

From *Mare Nostrum* to *Mare Aliorum*: Mediterranean Theory and Mediterraneism in Contemporary Italian Thought

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[“Mi sono sentito come una barca sbattuta da tante parole.”](#)

Mario (Massimo Troisi) in *Il postino*

In this unforgettable scene from *Il postino*, the Mediterranean Sea is figured as the progenitor of metaphor, poetry and the world. Mario feels like a “boat rocked by the words” of Pablo Neruda’s poem, but the liquidity of those metaphors invades his very being, leading him to venture the question: “Then the world, and everything in it, is a metaphor for something else?” Neruda’s startled face prompts Mario to fear that he may have gone too far, and he adds: “*ho detto una stronzata?*” (was that bullshit?). The poetic economy of the film requires Pablo’s infinite *humanitas* to pay its respects to the humble Mediterranean genius of poetry, but *Il postino* never provides a real answer to that question. The same issue returns to haunt the discourse about the Mediterranean in contemporary Italian scholarship and culture. Contrary to the clearly marked geographical boundaries of the Mediterranean Sea, the flow of metaphors around the theme of Mediterranean-ness is virtually infinite, and may indeed be without parallel in other cultural contexts. This essay will focus on those voices that in Italian culture have responded to the metaphoric call of the sea, but have also curbed its tendency to go *alla deriva* (adrift) by joining in dialogue with Mediterranean Studies as this field has been configured outside of Italy.¹ Dialogue rather than metaphor will guide my study of the place of modern Italy in the recent boom in Mediterranean Studies, as well as of the specific contribution that Italian thinkers of many kinds have made to the international conversation about Mediterranean-ness.

¹The temptation of metaphor in Mediterranean discourse is highlighted by (among others) Roberto Dainotto, “Asimmetrie mediterranee. Etica e mare nostrum,” *NAE* 3 (2003): 3-18, Scipione Guarracino, *Mediterraneo. Immagini, storie e teorie da Omero a Braudel* (Milano: Bruno Mondadori, 2007), 94, and Salvatore Bono, *Un altro Mediterraneo. Una storia comune tra scontri e integrazioni* (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2008), 7. See also the articles by Iain Chambers, Toni Maraini, and Francesca Saffioti in this issue of *CIS*.

Mediterranean Studies confront the Mare Nostrum

Traditionally Mediterranean Studies have been the province of classical archaeologists as well as of historians of antiquity and the Middle Ages. Not even Fernand Braudel's celebrated study of *La Méditerranée et le monde méditerranéen à l'époque de Philip II*, published first in 1949 and reissued in 1966, succeeded in producing a Mediterranean focus on early modern Europe. As Jacques Rancière has argued, *La Méditerranée* may be credited with a "geographization of historical time," which replaced the centrality of kings and politics in the rise of modern historiography, but, in so doing, it also decreed the death of its own subject: the history of the Mediterranean world.² *La Méditerranée* seemed to suggest that the geographical unity of that world had at last found political unification under the great Spanish king Philip II, but that with his death in 1598 this same unity had ceased to exist. Northern European powers had entered the sea and the epicenters of both History – with a capital H – and history *in* the Mediterranean had shifted to the Atlantic and its powerful nation-states. The very book that had imposed the Mediterranean as the "Subject of History" seemed to have also effectively killed that subject, at least for historical inquiry into the early modern period. Accordingly, as the multifaceted and multidisciplinary discourse on modernity began to develop through the publication of works such as Karl Polanyi's *The Great Transformation* (1944), the modern Mediterranean was entirely absent from the scene. It was in the field of anthropology that in the 1960s and 1970s a truly "modern" Mediterranean area studies began to emerge.³ It was modern because the study of "social, economic, political, and religious networks" was directed by British anthropologists towards fieldwork in rural communities across the Mediterranean area; their work was conducted comparatively and according to the most recent theoretical paradigms in the discipline.⁴ These are the studies that have given us, for example, the Mediterranean paradigm of "honor and shame."⁵ Yet, by the end of the 1970s, the social anthropology of the Mediterranean had encountered its limits both ideologically and methodologically. The reasons for the rise and fall of Mediterranean anthropology are diverse and quite important, but what needs highlighting here is the relative absence of interest in the study of Italian peasant communities and the marginalization of Italian scholars in the field. Suffice it to mention that the seminal writings of Ernesto De Martino on Southern Italian rituals were not translated into English until 2005, and thus took no part in a conversation that appears to have been monopolized by scholars influenced by the British school of social anthropology well into the 1990s.⁶

The story of Mediterranean anthropology is therefore tangentially a story of neglect of Italian scholarship, and much more directly a tale of British academic hegemony, recently augmented by British efforts to establish a historiography of the modern Mediterranean. This is in fact quite possibly crystallized in one book: *The Corrupting Sea: A Study in Mediterranean*

² Jacques Rancière, *The Names of History: On the Poetics of Knowledge* (Minneapolis, Minn.: University of Minnesota Press, 1994), 82.

³ Dionigi Albera, "The Mediterranean as an Anthropological Laboratory," *Anales de la Fundación Joaquín Costa* 16 (1999): 215-32.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 216.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 218. Clearly, not all anthropologists belonging to this school were of British nationality, and several were Southern European. But the majority of the journals in which this scholarship was published were produced in Great Britain.

History, authored by Peregrin Horden and Nicholas Purcell. First published in the year 2000, this monumental study (more than 700 pages in length) of the interaction between “dense [geographical] fragmentation” and the human “striving towards control of communications” in the coastal lands around the Mediterranean Sea, has managed to capture the imagination of historians with a refinement of the Braudelian thesis that seeks to save it from the latter’s geographical determinism.⁷ The unity of the Mediterranean world, argue Horden and Purcell, was the result of the *interaction* between humans and their environment. In other words, the closeness of coastlines facilitated the creation of separate commercial micro-regions, and the ease of communication by sea in turn allowed these micro-regions to depend on trade networks for their development, while also spurring them to exercise as much control as possible over the networks themselves. This unity did not end with the death of King Philip II but lasted, according to Horden and Purcell, until the “modern or post-modern periods – however modernity is conceptualized.”⁸ Yet in modern/post-modern times – however these are conceptualized by Horden and Purcell – the “history of the Mediterranean” ceased to be, and in its place there arose “history in the Mediterranean,” that is, the history of (mostly) non-Mediterranean nation-states seeking to make the Mediterranean into a European lake for the flow of globalized trade.⁹ In the “special sense” in which Horden and Purcell have claimed “the coastlands of the Mediterranean as a political unit at least as intelligible as ‘Europe’ or the ‘Middle East’,” the categories of modernity and Mediterranean are for these two authors antithetical.¹⁰ The problem, however, is that the “special sense” that Horden and Purcell identify with the “political” alerts us to both the methodological inadequacies of their attempt to address the question of modernity and the ideological stakes of their *summa historica*.

Whereas Braudel’s *La Méditerranée* ushered in a historiographical revolution that imposed structuralist models of interpretation on subsequent generations of historians, Horden and Purcell’s book seems so anachronistic as to have been written at the end of the nineteenth century. They pay no attention to the imagined Mediterranean described by John Pemble, or to the Grand Tour that served the British aristocracy as it sought to construct ideas of both modernity and the Mediterranean.¹¹ Nor are Horden and Purcell remotely interested in the nineteenth-century political-cultural construction of the Mediterranean as a “European lake,” or in any other cultural and political projection of a Mediterranean imaginary in the last two centuries. The sole exception may be found in their claim that the “geographical determinism” of Braudel’s *La Méditerranée* derived squarely from the “romantic” tradition in Mediterranean Studies.¹² Although they make no attempt to clarify this statement, Horden and Purcell nonetheless repeatedly make this claim in their book. This seems to indicate that a different form of romanticism may have indeed been a powerful force behind their own work.¹³ I am referring specifically to their own embrace of “Mediterraneanism.” This is a term originally coined by

⁷ Peregrin Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (London: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), 25.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2-3.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹¹ John Pemble, *Mediterranean Passion: Victorians and Edwardians in the South* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1987).

¹² Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 39.

¹³ Indeed, for Braudel, a certain anti-colonial Mediterranean imagined by Algerian intellectuals in the 1930s was a much more plausible and direct influence. See Guarracino, *Mediterraneo*, 135-37.

