

and snippets of case studies to illustrate certain points, and it is hard to imagine such a comparative undertaking without losing some of the finer details. This valuable book is more than a comparison of Latin American countries, it is a deeper reflection on democratic systems and the meaning of democracy more broadly. The historical breadth of Smith's research material provides the field with an important analysis of the waves of democratization in the region and contributes to our understanding of the current political processes in Central and South America.

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Review

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Robert Kusek and Joanna  
Sanetra-Szeliga (eds.)  
**Czy Polska leży nad Morzem  
Śródziemnym? (Does Poland  
Lie on the Mediterranean?)**

Międzynarodowe Centrum Kultury, Kraków/  
International Cultural Centre, Krakow, 2012,  
566 pp.

The key achievement of the contemporary excursions within cultural and political theory into geographical thinking (as part of the ongoing 'spatial turn' within the humanities and social sciences) is an irreversible questioning of the hitherto dominant premise that space and time are linked in a linear fixture, a premise which

seeks to cement that which immanently resists cementing. Space is a multilayered and open-ended process rather than a static and finished thing or container, it is at once fought over, constructed, destructed and demarcated as much as it is represented, imagined and practiced – and all those components create the relevant basis for political behaviour. Thus, if, as David Harvey once put it, "geography is too important to be left to geographers", it is only by opening up the debate about spaces as lived well beyond their physical locations – with a promiscuous engagement with various disciplines, like political sciences, philology, history, literary, media and cultural studies – that we can effectively grasp the ever-surprising work of power in the making and remaking of spaces.

There is much to be learnt about this important lesson from this compelling collection, the title of which is meant to do much more than surprise. Of course Poland is not a Mediterranean country, but upon reading this elegantly elaborated book it is impossible to simply confirm that old topographical fact and to move on charting other places along the same old-fashioned, static (and effectively, useless) map, not least without a "but...", followed by a (potentially endless) list of counter-arguments. The book's nineteen chapters, written mainly by Polish authors (coming from a staggering variety of disciplines) display Poland's affinity, at least amongst some of its leading intellectuals, to share the fate of the Mediterranean basin as a space of incessant cross-temporal interaction. Published by the Anna Lindh Foundation for the Dialogue Between Cultures, of which this book is openly a supporting project (part of the – thus far sadly ineffective –

Union for the Mediterranean), the book offers a working alternative to the limitations posed by dominant geographies of political borders. Here, it is not land, but sea which occupies the focal point, usefully disturbing all forms of habitual attendance to seemingly distant, separate cultures.

Jerzy Axer takes us on a journey of the “Mediterranean classical tradition in Central and Eastern European culture” from the middle ages – when the latter region “joined Western Christianity” – onwards to the present era (2012: 22). The author’s exhaustive study shows that the constant, if changing, presence of forms such as the republican model of governance and Latin language in the region (whether as a tool of domination or resistance – the latter, for instance, as an expression of “dissociation from communism”, 2012: 76) established a continued cultural tie with the wider Mediterranean space. Andrzej Borowski identifies certain essential forms of expressing ideas in the “European literature” as having a distinctly Mediterranean (which is to say both Latin and Greek) origin (e.g. ethos, myth), while the Mediterranean itself surfaces in the analysed works as an ‘inherited’ home for many writers, a consistent space of withdrawal from political turmoil and displacement. This powerful idea is particularly given attention by Anat Lapidot-Firilla who maps the mobilisation of the Mediterranean in the contemporary European politics towards the Middle East as a source of “nostalgia for the good old cosmopolitan world” (2012: 108), once envisioned in renaissance, and now increasingly evoked by the EU’s political elites as an alternative to the horrors of coeval nationalism or religious fundamentalism. This is not a happy panacea – dreaming

about “unity in the Mediterranean waters” (2012: 126), for instance as a compensation for the EU’s hindrance of Turkey’s entry, is just like a dream: unrealistic, because it tends to ignore the centuries old competition between Christian, Muslim and Orthodox influences in the area. The use of the Mediterranean in the political discourses turns out being ethnocentric (Western European), that is, “orientalist by nature [and] ... paternalistic”, “a waiting room on the way to Europe” (2012: 126, 130). Rather, the Mediterranean should provide a space for self-articulation, especially for the protagonists of the Arab Spring as “active agents of change” (2012: 128).

A constructive approach to the potential inherent in the historical encounters between the North, South, East and West of the Mediterranean is offered in the respective chapters by: Marek Dziekan (on journeys abundant with curiosities such as the fact that the first written trace of Prague was made by an Arab traveller in the 10<sup>th</sup> century), Tuomo Melasuo (on Central Europe functioning less as ‘centre’ and more as a transfer point between the Baltic and the Black and Mediterranean seas), Piotr Nykiel (on the little known but centuries old political and cultural Polish-Turkish bonds), Irith Cherniavsky (on the migration of 300,000 Poles and their Jewish community to Israel 1930s-1970s), Konrad Pędziwiatr (on the creation of the small but significant Muslim community in Poland, dating back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century with the Tatars), a story further explored in the present context, in terms of media perception and intercultural education, by Katarzyna Górak-Sosnowska. More contemporary attempts at formalising a productive relationship between Europe, the

Middle East and North Africa through the Mediterranean, in the context of international relations, are given respectively by Adam Balcer and Justyna Zajac (particularly on the shift from Poland's support for independence in the Near East during decolonisation and a decreasing interest in the region after Cold War), and Katarzyna Jarecka-Stępień and Anna Raduchowska-Brochwicz (on EU's cooperation and partnership programmes with "the Mediterranean", such as the Barcelona Process). Jarosław Dumanowski explores Mediterranean ingredients in Polish culinary customs and Witold Dobrowolski charts the work of Polish archaeology in the basin, while unknown connections are revealed within contemporary art by Magdalena Ujma and within drama by Ewa Bal.

The final chapter, by Jacek Purchla, a compendium of the book's overall argument, convincingly proclaims Krakow – mapped until recently according to the Adriatic sea level – as the Polish capital of the Mediterranean. If Krakow's Italian-style corso and café gardens stretch the Mediterranean into Central Europe, as this author implies, if anything is to be gained from such investigation, it is the fact that the Mediterranean has not one but many capitals, and as many histories and futures. As the editors of the collection put it, Poland might not physically "lie on the Mediterranean" but Mediterranean culture makes a significant "presence" in Poland (2012: 14). This is an ontology of spatial politics that poses new responsibilities for all actors in the Mediterranean: "being Oneself is at the same time being an Other, being here is inextricably linked with being from somewhere else" (*ibid.*).

As this large, bilingual, catalogue looking, but fully referenced academic book explores the varied connections between Polish and Central European cultures with the Mediterranean, the reader who is perhaps less interested in Polish particularities, will nonetheless encounter dozens of working definitions of the Mediterranean itself, dispersed throughout. The book usefully spends less time claiming a scientific breadth, and much more pursuing a humanistic depth, whereby emerging surprises and contextual specificities are prioritised to abstract schemata and generalisations. The authors dig deep to show us that different streams of interaction (through language, trade, diplomacy, military operations, education) might take us in rather unexpected directions. It is thus not a question of determining whether Poland does actually "lie on the Mediterranean" but for which analytical purposes the Mediterranean can work as a metaphor for contact and juxtaposition of rather different forms of living, and a place of alternative, if utopian, geopolitics (where the EU, North Africa and the Middle East are imagined as equal neighbours). Many empirical arenas cry for such unorthodox approach, and for this reason too (as a hopeful precursor to further interdisciplinary investigations of Europe using the Mediterranean as a method) this endeavour is to be applauded.

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