# THE MEDITERRANEAN
## *Reason, Faith, and Civility*

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*by* AREF ALI NAYED & WAEL FAROUQ

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*Speech at the Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, Milan*
TUESDAY 29TH NOVEMBER 2022

Cover Image: Ancient Greek city of Cyrene in Libya, looking towards the Mediterranean Sea © Sohail Nakhooda/KRM

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# The Mediterranean: Reason, Faith and Civility

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## Seminario

**Martedì 29 novembre 2022**
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T HE MEDITERRANEAN embeds in its very name the reality of being in the middle. This "in-between-ness" is vital. The "in-between" connects the surroundings, but it also separates them. The "in-between" is constituted by its surroundings, but it also constitutes them in turn. Gestalt psychologists have studied the fascinating Gestalt of the whole amply—shifting between foreground and background, whenever there is an 'in-between'. We can similarly shift between considering the Mediterranean as *foreground* between our countries, and the Mediterranean as *background* to our countries.

Furthermore, areas that are "in-between", are almost by their very nature separate, and therefore they invite connectivity. They invite connectivity through instruments that traverse (like shipping lines, pipelines, and cables). All such traversing instruments are really types of "bridges", and bridges are fascinating structures. Bridges stretch themselves humbly so that others can walk over them. They enable people to go places, without themselves being able to go there.

Today, we need to build bridges across the Mediterranean, like our ancestors did for centuries—but in fresh, creative and mutually-supportive and mutually-beneficial ways.

Let us be aware, from the outset, that the building of bridges is often a complex and difficult undertaking. It takes huge efforts in planning, coordination, and project management. We must also realize that we may even have to lay our very bodies, souls, and minds across the separation, so that our fellow human beings can walk across them safely. A Libyan proverb summarizes this imperative: "If you want to be a bridge, you have to withstand being stepped upon."

Let us also realize that even when several bridges have been built, the traversing of them can be problematic. Like the famous problematic of the "Seven Bridges of Königsberg", devising walks across them with specific requirements may actually prove difficult or even impossible.[1] In 1736 Leonhard Euler (1707–1783) proved that the problem of "devising a walk-through Königsberg that would cross each of the seven bridges once and only once" was impossible to solve. However, let us not forget that even such a negative conclusion still led to the development of Graph Theory and Topology.

Even if we build bridges that are problematic to traverse, we can still benefit from the emergence of a Mediterranean Graph Theory and Topology. A *Mediterranean Graph Theory* approach, on the one hand, can help us understand our Mediterranean networks— their 'nodes', their 'edges', and their 'patterns' of connectivity. We can develop not only studies of social networks, but of also networks that are cultural, ideological, doctrinal, spiritual, as well as material, urban, transportation, communication, energy, trade and economic networks. A *Mediterranean Topology* approach, on the other hand, can help us understand our civilizational, cultural, and spiritual "places", and their properties, as they are preserved or transformed under "continuous deformations" such as "stretching", "twisting", "bending' and even "crumpling".

A key to understanding the "Topology" of the Mediterranean, however, maybe the realization that there is not one "Mediterranean" but multiple "Mediterraneans". In his monumental 1949 work, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*,[2] the French historian and leader of the Annales School, Fernand Braudel (1902–1985), points out that there is no single Mediterranean Sea. Braudel shows that there are actually many "Seas", a huge and complex expanse in which multiple communities operate and interact in multiple contexts.

Braudel also points out that the "Mediterranean as foreground" must be understood through the many contexts of its backgrounds, including the geographies that surround it. The surrounding deserts with their nomadism, the surrounding mountains with their sedentary modes, and the dialectic between them—and the plains as well as the sea, are all relevant. The backgrounds also include temporal frameworks that are of different speeds. There is a geographical slow time, a long-term socio-cultural and economic time, and finally the rapid succession of events, politics, and specific people and personalities. Therefore, our approach to the Mediterranean must respect all such multiplicity, complexity, and intricacy.

When we adopt an Annales School-like panoramic and complex view of the Mediterranean, we notice not only the positive continuities and connections of prosperous trade and cultural exchange, but also the rifts and the gaps. We have long and complex histories of tensions, conflicts, full-scale wars, crusades, jihads, conquests, re-conquest, colonization, anti-colonization, mass migrations, uprisings and many other forms of bursts, ebbs and flows— all negative energy, which has at times been deadly and devastating. It is hard to generalize about the nature and intensity of all that negative energy, but perhaps we can begin to understand it by invoking two related phenomena associated with it: *Trust-Deficit*, *Consensus-Deficit*, and their ultimate root, *Trauma-Abundance*.

It is in the many episodes of Trauma over many centuries, and in multiple ways and contexts, that has most likely left many Mediterranean civilizations, countries, and communities, suffering from individual and collective forms of Post Traumatic Syndrome (PTS). Our communal memories and histories often perpetuate, and sometimes even accentuate, our post Traumatic sufferings. The personal and communal symptoms and impact of Trauma includes, but are not limited to, Trust-Deficit and Consensus-Deficit. The traumatized have difficulties trusting others. The traumatized have difficulties reaching consensus with others. With little or no trust, it is nearly impossible to build any cooperation. With little or no consensus it is nearly impossible to build any collective decisions and find common ways forward.

We need to acknowledge and address our Traumas and their deep and wide ranging effects—personally and communally. We need to find ways of rebuilding trust, and of

reaching consensus on addressing issues pertinent to our mutual future and our mutual thriving.

For the building of trust and consensus, there is no better approach than through *Dialogue*. Dialogue is multilateral, multifaceted; it is a respectful and humble "logos" that bridges the "in-between". As Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900–2002) reminds us, Plato had pointed out in the *Symposium*, that the "in-between-logos" does not belong to any of the interlocutors, but "comes" from beyond them, and that it does it in such a way whereby the interlocutors are the ones who belong to it. Dialogue also heals rifts and souls through what Viktor Frankl (1905–1997) calls "logotherapy", because it involves a mutual "search for meaning", and even "ultimate meaning".[3]

Our civilizations have long histories of, and resources for, Dialogue. From the post-Alexandrian Hellenistic and Roman inter-civilizational discussions, to the Sicilian, Andalusian, and Renaissance engagements, we have vast libraries of dialogical tools that can be invoked and re-utilized. In addition to the influential and unifying Aristotelian *Organon*, there are other helpful "Dialogics" like the Alexandrian ontological Isagoge tradition, and the medical-empirical and interrogative tradition of Galen (129–216) and Sextus Empiricus (died 3rd century).

Medieval manuals covering the proper etiquette and tactics of disputation are also instructive.

We must remember that our mutual theologies and outlooks were developed in full dialogical engagement with each other. St Thomas Aquinas (1225–1274) theologized in engagement with Ibn Rushd (1126–1198) and other Muslim philosophers and theologians. Moses Maimonides (1138–1204) theologized in engagement with the Asharites and Mutazilites, as well with the philosophical tradition of al-Farabi (827–950/951) and Ibn Sina (980–1037).

