

In: A. M. Kazanias & M. G. Spillane (eds) (1998)  
"Education and the Structuring of European Space  
North-South, Centre-Periphery, Identity-Others."  
(Athens: Aisios Edition).

## Chapter Five

### THE MEDITERRANEAN: A NEW FOCUS FOR COMPARATIVE EDUCATION STUDIES?

Ronald G. Sultana

#### Introduction

A comprehensive scan of the comparative education literature reveals that the 'Mediterranean' does not commonly feature as a category around which analytic and systematic studies of the education systems are organised. At best, one finds individual case studies of countries around the Mediterranean basin, or even comparative analyses between two or more countries in that region in terms of such categories as 'colonial/post-colonial influence,' for instance. Occasionally, one uncovers articles and even books that consider discrete entities within the Mediterranean as poles of comparison, such as when authors look at education systems in southern Europe, in the Maghreb and Machrek countries of North Africa, or the Middle East. Even more rarely one comes across collections of articles authored by Mediterranean scholars and purporting to represent regional studies, but which in fact fail to develop an analysis that connects specific experiences and account for them with reference to an overarching explanatory framework.<sup>1</sup>

Mediterranean countries also feature in studies which consider educational development in 'the South,' that is, by virtue of their being areas characterised by industrial underdevelopment, low per capita income, high birth rates, and high illiteracy rates: in other words, as a part of what some still refer to as 'Third World studies.' However, these comparative analyses do not, generally speaking,

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. the special 1987 issue of *European Journal of Teacher Education* dedicated to the 'Mediterranean.' M. Sabour's Bourdieun and empirically grounded *Homo Academicus Arabicus* (Joensuu: Joensuu Academic Press, 1988) provides a salutary, if rare, example of comparative work related to Mediterranean educational issues (in this case, the Arab intellectual).

recognise the Mediterranean as a discrete 'region' with its own characteristics and specificity, as is generally done with reference to 'Asia,' 'Europe,' 'North America' or the 'South Pacific,' for instance. In the latter cases, a unity is often perceived despite the diversity of education systems, and a set of shared characteristics differentiate the region from another in educationally important ways. Bray and Murray Thomas point out that "the unifying characteristics of any particular region may include language, political organisation, colonial history, economic system, national ambitions, and/or cultural origins." There are no studies that I know of that have attempted to tackle the challenge of cross-regional educational comparisons in the Mediterranean by proving that "the characteristics cited as unifying a region are truly shared by a region's members; [by] demonstrating that two or more regions are substantially similar or different in the nature of their unifying features; and [by] showing that such similarities and differences are educationally important."<sup>2</sup>

The reluctance to recognise the identity of the Mediterranean as a 'region' or systemic whole, within, of course, an increasingly interdependent world, has been a feature of several other fields of study besides comparative education. The main exceptions here have been geographers and anthropologists. But it would be probably true to say that until quite recently, Mediterranean studies were a rarity, reflecting the stance adopted by the main players on the world's stage. For, as Tanzarella<sup>3</sup> notes, the region is not even acknowledged by the key international decision-makers, or by financial institutions, political organisations and military alliances. If anything, these, and other leading institutions in world affairs (including the World Bank, for instance), consider the Mediterranean as a jig-saw puzzle, where the parts belong, not to a coherent nucleus, but are rather attached to larger, external zones such as black Africa, central Asia, central Europe or the Balkans, and western Europe.<sup>4</sup> The influential World Education Report,<sup>5</sup> for instance, continues with the traditional processing of statistical data on education with reference to the developed and developing countries, and by grouping the latter under the following regional aggregates: sub-Saharan Africa, Arab states, Latin America/Caribbean, Eastern Asia/Oceania, and Southern Asia. Discrete Mediterranean countries fall in one or another of these regions.

The 'invisibility' of the Mediterranean could, of course, be justified by comparativists on the ground that what we have here is not a region, and that the

---

<sup>2</sup> M. Bray and R. Murray Thomas, "Levels of Comparison in Educational Studies: Different Insights from Different Literatures and the Value of Multilevel Analyses," *Harvard Educational Review*, 65, No. 3 (1995), 472-490, 474.

<sup>3</sup> G. Tanzarella, "Liminaire," in Balta, ed., *La Méditerranée Réinventée: Réalités et Espoirs de la Coopération* (Paris: La Découverte/Fondation René Seydoux, 1992), 5-9, 5.

<sup>4</sup> See A.B. Zahlan, "Pour un Eurêka Méditerranéen," in Balta (fn. 3 above), 207-228, 208.

<sup>5</sup> UNESCO, *World Education Report* (Oxford: UNESCO Publishing, 1995).

UNESCO or World Bank strategy to desegregate countries of the basin and to organise them around more immediately significant economic or geographical units makes more sense. For the geographical Mediterranean is clearly divided into distinguishable sub-regions, so that we can speak of the 'North' and 'South' Mediterranean as we can speak of the 'East' and the 'West.' Globally, the region is made up of twenty states (if one had to include Portugal) and covers 3 million square kilometres. It is the home of 500 million inhabitants, representing 8% of the world's population. 200 million of these Mediterraneans are Arabs and, in all, over 200 languages are spoken around the basin.<sup>6</sup> The 'north Mediterranean' countries, generally referred to as the 'Latin arc' countries or, significantly, as 'southern Europe,' are, for instance, distinguishable from the countries in the south of the basin by several of the commonly used indicators of development. They generally have a faster rate of industrial development (though still 'less developed' when compared to northern Europe) and have high literacy rates. Despite progress in the south Mediterranean countries, by 1991 between 5% and 34% of students were still not receiving a primary education, with high illiteracy rates for several Maghreb and Machrek countries such as Morocco (at 50.5%) and Tunisia (at 34.7%).<sup>7</sup> The Latin arc is, moreover, characterised by a low birth-rate, the lowest being those of Italy and France with 1.3 and 1.8 children per woman respectively. In contrast, the south is a demographic time bomb of another sort, with high birth-rates that are topped by Libya, with 6.7 children per woman.<sup>8</sup> Algeria and Morocco have doubled their populations since the French retreat, and Egypt will double its population in twenty five years. The annual per capita income is less than \$1000 in the south, whilst that of the north is at least ten times as much. One could also speak of a south that 'exports' migrant workers, and of a north Mediterranean that receives them; of a South that is a home for Islam, and of a North that is steeped in Catholicism, even if this is a secularised version; and of a North that is increasingly integrating itself in the 'new' economic and political bloc, the European Union and of a South that is excluded.

