

## REVIEW ARTICLE

# NAVIGATING AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF THE MEDITERRANEAN: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN FRANCE

PAUL SANT CASSIA

*University of Durham, UK*

Ever since the critiques levelled at a Mediterranean anthropology by anthropologists in the late 1980s and early 1990s (e.g., Pina Cabral 1989; Herzfeld 1980, 1984, 1987), it has almost been politically incorrect for anthropologists working in Mediterranean countries to contemplate pan-Mediterraneanisms. This has certainly not been a problem for historians. Horden's and Purcell's recent book *The Corrupting Sea*, subtitled *A Study of Mediterranean History* (2000), attempts with some degree of élan to produce a synthesis of some three millennia of Mediterranean history. It is therefore encouraging that French anthropology has not been sufficiently overawed by the new orthodoxy to attempt some degree of critical appraisal of the concept, history and potential of an anthropology of the Mediterranean.

In 1966, a dozen anthropologists working in the Mediterranean met at Aix-en-Provence to discuss their findings. Some thirty years later, in 1997, the University of Aix (Marseilles) convened a large conference bringing together scholars from Europe, North Africa and the United States to discuss whether an anthropology of the Mediterranean was still a viable prospect. To be sure, French interest in the anthropology of the Mediterranean is not independent of contemporary geo-political concerns. For example, the French Government is worried that the eastward expansion of the European Union may detract from its Western and Southern European dimensions. A new museum of Europe and the Mediterranean is to be established in Marseilles. This will involve the relocation and expansion of the old Paris-based *Musée des Arts et Traditions Populaires* established in 1937 to collect the customs of *La France Profonde*.

The Aix volume of proceedings has just been published (Albera *et al.* 2001a). It is a courageous and long overdue attempt to tackle the problematic and vexing, but also siren-like, conundrum of an anthropology of the Mediterranean. That it has not been tackled before in such a systematic way is perhaps an indication of the difficulties experienced with the critiques launched at it in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is a tribute to Aix that it convened a conference on this topic. It is cautiously optimistic in its claims, but it is nevertheless firm

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Albera, Dionigi, Blok, Anton and Bromberger, Christian, eds (2001) *L'Anthropologie de la Méditerranée* (Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme: Maissoneuve et Larose, Paris) ISBN 2-7068-1529-9. 756 pp.

in its suggestions. The book has three main themes: a history of how the concept of a Mediterranean anthropology emerged; a critical evaluation of some of the original key concepts in the light of recent criticism, and an attempt to move forward; and finally examples of original research into Mediterranean societies.

There were two routes to the concept of the "Mediterranean". The first was home-based through early 19th-century French naturalists as a region of botanical and landscaped similarity (Schippers 2001). The second was much later, seemingly more apparently academic and imported from the United States in the shape of cultural studies, including the Redfieldian Great and Little traditions. As Bromberger (2001) points out, the French tradition had a strong ethno-geographical-historical base that was lacking in the Redfieldian approach. Generally speaking, French ethnological interests were influenced by literature (and hence were partly romantic) peddled by intellectuals (e.g., Camus, Nelli, etc.), and by political and cultural considerations of coexistence (versus expansionist colonialist anti-Arab Graeco-Latin models), as in the work of Frederic Mistral. To Camus, North Africa was the locus where the East and the West could cohabit, a view he was to change towards the end of his life. It is ironic, but not surprising, that this French romanticization of *metisage* and multiculturalism in the 1930s came between two major waves of ethnic and national homogenization at great human cost. The first was the massive expulsions of Armenians, Greeks and other minorities from the Ottoman Empire and its replacement by a unitary military-dominated state in the early 20th century. The second was the upheavals in North Africa during decolonization.

I will be referring to the thorny problem of "Mediterranean identity" later in this article, but let me observe here that the pre-history of Mediterranean Studies suggesting that such concepts have a political dimension is hardly new, nor surprising. As numerous contributors to the book emphasize, we have to locate intellectuals, including anthropologists, as actors in their social and political contexts and as having specific agendas. One major difference between the models proposed by scholars and intellectuals from within and from outside of the Mediterranean region is that those from within the region selectively drew from the past (usually but not exclusively from high culture) and, to a lesser extent, from the present to emphasize that there are certain similarities that people can celebrate in spite of their differences. By contrast, scholars from outside the region seemed to develop more interest in enduring and pan-Mediterranean cultural traits without much interest in historical depth or social differences. In both approaches, the significance or otherwise of history and social change is somewhat problematical. Even in Tillion's (1982) residually Levi-Staussian but powerful account, which is rarely quoted by anthropologists, it is the North African section of the Mediterranean that remains relatively static in contrast to the more historically evolving Christian part.

