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Unmaking the Mediterranean Border.

Mediterraneanism, Colonial Mobilities and Postcolonial Migration.

By

Ilaria Giglioli

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

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of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

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Spring 2018

Unmaking the Mediterranean Border.
Mediterraneanism, Colonial Mobilities and Postcolonial Migration.

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Ilaria Giglioli

Abstract

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Doctor of Philosophy in Geography

University of California, Berkeley

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Since the mid-1990s, the Mediterranean sea has become the most dangerous border crossing of the world. The physical fortification of this border has been matched by the rise of ethnocentric nationalisms throughout Europe, that cast this sea as a fault line in a 'clash of civilizations' between Europe and North Africa, and are thus strongly opposed to North African and Muslim immigration to Europe. In contrast to this vision, a series of actors throughout Europe, ranging from immigration activists to local and national politicians, have embraced a Mediterraneanist vision that casts the Mediterranean sea as an area with a rich history of exchange between North Africa and Europe.

I argue, however, that Mediterraneanist projects, by focusing on a-historical and depoliticized notions of cultural exchange, ignore and reproduce longstanding structural inequalities between people of European and of North African descent, and reify ideas of difference between these two populations. I make this argument by analyzing Mediterraneanist projects that have emerged since the early 2000s in Mazara del Vallo, Sicily – commonly known as 'the most Arab city' in Italy, thanks to its long-established Tunisian community and to its long history of economic and political relations with Tunisia. Through an analysis of two types of Mediterraneanist projects – ones focused on regional development and ones focused on migrant integration – I argue that, while Mediterraneanist projects formally celebrate the presence and contribution of people of Tunisian descent to the city, they ignore and reproduce longstanding material inequalities and symbolic hierarchies between these two populations. Far from being unique to Mazara del Vallo, similar tensions characterize other cities and regions in Southern Europe that have embraced Mediterraneanist politics, but that continue to be sites of racialized tension between people of European and of North African descent.

Mediterraneanist projects, however, do not only reproduce inequality, but also reify difference. By framing the challenges of immigration to be ones of 'cultural difference', in fact, both municipal and Catholic proponents of Mediterraneanist projects in Mazara del Vallo assume a long-standing difference between Sicilians and Tunisians, who – in the right context – may be coexist. In particular, they point to turn-of-20th Century colonial Tunisia, a French Protectorate

that was host to a large Sicilian population, as a 'model' of coexistence to be reproduced in the present.

In the second part of the dissertation, however, I provide a very different reading of colonial Tunisia. I show that rather than a model of coexistence between Sicilians and Tunisians, French Protectorate Tunisia was a site of differentiation between these two populations – a differentiation that served to define the boundaries of Europeanness. In addition, I show that while, in this context, French colonial authorities celebrated Mediterranean coexistence, this was an assimilatory understanding of coexistence that was perfectly compatible with notions of hierarchy between different populations.

This reading of colonial Tunisia shows that the celebration of Mediterranean interconnection alongside the production of hierarchies and inequalities is not unique to contemporary Southern Europe, but has a long history of defining relations between people of European and of North African descent. Thus, it points to the limits of a celebration of Mediterranean interconnection to create just and equal relations in the Mediterranean region. In addition, this reading of colonial Tunisia shows the fallacies of an assumption of 'cultural difference' between Sicilians and Tunisians. By reframing colonial Tunisia not as a site of coexistence, but as one of differentiation between Sicilians and Tunisians, I show how these two populations are not primarily distinguished by their different 'cultures', but by racialized inequalities produced through long histories of cross-Mediterranean Mediterranean exchange.

By pointing to the uneven power relations perpetuated by notions of Mediterranean mixing, the aim of the dissertation is not to disregard Mediterraneanism as a platform for cross-Mediterranean social justice. Instead, it aims to show under what conditions Mediterraneanist projects may challenge hierarchies and uneven power relations between people of European and North African descent. I argue that in order to do so, Mediterraneanist projects must advocate for equity and redistribution, both within Europe and across the Mediterranean; explicitly reject a politics of assimilation; and shed light on the contingency, and thus possibility of change, of the boundaries of Europe, carefully guarded by the fortified Mediterranean sea.

To all those who have the courage to cross borders and bring down walls

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Introduction



Figure 1. Map of the Central Mediterranean

In 2017, the sixth year of the European 'refugee crisis', over 3,000 migrants died while attempting to cross the Mediterranean sea between North Africa and Europe, making the Mediterranean sea the most dangerous border in the world. While numbers of deaths crossing Europe's Southern border have recently spiked, this is hardly a new phenomenon. According to recently released data by the German newspaper *Der Tagesspiegel*, over 33,000 people have died attempting cross the Mediterranean since 1993 (*Der Tagesspiegel*, 2017). At that time, in fact, the enactment of the Schengen agreement, which allowed free circulation of people within the European Union, was matched by the closure of the European Union's external borders through the implementation of restrictive immigration legislation throughout the EU, and through the increased surveillance of the Mediterranean sea by national (and later Europe-wide) coast guards.

The fortification of the Mediterranean, and the enactment of strict immigration legislation, however, are hardly the only form of boundary-demarkation in contemporary Europe. Over the past decade, in fact, right-wing nationalist movements and parties have gained popularity throughout the continent, symptomatic of a deep economic malaise, and of long-lasting racialized definitions of national and European communities. These movements are

diverse, ranging from the Front National in France, to Ukip in the UK, to the Lega in Italy, but generally share two assumptions. The first is that Europe, understood as a bounded and immutable socio-spatial unit, is a white Christian space, which is currently being disrupted by the arrival of migrants. The second is that the Mediterranean border represents a 'civilizational' frontier in a Huntingtonian 'clash of civilizations' (Huntington, 1993).

In contrast, a range of social actors throughout Europe have attempted to develop a counter-narrative to this vision by developing a very different understanding of the Mediterranean sea. Rather than casting it as a 'civilizational frontier', in fact, they describe it as a space with a rich history of cultural exchange between Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and of coexistence between different populations. I define this vision 'Mediterraneanism'¹. Mediterraneanism is not only a vision of cross-Mediterranean connection, but translates into concrete projects aiming to connect the two shores of the Mediterranean. These are diverse, ranging from large-scale economic and cultural cooperation projects such as the former French president Nicholas Sarkozy's vision of a 'Union of the Mediterranean', to collaboration of activists in Southern Europe and North Africa, stipulated in declarations such as the 'Charter of Lampedusa'², to urban & regional development programs celebrating Mediterranean mixing and interconnection throughout Southern Europe.

Some of the key sites of articulation of Mediterraneanist politics in Southern Europe, however, are also sites of on-going structural inequalities and racialized tensions between people of European and of North African descent. In Marseille (France), Andalusia (Spain), and Sicily (Italy), in fact, public celebration of these regions' long history of Mediterranean interconnection, and indeed of the regions' Arab and Muslim heritage, have gone hand-in-hand with the on-going marginalization and racialization of the regions' Arab and Muslim inhabitants (Giglioli, 2017; Lafi, 2013; Rogozen-Soltar, 2012). This points to three drawbacks of Mediterraneanist visions and projects focused primarily on notions of cultural exchange and coexistence. Firstly, by focusing primarily on ahistorical and depoliticized notions of 'cultural exchange', they are not tackling deep structural inequalities that persist along lines of race, religion and citizenship in Europe, and that materially affect the lives of people of North African descent in this context. Secondly, by framing Mediterranean multiculturalism as a partial incorporation of North African 'culture' (such as art, food or music) into European society, they consider European-ness as a neutral and universal terrain of mixing, into which some forms of Arab-ness can be incorporated. This framing places the onus of change and adaptation on people of North African descent, and – thus – implicitly reinforces the notion that migrants are the source of the tensions of multicultural Europe. Thirdly, by celebrating Mediterranean 'coexistence' between 'Europeans' and 'North Africans', Mediterraneanist visions and projects

1 Mediterraneanism, understood as the celebration of an idealized cultural/political unity of the Mediterranean based on histories of interconnection between Europe and North Africa, has a longer history. In the context of 19th century Italy, it was both a racial discourse and a form of legitimizing Italian colonial ambitions over North Africa. In the context of Sicily, at different moments of the 19th and 20th Century, invoking connections to the Southern Mediterranean was a means for the island's elite to define a different type of modernity from one based in North-Western Europe, and to re-cast Sicily from a marginal region of Europe to a key strategic point in the Mediterranean. Finally, in the context of turn-of-21st Century Tunisia, celebrating the country's 'Mediterranean' nature was a means for its ruling party to strengthen the country's economic and political cooperation with the EU. These different nuances of Mediterraneanism will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 1 and in the conclusion.

2 See <http://www.lacartadilampedusa.org/> [accessed 12/6/2017].

paradoxically reify ideas of *difference* between these two populations, and thus the notion that the Mediterranean represents a 'natural' boundary between 'Europe' and 'North Africa', understood as coherent and self-contained socio-spatial units.

If Mediterraneanist projects are challenging neither deep structural inequalities, nor economic, cultural and 'civilizational' hierarchies between Europe(ans) and North Africa(ns), does this mean that Mediterraneanism is not an effective vehicle to challenge exclusionary understandings of national and European belonging? Or might there, instead, be a way for Mediterraneanist projects to challenge uneven power relations and create relationships of solidarity between people on both shores of the Mediterranean, and between people of European and North African descent in Europe? I argue that, in order to do so, it is necessary for Mediterraneanist projects to go beyond simply celebrating Mediterranean coexistence. Instead, they should recognize and challenge uneven power relations between people of European and North African descent on both shores of the Mediterranean.

I make this argument by analyzing Mediterraneanist projects that have emerged since the early 2000s in Mazara del Vallo, Sicily. Mazara del Vallo represents an ideal location to analyze the pitfalls and potentials of Mediterraneanist projects for three main reasons. Firstly, the town has the reputation of hosting one of the oldest North African communities in Italy, thanks to Tunisian labor migration to Mazara del Vallo which began in the 1960s³. This means that it is possible to analyze how the emergence of Mediterraneanist projects in the early 2000s challenged or reinforced long-standing racialized inequalities between Sicilians and Tunisians. Secondly, Mazara del Vallo is located in an economically marginalized region of Italy, of which the inhabitants were historically considered not fully Italian by national elites. This means that it is possible to analyze how Mediterraneanist projects simultaneously address not only cross-Mediterranean relations, but also *internal* social and geographical inequalities within Italy and Europe. Thirdly and more generally, Mazara del Vallo has a long history of connection with North Africa. At the turn of the 20th Century, in fact, Sicilians from the southwest of the island (where Mazara is located) migrated southward to colonial Tunisia (a French protectorate) in search of labour opportunities. This means that it is possible to analyze current tensions around Mediterraneanist projects – and around immigration more generally – in Mazara del Vallo, in relation to an older history of boundary drawing between Sicilians and Tunisians, and older debates about 'coexistence' between populations of the Northern and Southern shore of the Mediterranean.

Mazara del Vallo is currently the epicenter of two main types of Mediterraneanist projects. The first, promoted primarily by local government authorities, is Mediterraneanism as a regional development project. This approach celebrates Mediterranean interconnection (including the presence of Tunisian migrants) as a means to brand Mazara as an 'exotic' tourist destination, and as a cosmopolitan hub of cross-Mediterranean cultural and economic cooperation. The second type of Mediterraneanist project, promoted primarily by the Catholic church, but also by Italian national authorities, is a multicultural one. This latter approach casts Mediterranean 'coexistence' as a response to the presumed difficulties caused by the co-presence of different 'cultures', and the assumed adaptation difficulties of Tunisian migrants and people of

3 By this I do not mean that there were no Tunisians in Mazara del Vallo, in Sicily or in Italy before this date. However, in the 1960s a consistent migration stream from Tunisia to Mazara del Vallo began, as a consequence of the labor demands of the city's expanding fishing fleet.

Tunisian descent. Both types of Mediterraneanist projects invoke histories of Mediterranean 'coexistence' as a model for the present, and as proof of Sicily and Sicilians' propensity to cross-Mediterranean relations. In particular, they focus on two historical moments. The first is 9th to 12th Century Arab and Arab/Norman Sicily, understood as a period of multi-religious coexistence in the Northern Mediterranean⁴. The second is turn-of-20th Century French protectorate Tunisia, site of Sicilian southward migration and settlement, understood as an example of multi-national, multi-linguistic and multi-religious coexistence in the Southern Mediterranean.

Analogies in language and similar invocations of the past, however, are not the only shared characteristic of these two types of Mediterraneanism. Despite their different approach, in fact, both types of projects are both ignoring and reproducing longstanding material and symbolic hierarchies between Tunisians and Sicilians in Mazara. This occurs in two ways. The first is through the exclusion, or very partial incorporation, of Tunisians from the economic benefits of regional development projects based on the celebration of Mazara's cross-Mediterranean connections. The second is through the framing (by Italian educators, clergy members, social workers, and politicians) of Sicilians as modern subjects, open to 'inter-cultural' or 'inter-religious' dialogue and mixed marriages, in opposition to (Muslim) Tunisians, whom they presume to be closed to this type of dialogue. This understanding is based on the assumption that Sicilians and Tunisians have fundamentally different 'cultures', but can coexist under the right conditions, such as those that were present in turn-20th Century colonial Tunisia.

In the second part of the dissertation, however, I provide a very different reading of inter-communal relations between Sicilians and Tunisians in colonial Tunisia. Using the lens of French and Italian colonial schools, I show how rather than a model of coexistence between Sicilians and Tunisians, this was a key site of differentiation between these two populations. By 'modernizing' and 'civilizing' a poor Sicilian population, in fact, colonial schools sought to differentiate them from Tunisians, with whom they lived in close proximity, and to whom they were racialized in a similar way by French and Italian elites. Certainly, colonial Tunisia was also a site in which French Protectorate authorities explicitly theorized and embraced notions of coexistence between Sicilians and Tunisians. However, this was an understanding of coexistence that was perfectly compatible with notions of hierarchy. The educational policy in the early years of the French Protectorate, in fact, was inspired by the notion of the 'fusion des races', an assimilationist model that argued that peaceful coexistence between the different communities living in colonial Tunisia could only occur under the umbrella of French language and culture, while simultaneously excluding Arab Tunisians from equal treatment. In essence, through this analysis, I frame turn-of-the-20th Century Tunisia as a site of material and symbolic drawing of the boundaries of European-ness, in which the celebration of Mediterranean interconnection served to legitimize European colonial ambitions over North Africa, and create consensus to colonial rule, while producing hierarchical difference between European and non-European subjects.

This reading of colonial Tunisia shows that the celebration of interconnection alongside the production of inequality has a long history in defining relations between people of European and of North African descent. Thus, it points to the limits of a celebration of Mediterranean

4 This is similar to the idealization of Arab Andalusia, that takes place both in Europe and in the Middle East and North Africa.

interconnection to create just and equal relations in the Mediterranean region. Both in colonial Tunisia and in contemporary Sicily, in fact, celebrations of Mediterranean mixing and interconnection by French Protectorate Authorities, and by Sicilian local government ones, created and perpetuated hierarchies. These are of two types. The first type is material, as celebrations of Mediterranean mixing did little to challenge the labor exploitation of Tunisian migrants in Sicily, or – indeed – the material advantages that Sicilian settlers had access to in Tunisia, such as preferential access to land, jobs and French citizenship. The second type of hierarchy is in the realm of 'culture' or 'meaning'. The type of coexistence celebrated both by French colonial officers in 19th century Tunisia, and by Sicilian public authorities in contemporary Sicily, understands coexistence to be based on the incorporation of the subordinate group (Tunisians) into the dominant language and culture. This understanding has two consequences. Firstly, it constructs a hierarchy between 'Frenchness' or 'Italianness', understood as universalist and neutral terrains of mixing, vs. 'Arabness' or 'Tunisianness' which cannot be. Secondly and relatedly, it considers the boundaries of the national community as a 'given', and thus places the onus of change on the subordinate group, which must change to successfully 'integrate'.

