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## **CULTURALIZATION OF THE MEDITERRANEAN SPACE**

Answering the question where does the Mediterranean begin is somewhat different for a Scandinavian: at Copenhagen - Kastrup, or at any other international airport! For millions of northern Europeans, the word 'Mediterranean' contains an eternal dream of the perfect holiday, something centuries-long longed for in poetry, visual art and music. Its culture, food and the way of life nowadays permeate every home and every mind; its people are what we are not: talkative, emotional, civilized, passionate, tanned. For us, it is simply the *other* and as such ever-present.

The formation of the Mediterranean as a transnational region is discussed taking into consideration different historical periods as well as geographical standpoints in the thought-provoking papers by Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin, Bojan Baskar, Reinhard Johler and Valentina Gulin Zrnić. They may differ in empirical material they employ, but they all take as their point of departure the Mediterranean as a cultural construct, far away from any effort to decide where it indeed begins. It is itself daring for a discipline with a such a strong legacy of diffusionism, with the mapping of cultural regions as one of its main activities for periods longer than decades. Instead, these papers most poignantly concentrate upon the Mediterranean as a discourse and dwell upon how the region is being remade from time to time and thereby in constant transition. The answer to the question "where" must at all times be contextualized by some additional questionmark, such as "when" and "for whom". Above all, the Mediterranean seems to be a cultural construct that has been fostered by intellectuals for centuries and in that regard pretty close to the image of the nation, while it has nowadays developed into more of a folk-concept founded upon tourism and a general interest in roots and tradition.

This development is by no means surprising, neither from the scientific point of view, nor from the empirical one. Today we can observe a popular enthusiasm for different kinds of cultural identities all over Europe. National identity but even more so the regional one is becoming

the cherished frame around the belonging. With a sweeping generalization one could say that what is happening in the Europe of today is that people perceive themselves locally and genealogically and that they are interpreted by others in such terms as well. The country like Austria with *Walzer*, *Wienerschnitzel* and *Sachertorte* is increasingly taking on the shape of the folklorists' nightmare; Switzerland has become the land of cheese and chocolate while Sweden looks as a chapter of one of Astrid Lindgren's popular books for children. The present success of any flag-industry does not reflect only a growing nationalism but the ongoing process of turning European inhabitants into happy visitors of different theme-parks.

The issue when identity is negotiated is therefore altogether not what you are as what you feel you are. Belonging has taken on an ornamental aspect. This indicates that in a large part of Europe any formal borders of the nation-state are being less and less demarcated, citizenship less important, and cultural identification more prominent.

In the intense cultural construction of belonging in today's Europe, we have to learn the important art of forgetting and remembering. Dunja Rihtman-Auguštin shows convincingly how the formation of the Yugoslav nation-state in the twentieth century was deliberately concealing the existence of the Mediterranean; how in the construction of the communist Yugoslavia after 1945, the Danubian orientation was of crucial importance to the Belgrade-regime and how the Mediterranean was again remembered as a key symbol during the Croatian Spring in the early 1970s. Furthermore, Valentina Gulin Zrnić is discussing how the formative period of Croatian cultural heritage in the sixteenth-century-Dubrovnik was promoting a notion of cultural identity by few means. The issue of nation that became relevant by then denoted an important social identity but with limited cultural ramifications.

It seems from these papers that there are at least two factors that have to be taken into consideration when constructing and reconstructing the concept of the Mediterranean. The first factor is that the Mediterranean seems to have been coined as the other side of the nation-state and consecutively more or less benefiting from the relatively low identification with national centres in the major part of the Mediterranean states. The other is that regions in Europe have a certain hierarchy in which the Mediterranean is one of the truly privileged ones.

Rihtman-Auguštin illuminates how the coast and the nation in former Yugoslavia and in Croatia have been on a seesaw. Here it seems as if any existing centre, be it Belgrade or Zagreb, seems to be afraid of water. The national grammar seems to make sense only if it has access to some well exercised and simple grammatical rules. To speak in the language of the nation-state, there must be a reliable, deeply rooted and preferably agrarian or pastoral peasantry, a landscape with not too long a coast and a restricted amount of cities or harbours. Slavonian or Zagorje

farmers fit more easily into the picture than the Dalmatian or Istrian poor shepherds, coast-dwellers, fishermen and sailors. Reinhard Johler is showing how awkward the Central European Habsburg empire was in dealing with the fact that it was equipped by an Istrian and Dalmatian coast! The Adriatic was given a Danubian gaze! Seen from the centre it was located at the margins of the civilized world where people were strange and the culture was a mixture of occidentalism and orientalism.