It is somewhat mysterious how the original intention to study differences—and certainly not just what Marie Elizabeth Handman (2001) calls that "*couple infernal*": honour and shame—came to dominate both research and the whole notion of a Mediterranean identity. As Silverman (2001: 46) points out, the Mediterranean was a useful unity to consider in the words of Pitt Rivers "for the purposes of comparison only". Silverman's account is a timely corrective that the early pioneers certainly did not intend to essentialize the Mediterranean. Perhaps we are also guilty of essentialising representations when we wish to criticize past work in order to advance academic careers. The virtual abandonment of studies on the family to the study of gender identities is lamented by Goody (2001: 272) who observes that "extension is important; abandonment suggests a field of limited intellectual achievements or ambitions". Maher attempts to move the discussion of honour and shame in a constructive way away from real behaviour towards representations. She suggests that the notion of "*pudeur*" allows us to throw new light on the gender-power nexus, that *pudeur* is a "special

case of interaction ritual" (Maher 2001: 162). The role of the state in the formulation and shaping of such ideologies is dealt with by both her and Gilmore (1982). Herzfeld (2001) with "an appropriate sense of constructive mischief" suggests that perhaps these ideas are just defensive discourses given by informants to their anthropologists.

As most contributors note, it is paradoxical that traditionally the anthropological study of religion in the Mediterranean was weak and lacked comparative focus, although there are some honourable exceptions—especially the work of William Christian (1981, 1996), Charles Stewart (1991) and Seremetakis (1991). All contributors in the Aix volume (Albera *et al.* 2001a) to the discussion of religion (Eickelman, Charuty, Caisson and Fabre Vassas) share a concern to move away from structural analysis to more symbolic forms, including the production of identities. How they do so is different. Eickelman (2001), drawing upon the work of Hammoudi (1993, 1997), criticizes earlier anthropological accounts (e.g., Gellner) for neglecting the historical and symbolic dimensions of supposed structural relationships. He draws a parallelism between Moroccan religious authority and Peter Brown's (1982) influential representation of Mediterranean late antiquity as well as to sainthood in medieval Europe. Clearly the introduction of Christianity changed much, a point made also by Ravis Giordani (2001) and Goody (2001). *Contra* Gellner, Eickelman suggests that the rural-urban distinction does not correspond with Morocco's religious and political history. He identifies the growth of an educated politically relevant religious discourse that appeals to a significant minority of educated youth, as well as three facets of objectification: massification, systemization and fragmentation of authority. The first two are relevant to a study of Christianity. Eickelman does not see identity as linked to the nation-state as much as Herzfeld (1985, 1987) does, but the latter's material, based as it is on a defensive, culturally homogenizing state (Greece), is, as he would recognize, a particular case.

Comparisons of the constituents and processes of identity would certainly be worthwhile pursuing further. Giordana Charuty (2001) provides a fascinating charter for the mapping out of how Christianity produces individuals. Like Eickelman, she is interested in religion as a culture, as a symbolic system. Concentrating on what De Martino (1959, 1961) called a "*Catholicisme meridionale*", she sees a linkage and continuity between liturgical and customary rites that create the Christian persona. Here the emphasis is to monitor "*comme le pretre, la magiciene et le saint incarnent trois poles et trois modes d'exercice du pouvoir sacre qui s'inscrivent dans un meme systeme cultural*" (Charuty 2001: 362), a cultural implication of the incorporationist tendencies of the counter-reformation. She rightly cautions against the distinction between magic and religion. The production of Christians (*Faire des Chretiens*) would thus vary between north and south Europe as well as between Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The making of Christians through rituals would appear to apply even more strongly for Orthodoxy where ethnic identity as Greeks and Bulgarians, for example, is based on a Christian identity. The harnessing of rites of passage is not a Christian monopoly, as Jean Cuisenier (2001) indicates in his discussion of Bulgaria under communism.

Charuty's paper also raises interesting questions about studying a symbolic system in a period of massive liacization and where many traditional religious festivals have been transformed into a more playful celebration and spectacle of local identities often put on, as Boissevain (2001) points out, for the entertainment of the massive number of tourists from overseas. Do their meanings change at all across time? The production of a global Catholic culture is also the subject of William Christian's (2001) refreshing paper. One could see a continuity from the medieval pan-European and circum-Mediterranean *furta sacra*, the theft of sacred bones of saints (Geary 1977), to their encapsulation and representation in statues possessing residual religious power, to finally the "polaroids from Heaven" (Wojcik 1996). Now "globalization" has also resulted in the emergence of an international vision culture that

re-enchants everything, and also includes anthropologists. Nevertheless, the archaeology of religious imagination varies between West and East. In the West, statues and apparitions are a royal and popular road to the divine, whereas such a transition in the East is generally still through magical icons. In the East, the Virgin does not appear personally. Christian's paper raises further questions to pursue concerning differences between pilgrimage in Catholicism and Islam, and the reasons why the latter does not appear to be so multi-sited and still seems to shun the media harnessing of spectacle and the globalization of seers and experts.

