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**“Bridge, Wall, Mirror;  
Coexistence and Confrontations  
in the Mediterranean World.”**

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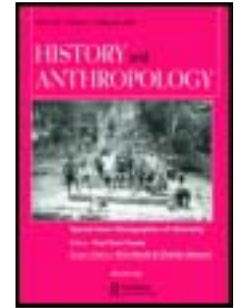
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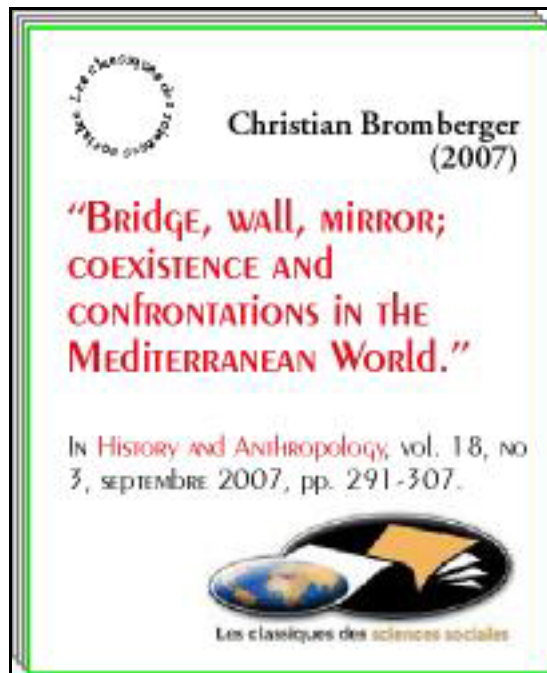
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***Abstract***

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This article examines three contradictory images of the Mediterranean : the “polyphonic” one of exchange, *convivenza*, diffusions, and cohabitation ; the “cacophonous” one of conflict, incompatibility, hostility, aggression, and ethnic cleansing ; and the “anthropological” one of underlying cultural complicities. Each image has had its own literary exponents, and selectively draws upon its own source examples. The author then explores some of the problems associated with each model. For example, for the first model, the notions of hybridity or *metisage* are criticized because they are incompatible with the logic of the religions of the book, and because the social fluidity contained in these concepts is not borne out by practices and the sentiments of group membership and identity. Whilst the author agrees that the criticisms of the Mediterranean as a uniform cultural area with static attributes and limits (the “Anthropological Mediterranean”) are justified, he nevertheless suggests what gives coherence to the Mediterranean world is not so much the evident similarities but the differences that form a system. These complementary differences, inscribed in a reciprocal field, allow us to speak of a Mediterranean system. Attempting to synthesize Freud's notion of “the narcissism of minor differences” with Wittgenstein's concept of “family resemblances”, the article suggests the image of the insupportable twin, the one who is

too much like us. Everyone is defined in the Mediterranean in a game of mirrors (customs, behaviours, affiliations) with his neighbour. All neighbours are close relatives who share Abrahamic origins and their behaviour only makes sense in this relational game. The article concludes by suggesting that to approach the Mediterranean it is essential to examine both its constitutive “family resemblances” and contradictions, and to analyze the interplay of reciprocal differences that now rigidify and then relax. The article thus attempts to explain how such opposed models of “polyphony/harmony” and “cacophony/hostility” could have been [292] constructed based upon some degree of valid (but partial) evidence, and to move beyond and synthesize them into a dynamic anthropological analytical programme.

**Keywords:** Mediterranean Anthropology, Literary Models, Social Differentiation and Identity, Symbolic Markers

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How are we to think about the relations “between...Others” in the Mediterranean world, and in the long term ? Anthropology, history, but also literature —that other way of perceiving the world— have suggested several contradictory answers to this type of big question. It is these contradictions that I would like to briefly examine in order to try to propose complementary frames of interpretation, besides the tested models which define the tradition of Mediterranean studies.

### *Three Mediterraneans*

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Three Mediterraneans, each with a well-marked profile, appear when one examines the disparate works which have taken this sea as their horizon : a Mediterranean of exchanges and meetings ; a Mediterranean of conflicts and hatred ; a Mediterranean in which the societies which border it present family resemblances of underlying cultural complicities, beyond the fractures which separate them.

## *Polyphony*

The first Mediterranean is the one of exchanges, coexistences, harmonious polyphonies, *convivenza*, symbolized by emblematic places, persons, objects.

This vision, often strongly idealized, finds its anchorage and its justification in a few memorable episodes and situations of a shared history (1) : Andalusia at the time of the Umayyad caliphate of Cordova, of which, “we carry within us”, said Jacques Berque (1981 : 43), “at once the scattered fragments and the tireless hope” (2) ; the cultural crossroads which was Palermo under the reign, in the 12th century, of the Norman Roger II, then in the 13th century, of his grandson, the Germanic Frederick II. The former ordered a planisphere representing the world from the great geographer Al-Idirisi, who had pursued his studies in Cordova, accompanied by 2,500 names, a work which was called *Al-kitâb al-Rujâri* (“the Book of Roger”). The latter knew Greek, Latin, Italian, Provençal, the *Langue d'oïl*, Arabic, and no doubt Hebrew : he composed poems in Italian and in Provençal and a treatise on falconry in Latin. <sup>1</sup>