In striving to develop a Dialogics that can help us understand each other with all our polyphonic discourses, we can also invoke the help of contemporary masters of Dialogue from Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), to Martin Buber (1878–1965) and Emmanuel Levinas (1906–1995). We can also invoke the help of contemporary masters of Methodological Hermeneutics from Wilhelm Dilthey (1833–199) to Adelchi Baratono (1875–1947) and Emilio Betti (1890–1968).

Betti, the Italian master of Roman Law and the human hciences, is of vital importance to us. His vision of interpretation as a response to an '"appeal" by another through "objectifications of the spirit" that invite empathic resonance, is particularly worthy of retrieval, re-invocation, and further development. It will help us face a world that is crushing the human spirit and its grace-filled manifestations.

Our rapacious capitalist world must remember that Adam Smith (d.1790) did not teach only the benefits of a free-market, but also the centrality of human Empathy (or Sympathy), as a basic moral imperative and sentiment.

However, in searching for ways to address the Trust-Deficit and Consensus-Deficit that we are suffering across the Mediterranean, we must also pay particular attention to the emergence of incredible technologies that promise to provide de-centralized and distributed ways of establishing "Trust" without "Custodians", and to provide techniques for Consensus-building without Consensus-makers. The new field of Decentralized Applications (DAPPS) promises solid techniques for achieving "Decentralized Consensus" and "Decentralized Trust", through such technologies as Blockchain. In our search for overcoming our Traumas and establishing Trust and Consensus, let us not forget that, in

addition to our vast Humanistic and Spiritual resources, there maybe also be helpful technologies for Consensus-building and Trust-building that can be learned and utilised.

Nevertheless, with all helpful technologies, Dialogue remains the main imperative, and Dialogue ultimately depends on our human 'reasonableness' in engaging each other. Just as Braudel points out that there are many Mediterranean Seas, Alasdair MacIntyre (b.1929) points out that there are many "Reason(s)". So from the very outset let us all be cautious about our tendency to universalize our particular "Reason".

For Plato, Reason is a "seeing" of Forms; for Aristotle (384–322 BC), Reason is contemplation, as well as the valid derivation of conclusions from premises; for Marcus Aurelius (121–180), Reason is alignment with a cosmic logos; for St Bonaventura (1221–1274) it is the Mind's Road to God, and the tracing of divine "vestiges" in the world; for Sufi scholar al-Muhasibi (781–857), Reason is a capacity to distinguish right from wrong; for Muslim theologian al-Baqillani (950-1013) it is the gazing upon divine operative signs (*ayat*); and for Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111), Reason is a light that God throughs into the heart. The list can go on, and all of those sages are onto something important. Suffice it to say that Reason is a name that encompasses a multiplicity of important human activities that have to do with our thinking, interpreting, understanding, explicating, and contemplating of ourselves, our world, and how to best live in it.

The reconciliation of our human activities called "Reasoning", with other sources of disclosure of realities and truths—most notably divine "Revelation"—has been the single most important problematic for all revealed religions, especially those associated with Sacred Scriptures. For example, in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, the problemata of reconciling Reason with Revelation have been central to the work of almost every major philosopher and theologian across the ages.

A survey of the questions raised, and the answers given, across the ages certainly constitute an important part of our Mediterranean civilizations, but it is beyond the scope of our brief remarks today. However, at the risk of gross overgeneralization, I shall attempt to focus on what I think is a unifying grand strand within the developments of our three Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions. I shall call this grand strand "Aristotelian Reasonableness".

Aristotle makes a very important distinction between three types of different, but related, human activities: Theory (*theoria*), Practice (*praxis*), and Production (*poiesis*). Aristotle's grand edifice of lectures, which became his received canonical works, details the intricacies of every single one of these types of human activities. In his logical *Organon*[4] and his *Metaphysics*,[5] he covers Theory and how it works, and how conclusions can be validly generated from first principles and premises. In his *Ethics*,[6] Aristotle covers Practice, how it works, and how it should be. Finally, in his *Poetics*, *Rhetoric*, and *Politics*, he covers how Production works, and how it is that we 'make' our world, including our cultural products.[7]

At different stages and places in our common and shared Mediterranean history—in all three Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions—the focus on the three dimensions of Aristotelian Reasonableness is often different and selective. Nevertheless, even when one is emphasized, the other two dimensions never disappear. All three human activities, therefore, more or less, have received over many centuries fairly equitable attention.

However, during the amazingly productive period of the Renaissance, Production (or *poesis*) took an importance and emphasis that was quite unique. Production was no longer predominantly literary; material production began to dominate. Great Masters of the

period, like Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), not only produce literature, and paintings, but also sculptures, and most importantly "Machines". The world increasingly becomes a "made-world", and the Machines begin to themselves produce, and eventually begin to produce other Machines. As the Industrial Revolution boomed, Aristotle's category of Production become the dominant human activity. By the Seventeenth century, Giambattista Vico (1668–1744) had already perceptively noticed that "Verum" was increasingly becoming "Factum". That which is made is the True (*verum ipsum factum*). Production was the supreme human activity.[8]

Today, the world we live in is nearly all "Factum". Most of humanity today lives in urban areas, in cities, towns, and villages, that have diminishing connectivity to the natural world around us, or even to traditional methods of farming. This phenomenon is so pervasive that we hardly think about it. Given how artificial the world we live in has become, Herbert Simon's *The Science of the Artificial*[9] is probably more relevant to our human condition than traditional Ontology. The world is no longer a set of natural things, or of creatures. The world is increasingly a set of artificial or made things. Even intelligence itself is striving towards "Artificial Intelligence" (AI). The artifacts around us operate upon us, and we operate upon them—we operate upon each other with operational artifacts. Our Hermeneutics is striving to towards "Operational Hermeneutics".[10]

Sadly, as we have ascended the ladder of Aristotelian Reasonableness—from *theoria*, to *praxis*, and ultimately to *poiesis*—we have reached a reality that is no longer reality; we have finally produced a reality that is largely artificial. As a matter of fact, we are now striving even beyond that stage, towards a completely "Artificial Reality"—and even a 'Metaverse'—in which everything including our Avatar-selves are "Factum". And now that we have ascended Aristotle's ladder, we are having difficulties climbing down. Perhaps we have used the ladder itself as raw material for our frenzied "productivity".

We have now reached a Factum-World, but contrary to Vico, it is not a Verum-World. It is largely a Falso-World—a Fake-World, filled with Fake News, Fake Looks, Fake Bodies, Fake Laughs, and Fake Social Life. It is becoming increasingly difficult to be in touch with our natural environment and even with our natural selves. Our Factum-World is overheating (global warming), drying-up (droughts) and burning (forest fires). When relief comes as water, it comes as floods and hurricanes. Like a sick body trying to get rid of an infection, the Earth is trying to get rid of us. While we frantically develop vaccines that can generate antibodies that can kill viruses, and the Earth is developing its own antibodies (as viruses) to kill the humans who are destroying it. This situation is unsustainable. If we cannot climb down Aristotle's ladder, we must find another ladder that is helpful for the same purpose.