Similarly, the 'east' Mediterranean countries, the Levant, face challenges that are different to those which trouble the 'western' sector of the basin, and that are decisively lodged in the geo-political context that can be more meaningfully and appropriately called Middle Eastern, or, if we took a north-easterly direction, Balkan.

---

<sup>6</sup> See M. Grenon and M. Batisse, *Futures for the Mediterranean Basin: The Blue Plan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989); G. Luciani, ed., *The Mediterranean Region* (London: Croom Helm, 1984).

<sup>7</sup> Figures for 1990, see X. Gizard, "Des Outils pour les Nouveaux Mondes," in Balta (fn. 3 above): 174-191, 176.

<sup>8</sup> H. Regnault, "Exister dans l'Economie-Monde," in Balta (fn. 3 above), 61-74, 63.

Given the rifts in the Mediterranean, why should one attempt to highlight the axis of unity when those of difference leap so readily to the comparativists' attention? One way of tackling this question is to consider 'regions' as 'constructs' rather than as 'facts.' This should not be difficult to understand in a decade which has seen the overt intensification of the creation of a region called 'Europe' which, while historically and even culturally disparate, became a 'region' (or a system containing unities) under the influence of conquering armies, Christian mysticism, merchant traders, and captains of industry. At different moments in history, it has been politically and economically expedient to focus on the similarities or the differences that mark the old continent, and to use specific constructs of 'Europe' to include or exclude groups of people and whole nations. Indeed, 'Europe' is constructed differently by diverse organisations such as the European Union, the Council of Europe and UNESCO, and behind these varied constructions lie important ideological, political and economic considerations. In other words, a 'region' should not be considered in a reified manner: it can become one, or fail to become one, as a result of vested interests by those doing the naming.

This is a point that is made by Edgar Pisani, erstwhile Minister of the French Republic under De Gaulle and Mitterrand, and who until recently was President of the Paris-based *Institut du Monde Arabe*. Pisani draws on his experience as a commissioner with the European Community to note that the fact that the term 'Mediterranean' has little purchase outside geographical discourse is an accomplished fact that suits the superpowers of this world. He says:

Go to Washington, to the State Department, and speak of the Mediterranean. You will be told, in an authoritative if not reproachful tone, that it does not exist. And if you have the misfortune to insist, you will soon understand that what is being implied is that everything must be done so that it does not exist. Go to Brussels and stroll up and down the corridors of the Commission of the Community. You will have to wait a long time before you find an office or meet a person who is concerned about our sea.<sup>9</sup>

Silence about a region, in this sense, can be as much conspiratorial as it can be due to honest doubts regarding its existence as a system. Both points are important, for they are the foundations of my case in favour of launching comparative and regional education studies focused around the Mediterranean. In other words, it now behoves me to consider whether we can, in fact, speak of the Mediterranean as a regional unit, and to also consider whether the region can

---

<sup>9</sup> E. Pisani, "En Quête d'un Avenir," in Balta (fn. 3 above), 32. With reference to the United States' piecemeal, ad hoc foreign policy in the Mediterranean, see the excellent review by E. Laipson, "Thinking about the Mediterranean," *Mediterranean Quarterly: A Journal of Global Issues* 1, No. 1 (1990), 50-66.

be 'brought into existence,' much in the same way as the blocs like the EU or NAFTA are in the process of self-creation. Of course, the two propositions are not mutually exclusive, for alliances between 'discrete' units are not created out of a sheer act of will, but must be based on commonly shared perceptions of areas and structures of compatibility. Indeed, my argument in the following sections will be that first, there are sufficient areas and structures of compatibility between elements that make up the Mediterranean to justify speaking of a 'region' (and hence to facilitate not only Mediterranean education studies, but *comparative* Mediterranean education studies), and that secondly, even if the Mediterranean did not 'exist,' then there is an increasingly felt need to create it, or better, to make it happen.

### *The Mediterranean as a System*

At the most superficial level, an answer to the question 'Does the Mediterranean region really exist?' is "Yes, since we use the word 'Mediterranean' in that sense in everyday language, and we intuitively know what we are referring to when we use that word." This would be a line of argument adopted by analytic philosophers for instance, who privilege 'ordinary language' as a tool for understanding, arguing that the meaning of a word is to be found in its use in everyday interaction. In this case, they would point out that we speak about somebody having a 'Mediterranean character,' about restaurants that serve 'Mediterranean food,'<sup>10</sup> about a festive celebration having a 'Mediterranean feel' to it.<sup>11</sup> We obviously speak about 'Mediterranean climate,' and the tourist industry certainly knows what clients mean when they ask for a 'Mediterranean holiday,' given that the region accounts for one third of the volume of the global tourist industry.<sup>12</sup> None of us who watched the award-winning *Mediterraneo* had any doubts as to why this title was chosen for that film, despite the essentially universal human themes explored. This sense of 'unity' of a system perceived popularly if unreflectingly came across recently when, at a christening party in the centre-west of France I was asked by one of the guests: 'Are you Italian?' - 'No'. 'Are you Spanish?' - 'No'. 'Ah! You must be Portuguese!' - 'No, I'm Maltese'. 'Oh...It's all the same thing!'

<sup>10</sup> About Mediterranean cuisine and culture more generally, see Balta (fn. 3 above).

<sup>11</sup> See A. Badry and J. Monleon, "La Fête: Théâtre, Musique et Danse," in Balta (fn. 3 above): 288-302.

<sup>12</sup> At one stage, the figures were constantly increasing, with obvious repercussions for the cultural (as well as economic and environmental) realities of the countries affected: there were 58 million tourists in the region in 1970, 117 million in 1986, and despite the current depression in the market, it is expected that by the year 2025 the figures will rise to anywhere between 370 and 758 million (see Balta, N. 3 above; and M. Grenon and M. Batisse, N. 6 above).