There seems to be a big difference between the West and the Eastern Mediterranean concerning ethnic cleansing and ethnic *qua* religious homogeneity. The West did its ethnic cleansing much earlier than the East, partly as a result of political centralization. The Ottoman *millet* system permitted an unequal but relatively religiously tolerant multi-ethnicity, which in the hands of contemporary Turkish intellectuals has itself become romanticized as a sign of Turkey's "multicultural" and proto-European qualifications. The religious homogeneity we now have in the Western Mediterranean was the end result of a long process of ethnic and religious cleansing. Let us not forget that traditionally and historically Muslims were much more tolerant towards conversions from Christians, than Christians were towards conversions from Islam. Many important individuals in Istanbul were renegade Christians; there are few similar examples in Western Christianity. Islamic society was thus more porous. It is interesting that, in Southwestern Europe, Christians still seem to be obsessed with symbolically representing the "Muslim (or Jewish) Other" in religious festivals hundreds of years after they were expelled, whereas contemporary Muslims, even in more religiously diversified contexts like the Balkans, Cyprus before Turkish occupation and partition, and the Middle East, seem to be less concerned with the depiction of the "Christian Other" even in symbolic form. Anna Kanafani-Zahar's paper (2001) showed that co-existence was possible in certain villages in the Lebanon, even if it was in a limited form comprising co-visiting and participation in joint rituals. Yet folk memories and practices of co-existence was not a suitable enough defence against the irruptions of divisive and virulent nationalisms, as Bringe's recent film on Bosnia brought out. Nor is the lack of interdenominational intermarriage a sufficient impediment to the corrosive appeal of nationalism as was indicated in the Balkans where intermarriage was common.

Claudine Fabre-Vassas (2001) notes the similar crises that affect the family and religion. One could suggest that only when society has become generally laicized as in Southwestern Europe, when religion is not practised in the conventional sense (as Weber pointed out, we cannot escape from taking into account the social and economic consequences of beliefs about salvation, including if people do not believe but still nevertheless participate in religious rituals), can we begin to have "the society of the spectacle" as Guy Debord called it. We seem to be moving from Christianity as a social system, and then a symbolic system, to a symbolic system that has social implications—what Edgar Morin called "neo-archaisms". This seems to be the theme of Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*, which concerns the transformation of the relationship between the symbolic and representation. As they point out, "[t]hese modern archaisms are extremely complex and varied. Some are mainly folkloric, but they nevertheless represent social and potentially political forces" (Deleuze and Guattari 1984: 257). Fabre-Vassas (2001) rightly suggests that we should explore how religion gives individuals "*identites sexuees*". It should be added here that Mediterranean religions provided much wider, complex and nuanced "*identitees sexuees*" than mere "male" and "female": monks (including warrior monks and Janissaries), nuns, priests and *castrati*. So did the Ottoman Empire, which took over the social role and identity of the eunuch as a protector of sacred boundaries from late Imperial Rome and Byzantium (Marron 1995). Grassroots notions of gender identity in both East and West often vigorously

opposed such classifications (Cameron 1993; Tougher 1997), although clearly such individuals were often drawn from the poorer segments of society. This was one lacuna of the book. There was little on gender identities especially on alternative and diverse forms to mere male and female. We need to explore these, both contemporaneously and historically, and there is enough material available to attempt some tentative comparisons (see Faubion 1993; Wikan, 1980).

Finally Jack Goody contributed a classic paper on the circulation of wine, women and song between classes and social groups in the Great and Little traditions. His broad canvas was an attempt to show that culture divides as much as unifies both across the Great and Little traditions and within the component estates. The genealogy of "traditions" is thus very complex and can have different, even sometimes opposed, meanings depending on the social groups concerned—a theme that is effectively explored by Saumade's analysis of the Bullfight (2001). He shows that the Bullfight was both mediated by writing and by popular tradition. *Contra* Turner (1969), Goody refreshingly emphasized that joint ceremonies can sometimes highlight cleavages as much as engender solidarity. Burke (2001) developed this to talk about the appropriation and adaptation of cultural themes such as *Orlando Furioso*. Cultural themes and traditions are not unrelated to class and social distinctions, even in the contemporary Mediterranean, and following Mintz (1997), we ought to examine how subaltern song and "ethnic" music in the Mediterranean can gain acceptance among dominant groups by becoming part of world music (Stokes 1992). Here, new forms of internal exoticism replace external exoticisms in complex class dynamics and evolving social distinctions (Sant Cassia 2000). Just as we should not neglect the circulation of luxuries in the traditional class-stratified Mediterranean, we should be aware of the "discovery", transformation, commercialization and narrativization of new cultural resources (including new representations of "traditional Mediterranean themes" including food, music, etc.) by various social groups to retain their symbolic power in society.