Perhaps the best alternative to Aristotle's ladder of human over-confidence (perhaps even arrogance), is what Medieval sages called the "Ladder of Humility", after St Benedict (480–547) who included a chapter "Of Humility" in his famous Monastic Rule.[11] Benedict's Ladder of Humility is based on the Biblical imperative: "*Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*" (Luke 14:11; 18:14).", and is designed to arrive at the biblical goal of the Love of God and overcome all fear. (1 John 4:18).

St Benedict's *first degree* of humility is awe of God, the awareness of His watchfulness over our thoughts and actions. The *second degree* is aligning our will with the divine will. The *third degree* is accepting wiser mentors to help guide us in life. The *fourth degree* is resilience and endurance in the face of hardships. The *fifth degree* is transparency and

truthfulness. The *sixth degree* is humbly having a sense of one's own "nothingness". The *seventh degree* is not seeing oneself as better than anyone else. The *eight degree* is abiding by communal guidelines. The *ninth degree* is attentively listening in silence. The *tenth degree* is maintaining a serious attitude. The *eleventh degree* is speaking gently and with gravity. Finally, the *twelfth degree* is to be humble of heart and of character and manners. St Benedict's Ladder of Humility has other parallels in the Judeo-Christian-Islamic traditions, and is a good summary of the traditional consensus on the importance of humility in our various Mediterranean traditions.

There are also two sages of Christianity and Islam who ascended Aristotle's ladder, and ended up advocating a Ladder of Humility instead: St Augustine (354–430) and Imam Ghazali (1058–1111). Both of Augustine and Ghazali were thoroughly versed in Philosophy and Logic. Augustine wrote important philosophical works against the late Platonic Academy, and Ghazali wrote several manuals of Logic. However, both of them eventually had intellectual and spiritual crises and realized that Reason taken to its fullest extent eventually reaches its limits—or to put it in Sidi Ahmed Rifa'i (1118–1182) and Muhammad ibn ʿAbd al-Jabbar al-Niffari's (d.965) terms, a state of "bewilderment" (*hayra*) and a humble receptiveness to a divine guidance that is beyond humanity itself. In that "dark night of the soul", as termed by St John of the Cross (1542–1591), the divine light is gifted by God to the humble heart. Now that humanity has reached the pinnacle of Aristotle's Ladder of Reasonableness, and is confronted by its overheating Factum, it is time for the Ladder of Humility that prepares our hearts for the receiving divine guidance and light.

In many ways this realization was already reached by a modern master who was well versed in Medieval thought: Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914). Peirce strove to go beyond Aristotle, and even Descartes and Kant, by re-invoking "Signs" as a fundamental notion. His Logic becomes continuous inquiry and interpretation of Signs by not just an individual but a Community of Interpreters. This humble approach of Peirce produces a "Fallibilism" that is of the utmost importance to the new Mediterranean Civility today. Echoing the fascination with "Error" expounded by Josiah Royce (1855–1916), Peirce outlines an inquisitive approach to the world of Signs that at once respects what is given, and keeps correcting itself as it goes along. The Peircean emphasis on the importance of questioning is built upon, through different routes, by R.G. Collingwood (1889–1943) with his "Logic of Question and Answer",[12] and later Jaakko Hintikka (1929–2015) with his interrogative logics.[13] Even Herbert Simon (1916–2001) with his "bounded rationality" is really working out a similar humble approach to reasoning.[14]

Peirce's Semiotics is further developed by Charles W. Morris (1901–1979) by way of typologies, and by George Herbert Mead (1863–1931) by way of Social Psychology. The Thomist theologian John Deely (1942–2017) then continues the development by invoking the neglected history of the early Semiotic work of John Poinsot (1589–1644. Deely expounds a much broader Semiotics that encompasses the natural, and even the animal world, following the efforts of the German biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944). Today, the Estonian city of Tartu houses an important Semiotic library stemming from Deely's American work, but also the accumulated works of the thinkers of the Tartu-Moscow school. Tartu is now effectively the best place to engage with, in order to expound a truly humble Semiotic approach. As a Muslim, who is striving to develop a doctrine of divine Signs (*ayat*)—"Ayatology" as I term it—I am aiming to work it out in dialogue and engagement with the culmination of Western Semiotic scholarship in Tartu.

Augustine, Ghazali, Peirce, and Royce all recognized, as did Jean-Luc Marion (b.1946) later too, that Being itself is a signifying gift that must be received with the requisite humility and recognition of faultiness. As Marion, following Mircea Eliade (1907–1986), points out that Scriptures are supersaturated and abundant. They overflow with meanings and grace-filled guidance. The Ladder of Humility proves to be an important hermeneutical "rule". The given is understood best when received in humble gratitude.

Though Aristotelian Reasonableness may seem to have an opposite trajectory from the Ladder of Humility, it may very well be possible to combine both into a Humble Reasonableness. That is exactly what Augustine, Ghazali, Peirce, and Royce strived to achieve in their different ways.

*Humble reasoning* can be fostered in multiple ways. Dialogue is certainly a good way of fostering humble reasoning. Other ways have to do with recognizing Scriptures as types of reasons. Reading Scriptures with others from the same faith, as happens in *Textual Reasoning* where Jewish scholars compare notes as they read the Torah, and which fosters a reason that is respectful of the Torah. *Scriptural Reasoning* involves people of different faiths reading Scriptures together, each with own Scripture, but comparing the engagement of others with their own Scriptures. Then, there is *Compassionate Reasoning*, developed in the context of conflict-resolution and peace-building, where compassion is at once the driver and the aim of reasoning.

Other traditions, like Buddhism can also offer great advice when it comes to humble reasoning. The Japanese Kyoto School of Philosophy, especially through the works of Hajime Tanabe (1885–1962), teaches a mode of reasoning that is not ego-driven, but is actually a kind of 'no-thinking' or 'beyond-thinking' (*metanoetics*). Another helpful Japanese attitude is that of Wabi-sabi, which accepts imperfections and defectiveness, and even celebrates them. A broken plate is put back together with gold in the cracks, celebrating the very breaking points that would seen as ugly in other cultures. Accepting our proneness to error, our fallibility is something that we truly need today in mending our Mediterranean.

In all reasoning engaged with Scriptures, it is very important to approach the text with reverent humility. This injunction goes against the common pretension of "General Hermeneutics", which since the time of Schleiermacher, assumed it could apply it to everything. "Sacred Hermeneutics" must not be subsumed under "General Hermeneutics". Sacred Texts are to be approached with the proper manners of recitation (*Adab al-Tilawah*) as Abu Bakr al-Ajurri (877–970), Imam al-Ghazali, and Imam al-Nawawi (1233–1277) have elucidated. Sacred Scriptures are to approached in the mode of sacred reading or as *lectio divina*, and mulled over slowly and lovingly, as the Monk Guigo II (d.1193) so beautifully explains.

We must realize that our discourses are strings of actions; that we always "do things with words", as the philosopher of language John Austin (1911–1960) demonstrated. Pragmatics, Critical Theory, Reader Response Theory, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895–1975) important work on polyphony and the carnivalesque are all areas that can support our efforts in developing humble reasoning that is attentive to others—one that is aware of what it is that we do with words, and more importantly, what words do and how they do it.