Of course, we all know it is not the same thing, as I discovered at my expense when I was taken to be an Arab from North Africa by a French bureaucrat in Paris as she processed my scholarship allowance. But the point is that despite different histories, cultures, ethnicities and religions, the Mediterranean does have a set of stable meanings associated with it, and at its most popular level one can propose that the Mediterranean means what people who use it in everyday conversation understand when employing the term.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, this 'ordinary language' approach is useful because it makes another point: it actually takes us beyond the strict semantic and geo-environmental meaning of the word 'Mediterranean,' i.e. landlocked Sea, since it recognises that a country such as Portugal, for instance, can be termed 'Mediterranean,' even though it does not touch the Sea.

But does the stability of the concept begin to disintegrate once we go beyond this fundamental level? Geographers, of course, have been among the first to identify the coherence of the region as a system. The geographer's 'Mediterranean' traditionally stretched from the northern limit of the olive tree to the northern limit of the palm tree, with climate being the determining boundary-maker. Climate too determines the bio-geographer's definition of the region, considered as a narrow zone lying between two parallels of latitude where certain plants and animals are typically found. And since Fernand Braudel's path-breaking *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (first published in 1949), the climactic idiom was extended to explain not only a geographical but a social unity as well. As the major figure of the Annales School points out:

It would be difficult to recognise any unity in this dense, composite and ill-defined world [i.e. the Mediterranean]...other than that of being the meeting place of many peoples, and the melting-pot of many histories. Nevertheless it is significant that at the heart of this human unit, occupying an area smaller than the whole, there should be a source of physical unity, a climate, which has imposed its uniformity on both landscape and ways of life...It is a matter of some importance to the historian to find almost everywhere within his field of study the same climate, the same seasonal rhythm, the same vegetation, the same colours and, when the geological architecture recurs, the same landscapes, identical to the point of obsession; in short, the same ways of life...a native of the Mediterranean, wherever he might come from would never feel out of place in any part of the sea.<sup>14</sup>

---

<sup>13</sup> This, while superficially a simple statement, is itself a subject rich with possibilities for research.

<sup>14</sup> F. Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (London: BCA, 1992), 171, 172, 178.

As Gilmore notes, 'Faced with virtually identical ecological problems, Mediterranean peoples have indeed responded historically in like ways.'<sup>15</sup> Despite the heterogeneity of the region, therefore, attention to the *longue durée* of history reveals an inner soul and an identity worth privileging. That inner soul is the result not only of ecological continuities, but also of mutual influence among the peoples of the region. Braudel put it in his characteristically apt way, 'in the Mediterranean to live was to exchange,' whether this exchange involved men, ideas, ways of life, beliefs...or habits of courtship.<sup>16</sup> Referring to a more contemporary world, Davis has argued that the intensity of contact has carried over from the past, so that "Over the millennia it has proved impossible for Mediterranean people to ignore each other. They have conquered, colonised, converted...the contacts are perpetual and inescapable."<sup>17</sup> It is this constant factor of interaction, borrowing, diffusion and acculturation that are, at least in part, responsible for the homogeneity of the Mediterranean. Since Braudel, others have set out to identify a logic of inter-relationships around the Mediterranean.<sup>18</sup> Different members of the Annales School grouped around their mentor to produce studies on other aspects of the Mediterranean, such as the analyses which are to be found in the two edited volumes by Braudel himself<sup>19</sup> and by Braudel and Duby.<sup>20</sup> But these studies were concerned with the sixteenth century, historical, classical Mediterranean, not with the contemporary one, and it fell to anthropologists and social scientists to explore the extent to which one could speak of the present Mediterranean reality as a social system, an attempt which less than a decade and a half ago was considered to be 'new and controversial.'<sup>21</sup> However, under the influence of authors such as Pitt-Rivers,<sup>22</sup>

---

<sup>15</sup> D. Gilmore, "Anthropology of the Mediterranean Area," *Annual Review of Anthropology*, No. 11:175-205,178.

<sup>16</sup> F. Braudel (fn. 14, above), 548, 550.

<sup>17</sup> S. Davis, *The People of the Mediterranean: An Essay in Comparative and Social Anthropology* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 255.

<sup>18</sup> For an alternative to Braudel's unitary vision, see A.C. Hess, *The Forgotten Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

<sup>19</sup> F. Braudel, ed., *La Méditerranée: Espace et Histoire* (Paris: Flammarion, 1985; first edition 197).

<sup>20</sup> F. Braudel and G. Duby, ed., *La Méditerranée: Les Hommes et l'Héritage* (Paris: Flammarion, 1986; first edition 1977).

<sup>21</sup> D. Gilmore (fn. 15 above), 175.

<sup>22</sup> J.A. Pitt-Rivers ed., *Mediterranean Countrymen: Essays in the Sociology of the Mediterranean* (Paris: Mouton, 1963).

Peristiany,<sup>23</sup> Wolf,<sup>24</sup> Gellner,<sup>25</sup> the Schneiders,<sup>26</sup> and perhaps more importantly Davis<sup>27</sup> and Boissevain,<sup>28</sup> a pan-Mediterranean focus was developed in order to explore Mediterranean distinctiveness around unifying themes.<sup>29</sup> Their studies suggest, controversially, that a relatively uniform Mediterranean ecology led to an aggregate of socio-cultural traits which Gilmore, drawing on a variety of sources, lists as follows:<sup>30</sup>

... a strong urban orientation; a corresponding disdain for the peasant way of life and for manual labour; sharp social, geographic, and economic stratification; political instability and a history of weak states; 'atomistic' community life; rigid sexual segregation; a tendency toward reliance on the smallest possible kinship units (nuclear families and shallow lineages); strong emphasis on shifting, ego-centred, non-corporate coalitions; an honour-and-shame syndrome which defines both sexuality and personal reputation; ...intense parochialism and inter-village rivalries; communities are marked off by local cults of patron saints who are identified with the territorial unit; general gregariousness and interdependence of daily life characteristic of small, densely populated neighbourhoods, where patterns of institutionalised hostile nicknaming abounds, where the evil eye belief is widespread, and where religion plays an important institutionalised political role, as do priests, saints, and holy men. Marriage patterns, while superficially varied, signal the unity of the Mediterranean through the practice of the dowry. And there are important similarities in politics also, with weak bureaucracies at the national level leading to unstable democratic regimes, often alternating with dictatorships of both Right and Left. At the micropolitical level, this emphasis on informal personal power rather than formal institutions is reflected in the reliance on patronage, with clientage being the preferred form of adaptation to social inequality in the region.