It remains to discuss briefly the thorny issue of the status of the Mediterranean as a domain of scholarly navigation and investigation. There are those like Herzfeld (2001) who reject it as an ontological category. This may be correct, but most ontology in philosophy in any case often involves the dissolution of categories. One could argue that the ontological nature of the Mediterranean is debated not just by "us" as anthropologists, but also by "us" as "them" (in some cases as "Mediterraneans") and "them" as "us" as "anthropologists" in other cases. Like a double negative, a double entendre/parentheses/quotation marks can re-conjure the object whose existence we have just denied. Herzfeld's diplomatic disapproval is to caution us against reifying the notion and encourage us to see it as a competing level of identity. Yet this would apply equally to the critiques of the anthropology of the Mediterranean from scholars such as Pina Cabral (1989). As Driessen (2001) points out, the eclipse of the anthropology of the Mediterranean (especially by southern European scholars) in favour of a European anthropology surfaced when Portugal, Spain and Greece joined the European Union. Herzfeld's (2001: 674) recommendation is modest but still implicitly embedded in the rhetorics of the nation-state: to conduct small-scale "and more careful comparisons of processes of cultural self-construction in the region". To him "Mediterranean Identity" is "an index of local and international political process" (Herzfeld 2001: 675). This may not distinguish it epistemologically from the nation-state, which we in effect attempt to demystify but nevertheless privilege at least through the shadows our silhouetted objects project onto the wall of our cave. One could at least pluralize it. We could talk about Mediterranean "identities", with which he may agree. One could note that Herzfeld's suggestion are the opposite of Pitt Rivers's: "A social anthropology of the Mediterranean must start with these diversities (within their national frontiers) rather than with the stereotypes of 'national' culture" (Pitt Rivers, 1963: 10).

There should be more to an anthropology of the Mediterranean (as opposed to a Mediterranean anthropology) than a study of how the rhetorics of negative or positive stereotypes can provide vocabularies of justification and counter-justification in the tension between self-projection and self-knowledge. There is undoubted value to such a modern transactionalist analysis of identity negotiations. Yet we also need to move beyond this to encompass comparative studies on how families have responded to changes in the structure of sentiments, comparative gender identities, regional cultural and political responses to globalization, the emergence of new Mediterranean minorities, etc., quite apart from the massive often illicit population movements across the Mediterranean Sea and the role of new mafias in the trafficking of migrants, to name but a few. One could also point to the political merit of an anthropological study of the Mediterranean as a means to counter the increasing rigidity and xenophobia within and outside national borders. This is not an easy task. As the Schneiders (2001) indicate, the Palermitan working class are often bewildered and disenchanted by the reforming (local) anti-mafia middle classes and intelligensia. Orientalism in one country (Schneider 1998) is also a function of class and a failure of comprehension. Albera and Blok (2001b: 41) wisely suggest that one should avoid defining the Mediterranean as an *object* of study, but consider it as a *field* of study. They note the spectre of the trait list haunts the culture area approach even in the work of Davis (1977) and Gilmore (1982) who nevertheless reject it. There are two dangers to the trait list: the playing down of differences and the presentation of an ahistorical, essentialized picture of the Mediterranean. They reject concentration on ethnographic particularisms and note that the problem is with place: "taking issue with the cultural area concept is not easy: everybody is ready to throw it out, but it comes again through the window" (Albera and Blok 2001b: 22). Critiques offered little in their place, and the critiques were themselves not uninfluenced by the changing geo-political concerns. One could add that the problem lies not so much in the political underlays of academic critiques, but rather in deciding how to work with or in spite of them. A politically reflexive and socially engaged Mediterranean focus among anthropologists could itself help counter the increasing rigidification of national borders and the growth of xenophobia found unsurprisingly in those areas most affected by globalization—such as the Almeria, where there have been recent vicious attacks on North African Arabs working on plantations producing early export vegetables for world markets.

As well as suggesting that one should avoid defining the Mediterranean as an *object* of study and consider it instead to be a *field* of study, Albera and Blok (2001b: 24) also suggest, following Derrida, that the Mediterranean should be seen as a field of "differance", as a "texture of differences continuously reshaped". The Mediterranean may have a paradigmatic value since it exemplifies the blurring of distinctions between "us" and "them". This is useful, but it still requires further teasing out. Perhaps the recurring penultimate word/gesture should belong to the late classicist Arnaldo Momigliano. When Horden and Purcell described their intention to write a study of 3,000 years of Mediterranean history, he just laughed. Yet they still went on to produce a remarkable and rich book.

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