Analyzing inter-communal relations in colonial Tunisia in relation to current debates about immigration also shows the fallacies of assumptions of an intrinsic 'cultural difference' between Sicilians and Tunisians. When proponents of Mediterraneanism in Sicily idealize turn-of-the 20th Century colonial Tunisia as a site of coexistence, in fact, they assume that Italians and Tunisians are pre-existing social units, which – in the right conditions – can be blended or brought together in a shared Mediterranean region. By reframing colonial Tunisia not a site of coexistence between Sicilians and Tunisians, but as a site of their differentiation, I show how difference between these two populations was historically produced, and how this historical production of difference was key in defining the boundaries of European-ness. This understanding allows me to show that Sicilians and Tunisians are not primarily distinguished by their different 'cultures', but by racialized inequalities produced through long histories of Mediterranean interconnection. Understanding how the boundaries of European-ness were historically produced, then, allows for a type of Mediterraneanist politics that does not simply celebrate interconnection across borders, but that questions the very existence of these borders by showing their contingency and their possibility of change.

The aim of this dissertation, in fact, is not to set aside Mediterraneanism as a platform for cross-Mediterranean social justice. Acknowledging that both historically and currently the celebration of Mediterranean mixing has existed alongside the production of hierarchical difference, does not mean that Mediterraneanism might not serve as a means to advocate for more just and equitable cross-Mediterranean relations, and for the rights of people of North African descent in Europe. Similarly, showing how the celebration of Mediterranean mixing has a long history of supporting European control over North Africa does not mean that there is not value in embracing Mediterraneanism as a counter-narrative to ideas of the Mediterranean as a 'fault line' in the clash of civilizations. My aim, instead, is to show what Mediterraneanist projects must do in order to challenge deeply engrained hierarchies and uneven power relations between people of European and North African descent. More specifically, I argue that in order to challenge the current Mediterranean status quo, Mediterraneanist projects must go beyond simply celebrating hybridity and interconnection, and advocating for 'multicultural coexistence'.

Instead, they must commit to challenging uneven power relations across the Mediterranean and between people of North African and of European descent in contemporary Europe, to a critique of 'cultural' or 'civilizational' hierarchies, and to a critique of Islamophobia. In addition, Mediterraneanist projects must challenge the assumption that the boundaries of European-ness are 'given' and immutable, showing the historical construction of the borders of Europe, carefully guarded by the fortified Mediterranean sea.

The implications of this study, however, go beyond a study of processes of socio-spatial boundary drawing in the Mediterranean, and a critique to Mediterraneanist politics. The dissertation, in fact, draws on and is inserted into broader intellectual and political debates about cosmopolitanism, mixing and hybridity; the framing of migration and its relationship to racialized processes of nation-building; and how the production and legitimization of borders occurs through the production of social and spatial difference.

Mediterraneanism, cosmopolitanism and hybridity

The recent rise in popular interest in notions of Mediterranean interconnection has translated into a revival of academic interest in the Mediterranean, understood not only as a location of specific social processes, but as a coherent entity which deserves to be studied as such. Within this line of inquiry, a series of recent studies have reconstructed the history of cross-Mediterranean population movements over the past two centuries in order to show that this sea has always been a crossway between Europe and North Africa, and – consequently – that the boundaries of identity have historically been blurred and ambiguous in this space (Clancy-Smith, 2010; Davi, 2000; Melfa, 2008). A similar analysis of cross-Mediterranean population movements (in particular, an ethnographic and historical study of Mazara del Vallo's fishing fleet) allows Ben Yehoyada (2018), to argue for a re-centering of 'the Mediterranean' as an object of study in Anthropology, a focus which had been largely abandoned by anthropological debates of the 1980s on the basis of a lack of any 'cultural unity' between people of South-eastern Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (Herzfeld, 1984). Ben Yehoyada, instead, argues that this region is actively produced by people who cross the Mediterranean and forge cross-Mediterranean relations in order to support their livelihood, and – consequently – that it is possible to study 'the Mediterranean' produced through these interconnections. Adopting a more normative approach, Chambers (2008) invokes histories of Mediterranean interconnection to cast the Mediterranean as a project we should engage in in order to break down dichotomies between 'west' and 'rest', and bounded notions of identity.

My work, however, addresses a different question. My concern, in fact, is not to demonstrate long histories of Mediterranean interconnection, nor to prove the existence of a socio-geographical entity called 'the Mediterranean'. Indeed, whether 'the Mediterranean' exists or not is irrelevant to this study. Instead, I seek to understand what work invoking the Mediterranean does. Thus, my research focuses on the hierarchies and uneven power relations created by discursive references to the Mediterranean, and projects aimed at creating a 'Mediterranean' material and social landscape. In particular, I am concerned with how the celebration of Mediterranean interconnection can contribute to the on-going racialization of people of North African descent, and the perpetuation of uneven power relations between Europe(ans) and North Africa(ns).

Some critical scholarship of the 19th century Mediterranean has addressed similar questions by gesturing to the uneven power relations in the multi-linguistic, multi-national and multi-religious Ottoman or European colonial cities of the Mediterranean coastline (Bromberger, 2007; Haller, 2004; Lafi, 2013), and – consequently – by arguing for caution in considering the 'cosmopolitanism' of Mediterranean port cities as a model for an alternative vision to contemporary ethno-nationalisms (Ben-Yehoyada, 2014; Haller, 2004). They have done so by showing that these spaces were highly hierarchical, with hierarchies marking *both* the relations between different subjects within 'cosmopolitan' spaces (Dakhliya, 2005; Memmi, 1965), and the nature of 'cosmopolitan' circles themselves – which were often elite spaces, strongly connected both economically and culturally to imperial Europe (Haller, 2004; Mills, 2010)⁵. They have also done so by arguing that the co-presence of different national, linguistic and religious communities did not necessarily mean their fusion, and thus that interaction between different communities existed alongside the careful guarding of their boundaries (Bromberger, 2007; Dakhliya, 2005; Lagueche, Clancy-Smith, & Audet, 2001). This analysis, however, is limited to the 'cosmopolitan' spaces of the past. Combining these critiques of Mediterranean cosmopolitanism with my grounded analysis of contemporary Mediterraneanist politics in Sicily, allows me – instead – to make three more general arguments about the limits of notions of hybridity and mixing, both in the Mediterranean and more generally.

Firstly, by showing how both in contemporary Sicily and in colonial Tunisia the celebration of Mediterranean mixing has coexisted with the production and reproduction of racialized hierarchies and inequalities, I argue that the celebration of mixing and interconnection does not necessarily challenge uneven power relations between the entities that are mixing. By considering these entities to be both social ones (Europeans and North Africans), but also spatial ones (Europe and North Africa), I add a spatial dimension to the argument made by scholars of mixed-race studies, who underline how the celebration of mixing can both obscure the power relations between groups that are mixing, and the violent histories through which this mixing took place (Glissant, 1989; Hawthorne & Piccolo, 2016; Welch, 2010).

Secondly, by analyzing how both in contemporary Sicily and in colonial Tunisia forms of mixing that incorporated a subordinate language / cultural form into a dominant one (such as fluency in multiple languages) were celebrated by colonial and local government authorities, but forms of mixing that challenged dominant cultural forms were not (such as the pidgin French created through a mix of dialects), I show how the celebration of mixing and interconnection can create hierarchies between different types of mixing (De la Cadena, 2005; King-O'Riain, Small, Mahtani, Song, & Spickard, 2014). Through this analysis, I historicize critical studies of neoliberal multiculturalism. Ferguson (2012), Goonewardena & Kipfer (2005) and Povinelli (2002), in fact, all show how early 21st century neoliberal multiculturalism creates hierarchies between types of mixing deemed 'acceptable' and ones that are not, as it only celebrates and incorporates forms of difference that can facilitate flows of capital and that do not challenge dominant understandings of the national community. By showing how the Mediterranean multiculturalism celebrated in contemporary Sicily re-articulates some of the tensions of

5 This was the case both under the Ottoman empire, for instance in the case of Istanbul (Mills, 2010), and under European colonial control, for instance in Alexandria, Egypt (Haller, 2004). Indeed, in the case of the latter, Haller notes how the city's cosmopolitan space tended to exclude and marginalize the native Muslim underclass, particularly migrants from the hinterland, and connects this exclusion with the founding of the Muslim brotherhood as a means of articulating a counter-discourse to elite cosmopolitanism (Haller, 2004, p. 12).

colonial models of coexistence in French Protectorate Tunisia, my work shows – instead – that a selective incorporation of difference is not simply a characteristic of contemporary neoliberal multiculturalism, but was historically central in the maintenance of colonial power.

Finally, similarly to arguments that the notion of mixed-race, while appearing to transcend racial categories actually reifies the category of race (Spencer, 2006), I argue that idealizing past moments of Mediterranean mixing between different national and religious backgrounds paradoxically reifies these differences. Idealizing Mediterranean mixing, in fact, assumes a pre-existing difference between Europe(ans) and North Africa(ns) that must then be bridged through Mediterranean interconnection. In contrast, my work does not question assumptions of difference between Sicilians and Tunisians by celebrating their coexistence in a 'blended' and 'mixed' Mediterranean, but shows the historical production of difference between these two populations that gradually allowed the Sicilian, Italian and European public debate to consider the Mediterranean as the 'natural' border of Europe. Through this reframing, I argue – in more general terms – that celebrating a 'hybrid' border zone between two nation-states as a counter-argument to the 'natural-ness' of borders (Chambers, 2008; Dear, 2013), may actually reify the nation-states that are blended in the border-zone. In order to not reify difference (be it between different 'groups' of people, or different territorial entities) it is fundamental to show, instead, the historical construction of the social and spatial boundaries of the nation.

Migration, race and nation. Postcolonial Europe.

Studying contemporary tensions about Tunisian migration to Italy in relation to colonial history allows me to reframe discussions about immigration away from a focus on the integration of migrants – a framework which places the focus of study and the onus of change on migrants and their descendants (see El-Tayeb, 2011; Sayyid & Dabashi, 2015). Instead, I analyze how the social and spatial boundaries of Italianness were historically traced in relation to Tunisia/Tunisians. In particular, I consider colonial Tunisia as a key site of definition of the boundaries of Italian-ness and European-ness that figure in contemporary debates about the ability of people of Tunisian descent to 'integrate' into Italy and Europe. This approach draws on a growing body of work of postcolonial and de-colonial scholars of migration, who reframe studies of migration away from a focus on the incorporation of 'difference' into the national community, to an analysis of how the boundaries of the nation were historically constructed through the production and exclusion of racialized subjects (El-Tayeb, 2011; Khiari, 2009; Kipfer, 2011; Solomos, Findlay, Jones, & Gilroy, 1982). In particular, they show how colonies were a key site of negotiation of the symbolic borders of the nation that figure in contemporary migration debates, as the current racialization of migrants re-articulates processes of racialized boundary drawing between European settlers and colonial subjects in European colonies (Chambers, 2008; Grosfoguel, 2003; Hall, 2000; Khiari, 2009; Kipfer, 2011; Solomos et al., 1982).

My research, however, expands the scope of this research by addressing a common critique of studies that 'flip' the object of analysis from the problem of 'integration' of migrants to focus on the construction of the boundaries of European-ness. This critique is that this framework considers both European Nation states and Europe as a whole as undifferentiated bodies: opposing 'European-ness' to an external 'other', in fact, does not take into account deep

territorial inequalities and processes of internal racialization that characterized Europe both historically, and in the present. My research addresses this critique by expanding a postcolonial analysis of migration to include processes of internal colonialism (Blauner, 1969; Hechter, 1975; Quijano & Ennis, 2000), Orientalism (Moe, 2002; Schneider, 1998), and territorial marginalization (Curtis, 1968; Gramsci, 1971; Weber, 1976) within Europe. By so-doing, I argue that both the historic racialization of colonial subjects, and the contemporary racialization of migrants, are connected to attempts to address patterns of socio-territorial differentiation within Europe.

Defining and strengthening the *external* material and symbolic boundaries of Europe; in fact, was central to assert the full European-ness of internally racialized subjects, and economically marginalized regions. At different periods of the long history of migration between Sicily and Tunisia, I show how differentiation from Tunisia and Tunisians was a key way to demonstrate the full Italian-ness and European-ness of Sicilians. This was the case projects of modernizing Sicilians to assert their full Italian-ness and thus differentiate them from Tunisians sponsored by the Italian state (see, for instance, the education of Sicilians of colonial Tunisia, as well as regional development programs of post-WWII Italy), but was also true in self-representations of Sicilians in daily life, who asserted their full modernity through their differentiation from Sicilians (see chapter 2). Certainly, in some moments Sicilian intellectual and political elites celebrated their proximity to Tunisia. By so-doing, however, they did not seek to question Sicilians' Italian-ness and European-ness (and thus the boundaries of the national and European community), but – instead – to redefine the geographical and cultural proximity of Sicily and Sicilians to North Africa (historically a means of racialization of Southern Italians) into an asset of interest to Italy and Europe.

Bordering – producing social and spatial difference

A key argument of this study is that the Italian and European public debate came to widely accept the Mediterranean as the 'natural' border of Europe as a consequence of the production of racialized difference between populations of the extreme periphery of Europe (Sicilians) and North Africans (Tunisians). Thus, I understand bordering as a process of production and naturalization of difference between populations and territories on the two sides of the border. This naturalization of difference, in turn, allows for the border to be widely accepted as a 'natural' dividing line. This conception of bordering shifts the focus of analysis in the study of borders away from an analysis of the *effects* of borders on the organization of space and on social relations. Instead, I analyze how the creation of social and spatial difference allows for the legitimization of borders. In other words, rather than analyze how the border produces social difference (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013), I show how the creation of social difference produces and legitimizes the border. Let me explain this conceptual shift in more detail.

Recent scholarship in critical border studies and political geography has analyzed the repercussions of border securitization on the organization of space and on processes of social differentiation well beyond the border line. Some scholars have done so by focusing on the multiplication of sites of border-control, through both the externalization of operations of border control outside national borders (Bialasiewicz, 2012; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, & Pickles,

2013), and through the proliferation of practices of surveillance within the territory of the nation-state (Brown, 2010; Graham, 2010; Petti, 2007). Others, instead, have focused on the effects of fortified borders on social differentiation, showing how differences in citizenship and immigration status confer different social, political and labor rights to people living within the same national space (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013). All of these studies, however, consider the border a 'given'. Certainly, they may describe how borders became gradually more closed and fortified, but their framework of analysis assumes the existing material and symbolic borders of contemporary nation states. But in order for there to be a debate about border securitization, there has to be a previous assumption that the border *should* be there – whether more or less fortified. My research, thus, analyzes the process through which borders become widely accepted as a representation of 'natural' difference between the populations on the two sides of the border.