Closer to us sociologically and historically, this Mediterranean of confluences and meetings is incarnated in the port cities and cosmopolitan world-cities which were, in the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, before the emergence of the rigid exclusivisms of nationalisms and blocs, such as Istanbul, Smyrna, Beirut, Alexandria, Algiers, Trieste and Marseilles. Each one of these cities had its literary voice, sometimes its literary review, such as the *Cahiers du Sud* of Jean Ballard in Marseilles, *Rivages* of Edmond Charlot and Albert Camus in Algiers, *Aguedal* of [293] Henri Bosco in Rabat. These works exalted a Mediterranean which was both imaginary and real : a Mediterranean, as Albert Camus told us (republished 1965 : 1321), “where Orient and Occident live together. And at his point of confluence”, he continued, “there is no difference between the way of life of a Spaniard and an Italian on the quays of Algiers and the Arabs who surround them... We are here in a Mediterranean

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<sup>1</sup> On this amazing sovereign, see the classic work of Kantorowicz (2000).



against Rome”—Rome which symbolized in the polemical debates of the 1930s, a Mediterranean anchored in imperial Antiquity, with occidental, Latin and classical pre-eminence. The most striking evocation of the Mediterranean world-cities, with their *lingua franca*, is surely the one left to us by Lawrence Durrell in the *Alexandria Quartet*, whose principal personages are Nassim the Coptic prince, Justine the elegant Jewish woman, Melissa from Smyrna, Darley the Irishman, Clea the Italian woman, Balthazar the Jewish doctor attracted by the Gnostics who directs a group of Cabalistic studies, and all the Muslims who surround them. “Five races, five languages, a dozen religions, five fleets which cruise outside the oily waters of the port”. But there are also, Durrell continues, “five sexes : only demotic Greek seems able to distinguish them”. Defining itself as “the queen of the Mediterranean”, Alexandria was, at the dawn of the First World War, a candidate for the holding of the Olympic games. <sup>2</sup>

Out of this Mediterranean of tolerant coexistences, of meetings, of the interpenetration of cultural works, there emerge some emblematic personal figures who have been naturally seized upon by the pioneers of the dialogues of civilization, in the front rank of whom appears the great orientalist Louis Massignon. One thinks, of course, of Ibn Rushd (Averroes), that bright light of Andalusia, translator and commentator—“the author of the great commentary”, said Dante—of the work of Aristotle which he transmitted to the Christian West. <sup>3</sup> We must also cite the Majorcan philosopher of the 13th and 14th centuries, Raymond Lulle, who learned Arabic at the age of thirty-three and introduces, in his *Book of the Gentile and Three Wise Men*, three professors, one a Jew, the second a Christian, the third a Muslim who each in turn explain to a “Gentile” the foundations of their faith. “At the time of taking leave”, Lulle tells us (1968, edition : 119)—when the

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<sup>2</sup> For Alexandria in the contemporary epoch, see Ilbert (1992, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> “It must be repeated”, comments de Libera (1999 : 26), “it is a translation in the interior of the land of Islam, created by the Muslim conquest, which made possible the return of Greek science to the Latin world. But Greek science did not arrive alone, Arab science accompanied it. And moreover, the figure of the Muslim intellectual from which proceeded, whatever one may say about it and contrary to every expectation, that first rough sketch of the European intellectual which was the *magister artium* of the university, the professor of philosophy.”

Gentile has converted to one of the three faiths without, however Lulle saying to which one “there was much embracing and kissing, crying and weeping”.

Alongside these intellectual beacons and on the scale of daily life, we must mention the multitude of go-betweens, the intermediaries between communities, among whom the *dragoman* (the interpreter in the Ottoman empire) is one of the most significant figures. In *Vidal et les siens* (1989) Edgar Morin portrays this multi-faceted personage through the evocation of his own grand-father, a Shepardic Jew born in Leghorn, established in Salonika, speaking Italian, French, Turkish, Greek and *dragoman* for the consulates of France and of Belgium. This Mediterranean of crossings, is also that, in the long run, of the diffusion of techniques in the Middle Ages, in a direction opposite to the one which prevails today : from paper to confectionary, the innovations then came from the Orient, as Jack Goody notes in his recent synthesis on “Islam in Europe” (2004), in which he summarizes the contributions of the Islamic civilizations in the domains of agricultural, architectural, musical and culinary techniques.

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Circulation of objects, of ideas, of languages, circulation of men who sometimes move on to less radiant fates, mass movements of people draining, in the contemporary epoch, millions of individuals from the South to the North ; pious peregrinations, sometimes encumbered and conflictual, on this earth where God, his prophets and his witnesses have established their residence ; mercantile movements with their shadowy entrepreneurs these days spreading their activities in trans-national spaces and re-inventing the routes from Algiers to Istanbul, Dubai and Hong Kong <sup>4</sup> ; movements and diasporas linked to exile, but also floods of tourists on the contemporary scale (260 million of these outsiders were counted in the Mediterranean countries in 1995), and Jeremy Boissevain (2001 : 680) correctly tells us that to neglect this component of social life would be as bad as to make an anthropological study on the Nuer (a famous tribe of herdsmen in the Sudan) without taking into account the place that cattle-breeding occupies in this society.

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<sup>4</sup> On these contemporary commercial networks, see Peraldi (ed.) (2001) and Cesari (ed.) (2002).