Michael Herzfeld in 1985 to indict the invention of “the Mediterranean” by British anthropologists in the 1960s as a post-colonial ideological creature allowing them to play nostalgic games while displacing anxieties due to the loss of empire.¹⁴ Indeed, Horden and Purcell are so concerned with the potential accusation of “Mediterraneism” that they devote an entire chapter (XII) to proving that the “honor and shame” paradigm first theorized by John Peristiany in 1965 is indeed quintessentially Mediterranean. They thus imply that Herzfeld’s accusation against British anthropologists is to be rejected and certainly does not apply to themselves.¹⁵ This preemptive strike is all the more revealing because Herzfeld has recently observed that he agrees with most of what Horden and Purcell have written, while pointing out that the fact that a pattern of honor and shame has been identified across a certain cultural area cannot *ipso facto* make it *uniquely* characteristic of that area, since, in fact, comparative anthropology of non-Mediterranean areas has revealed similar practices and beliefs in other areas.¹⁶ But, more importantly, Herzfeld has called attention to the very title of Horden and Purcell’s book: why “corrupting,” he wonders, rather than “enriching” or “enlivening” sea, as their narrative of marine resourcefulness suggests? Doesn’t this title and the preposterous assertion that the Mediterranean is a “political” unit like “Europe” or the “Middle East” warrant the suspicion that these two historians operate according to very puritanical conceptions of politics and stereotypes about the nature of Southern (European) politics? Corruption of the flesh and soul, as well as of all good (i.e. commercial) intentions, seems to be in the cultural DNA of Mediterranean peoples.¹⁷

This critique of Horden and Purcell’s book is not aimed at judging their scholarship *per se*, but rather at setting up the stage for the evaluation of the specific contributions that Italian intellectuals and scholars have made to a discourse on the Mediterranean and modernity of which *The Corrupting Sea* is the Scylla and Herzfeld’s conception of “Mediterraneism” is the Charybdis. Cutting off the modern period from what they call “history of the Mediterranean,” Horden and Purcell effectively minimize not only the role of cultural representations, but of the many cultural theories (including anthropological ones) that over the past decades have highlighted the social role of representations, not to mention the representational meaning-production of the social sciences, including historiography. To present “romantic views” of the Mediterranean in the nineteenth century as a flawed tradition that led even the best scholars (such as Braudel) astray, rather than as an integral part of an inquiry such as theirs, which instead looks primarily at the *circulation* of products from one shore to another and the formation of micro-cultural regions in the modern Mediterranean, means to have truly missed the boat that Braudel set on the course of a self-conscious and critical historiography of mentalities and civilizations. Unfortunately, this cultural-intellectual boat seems to have been also partially missed by those scholars who have followed enthusiastically Horden and Purcell’s lead, while at the same time extending the temporal scope of the history of the Mediterranean to the modern period.

David Abulafia’s *The Mediterranean in History* (2003) is one of those fortunate publications benefitting from both a specific definition of its focus and an editor with the panache to keep its first-rate author on target. Paying homage to Braudel as well as to Horden and Purcell, Abulafia

¹⁴ Michael Herzfeld, “The Horns of the Mediterranean Dilemma,” *American Ethnologist* 11 (1984), 439-54.

¹⁵ Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*, 488-523.

¹⁶ Michael Herzfeld, “Practical Mediterraneanism: Excuses for Everything, from Epistemology to Eating,” in *Rethinking the Mediterranean*, ed. W. V. Harris (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005): 54.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 55.

nonetheless claims that by focusing on the “human element” that works *on* the environment – that is, on the “interactions” of societies across the sea and, specifically, on the role of Mediterranean islands in fostering trade and politics – the unity of the Mediterranean can be dislodged from its peculiar geographical conditions and temporal limits (such as the mid-seventeenth century), in order to extend it all the way to our age of globalization, so that it may even function as a model for studying and comparing other examples of “internal sea” systems.¹⁸ The book’s promise is kept for most of its captivating chapters, which can be credited with constructing the most up-to-date, coherent image of the history of the Mediterranean from antiquity to the 18th century. Yet, when we come to the last two chapters, written respectively by Jeremy Black and David Abulafia himself, the coherence of the enterprise falters. The chronological straitjacket imposed on the collection, in which different periods are identified with one “thalassocracy” after another, collapses two centuries of interactions (1700s to 1900s) under the rubric of a “loss” of the “old order” because “outside interests” (i.e. British and Dutch) now determined trade in the Mediterranean.¹⁹ That in these two centuries the Mediterranean would also receive its first modern definitions from these “outside interests” and, in the process, also participate in the cultural construction of the modern idea of Europe, born of both Orientalism and Mediterraneism, does not seem to interest Black. The Grand Tour gets a total of one mention in the chapter, and while noting that “culture was one of the main exports from Italy,” the next sentence registers only the movement of goods: “Salt, from Cagliari in Sardinia, Alicante in Spain, Ibiza, and Trapani in Sicily, was recorded in the South Tolls moving into the Baltic.”²⁰ Clearly, for Black, (Italian) cultural products do not deserve more than a passing mention even though the insertion of the Mediterranean in vast trading networks – as highlighted by the example of salt traveling through the Baltic – suggests that “Mediterranean-ness” may have circulated even more widely than in previous centuries. This blindness to the cultural construction of Mediterranean-ness as a quintessentially modern phenomenon, and to the central role that Italy has played as both subject and agent of this construction, is unfortunately also present in Abulafia’s last chapter. It must be said that Abulafia is a first-rate scholar of the ancient Mediterranean, and therefore he was very far from his field of expertise in taking up the challenge of conceptualizing the Mediterranean in this past century. Yet to focus the treatment of colonial and Fascist Italy on the destiny of the “ill-fated King Zog of Albania” obfuscates not only the much wider scope of Italian-fascist colonial ambitions, but also the relevant continuities between liberal and fascist foreign policies in terms of their overall Mediterraneist design. Similarly, to make light of Fascism’s “strategic purpose” for seeking “control of the Adriatic” because “there were no obvious rivals” belittles both the criminal side of Italian-fascist colonialism and the fact that to return the Mediterranean to the status of *Mare Nostrum* (“our sea”) – as it was called in Imperial Roman times – had been a key element in the formation of Italian national identity from the Risorgimento to Fascism (and beyond).²¹ One cannot but conclude that questions of nationalism, collective identity-formation, and social consensus-building lie outside both Black’s and Abulafia’s understanding of “interactions.” They are not peripheral, however, for a new generation of Italian scholars who have begun to contribute to

¹⁸ David Abulafia, ed., *The Mediterranean in History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 13; see also, by the same author, “Mediterraneans,” in Harris, *Rethinking*, 64-93.

¹⁹ Jeremy Black, “The Mediterranean as a Battleground of the European Powers: 1700-1900,” in Abulafia ed., *The Mediterranean in History*, 269.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 289.

Mediterranean Studies by studying the ideological formation and political agency of a Mediterranean imaginary in modern Italian culture.²²

Let us begin by noticing one key peculiarity about the position of modern Italy in regard to the Mediterranean Sea. In the decades after its national formation, and increasingly so in the first years of the 20th century, Italy sought to appropriate the ancient Roman past of the peninsula for the declared purpose of adding a sense of grandeur to its national identity, as well as to boost its claims to “Great Nation” status. One key element of this past that needed to be reclaimed was the singular name of *Mare Nostrum*. That possessive pronoun had never been claimed by other conquerors. Islam called the Mediterranean *Ak Deniz* (white sea), and local names are still prevalent in all coastal communities. It is only modern Italians who have had the privilege (and curse?) of having to contend with a legacy of appropriation – a key identity-formation process that until very recently had remained seriously neglected by historians. Two collections of essays, both edited by Stefano Trinchese, have brought to the attention of Italian scholars the key role that the appeal to the Roman *Mare Nostrum* played in the construction of Italian national identity by providing both an antidote to a widespread complex of “military inferiority” following the defeat at Adwa in 1896 and a “supplementary idea of belonging.”²³ Trinchese’s assertion is given currency in Roberta Viola’s analysis of nationalist positions vis-à-vis the conquest of Libya, in Vittorio Ianari’s analysis of Italian foreign policy towards the Ottoman Empire and, above all, in Olga Tamburini’s essay on the cultural construction of the *Mare Nostrum* from the Risorgimento through World War I.²⁴ Focusing on both major (i.e. Paolo Orano, Francesco Corradini, Gabriele d’Annunzio) and less well-known pundits (i.e. *Corriere della Sera*’s Arnaldo Fraccaroli, *L’Unità*’s Cesare Spellanzon), Tamburini paints such a vivid picture of the myth of the *Mare Nostrum* constructed during the liberal *cinquantennio* that one cannot help but question the often-repeated tale of a structural deficit in the nationalism of the Italians. If royal rituals and widespread literacy failed to “make Italians,” the *Mare Nostrum* surely provided them with naturalized metaphors of an imperial geographical destiny, of a “historical legacy” to uphold, of a “civilizing mission,” of a “good” Roman-Italian colonizer, of “a Latin race born of the sea,” and of North Africa as a “Promised Land.”²⁵ The second collection edited by Trinchese, *Le cinque dita del sultano*, widened the path first blazed by Tamburini and was followed by both Fabrizio De Donno – see his contribution to this volume – and Paolo Frascani, author of *Il mare* (2008).²⁶ Frascani’s excursus focuses simultaneously on the intellectual and political construction of a “maritime nation,” and the wide popularity that this image obtained irrespective of the fact that the newly born Italy was overwhelmingly a

²² For somewhat complementary and partially alternative readings of the development and place of Mediterranean Studies in Italian Studies, see Bono, *Un altro Mediterraneo*, 10-13, and Dainotto, “Asimmetrie,” 3-5.