The creation of spatial difference played a key role in the constitution of social difference between Sicilians and Tunisians, which – in turn – was central in legitimizing the Mediterranean as a 'natural' dividing line⁶. Drawing on studies on the effect of uneven infrastructure development on the production of social difference in cities (see Fanon, 1965; Gandy, 2008; Kooy & Bakker, 2008), I show how – at different moments of the long history of migration between Sicily and Tunisia – differentiation between Sicilians and Tunisians was produced by associating the two populations with different levels of 'development' of the areas they inhabited. This occurred at multiple scales. At the scale of the neighborhood, Chapter 3 shows how – in Mazara del Vallo – Sicilians' changing perception of their similarity/difference from Tunisians was determined, in part, by the changing state of the built environment of the town's immigrant neighborhood. At the scale of the region, Chapter 1 shows how the Sicilian press's shift from framing Tunisians as similar to Sicilians to different from them, was connected to the changing economic situation of Southern Italy vis-à-vis both Northern Italy and Tunisia.

But how does this translate into bordering? In the previous section, I explained that in this study, rather than adopting a Europe/non-Europe dichotomy, I also take into account forms of social and spatial differentiation within Europe. By analyzing the interplay of different forms of marginality, I conceive of the border as part of a broader relational geography of socio/spatial difference. In other words, I understand the Mediterranean border between Southern Italy and Tunisia as one line of socio/spatial difference, which exists alongside the socio/spatial difference between northern Italy and Southern Italy. Consequently, when I refer to 'producing' or 'naturalizing' the Mediterranean border, I mean the process through which certain forms of socio/spatial difference (across the Mediterranean) became naturalized, while others (within Italy) were a target of intervention. For instance, as I will show in Chapter 1, the Italian public debate began to widely accept the Mediterranean as a 'natural' development dividing line, and thus as the 'natural' Southern border of Europe, just as programs of Italian national development and of European integration made socio-territorial differences within Italy and Europe less politically significant.

In developing this approach, I am in dialogue with studies that denaturalize borders by

6 Of course, the production of social difference occurred in multiple ways. Throughout the dissertation, I show how differentiation between Sicilians and Tunisians also occurred through the educational system in colonial Tunisia (chapter 5), differential labor incorporation in Sicily (Chapter 2) or through religious practice (Chapter 4). However, the production of difference through these arenas of everyday life was strongly related to shifting development programs and border regimes.

showing how the current territorial unity of settler nation-states was produced through violent processes of territorial annexation and pacification of populations, as well as the separation of organically connected territories and populations (Anzaldúa, 1987; Barrera, 1989; Hernández, 2010; Simpson, 2014). The majority of these studies, however, are focused on settler-colonial contexts where processes of territorial conquest and internal colonialism (Barrera, 1989) continue to be contested, and are thus visible. As a consequence, this approach risks naturalizing the borders of non-settler colonial states, as they were not created through similar processes of colonial conquest, settlement and elimination/assimilation of native populations. Drawing on studies of nation-building in Europe through the incorporation of internal peripheries (Curtis, 1968; Hechter, 1975; Moe, 2002; Schneider, 1998; Weber, 1976), I argue that processes of violent incorporation of territory and the management of 'less civilized' populations was also constitutive to the production of European nation-states, and occurred in connection to processes of boundary drawing between 'civilizable' and 'non-civilizable' subjects in European colonies. By making this analogy, I do not intend to minimize the different ways in which national elites saw populations of internal peripheries and colonial subjects, as they assumed that only the former *could* be 'civilized' and assimilated into the nation state. What I intend to show, instead, is that the current borders of European nation-states – similarly to colonial borders – were also produced through processes of violent incorporation of territory and coercive assimilation of populations.

In sum, my research shows how the creation of uneven development produces and reproduces racialized difference, and how – in turn – the production of uneven development and racialized difference are key in legitimizing borders as 'natural' dividing lines. Understanding the historical construction of the boundaries of European-ness shows their contingency, and thus possibility of change.

Structure of the dissertation

The dissertation is divided into three sections. The first section (chapter 1) situates the dissertation historically and geographically, and provides its conceptual framing. It carries out an overview of the history of two-way labor migration between Sicily and Tunisia from the late 19th Century to the present, on the backdrop of shifting Italian and European regional development, colonial and border fortification policies. The chapter argues that Sicilians affirmed their full 'modernity', Italianness and European-ness through their differentiation from Tunisia/Tunisians, and – in some moments – through a strategic celebration of their connection with North Africa. The chapter also traces histories of Italian and Sicilian Mediterraneanist thought, from a racial discourse and justification of Italian colonialism, to an attempt to define a form of Sicilian modernity and a development model independent from Northern Italy and Northern Europe.

The second section (Chapters 2, 3, 4) analyzes everyday mobilizations of Mediterraneanism in Sicily, focusing on how the public celebration of Mediterraneanist projects has gone hand-in-hand with the perpetuation of structural inequalities between Sicilians and Tunisians. These three chapters are all based in Mazara del Vallo, Sicily. Chapter 2 analyzes Mediterraneanism as a multicultural project promoted by Mazara del Vallo's municipal authorities in collaboration with the national government. The chapter argues that local and

national authorities' celebration of Sicily as a site of Mediterranean multiculturalism has done little to address the structural precariousness of Tunisian migrants, produced by a combination of labor exploitation and difficult access to immigration status. This means that, with the exception of a few 'mediating' figures close to the municipal authorities, the bulk of Mazara's Tunisian population was relatively indifferent to the municipality's cultural politics of Mediterraneanism, and cast Mazara del Vallo's 'in-between' status between Europe and North Africa as a proof of Mazara's *lack* of modernity, and it not being European enough.

Chapter 3 analyzes Mediterraneanism as a regional development project promoted by Mazara's municipality. This occurred as an attempt to re-orient the city's economy away from the declining fishing sector towards tourism, and to capture national and European Union subsidies for cross-Mediterranean cooperation and migrant integration. In particular, the chapter focuses on the tensions that emerged around the 'ethnic packaging' of Mazara del Vallo's old center, which sought to transform it from a 'dangerous' immigrant neighborhood to an 'exotic' Casbah, and – by so-doing – celebrate Mazara's medieval Arab heritage and its connection to Tunisia. I claim that this Mediterraneanist regional development project, while somewhat changing the public depiction of Tunisian migrants and formally recognizing their contribution to the city's economic and social life, did little to address the material difficulties and structural inequalities lived by the majority of Mazara's Tunisian population.

Chapter 4 focuses on Catholic articulations of Mediterraneanism, analyzing activities of different Catholic institutions in service provision to migrants, and in cross-Mediterranean cooperation and 'dialogue'. It argues that the vision of Mediterraneanism proposed by Catholic institutions creates a symbolic hierarchy between Sicilians and Tunisians, as it considers (Catholic) Sicilians as open to inter-religious dialogue and inter-cultural mixing, but (Muslim) Tunisians to be relatively closed to this dialogue. Thus, Catholic institutions consider the key challenge of migrant integration to be one of 'cultural difference' between Sicilians and Tunisians, and cast turn-of-20th Century colonial Tunisia (site of Sicilian southward migration and settlement) as a model of 'coexistence' between these two populations. In order to paint colonial Tunisia as a model of Mediterranean coexistence, however, Catholic depictions of colonial Tunisia ignore the uneven power relations at play in colonial Tunisia, and Sicilians' privileged positionality vis-à-vis Tunisian colonial subjects.

The third section (Chapters 5 and the conclusion) gives a different reading of colonial Tunisia, attentive to unequal power relations in this context, and discusses how an alternative reading of the colonial past in Tunisia could allow contemporary Mediterraneanist projects to address uneven power relations between people of European and of North African descent. Chapter 5 uses the lens of colonial schools in order to show how French Protectorate Tunisia was not a period of coexistence between difference, but one of *production* of difference. This occurred through the 'modernization' and 'Europeanization' of Sicilian labor migrants to Tunisia, and thus their differentiation from Tunisians with whom they often shared both customs and living quarters. Thus, colonial Tunisia was a key moment of definition of the boundaries of European-ness. The chapter also analyzes the importance of notions of Mediterranean mixing and interconnection as an integral component of European colonial strategy in North Africa.

Based on the analysis of Chapter 5, the Conclusion discusses the implications of different ways of remembering colonial Tunisia for contemporary Mediterraneanist visions and projects. It argues that casting inter-communal relations in colonial Tunisia as a model for the

present risks reproducing the hierarchies and uneven power relations that characterized this space in contemporary projects of cross-Mediterranean cooperation, and models for multicultural Europe. In order to challenge the current status quo of power relations in the Euro-Mediterranean region, instead, it is necessary to understand how Mediterranean histories of 'co-existence' created both the racialized inequalities that persist between people of European and North African descent in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and the notion that the Mediterranean sea represents the 'natural' Southern border of Europe.

Section One

Mediterranean Interconnections

Chapter 1

Migration, colonialism and the Southern Question

Introduction

For much of unified Italy's history, the island of Lampedusa was little more than a small military outpost. A marginal island within a marginalized region of Europe, Italy's southernmost landmass offered few opportunities to its inhabitants, who mainly relied on fishing. Despite the tourism boom on the island in the 1990s, its water, educational and medical infrastructure remain precarious till this day, and the majority of Lampedusa's 6,000 official residents spend the winter months on the Sicilian mainland (Orsini, 2015). Since the mid-1990s, however, the island of Lampedusa has jumped to national and European prominence⁷. As the European Union fortified its southern border, the island's proximity to the North African coast placed it at the center of routes of undocumented migrants routes to Europe.

Lampedusa's symbolism as a bastion of fortified Europe in the Mediterranean led over 300 Italian and European activists to converge on the island in January 2014, as cold winds swept its semi-deserted landscape, populated only by its few year-round inhabitants and some members of the Italian navy. The activists had come together to produce the 'Charter of Lampedusa', a shared statement on migrants' rights spurred by a tragic migrant shipwreck of the coast of the island in October 2013, in which over 350 people had lost their lives. This incident had occurred in the context of an intensification of cross-border migration since 2011, when political instability in North Africa, combined with reduced coastal surveillance, had let over 6,000 Tunisians disembark on Lampedusa in the first free months of the year, soon to be followed by Sub-Saharan African refugees fleeing Libya⁸.

The mayor of Lampedusa was a guest of honor at the event. Her speech, carefully crafted to cater both to the activists gathered on the island and to her constituency, opened the meeting:

“I want to welcome you and recognize the fantastic level of participation I see here today...a small demonstration that Lampedusa can draw on its role in the Mediterranean to become a meeting place for people to come together to discuss, testify, launch messages and work with the local community, in order to connect the rights of those who are obliged to flee from their countries, and the rights of populations obliged to the fate of a border, rights that are cut in half, denied and stepped on.”

7 Lampedusa's symbolism as a bastion of fortified Europe in the Mediterranean is not limited to Europe alone. The island, in fact, appears as a symbol of the dangers of emigration in North African novels and popular music. An example of this are the two homonymous novels by the Tunisian Lutfi Said (2012) and the Moroccan Abd-er-Rahman 'Abeed (2011), as well as the Tunisian political signer Bendir Man (see his 2011 Hbibba Ciao https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYqBx4x_swM).

8 For migrants from Tunisia and Libya see International Organization for Migration, *First Migrants from Lybia Arrive on the Italian island of Linosa* (3 March 2011). Retrieved from <https://www.iom.int/news/first-migrants-libya-arrive-italian-island-linos>.

The island's inhabitants, who adopted a diversity of positions towards immigration, generally shared a concern about the impact of migrant arrival, and the media attention they attracted, on Lampedusa's tourist industry. Taking the floor after the mayor's speech, a 'mother of Lampedusa' expressed these concerns, as well as more general ones about the island's insufficient medical and educational infrastructure:

“In Lampedusa we feel like foreigners! Geographically we are much closer to Africa...for Italians we don't exist! They only notice us with the problem of the 'illegals'. 'Illegals' so to speak, because they are people like us...rights should be universal, and guaranteed to all, so we must put on the same level the rights of those who arrive, and the rights of those who are already here...”

Since the tightening of EU immigration legislation in the mid-1990s, Italian and European media and popular representations have generally cast the Mediterranean border the key dividing line between migrants hailing from a 'dysfunctional south', and a rich and democratic north that must figure out how to absorb them. The words of the mayor and of the 'mother of Lampedusa', however, identify three spaces – the North (Italy or Europe), the South (Lampedusa or Southern Italy) and the Deep South (North Africa) – and make two claims about the relationship between different forms of social and spatial marginality. Firstly, they claim that migrants' rights are connected to the rights of Lampedusani, be it by analogy (they share the same experiences of marginalization) or by opposition (migrants' rights come at the expense of Lampedusani's rights). Secondly, they claim that Lampedusani are closer to North Africa than to Italy, geographically and in terms of existing social and economic rights, but as Italian and European citizens, they should have more rights than North African migrants.

In this chapter, taking the claims of the Lampedusani at face value, I analyze the interplay of these two forms of socio-spatial marginality. More specifically, I provide a historical and conceptual analysis of the relationship between the 'othering' of cross-Mediterranean migrants and the marginalization of Southern Italians in the process of defining the 'civilizational' boundaries of Europe. I analyze this process at three moments characterized by different territorial and political configurations within Italy and Europe, and different cross-Mediterranean relations. The first is the late 19th Century, a period of Sicilian southward labor migration to Tunisia, a French protectorate, and site of competing Italian and French interests over the territory. The second is late 1970s Sicily, characterized by the first waves of Tunisian northward migration and strong national developmentalist policies in Italy. The third is turn of the 21st Century Sicily, defined by large-scale immigration from North Africa and the process of European integration. At each moment, I explore how the demarcation of difference between Sicilians and Tunisians was related to the attempts of government, economic elites and intellectuals to resolve internal disparities between Northern and Southern Italians. Overall, I argue that the relationship with Tunisia and Tunisians (both of differentiation, and – on some occasions – of proximity) was central in producing Sicily and Sicilians as fully Italian and European, and in defining the Mediterranean as the 'natural' border of Europe.

By studying the production of the Mediterranean border in relation to processes of

internal socio-spatial differentiation, I conceive of the border as part of a broader relational geography of social and spatial difference, and analyze the process through which the Italian public opinion came to see certain forms of socio-spatial difference (between Southern Italy and North Africa) as a key 'developmental' dividing line, while others (between Northern and Southern Italy) gradually became less significant. Through this analysis, I also show how the problem of incorporation and management of difference (that currently lies at the center of the Italian and European immigration debate) is not a new question posed by the arrival of 'external' migrants, but was an older problem that accompanied the creation and consolidation of different European nation states. National elites, in fact, were concerned with the management of marginalized populations, both in their internal peripheries, and in their colonies. Thus, current concerns about the incorporation of migrants should be understood as part of a broader process of defining Europe's 'civilizational' boundaries. In the following sections, I analyze the relationship between the incorporation of the population of internal peripheries, the management of colonial subjects, and the integration of migrants – first in general terms, and then in the context of Italy and Tunisia.

Incorporating 'marginal' territories and populations into the nation.