<sup>23</sup> J.G. Persistiany, ed., *Honour and Shame: the Values of Mediterranean Society* (London: Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1965); idem, ed., *Contributions to Mediterranean Sociology* (The Hague: Mouton, 1968); idem, ed., *Kinship and Modernization in Mediterranean Society* (Rome: Center for Mediterranean Studies, 1976; idem, ed., *Mediterranean Family Structures* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

<sup>24</sup> E.R. Wolf, "Society and Symbols in Latin Europe and the Islamic Middle-East: Some Comparisons," *Anthropology* 42 (1969): 287-301.

<sup>25</sup> E. Gellner and J. Waterbury eds., *Patrons and Clients in Mediterranean Societies* (London: Duckworth, 1977).

<sup>26</sup> J. Schneider and P. Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (New York: Academic Press, 1976).

<sup>27</sup> N. 17 above.

<sup>28</sup> J. Boissevain, "Uniformity and Diversity in the Mediterranean: An Essay in Interpretation," in J. G. Persistiany ed. 1976a (fn. 23 above); and idem, "Toward an Anthropology of the Mediterranean," *Current Anthropology* 20 (1979), 81-93.

<sup>29</sup> For an overview of the literature on the anthropology of the Mediterranean, see Boissevain (fn. 28 above) and Gilmore (fn. 15 above).

<sup>30</sup> Here I quote, synthesise and paraphrase a list of traits as presented by Gilmore (fn. 15 above), 178-184.



Over and above these Mediterranean 'traits,' which seem to have evolved due to internal contacts which are both historical and contemporary, and which tend to germinate around the basin due to a similar eco-environment, others have emphasised the identity of the Mediterranean region in terms of a shared subjugation to external economic pressures. Several authors<sup>31</sup> take a political-economic approach to the Mediterranean, and draw on Wallerstein's world-systems analysis, with its emphasis on centre-periphery relations, or on Santos' theorisation, of semi-peripheral societies, in order to argue that what is quintessentially Mediterranean is not the result of local or regional conditions, but rather more a direct response to 'de-development' by the core powers.

In this necessarily brief overview, drawing mainly on geography, history, anthropology and political economy,<sup>32</sup> I have outlined a variety of sources of cultural affinities, of regularities that indicate a justification of a Mediterranean speciality, of a focus on Mediterranean studies. In one important sense, this is just a superficial, linear appraisal, given that comparative analysis goes beyond the simple inventory of shared traits between different countries in the same region, to a multi-level understanding of the dynamic inter-relationship between these same traits. Both the traits referred to, and the possible connections between them are a rich source for insights as to what agendas and fertile research programmes could lie ahead for comparative education studies of the Mediterranean, agendas that have already been profitably pursued in a number of other disciplinary fields, fields that are increasingly contributing to a relatively new but burgeoning interdisciplinary focus in universities called 'Mediterranean Studies.' However, before teasing out these sorts of implications, I would like to focus on the second foundational argument with reference to my attempt to justify Mediterranean education studies, namely what I referred to earlier as the 'need' to engage in this sort of project even if one had to ignore those synthesising qualities that could conceivably result in the Mediterranean becoming a regional system.

---

<sup>31</sup> E.g. S. Amin and F. Yachir, *La Méditerranée dans le Monde: les Enjeux de la transnationalisation* (Paris: La Découverte, 1988), and F. Yachir, *The Mediterranean: Between Autonomy and Dependence* (London: Zed Books, 1989).

<sup>32</sup> Some have even attempted to identify the typical Mediterranean athlete, by referring to the morphological stock of different Mediterranean peoples as well as to the common climactic, sociological and economic realities that make up their daily existence (cf. J. Marchand, "La Fête Sportive," in Balta (fn. 3 above), 303-318).

*'Inventing' the Mediterranean?*

In an influential book on the Mediterranean which appeared in French in 1992 under the auspices of the René Seydoux Foundation,<sup>33</sup> the editor, Paul Balta, significantly chose to group the collection of articles under the title *La Méditerranée Réinventée: Réalités et Espoirs de la Coopération*. As one of the contributors remarked, "The Mediterranean is ripe for inventing/constructing, beyond the conflicts that envelop it...It is to be invented because, if truth be told, it barely exists and because those living along its shores, as neighbours and partners, need it to exist."<sup>34</sup> Such an avowal by an internationally renowned expert on Mediterranean affairs ties in with the argument outlined earlier, namely that there could be a variety of reasons (political, cultural, ideological) that encourage the social construction or 'invention' of a region and of a unity.

*The EU, the Mediterranean and Regional Identity Formation*

Indeed, the invention of the Mediterranean (over and above the arguments that claim that the region already exists as a homogenous unit anyway) can be the result of exogenous pressures as much as of internal ones. While there are several reasons why the Mediterraneans themselves might wish to co-operate in order to generate unity, there are also external processes which, perhaps unintentionally, generate and reinforce Mediterranean identity. Here I am referring to the formation of the European Community where, despite the slogan 'unity in diversity,' European identity is increasingly reinforced through the exclusion of 'the other.'<sup>35</sup> That sense of exclusion of the South in itself, of course, leads to identity formation among the Mediterraneans, who now find themselves sharing another trait: that of being commonly ostracised by the economic and political core, towards which they otherwise gravitate.

The argument therefore becomes different: Mediterranean unity and collaboration is a matter of survival. It is also a matter of importance to the rest of Europe, given the political and economic implications of instability in the region, and Balta is correct to argue that "the destiny of the two shorelines

---

<sup>33</sup> The René Seydoux Foundation was set up in 1978 to develop links that would unite Mediterranean countries and promote opportunities for exchanges, meetings and co-operation amongst the inhabitants. Its key publications include the *Répertoire Méditerranéen*, which includes information about the main institutions of research, culture and training which focus on the Mediterranean region (Fifth Edition, 1993).

<sup>34</sup> E. Pisani (fn. 9 above), 32.