A striking parallel could be drawn from the faraway country of Norway. Everyone who has been watching the transmission of the Olympic games from Lillehammer in 1994, assumes that this country must be populated by a cheerful crowd that has a peasant ancestry. To the world's amazement many of them appeared in dresses and outfits inspired by the nineteenth century peasant culture and this very culture was also the theme of the opening ceremony. When Norway's national identity was being forged in that century there was but one really successful display of how a national identity could be tufted upon a *Volk* - Switzerland. Even the Austrians tried to let the strange Serbs pass through this filter to become intelligible. The irony is that Norway is, as is Croatia, blessed by a very long and most viable coast. It has been, and still is, heavily dependent upon fishing, shipping and trade. But the true nation-building of the time was done on *terra firma*, while the coast, with its urban life, cultural complexity and people coming and going, was not to be trusted. Any heritage that is easy to identify with must bear the mark of simplicity and trustworthiness that the unspoiled countryside can display.

This marginalization of the coastal region is explaining why the Mediterranean has been defined as a periphery, populated by people who ought to turn their backs towards the sea, facing the centre. Bojan Baskar has pointed out the fact that the Mediterranean as a concept has been understood as a regional one, and in contrast to the nation, was both semantically and politically subordinated. Istria has always been seen as lacking something, as being handicapped by not fully being first Yugoslavian and today Croatian or Slovenian. This is, however, precisely what gives this very region its privileged position as a true cultural challenge to the centre — regardless of which centre, Ljubljana or Zagreb. Homogenizing processes from above can then be dealt with through a long tradition of being an anomaly or adversary of power. That, I suppose, is precisely the pivotal position the regional politics of IDS (the main Istrian party) in Istria is benefiting from. From the margin, the centre could be asked for more freedom, tolerance, peace, complexity or openness.

If this is so, how then can we bring out a discourse about something Mediterranean at all without bringing up the national at the same time. The entities define one another in a tense *complexio oppositorium* where one is presupposing the other. If this is further so, why at all talk about whether the Mediterranean begins in the Dinaric Alps or southern Portugal, closer or further away from the coast? These are ecological zones no longer

saturated with cultural significance. Today, the concept is expanding, and laid open to negotiations. To some extent this is due to the processes found all over Europe where formal claims of power from old centres are played down, and the way for the manifold and deeply culturalized regions is being paved.

But the process in this very transnational and national region takes on a rather particular dimension, the one mentioned at the outset. This is the privileged area of recreation and tourism, of dreams and aspirations. In economical terms, it is by far the most important of all the regions dealt with so far and in Croatia it is the very place of the production of a substantial part of the GNP. Tourism at large is a world-wide fast growing industry and the Mediterranean stays its cradle and its most vital progeny. Today some incredible 4.000 billion dollars are being generated within the tourist industry and in a couple of years it is estimated to rise to more than 10.000! Furthermore, the coastal regions are generally the ones where almost all expansion regarding urban settlement and dwelling is taking place. It attracts all sorts of people but especially those who have the means to pay for a nice sea-view. In short, here is where new centres are being located, culturally as well as economically.

Accordingly, what the Croatian nation seems to be facing is a growing concern for this very part of the country. Not out of some yielding to subdued regions or righteous claims from neglected citizens, but as a necessity to facing a new cultural and economical reality. Leisure is generating the big money at the eve of modernity. Consequently, a 'Mediterraneanification' of the nation is going on here simply because Croatia is blessed by one of the areas with the largest touristic potentials on the European continent. To some extent this is going to influence the discourse on the Mediterranean and make it one of the most expansive regional concepts of contemporary Europe.

## KULTURALIZACIJA MEDITERANSKOG PROSTORA

### SAŽETAK

Zajedničko obilježje tekstova Dunje Rihtman-Auguštin, Bojana Baskara, Reinharda Johlera i Valentine Gulin Zrnić jest da polaze od Mediterana kao kulturnoga konstrukta i diskurza, pokazujući kako se taj pojam stalno mijenja. Pri konstruiranju i rekonstruiranju pojma 'Mediteran' valja uzeti u obzir barem dva čimbenika. Prvi je da se Mediteran, manje ili više, slabo identificira s nacionalnim središtima u većini mediteranskih država. I primjer Hrvatske pokazuje kako se nacija-država oslanja na duboko ukorijenjeno agrarno ili stočarsko stanovništvo izbjegavajući identifikaciju s obalnim i gradskim prostorima. Sličan proces autor otkriva u skandinavskim zemljama: izgradnja nacije u Norveškoj bila je oslonjena na *terra firma* dok se obali, s njezinim urbanim središtima, kulturnom složenošću te pokretnim stanovništvom nije vjerovalo. Marginalizacija priobalja u nacionalnim diskurzima objašnjava zašto se Mediteran određuje kao periferija, odnosno kao regionalni, naciji suprotstavljen koncept, na što ukazuje i primjer Istre. Drugi čimbenik važan za konceptualizaciju Mediterana jest njegovo povlašteno mjesto u hijerarhiji europskih regija, koje ponajprije zahvaljuje turizmu. Autor predviđa da će upravo zahvaljujući turističkom potencijalu Mediteran postati jednim od najprotežnijih regionalnih koncepata i u suvremenoj Europi i u Hrvatskoj.