Through this Prévertian inventory, one can see a Mediterranean of movement, “travelling cultures”, real—and today virtual—networks, of which one of the most striking examples is the creolization of contemporary Mediterranean musics. In a fundamental book, shaking the Braudelian theories of the Mediterranean, Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell (2000) inquire into the sphericity of this world over the long term. For them, combining interactionist and ecological points of view, the Mediterranean is defined by the establishment of relations by sea of extremely fragmented territories, by a “connectivity”, facilitated by the Empires and which is dying out, they say (wrongly, I think) in the 20th century. The enigmatic title of their book, *The Corrupting Sea*, then acquires its full meaning. Because it creates relationships, this sea then becomes a menace for good social order and for peace within families.

### *Cacophony*

Confronting this Mediterranean of networks, of passages and of *convivenza*, at its best moments, is the more familiar and dramatic Mediterranean of conflicts, dominations, religious frontiers, of the face-to-face rather than the side-by-side, to borrow the expression of Thierry Fabre (2005). No one has better translated this Mediterranean of tensions, and even hatred, than Ivo Andric, in his *Letter of 1920* (reprinted 1993) about Sarajevo :

When, in Sarajevo, one stays wide-awake in his bed till morning, one hears all the noises of the night. Heavily and implacably, the clock of the Catholic cathedral sounds two o'clock. One minute later (seventy-five seconds exactly, I have counted them), with a little weaker but piercing timbre, the clock of the Orthodox cathedral sounds “its” two o'clock. A little later, the clock of the mosque of the bey sounds in its turn with a hoarse and far-off timbre, it sounds eleven hours, eleven spectral Turkish hours, in accordance with the strange calculations of countries situated at the other end of the world. The Jews do not have a bell to toll, and only the cruel god knows

what time it is for them at that moment, an hour that varies according to whether they are Sephardic or Ashkenazic. Thus even the night when everything sleeps, in the count-down of empty hours, the difference is awake which divides the sleeping people and sets them against one another, and which listens to their prayers in the same heaven in four different church languages. This disparity, now [295] visibly and openly, now invisibly and slyly, always resembles hate, and sometimes is totally identified with it. (1993 : 33–34)

This Mediterranean, that of *eris* (hate) and not of *eros* in the words of Jacques Berque (1997 : 10), is symbolized by the concurrent calls to prayer ; by the incredible cacophony of bells, muezzins and *shofars* in Jerusalem. It is the Mediterranean of cities and territories broken down by denominational allegiances, as in the Middle East and the Balkans, where ostentatious rivalry can quickly be transformed into “international hatred”, where one quickly sets to work to deface or destroy the religious edifices and the patrimony of the other, as François Chaslin has shown in the ex-Yugoslavia. This is the Mediterranean of walls built and bridges destroyed, like that of Mostar in Bosnia : the bridge, built to bring together but whose annihilation is a over-determined sign of separation, being precisely a frequent theme in the literature of the Balkans, from Ivo Andric to Ismail Kadaré. It is at the religious frontiers where, from Kashmir to Ireland, passing through Chechnya, Palestine, Turkey, Cyprus, the Balkans, can be found the principal zones of friction and of conflict, where people are cleansed, herded together, exiled, and where interminable dramas are played out. Of course one cannot explain all these conflicts by a simple religious geography : geopolitical strategies, instrumentalizing nationalisms, social demands play their part. But this religious component of the conflicts, which leads sometimes to the sacrifice of one's life with the certitude of salvation, has been, it seems to me, under-rated for the benefit of sociological explanations which reduce faith and its motives of action, of love for one's own and hate for the others, to an epiphenomenon. Besides, is it not the spectre of crusade and holy war, incarnated today by the strangely symmetrical figures of Osama bin Laden and George Bush, which hangs over our planet ? Once an interior lake, at its best moments a “lake of meanings” as

Jacques Berque (1997 : 16) said, the Mediterranean today looks rather like a frontier of fear, which separates, and has become in addition a kind of *cordon sanitaire*, an unexpected natural barrier to keep out the poor, the dispossessed and the powerless.

### *A Common Basic Melody*

And then, there is also a third Mediterranean, that of anthropologists in the strict sense of the word, those far-off people who late in the day have become interested in this nearby region, in these little Others, who did not have the prestige, in this field of discipline, of those big Amerindians, Oceanic or African Others. From their works has emerged a Mediterranean composed of societies presenting “a family resemblance”, as Dionigi Albera and Anton Blok call it (2001 : 23), adopting a gnomic utterance of Wittgenstein. Horden and Purcell (2000 : 507), fine connoisseurs of anthropological studies—on which, however, as become historians, they cast a rather haughty look—speak, in their own terms, of a “loose unity of family resemblances”. If we must choose totemic figures of this Mediterranean and ways of life and social values, they would have to be those of Julian Pitt-Rivers (1986, 1997) and of Germaine Tillon (1966, 2000) to catch that “Mediterranean touch” which forms the background of complicities which allows men to know and to recognize one another.<sup>5</sup> This, the Mediterranean—can it be [296] said often enough—of ostentatious hospitality, of honour and shame attached to blood and to names, of an endogamous vision of the world, of the republic of cousins, a formula which is today concentrated on the southern shore and, in pre-Christian antiquity of marriage between close relations, of Jocasta saying to Polyneices, “A spouse taken from outside brings bad luck”, of a predilection for living “living with one's own”, of sexual segregation, “of a certain ideal of virile brutality of which the complement is a dramatization of feminine virtue” (Tillon 1966 : 67). This is the Mediterranean of structures of patronage in agro-literate societies and, similarly of the cult of saints, those intermediaries pampered by mon-

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<sup>5</sup> On this anthropological invention of the Mediterranean, see Bromberger (2001, 2002) and Bromberger and Durand (2001).

otheisms, of factionalism with its rival clans, of negotiation of conflicts and acts of vengeance, or the Mediterranean of grace, the dolorous devotions to virgins and martyrs.