In the late 19th Century, integrating populations perceived as 'culturally different' was a key concern for European nation-states, both within the national territory and in overseas colonies. Even in long-consolidated nation-states like France and England (Curtis, 1968; Weber, 1976), rural populations often did not speak the national language and were incorporated into the nation through coercive assimilation practices. Indeed, national elites viewed the populations of their internal peripheries and of their colonies similarly. In France, for instance, urban middle classes considered rural peasants 'savages' (Weber, 1976), while British elites considered the populations of the 'Celtic Fringe' and of their overseas colonies to be incapable of self-rule (Curtis, 1968). Hechter (1975) thus describes the incorporation of European peripheries as 'internal colonialism', drawing on a concept coined in the Americas to refer to the on-going subordination of populations of indigenous and non-European descent in a settler-colonial context (Barrera, 1989; Blauner, 1969; Gonzales Casanova, 1965; Quijano & Ennis, 2000).

In the colonies, colonial authorities saw both colonial subjects and working-class European settlers as 'culturally different' populations to be managed. To some extent, colonial subjects had to be managed and 'civilized' in similar ways to populations of internal peripheries. Techniques traveled widely between colony and metropole in fields such as architecture and planning (Rabinow, 1989), or the teaching of French to non-native speakers in schools (Sugiyama, 2007; Weber, 1976). Despite their similarities, however, such techniques had different aims in each context. In internal peripheries the main objective was the population's full-assimilation into the nation's body-politic. In overseas colonies, in contrast, this aim was limited to working-class European settlers. Colonial subjects could be partially civilized, but only rarely recognized as full citizens of the colonizing country. In French Algeria, for instance, Algerians were recognized as French nationals, but they were not allowed to vote, and were subject to a separate legal system from Europeans, the *code de l'indigénat*⁹. Differences between

9 On the dual legal system in Algeria see Kipfer (2011). In Tunisia a similar dual legal system existed, but on different premises. As Tunisia was a protectorate, native Tunisians were not considered French nationals, and

European settlers and the indigenous population were particularly clear in settler colonies where a large European working class was often incorporated into European modernity through its socio-spatial separation from the indigenous inhabitants (Abu-Lughod, 1980; Rabinow, 1989; Stoler, 2002; Wright, 1991).

In the second half of the 20th Century, following decolonization, various European states turned concepts and techniques for managing 'peripheral' and 'backward' populations inwards. Giuliani (2013) and Ross (1995) show how with the demise of Italian and French colonial empires, efforts to cleanse and modernize populations were re-focused on these countries' internal (often rural) peripheries. Others have examined how colonial patterns of urban segregation and policing were turned on newly arrived migrant workers from former colonies (Khiari, 2009), even as migrants' capacity to assimilate into 'European values' became a topic of public debate (Solomos et al., 1982). These colonial techniques were re-articulated with the political climate and labour market of the metropole to produce new understandings of difference, which were, however, informed by the way national boundaries had historically been drawn in relation to colonial subjects (Kipfer, 2011; Solomos et al., 1982).

While several authors have addressed the contemporary treatment of migrants in relation to the management of colonial subjects (Khiari, 2009; Kipfer, 2011; Solomos et al., 1982), this has rarely been studied alongside the incorporation of internal peripheries and the civilization of a 'petit blanc' colonial population. In the following sections, I analyze migration, colonialism, and the incorporation of internal peripheries in Italy and Tunisia. By so-doing, I examine the relationship between the 'othering' of cross-Mediterranean migrants and the marginalization of Southern Italians, and the role of Tunisia and Tunisians in producing Sicily and Sicilians as fully Italian and European.

Colonial Tunisia. Colonialism, emigration and the Southern Question.

Since its 1861 unification, Italy has been characterized by uneven development between its North-Western core and its Southern regions. The problematization of the Italian south as underdeveloped, backward and ultimately different from Northern and Central Italy is referred to as the 'Southern Question' (Gramsci, 1971). The Italian government began referring to the South as 'different' immediately after unification (Schneider, 1998). At a moment of Europe-wide efforts to define the civilizational boundaries of the continent, northern Italian elites sought to prove their full Europeaness by attributing Italy's 'backwardness' entirely to the South (Schneider, 1998). In doing so, they drew on a much longer Northern European tradition of depicting southern Italy as a liminal zone at the edge of Europe (Moe, 2002). In this context, two main explanations for the underdevelopment of the south emerged: its social and economic structure (an explanation adopted by the post-unification government, Moe, 2002) or the racial difference of its inhabitants (an interpretation adopted by turn-of-the-century positivist criminologists, Gibson, 1998). Not all Italian scholars of the time, however, conceived of explicit differences between Northern and Southern Italians. While Aryanists considered Northern Italians to be Aryans, and thus superior to Southern Italians who they claimed were

were thus subject to Beylical justice. French and other Europeans, on the other hand, were subject to the French justice system. See Lewis (2014).

mixed with a Semitic element¹⁰, Mediterraneanists did not draw this dividing line, but celebrated Italy's 'mixed' Mediterranean heritage as proof of the country's role as the cradle of western civilization¹¹ (De Donno, 2006; Gibson, 1998; Giuliani & Lombardi-Diop, 2013).

The Southern Question translated into Italian foreign and colonial policy through emigration. In the years following unification, many Southern Italians left for the Americas, Northern Europe, and, to some extent, North Africa¹². In the political debate that ensued, two different views on the relationship between emigration and colonialism emerged. Advocates of colonial expansion urged the re-settlement of emigrants to Italian colonies in order to prevent their mistreatment elsewhere. In contrast, advocates of 'emigrant colonialism' believed Italy could best support its interests not through military conquest, but by nurturing feelings of national belonging in its emigrants worldwide (Choate, 2008). Tunisia lay at the center of both visions. In 1881, approximately 11,200 Italians lived in the territory (Davi, 2000), composed of two main groups: a small bourgeois elite, largely made up of Jewish families of Tuscan origin and with a strong sense of identification with Italy (Clancy-Smith, 2010), and a large group of working-class southern Italian migrants (Clancy-Smith, 2010).

The establishment of the French Protectorate over Tunisia in 1881 produced political shockwaves in Italy (Choate, 2010). The assumption in Italy had been that Tunisia would come under Italian influence due to its geographical proximity and its substantial Italian population. English and German support for France at the 1882 Berlin conference (Shorrock, 1983), however, consolidated French control. Yet this did not mean the demise of Italian settlement, nor of Italian attempts to exercise political influence in Tunisia. Unlike in Algeria, French settlers remained few, and were mainly limited to diplomatic functionaries and large investors. The number of Italians, on the other hand, increased up to 67,000 in 1898 (Choate, 2007) thanks to a combination of labour opportunities provided by the protectorate's large-scale public works programs, and possibilities of agricultural land-ownership thanks to French land reform (Melfa, 2008).

While the Italian elites had strong national affiliations and actively organized to defend their economic and political interests, many Southern Italian migrants had a stronger sense of identification with their regions or towns than with an abstract notion of Italy (Choate, 2007). Nationalizing working-class Southern Italians through schooling, religion and cultural activities became an important aim of Italian diplomatic authorities and made Tunisia a prime site for Italian emigrant colonialism (Choate, 2008). Emigration simultaneously provided a relief for social tensions and economic problems of Southern Italy, and represented a way for the Italian government to promote its interests abroad through its diasporic population. These efforts were strongly opposed by French Authorities, who sought instead to Francophonize the working-class Sicilian population in order to strengthen French control on the territory.

In fact, French elites and colonial authorities in Tunisia did not see working class Sicilians that differently from their Tunisian colonial subjects. The introduction to the article "Our Sicilian migrants in their own land", published in the quarterly magazine of the "Institute

10 Lombroso, one of the positivist criminologists, pointed to the 'Arabness' of Sicily as an explanation for the proliferation of violent crimes on the island (Gibson, 1998).

11 Claims of Italy's 'Mediterranean' nature would later be instrumental in Italy's colonial rhetoric, as references to the Roman empire were a common way for the Italian liberal and later fascist government to assert its legitimate presence and control over North Africa (Fuller, 2007).

12 According to Choate, between 1880 and 1915 thirteen million Italians left the peninsula (Choate, 2008).

de Carthage”, a French cultural society established in Tunisia in 1891, stated that:

“...in Sicily one finds the same organization described in the societies of North Africa: narrow group spirit, formation of clans, challenges to the central government by these clans... The laws of the berbers of the Tunisian south...are not without analogies with the primitive organizations of Sicily. The many comparisons that can emerge from these parallels...are of the highest sociological and ethnographic interest”

(Germain, 1901, p. 61)

Other French scholars described similar analogies between Tunisians and Sicilians in the context of Tunisia. In 1899, French anthropologist and exponent of the settler lobby Jules Saurin described Sicilian agricultural settlements in Tunisia as *“...modest huts, sometimes covered by the remains of crates...their general aspect reminiscent of Arab shacks”* (Saurin, 1899, p. 7). Gaston Loth, professor at the French lycée of Tunis, provided a similar description of Sicilian living quarters. In urban areas, he noted that Sicilians *“...pile up in the 'founduk' of the Arab cities, humans and animals all jumbled together...”*, while in the rural ones they would build *“...a shack out of branches, sometimes covered with mud, a sort of 'gourbi' similar to the humble dwelling of the Arab”* (Loth, 1905, pp. 219-220).

If these authors pointed to ethnographic *similarities* between Sicilians and Tunisians, they also advocated for the assimilation of Sicilians into Francophone modernity, a process they considered impossible for Muslim Tunisians. Both Saurin and Loth, for instance, advocated for marriages between French and Italians as a way to assimilate the latter, but noted that marriages between French and Muslim Tunisians were not possible (Loth, 1905; Saurin, 1899). Saurin saw the stakes of Sicilian assimilation in religious terms:

“We cannot...send back our Latin brothers, nor create a Great Wall of China between Sicily and Tunisia. Even if we were able to, we have no interest to do so. They [Sicilians] are a precious support that will help us make of this country a Christian land where Muslims will no longer be able to get rid of us.”

(Saurin, 1899, p. 10)

In essence, despite their perception of Sicilians and Tunisians as similar, French scholars thought that Sicilians, unlike Tunisians, could become fully French. Differently from Tunisians, Italians were tried through the French justice system (Lewis, 2014), and French protectorate authorities pushed for their incorporation into French schools (Choate, 2010), and their naturalization as French (Bonurra, 1922). Limited attempts to Francophonize Tunisian elites, in contrast, were aimed merely at producing consensus around French rule (Sugiyama, 2007).

In brief, in the first few decades of the French Protectorate over Tunisia, emigration, colonialism and the Southern Question were strongly connected. Both French and Italian authorities considered Southern Italian migrants closer in customs to Tunisians than to the European bourgeoisie, yet both considered these migrants' 'civilization' and incorporation into French or Italian modernity important to furthering their political and economic interests in the

territory. French Protectorate Tunisia may thus be considered a first moment of the tracing of socio-spatial boundaries between Sicilians and Tunisians.

1970s Sicily. The Southern Question as an Internal Question

Following Tunisian decolonization in 1955, and land nationalization in 1964, most Italians left Tunisia, heading to France and, to a lesser extent, back to Italy (Kazdaghli, 1999). Simultaneously, with the end of Fascism, Italy's capitulation in World War II and the loss of its overseas colonies, questions of emigration, race and colonialism disappeared from the public debate (Labanca, 2002). The Italian state recast the 'Southern Question' as an entirely internal problem and a high priority. Law 646/1950 established the 'Intervento Straordinario' (extraordinary intervention) for the development of the south, and created an independent agency to manage its funds and oversee its implementation: the 'Cassa per il Mezzogiorno' (Fund for the South) (Gualini, 2004). Initially funded through the Marshall plan and focusing on developing agriculture and key infrastructure such as roads, piped water and electricity, from the early 1960s the focus shifted to industrial development, concentrated around regional development poles (Ginsborg, 1990). Post-war modernization programs also emphasized hygiene and sanitation, a civilizing mission re-imported from Italy's colonies to its metropolitan space (Lombardi-Diop, 2013).

In these years, theoretical inquiries into the 'Southern Question' by Italian and foreign scholars proliferated. They generally followed one of two trends, reflecting a broader dichotomy between modernization and dependency theory in development debates of the time (Cassano, 2005; Perrotta, 2014). The first trend explained the South's poverty in terms of its *cultural* deficiencies (Banfield, 1958). The second saw the 'underdevelopment' of the south as the direct counterpart of the development of the north, resulting from late 19th and early 20th century policies favoring the industrial North over the agricultural South (Davis, 1998).

If there was ample debate on Italy's Southern Question, this was not so for immigration. Between the late 1960s and early 1970s, thanks in part to the development boost provided by the Cassa per il Mezzogiorno, the first Tunisian migrants began traveling to Sicily to work in fishing and agriculture, facilitated by the lack of visa requirements for Tunisians¹³. One of the rare news-articles on the topic, appearing in the Sicilian left-wing newspaper L'Ora, described Tunisian migrants as a paradox and an ethnographic curiosity:

“There are thousands of them throughout Sicily...loaded with suitcases so similar to those of Sicilian emigrants...they return...to a Tunisian South that is much deeper than their own. Who are these people, who...have given so many Sicilian towns, which suffer from emigration, the grotesque dimension of a 'host country'? From what reality have they been catapulted here, to a place from which people have always fled?...”

(Giaramidaro, 1975)

While a few articles in a centre-right Sicilian newspaper in the 1980s mentioned labour competition between Sicilians and Tunisians, describing the latter as “...*people who agree to the*

¹³ Interviews with Tunisian migrants in Sicily, March 2014.

hardest jobs for absolutely humiliating sums of money” thus “coming to take places that could be left to our unemployed” (Conti, 1980; Mignosi, 1980), these reflections were rather isolated. Most articles had a tone analogous to the 1975 L'Ora piece, reflecting on similarities between Tunisian immigrants and Sicilian emigrants, and on the paradox of the existence of a much deeper south than Sicily.

Though not commonly discussed on its own, some Sicilian politicians took up migration in the context of the island's broader relationship with the Southern Mediterranean. In the 1980s, as the post-World War II 'extraordinary intervention' to develop the South was drawing towards an end, and the single European market was on the horizon, Sicilian politicians across the political spectrum became interested in strengthening Sicily's relationship with the Southern Mediterranean as a means to boost its economic and political position within a unified Europe. For the Communist member of parliament Agostino Spataro, who was part of the National Parliamentary Association of Italo-Arab Friendship, advocating for North African migrants' rights was connected to his political activity with the Arabic speaking world¹⁴, centered on contrasting cold-war militarization of the Mediterranean and Nato presence in Sicily (Spataro, 1986). Christian Democrat mayor of Mazara Del Vallo Nicolò Vella, on the other hand, who advocated for Tunisian migrants' rights as part of negotiations with Tunisian authorities to safeguard the interests of his town's fishing fleet, saw cross-Mediterranean cooperation as central to bringing newly independent North African countries towards the capitalist West instead of the Soviet Union¹⁵.