²³ Stefano Trinchese, “La ‘memoria blu’. Rappresentazioni del Mediterraneo all’inizio del ‘900,” in Stefano Trinchese, ed., *Mare Nostrum. Percezione ottomana e mito Mediterraneo in Italia all'alba del '900* (Milano: Angelo Guerini, 2005), 38. All translations from this text are mine.

²⁴ Roberta Viola, “L’Italia non va, ritorna!': Intervento in Libia e opinione nazionalista,” 97-148, Vittorio Ianari, “La politica islamica dell’Italia durante la Triplice Alleanza. L’attività di Enrico Insabato,” 199-246, and Olga Tamburini, “‘La via romana sepolta dal mare’: mito del *Mare Nostrum* e ricerca di un’identità nazionale,” 41-95, in Trinchese, *Mare Nostrum*.

²⁵ Tamburini, “‘La via romana sepolta dal mare’,” 41-95.

²⁶ Olga Tamburini, “*Mare Nostrum*: la nazione italiana alla ricerca dell’identità perduta,” in Stefano Trinchese, ed., *Le cinque dita del sultano. Turchi, armeni, arabi, greci ed ebrei nel continente Mediterraneo del '900* (L’Aquila: Textus, 2005), 53-72.

nation of peasants.²⁷ According to Frascani, the popular-cultural hold of the image of an *Italia marinara* may have been the most successful and long-lasting attempt to transform the collective imaginary of Italians. Established in literary-political circles well before the Risorgimento, the identification of the Italian people as a whole with the surrounding sea takes us from the early days of nation-building to the fascist *popolo di navigatori* (sea-going race) all the way to the contemporary stereotype of Italians as *navigatori della domenica* (Sunday-only sailors).²⁸

As Frascani highlights, over the past two decades the rise of a self-conscious scholarly and intellectual discourse on all things Mediterranean in Italy has accompanied an increasingly widespread identification of Italians with an “*Italia balneare*” (beachside Italy).²⁹ This phenomenon, however, has also responded to forces outside the internal development of an Italian Mediterranean imaginary. In the first place, the combination of the European processes of economic-political unification with the use of the Mediterranean as a waterway facilitating the immigration of Balkan refugees and Sub-Saharan and North African people into Europe—via the Italian island of Lampedusa and the coastal regions of Sicily and Puglia—has made the Italian perception of the Mediterranean ever less of a *Mare Nostrum* and ever more of a threatening *Mare Aliorum* (of the others). Second, post-Cold War globalization has also created a much more fertile ground for “supplementary forms of belonging” like Mediterranean-ness to counteract stifling forms of identity linked to nation, religion, and class. As Roberto Dainotto has perceptively highlighted, the association of Mediterranean-ness with a certain idea of “liquidity” and fluctuating identity has therefore found perfect resonance with the neoliberal logic of a global “free market of goods and labor,” even when it has been proposed in the name of anti-capitalism and anti-globalization.³⁰ Italy, the peninsula, Italian culture, the ensemble of its natural and aesthetic signifiers, and the Italians themselves have, out of the interaction of these processes, been invested by and become invested in a self-identification with a Mediterranean-ness *prêt-à-porter*. Witness the global reception of Oscar-winning Italian films in the 1980s and 1990s, namely *Cinema paradiso* (1988), *Mediterraneo* (1991), *Il postino* (1994), and *La vita è bella* (1997): in them we can detect the already established identification of ‘made in Italy’ with the idea of *having style and distinction* in the globalized market of postindustrial images. Such style and distinction have expanded to spell out M-E-D-I-T-E-R-R-A-N-E-A-N-N-E-S-S as a post-ideological and post-national form of supplementary identity, equally acquirable by eating Italian (i.e. the Mediterranean diet), dressing Italian (United Colors of Benetton, Emporium Armani), or *going Italian* – that is, traveling to Italy as an experience of “going native” in the postindustrial age.³¹ The discourse – cultural and intellectual – on the Mediterranean has thus been marked in Italy by a stubbornly paradoxical problem : how to effect a shift in perspective from ‘our’ (*nostrum*) sea to that ‘of the others’ (*aliorum*), but to do so in response to a global market of Mediterranean images that now wants Italy to be the signifier of a globalized *Mare Nostrum*?

²⁷ Paolo Frascani, *Il mare* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2008), 57, and 45-55. All translations from this text are mine.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 7-15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

³⁰ Dainotto, “Asimmetrie,” 3. All translations from this text are mine.

³¹ See my “Fascismo-Style,” *Spectator. USC Journal of Film and Criticism* 21:2 (Spring 2001): 56-67.

From Mare Nostrum to Mare Aliorum

The first way in which we can measure the cultural erosion of *Mare Nostrum* is by taking stock of the burgeoning interest in the history of Italian colonialism, both in Italy and abroad. Unlike the case of social anthropology and modern historiography, the field of colonial Italian studies seems to have developed at about the same time, over the past two decades, among Anglo-American scholars and Italian historians, albeit under different circumstances. The contemporaneous rise of cultural historiography and postcolonial studies has influenced English-speaking scholars such as Patrizia Palumbo, Mia Fuller, Ruth Ben-Ghiat, Jacqueline Andall, and Derek Duncan – editors of the three most recent and important collections of essays on Italian colonialism – to a far greater extent than Italian historians such as Angelo del Boca, Nicola Labanca, or Giorgio Rochat.³² The work of these latter scholars, instead, has reacted principally to socio-political conditions in Italy that have made the colonial past suddenly visible and relevant after decades of public silence. In particular, their work has sought to counteract the interrelated phenomena of the *sdoganamento della destra* (rehabilitation of rightwing politics), and the reactions of Italians to the perception of an unending wave of uninvited foreign immigrants “invading” the peninsula, starting in the early 1990s. While the latter has made “the other” suddenly visible among Italians, the former has nourished ever more arrogant displays of xenophobia, racism, and revisionism in large sectors of the political spectrum and Italian society as a whole. The conciliatory tone adopted even by politicians of the center-left and heads of state towards, for example, “patriotic” demands for the commemoration of the Italian “martyrs” of El-Alamein, could not but influence the sense of urgency found in Nicola Labanca’s prodigious output of seventeen books (between monographs and collections of essays) on all aspects of Italian colonialism, both liberal and fascist, between 1997 and 2009, or the over twenty titles published by Angelo Del Boca since 1992.³³ Yet, even though American scholars might not have been as affected by the revisionist winds of Italian political discourse and historiography, there clearly exists a collective awareness in all scholars of Italian colonialism, across geographical space and generational time, that their work is breaking the mold of five decades of Italian politics of memory, which had revolved around a Risorgimental trope and the related myth of the *bravo italiano*.³⁴ Placing colonialism squarely at the center of the interpretation of the fascist phenomenon has therefore highlighted the politics of forgetting around the powerful myth of the *Mare Nostrum* that Trinchese and Frascani have identified as a central element of continuity between the liberal and Fascist “making of Italians.” Yet, with the exception of Davide Rodogno’s *Il nuovo ordine Mediterraneo*, published in 2003, much of this has been implicit rather than explicit.³⁵ And even in the case of Rodogno’s book, the “new Mediterranean order”

³² Patrizia Palumbo, ed., *A Place in the Sun: Africa in Italian Colonial Culture from Post-Unification to the Present* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2003); Ruth Ben-Ghiat and Mia Fuller, eds., *Italian Colonialism* (London: Palgrave, 2005); Jacqueline Andall and Derek Duncan, eds., *Italian Colonialism: Legacy and Memory* (London: Peter Lang, 2005).

³³ A complete bibliography of both authors is retrievable through the online research portal of the Biblioteca Nazionale Italiana <http://opac.sbn.it/opacsbn/opac/iccu/base.jsp>.

³⁴ See my “*Italiani brava gente*: The Legacy of Fascist Historical Culture on Italian Politics of Memory,” in Claudio Fogu, Ned Lebow, and Wulf Kansteiner, eds., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 147-76, and Angelo del Boca, *Italiani brava gente? Un mito duro a morire* (Vicenza: Neri Pozza, 2005).