## *And Their Traps ?*

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Here then are three perspectives : one proposing a Mediterranean of the side-by-side, the second of face-to-face, the third of underlying cultural complicities. These contradictory or, if one wishes to be scientifically optimistic, these complementary points of view must be carefully refined ; to tell the truth, especially the first of them—the Mediterranean of confluences, and the third, the Mediterranean reduced to a cultural area endowed with a massive homogeneity, But we must also pose questions to ourselves about the reasons for the coexistence of such contradictory models, of both proximity and conflict, and which will lead us to introduce another figure : that of the insupportable twin, the one who is too much like us.

The first Mediterranean, the one of contacts, exchanges, diffusions, traffic of ideas and goods, compulsory or pious mobilities, fluidity of men and things, intermingled arts, like the Arab-Norman architecture of Sicily, has led to a superabundance of concepts like melting pot, *métissage* (crossbreeding), hybridity, to characterize the cultures implanted on shores of the sea. I am not unaware, like everyone else, of the cultural syncretisms and improvised constructions which are accelerating today in domains as diverse as cooking, music, dance, literature, and what Arjun Appadurai (2001) calls *mediascapes*, (depending on the country they live in, from 40 to 70% of the Maghrebis receive satellite TV). But nothing seems more inappropriate to me than terms like *métissage* or “hybridity” to characterize Mediterranean societies—or to be more precise, the translation to the social plane of what is suggested by cultural works which have indeed been cross-bred. *Métissage* implies a union of flesh and especially a fusion, or at least a reciprocal acceptance of beliefs that would make possible such a social union of bodies. Now, nothing is more foreign to the Mediterranean world, the land of intransigent monotheisms, than this

fusion of beliefs and compromises of allegiances, which remain rigorously exclusive. The God of the one and the others is here structuralist and admits no mixtures. We are in the Mediterranean, a thousand leagues from the *umbanda* of the Brazilians, a transformation of the *macumba* of Bantu origin, gathering together the *caboclas* (spirits of the Indians), the *orixas* (African divinities) of the candomble, the guardian saints of Catholicism, Buddha, Gandhi, Ayrton Senna... We are also at a thousand leagues from the conceptions of Japan, [297] where one can be born a Shintoist, enter a voluntary Christian marriage, and die a Buddhist.

The notion of *métissage* is incompatible with the logic of the religions of the Book, where the religious allegiance of children yet to be born is not negotiable and where interdenominational marriages are in several Mediterranean countries impossible, or at least socially unacceptable. The capitals of cosmopolitanism did not escape from this iron law. “Alexandrian cosmopolitanism”, Robert Ilbert tells us (1992 : 28), did not function as a melting pot, but as a continuously renewed contiguity of constituted, recognized and responsible groups”.<sup>6</sup> No doubt Greeks in Alexandria cooked macaroni in the Italian style, and *fouls* (beans) in the Arab style ; no doubt they painted their Easter eggs in the occidental manner, using all colours not just the red of Greek tradition ; but, add Katerina Trimi and Ilios Yannakakis (1992 : 85), “the only ethnic-religious boundary which the Greeks did not cross was endogamy” ; and let us note in addition that cosmopolitanism, a common Alexandrian conceit, did not exclude nationalism. The same frontier operates between Copts and Muslims in Egypt, though they share more or less the same usages and customs and participate in their respective holidays in a climate, which is frequent in the Mediterranean, of ostentatious rivalry, minarets raised systematically to look down on the clock-towers of the churches.<sup>7</sup> Similar observations in the Balkans, “where”, says Jean-François Gossiaux (2001 : 236), “religion is the material par excellence of ethnic frontiers”—but shouldn't we rather say the exact opposite ? In all the studies that deal with this complex region where ethnic and religious identities are often combined, mixed marriages, though encour-

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<sup>6</sup> The same observation when we consider the spatial distribution and the juridical status of the communities in Smyrna.

<sup>7</sup> See, among others, Mayeur-Jaouen and Voilé (2003 : 174).

aged by socialist regimes, have remained on the whole very limited in number, just as in Yugoslavia for example, adhesion to this cross-breed entity which was Yugoslav nationality, offering itself as alternative to ethnic-religious identities, has remained very small as well. “Censuses”, Gossiaux (2001 : 238) tells us, “allow us to choose between the diverse national adhesions”, (Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, etc.)—one can rediscover here a trace of the Austro-Hungarian dream of choice of nationality—but they also allow one to affirm one's self as Yugoslav. In 1981, only 5.4% of the population had chosen to declare itself Yugoslav.