Spataro and Vella's contrasting approaches both drew on a longer tradition of politico/economic cooperation between Sicily and North Africa, and were part of a broader resurgence of interest in this cooperation amongst the island's political and intellectual elites. This worried the Italian government, concerned that Sicily, with its long-standing orientalist tradition, strong independentist movement and considerable political autonomy, would forge relations with the Arabic speaking world independently from the national government (Frusciante, 2012). This fear materialized in the late 1970s and early 1980s, following the Sicilian Regional Assembly's 1977 economic cooperation accords with the Libyan government, which led to the opening of a Libyan consulate and cultural center in the regional capital Palermo (Spataro, 1986). Cultural interest in Sicily's 9th and 10th Century Arab history and in the contemporary Arab world flourished through Arabic language classes, cultural encounters between 'peoples of the Mediterranean' and publications.

In essence, in the late 1970s and the early 1980s, immigration from the Southern Mediterranean was mainly an ethnographic curiosity in Sicily, and only addressed politically in relation to broader cooperation initiatives with North Africa. Even when fishing conflicts with Tunisia led Tunisian coast guards to shoot at Sicilian vessels entering their territorial waters (Ben-Yehoyada, 2014), Sicilian media and politicians did not depict the Southern Mediterranean as a threat to the island, but as a possible (though troublesome) business partner. As the Southern Question fell off the national radar, Sicilian intellectual and political elites saw the Southern Mediterranean as a way to boost Sicily's political and economic centrality. Yet all this changed by the mid-1990s, as the 'immigration problem' exploded in Sicily and throughout Italy.

14 Agostino Spataro was co-author of Italy's first immigration law proposal in 1980, and had advocated for the completion of the Algeria – Tunisia – Sicily transmed pipeline , see (Ben-Yehoyada, 2014)

15 Interview with Nicola Vella.

Sicily as the 'sieve of Europe' or the 'garbage dump of Italy'. Immigration, border fortification and the Southern Question.

Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, preparations for the creation of the EU in 1993 led to a reconceptualization of Italy's internal geographies of uneven development and its relationship with the Southern Mediterranean. By the mid 1980s, the rationale and effectiveness of the 'Intervento Straordinario' was under question, particularly in the North. After some reform in 1984, the program was abolished in 1992, a year before the implementation of the single European market. The program's termination was spurred by budgetary constraints required for Italy's entrance into the single market, and in order to bring Italy's regional development assistance in line with European Commission guidelines (Davis, 1998); (Gualini, 2004). This change did not mark the end of government assistance to southern Italy, but redefined it within a broader framework of state and EU aid to 'depressed regions', and made access to funds contingent on competitive bidding by local governments. Some such funds were available through EU programs linked to the 1995 Euro-Mediterranean partnership between the EU and ten countries of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean aimed at creating a Mediterranean free-trade area.

While, as chapter 2 will show, various local governments in Sicily embraced Mediterranean language and projects of cross-Mediterranean cooperation as a means to capture this EU funding, cross-Mediterranean accords received little attention from the Sicilian press, unless they were about migration management. The early 1990s had seen a substantial redrawing of European internal and external borders. The creation of the EU in 1993 had harmonized immigration policy among EU countries. The implementation of the Schengen agreement in 1995 eliminated internal EU border controls, but led to the strengthening of external ones (Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, & Pickles, 2013; Rinelli, 2016). In 1990, in preparation for these changes, the Italian government passed the country's first comprehensive immigration law (law 39/1990), known as the Legge Martelli. Amongst other things, this law introduced a visa requirement for Tunisians. Tunisian migrants who had previously traveled to Sicily to work seasonally in fishing and agriculture were no longer able to do so, and in the first years of the law's implementation, were regularly denied entry at Sicilian ports ("Dieci nordafricani respinti al porto di Trapani," 1990; "Gli immigrati respinti al porto di Trapani bloccano un aliscafo," 1990; "Trapani, con i visti obbligatori cala il numero degli immigrati in arrivo.," 1990; "Trapani, respinti sessanta nordafricani," 1990). The principles of the legge Martelli that regularized the situation of migrants present in Italy and regulated new migration more stringently, were further specified in law 40/1998 (legge Turco-Napolitano) that introduced migrant detention centers such as the one in Lampedusa, and law 189/2002 (legge Bossi-Fini).

These stricter border controls made undocumented migration by boat increasingly common and spurred international cooperation in monitoring and fortifying the Mediterranean border, both between Italy or the EU and Southern Mediterranean countries and within the EU itself (Bialasiewicz, 2012; Casas-Cortes et al., 2013; Casas-Cortes, Cobarrubias, & Pickles, 2014). In 1998, following lengthy negotiations, Italy signed accords with Morocco and Tunisia involving them in the surveillance of their coasts and accelerating the procedures for repatriating

their citizens (Zaiotti, 2016). These agreements were followed by similar ones with Libya nearly a decade later, in 2007 (Bialasiewicz, 2012). Bilateral agreements between Italy and North African countries were part of a broader process of EU border externalization through a range of bilateral and multilateral initiatives (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015), a policy that was made explicit by the EU's 2005 Global Approach to Migration (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015). Coordination between different EU countries was facilitated by the creation of Frontex in 2005, a joint migration management program designed both to aid governments at moments of high arrivals of undocumented migrants, and to facilitate collaboration with countries bordering the EU in the monitoring of the Union's borders (Casas-Cortes et al., 2014).

The intensification of border control as a result of Italian migration legislation, of intra-EU cooperation in border monitoring, and of the externalization of border control to North Africa was matched by an unprecedented attention to immigration in the Italian and Sicilian media. From under ten yearly articles in the 1970s and 1980s, to approximately fifty in 1990, by the end of the decade both of Sicily's major newspapers – *Giornale di Sicilia* and *La Repubblica*¹⁶ – featured over 200 yearly articles on the topic.

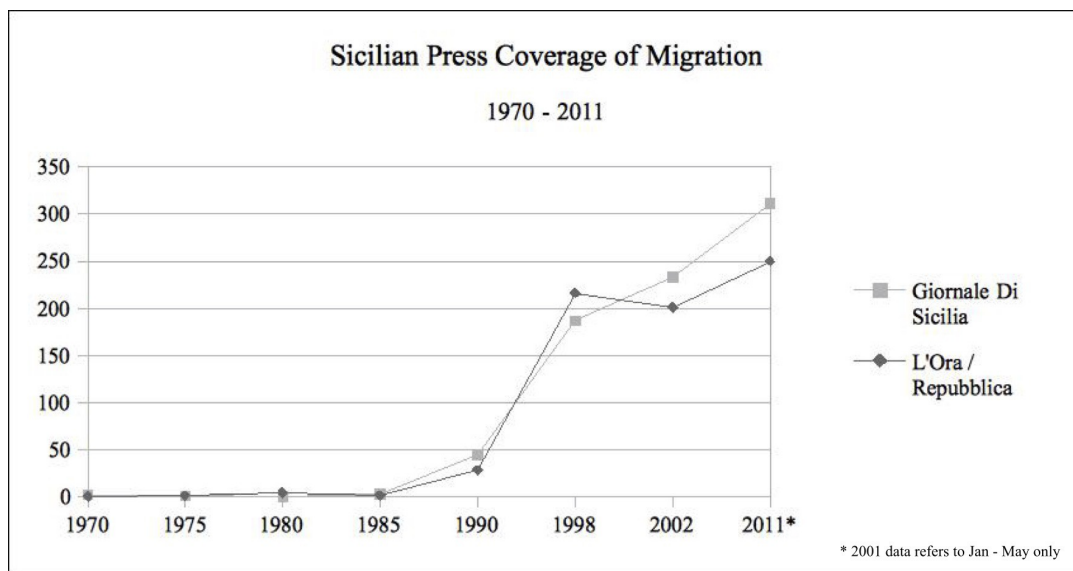


Figure 2. Sicilian Media Coverage of Immigration

While some articles covered new migration legislation and amnesties granting work permits to migrants already in Italy, the majority focused on the arrival of undocumented migrants by sea. Despite the different political orientation of the two papers, their headlines were remarkably similar, invoking military metaphors, emergencies and, to a lesser extent, health threats.

¹⁶ L'Ora closed in the early 1990s, and the local edition of the national centre-left paper 'La Repubblica' took over its readership and some of its journalists.

	Military Metaphors	Emergency	Health
Giornale di Sicilia	In Lampedusa it is a continuous assault . In only 24 hours, over 250 arrivals. 28/7/98. Sicily, migrants to the assault , 13/2/11	Emergency of Illegals, first detention centre opened, 3/7/98. In Lampedusa it is once again an emergency . 15/5/11	Pantelleria and the invasion of illegals. The mayor “There is a risk of disease ”, 30/6/98. Illegals, flurry of arrivals. Alarm for the sanitary situation . 18/8/02
Repubblica	Pantelleria, illegals assault . In two days, one hundred disembarked, 14/2/98. The fear of invasion , Sicily cannot absorb a maxi-wave of migrants, 24/2/11	Emergency of the illegals, mass arrivals in the South, 2/7/98. Emergency of arrivals, Berlusconi allocates one million euro. 19/2/11	More migrants than inhabitants. Lampedusa at the brink of collapse and there is a risk of epidemics . 22/3/11

Table 1. Sicilian news headlines on immigration

Two years were particularly significant for the arrival of Tunisian migrants and the reconfiguration of relations between Sicily, Italy, Tunisia and the EU. These were 1998, when the migration re-admission accords between Italy and Tunisia were signed, and 2011, year of the Tunisian uprising and subsequent surge of undocumented migration from Tunisia. Each was characterized by similar media images of large numbers of Tunisian migrants arriving on Sicilian coasts. Yet while in 1998 conflicts around migration were mainly represented as cross-Mediterranean ones between the Italian and Tunisian governments, in 2011 older territorial tensions emerged within Italy itself, and between Italy and the EU.

In 1998, the media mainly described working-class Tunisian migrants as desperate people fleeing poverty, as in the following July 19th piece in the center-left La Repubblica which described a migrant detention center in Agrigento, on the Sicilian mainland:

“Behind barbed wire, surveilled by the police, are the men who arrive to Lampedusa thinking that it is...the new America. Tunisians, Moroccans, desperate people...Europe, the dream of the illegal migrants, remains outside [the detention center]...inside there is only despair, faces marked by poverty and misery”

(Filetto, 1998)

A few days earlier, on July 26th, another article on the situation on the Tunisian coast had recounted:

“Tunis...the police are everywhere except for the coasts...those who can...board the boats...try the adventure of disembarking on Italian shores...Tunisia at the end of the millennium remains a country of great contradictions...the landscape is still largely despairing: large swaths of uncultivated land, dry bushes and cactuses where the hand of man has not been seen for centuries...we travel on taxis that feel the weight of the years...but they come with sophisticated stereo systems. Privileges of the sub-proletariat that cannot give up the superfluous...”
(Sergi, 1998, p. 13)

To some extent, these descriptions of Tunisian poverty are not that different from those of the late 1970s, that marveled about the existence of an 'even deeper south' than Sicily. However, by 1998 the existence of this 'even deeper south' was no longer a paradox, nor a curiosity. The July 19th article, in fact, created a stark opposition between '*faces marked by poverty and misery*' inside the detention camp, and outside Sicily, which had come to be a stand-in for Europe. The July 26th article, in turn, described the extreme poverty of rural Tunisia, but with a hint of sarcasm on “*...a subproletariat that can't give up the superflous*”, and thus might not have been in a situation of desperate poverty.

At the same time, the Italian press depicted the Tunisian authorities as hostile and uncooperative and “*everywhere except for the coasts*”. While the Tunisian government worked with Italy on many aspects of migration control, accelerated repatriation of undocumented Tunisian migrants was a key point of contention in the 1998 negotiations, leading to numerous diplomatic incidents¹⁷. Italian authorities complained about the negotiating style of their counterparts. Speaking to *La Repubblica* on August 6th, a member of the Italian negotiating team described the Tunisian delegation: “*In their way of negotiating*” he complained “*they are levantine...if they were Swiss, either we would agree on everything or we wouldn't, but these ones, every time they add more things, and we have to start negotiating from scratch*” (Ansaldo, 1998d, p. 7).

The accords finally reached on August 8th, and subsequent ones in the early 2000s (Cassarino, 2014), focused on a range of themes¹⁸. In the Sicilian and Italian public debate, however, political and economic cooperation received only minor attention and was portrayed as a concession in exchange for an in-depth monitoring of migration¹⁹. In brief, while in Sicily of the late 1970s and early 1980s the Southern Mediterranean appeared as a source of business opportunities, by the late 1990s it was mainly perceived as an inconvenient source of invading migrants. As part of a longer process that included the incorporation of Southern European States into the EU, and thus increasing differentiation between the Northern and Southern shores of the Mediterranean (A. Jones, 2006), this sea had become the key dividing line between the 'west' and the 'rest'. Internal Italian and European geographies of uneven development (including Italy's Southern Question), on the other hand, had faded into the background. By the mid-1990s, the closure and fortification of the Mediterranean border had made the extreme periphery of

17 (Ansaldo, 1998a, p. 1, 1998b, p. 8, 1998c, p. 3).

18 M. Ansaldo, 'Italia – Tunisia. Accordo Fatto sul Rimpatrio dei Clandestini', *La Repubblica* (6 Aug 1998) p.6.

19 In fact, EU cooperation programs with Southern Mediterranean were in many cases posited on the need to 'stabilize' the region and to contain northward migration. See (Bialasiewicz, Giaccaria, Jones, & Minca, 2013; A. Jones, 2006).

Italy into a key outpost of Europe.

All this would change in 2011. In the weeks following the ousting of Tunisian president Ben Ali on January 15th 2011, multiple thousands of Tunisians attempted to cross the Mediterranean, taking advantage of the decreased surveillance of Tunisian coasts, and landed on the island of Lampedusa (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2013). The press coverage was similar to that of 1998 as the migrants were described once again as an invasion (Lauria, 2011b), a health threat (Viviano, 2011), and – additionally – a possible source of terrorism (“Sbarchi di tunisini al sud. Maroni: tra loro terroristi,” 2011). Unlike in 1998, however, the arrival of migrants brought back to the forefront older internal struggles between Sicily and the Italian government, and between Italy and the EU.

These struggles were widely reported in the press. From mid-February, as arrivals to Lampedusa intensified and plans to re-settle some migrants to small towns in mainland Sicily were made public, various Sicilian officials denounced the inactivity of the Italian government and the EU. Inhabitants and the mayor of Lampedusa complained about delays in resettling migrants to mainland Sicily (Pecoraro, 2011), while the president of the Sicilian region protested the temporary settlement of these migrants in his territory. “*Here we can do many things*” he complained to Repubblica on February 22nd “*but definitely not integration into a social, economic and employment fabric amongst the weakest of the country*” (Lauria, 2011a) and went on to add in an interview a few days later “*...it is obvious that immigration is an Italian and a European problem, it cannot just concern Sicily because it is the closest region to Africa...*”. Following the opposition of the richer northern regions of Lombardy and Veneto to rehousing some of the migrants in their territory, Sicilian politicians accused the national government of catering to the anti-immigration and anti-south Northern League. On February 25, La Repubblica quoted a center-left Sicilian national senator stating that “*...Bossi's party [the Northern League] works for its own interests, and the minister...can only obey!...on the question of migrants [the minister] is working to turn the South into the garbage dump of Italy.*” (Lorello, 2011). As the speeches of the Mayor and inhabitants of Lampedusa cited in the introduction suggest, these critiques were widespread, and continued with the ongoing arrival of migrants.