<sup>35</sup> See E. Balibar, "Es Gibt Staat in Europa: Racism and Politics in Europe Today," *New Left Review* 186 (1991), 5-19; D. Coulby, "European Culture: Unity and Fractures," paper presented at the 16th CESE Conference, Copenhagen, 26-29 June, 1994; R. G. Sultana, "A Uniting Europe, A Dividing Education?" *International Studies in Sociology of Education* 5, No. 2 (1995).

[north and south] have always been linked."<sup>36</sup> It is important to consider the Mediterranean policy of the European Union, and what interests are at play in the processes of construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of the region.

The EU's Mediterranean policy, while taking off in the 1970s,<sup>37</sup> has known only a halting progress largely because there is not much consensus regarding it among the member states. Germany, understandably, given its vested interests, is keen to see the Union expand eastwards. Spain, France and Italy, on their part, have used the forum of the 1995 Barcelona initiative to try to put the Mediterranean back on the agenda of the EU, a focus that went astray after the events of 1989. But the Euro-Mediterranean Conferences (in Barcelona in 1995, and in Malta in 1997) have failed to achieve much, and in many ways have simply highlighted the divide between the North and the South. One of the key aspects of the Mediterranean Partnership Policy is the establishment of a free trade zone in the area by the year 2010. Whilst this might increase the trade between the northern and southern countries of the Mediterranean, this does not mean that the level of current economic disparities will be reduced,<sup>38</sup> and it could also be argued that an increase in EU exports to the Mediterranean will simply intensify the negative balance of payments which exists in the south.<sup>39</sup> It is reasonable to also argue that the creation of a free trade area in the Mediterranean will reinforce the axis of division not only between North and South, but between South and South as well, as different Mediterranean, non-EU states compete for restructuring funds. Not that there is much to fight over. Much more tangible financial support is being committed by the EU towards its eastern European neighbours, even though that region contains half the population of the Mediterranean partners, and the EU's trade surplus with the latter is double the one it runs with the former.<sup>40</sup> As one commentator noted in his analysis of the results of the Euro-Mediterranean Conference held in Barcelona in late November 1995:

---

<sup>36</sup> P. Balta, "Depuis Ulysse et Sindbad," in Balta, ed. (fn. 3 above), 13-28.

<sup>37</sup> For a brief account of the historical development of the EU's Mediterranean policy, see F. Rizzi, "La Méditerranée au Centre," *Universita' del Mediterraneo*, No. 2 (1995), 4-5.

<sup>38</sup> There is an ever growing gap in living standards between the southern members of the EU and third countries in the area, excluding Israel. In its document *Horizon 2101*, the European Commission has committed itself to facilitating a doubling of the GNP of these countries, but despite that, and because of the demographic structure in the area, the gap is expected to widen from 1:10 to 1:20 by the year 2010.

<sup>39</sup> Regnault (fn. 8 above) argues that the movement of merchandise shows more clearly than anything else the extent of the asymmetric relations between North and South, an imbalance that is most striking in relation to the Maghreb. Two-thirds of the Maghreb's commerce is with the European Union (mainly France, Italy and Spain), but the region represents only 3% of the external commerce of the Union.

<sup>40</sup> L. Brincat, "After Barcelona...the Daunting Task Ahead," *Sunday Times* (December 17, 1995) 14.

The 4.7 billion ECU the EU is dedicating to the Mediterranean in the next five years will have very little impact on reducing existing north-south socio-economic imbalances. This is particularly evident when one notes that the EU has run a trade surplus of 12.1 billion ECU in 1993 and 9.3 billion ECU in 1994 with Mediterranean countries. It is therefore only redistributing half the profit it made in one year from the area over a five year period.<sup>41</sup>

The conclusions of Mediterranean analysts of the EU stance vis-à-vis the South is generally that with the end of the East-West confrontation, the gravitational pull has turned eastwards, and the strategic importance of the Mediterranean has decreased. While some authors have argued that Europe ignores the South at its own risk, the Algerian case could also suggest that local confined crises in the Mediterranean region no longer provoke immediate reactions in world politics. The feeling of disengagement of the North from the South, by what could be the latter's most important ally, I would argue, might heighten a feeling of regional identity, and certainly and paradoxically gives cause for its regeneration. Pisani's affirmation that "la Méditerranée ne peut naître que si l'Europe existe" is a slogan which therefore cuts both ways.<sup>42</sup> In other words, can the Mediterranean exist without European aid? But also, the Mediterranean exists *because* of the dearth of European support.

### *Mediterranean Initiatives*

The sense of Mediterranean identity is being heightened by a variety of initiatives that have sprouted over the past decade and a half. Most of these are in such fields as regional politics, finance, and culture and can best be described as 'eschatological' in nature; that is they are gesturing hopefully, or anxiously (if the initiatives originate from the North), towards a regional unity that, in fact, does not exist. For those from the Mediterranean basin itself, and especially for those from the South, these initiatives represent an investment on the part of those who would, for diverse reasons, wish to see an integration of the region around focused nodes of activity, for the development of the same region. Some of these attempts have concerned only the southern shores of the Mediterranean, with movements trying to instil an Arab unity (through the founding of the Arab League in 1945 and the Arab Maghreb Union of 1989), being largely unsuccessful and, as with the more regionally open Mediterranean Forum, generally active exclusively in what in international relations is called

---

<sup>41</sup> S. Calleya, "The Euro-Med Conference: What Results?" *Sunday Times* (December 3, 1995), 4.

<sup>42</sup> E. Pisani (fn. 9 above), 40.

'soft diplomacy.' For those from the North, Mediterranean regional initiatives are primarily an attempt to ensure European presence and influence, and to control what is seen to be a security challenge in a zone of potentially dangerous instability, an instability that is the result of poverty and a massive demographic growth which is leading to an explosive mixture of youth unemployment, north-bound migration, religious fundamentalism and general political unrest.