Humble reasoning is not an enemy or even a competitor of faith. It actually prepares for faith, and ends up working hand-in-hand with it. Such a reasonable faith, and a faithful reason, fills the heart with joy and compassion for all of humanity, and all of God's

creation. It also fills the heart with hope. Such humble reasoning looks forward with confidence to the "not-yet" as Ernst Bloch (1885–1977) calls it, in anticipation, in openness. It is attentive not only to what surrounds it, but also to what is yet-to-come. It is not in a hurry to settle disputes, but is willing to patiently postpone them to the not-yet, while at the same time engaging and arguing about their content.

Such humble reasoning helps us become citizens within peaceful emerging cities. The "Civitas" becomes a place for peaceful and meaningful engagements—a place of "Civility". The great sages of Reason all paid close attention to the nature of proper cities. Plato outlined his *Republic*; Augustine in his *City of God*; Al-Farabi outlined his City of Virtue, and Ibn Khaldun (1332–1406) wrote extensively on Civility itself (*Tamaddun*). All of these wise sages realized that the truly reasonable life can only be lived in reasonable cities. Today, our challenge is to build such a civility *together*. The key to such mutual cooperation and mutual aid in civility is networking, and bridging.

Going back to our bridging and the need for a Mediterranean Graph Theory and a Mediterranean Topology, let us knit together our Mediterranean "Seas". This networking and bridging must be human, cultural, philosophical, spiritual, as we are doing here today. However, it must also be physical through navigational lines, air links, pipelines, cables (electrical and fiber). Only such bridging can build a common Mediterranean civility. In such a civility, "neighborliness" will be the most important consideration, together with its associated "duties of proximity".[15] Like cellular automata, we shall flock together in organized formations because of local rules of proximity, not overarching and imposed rules. Our ethics, morals, and virtues will be positional as they were for Cicero (106BC– 43BC) and Ghazali, and more recently to F.H. Bradley (1846–1924).

The key to our new civility is networking, especially networking as human engagement, dialogue, and education about each other. That is what your festival is about, that is why I am here, and I am truly grateful for your kind invitation. I hope to receive you soon in Libya, and that we will be able to read Greek, Roman and Arab classics together in ancient Cyrene and Leptis Magna, and to dig up our common heritage in joint archeological and cultural projects.

Thank you very much for your kind invitation and attention. ❧

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# THE MEDITERRANEAN: SEA OF IDENTITIES

*by* WAEL FAROUQ

THE MEDITERRANEAN SEA is the most ancient space among those populated by narratives. It can be argued that the clash between different identities is the crucial element in the narration of the Self, both on the personal and collective level. The Mediterranean Sea is also the oldest area—historically, politically and culturally—in which identities have taken shape, in the context of dialectical relations between the Self and the Other.

According to Filippo Corigliano, from a geographical point of view, the Mediterranean Sea is an enclosed space, delimited by the lands of three different continents that have encompassed countless ancient civilizations, inevitably destined to communicate through its water links. Their communication has gone far beyond trade exchanges and bloody wars: it achieved mutual cultural influence.[1] All this resulted in the Mediterranean becoming the beating heart of a body delineated by those lands, of which water became the natural extension. Every new power emerging on this or that shore attempted to extend its control over the whole sea. The Punic Wars between Rome and Carthage were only the first page in a long history of wars for the domination of that water.[2]

In ancient times, there were no roads. The only effective means of connection was through the water, since water had the added virtue of being able to transport heavy loads, a task that was impossible to achieve by other means.[3]

Initially dominated by the Greco-Roman civilization, the waves of the Mediterranean were later stirred by identities that were rooted in the waters, to the point that the sea began to be populated by new historical subjects: "When the Roman empire—once in decline due to attacks by Vandals, Vikings and Normans—lost its dominion over the sea, the new course of events was decided."[4] It took less than a century after the advent of Islam, to allow people united upon its vessel to invade Carthage, inaugurating a long historical period in which the Mediterranean Sea became a bridge to new lands of conquest. So it was that land and sea, bound as a whole, became a space for political conflict.

"Every historical transformation almost always includes a change of the image of space."[5] As Corigliano rightly comments, this change of the image of the world has immediate practical implications: "the representations of space are redefined, and each one

of them takes on political value because it is centered on a worldview."[6] Therefore, "the space of cultural plurality in the Mediterranean is slowly transformed into the plurality of political self-representations"—or self-representations in general—"that aim towards the research of a collective 'us', in such a way that the identitarian representation of politics"—or of identity in general—"becomes overburdened with a normativity, a value, a surplus of meaning that is invested libidinally (affectively) by the members of the group, and as such, it escapes dissolution."[7]

Consequently, after laying the roots of the individual and the collectivity, the representations that took shape within the Mediterranean—which were the only way out of the repetitive world of the Self—contributed to the construction of identities based on contradiction and opposition to the Other. Indeed, the first sign of a "European identity" came in the context of the conflict between the rising Carolingian empire (800–888) and the Arab-Islamic armies that were continuously advancing towards Europe.[8] According to Pietro Rossi, the centuries-long conflict with the Islamic world was decisive in the construction of European identity, since its nascent civilization defined itself through its difference from Islam, and even through setting itself openly against Islam.[9] For his part, Giacomo Marramao argues that "the European exception is somewhat to be found in the fact that, while every other civilisation is self-centered and sees itself as the 'center of the universe', Europe is constituted through an internal polarity of West and East. The antithesis of East and West is, therefore, a mythical-symbolic property exclusive to the West: a typical dualism that can't be found in other cultures."[10]

Imagination, therefore, plays an extremely important role in shaping identities, since the manifestation of a civilization or a people can only be understood through their collective imaginary of reference,[11] embodied in changing social and political structures, because "in any case, it must be clear that identity cannot be perceived as a permanent and invariant core, unaffected by historical mutation."[12]

**The shores of the Mediterranean and the contradictions of modernity**
The Mediterranean Sea has been—and still is—an open horizon for the expansion of political influence, a gateway allowing anyone to reach the world. However, it was also a space of free exchange, in a way that gave the parties involved room and freedom to leave their personal imprint on whatever was being exchanged, be it agricultural and industrial products, or philosophical-religious ideas and stories.[13] Perhaps the most striking evidence is Juha's tales that take on the many colours of its shores in their journey through the cultures of the Mediterranean. The popular character of these stories undoubtedly confirms that cultural exchange was not limited to the elites, but also involved the ordinary masses. A character like Juha took on the colours of the societies that adopted him and remade his stories: in Turkey, Juha is a teacher; in Egypt, he is a *faqih* (jurist) and in Sicily, a thief.