Internal tensions between Northern and Southern Italy were soon followed by conflicts between Italy, the EU and various Northern European countries, particularly France. With the first arrivals of migrants in February, the Italian government had reached out to the EU asking for support (“L’Europa promette sostegno finanziario.,” 2011). While the joint border monitoring program Frontex was quickly activated (“Immigrazione, interviene l’Europa. Da oggi arrivano aerei e navi,” 2011), other EU countries were resistant to aiding Italy financially or to resettling migrants, pointing out that among EU countries, Italy accepted one of the lowest numbers of asylum seekers.

These tensions were exacerbated when, in early April, the Italian government accorded temporary protection permits to 6,000 Tunisian migrants who had arrived in Lampedusa, since the Tunisian government refused to collaborate in their swift repatriation (Bonanni, 2011). While Tunisia had been collaborating with Italian and EU authorities on migration control since 1998 (Cassarino, 2014), the power vacuum that followed the 14th of January uprisings and the volume of migrant arrivals had made new accords necessary. Following extensive negotiations, on April 6th the Tunisian authorities agreed to intensify coastal surveillance in exchange for Italy conferring temporary visas to the migrants who had already arrived (Nesticò, 2011a, 2011b;

Perini, 2011).

These permits were controversial. The Italian government believed they should enable Tunisian migrants to circulate freely within the EU, allowing many to join family members in France or Germany. Both those countries, however, refused to recognize the permits (Coppola & Polchi, 2011; Pisa, 2011). The European Commission backed them by refusing to apply EU directive 55, which would have recognized Tunisian migrants' temporary protection (Caldanu, 2011). The conflict escalated further when France temporarily suspended the Schengen agreement, blocking trains with Tunisian passengers at the Ventimiglia land border with Italy (Bonanni, 2011; Carenini, 2011; Garelli & Tazzioli, 2013; "Immigrati, schiaffo francese. Parigi chiude la frontiera. L'ira dell'Italia," 2011; Rinelli, 2016).

While tensions within the EU and Italy eventually subsided, and many Tunisian migrants were able to make their way to France, the 2011 migration crisis had brought older tensions to the surface. While in the early 1990s, the definitive fortification of the Mediterranean border and the subsidence of the Southern Question, had appeared to eliminate or at least mitigate internal territorial tensions, by 2011 a new dynamic had emerged. The breaching of the EU's Southern border by North African migrants had brought back to light internal territorial tensions and inequalities within Italy, and led to the temporal re-instatement of internal European borders. This dynamic would continue and intensify in the following years, in the context of the European 'refugee crisis'.

Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed how the Mediterranean sea came to be widely viewed in Italy as the 'natural' dividing line between 'development' and 'underdevelopment'. This occurred through the accentuation of certain forms of socio/territorial difference (between Sicily/Sicilians and Tunisia/Tunisians), and the targeting of other forms (internal to Italy and Europe) for intervention. The chapter has shown, in fact, that the Italian and Sicilian media began representing the Mediterranean sea as 'natural' border as a simultaneous consequence of the enactment of strict Italian immigration policy, and a decrease in public interest and political attention to Italy's Southern Question²⁰. This analysis suggests that borders should be understood as part of a relational geography of socio-spatial difference, and – consequently – understands bordering as a process of accentuating certain forms of difference (across the Mediterranean, in this case) and mitigating others (internal to Italy and Europe).

From the Sicilian perspective, managing the interplay of different degrees of socio-territorial marginality was central to assert the full Italianness and Europeanness of this peripheral region of Italy and of its inhabitants. In colonial Tunisia, Italian diplomatic authorities sought to make Sicilian labor migrants fully Italian by differentiating them from Tunisian colonial subjects, a move that was also instrumental for the Italian government to maintain influence in the territory. In 1970s and 1980s Italy, promoting economic cooperation with a land that was 'paradoxically' poorer than Sicily, represented a way for the intellectual and political elites of the island to challenge its marginality within Italy and Europe. By the 2000s, as a

20 A particularly emblematic example of this is the way in which the regional secessionist party Lega Nord, which had articulated anti-Southern Italian prejudice in the late 1980s and early 1990s, largely abandoned its anti-south rhetoric in the 2000s (eventually eliminating the word Nord (north) from its name in 2017), casting itself instead as the main anti-immigrant party.

consequence of European integration and the fortification of the European Union's southern border, Sicilian and Italian media cast the Mediterranean as the key boarder of Europe, and placed Sicily firmly on its northern side. This process, however, is not linear. Tensions around the management of the 2011 mass arrival of Tunisian migrants to Lampedusa, in fact, brought back older tensions between Sicily, Italy and the EU, showing how the definition of the 'civilizational' boundaries of Europe is ongoing.

This chapter has analyzed processes of differentiation between Sicilians and Tunisians – and thus of naturalization of the Mediterranean sea as the southern border of Europe – at the macro-scale, focusing specifically on the intersection of Italian and European regional development, colonial and immigration policy. The following two sections of the dissertation, instead, will focus on similar processes in the context of contemporary Mazara del Vallo (chapters 2, 3 and 4), and colonial Tunis (chapter 5), focusing on different arenas of everyday life (inhabitation of urban space, labor, religious practice, and schools). In both of these contexts, I will analyze how formal celebrations of Mediterranean interconnection (a longstanding trope through which Sicilian elites sought to affirm the centrality of the Island to Italian and European interests in the Mediterranean, and through which Italian colonial authorities justified their presence in North Africa) coexisted with the production and reproduction of racialized inequalities between Sicilians and Tunisians.

Focusing on everyday practices, however, does not mean limiting the scale of analysis to 'the local'. Indeed, I will show how both Sicilians' and Tunisians' understanding of their relationship of proximity/difference was strongly influenced by the shifting regional development programs and border regimes I have discussed in this chapter. At the same time, Mazara del Vallo's role as a key hub of Mediterraneanist politics, as well as its reputation as 'the most Arab city in Italy', meant that understandings of cross-Mediterranean relations and of 'migrant integration' elaborated in this city had broader repercussions in Sicily and in Italy. Similarly, the daily socialization of Sicilians and Tunisians in colonial Tunis had substantial effects on the ability of the Italian and French government to exert influence over the territory.

Section Two

The Politics of contemporary Mediterraneanism

Introduction to Mazara del Vallo



Figure 3. Mazara del Vallo location map

The city of Mazara del Vallo, situated on the South-Western coast of Sicily at a mere 90 nautical miles from Tunisia, is widely known as 'the most Arab city in Italy'. This reputation reflects the long history and complexity of relations that connect Mazara del Vallo to North Africa. Between the 9th and the 11th century, under the period of Arab rule of Sicily, the city was an important economic and political hub. In more recent times, the city has been connected to North Africa through migration. The Trapani province, where Mazara is located, was the main source of Sicilian labor migration to Tunisia at the turn of the 20th Century. In the 1960s this movement was reversed, as Tunisian migrants began to migrate northward to work in Mazara del Vallo's booming fishing fleet, creating one of the oldest migrant communities in Italy (Cusumano, 1976)²¹. The fishing sector, which would become the city's main economic motor in the second half of the 20th Century, was dependent on Tunisia for more than labor. Some of the richest fishing grounds in the Mediterranean, in fact, lie within Tunisian territorial waters. For nearly two decades, between the late 1970s and the mid-1990s, Mazara's fleet was engaged in a low-scale conflict with the Tunisian government over fishing rights. Within this period, Mazara del Vallo was also the landing site of the Algeria – Tunisia – Italy gas line, completed in 1981 (Ben-Yehoyada, 2014b).

By the early 2000s, however, the city's economy was in crisis. The termination of Italy's

²¹ In 2013, about 6,000 Tunisian nationals were officially resident in Mazara, out of a total population of 55,000. This number is close to the national statistic of resident non-citizens.

national development program for the South, on which the fleet had depended, combined with the depletion of Mediterranean fishing stocks, set the city's fishing sector on an irreversible decline. This, combined with the broader economic crisis which would hit Italy's southern region in the early 21st century, meant that unemployment soared amongst both the Italian and the Tunisian population. In this context, the city council sought to rebrand Mazara as a Mediterranean borderland, and thus as a key site for cross-Mediterranean relations and as a model of successful migrant integration²². This had two main aims. The first was attracting tourists, by marketing the town as an 'exotic' site with a North-African feel. The second was attracting national and European Union subsidies for cross-border cooperation and for migrant integration. The municipality, however, was not the only proponent of Mediterraneanist projects. In the early 2000s, in fact, Catholic institutions – which had been providing services to migrants since the 1970s – began to frame their activities as part of their vision of cross-Mediterranean relations, in the broader context of the twinning between the diocese of Mazara del Vallo and the diocese²³ of Tunis.

Despite their differences, the Mediterraneanist projects promoted by the municipality and by Catholic institutions in Mazara del Vallo shared two characteristics. On one hand, they celebrated Mazara del Vallo as an example of Mediterranean coexistence and inter-cultural dialogue, and formally celebrated the presence of the city's Tunisian community as proof of its cosmopolitanism. At the same time, however, neither municipal nor Catholic Mediterraneanist projects acknowledged or addressed deep structural inequalities that were affecting the daily life of people of Tunisian descent in Mazara. In the following chapters, I will use different lenses (labor, built environment, religion) in order to analyze in detail how the development of Mediterraneanist projects affected both the racialization and the material condition of Mazara's Tunisians. Chapters 2 and 3 will analyze Mediterraneanist projects promoted by the city council. Chapter 4, instead, will focus on Catholic Mediterraneanism.

22 To some extent, Mazara del Vallo already had this reputation. The city was regularly featured in Italian media as a model of peaceful relations between Italians and immigrants. Since the 1980s the city housed a Tunisian elementary school, and since the early 2000s, the city council included a special position (without the right to vote) for a Tunisian national in order to ensure representation of the community. Both of these institutions had been spearheaded by Nicolò Vella – twice mayor of Mazara del Vallo – as part of his broader activities of cross-Mediterranean diplomacy, in order to favor the interests of the town's fishing fleet.

23 A diocese is the territorial jurisdiction of the Catholic church, similar to regions, which includes a series of smaller subdivisions – parishes. For a small city of 55,000 people to be the seat of a diocese, and to have its own bishop, is particularly significant.

Chapter 2

Mediterranean or 'Not European enough'. On (not) getting by on the periphery of Europe

Introduction

On the afternoon of March 6th 2014, an unusual crowd filled the conference room of the municipality of Mazara del Vallo. Tunisians and Italians of Tunisian descent occupied over half of the seats of the vast hall, and a buzz of excited conversations in Arabic and Italian filled the air. The occasion was the event *Tunisia, Mare Nostrum: face-to-face*, one of a series of public meetings with ‘migrant communities’ organized throughout Italy by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, and sponsored by the Municipality of Mazara del Vallo. The high turnout at the meeting was not a coincidence. Activists of *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant*, an independent Mazara-based organization of people of Tunisian descent, had spent weeks organizing the community. Citing the presence of representatives of the local and national government, the police, and the International Organization for Migration, they had pushed their compatriots to attend the event in order to voice their difficulties in accessing work, residency papers, and citizenship – longstanding concerns which had intensified as a consequence of the post-2008 recession and the demise of Mazara's fishing sector.

The *Tunisia, Mare Nostrum* event, however, was highly scripted. Following a series of short speeches by different Italian authorities focused on Sicily's ‘culture of hospitality’, commonalities between the Northern and Southern shore of the Mediterranean, and the importance of the integration of migrants into Italian society, it was time for the ‘voices’ from the Tunisian community. One, a young woman who worked for the Italian Union CGIL, took the floor. She started in a fairly neutral tone:

'It is certainly to be appreciated, that you created a program for integration. However, today I would like to start from article one of the Italian constitution: "Italy is a republic founded on work"...now, to have work means to have a life, to have a salary - something that 80% of my community does not have! Of course, the crisis also affects Italians, but if an Italian cannot find work, he does not risk being displaced, we risk being deported!.'

As the crowd murmured in approval, she continued:

'In Mazara, all the seamen who arrived in the 70s and 80s are unemployed, or cannot access their pensions! Why? Because their employers never contributed to social security, or because they cannot become permanent residents. To become permanent residents, what do they need? A basic income that goes up every year! And to apply for citizenship, you need an annual income of 8,500 Euros. Who here can possibly have an 8,500 Euro annual income? Does the minister ever put himself in our shoes?'

As the facilitator nervously pushed Ons to wrap up, she concluded:

'To work on boats immigrants need a residence permit, but to get a residence permit, they need a job. I don't know, and they don't know, what they are supposed to do. We want the minister to tell us what we have to do, and to give us our rights!'

As Ons concluded her remarks, the audience became more animated, almost drowning out the musical interlude that followed her words. By the time a representative of the Ministry of Labour closed the meeting, many Tunisians had already left the room, disappointed at the lack of opportunities to intervene, and frustrated by the lack of answers to Ons' questions²⁴.

In the evening after the event, I sat around the dinner table with Farah – one of the founding members of *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant*, her husband and their eldest daughter. Their dissatisfaction with the event was palpable, as they sensed that they had been 'used' to create an audience for the event, but that Italian public officials did not understand, or were not sympathetic, to their needs. *'The ministry and the municipality are happy'* exclaimed Ahmad, Farah's husband *'a lot of people showed up, there was "participation", they made their video. For them it was a success! But what about all the people who came? No one listened to them'*. *'Yes'* agreed Farah *'all this organizing work, and nothing came of it. We won't be able to convince people to show up again'*.

The disruption of the *Tunisia, Mare Nostrum* event was but a small symptom of deep tensions that were brewing between some members of Mazara del Vallo's Tunisian community and the town's municipal authorities. Just as the city council was beginning to formally celebrate the presence and contribution of Tunisian migrants to the city's economic and political life, in fact, the livelihood of Mazara's Tunisian community was precipitating, due to the collapse of the fishing sector in which many Tunisian men had been employed. As Italian immigration law makes legal residency status contingent on employment, this also meant that a considerable proportion of Mazara's Tunisian community risked becoming undocumented. On the surface, the *Tunisia, Mare Nostrum* event appeared to be both a moment of recognition of Tunisian migrants in Mazara, and an attempt to address some of the key challenges to facilitate the labor integration of this population. However, Tunisian activists contested this event, as they considered it to be primarily a publicity stunt by the municipality, which sought to cast Mazara del Vallo as a successful example of migrant integration – a key priority for the Italian government and for the European Union, that could eventually translate into funding for the city. However, the *Tunisia, Mare Nostrum* event failed to substantially address some of the critical concerns and key material needs of Mazara del Vallo's Tunisian community. But what, exactly, were these needs?

This chapter analyzes the precarious material and legal condition that people of Tunisian descent were living in Mazara del Vallo at the turn of the 21st Century, as a combined

²⁴ The description of this episode is based on the author's ethnographic field notes, and on interviews with activists from 'The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant'.

consequence of their history of labor incorporation and of Italian immigration legislation, which had made their lives and livelihoods particularly precarious. I show how their unstable economic and legal condition was a consequence of the both their structural incorporation at the bottom of the labor market, often in informal labor arrangements, and of the structural incorporation of Sicily within the Italian and European economy, which made access to stable employment difficult for everyone.

