetry in translation from Arabic to modern Italian offers a bridge suspended in sound, bringing elements of the past into the composition of the present. Recovered, reworked, and re-proposed, this poetics opens up to a future that escapes the boundaries of the existing map, the limits of its politics, and the despondency of its brutal semantics. Following these sounds, we move into another understanding of the Mediterranean, which is multiple and refuses to follow a single rhythm. In its folds, we are drawn into further critical spaces and political possibilities.

8 Etta Scollo, *Il fiore splendente* (Edel Classics, 2008), CD.

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