There was no need to establish institutions that could organize these exchanges. They just happened by themselves and played the role of institutions. Goods and thoughts passed from one shore to the other, then were readapted, modified and reused for different purposes by each party involved in the exchange. Arnold Toynbee uses a revealing metaphor when he compares societies under the pressure of an external force. He proposes two possible types of response: Herodianism and Zelitism. Herodianism derives from Herod, who was not born a Jew, but an Edomite, and later "converted" to Judaism and became its leader. He represents what we might call today "full integration". On the opposite side of the spectrum we find Zelitism, a medieval ecclesiastical term that indicates

excessive enthusiasm in glorifying God or, in modern idiom, fanaticism, i.e. stubborn adherence to one's own culture added to the rejection of the Other.[14] In the first case, through the complete or partial acceptance of the models proposed (or imposed) by the Other, one's identity gradually vanishes or, in the best-case scenario, it is weakened and reduced to the exterior superficial appearance. In the second case, there is a strong push towards closure, extremism and the feverish attempt to cling to that imagined identity that gives society a sense of belonging.

## Mediterranean identity in twentieh-century Egyptian thought

Egyptian liberals chose Europe. Europe was chosen, before anyone else, by Taha Husayn (1889–1973) who can be considered the first theorist of "Mediterraneanity" in Egypt, thanks to his book *Mustaqbal al-taqafa fi Misr* (The Future of Culture in Egypt) published in 1938. This work addresses two fundamental issues: the first concerns identity and cultural belonging, the second concerns the issues of education and culture in Egypt. Regarding the first issue, Taha Husayn writes peremptorily: "If Egyptian reason, from the earliest centuries, has been influenced by anything, it is certainly the Mediterranean Sea; and if there has been any exchange of benefits, it has certainly been with the peoples of the Mediterranean."[15] Then he adds: "If we were to look for a family in which to place Egyptian reason, this would be the family of peoples who have lived around the Mediterranean Sea."[16] Taha Husayn looks at "Mediterraneanity" as a homogeneous cultural unity, and not as a political one. He says: "How is it that this sea generates excellent and exquisite reason in the West, while it leaves the East devoid of reason, or it generates in it a decadent and weak reason?"[17] And he states: "Among the people that have developed around the Mediterranean Sea, there are no intellectual and cultural differences, only different political and economic circumstances."[18]

When addressing the topic of education, Taha Husayn clearly focuses on the importance of learning foreign languages, suggesting that their teaching must be postponed until after primary school, where children should be devoted to the study of national culture. According to Taha Husayn, foreign language learning should not have been limited to English and French. He suggested that the government establish a translation department whose task would have been translating into Arabic the milestones of science, literature and philosophy, the heritage of all mankind, which no living language can do without, because it can enrich the language itself, give it the ductility it needs, and fulfil national dignity.[19]

On the other shore, in the France of the 1930s, a literary movement called "Mediterraneanism" had already appeared, and looked at North Africa as a part of its own horizon. Taha Husayn followed the debates sparked by this movement. Relying on the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936, it seems that Taha Husayn tried to instil new confidence in the idea of "borrowing" from Western culture, but according to the formula of Mediterraneanity as a space of equality. It is a reconciling idea that completes the legacy of šay Muḥammad 'Abduh and strives for eliminating any contradiction between Islam and secular modernity, and for building bridges between them, in the form of a relation that Taha Husayn called "give and take", a relation that develops in the encounter between French and Egyptian reason.[20]

In a collection of articles entitled *Min al-sati' al-ahar* (From the Other Shore), Taha Husayn conceives of the relationship between France and Egypt as a model that can also be applied to Egypt's relations with Mediterranean culture. Taha Husayn sees this relation

as an integral dialogue, with ancient roots, that involves a group of cultures, in particular two major cultures that differ from each other: one centred in Egypt and the other in Europe.[21]

Ahead of Taha Husayn's vision, that enriched Egyptian identity with geographical, historical and cultural dimensions, some voices dominated by an unconditional admiration for the West arose to urge the adoption of all its cultural and secular values without any reservation or distinction. For example, Salama Musa (1887–1958) who thought that the only existing civilization was Western, and that Eastern civilization was a "failure". He called for the rejection of the colonialist West but, at the same time, he considered it the apex of contemporary civilisation that summed up all the contributions of human reason. Therefore, turning to Western civilization was not a form of subordination, but a step toward development. Husayn Fawzi (1900–1988) thought that civilization was an indivisible whole, and it was not possible to take only its material side and neglect its cultural elements.[22] With this concept, Fawzi came very close to the conclusions reached by another thinker, Subhi Wahida, in his book *Fi usul al-mas'ala al-misriyya* (On the Origins of the Egyptian Question, 1950), where he wrote: "Civilization is not something from which a person can select what he wants, it's the inevitable fruit of the social conditions in which peoples find themselves. These conditions now turn towards unity."[23] Wahida—who had studied in Italy—concluded by saying that the differences between the peoples of the Mediterranean had in no way touched the common elements on which their different societal and political attitudes had arisen, and those who wanted to take Egypt back to different attitudes were mistaken. Wahida was clearly asking Egypt to avoid masking the reasons for its weakness, otherwise this would have blocked Egypt's own path to modernity.[24] Wahida's demand was seeking a remedy to the cultural anaemia that had affected Egypt in the Ottoman period, leaving it subordinate to the West.[25]

In a series of articles, Louis 'Awad developed this idea by speaking of a "basin of civilizations". He states that the idea of the virgin mother and the tortured god is widespread in monotheistic religions, which means that all the religions of the Mediterranean basin share the same metaphysical framework concerning the idea of salvation, and that Mediterranean culture embodies humanity's constant search for an absolute goal. Awa explains that religion is examined as one of the most important cultural components of this region.[26]

Husayn Mu'nis (1911–1996) called for maintaining the relationship with the western Mediterranean, provided that it was an equal relationship.[27] However, he regarded the separation of Eastern and Western civilization as being a result of political conflict, and consequently he refused to take the East as the sole reference for identity. He bluntly says: "In this sea we have a mission by which our existence is completed and our being, together with the scale of our life, finds a balance."[28] And he ends by saying that Egyptians belong to the whole of humanity and that our civilization, the current one, is called "Western", because it embraces the essence of the experience of all nations, including those of Eastern civilization.[29]

The most relevant idea in Mu'nis is that he considers all those who refuse to turn to Western civilization as being like a coven of Salafists who, feeling unable to face the present, run to hide their heads in the sands of the past.[30] He also argued that inserting Egypt into the Mediterranean space would contribute to national security, given the threatening presence of Israel. In this way, Mu'nis added to the Mediterranean identity a political dimension that was previously absent, and that had been imposed by the circumstances

created by the 1948 Arab defeat in Palestine. Therefore, he believed that it wasn't possible to get rid of the Mediterranean, unless there was a willingness to get rid of one's own essence.