“Humanity must have had to decide very early”, wrote our great ancestor Edward Burnett Tylor (1889 : 267) “between marrying outside or being killed outside”. It would appear that Mediterranean societies, with their religious barriers, including those inside Christianity, have tended to choose the second formula. This rigidity can still be verified when one examines the statistics—even though they reveal a little evolution—of marriages in France of young men and women who are children of the Maghrebi immigration. According to the research of Michèle Tribalat (1995), there is a very strong difference between the boys and the girls. Fifty percent of the boys of Algerian origin born in France marry a young Frenchwoman born to parents born in France (a figure similar to that of boys of Portuguese origin). On the other hand 24.5% of the girls of Algerian origin born in France marry a Frenchman born to French parents, while 47% of Portuguese young women are married to a Frenchmen born to French parents. The *fiqh* (Muslim cannon law) forbids the marriage of a female Muslim with a non-Muslim : it is a matter of the denominational allegiance of the children. It is [298] significant that the boy friends “of French stock” of girls of Maghrebi origin is twice as large as that of husbands. “This gap”, comments Michèle Tribalat, “gives an idea of the family and religious pressure regarding the marriage of girls”, perhaps also of the xenophobia which awakens in those “of French stock” when it is a question of engaging in a public and durable relationship. Still it is true that the more and more numerous transgressions, by young women, of this endogamic vision of the world are accompanied by at least temporary ruptures with the parents. A stratagem to reconcile paternal and religious intransigence with personal inclinations is to accept an endogamic marriage and then divorce and embark on a



more personal adventure (Boukhobza 2001) ; or to engage in a free union which avoids the publicity of socially disapproved marriage and allows family peace to be maintained. Celibacy, which is a shelter from constraints and conflicts, is over-represented among young women of Maghrebi origin. “Thus”, notes Hervé Flanquart (1999 : 128) “only 38% of the young women of Algerian origin aged from 25 to 29 are married, against 48% of those of French origin”.

This rigid differentiation, which hardens or softens according to the circumstances, does not, let us note, exclude a taste for the arts of living and the practices of the Other. The misuse of the concept of *métissage* and a fairy-tale evaluation of the relations between the ones and the others are often based on this ambiguity. It was at the very moment when the Arabs in Sicily were repressed with the utmost violence that was constructed, in 1165, the Zisa, a jewel of the art called “Arab-Norman” (Puccio 2004 : 123). *Mudéjar* art thrived in Christian Spain at the very time that Muslims were being persecuted, then expelled (Grabar 1994 : 589). And if the French today count couscous among their favourite dishes, this is not for all that an indication of Arabophilia. Beyond these cultural meetings and complicities, *métissage* is hardly thinkable or possible in these societies where union with the Other can only be envisaged if one renounces one's identity, one's religion—in short, if one is no longer an Other. The great writer Jean Amrouche, who as at one and the same time Berber, Christian, Algerian and French, had well understood the harshness of the recurrent Mediterranean lesson, which does not joke with denominations : “Hybrids are monsters...monsters without a future” (Liauzu 1998 : 509). Let us be clear : this they are in the “traditional” Mediterranean system, re-enforced by nationalisms : they are, no doubt, less so among elites and in another system which is slowly inventing itself anwhich will one day, through the assumption of secularity, have renounced these rigidities.

## *A System of Complementary Differences*

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What should we not say about the portrait, the sometimes caricaturist portrait, drawn by the anthropologists, in which the syndrome of honour and shame, and some others, becomes the Mediterranean *raison d'être* and forms the background of a common language in which one recognizes one's self ? Several anthropologists, in the first rank of which are Michael Herzfeld (1980) and Joao de Pina-Cabral (1989), have radically called into question the pertinence of the Mediterranean world as a field of study. For them, the ethnological Mediterranean is an artificial object, created by Anglo-Saxon anthropologists to render exotic a region that is too close and thus objectify the [299] distance necessary for the exercise of our discipline. It is thus said to shield itself behind certain federating and strongly stereotyped terms, and thus provide a heterogeneous reality with a fictitious homogeneity. No doubt these censors were right in denouncing the failings of an enterprise which would turn the Mediterranean into a cultural area provided with static attributes and limits. But it does not seem to me that one can thus throw out the Mediterranean along with the bath water. To tell the truth, what gives coherence to this world, is not so much the evident similarities but the differences that form a system. And it is doubtless these *complementary differences*, inscribed in a reciprocal field, which allow us speak of a *Mediterranean system*. Every one is defined, here perhaps more than elsewhere, in a game of mirrors (customs, behaviours, affiliations) with his neighbour. This neighbour is a close relation who shares Abrahamic origins and his behaviour only makes sense in this relational game. <sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> This process is no doubt common to most societies as Lévi-Strauss (1973 : 281–330) shows us in his comparative study of Mandan and Hidaitsa Indians : “If the customs of neighbouring peoples”, he says, “manifest symmetrical relations, we must not for all that seek the causes in some mysterious laws of nature or of the mind. This geometrical perfection thus resumes, in the present tense, the more or less conscious but innumerable efforts accumulated by history and which all aim at the same end : to reach a threshold, no doubt the most profitable one for human societies, where a true balance is achieved be-

How are we to understand, for example, the alimentary behaviours of the ones and the others if not in this relational system of reciprocal oppositions ?

Alcohol and pork remain the base of the triangle of differentiation between Jews, Moslems and Christians. In the 3rd century, the eating of pork was recommended to Christians, at the time of Council of Antioch, with the explicit aim of differentiation from the Jews : “Christians shall not imitate Jews on the subject of abstinence from certain foods but they shall eat pork because the synagogue of the Jews abhors pork” (Fabre-Vassas 1994 : 13). According to Gilles de Rapper (2002 : 25), the Muslims in Albania call their Christian neighbours “pork Christians.”