³⁵ Davide Rodogno, *Il nuovo ordine Mediterraneo. Le politiche di occupazione dell'Italia fascista in Europa (1940-1943)* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003). All translations from this text are mine.

refers exclusively to the Fascist occupation of Albania and parts of Dalmatia and Greece between 1940 and 1943, thereby excluding an evaluation of the much larger *Mare Nostrum* cultivated in the colonial imaginary of Italians, in Fascist foreign policy, and in the cultural politics of the regime. The Mediterranean as such has yet to become a central category of interpretation for scholars of either Fascism or Italian colonialism.³⁶

Much more overtly Mediterranean-centered has been the scholarship on Italian foreign policy in the postwar era. As can be seen in the collective volume *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra*, edited by Massimo de Leonardis in 2003, the *Mare Nostrum* has effortlessly positioned itself at the center of all reflections on the past and future of Italian foreign policy.³⁷ It has done so, of course, in direct response to the dramatic acceleration in the political and economic processes of European unification and, more specifically, to the discourse around the consolidation of a Euro-Mediterranean partnership following the “Euro-Mediterranean” conference of Barcelona in 1995.³⁸ The sheer quantity of scholarly publications, foreign policy papers, and pamphlets directed at the larger public makes an evaluation of this fertile field of Mediterraneanist discourse beyond the scope of this essay. We should, however, acknowledge here the importance of institutions such as the *Istituto per Studi di Politica Internazionale* (ISPI) and the much more recently established *Centro Studi Politica Internazionale* (CESPI) in Rome (1985), as well as the *Mediterranean Programme* at the European University Institute in Florence (1999). These institutions have financed numerous conferences and individual research focused on contemporary Mediterranean issues, and the latter has been particularly instrumental in bringing non-European Mediterranean scholars into the mainstream of European conversations on the development and future of the Euro-Med partnership.³⁹ In general, the conferences and collective projects run by these institutions have helped to insert immigration studies into all considerations of Euro-Med relations, and the CESPI has been instrumental in creating a comparative framework for the evaluation of Italian responses to immigration from the Mediterranean area.⁴⁰ What remains problematic, however, about most foreign policy studies is their reification of the Europe / Mediterranean divide. Seen in tandem, these two entities are given as both distinct and clearly defined, while their definitions, if taken in isolation, are much more contentious. Whether one reads contributions to the volume on the Mediterranean in Italian foreign policy edited by de Leonardis, or a more specific collection of essays such as *L'Italia tra Europa e Mediterraneo. Il bivio che non c'è più*, the emphasis is always on the dilemma of either following Europe or turning towards the Mediterranean, even when that dilemma is given as a “fork that is no more.”⁴¹ What remains undefined, however, is what precisely is the Mediterranean and what is Europe in this context, since several European countries (or portions thereof) belong by virtue of geography to the Mediterranean area, and others, even if not directly facing the sea, may be considered,

³⁶ Exceptions include Fabrizio De Donno, “La Razza Ario-Mediterranea. Ideas of Race and Citizenship in Colonial and Fascist Italy, 1885-1941,” *Interventions. International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 8:3 (2006): 394-412, and my “Futurist mediterraneità between Emporium and Imperium,” *Modernism/modernity* 15, 1 (January 2008): 25-43.

³⁷ Massimo de Leonardis, ed., *Il Mediterraneo nella politica estera italiana del secondo dopoguerra* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2003).

³⁸ See Bono, *Un altro Mediterraneo*, 13-17.

³⁹ For a list of the 11 Summer Research Meetings conducted at the EUI go to:

<http://www.rscas.org/Search/archive_MRM.asp>

⁴⁰ See CESPI's website at <<http://www.cespi.it/home.html>>

⁴¹ *L'Italia tra Europa e Mediterraneo. Il bivio che non c'è più* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1998).

historically and culturally, as more Mediterranean than European (i.e., Macedonia).

The problematic implications of Euro-Mediterranean discourse have been at the center of the historian Salvatore Bono's attempt to rethink the Mediterranean from antiquity to the present after the publication of Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea*. A prolific historian of the early modern Mediterranean and of the slave trade in particular, Bono's *Un altro Mediterraneo. Una storia comune tra scontri e integrazioni* (2008) constitutes the most recent and ambitious attempt by an Italian scholar to sketch a Mediterraneanist historical approach that extends from antiquity to the present.⁴² In opposition to Horden and Purcell's sea-centric definition of the Mediterranean historical-cultural area, Bono calls for a re-focusing of scholarship on the subtitle of Braudel's *La Méditerranée*, that is, the "Mediterranean world."⁴³ This "world," for Bono, is "the Mediterranean of history," rather than "geography," that is, "a vast space centered around the internal sea" and comprising "all of Europe, with all of its nations whether or not they belong to the union, the entire Arab world, all the way to the Arabian peninsula, as well as Turkey and Israel, which are state entities equally tied, historically and politically, to Europe as well as to the Mediterranean."⁴⁴ For Bono, this perspective would allow us to see a "history of the Mediterranean" stretching from antiquity to the present without the interruption that Horden and Purcell posit in the twentieth century. Moreover, it would fulfill the challenge that the Mediterranean, as a body of water and as a zone of interactions, brings to the prejudicial marriage of political geography and historiography with continents and nations. In fact, to those who would wonder how "Poland and Morocco" could be "imagined 'together' as belonging to the 'same part' of the world," Bono responds that there exist a shorter distance "not only geographically speaking, between Finland and Poland on the one hand and Syria and Morocco on the other, than between the latter and--respectively--Burma ('Asian' like Syria) and Mozambique ('African' like Morocco)."⁴⁵ In view of the uncertainties of geographers in finding a principle according to which to delimit the Mediterranean, Bono proposes a "geopolitical" conception of the Mediterranean that he calls "pan-Mediterranean."⁴⁶ Yet, as the last two chapters of Bono's book make abundantly clear, his historical pan-Mediterraneism is no mere scholarly alternative to the Mediterranean of geographers. It stands as a "political" label aimed at replacing the terms "Euro-Mediterranean or Euromediterranean," which conceive "the Mediterranean as distinct from, and even opposite to, Europe," so much so that, for Bono, "to speak of or to deal with the Mediterranean has come to refer to the ensemble of issues and problems between Europe as a whole and non-European Mediterranean countries (Arab countries, Turkey, Israel)."⁴⁷ As distinct from the tone of Horden and Purcell's sea-centric Mediterranean, Bono's anti-continental Braudelianism roots itself explicitly in the new wave of Mediterranean historical studies promoted by the *Société internationale des historiens de la Méditerranée* (SIHMED). This society's distinctly "political" goal is to question the continental claims of Europe and thus counteract new forms of Eurocentrism derived from the absorption of the ex-Eastern Bloc countries, political unification, and Europe's attempts to define an identity for itself. It is on this path towards a Mediterraneanism calling into question the very notion of

⁴² Bono, *Un altro Mediterraneo*. All translations from this text are mine.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 73.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 277.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 278.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 282.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 281 and 273.

Europe that historiography encounters an unlikely fellow traveler: deconstruction.

Commenting on Paul Valéry's writings from the 1930s on Europe and the Mediterranean in a lecture delivered in Turin in 1990, Jacques Derrida elaborated the idea of a Europe that is but "a cape, [. . .] an 'appendix' to the body of the 'Asian continent'" into a cultural-geographical predicament, a "heading" towards the North African shore of the Mediterranean.⁴⁸ Facing the twin historic events of the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unification of Germany, Derrida refused to celebrate the victory of capitalism and continental unity by calling for a "European cultural identity" that would be "responsible for itself, for the other, and before the other, to the double question of *le capital*, of capital, and of *la capitale*, of the capital."⁴⁹ In what may turn out to be the quintessential untimely meditation of our times, the Algerian-born philosopher expressed the kernel of a novel kind of Mediterraneanism, which would be at once the exploration of the Mediterranean as "a negative limit and a chance, [. . .] that is the opening of identity towards its very future," and of Europe's "opening onto a history for which the changing of the heading, the relation to the other heading or to the other of the heading, is experienced as always possible."⁵⁰ Although Bono does not cite Derrida in his book and might not have known his text, the former's proposal for a pan-Mediterranean imaginary to counteract a Europe that is constituting its sense of cultural identity in explicit separation from, and even opposition to, a Mediterranean other contains more than an echo of Derrida's decapitation of Europe's dependence on the history of capitalism and the nation state (*la capitale*). More significantly, it contains references to the work of a number of Italian scholars who have been elaborating upon the themes raised by Derrida in his *Reflections on Europe Today*. In fact, the philosophical exploration of and conversation about the Mediterranean *as a revealing of Europe's destiny to itself* may be considered the most original contribution made by Italian scholars to both Mediterraneanism and Mediterranean studies.