Also worthy of attention is the series of lectures given by the distinguished historian Safiq Gurbal (1894–1961) that were published in 1957 under the title *Takwin Misr* (The Creation of Egypt). Gurbal concludes his lectures by saying that the cultural imprint left by the West on Egypt could last for a long time and that Egypt had a vital field of action that extended far beyond its borders.[31]

Although all these thinkers support Egypt's Mediterranean identity, they reduce it to a single component: the West. Taha Husayn, on the other hand, always asserts that this identity is shaped by a relation among cultures that is rooted in history. It is a multilateral relationship involving Mediterranean people: on the one hand, those in the Levant, Iraq, Egypt and North Africa, and on the other, those to the north of the Mediterranean. It is a relation that has lasted throughout history and in which Islam is but one episode. This position clearly distinguishes aha usayn both from Islamic fundamentalists, who saw Islam as the main component of identity, and from laicists, who wanted to exclude Islam from the history of this relation. Identity, for aha usayn, is not made up of fixed elements organized in locked forms, it is a dynamic process whose vitality manifests itself in the relation with the Other. He continued to affirm this idea at every given opportunity, going so far as to describe it, in his inaugural speech at the Faruq I Institute in Madrid in 1950, as an inescapable destiny:

I do not believe in the inevitability of history. Quite the opposite, I am convinced that human beings are masters of their own lives and are to some extent in control of their own destiny. However, there is one thing that no one can disavow: the ineluctability of mankind which cannot undo what history has done; and history has willed that Arabs and Spanish should develop together for a few decades, by giving existence to a civilization worthy of admiration. There is no doubt that harmony was not always the rule between them. There is no doubt that feelings of brotherhood have not always guided their shared work. However, this work has produced fruits of great benefit to humanity. Thanks to this, new horizons have been opened in the literary field. Not only in Spain, but also in France, during the Middle Ages for example. Thanks to this, philosophy made great strides, and in the Middle Ages, more precisely before the Renaissance, the heritage of ancient Greece was transferred to Europe and the entire West. Yes, the Arabs and the Spanish experienced many victories and many defeats. Both peoples can be said to have wet this civilisation with their own blood. That is why it is as dear to you as it is to us.[32]

Taha Husayn does not think that Egyptian identity lies north or south of the Mediterranean, he thinks that it lies on that cultural bridge that has always connected the two shores through history, thus making this identity, "wet with the blood of the Mediterranean peoples", a destiny based on something akin to historical ineluctability. In the Mediterranean basin, Taha Husayn does not see two civilizations, he sees one. Once again, he finds himself alone against the great *Nahda* pioneers of his generation.

And in a parallel context, the novels of Tawfiq al-Hakim and Yahya Haqqi, as well as the writings of Qasim Amin, Muhammad Husayn Haykal and 'Abbas al-'Aqqad, reflect the confusion of some Egyptian intellectuals in the face of European culture. Tawfiq al-Hakim arrived at a form of reconciliation between Eastern and Western civilizations, by

imagining a third civilization that united the materiality of the West and the spirituality of the East: a living and beautiful civilization that can only come into being if the East is able to recover its own intellectual concepts and the wisdom it had accumulated, after colouring them with a Western tint.[33]

aha usayn remained faithful to his fundamental idea that identity cannot form, live nor bear fruit if it remains isolated. Identity, for Taha Husayn, can only be realized in the encounter with the Other; and the Mediterranean Sea has always been, and still is, the historical space and destiny of Arab identity.

### The difference in the Islamic perspective: An inclusive framework for Mediterranean identities

A widespread opinion is that, on the path to dialogue and coexistence, "one must overcome the differences and diversities that distinguish one culture from the other,"[34] but the exclusion of difference leads to a negative pluralism that results in the exclusion of the Self. True pluralism imposes no renunciation on anyone because we are aware of the fact that what distinguishes one culture from the other is precisely the contribution it has to offer to the others.

There is a long tradition in Islam that values difference and can offer a useful inclusive framework for plural identities in the Mediterranean. A prophetic tradition relates that:

> According to Abu Hurayra (may God be pleased with him), the Messenger of God (may the peace and blessing of God be upon him) said: 'my example, and that of the prophets who have gone before me, is that of a house built by a man who made it beautiful and well done, except that he left out a single stone at one of the corners. The people walk around the house, admiring it, and ask: '[Why] did you leave out that brick?' [The Prophet] says: 'I am that brick and the Seal of the Prophets'.[35]

In this hadith, the Prophet reveals himself as a "continuation" and "connection" in the long, historical relationship between the heavens and the earth, the sacred and the human. He is a new connection, in which this relationship reaches its fulfilment, and through which the edifice of prophecy passes from imperfection to perfection. However, the perfection and completeness of this connection imply that its manifestations will cease. For this reason the Prophet, in this hadith, also reveals himself as an "interruption:" indeed, he is the Seal, that is, the end. Nevertheless, this end announces a new beginning, the start of a new phase in the relationship between the sacred and the human, which is no longer transitory and limited to a single prophet who hands down the message from Heaven. It is now a relationship in which "the reason of the congregation of believers" has assumed the place of the Prophet, a transformation that would have been impossible without the fulfilment of prophetic revelation through the Prophet-Seal.

These dualisms of connection and interruption, imperfection and perfection, beginning and end do not, in this context, do not imply contradiction but rather difference or contrast, represented by the same principle that governs the relationship between Islam and the revealed religions that preceded it. It is even possible to argue that the conflict between Islam and paganism was not, in essence, one of doctrine. Religion was not the pivot around which turned the debate with the idolaters, who had not completely rejected Islamic monotheism. The Quran itself supports this view in many of its verses: "Truly, if you asked them: 'who created the heavens and the earth, and subjected the sun and the moon?' they would surely say, 'God!'" (Quran 29:61). Indeed, they worshiped idols only

to grow nearer to God: "'We only worship them that they may bring us nearer to God in position'" (Quran 39:3). Nothing prevented them from embracing Islam, except for their attachment to the legacy of their ancestors: "And when it is said to them: 'Follow what God has revealed,' they say: 'Rather, we will follow that upon which we found our fathers.'" (Quran 31:21). Islam's battle, therefore, was neither religious nor doctrinal. Instead, it was the struggle against the culture that had placed the tribal system outside of this world, although preserving its cohesiveness, turning its geographic isolation (in the desert) and its temporal isolation (in the past) into the defining element of its collective and individual identity.

Islam adopted many of the beliefs, religious practices, and ethical values that preceded it. Contrary to what is commonly written in the books of Islamic history, belonging both to the tradition and the contemporary age, the society in which Islam came into being was neither immoral nor lacking in virtue. Its people "were neither ignorant, nor stupid, nor vulgar, and neither were their lives cold and course; rather, they were possessed of knowledge, intelligence, fine emotions, and a life that was both sweet and comfortable."[36] In another hadith, the Prophet says: "Truly, I came to bring virtue to its fulfilment."[37] But the act of fulfilling religion and moral virtue does not deny their existence. This was the state of Islamic society under the leadership of the Prophet until the descent of some Quranic verses, during the Farewell Pilgrimage, which say: "This day I have perfected for you your religion and have completed My favour upon you, and I have approved for you Islam as religion" (Quran 5:3). Upon hearing this, 'Umar ibn al-Khattab burst into tears, and, when he was asked why, he replied: "After perfection there is nothing but incompleteness," meaning that the completion of the religion implied the absence of the Prophet. Imperfection here does not suggest a moral judgment, because Islam wanted nothing more than to pass from a society consecrated to imperfection to a society that strives for perfection. Indeed, life itself is but a bridge between human imperfection and divine perfection, which is traversed by the human being.