We have most recently seen the European Council of Heads of State and Government meet in Corfu in June 1994 to give an initial political impetus towards a new partnership with the Mediterranean, with the ensuing proposals being approved at the Essen and Cannes meetings in December 1994 and June 1995 respectively. The so-called Euro-Mediterranean partnership agreement has three key components, namely, a series of Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreements; an enhancement of the involvement of the civil society in Euro-Mediterranean partnership (as a crucial factor in the fostering of understanding between the people and bringing them closer together,<sup>43</sup>) and a multilateral process of political, economic and social dialogue between the European Union and its twelve Mediterranean partners. In October 1995, the Amman Summit tried to revive the idea of a Middle East and North African Regional Bank and, in the same month, the Crans-Montana Forum met in Malta, bringing together heads of states, ministers, governors of central banks, diplomats and academics to discuss issues related to security challenges in the Mediterranean, co-operation between North and South, and the democratic process and human rights in the countries around the Mediterranean. One could also mention in this context the EuroMed Civil Forum, the first meeting of which took place in Barcelona immediately after the EU Conference, with the objective of offering a framework for co-operation, over and above political agreements and through the social, economic and cultural agencies of the Mediterranean Basin. Similarly, one could highlight the ambitions of the Inter-parliamentary Conference on Security and Co-operation in the Mediterranean (CSCM), held, for the first time, in Malaga in 1992 and then in Malta in 1995, in order to consider regional stability, co-development and partnership, and dialogue of civilisations and human rights. Were it not for the modest results produced by much of this activity, one would really be forgiven for thinking that indeed, the Mediterranean not only exists, but is also back on the centre stage!

What concerns me rather more in this context is the plethora of initiatives launched by the South itself, and mainly in the cultural, and more specifically in the educational, fields. Northern initiatives, and specifically those instigated by

---

<sup>43</sup> The European Commission has, in this regard, set up a number of decentralised co-operation programmes with key players in civil society such as universities (Med-Campus), the media (Med-Media) and local authorities (Med-Urbs), or in specific fields such as investment (Med-Invest), migration (Med-Migration) and technology transfer (Med-Techno). These programmes were put on hold in 1996.

the European Union, have tended to be dominated by Brussels, with the latter dictating the pace and scope of European and Mediterranean interaction. Indeed, this hierarchical interaction suggests that 'the central aim of the EU in the Mediterranean is not to assist in the creation of a trans-Mediterranean network but to consolidate a European sphere of influence.'<sup>44</sup> Such a reflection is true of Med-Campus activities, for instance, which, while providing opportunities for joint projects between European and Mediterranean partners in such areas as tourism studies, adult education and training, and the development of alternative sources of energy, tend to be generally marked by a concern with the transfer of technology from the North to the South. A renewed, if irresolute, international focus on the Mediterranean, the availability of (modest) funding for research and project partnerships and initiatives, the intensification of exchange between experts in various fields, an increasing sense of identity fuelled by a shared awareness of common problems and challenges, have all have contributed to a feeling that the Mediterranean represents a 'space' that needs to be occupied, developed and exploited. While undoubtedly for some (be they impresarios from North or South), this new space is conceived in terms of a potentially lucrative niche market in the purely commercial meaning of the term, for others the new, hesitant sense of regional identity represents rather more a possibility for genuine dialogue between South and South, and between South and North, with the intention of promoting mutual understanding, equitable partnerships, and collaborative ventures in diverse fields.

A number of the latter sort of initiatives are worth highlighting briefly in this context, in order to both illustrate the vitality that increasingly marks the Mediterranean, and to take up the thread of arguments that I pursued in the earlier sections of this paper, namely that not only can one make a case in favour of the official acknowledgement of the Mediterranean as a region, but also that a region can be re/constructed by virtue of serendipitous, identity-generating initiatives. Indeed, there have been so many initiatives that agencies are currently attempting to catalogue them and to produce directories in order to create a 'network of Mediterranean networks,' and so facilitate collaboration. I have already mentioned the *Répertoire Méditerranéen*, published by the *Fondation René Seydoux* since 1982 and currently in its sixth edition. The *Répertoire* presents the activities of 511 institutions working on Mediterranean concerns in the fields of human, social and applied sciences. 1982 also marks the year of the World Conference on Cultural Policies, when UNESCO took a small, but significant step, by declaring its interest in Mediterranean affairs and recommending that its member states proclaim the Mediterranean the "sea of

---

<sup>44</sup> S. Calleya, "Euro-Med Conference: A Defining Moment?" *Sunday Times*, 26 November, 1995, 5.

human civilisation" and to "use the resources of culture and communication to intensify their activity on behalf of peace and international understanding around the Mediterranean." UNESCO justified these recommendations on the basis of its understanding that "the Mediterranean has ...constituted a link between peoples and cultures, as a sea which is a source of creativity and of fruitful exchanges spanning millennia, and a means of communication between European and Islamic cultures." In 1995, as a culmination point of various bi- and multilateral initiatives undertaken by individuals and organisations under the auspices of, or in collaboration with, UNESCO, the latter decided to group together (under the name 'Mediterranean programme') a set of schemes, networks and activities with the aim of contributing "to the advancement of the countries and people of the Mediterranean in the sectors that correspond to UNESCO's mandate," to "develop co-operation between public and private sectors (civil societies) in all parts of the Mediterranean area;" and, significantly given the arguments put forward in this article, to "promote the Mediterranean as an eco-cultural region."<sup>45</sup> Guided by documents such as the "1995 Carthage Charter on Tolerance in the Mediterranean," The UNESCO Mediterranean programme functions as a network for over 600 organisations, centres, universities, institutions and municipalities, relayed in each country by National Commissions, UNESCO clubs, Associated Schools, and UNESCO accredited NGOs.

Among the more important of these initiatives are the relocation of the Vienna Centre in Malta, which reflects, rather more than a physical transposition of the site, the current understanding that the North-South axis has effectively replaced the traditional cold-war East-West divide as a focus for the social sciences. In order to facilitate the work of social scientists in this task, the Malta Centre is now responsible for the co-ordination of EUMENESS, the Euro-Mediterranean Network of the Social Sciences, and is set to publish a *Mediterranean Review of the Social Sciences*. Other initiatives connected with UNESCO and which have culture and education as a main or subsidiary focus are the Community of Mediterranean Universities (CMU) based in Bari (Italy) and active, through its decentralised Schools, since 1983; the University of the Mediterranean (UNIMED), with a central base in Rome, and with outreach bureaux in Amman, Cairo, Valletta, Montpellier and Rabat; the *Laboratorio Mediterraneo*, set up as a cultural foundation in 1995 and based in Naples; the Network of Mediterranean Study Centres, established in 1995 and co-ordinated by the Institut Català d'Estudis de la Mediterrànea i Cooperació (ICM); the 'Children of the Mediterranean' programme, launched by Federico Mayor in

---

<sup>45</sup> UNESCO *Mediterranean Programme* (Paris: UNESCO, 1995), 5. See also the special issue of the *UNESCO Courier* (1985) dedicated to the Mediterranean, with an overview of UNESCO's interests in the region.