Mare Nostrum as Mare Aliorum

As Anna Botta highlights in her tribute in this issue of *CIS* to Pedrag Matvejević's writings, the publication and translation of *Mediterranean Breviary* in 1987 may be considered the starting point of a search for an "intramediterranean culture beyond stereotypes" unfettered by nostalgia for an "ex-world" that has been passionately pursued by philosophers and intellectuals from every corner of the Mediterranean "world" – Matvejević himself being a Bosnian of Croat descent.⁵¹ An intellectual and artistic *koine* has been evolving on the three continental shores of the inland sea. Yet, since the early 1990s, this Mediterranean-based conversation on the Mediterranean has also been growing so fast and so extensively as to make even an account of its participants, let alone a comparative evaluation of common themes and key contributions, an

⁴⁸ Jacques Derrida, *The Other Heading: Reflections on Today's Europe* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1992), 19 and 35.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁵¹ Anna Botta, "Pedrag Matvejević's *Mediterranean Breviary*: Nostalgia for an 'Ex-World' or Breviary for a New Community?" Besides Derrida, we can single out as active participants in this Mediterranean conversation all the authors of the splendid series of ten volumes on *Les Représentations de la Méditerranée (Representations of the Mediterranean)* published by the Maison méditerranéenne des sciences de l'homme: Mohamed Afifi, Edouard al-Kharrat, Muhammad Barrada, Ahmad Beydoun, Eduardo González Calleja, Feride Çiçekoglu, Edhem Eldem, Thierry Fabre, Jean-Claude Izzo, Elisa Khuri, Gregor Meiering, Rania Polycandrioti, 'Abd al-Magid Qadduri, Wolfgang Storch, Takis Theodoropoulos, Manuel Vázquez Montalbán.

impossible enterprise. As Dainotto remarks, one cannot help noticing a “certain inflation of discourses about the Mediterranean,” when a catalogue search in any American university library returns “more than 107 books with 'Mediterraneo' in their title, 229 with 'Méditerranée,' and 1260 with 'Mediterranean' – more than two thirds of which were published in the last fifteen years.”⁵² And the conversation, Dainotto also notices, has progressively expanded far beyond the Mediterranean basin. The Mediterranean has become a “global business: books sell, research centers spring up, and Mediterranean Studies have migrated from Tunis and Bari to Ottawa, Durham (North Carolina), Sidney, and Katmandu.”⁵³ In this respect, Dainotto contends, the foundational metaphor of Mediterranean discourse, “liquidity,” has also become its discursive *modus operandi*. The self-reflexive “liquidity” of Mediterranean discourse has reproduced the very “logic of the market, of competition, of the free circulation of goods and labor,” namely the logic of that “Westernization” of the world that – following Derrida – Mediterranean discourse was supposed to have opposed, stopped, or transformed from the inside. By celebrating Mediterranean “liquidity,” first-world intellectuals situated in the hegemonic institutional sites of European and North American universities – whatever their “good or utopian intentions” – have thus concealed the fundamental “asymmetry” between the European and non-European gazes on the Mediterranean, “selling the contemporary Mediterranean as the best of all possible worlds.”⁵⁴ As Dainotto puts it: “any Italian may write about the Mediterranean [. . .] without bothering with citing Abdelkebir Khatibi, Albert Memmi, or Taieb Belghazi. For a Turkish or Algerian author it is instead impossible (or suicidal) not to confront the ‘Mediterranean’ canonized in European literature – provided, of course, that said author wishes to reach a Mediterranean audience beyond its national borders.”⁵⁵

Like Massimo Troisi’s question about the world as metaphor, Dainotto’s acute observations should serve as a reminder to all scholars about the pitfalls of all Mediterranean discourse. They may however also constitute an invaluable framework for the evaluation of the place that Italian authors and intellectuals occupy within the European hegemony in Mediterranean discourse and, in particular, of a certain lack of “liquidity” in Italian discourse about the Mediterranean. As noticed above, Italy is not just one of the European-Mediterranean nations, but has also become the signifier of Mediterranean-ness in the global cultural market. In Dainotto’s words, the “liquidity” of *made in Italy* is inextricably tied to a global desire for Mediterranean-ness. At the same time, Italian philosophers and intellectuals have long suffered from a subaltern position vis-à-vis French and German scholars in the definition of what counts as “continental” European thought in the global market of ideas. For example, although the names of Massimo Cacciari and Franco Cassano are not unknown to other European and non-European participants in Mediterranean discourse, their ten-year-old seminal works on Mediterranean-ness have yet to be translated either into English or French.⁵⁶ Comparatively speaking, the names of Derrida, Serge Latouche, Edgar Morin, Matvejević, Herzfield, Horden and Purcell have circulated much more widely, and their works have been translated into several languages, including of course Italian. Italian discourse on the Mediterranean occupies vis-à-vis European discourse an intermediary asymmetrical position between European and non-European Mediterranean discourse, for it is

⁵² Dainotto, “Asimmetrie,” 5.

⁵³ Ibid. 5.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 7.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ At last, a translation of Franco Cassano's *Il pensiero meridiano* is forthcoming.

signified as culturally “Mediterranean” (i.e. non-European) by a global market of signs, and yet it addresses itself directly and emphatically to “Europe.” As Francesco Loriggio suggests, “within the Mediterranean, Italy has been something like a laboratory” for a unique sort of Mediterraneism,⁵⁷ because Italian culture itself has historically been excluded from the constitution of the “European” by the key role that Orientalism played in the “West’s mutilation of [its Mediterranean] geography and history.”⁵⁸ To confirm Loriggio’s observation and to begin to ascertain the distinguishing traits of Italian Mediterraneism, we need to turn to the first two texts that initiated this discourse: Franco Cassano’s *Il pensiero meridiano* (1996) and Massimo Cacciari’s *L’arcipelago* (1997).⁵⁹

Although Cassano does not even name him, one can think of his work as a direct response, on both theoretical and ideological grounds, to Herzfeld’s conception of Mediterraneism. For Cassano, beginning with Paul Valéry’s and Albert Camus’s respective writings in the 1930s, and continuing in Pier Paolo Pasolini’s critical and creative practice, a new kind of thinking about the Mediterranean, from the point of view of Mediterranean-ness, has emerged.⁶⁰ Thinking the Mediterranean has brought into being a discourse among Mediterranean-born intellectuals and artists that is aimed at rescuing the image-concept of the “South” – not the Mediterranean *per se* – from any Northern inflection of Mediterraneism. “Southern thought” – as *Il pensiero meridiano* has been rightly translated – is therefore a response to Mediterraneism.⁶¹ It is the discourse of an “autonomous South” that has regained “the dignity of being the subject of its own thinking, and interrupted its being a mere ‘object’ of thought for Northern Europeans.”⁶² In this respect, as Cassano stresses in the introduction to the 2005 edition of his book, “the theoretical move enacted by southern thought” is very different from both the discursive object and the theoretical description of Orientalism.⁶³ The key difference is not only that “southern thought” has come to confront head-on Mediterraneist discourse, but also that for Mediterraneism the Mediterranean is not like the exotic Orient/Other against which Europe constituted itself as the West in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but rather, it is a “not-yet,” or “incomplete North.”⁶⁴ In other words, the Mediterraneist depiction of the Mediterranean-South, oscillating “between a paradise for tourists and an archaic hell dominated by the mafia,” presupposes the imposition of a teleological “conception of historical time,” by means of which the promise to the South to become part of the North is simultaneously affirmed and negated.⁶⁵ Cassano’s *Il pensiero meridiano*, then, proposes both a description of southern thought and an

⁵⁷ Francesco Loriggio, “Modernism, Memory, and the Mediterranean: Italian Variations,” in Luca Somigli and Domenico Pietropaolo, eds., *Modernism and Modernity in the Mediterranean World* (New York and Ottawa: Legas, 2006), 17.

⁵⁸ Francesco Loriggio, “Allegories of Modernity: Space, Time, and the Mediterranean,” in Wojtec Jirat-Wasiutynski and Ane Dymond, eds., *Modern Art and the Idea of the Mediterranean* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), 48.

⁵⁹ Franco Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano* (Bari: Laterza, 2005), first edition 1996, and Massimo Cacciari, *Arcipelago* (Venice: Adelphi, 1997). Of course focusing on Cassano and Cacciari excludes many key participants in the conversation, but it offers the advantage of looking at the founding texts referred to by all subsequent participants in the discourse.

⁶⁰ On Pasolini see also Gian Maria Annovi’s essay in this issue of *CIS*.

⁶¹ Cassano has published only one article in English, entitled “Southern Thought,” *Thesis Eleven* 67 (2001): 1-10.

⁶² Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano*, 5.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, XII.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, VIII and XIII.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, XIII.

exemplary *act* of anti-Mediterraneism.