In the historical domain of alimentary behaviour the symbolic status of blood is a powerful relational distinguishing line between the traditions which co-exist on the shores of the Mediterranean. The contrasting attitudes of Jews, Christians and Muslims form, here again, a kind of triangle. In Islam, blood is conceived as the impure substance *par excellence*, which must be expelled at any cost and which it is impossible to ingest (the simple mention of a blood sausage is enough to induce nausea), and the metaphoric equivalent of which, wine, is prohibited. This is a schema rigorously the reverse of that prevailing in Christianity : the miracle of Cana, the transformation at the Last Supper of wine into blood, the ritual absorption of this blood in the Eucharist or the metamorphosis of wine into water to wash out sins...are incredible and repulsive episodes for Muslims. And while, in Judaism, the sacrificial blood is offered to God, in Islam only the intention of offering is addressed to him, blood not being able to be anything but the unclean food of evil spirits (the *jnun*).

One can make the same type of observations on this permanent interplay of identities in mirrors, in the structural dialogism between societies which are cousins and neighbours by referring to the register

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tween their unity and their diversity ; and which keeps the balance stable between communication, favourable to reciprocal enlightenment, and the absence of communication, equally salutary, since the fragile flowers of the difference can only survived in the shade” (p. 300). These relations of symmetrical inversion reach a singular density in the Mediterranean world where the populations share the same God.

of appearance. The treatment of bodily, facial and capillary hair appears thus in symmetric and inverse distribution from one religious tradition to another. This will for differentiation in hirsute appearance is clearly displayed by clerics and exegetes. In the Epistle to the Corinthians (11, 3–10) Saint Paul recalls the obligation of the (masculine) faithful to pray with uncovered head : “Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoreth his head”. This usage is opposed to that of the Jews and of the Romans (whose pontiffs covered their heads during sacrifices). The Fathers of the Church recalled this [300] demand for demarcation, not only vis-à-vis the Jews but also the Egyptians and the barbarians. In the 5th century, Saint Jerome prescribes that “we must not have either our heads shaven like the priests of Isis and of Serapis, not let our hair grow, which is the habit of debauched men and barbarians”. The schism in Christianity would equally find a hirsute translation with its Oriental clerics letting hair, beard and moustache grow long, contrary to those of the Roman Church. “The Byzantine clergy”, writes Marie-France Auzépy (2002 : 9)

has insisted, in the face of the Latins who maintain the opposite tradition, on the beard as a fundamental element of the tradition of its Church, and hair, defended by the Greeks, abhorred by the Latins, became thereby and essential argument of the schism between Orient and Occident.

The same voluntarist concern with distinction seems to have weighed on the fashioning of appearance in Islam. “Distinguish yourself from the Magi”, “Imitate neither the Jews nor the Christians”, the Prophet is said to have said. Wearing beard and moustached, strictly codified, and bodily depilation, figure in the rank of the strong distinctive markers with infinite nuances, of membership in the same community. Bernard Lewis (1990 : 265) reminds us of the medieval vigour of this game of opposition which has lost none of its virulence in our days : Harun ibn Yahya, a prisoner in Rome in the 9th century, remarked that the inhabitants of the city, “young and old, entirely shave the beard, not sparing the smallest hair. The finery of man, I told them, is the beard !” And one of the Romans, challenged on this

point by another Arab, replied : “Hair is superfluous. If you people cut natural parts of the body, why should we leave hair on our faces ?” This insistence on communitary distinction is explained by a contemporary exegete, the Ibadi shaykh Bayyudh, ardent propagandist for the religious obligation to be bearded : “It is asked and even commanded of Muslims to give themselves a specific personality, with the aim of differentiating them from those who have not the same religion as they, to make them recognized by others and among themselves. This personality must be their emblem and the mark which singularizes them” (Benkheira 1997 : 92).

Need we emphasize that, in this system of differences, the place held by the Jews following the prescriptions of Leviticus (19, 27 : 21.5) not to cut the corners of the beard ? This prohibition, along with the wearing of a beard, doubtless at its origin had a distinctive function in contrast to the Egyptians, with clean-shaven faces, and the Babylonians and Persians with their expertly trimmed beards.

The status of images was the object of a similarly differential treatment, and it is probable that the iconophobia of Islam, which then turned to calligraphy and to arabesques, was a reply to the iconophilia of Christianity, which was itself iconophobic in its beginnings. “The reasons for the prohibition of wine and of images are to be sought in the practices of two religious communities backed up against each other”, comments Jean-Baptiste Humbert (2001 : 154) who has followed, using his archaeological excavations in northeast Jordan, this process of differentiation in the 7th and 8th centuries. “We know”, he continues (ibid : 155), “that mosaics and frescoes served as catechistic aids. Iconoclasm had therefore a doctrinal foundation”. [301] And the same author correctly observes that the first destructions of images were directed against the representations of animals which had a high symbolic value in Christianity (lamb, fish, etc.), besides human bodies. Jack Goody reminds of the contemporary relevance of this opposition between iconophiles and iconophobes when he evokes memories of the Greeks and Turks on Cyprus during the last war : “The former,” he writes, “put up innumerable images of saints and of the Holy Trinity which they adore even as they bow and kiss them. The others (the Turks) are horrified by the barbarity of such acts”.<sup>9</sup> This

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<sup>9</sup> On the theme of iconophobia, see Goody (2004) and Centlivres (2003).

quarrel over images has also—need we recall ?—traversed Christianity, the Protestants displaying a rigorous iconoclasm against what they perceived as idolatry. Elizabeth I, Goody reminds us (2004 : 160), had her ambassador in Istanbul tell the Sultan that Islam and Protestantism were united in the rejection of icons.