Islam views all religions as members of the same body. If even one of them were missing, the prophetic edifice could not have been completed by the Prophet Muhammad. This idea has continued to exist in Islamic tradition under different forms. In the fourth century of hijra, for example (the tenth century AD), the Brethren of Purity[38] used a different metaphor to express the same idea, describing humanity as a sick person beset by various illnesses. The doctor (God) prescribes different medications (religions) for different ailments, and the lack of a single medicine threatens the life of the patient (humanity). The other, in Islamic tradition, is the companion whose presence guarantees human fulfilment, and whose absence threatens human civilization.

It is therefore not surprising that Muhammad 'Abid al-Jabiri maintains that the concept of "other" (al-ahar) is unknown to the Arabic language, and that the closest word to this concept is al-gayr, "the different," which means "whoever is not me." The term gayriyya, which simply means "difference," derives from this word. As a result, according to al-Jabiri, difference is not necessary for self-awareness, as it is in European thought. In Arabic, difference is an attribute, not a substance unto itself as in European languages. In the majority of cases, the term "other" is used to mean "to put in order," in the sense of listing or enumerating, rather than ranking things by preference or priority.

The Quran's position towards "non-Muslims" begins with their recognition not as "other" in the European sense of the word, but as "others" recognized as "people of religion." In any case, everyone, including "I/Islam" is equal before God. The Most High

says: "Indeed, those who believed and those who were Jews or Christians or Sabeans [before Prophet Muhammad]—those [among them] who believed in God and in the Last Day and did righteousness—will have their reward with their Lord, and no fear will there be concerning them, nor will they grieve" (Quran, 2:62).

**Difference as a natural right**

The root *h.l.f*, from which the word for difference, *ihtilaf*, is derived, is among the richest in the Arabic vocabulary, both in terms of the words that derive from it and its meaning. It includes both positive and negative meanings, for example: *corruption, stupidity, resistance, contradiction, emirate, to give fruit, pray for rain*, etc. But despite this wealth of meanings and forms, some dictionaries overlook that of 'difference', while others have related it back to the explanation of the term *hilfa*: "the peoples are *hilfa*, meaning that they come one after the other; and *hilfa* also refers to the succession of day and night." Ibn Manzur attributes multiple meanings to the verb *ihtalafa*. It means a lack of conformity or correspondence and derives from "*ihtalaftu-hu*, which means I have put it behind me".[39]

What can be understood from this examination of the meaning of *ihtilaf* in Arabic dictionaries is that difference is neither a cause nor a consequence of conflict. Rather, a lack of conformity signals heterogeneity and distinctness, which form the basis of individual identity and pluralism. God did not make human beings to be identical to one another. Those who hide their differences in dialoguing with others, just like those who use differences as a pretext to make war against the other, fail to understand the divine wisdom, which ordained that difference be a *sunna* of God (*sunnat Allah*), that is, a law of nature that is continually present in His creatures.

A careful observation of the universe, of which we occupy only a small part, reveals that the Almighty God created it to be manifold and various. God Himself says: "Do you not see that God sends down rain from the sky, and We produce thereby multicoloured fruits? And in the mountains are tracts, white and red of varying shades, and [some] extremely black. And among people and moving creatures and grazing livestock are various colours similarly" (Quran 35:27,28).

These two verses confirm, leaving no room for doubt, that difference is a *sunna* of God, constantly present in his Creation and his Kingdom—so much so that it is impossible to find two creatures that are identical in every way. Almighty God even created each species in twofold form, making this a sign and point of reflection. The Most High says: "And of all things We created two mates: perhaps you will remember" (Quran 51:49).

The kind of difference pointed to in the Quran involves neither contradiction nor conflict, but rather multiplicity. For this reason, the word "multicoloured" is used at least twice in more than one *sura*. In fact, the Quran explicitly denies any hint of conflict or contradiction in the universe. The Most High says: "You do not see in the creation of the Most Merciful any inconsistency" (Quran 67:3). And again, supporting the proposition that difference—whether among human beings, in the universe, or in life in general—implies only multiplicity and never conflict or contradiction, the Most High says: "And of His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth and the diversity of your languages and your colours. Indeed in that are signs for those of knowledge!" (Quran 30:22).

The Quranic commentator Ibn Kathir, in explaining this verse, writes:

> The Most High says that (among the signs) of His absolute power are (the creation of the heavens and the earth), that is the creation of the vast heavens above, the ce-

lestial bodies, the brilliance of the planets, the fixed and the wandering stars; and the creation of the solid earth below, with its mountains, its valleys, its seas, its deserts, its animals, and its trees. The Most High says, "the diversity of your languages," because there exist those who speak the language of the Arabs, those who speak the language of the Franks, those who speak the language of the Berbers, those who speak the language of the Abyssinians, those who speak the language of the Indians, and still others who speak other foreign languages; only God knows all the languages of human beings, as only He knows all their different colors. All the peoples of the world, from the creation of Adam until the Final Hour, have two eyes, two eyebrows, one nose, one forehead, one mouth, and two cheeks, and yet no two are identical; and even their bodies can always be distinguished by some obvious or hidden characteristic, or by their shape.

Upon close observation, each person has a face endowed with a unique expression, and a body that is not identical to anyone else's. Even if people have common features such as beauty or ugliness, within these they are different one from the other. (Indeed, in this are signs for those of knowledge!)."[40]

Difference, therefore, is an innate characteristic with which God has stamped His creation - a sign of His extreme power, one of His astonishing signs. The population of the universe, the flowering of existence, the flourishing of life: none of this could have come to fruition if human beings had been created identical, and each one is enabled to carry out that for which he or she has been created. The Most High has said: "And if your Lord had willed, He could have made mankind one community; but they will not cease to differ [...] and for that He created them [...]" (Quran 11:118, 119).

Difference, in light of all of this, is a natural right, in the sense that it is present in every individual inasmuch as he or she is human. It is a feature of a person's humanity, and to vitiate it is to vitiate his or her humanity. Moreover, it is a permanent natural right, in the sense that it will exist for as long as humans continue to live on earth, that is, until the Day of Judgment, in which Almighty God will judge the differences between people.

Pluralism is the sincere expression of difference in thought, opinion, and faith, and so it, too, is both general and permanent.

The Quran itself supports this truth when it says, in addition to the verses cited above (Quran 11:118, 119): "And mankind was not but one community [united in religion], but [then] they differed. And if not for a word that preceded from your Lord, it would have been judged between them [immediately] concerning that over which they differ" (Quran 10:19); "Had God willed, He would have made you one community [united in religion], but [He intended] to test you in what He has given you; so race to [all that is] good. To God is your return all together, and He will [then] inform you concerning that over which you used to differ" (Quran 5:48); "Indeed, your Lord will judge between them on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which they used to differ" (Quran 32:25); "And if they dispute with you, then say, "God is most knowing of what you do. God will judge between you on the Day of Resurrection concerning that over which you used to differ." (Quran 22:68, 69).

It is clear that the right to difference, in the Islamic context, is a natural right, a general right applicable to all people, and it will endure until the Day of Resurrection, in which Almighty God will adjudicate the differences between people.

