

Preface

FASCINATION WITH THE HYBRIDITY of the Mediterranean cultures has a long history in the scholarly narratives. At the same time, many misrecognitions, misunderstandings and stereotypes are produced about this region. Scholars have emphasized the problematic notion of the Mediterranean and the very field of Mediterranean studies as the product of orientalist discourses of Western scholarship (Herzfeld 1980; Llobera 1986). They also criticized the binaries present in the dominant scholarly discourses such as the North/South, Christianity/Islam, honor/shame, masculinity/femininity, and tradition/modernity. Michael Herzfeld has asserted the problematic concept of the Mediterranean culture as one unified entity, challenging the ambiguous discourses on Mediterranean, which is recognized at the same time as the centre of European culture and the 'incomplete European space'. By the concept of Euro-Mediterranean, this ambiguity seems to be challenged, although it does not offer essentially new approaches in avoiding colonialist premises.

The main idea of the Journal is to present the Euro-Mediterranean as an imagined space, a performative category constantly re-constructed through the dominant discourses. It proposes a scholarly response to the current political actions of making a new 'biopolitical' region. One of the main goals of the Journal is to examine the very discourses and practices that shape the concept of Euro-Mediterranean and also to provide a critical stance toward the official narratives associated with this idea. The Journal aims to challenge fixed representations of this area, with an intention to show that the 'natural' cultural unity or cohesion is constructed through official cultures and dominant politics. The main attempt is to avoid the concepts of homogeneous cultures or historical traditions, and their 'univocal' representations. In this respect, the general approach we suggest here avoids a reductionist approach, an essentialized idea of culture as the property of an ethnic group. In order to present the 'polyvocality' of the Mediterranean societies and cultures, the general orientation of the Journal supports the studies focused on dynamic and transgressive cultural productions and performances of identities.

[4] We enthusiastically present this inaugural issue not as a complete product, but rather as a basis for a further rethinking of the acute questions concerning this area, such as hegemonic discourses of cultural interaction and multiculturalism, issues of Eurocentrism and new colonialism, illegal migration, conflicted or divided regions. The first issue focuses on intercultural exchange and dialog in the Euro-Mediterranean, with the main intention of giving an insight in the complexity of intercultural dialog as a social reality itself. The leading idea was to show that intercultural dialog is not just a result of dominant politics and political strategies of multiculturalism, but a real, unavoidable phenomenon. As Seyla Benhabib points out, 'the cultures are formed through complex dialogs and interactions with other cultures, as an inseparable part of the constant creations, recreations and negotiations of imaginary boundaries between self and others' (Benhabib 2002, 8). At this point, it is important to emphasize that dialog is only possible when the concepts of coherent and pure cultures are abandoned and when alternative voices and narratives are included along with the dominant ones. Therefore, this issue does not reflect only on the official cultures and dominant politics, but also brings to the fore unofficial public sphere and alternative voices.

The main questions tackled in this issue are the strategies of construction of East and West in connection to the concept of Otherness, as well as minority-majority relations and their role in cultural interaction in the Euro-Mediterranean. All these questions refer to the pivotal issues related to the field of Mediterranean studies, pointing out its association with ethnocentrism, colonialism and imperial domination. Thus the contributions also challenge the idea of knowledge produced beyond the dominant politics, and 'neutrality' and 'detachment' associated with the academic work.

The issue is divided into three micro-thematic blocs. The first one is dedicated to rethinking the concepts of Mediterraneanness and the intercultural dialog in historical perspective. David Ohana addresses the dynamics in conceptualization of East and West and the notion of Mediterranean in connection with the Zionist movement in Israel. By looking into these two geopolitical concepts the article seeks to examine the genealogy of the cultural discourse, tracing the political



development of the crusader myth in creation of the image of Israel as a Western country. Roser Salicrú i Lluch's article is focused on the transversal figures that were able to cross religious and cultural boundaries in Medieval Mediterranean Iberia. In the same way as Ohana, she examines discourses of constructing and understanding the Other, showing how the concepts of intercultural dialog are very often exclusively led by the pragmatic reasons. [5]

Next two papers are more applicative, exploring the ways the various concepts of culture can be employed in intercultural legal communication and in creating soft social infrastructure. Alenka Kocbek's paper proposes a strategy suitable to the specific requirements of intercultural legal communication, while Alexi Danchev provides a study of the role of soft social infrastructure in the strategies of inclusion of Roma community into the dominant culture in Bulgaria.

The last part of the issue is dedicated to the role of art in articulation of cultural interactions. Essica Marks's contribution takes a critical stance toward the official culture policy toward Arab minority in Israel, examining the alternative voices in establishing new bridges between minority and majority cultures. By examining the Orientalist tradition in the Elizabethan theatre, Tahar Bayouli intends to emphasize a multi-sided nature of the Orientalism and its role in construction of the image of the East.

Ana Hofman
Editor

REFERENCES

- Benhabib, S. 2002. *The claims of culture: Equality and diversity in the global era*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Herzfeld, M. 1986. *Ours once more: Folklore, ideology, and the making of modern Greece*. London: Pella.
- Llobera, J. R. 1986. Fieldwork in Southwestern Europe: Anthropological panacea or epistemological straitjacket? *Critique of Anthropology* 6 (2): 25–33.