Unmistakably the tone of Cassano's reflections,, even more than the content, testifies to a novel sense of self-assertion. At the same time, it follows very closely upon the path traced by Derrida's writings, for it carries with it a frontal attack on Europe as both "continent" and "capital." It is not so much the Mediterranean that is being thought here, but rather a European-Atlantic perspective that is being deconstructed. In other words, *Il pensiero meridiano* aims at rescuing the Mediterranean from its identification with nostalgia and the pre-modern, while at the same time articulating a relationship between Mediterranean-ness and modernity able to counteract and reject the dominant Western-Atlantic vision of the modern. Southern thought turns out to be nothing short of a radical reworking of Western ideas of time and space as they rotate around the chronotope of Ulysses's voyage, i.e. the going out to sea *in order* to return to land. From this chronotopical principle Cassano derives the three essential elements of southern thought. First, it rejects all forms of "fundamentalism," but in particular that of capital(ism) – understood as an unrestrained drive towards the abstraction and dematerialization of all values. Second, the anchoring of history to an idea of "slow time" is radically different from the Faustian-Hegelian time of indefinitely accelerating progress endorsed by the West in its Atlantic phase, and symbolized by Melville's Ahab. Slow Mediterranean time, by contrast, is symbolized for Cassano by Ulysses, the hero of "return." Lastly, and above all, a "sense of measure" (inspired by Albert Camus) prevents the Mediterranean imaginary from pursuing the Atlantic path of transcending both time and space.⁶⁶ Southern thought, in short, posits Mediterranean-ness as a dialectic of leaving *for* returning, as owning time, and as living within a bounded horizon.

Cassano knows, of course, that southern thought is not a "natural" form of Mediterranean thinking. In fact, he readily admits that Mediterraneanism is a mode of thought that even Mediterranean intellectuals – whether European, North African, or Turkish – have absorbed, held on to, and reproduce constantly, as Herzfeld charges in "Practical Mediterraneanism."⁶⁷ Yet he also claims that southern thought has made inroads among Italian intellectuals and artists, as well as with the public at large, because of the unique weight of the "southern question" in Italian history, politics, and collective consciousness.⁶⁸ Following Pasolini's early elaboration of "southern thought," Italian intellectuals have internalized the "connection between the Italian South and all other Souths in the world" and are prone to conceiving the Mediterranean and Mediterranean-ness in explicit geopolitical terms – as even the case of a historian such as Bono, discussed above, may confirm.⁶⁹ Implicit in Cassano's enterprise we therefore find the recognition, assertion, and even exploitation of the configuration that positions Italy as a global signifier of Mediterranean-ness. In fact, the geophilosophical premises of *Il pensiero meridiano* have been developed by Cassano in later works, such as *Paeninsula* (1998) and *L'alternativa mediterranea* (2008), in which he has proposed a more sustained reflection on the geopolitical implications of Italy's physical aspect and position in the Mediterranean.⁷⁰ But this geophilosophical development in his thought has not changed the basic tenets of southern thought for Cassano. Rather, as evidenced by his 2005 introduction to *Il pensiero meridiano*, it

⁶⁶ Cassano, "Southern Thought," 3, 7, and 10.

⁶⁷ Herzfeld, "Practical Mediterraneanism," 52.

⁶⁸ Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano*, IX.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Franco Cassano, *Paeninsula. L'Italia da ritrovare* (Bari: Laterza, 1998), especially 45-58, and "Necessità del Mediterraneo," in Franco Cassano and Danilo Zolo, eds., *L'alternativa mediterranea* (Milan: Feltrinelli, 2007), 78-110.

has signaled a lively and productive conversation between Cassano and other Italian and Mediterranean thinkers, especially with Massimo Cacciari, the Italian philosopher most closely associated with geophilosophy.

In 1997, one year after *Il pensiero meridiano*, Cacciari published *Arcipelago* (1997), a book that may have provided the Euro-Mediterranean image against which Cassano conceived his Italo-(centric)-Mediterranean *Paeninsula*. Contrary to Cassano, Cacciari does not identify the Mediterranean with the South, and his discourse cannot be classified as either Mediterraneanist or southern thought. Following both Derrida's lead and Deleuze's geophilosophical approach, Cacciari extrapolates one physical feature of the Mediterranean to reconfigure Europe itself. For Cacciari, Europe is an "*archi-pélagos*," an ensemble of distinct islands "divided by the sea, and by the same sea intertwined; all nourished by the sea, and endangered by the same sea."⁷¹ Cacciari's Mediterranean is neither Europe's other, nor Europe's destiny towards its other (North Africa); it is more like Europe's shadow, an imprint left by the continent on the sand, and that Cacciari reads like so many murky grounds deposited on the bottom of a cup of Turkish coffee. Europe as Mediterranean archipelago shares the sea's direction towards the sunset (the Atlantic Ocean, the Occident) and the "beyond" (the Pillars of Hercules), forever caught in a "tragic dialectic" between "*dià-logos* and *pólemos*."⁷² It is this double nature of the Mediterranean as Europe, its "*flowing* towards the sunset" but also its being "constitutive of its light," for which Cacciari accuses Cassano of having failed to account with his identification of the Mediterranean with the South.⁷³ For Cacciari, in fact, it is not the Derrida of *The Other Heading* but rather of *The Politics of Friendship* (1995) who is the true Mediterranean thinker. Following Derrida's redefinition of the (European) community as being made up of individuals "*who only love separating and going far from each other*," Cacciari invokes the Nietzschean superman to emphasize that the archipelago is in fact a community of distinct entities, and thus concludes his Euro-Mediterranean musing by calling for a Europe that would simultaneously go beyond the limit of, and live within, the sunset of the Occident.⁷⁴ As he phrases it: a "community of 'stellar friendships' [. . .] that embraces the stranger and the enemy."⁷⁵

At first sight, the proposition that Cacciari is not just *a* figure, but *the* key figure, in both Cassano's development of southern thought from 1998 to the present and, consequently, in the development of Italian discourse around the Mediterranean may appear puzzling, given the uncanny absence of this influential philosopher and political thinker from Cassano's footnotes and bibliographies. Unless, of course, one is willing – as I am suggesting – to consider the absence of Cacciari in Cassano's texts as a sign of his overwhelming presence as an unacknowledged challenge. One may thus understand Cassano's reluctance to confront directly Cacciari's revision of the Mediterranean, for the latter not only represents a very different type of discourse from the Eurocentric and Mediterraneanist discourses that Cassano explicitly denounces, but also treads much of the same philosophical ground covered by Cassano in his book. Derrida, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Camus, and Latouche all make their appearance in both Cassano and Cacciari, although the latter adds a central figure to his discussion that seems to

⁷¹ Cacciari, *Arcipelago*, 16. All translations from this text are mine.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 23.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 147.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 148.

deconstruct one of the central axioms of Cassano's paradigm: Dante's Ulysses.⁷⁶ Functioning as the other of Melville's Ahab, Cassano's Ulysses is a monolithic Homeric hero. For Cacciari instead, Ulysses is also the "shipwrecked" character conceived by Dante in the *Divine Comedy* as wandering across the Mediterranean pushed by his insatiable "curiosity" to go beyond the Pillars of Hercules.⁷⁷ Undoubtedly, with this textual move, Cacciari allows us a glimpse into Cassano's reification of the Mediterranean flow, and poses important questions regarding certain extreme polarizations and exclusionary tendencies in Cassano's version of southern thought. Yet, by ending his book with Derrida's call for a politics of friendship resting on a "fundamental imperative to welcome; a duty of hospitality towards those who are truly foreigners," Cacciari's own geophilosophical reflections leads us right back to the Mediterranean as South.⁷⁸ Cacciari's call cannot but refer to the contemporary Mediterranean where Europe no longer encounters *the other* but, in fact, the "stranger" and "the enemy." Quite uncannily, this turn in Cacciari's text gestures towards Cassano's hometown, Bari, and its exemplary reception of Albanian refugees in the early 1990s, which may be contrasted to the xenophobia of the many supporters of the *Liga veneta* in Mayor Cacciari's own Venezia.⁷⁹