Of course, these massive and fundamental oppositions, have been, in the different registers which we have just discussed, adapted, and sometimes transgressed, depending on their contexts and periods of history, and it would be reductionist to see them as frozen invariants. The Prince, whatever his dogma, has rarely avoided visibility, except recently the mullah Omar, commander of the faithful in the Emirate of Afghanistan, a rigorous iconoclast, who has never had a picture taken or made of himself. If the Talibans have burned images and destroyed statues, there was a flourishing iconography for Saddam Hussein. A poster, which would delight the fans of “travelling cultures”, depicted him on a white horse bearing a standard on which is written, *Allah a akbar*”. This representation is directly inspired by the painting of David showing Bonaparte at the head of his troops crossing the Saint Bernard Pass. Let us recall, for the sake of the anecdote and of the fans, this time, of the invention of tradition : that Bonaparte crossed the Pass on a mule behind his troops and guided by a Valaisan herdsman (ibid : 124).

## ***From Benign Coexistence to Bloody Confrontation***

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But let us return to more serious matters. Between these separated and close communities, what are the rules of the game ? And what factors can transform sympathetic curiosity, benign coexistence into bloody conflict ?

In the ordinary course of intercommunitary relations in the Mediterranean, a comprehensive contiguity is dominant, almost everywhere, marked by the same gestures of civility and good-neighbourliness, by small exchanges. From medieval Andalusia to the contemporary Balkans, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, one finds the

same attention, more or less intense, even voluntarist attitudes of participation in the rituals of the Other. “Is it not a surprising thing ?” we are asked by Al-'Azafi, doctor of Law in the 13th century, commenting on the life in Andalusia,

to see Muslims making inquiries about Christian holidays and when they are to take place ? They consult with one another regularly about the nativity of Jesus, about yannair, the seventh days after the day of his birth, and on the ‘ansara, the day of the birth of John.

[302]

And the same chronicler continues,

Not content with caring so much about these holidays, and welcoming them properly they have introduced novelties. On tables prepared by the children and the women, one finds all kinds of fruits and valuable objects. On these festivals they exchange with one another expensive gifts [including] sugared confectionaries. (Bolens 1981 : 343)

One can find this mediating role of good wishes and festive sweets at the four corners of the Mediterranean. In the bi-denominational Lebanese communities (Shiite Muslim and Maronite) studied by Aida Kanafani-Zahar (2001) the Shiites participate in the Assumption, the festivals of Saint Barbara and of the Epiphany, by preparing pastries, are present at the ordination of priests. While the Maronites participate in the *fitr* (the festival of the end of the Ramadan) and the festival commemorating the birth of the Prophet. Still more significant, the Christians, on the occasion of the ceremony inaugurating Lent, delegate to the Shiites the task of killing the sacrificial sheep so that these latter may participate without any anxiety in the commensal rites, reassured of the purity of the meat they will share in. The *slava*, the celebration of the local saint, is the occasion, among the Serbs, for receiving their Muslim neighbours (Gossiaux 2001 : 467). These tradi-

tions of civility, of commensality, of mutual exchanges are designated, in Bosnia-Herzegovina, by the term *komshilik*. (derived from the Turkish word *komshila* (“neighbour”)) (Claverie 2004 : 22). As to the mixed pilgrimages, to the “ambiguous sanctuaries” frequented by the faithful of different denominations, they are not lacking on all the Mediterranean shores. This opening-out toward the Other sometimes goes farther, up to the temporary transgression of a taboo : the Shephardic Jews of the Maghreb, like the Islamic Pomaks of Bulgaria, agree to eat ham when they are received by Christians ; when they are among themselves, and no longer with Others, they scrupulously respect the prohibition. Here without doubt is one of the most significant examples of this tension which so characteristic of the Mediterranean world, between the valorisation of inwardness at home and tendencies toward cosmopolitanism outside.

How then are we to understand how yesterday's neighbour is transformed into a killer, a monster, to be slaughtered, and these violent outbreaks of violence which bring about deportation or collective murder ?

Ethnologists, attentive to daily life, have a tendency to draw a portrait of good folk living side by side and to explain from above these explosions of violence. They invoke, reasonably enough, the strategic interactions of nation-states, social crises, imperialist and economic ambitions, the manipulations of populist politicians who bring powder to the fire. But, in doing so, they do not take into account the processes which transform the office or bar-room chum into a torturer, rapist and killer.

The concept of “cascade” introduced by James Rosenau (1990) and used by Arjun Appadurai allows us to move forward on this path. Cascades, connecting micro- and macro-politics, incorporate local disputes and incidents into larger causes and interests, less bound to the context. They furnish material to the imagination of the actors who find the general significations of contingent events and thus connect global politics to the micropolitics of streets and districts. Mediterranean societies, in which are imbricated the loyalties and oppositions constituted and hardened by history, no doubt furnish a favourable terrain for the outbreak of these turbulences. But this is still saying [303] too little. The memory of past atrocities, the memory of crimes, the images which propagate them, the rumours which feed on them



and are amplified as they spread from mouth to mouth, contribute to that feeling of fear which swings to crime under the pretext of preventing the crimes of others. In the same individual, these attitudes of tolerance and of hatred can vary, of course, according to the “cascades” of the moment, but also according to certain ritual times of the year, when partisan loyalties are exalted and fears re-awaken, and also according to the age of the people of involved.