Almighty God does not prohibit difference. Muhmmad Sa'id al-Buti writes:

I searched the book of Almighty God for a verse that prohibits difference [...], but I found nothing. However, He prohibits division and conflict, that is, the negative consequences of difference. He says, for example: "And hold firmly to the rope of God all together and do not become divided" (Quran 3:103). He could instead have said "and let there be no differences among you." And in another place He says: "And obey God and His Messenger, and do not dispute and [thus] lose courage and [then] your strength would depart" (Quran 8:46). And where He does prohibit difference, it is a particular type—that which characterizes certain defunct nations: "And do not be like the ones who became divided and differed[…]" (Quran 3:105), that is "that your differences are not destabilizing, bringing you to conflict and disorder." Furthermore, we have all heard and read the words of Almight God "but they will continue to be different".⁴¹

The wisdom of the Lord is revealed in the sunna of difference, in the noble verse which says: "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of God is the most righteous of you. Indeed, God is Knowing and Acquainted" (Quran 49:13). This verse is addressed to all people and was revealed, according to Ibn Kathir, "after having prohibited mutual contempt between people and speaking ill of one another, with reference to the equality of people in their humanity."⁴² So, difference is not the criterion for establishing who among the people is best, because people are as equal as the teeth of a comb. God says, "We have created you from male and female," because in this characteristic, all are equal. This confirms the conclusion that difference means distinction, and that the deeper meaning of this difference is knowledge. The Most High says: "know one another," or, according to 'Asim's reading: "know."

Thus, difference is the basis of knowledge, and dialogue is an instrument by which to pursue it. This makes clear that exclusion of difference in the name of dialogue is every bit as abhorrent as exclusion of the other because of his difference.

In difference itself there is no evil, which can instead be found in the rejection of difference, since, as Edgard Pisani writes, "intolerance is the rejection of difference; the search for identification carried out with bloody hands; the rejection of any form of independence and diversity. Intolerance rejects the exchange of ideas because it disperses hatred, and it discards coexistence because that would mean accepting diversity."⁴³

The bottom line of this discourse is that Mediterranean pluralism has solid support in Islamic tradition. Indeed, even going one step further by asserting that each person has an inalienable right to difference, which is, in fact, the very thing that makes us individuals. Difference, therefore, can be neither reduced nor eliminated. On the contrary, the legislature must affirm and respect it, remaining bound by it as the ideal model. If it succeeds in doing so, the rule of the majority may inch closer to the rule of justice in contemporary society. ♣

*This paper was translated from the Italian by Marianna Massa.*

[1] Filippo Corigliano, "L'identità immaginata: Parole e concetti sul Mediterraneo", *Daedalus. Quaderni di Storia e Scienze Sociali* 5, 2014, p.37.

[2] See John Julius Norwich, *Il Mare di Mezzo. Una storia del Mediterraneo*, Sellerio Editore, Palermo, 2020.

[3] Franco Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano*, Laterza, Rome-Bari, 2007.

[4] Corigliano, "L'identità immaginata", p.38.

[5] Carl Schmitt, *Terra e mare*, Adelphi, Milan: Adelphi, 2002, p.59.

[6] Corigliano, "L'identità immaginata", p.39.

[7] Laura Bazzicalupo, *Politica: Rappresentazioni e tecniche di governo*, Carocci, Rome, 2013, p.25, quoted in Corigliano, "L'identità immaginata", p.39.

[8] Corigliano, "L'identità immaginata", p.39.

[9] Pietro Rossi, *L'identità dell'Europa*, Il Mulino, Bologna, 2007, p.105.

[10] Giacomo Marramao, *Passaggio a Occidente: Filosofia e globalizzazione* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2003), p. 59.

[11] Chiara Bottici, "La politica immaginale", in Alessandro Ferrara (ed.), *La politica tra verità e immaginazione*, Mimesis, Milan-Udine, 2012, pp.63–69.

[12] Pietro Rossi, *L'identità dell'Europa*, p.103.

[13] Francesca Corrao, *Hikayat Juha al-Siqilli*, translated by M. al-Sarif and H. Mahmud, al-Majlis al-'Ala li-l-taqafa, Cairo, 2018, p.18.

[14] Quoted in Franco Cassano, *Il pensiero meridiano*, p.69.

[15] Taha Husayn, *Mustaqbal al-taqafa fi Misr*, Hay'at al-Kitab, Cairo, 2013, p.369.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Ahmad Zakariya Al-Salaq, *Muqaddima*, in *Mustaqbal al-taqafa fi Misr*, op. cit. p.28.

[21] Taha Husayn, *Min al-sati' al-ahar*, Dar al-Hilal, Cairo, 1997, p.25.

[22] Sayyid Amin Salabi, *Al-garb fi kitabat al-mufakkirin al-misriyyin*, Dar al-Hilal, Cairo, 2003, p.19.

[23] Subhi Wahida, *Fi usul al-mas'ala al-misriyya*, al-Hay'a al-Misriyya al-'Amma li-l-Kitab, Cairo, 2014, p.282.

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[25] Anwar 'Abd al-Malik, *Muqaddima*, in Wahida, *Fi usul al-mas'ala al-misriyya*, op. cit.

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[27] Husayn Mu'nis, *Misr wa-risalatu-ha*, Dar al-Kutub wa-l-Wata'iq al-Qawmiyya, Cairo, 2011, pp.49ff.

[28] Ibid, p.65.

[29] Ibid.

[30] Ibid, p.70.

[31] Muhammad Safiq Gurbal, *Takwin Misr*, Dar al-Kutub wa-l-Wata'iq al-Qawmiyya, Cairo, 2011, p.92.

[32] Taha Husayn, *Al-awraq al-majhula*, translated 'Abd Al-Rashid Mahmudi, al-Markaz al-Qawmi li-l-Tarjama, Cairo, 2016, p.74.

[33] Tawfiq Al-Hakim, *'Usfur min al-sharq*, Dar al-Suruq, Cairo, 2004.

[34] Koichiro Matsuura, *Foreign Policy*, No.147, January 2002, p.95.

[35] Al-Bukhari, *al-Sahih*, *Kitab al-Manaqib*, n.3535; Muslim, *al-Sahih*, *Kitab al-Fada'il*, n.2286; Ahmad b. Hanbal, *al-Musnad*, 2/312.

[36] Taha Husayn, *Fi al-si'r al-jahili*, Dar al-Kutub al-Misriyya, Cairo, 1926, p.20.

[37] Al-Bukhari, *Al-Adab Al-Mufrad*, n.273.

[38] Muslim confraternity from Basra, in Iraq.

[39] Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-'Arab*, section entitled *h.l.f.*; al-Zamakshari, *Asas al-Balagha*, section entitled *h.l.f*; al-Jawhari, *al-Sihah*, section entitled *h.l.f.*

[40] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Quran al-'azim*, Dar al-Jil, Beirut, 1988, vol.3, p.414.

[41] Muhammad Sa'id Ramadan al-Buti, *Al-islam wa-sunnat al-ihtilaf*, Dar al-Fikr al-Mu'asir, Beirut, 1995, p.29.

[42] Ibn Kathir, *Tafsir al-Quran al-'azim*, supra, vol.4, p.218.

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