That Cassano and Cacciari have conducted an implicit dialogue over the years, and that this dialogue has marked the intellectual imaginary of younger scholars, is made evident by the publication – ten years after *Il pensiero meridiano* and *Arcipelago* – of Francesca Saffioti's *Geofilosofia del mare. Tra oceano e Mediterraneo* (2007).⁸⁰ Saffioti turns her gaze upon the European masters of the discourse on the Mediterranean themselves – from Camus to Braudel, Derrida, Latouche, and Matvejević – with an eye to include in their conversation both Cacciari and Cassano. In this respect, *Geofilosofia del mare* is self-conscious about both the subaltern position still occupied by Italian intellectuals vis-à-vis their continental peers and the implicit dialogue between Cassano's and Cacciari's respective positions. Yet Saffioti's book is by no means a *summa filosofica*, nor a mere riffing on Mediterraneanist discourse by Mediterranean-European philosophers. The point of departure is geophilosophical, as in Cacciari; and following him along the trail blazed by Carl Schmitt, it is the oppositional relationship between sea and land that interests Saffioti. She nevertheless conducts her philosophical inquiry starting from Cassano's reflections on the differences between Mediterranean *sea* and Atlantic *Ocean*. Along this path, and by way of Latouche, Saffioti's reflections expand the horizon of her predecessors' reflections, in order to insert the relationship between the Mediterranean and Europe in a global framework of reflection that focuses on the new "Occident" inaugurated by America. Departing from the now customary commonplace of all Mediterraneanist discourse that the Mediterranean "West" corresponds to a living within limits, an aesthetic of the beautiful, and a *relation* between water and land, Saffioti historicizes the "Occident" by associating it with the early modern voyages of discovery, the opening up of the European mind to the "man of technology," and the Baroque aesthetic of the sublime. Her first conclusion is that the New World, and in particular the United States of America, were not a "mere projection of the idealized characteristics of Europe [. . .] but the result of a self-assumption of the geophilosophical characteristics of the

⁷⁶ Ibid., 65-73.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 65.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 148.

⁷⁹ Massimo Cacciari is in his second turn as mayor of Venice since 2005.

⁸⁰ Francesca Saffioti, *Geofilosofia del mare. Tra oceano e Mediterraneo* (Reggio Emilia: Diabasis, 2007). See also Saffioti's piece in this issue.

Ocean.”⁸¹ America is for Saffioti the transformation of Cacciari’s Europe as the “land of sunset” into the “sunset of land,” that is, the projection of “the world as *free space* [. . .] to be ordered according to a technology no longer land-bound.”⁸² We are, then, in the presence of an “Occident without sunset.”⁸³

Saffioti reads American democracy as geosymbolically connected to the “smooth, indistinct, and homogeneous” surface of the ocean “in which men, as equal as they are among themselves, do not form a State [sic] or a community, since they have no tie that hold them back from dispersion.” This is a prelude to the original geophilosophical question that her book explores, namely that of the “frontier.”⁸⁴ Without the Mediterranean connection between limit (*limes*) and frontier, which implies, according to Cassano, an intensified relation to the other, the oceanic logic of the frontier that characterizes the westward expansion of the United States is u-topic (in the sense of *non luogo*, non-place) and deterritorializing. Once the other ocean (the Pacific) is reached, this logic cannot but extend itself to the whole world and transform the definitive sunset of the “historical West” into global “Westernization.”⁸⁵ From this analysis, Saffioti not only derives her original reading of the “absent political” role of the United States in the UN as due to the “oceanic principle of freedom *from* politics,” but also the input to justify her proposal for a European (re-)turn to an “other” Mediterranean-South, *à la* Derrida and Cassano, and a “revolt,” *à la* Camus, against global “Westernization.”⁸⁶ In the last quarter of the book, Saffioti thus elaborates her notion of a European unification process that she reads as effectively – if not explicitly – oriented towards the Mediterranean as “Europe’s other head.”⁸⁷ Against the oceanic destruction of all frontiers, Europe proposes a “deeper engagement with the sense of the frontier, its double line, its marginality and extreme-ness,” and this is why Europe needs to think itself as both *archipelagos*, according to Cacciari, and *paeninsula*, according to Cassano.⁸⁸ In particular, according to Saffioti, Europe needs Italy and its “peninsular thinking” in order “not to forget that its border is necessarily double,” in order to realize a Mediterranean form of democracy (*democrazia mediterranea*) founded not only on the impossibility of fixing an identity for itself, but also on the injunction always to “*re-volt*, turn itself toward the other.”⁸⁹ To the American flight from the political, Europe would respond with a “*cosmopolitics* of differences, that would accept the burden and the arduous task of mediating [. . .] among *large spaces* open, hospitable, and interrelated [. . .] according to the model of the archipelago.”⁹⁰ This way, Saffioti elaborates upon Cacciari’s spelling out of the “logic of hospitality” as the Mediterranean ability of Europe to “*welcome another that comes from the sea*,” and to remember “that it is both marked at its origin by the other, by its ‘intrusion,’ and, in its turn, it has been other for the other: invader, traveler, exile.”⁹¹

⁸¹ Ibid., 53 and 83. All translations from this text are mine.

⁸² Ibid., 84.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 87.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 89.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 91 and 149.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 172.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 176.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 185 and 222.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 229.

⁹¹ Ibid., 231 and 233.

Quite consciously, Saffioti's *Geofilosofia del mare* weaves Cacciari's preoccupation with the sunset of Europe into the southern warp spun by Cassano from *Il pensiero meridiano* onward. In fact, after *Paeninsula* (1998), Cassano has continued to develop his arguments in his contribution to *Rappresentare il Mediterraneo. Lo sguardo italiano* (2000) and the volume *L'alternativa mediterranea* (2007) that he co-edited with Danilo Zolo.⁹² In both volumes – as well as in the interview published in this issue of *CIS* – one notices a certain growth in Cassano's attention to the anti-fundamentalist and anti-capitalist traits of southern thought, corresponding to a higher degree of interest in inserting the Mediterranean into the more global perspective developed by Saffioti. Whether in the form of spirited debates over the differences between European and American forms of capitalism-imperialism, or reflections on Arnold Toynbee's theories of civilization, or conscious efforts to bring into the European dialogue non-European voices such as those of Martya Sen, Mohamemed Arkoun, Fatima Mernissi, and Tariq Ramadan, southern thought seems to have abandoned some of the irreverent tone with which it started, in favor of a more self-consciously counter-hegemonic project. This shift is nowhere more noticeable than in the historicist bent that Cassano's arguments have taken in his more recent work. In "Contro tutti i fondamentalismi," Cassano compresses into thirty-two pages the history of Italy's relationship to the Mediterranean from Unification to the present, and in "Necessità del Mediterraneo" he anticipates Saffioti in pointing to the oceanic Occident as the "principal producer" of fundamentalisms "since the beginning, at least, of the modern age."⁹³ As we have seen, this same historicist direction is followed by Saffioti, who patterns her book on the historical progression from ancient Mediterranean Europe to modern oceanic America. In the process, however, a marked difference between the contemporary and earlier phase of Italian discourse on the Mediterranean has emerged. Side by side with the explicit or implicit identification of the Mediterranean with southern-ness, there circulates in both Cassano and Cacciari, in the 1990s, the image of the Mediterranean as source of inspiration for a counter-hegemonic form of historical consciousness. This image was present in Cassano's identification of southern thought as "searching in the sacred for the ability to resist commodification as the unstoppable law of history," or in his "elegy" of Mediterranean "slowness" against the occidental "*homo currens*."⁹⁴ And it was fully developed by Cacciari in a Nietzschean and deconstructive direction, which identified Europe with the "end of sense" and the "sense of an ending."⁹⁵ Contrasting this earlier phase with the recent turn of Italian discourse on Mediterranean-ness towards a more global dimension of dialogue and interpretation, one may thus be tempted to posit an evolution from an antihistoricist mode that gave it a tone at once more subaltern and corrosive to a historicist mode at once more self-conscious of its global appeal and more self-assertive. Yet the antihistoricist slant initially associated with Italian constructions of Mediterranean-ness has not disappeared. In fact, it has assumed center stage in the final work under consideration in this essay, Iain Chambers' *Le molte voci del Mediterraneo* (2007).⁹⁶

⁹² Franco Cassano, "Contro tutti i fondamentalismi. Il nuovo Mediterraneo," in Vincenzo Consolo e Franco Cassano, a cura di, *Rappresentare il Mediterraneo. Lo sguardo italiano* (Messina: Mesogea, 2000), 37-69, and Franco Cassano, "Necessità del Mediterraneo," in Franco Cassano e Danilo Zolo, a cura di, *L'alternativa mediterranea* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007), 78-110.

⁹³ Cassano, "Necessità," 82. All translations from this text are mine.

⁹⁴ Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano*, 8, 51, and 63.

⁹⁵ Cacciari, *Arcipelago*, 83.