These swings sometimes take an apparently paradoxical turn. A simplistic vision might lead us to think that the closer cultures are to each other, or approach each other, the greater the harmony that must reign among them. If that were the case, harmony should have been reigning for centuries between Jews and Muslims. How can we imagine religions that are even closer ? To observe the Sabbath, eat Kosher, be circumcised, fast on Yom Kippur, distinguish between the clean and the unclean, it all has a very familiar air for a Muslim. Commandments and punctilious jurisprudence are also present in both religions. But need one underline the aporias of such an essentialism ? In fact, if we had to search for some general rule, it is not so much the plainly indicated difference but the excess of proximity, “*the fact of becoming too close*”, said Georg Simmel (1983 : 265), which is perceived as an insupportable attack on the honour of the Other. One too often neglects in the genesis of conflicts the role played by what Freud called “the narcissism of minor differences”<sup>10</sup>, a theme recently revisited by Anton Blok (2001), with contemporary examples to support it. This concern for keeping a distance from the nearby Other sometimes take the derisory form of the ethnic joke and of campanilist manifestations, now that of the imposition of vestimentary or corporeal stigma-

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<sup>10</sup> Freud uses this concept three times in his work : in *Messenpsychologie und Ich-Analyse*, in *Das Tabu der Virginität*, and in *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur*. In this last work he writes : “It is always possible to tie together in love a rather big crowd of men, if only there remain others on whom to manifest their aggression. I once studied the phenomenon according to which, precisely, neighbouring communities, which are also close to each other, fight with or make fun of each other, like the Spaniards and the Portuguese, the North and the South Germans, the English and the Scotch, etc. I have given to this phenomenon the name of “narcissism of little differences... One can recognize here an easy and relatively anodyne satisfaction of the penchant to aggression by which the cohesion of the community is more easily assured to its members.”

ta, to put the Other in his place, as was the case for the Jews when nothing in their appearance made them distinct. In societies rigid in their theological or ethnic attitudes, one tracks down relentlessly whoever one suspects of trickery and imposture in his identity, the neo-convert whose sincerity one doubts, the foreigner who has ended up by resembling us, or even going beyond us. When differences become blurred, one recalls them, one recreates them, for one's self and of the Others, in an ostentatious mode. Isn't it striking that the observance of Ramadan shows a clear revival, that headscarves appear, while religious worship decreases, and ways of life tend toward uniformity, as if it were necessary to mark out frontiers that are fading ? Is it not striking, on a quite different plane, that among the football matches where the most emotional effervescence takes place, figure the derbies, opposing two teams from the same city, whose supporters do their best to emphasize with great effort their distinctive characters ? Isn't it striking, in a general way, that feelings of identity are being exacerbated while the substantial identities are fading away. Isn't it also striking that master and slave get exasperated when they end up looking alike ? And what is there to say of the accomplished translators and ethnologists, those Others who sometimes are no longer Other, who know too much, do not differentiate themselves from the object of their study, become unclassifiable, insupportable, and are invited to keep their distance ? <sup>11</sup> It is not so much the differences as the loss of differences which excites rivalry, even violence. “Is it not always true, even among us, that good neighbourliness demands of the partners that they become like us up to a certain point while still remaining different ?” (Lévi-Strauss [304] 1973 : 299). The twins find it hard to affirm their existence, and they don't have much to say to each other. All that they can do is to create differences and maintain them in order to have the feeling they exist. The mythology, the past, and

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<sup>11</sup> The drogman/dragoman, the interpreter in the Ottoman Empire incarnated both the positive figure of the cosmopolitan go-between figure and the negative one of the scoundrel manipulator. “The empire was suspicious”, comments Kadaré (2003 : 13). “In its eyes the knowledge of two languages implied an ineluctable possibility of deceit, and the common people, from whom he often came, considered him as a ‘collaborator’. Every one suspected that the interpreter was a traitor : the dominated suspected him of being an accomplice of the dominators, and the dominators suspected him of connivance with those whom they held in subjection”.

the present of the Mediterranean peoples are replete with such stories of tragic twinings.

Let it be understood that I do not pretend to explain the conflicts in the Mediterranean, and perhaps elsewhere, by the intransigence of their monotheisms, with all their certitudes and the consubstantial hostility to any form of mixture, nor by the “narcissism of minor differences”; but surely, these two mechanisms contribute to harden the antagonisms and swell the “cascades”.

To think of the relations “between...Others” in the Mediterranean world, then, means to put into evidence both the constitutive family similarities and contradictions, to analyze an interplay of reciprocal differences which now rigidify and then relax, to envision simultaneously the bridge and the Wall, affirmation and denial, the meeting and the rupture, the borrowing and the rejection. To understand the genesis and the functions of complementary differences which shape this world is surely relevant for relativizing the extent of the frictions, and the “agonisms” and antagonisms which form the background noise of these turbulent shores.

*Translated by Olivier Renault and Paul Sant Cassia*

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