In this context, the municipality's projects celebrating migrant integration and cross-Mediterranean relations were of concern only to a small part of Mazara's Tunisian community: individuals who had the education and social capital to use the city's Mediterraneanist language to make claims to economic resources or political power. The majority of Mazara's Tunisian community, however, was indifferent not only to the municipality's Mediterraneanist projects, but to notions of Sicily's nature as a Mediterranean borderland, culturally in-between Europe and North Africa. Indeed, many people of Tunisian descent interpreted Sicily's geographic and 'cultural' proximity to Tunisia as a demonstration that the region was 'not yet' or 'not fully' European. By so-doing, they were operating as a 'rating agency from below' (Heller, De Genova, Stierl, Tazzioli, & van Baar, 2017), reifying both notions of Europe as a land of rights and economic opportunity, and long-lasting tropes of Southern Italy as 'not European enough' (Moe, 2002; Schneider, 1998).

In the following sections, I will firstly describe the life stories of three long-established families of Tunisian descent in Mazara del Vallo, in order to give a sense of the material conditions of Mazara's Tunisian community in the early 21st century. Secondly, drawing on these life stories and additional interviews, I will give historical context to the current precarious economic and legal situation of people of Tunisian descent. I will then turn to show how histories of informal labor and irregular legal status congealed in producing different levels of precariousness in the context of the decline of Mazara del Vallo's fishing sector, and the broader economic crisis which hit Southern Italy in the second decade of the 21st century. Finally, I will analyze how people of Tunisian descent engage with both Mediterraneanist projects, and with ideas of Sicily's 'Mediterranean' nature.

Living the crisis. Labor, welfare and migration at the periphery of Europe.

Farah

The first time I entered Farah's house, a two-story building in the old centre of Mazara, she struck me as relatively well-off. The entry hall, decorated with geometric ceramic tiles and potted plants, led up to a large, three bedroom apartment. As I sat down to dinner one evening in her kitchen, together with her extended family, I noticed a postcard, written in Arabic, sent from a small town in the Italian Alps. When I asked about the card, Farah told me it was from her husband, who was temporarily working in Northern Italy, where salaries and working conditions were considerably better than in Sicily. As I would get to know Farah better, I would realize that my first impression about her family's comfortable status was not accurate. Indeed, their situation had become more precarious over the years. While they did own their own house, by early 2014 neither Farah nor her husband Ahmad were working full time. Ahmad was only able to find work a few nights a week as a cook, while Farah employed a range of livelihood

strategies, ranging from renting out rooms in her house, to caring for older Italians, to selling cheap ‘made in Italy’ clothing (which she would buy in open air markets, or in local sales) informally in Tunisia. As I would come to realize, informal cross-border trade of cheap consumer items represented a significant livelihood strategy for many people of Tunisian descent in Mazara.

The precariousness of Farah’s family’s livelihood was reflected in a series of daily choices, such as her reluctance to use any kind of heating despite outdoor temperatures dropping to 10 degrees celsius. Adding to Farah's worries was her need to support two of her nephews who had recently arrived to Italy while they waited for residency and work permits which would allow them to move beyond Mazara to look for work. Both Farah and Ahmad nostalgically remembered their early years of immigration to Mazara, between the late 1980s and early 1990s, when their livelihoods were more secure as they could easily find work, and had enough disposable income to regularly visit the shopping centre in nearby Castelvetrano, a habit which they had abandoned over the previous few years.

Despite their economic difficulties, Farah and Ahmad's family was in a privileged position compared to other people of Tunisian descent in Mazara. Thanks to his lengthy residence in Italy, and – at the time of application – to his regular salary, Ahmad had been able to acquire Italian citizenship and to pass it to his underage children and, eventually, to his wife. Thus, as Italian citizens, Farah’s family did not risk the loss of residency papers faced by many migrants in Italy as a consequence of their unemployment. Farah and Ahmed were also unusually politically active. Farah had been so since her arrival to Italy, when she had both worked and volunteered with unions and with Catholic organizations to provide services to the Tunisian community. Following the political opening created by the Tunisian revolution of early 2011, she had become increasingly active in Tunisian electoral politics abroad, as well as local politics in Sicily. Both Farah and Ahmed, in fact, were co-founders of *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant*, the organization which had organized the protests around the opening of Casa Tunisia, and the Tunisia: Mare Nostrum events. In early 2015, however, Farah and Ahmad would leave Italy, not to return to Tunisia, but to move to a small town in France, where they had family and were almost immediately able to find work. This points to how some of the more ‘established’ people of Tunisian descent in Mazara were also the ones who had enough social and economic capital to search for better opportunities abroad.

Hiba

Differently from Farah, Hiba had neither organized nor attended the *Tunisia: mare nostrum* meeting. While her extended family shared many of the difficulties that had led many members of the Tunisian community to gather in the municipal conference room, hardly anyone of her family showed up. To some extent, they had more immediate concerns on their mind.

When I first walked into Hiba’s house, where she lived with her parents and the youngest of her four siblings, I was struck by its difference from Farah’s home. While in Farah’s house her children would constantly shift the TV from the Arabic to the Italian channels, in Hiba’s house, the TV and the majority of conversations were all in Tunisian Arabic. Hiba’s family, however, had longer roots in Mazara del Vallo. Her father was amongst the first generation of

Tunisians to work in the town's fishing fleet, and he and Hiba's uncle had moved to Sicily in the late 1970s, when - as they would repeatedly point out - you could come and go easily, without a visa. At the beginning, Hiba's father had emigrated to Mazara alone, and shared accommodation with other men, as was the case for the majority of Tunisian migrants. Through his savings, he had been able to build a house in his home town - Mahdia - where one of his daughters lived with her family.

At the beginning, Hiba's mother and their children had traveled back and forth, but eventually they settled in Mazara. This decision was mainly tied to medical services they could not access in Tunisia. Since the 1990 immigration reform that had introduced medical coverage for migrant workers in Italy, foreign nationals had the same rights as Italian citizens in accessing medical care. This had allowed for Hiba, who was born with a disability, to receive free medical care, as well as a disability pension. By the time I met Hiba in 2014, however, she was not the only member of her family with a disability. Similarly to many other Tunisian men who had worked on Mazara's fishing fleet, after years at sea her father was home-ridden, as he could only breathe with the aid of a cumbersome oxygen machine.

Despite having a modest income – the family of four relied largely on the combination of these two disability pensions – Hiba's family had managed to purchase their house, with the assistance of the Catholic organization Caritas, which served as mediator between a local bank and members of the Tunisian community. Receiving a regular source of income from the government, allowed the bank to approve Hiba and her parents' mortgage. Hiba's sister, instead, who also lived in Mazara and who was materially better off, had been unable to secure a similar mortgage. Her husband, in fact, was employed as a dependent worker in the fishing sector – an occupation which left banks skeptical about their access to a regular source of income. As I got to know Hiba's broader social circle, I realized that Tunisian families in Mazara were divided into two main groups. While all of them were struggling economically, those who had family members who received a disability pension, and thus had some level of economic stability, were content to remain in Mazara, similarly to Hiba. The others, instead, if they had citizenship or permanent residency, were looking for possibilities to emigrate to other parts of Europe. Leaving to search for these opportunities, however, was not simple. While Hiba's nuclear family was not interested in onward migration, some of her cousins had tried unsuccessfully, as the move itself required a few thousand euros in savings and a social network in Northern Europe that not all people of Tunisian descent had.

Ons

Stories such as those of Farah and Hiba's family were well known to Ons, the trade unionist who had intervened during the 'Tunisia Mare Nostrum' meeting. She was familiar with them not only through her professional work in assisting Tunisian migrants through the CGIL union, but because she lived very similar experiences herself. Despite her father having worked in the Mazarese fishing fleet since the early 1970s, Ons's parents had never managed to buy a house in Mazara. For a long period of time, in fact, they had thought of a permanent return to Tunisia, where – thanks to her father's savings – they had bought a house in the coastal town of Mahdia in the early 1990s.

When I visited her family at their house in Mahdia during their annual vacation in

August, they were busy cleaning it out, as – due to economic constraints – they had not been back as a family for four years. Meanwhile, the house had mainly served as a deposit for the used goods that Ons's father would bring from Italy to sell in Tunisian markets. Similarly to Farah, in fact, Ons's family relied on this type of informal commerce as a livelihood practice to supplement their income. In fact, Ons's salary and her father's disability pension were the only regular income her family of six could rely on. Despite its meagerness, however, the regular nature of Ons and her father's income (guaranteed by a long-term contract, and by the Italian state pension system) allowed Ons to contemplate buying a house in Mazara. As Hiba's story has also suggested, disability pensions – however small – represented a regular source of income which allowed for long-term saving strategies, such as accessing a mortgage.

Ons's professional and personal experience had made her particularly skeptical of the municipality's Mediterraneanist politics, and public officials claims about Mazara del Vallo's nature as a cosmopolitan borderland. *“How can we talk about integration, if the basic situation is one of exploitation?”* she commented, when I asked her what she thought about Mazara's reputation as a successful example of peaceful coexistence between Italians and Tunisians. *‘If someone comes to me to make a labor complaint, I call the employer, and the reaction is always “You should thank me because I gave him a job”. Employers still see Tunisians as foreigners, as hungry Africans. A similar situation happens to me here. Sometimes an Italian will come to the union for help, and will ask me if I am Tunisian. Then they will ask to speak to someone else, because they think that an Italian will know things better than me. One out of ten people reacts this way.’*

Ons's skepticism was also tied to her negative experience with political engagement at the municipal level. As one of the more prominent people of Tunisian descent in Mazara, a few years earlier she had been invited to run in the local elections by one of the left wing parties. However, neither she, nor indeed other candidates of Tunisian descent that had run with other parties, ended up receiving a seat on the city council (Ben-Yehoyada, 2011b). Ons was resentful of the experience, as she suspected that she had been used as a means to attract the Tunisian vote to a party that would then do little to address the material situation of the town's Tunisian population. Overall, the combination of these personal, professional and political experiences had led Ons to be skeptical and disillusioned with formal celebrations of Mazara's Mediterranean nature.

Farah, Hiba and Ons's stories give a sense of the history of immigration trajectories of people of Tunisian descent in Mazara, and of the differentiated effect of the economic recession of the early 2000s on their livelihoods. To some extent, all three families were privileged, as they had managed to acquire citizenship or permanent residence, which protected them from losing their papers as a consequence of unemployment, and allowed them to access livelihood strategies such as welfare or onward migration. The three families, however, had substantially different levels of stability. While Hiba and Ons's families were apparently more vulnerable than Farah's – as some of their potential breadwinners were receiving disability pensions – they were more stable in Mazara, as they could rely on a small but regular income. Farah's family, instead, despite higher levels of education and savings, could not access a regular source of income, and,

consequently, was suffering dramatically from the economic crisis, and would eventually leave Mazara. In the following section, I will turn to contextualize the trajectory of these three families within the history of incorporation of migrant labor in Sicily. More specifically, I will show how a combination of migration legislation and structural incorporation of migrants at the bottom of the labor market between the 1970s and the present created the type of economic vulnerability that Farah and Hiba's families were living.

'Sicily, land of labor'. Informal labor on the periphery of Europe, 1970s – 1990s.

As Chapter 1 has described, Tunisians began to migrate northward to Sicily in the late 1960s, to work primarily as seasonal labor in fishing and agriculture. This northward migration grew in the mid-1970s, when France and Germany – countries that had traditionally absorbed Tunisian migration (Hibou, Meddeb, & Hamdi, 2011) – suspended the worker-recruitment programs that had attracted large numbers of labour migrants in the post-WWII period (Daly, 2001). This change in policy re-routed Tunisian migration through Italy, which at the time did not require visas from Tunisian nationals. In this context, entering Italy as a tourist and saving some money by working informally in the Sicilian agricultural sector represented a stepping stone for migrants to eventually move north to another European country (Cole & Booth, 2007; Daly, 2001). Many of the older generation of Tunisian labour migrants in Mazara nostalgically remembered a time in which they could easily travel to Italy with no hassle and regularly visit their family in Tunisia. If agricultural employment was widespread throughout Sicily, in the context of Mazara del Vallo, Tunisian migrants were mainly employed in the town's expanding fishing sector (Ben-Yehoyada, 2011).

If a lack of immigration legislation made entrance into Italy easy, it also placed migrants in a vulnerable condition with regards to labour rights and medical care. These aspects became the object of a campaign by the Sicilian communist deputy to the Italian national parliament Agostino Spataro, who also pointed out how the employment of migrant labour on the black-market was undermining long-fought for salary conquests in Southern Italian agriculture (Spataro, 1980). In general terms, however, labour competition between migrant workers and Italians was not a highly politicized theme, as the common-sense understanding was that migrant workers were doing the jobs that the children of Italy's post-war economic boom were no longer willing to do (Cole, 1997). This analysis emerges clearly in a 1980 article, published by the regional centre-right wing newspaper 'Giornale di Sicilia':

Sicily, land of labour. It sounds like a fairy-tale, one of the age-old slogans of the 'Southern Question'. Instead, it is the reality of thousands of 'refugees' coming from Third World countries...33 thousand workers in a land that has...180,000 unemployed...feed the inflation of the labour market. Will Sicily also witness a 'war between the poor'? ...In reality, immigrants are occupying places left vacant by the 'intellectual unemployment' of young people who do not intend to mortify years of study and aspirations by going to work in the fields or in restaurant kitchens (Mignosi, 1980).

In the following year, the Italian government began to introduce immigration legislation. In 1981, Italy ratified the International Labour Organization convention n. 143/1975 that established the principle of equal treatment between citizens and non-citizens in the workplace (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000). This ratification was put in practice with law n. 943/1986, Italy's first legislation on migrant labour. This law, combined with a series of immigration amnesties in the 1980s, allowed many undocumented migrants who had been working in Sicily to obtain residency papers, and thus to search for more regular employment in Northern Italian industry (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000).

By 1990, when Italy introduced its first comprehensive immigration legislation and introduced a visa requirement for Tunisian nationals, a clear regional pattern of employment for Tunisian migrants had emerged. With the exception of Mazara del Vallo's fishing fleet, in Southern Italy, Tunisian migrants were primarily employed in the agricultural sector (Cole & Booth, 2007; Daly, 2001), largely on the black market. Northern Italy, on the other hand, offered employment in the small industries of the 'Third Italy' – better paying work that offered an official contract, and that consequently tended to employ migrants with legal residency status (Daly, 2001). A common immigration trajectory was thus to arrive to Southern Italy, work in agriculture to save money and wait for an immigration amnesty, and then go towards the north (Daly, 2001). These internal trajectories, however, would be significantly affected by the 2008 economic crisis and its aftermaths.

If migrant labour in Italy was largely employed in the informal economy, this type of labour arrangement did not only apply to migrant workers. Some estimates consider informal labour to have constituted up to 50% of employment in Southern Italy in the early 1990s, particularly in agriculture, care services and small-scale family industries (Meldolesi, 1998). In Northern Italy, in turn, the success of small-scale family industries of the 'third Italy', was also based on the exploitation of low-cost, flexible and – in some cases – informal labour (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000). Thus, the case of Italy resonates with Castles' (2011) analysis of how, throughout the global north, the increasing employment of migrant labour was a response to a post-Fordist restructuring of labour markets that increased the demand for flexible labour. Throughout different contexts, the threat of deportation (Casas-Cortes et al., 2015), as well as differential access to labour protection and citizenship rights (Mezzadra & Neilson, 2013; Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013), produced migrant workers as a particularly vulnerable and easily exploitable category.