1993, and involving children under the age of eleven with the aim of affirming the twin messages of ecology and peace; and the South-East Mediterranean Project (SEMPEP), which is primarily involved with environmental, technical and vocational education in Albania, Greece, Turkey, Lebanon, Cyprus, Israel, Jordan and Egypt.

Other organisations apart from (although associated with) UNESCO have also begun to focus more on the Mediterranean region. Thus whilst the Council of Europe has increasingly had its attention and resources channelled towards Eastern Europe, it has decided to set up a Mediterranean Information Centre (Transmed-Info Centre) in Lisbon, through its North-South Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity, with the purpose of identifying and organising into a trans-Mediterranean network the main sources of information about the Mediterranean. The European Cultural Foundation has its own Mediterranean programme focusing on translations from Arabic and Hebrew to European languages and vice-versa, as well as on a Network of Mediterranean Bookshops.

#### *The Mediterranean and Education, Education in the Mediterranean*

It is surprising that with all this activity going on in, about and around the Mediterranean, that same Mediterranean which one still feels obliged to justify as constituting a regional entity, 'Mediterranean education' or 'Education in the Mediterranean' has yet to emerge (taking into consideration the caveats made at the start of this article) as a specific focus for scholars and researchers in international education literature. Many of the initiatives to which I have already referred have, perhaps, been too recent or have addressed concerns that are too localised, to attract widespread attention, even though they deserve to be more widely known and documented. In addition, given the EU's main focus on economic rather than cultural issues, programmes such as MedCampus have largely provided funds for programmes dealing with training rather than education and, in some cases, have promoted the transfer of knowledge from the North to the South without challenge, as if the South had nothing to contribute to the process of the production and circulation of knowledge. Other initiatives have been short-lived (such as the *Adult Education Network of the Mediterranean*), have tended to be largely one-person initiatives with little sustained effort to establish collaborative partnerships with other similar projects,<sup>46</sup> and have certainly failed to engage in the hard work required to develop comparative education analysis in any systematic and empirical manner, as, for example, has been done by anthropologists and historians.

---

<sup>46</sup> See Gizard (fn. 7 above).



And yet, there is ample opportunity and scope for this kind of systematic comparative analysis, for collaboration in education, and for the development of networks of scholars and joint research projects. There are over 250 universities and research centres in the Mediterranean. There are more than 130,000 university teachers and researchers,<sup>47</sup> and most universities have a faculty, school or institute focusing on the educational sciences.<sup>48</sup> There is also plenty of scope for comparison between education systems. Higher education systems in the Mediterranean, for instance, tend to be more focused on teaching rather than research, which is obviously a repercussion from the lack of adequate funding and of the transfer of knowledge southwards. Most Mediterranean universities tend to be dominated by the faculties educating the traditional professionals, such as doctors, lawyers, pharmacists, architects and religious specialists. There tends to be an over-reliance on the metropolis and the 'North' for research and training partnership, often leading to post-colonial dependencies. Teaching styles and pedagogies tend to be uncritical and unquestioning, given the authoritarian relationships that dominate at many levels of the different institutions,<sup>49</sup> and also the proximity of the education systems to sources of power, whether secular or religious, although secular universities are a rarity in Muslim countries, for instance.<sup>50</sup> The 'brain drain' problem is particularly acute in the Maghreb countries, with 250,000 graduates emigrating northwards in the last twenty-five years, representing an average of 10,000 graduates per year, an enormous blow to human resource investment in the region. The brain drain phenomenon also affects Greece, all the Mezzogiorno, and Corsica.<sup>51</sup>

There is a similarly wide scope for comparative studies of Mediterranean compulsory education systems. Just to mention a few examples, one could focus on the influence of the Napoleonic tradition on the development of centralised administrative systems. Economic underdevelopment has also led to an attraction for vocationalist forms of schooling on the part of system managers, while colonial experiences, and traditional Mediterranean views,<sup>52</sup> have, paradoxically, kept most of the population away from such vocational schools given that manual labour was constantly associated with low status. The importance of religion in the Mediterranean region, and the ability of the clerical class to generate funds via the devotional practices of the faithful, has led to a

---

<sup>47</sup> See J. Boissevain, "Towards a Mediterranean Scientific Community," *International Foundation for Development Alternatives*, Dossier No. 27 (1982), 1-8; and S. Busutil, "Vers un Projet Averroès des Universités," in Balta (fn. 3 above), 192-206.

<sup>48</sup> See R. Sultana and E. Ebejer, *Directory of Mediterranean Education Scholars* (forthcoming); and R. Sultana "Higher education in the Mediterranean" (unpublished manuscript).

<sup>49</sup> Boissevain (fn. 47 above).

<sup>50</sup> Busutil (fn. 47 above).

<sup>51</sup> See Gizard (fn. 7 above).

<sup>52</sup> Regarding the traditional Mediterranean association of manual work with dishonour, see F. Braudel (fn. 14 above), 520, 524.

situation where parallel educational services can be offered through denominational schools, an issue of no small consequence given the rise of fundamentalism in the Mediterranean region's three main and monotheist religions. At all levels, the medium of instruction presents a veritable challenge, as policy-makers have to decide whether to adopt an international language for teaching scientific knowledge (mainly English), or to translate and adapt books in the mother tongue. At all levels, the issue of women's education remains a crucial one, as cultures struggle to manage social movements for women's liberation without destroying traditional family life and the roles it entails. In a similar vein, comparative education studies have a rich research programme should they focus on the contradictions between the socialisation provided in conventional Mediterranean families and schools, and the tidal wave of modernisation catapulted into the home via television programmes and cinematic productions from the North.<sup>53</sup>

#### *A Mediterranean Education Project*

The list of themes provided above is far from comprehensive, and is presented merely to highlight the extent to which regional co-operation in educational studies is both possible and necessary. It is necessary, for instance, in order to identify the external and internal challenges the Mediterranean must face and the role that education can play in responding to issues such as the insertion (or better still, self-positioning) of the region in the world economy; ecological and environmental protection; migratory movements; participation in science and technology; and so on. It is equally necessary to identify common characteristics of Mediterranean civilisations, including social structures, cultural perceptions, relationships to work and to the world, in order to share experiences rising from the same or similar problems, as well as adaptations and solutions to them.