⁹⁶ Iain Chambers, *Le molte voci del Mediterraneo* (Milano: Raffaello Cortina, 2007). The book has been published

Chambers teaches at the branch of the University of Naples known as *L'Orientale*, where he has founded the first center of postcolonial studies in Italy.⁹⁷ Both of these facts weigh on the composition of *Le molte voci del Mediterraneo*. At once deeply personal and committed to bringing postcolonial discourse out of the backwaters of Italian academia and into the center of Mediterranean metaphorizing, Chambers' book merges a profound act of homage to the "European, Mediterranean, and world city" of Naples (110) with a powerful critique of the Euro-humanist tradition that transits through Croce's historicism while forgetting the lesson of the other Neapolitan-Mediterranean philosopher of history, Giovambattista Vico. The book begins with a series of chapters using the geophilosophical image of Mediterranean fluidity to criticize the way in which the land-bound, nation-bound foundations of modern historical consciousness have not only suppressed vast chunks of non-European hegemony in the Mediterranean, but also negated a Mediterranean "hearing" of history modeled after the plural "voices" and "rhythms" of its "polylinguistic and polycultural composition" and the "tributary histories that flow into the 'modern' framing of the world."⁹⁸ Against the vision-driven, progress-driven, monotheistic "fundamentalism of Occidental humanism," Chambers proposes the "Baroque" notion of a historical writing that looks into the (Deleuzian) "folds" of modernity in order to disavow the "empty, homogeneous continuum of historical time."⁹⁹ This would be a historiography that relocates the gaze "in the historical swell of a tempestuous sea, where no single perspective is ever able to fully impose its view," and thus produces a history "lost at sea," "vulnerable to encounters," a historical poetics of "pulsation" akin to the experimental prose of Walter Benjamin's *Passagenwerk*.¹⁰⁰

Chambers' is no mere "call for . . ." a Mediterranean poetics of history, but a battle cry. Self-confident in the unfolding of metaphors of fluidity, he passes from reminding us that, before decolonization, North Africa was once the "southern border" of Europe, to denouncing the historiographical silence about "Arab-Ottoman hegemony" over the Mediterranean between the eighth and eighteenth centuries of our era, to pointing out the intimate connection between Italian politics of colonial forgetting and the academic attribution of the "postcolonial" as the province of non-Italian literatures, cultures, and histories.¹⁰¹ To hold it all together, Chambers adopts the figure of the "modern migrant," who is not only "suspended in the intersections of economic, political, and cultural dispossession," but is also a "condensed interrogation of the very identity of the modern political subject," the image of a "precariousness [that] is ultimately also *ours*."¹⁰² As a migrant-historian Chambers thus takes us towards the body that savors the plurality of "migrating cultures" via the "incredible composition of the Mediterranean diet," and hears the "cultural testimony of music" that makes of the Mediterranean "a complex echo chamber where the migrancy of music suggests histories and cultures sounding off and sounding out, transforming and transmuting each other."¹⁰³ We meet in Chambers' book the signs of a deep subaltern memory captured by the 1992 hit song [Figli di Annibale](#), by the Neapolitan group

in English with the title *Mediterranean Crossings: The Politics of an Interrupted Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke, University Press, 2008). All quotations are from the English edition.

⁹⁷ http://www.iuo.it/index2.php?content_id=234&content_id_start=1

⁹⁸ Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 2, 32, and 15.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 33 and 27.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 6, 16, and 29.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 7.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 37, 42, and 48.

Almamegretta. One of the key passages of this song remarks that “Hannibal defeated the Romans, remaining in Italy as a ruler for fifteen or twenty years, that’s why many Italians have dark skin [. . .].” . And Chambers is right to see in this refrain both a “critique of a ‘Neapolitan’ song tradition that represents itself as though it were an autonomous grammar of being” and a place where “the African and European shores are rendered proximate, and mutually translatable, as subaltern musics (dub, reggae, Neapolitan dialect, raï, and urban Arab mixes) mingle in a shared sea of sound.”¹⁰⁴ Furthermore, this song also speaks to the growing popularity of the great Carthaginian general in Italian discourse on Mediterranean-ness.

As Silvio Marconi and Paolo Rumiz have separately argued, Hannibal symbolizes a “network” idea of the Mediterranean that was defeated by the Roman-Imperial vision of a “spider web” Mediterranean, but that has survived to be revived first by the Arabs in the Middle Ages and again today by contemporary migrants.¹⁰⁵ In this respect, the exaltation of the Carthaginian hero registers both the definitive demise of the *Mare Nostrum* mytheme and the desire to emancipate the Mediterranean from the Greco-Roman legacy. In fact, in replacing Ulysses as an icon of a new anti-imperialist, anti-Eurocentric, and anti-identitarian vision of Mediterranean-ness, Hannibal may have provided a key point of contact between the growing *koine* of Mediterraneanist intellectuals in Italy and a Mediterranean musical subculture that predated it and now includes masters of innovation such as Pino Daniele, with his 2001 CD *Medina*.¹⁰⁶ The Almamegretta endorse Martin Bernal’s provocative theses in their song [Black Athena](#) (1998) to confirm that the shift from *Mare Nostrum* to *Mare Aliorum* is one that, in Italy, has a strong popular-cultural dimension. Chambers’ book, however, does not explore further this staying with Hannibal and Almamegretta as it leads us on a migrant tour of the Mediterranean-network city par excellence: Naples.

Chambers literally takes us on a walk through Naples, disclosing its “porous modernity” that interrogates our “inherited understanding of urban life, architecture, and planning” and returns “the question of the city to the relationship between politics and poetics.”¹⁰⁷ He describes a “vertical” city of archaeological sediments and social stratifications to which the sea “remains an accessory,” but his gaze and ours is captured by the “profoundly Baroque” nature of Naples.¹⁰⁸ The Baroque is for Chambers much more than the aesthetic cipher of Naples, and is not at all synonymous with “ornamental matter.”¹⁰⁹ It is rather the embodiment of a “sensually assembled” gaze, a “mutable point of view revealed by the body,” for which to explain (*spiegare*) means to “disclose complexity” and trace it in the “folds” (*pieghe*) of the world.¹¹⁰ This is why Chambers includes Giovambattista Vico in his Baroque version of Naples as the philosopher who translated this city of “historical sediments, detritus and contingent configurations” into the first modern idea of history.¹¹¹ History, that is, “the untidy and incomplete testament to lives lived in a

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 47.

¹⁰⁵ Silvio Marconi, *Reti mediterranee. Le censurate matrici afro-mediterranee della nostra civiltà* (Roma: Gamberetti Editore, 2003), especially 53-58 and 87-92; and Paolo Rumiz, *Annibale. Un viaggio* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2008).

¹⁰⁶ Hannibal shows up for example in Giuseppe Goffredo, *Cadmo cerca Europa. Il Sud fra il Mediterraneo e l’Europa* (Torino: Bollati Boringhieri, 2000), 87-88.

¹⁰⁷ Chambers, *Mediterranean Crossings*, 86.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 84 and 89.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 96.

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid., 103.

worldly frame,” is founded on a “poetic understanding” of the “power of language” and of the “centrality of metaphor in the articulation of knowledge”: above all, however, it points to the quintessential lesson of the Baroque about the “layered folds” and the lack of transparency “*between* language and event.”¹¹² Although Chambers’ walk continues past Vico’s library and home, reaching Croce’s former residence in the splendidly Baroque Palazzo Filomarino, here it stumbles on an indigestible dose of “absolute historicism” that has become a hegemonic form of “critical common sense” impervious to “radical problematization and critical appropriation.”¹¹³

At this key moment of encounter, Chambers does not confront the many *folds* of Croce’s own historicism, either in his *Storia del regno di Napoli* (1925) or in his debt to Vico’s poetics of history, nor is Chambers capable of including Croce within the fold of his manifold idea of Mediterranean crossings. He simply pushes on towards further “subaltern” and “counter-hegemonic” sites of post-Baroque historiography: chief among them the failed revolution of “1799” and the “*questione meridionale*” (Southern question) as it appears in the writings of Antonio Gramsci, Ernesto De Martino, and Pier Paolo Pasolini.¹¹⁴ Here Chambers finds the legitimate Mediterranean heirs of Vico, who rejected the idea that “the archaic is somehow external and foreign to modernity” and pointed the way toward the recognition that “the foreigner, the stranger, the immigrant” as “internal,” just “like the space between words – silent but essential for meaning – becomes integral, central, to another conception of the world we inhabit.”¹¹⁵ And with this simile, we come back full circle to the beginning of our inquiry, although not without noting that the liquid metaphoricality exalted by Troisi in *Il postino* and problematized by Dainotto does not exhaust the poetics of Mediterranean-ness in contemporary Italian discourse and culture. This “other” conception of the world we inhabit, so eloquently invoked by Chambers, is another fold of the same Mediterranean discourse that we encountered with Cassano, Cacciari, and Saffioti, held together at the seams by a common translation of *nostrum* into *aliorum*. What remains to be seen is whether and how far Mediterranean Studies, in Italy and abroad, will respond to the southern wind of Italian thought.

¹¹² Ibid., 105 and 104.

¹¹³ Ibid., 108.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 109-06.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 106-21.

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