In other words, it is vitally important for educators in the Mediterranean region to discover their voice, to speak to each other about education and broader cultural, political and economic issues, to be critically aware of the dynamics of the production and circulation of knowledge around the Mediterranean within the context of the present world order and to discern in whose interests this works. As education scholars in the Mediterranean continue discovering their voices, they will also learn to acknowledge the value of the experiences and research achievements of the various peoples living in the region, in order to encourage South-South dialogue rather than constantly

---

<sup>53</sup> On the North's cultural invasion of the Mediterranean via satellite, see L. Perrein's excellent "Les Paraboles de la Communication," in Balta (fn. 3 above), 261-275.

appealing to the expertise of the North. In this context it is important to add that being *for* the Mediterranean does not mean being *against* others. It simply means that the South has to enter into a dialogue with the North from a position of strength, having discovered the wealth of its resources, having overcome the very real barriers of communication between its members, and having articulated its own vision for itself.

One way of overcoming these barriers is through the intensification of the process of *fora-building* where education scholars can discuss and pursue through collaborative research programmes such common issues, concerns and challenges as outlined earlier. One such forum is currently being provided by the Comparative Education programme of the University of Malta which, through its Mediterranean Education Project (MEP), and with the support of agencies including CMU and UNESCO, is attempting to provide concrete measures to facilitate the development of educational studies in the region. The MEP is in fact responsible for such initiatives as the newly launched *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies* (three issues of which have already been published) and the *Mediterranean School of Comparative Education*. There are plans to open the first Mediterranean Education Documentation Centre, with the hope of stocking and also producing educational material that is sensitive to regional issues and concerns. The *MJES*, the first review to focus specifically on education in the Mediterranean,<sup>54</sup> is proving to be especially useful in signalling a field as a focus for comparative and Mediterranean studies, and in encouraging education scholars and researchers to speak to each other and to represent themselves and their work to others on their own terms. As with the other fora that are 'flowering' across the Mediterranean, the MEP values fruitful and enabling dialogue, where participants 'meet' with the understanding that each voice is to be respected and heard. This is an important consideration, for there is the South within the South, so to speak, and economic and other imbalances must not jeopardise the desire to understand each other and to celebrate both the diversities and the similarities of the different groups as these struggle to articulate a critical discourse on education and school systems in the Mediterranean. An invaluable tool in highlighting the potential of the human resources in the region is the Mediterranean Education Research Network, and particularly the first activity connected with it, namely the publication in 1996 of a *Directory of Mediterranean Education Scholars*, carrying information about educational and career paths, experiences, research interests, language abilities, and records of publications.

---

<sup>54</sup> Of the 592 journals and periodicals listed by the *Répertoire Méditerranéen* (fn. 33 above), and which could be said to have a specific or tangential focus on Mediterranean issues, none of the titles focuses on education.

The issues raised by the MEP, and especially those highlighted by the *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, have international, as well as national and regional dimensions. Mediterranean people have left their homes and sought an education and a livelihood the world over, but, for instance, little is known about the fortunes of the fifteen million Maghreb migrants who, in the forty seven years since 1950, have left their homes and are now in host countries in Europe, North America and Australia. It is crucial to the project to facilitate the study of the educational experiences of the children of these migrants,<sup>55</sup> in order to explore the specificity of challenges, problems and dilemmas as Mediterranean families seek to integrate themselves through the educational opportunities made available in their newly adopted homes. A further international aspect of the project (referred to earlier) is the shift of concern towards the South on the part of social scientists, given the 'resolution' of the East-West divide.

#### *By Way of Conclusion: An Invitation*

This article has made a case for the recognition of the Mediterranean as a discrete region, worthy of the focus of comparativists in a number of disciplinary fields, including education. It has outlined the specificities of the countries bordering on the *Mare Nostrum*, and highlighted recent happenings in the political, economic, academic and cultural spheres that indicate the increasing importance of the Mediterranean both for Europe and for global affairs more generally. In this article I have also argued in favour of more enduring and structured collaborative projects in comparative and regional educational research, and have indicated areas which could constitute promising foci for such ventures. Throughout, I have placed an emphasis on the political and economic agendas in the construction, deconstruction and reconstruction of the boundaries of particular regions, and have argued that in education as in several other areas, a response from the South, be it the Mediterranean or the broader political and economic South, is necessary if we are to withstand the 'new circuits of imperialism'<sup>56</sup> that are currently being established. I also gave a

---

<sup>55</sup> See for instance an account of the educational misfortunes of the children of Maltese migrants in Victoria, Australia, as documented by L. Terry, H. Borland and R. Adams, *To Learn More than I Have... The Educational Aspirations and Experiences of the Maltese in Melbourne* (Victoria: Victoria University of Technology, 1993).

<sup>56</sup> See A. Sivanandan, "New Circuits of Imperialism," *Race and Class*, 30, No. 4 (1989), 1-19; and R. G. Sultana (fn. 35 above).

brief account of the Mediterranean Education Project which, through its various initiatives and particularly through its *Mediterranean Journal of Educational Studies*, provides a space for a theoretically and empirically informed dialogue on the different facets of education in the region.

Finally, I have argued that the agendas outlined amount to what is in fact a generative research programme, which comparative and international education scholars, in the Mediterranean and elsewhere, are invited to consider as a challenge and an invitation. Such educational studies, if carried out in a spirit of mutual and equal regard, could lead to better understanding between peoples of the Mediterranean and between the North and the South, in the interests of the construction and consolidation of a culture of peace.