If migrant workers shared informal employment conditions with Italian nationals, the implications of this type of work on their long-term livelihood prospects was substantially different. The Bossi-Fini immigration reform of 2002, in fact, would connect residency papers to a stable labour contract – a requirement which was at odds with the precarious, flexible and short-term nature of migrant labour (Mingione & Quassoli, 2000; Triandafyllidou & Ambrosini, 2011), and which consequently created a constant threat of becoming undocumented. At the same time, decades of informal work, as well as undocumented status, would substantially affect Tunisian migrants' livelihood options in the early 21st century. In the following section I will discuss these implications in more detail.

On (not) getting by on the margins of Europe. The 2000s.

Economic Transformations

By the early 2000s, both sectors of traditional employment of people of Tunisian descent in Mazara – fishing and agriculture – were undergoing structural changes which would substantially affect employment and earning prospects. With regards to the fishing sector, since the mid-1990s, national subsidies that supported the sector had been cut as part of a broader reorganization of Italian regional development programs to prepare the country's entrance into the European common market (Gualini, 2004; Schneider, 1998). The consequent rise in operational costs had led to the crisis of smaller businesses, the consolidation of the sector, and a drop in employment. This trend would be intensified a few years later, as a consequence of the European Union's 2002 Common Fishing policy that provided financial incentives for the demolition of fishing vessels (Ben-Yehoyada et al., 2016).

The agricultural sector was also undergoing a process of restructuring. Since the early 2000s, the European Common Agricultural policy had pushed for specialization, leading some areas of Sicily to focus on providing produce in the 'off-season' (Colloca & Corrado, 2013). In this context, small-scale family businesses that characterized large sectors of Southern Italian agriculture had been increasingly incorporated into large distribution networks through production contracts (Colloca & Corrado, 2013). By pitting small farmers against each other, this type of distribution network created a downward pressure on prices, which was met throughout the Italian south through the informal employment of migrant workers at wages well under the nationally-regulated agricultural pay scale (Colloca & Corrado, 2013; Mingione & Quassoli, 2000; Triandafyllidou & Ambrosini, 2011) – a strategy of dominating labour through the border and visa regime hardly unique to Sicily (Castles, 2011; Meldolesi, 1998; Papadopoulos & Tsianos, 2013). Overall, the conjunction of these structural transformations on one side, and histories of informal labour and undocumented migration on the other, made the situation of people of Tunisian descent in Mazara del Vallo particularly vulnerable by the second decade of the 21st Century.

Unemployment, underemployment and exploitation.

Even before the 2008 recession, the nature of Mazara's labour market had created drab prospects for the Italian-raised children of Tunisian labour migrants. Despite having achieved higher educational levels than their parents, in fact, there were few alternatives to highly exploited and underpaid manual labour. This situation led to widespread frustration, clearly expressed in the words of Imen, one of Hiba's close friends, who worried about the future of her two small children:

'...We all have a problem, and that is that our children, especially the boys, by the last year of middle school, hate school. They feel that it has no value. Even if they do five years of technical high school, these diplomas are useless here in Sicily...I have a diploma, but I am at home, and my sister is in the same situation. My cousins have a diploma, but they work on the boats...'

In other words, acquiring more education had placed the children of Tunisian labour migrants in a similar situation of *'intellectual unemployment'* to that of their Italian-born peers described in the 1980 *Giornale di Sicilia* article (Mignosi, 1980). However, differently from their Italian peers, their livelihood strategies were more limited, as they could not rely on the financial support of extended family or the networks of connections that would help them find employment. Additionally, if they were not Italian citizens, they were formally excluded from applying to public-sector jobs – a coveted sector of employment in Sicily as it provided regular employment and full benefits (Farinella, 2013). By the second decade of the 21st century, however, as Mazara del Vallo's fishing sector precipitated (Ben-Yehoyada et al., 2016), and the recession made other employment options hard to find, difficulties in finding a 'good' job had transformed into difficulties in finding *any* sort of employment. Hiba's friend Iman expressed this dynamic clearly:

'It used to be that as soon a new Tunisian arrived to Mazara, they [employers] would go look for him at his house to offer him a job...now if you go to Porta Palermo²⁵ at eight in the morning you will see a crowd of people looking for a job... maybe they will get a day of work, or maybe they will meet someone who will help them find a job, but at the end of the day all the men who hang out there are unemployed...'

In a context of reduced employment opportunities, Tunisian workers often found themselves in competition *both* with Italian workers, and with newer migrants. The former was mainly the case in the fishing sector, where some Tunisian workers would actually *pay* Italian seamen to give up their precedence and allow Tunisians to embark in their place²⁶. Working at sea, in fact, not only guaranteed a meagre income, but was also one of the few ways to obtain a regular work contract necessary to maintain a residence permit. Competition with other migrants, instead, was particularly acute in agriculture, where both Subsaharan African and Eastern European workers were regularly employed to reduce the cost of labour²⁷. With regards to the latter, the 2007 European enlargement had given Eastern European workers – primarily Romanian nationals – the same labour and residency rights as Italians, which meant that employers ran lower risks in employing them. Additionally, by virtue of being able to easily move between Italy and Romania, Romanian workers were able to reduce the cost of reproduction for themselves and their families just as Tunisian workers used to do in the 1970s and 1980s when they didn't need a visa (Piro, 2014).

The extent of competition for jobs, and their informal nature, meant that demanding any type of labour rights - from an adequate salary to the full payment of social security - was extremely difficult. One of many examples of these difficulties can be found in the story of Rami, a young Tunisian man with two small children who had recently moved to Mazara by marrying an Italian-born woman of Tunisian origin:

"When you have a problem...you can go to the union...but when you go to your

25 The entrance to the old city center (see Chapter 3 for a fuller description of this area).

26 Interviews with Tunisian migrant workers, Mazara del Vallo, February 2014.

27 Interviews with Tunisian migrant workers, Mazara del Vallo, February 2014.

employer to demand your rights, you become someone who is 'not good' ...I injured my back for six months. In theory, the Italian state should give you compensation. But when I went to submit the paperwork, I found out that my employer had never paid into the national insurance program. I could have complained, but I didn't because...you never know. You see, if you go ask for a job with your seamen's booklet, they can see who you worked before. So they will call the person and ask 'Why did he only work with you for a year' - for example - 'What is his character like?', and your old boss might answer 'He is a hard worker, but he will make complaints'. So then the new guy will say 'I am sorry, I don't have work for you.' ...”

When I recounted this experience to Ons, the employee of the CGIL union who had intervened at the *Tunisia: mare nostrum* event, she was not surprised, as she mentioned that this was common practice in Mazara's fishing fleet.

Welfare

The overview of the previous section points to the precarious nature of employment in Mazara in the second decade of the 21st Century. In this context, as Hiba, Farah and Ons's stories also showed, a key distinction in precariousness existed between people who were working and people who had access to retirement or disability pensions, which represented a more reliable source of income. Access to pensions, however, was also challenging, as it depended on a combination of regular employment and immigration status.

Regardless of their contribution to social security, Italian citizens and permanent residents over the age of 65 have ensured access to a basic old age pension. In a national context characterized by high levels of informal labour, this allows broad sectors of the population, regardless of their history of contribution to social security, to have access to a 'Social Check' of approximately 450 euros per month²⁸. For non-nationals who are not permanent residents, instead, access to retirement benefits depends on having at least 20 years of social security payments²⁹. The informal nature of much migrant labour, however, meant that many of Mazara's Tunisian workers, despite having lived and worked in Italy since the 1970s, did not have sufficient years of contribution to Social Security to access a pension³⁰.

Access to retirement benefits presented additional problems if the retiree, or his family, had returned to Tunisia. In theory, retirement benefits – differently from the 'Social Check' – can be claimed anywhere in the world. Thanks to a 1987 bilateral accord between Italy and Tunisia, Tunisian nationals who had worked in Italy and had paid into Italian social security should have been able to access retirement benefits through the Tunisian Institute for Social Security. In practice, however, the system was fraught with delays and inconsistencies, which made accessing these benefits without professional support particularly difficult. This created the need for a vast network of service-providers who mediated between Tunisian migrant workers and different levels of state bureaucracy. This service was provided by unions and catholic service

28 Istituto Nazionale per la Prevenzione Sociale (INPS) website.

29 Istituto Nazionale per la Prevenzione Sociale (INPS) website.

30 Interview with union worker, Mazara del Vallo, February 2014.

organizations for free, or by for-profit agencies³¹ as well as individuals for a fee³². These individuals often provided a vast array of services, including false documentation (such as labour contracts or leases) necessary to renew residency permits.

Citizenship, residency and the paper market

If the informal nature of much migrant labour made it difficult to access welfare benefits, labour informality and a history of undocumented immigration also made it difficult to acquire permanent residency or citizenship. As a country that privileges citizenship by descent over birth and residency on national soil, and in which a reform that would facilitate the naturalization of children born in Italy has been stalling in parliament for years, naturalization is an arduous process. At present, one is not a citizen as virtue of being born in Italy. Instead, children of foreign nationals are allowed to apply for citizenship when they turn 18, provided that they were born in Italy, resided there continuously, and at least one of their parents had legal residency papers and was officially registered in an Italian municipality at the time of their birth. In the context of Mazara this created considerable difficulties, as many young Tunisians might have had undocumented parents at the time of their birth, or have lived between Tunisia and Italy in their younger years³³.

Alternatively, one can apply for citizenship after ten years of residency in Italy, regardless of place of birth. This, however, is contingent on a personal annual income of approximately 8,500 euros – a number that increases according to family members. Access to permanent residency is also income-dependent, although the minimum income is slightly lower, at approximately 5,800 euros. These income-levels, and the fact that they had to be formally documented through regular contracts, represented a serious obstacle for Tunisian families in Mazara, particularly the larger ones. This meant that many long-term Tunisian migrants in Mazara, often present since the 1970s, were still reliant on annual or bi-annual residency permits in the 2000s. These residency permits – in turn – were contingent on employment status³⁴. In this context, the specter of unemployment loomed large, as it endangered not only Tunisian migrants' livelihoods, but also their legal status.

This situation created a flourishing black market for labour contracts. These were of two types. Sometimes migrant workers would reach an agreement with their existing employers, with whom they worked informally, to write them a contract in line with the requisites to access or renew residency permits. In these cases, the worker would also usually pay the arrears of social security payments which the employer owed the state. In other cases, both the job itself and the employer were fictitious³⁵. In the countryside around Mazara, the providers of these contracts were often the same middle-men who recruited and organized migrant workers for Italian farmers. Within the town, these middle-men were individuals well-connected to the municipality, inserted into local political relations of patronage, and regularly showcased as the

31 The term for these agencies is 'Agenzie disbrigo pratiche'

32 In practice there was some level of overlap between these categories, as sometimes people who had been providing these services as employees of Catholic service organizations or unions, would then found their own for-profit agencies and bring their clientele with them.

33 Interview with union worker, Mazara del Vallo, February 2014.

34 Interview with union worker, Mazara del Vallo, February 2014.

35 Reconstruction based on various interviews carried out in Mazara del Vallo, February and March 2014.

‘voices’ of the Tunisian community. They were also the individuals who were able to take advantage of the municipality's Mediterraneanist projects to gain material resources and political power.

The market of these contracts was hardly a situation unique to Mazara. The contradiction between the Bossi-Fini law requirement of formal and regular employment to maintain a work permit, and the flexible and informal nature of migrant employment, created a similar black market throughout Italy (Avallone, 2016; De Luca, 2014; D. Perrotta, 2014; Triandafyllidou & Ambrosini, 2011).

Changing migration patterns

To some extent, high levels of informality and exploitation in Southern Italy were not a new characteristic, but had characterized migrant employment since the 1970s. However, if previously employment in Southern Italy could serve as a stepping stone to save money and regularize one's legal status to then search for better opportunities in Northern Italy, by the second decade of the 21st century, small northern Italian industries were also in crisis, and internal migration was no longer a viable option. Indeed, according to a study of demographic data from the municipality of Mazara del Vallo, starting from 2008 the town had seen a net influx of Tunisian nationals from other parts of the country (Foderà & Pipitone, 2016). This was part of a broader trend of reversed migration patterns throughout Italy. For migrant workers who had lost their job in Northern Italian industry, in fact, the availability of black market low-paying agricultural work, combined with the low cost of living in the Italian south, represented a survival strategy during the crisis (Colloca & Corrado, 2013; De Luca, 2014; Piro, 2014).

If migration to Northern Italy was no longer attractive, moving abroad to a different European Union country was a widespread aspiration that repeatedly emerged in conversations. An example of this can be found in the words of Imen, Hiba's friend:

“A lot of Tunisians who were born here in Mazara go to France and Germany once they get citizenship. Because over there it is different. You just go to the labour office, you give them your cv, and after a few days – not a few months – a few days, they will call you and ask you: 'Are you interested in this job? Or this other job? Or maybe this third job?'. Not a prestigious job, of course, but a job! You can live well, you can earn at the very least 1,200 euros a month.”

This vision of employment possibilities abroad was confirmed by Aziz, a prominent spokesperson for Mazara's Tunisian community, who had recently acquired Italian citizenship. Complaining about the lack of economic and political prospects in Mazara, he went on to explain:

Whenever I see people who have citizenship, I tell them: go on, leave! What the hell are you going to do here? Over the last five years 'second generations' have all been going to Germany and France. There is work over there. I always tell them, you guys, you have Italian citizenship, take advantage of it! No constraints, no residency permits, nothing! Just go! Staying here makes no sense, there are no

opportunities, not even for the children of Italians. So what future are you, the child of a fisherman, who don't have any connections, going to have? Here everyone lives off pensions, or the public sector.

The importance of acquiring citizenship as a means to move to another European Union country is not unique to Mazara del Vallo, nor to Italy. Indeed a series of studies have underlined similar patterns of mobility of newly naturalized citizens between EU countries in order to improve labour opportunities by escaping from the economic crisis (Mas Giralt, 2017), or by moving to a country with a more established community of the same ethnic background (Ahrens, Kelly, & Van Liempt, 2016; Kelly & Hedman, 2016; van Liempt, 2011). In the context of Mazara, if Italian citizenship was a necessary prerequisite to move, it was not a guarantee of success of the operation in of itself. Various of the Italians of Tunisian descent whom I interviewed in Mazara, including Hiba's cousins and Imen's husband, had tried to do so unsuccessfully, as they could not count on sufficient savings or an extended family network to allow them to travel and search for employment in a new place. In essence, it was only the better off amongst people of Tunisian descent in Mazara who could successfully attempt this move.

Differential incorporation and the hierarchy of livelihoods

Overall, this section, combined with Hiba, Farah and Ons's life stories, has shown how – in the general context of the economic crisis – people of Tunisian descent had different levels of vulnerability to the crisis, and could count on a differentiated array of coping mechanisms to it. Paradoxically, the members of Mazara's Tunisian community with the most stable income were those who were not able to work (due to old-age or disability), but had access to state welfare through Italian citizenship or permanent residence. In the context of Southern Italy, in which state-backed income represents the most stable source of revenue (Farinella, 2013), but in which it is very difficult to access public-sector jobs without Italian citizenship and an extended social network, these pensions represented the only way for members of Mazara's Tunisian community to access state-backed income. Amongst able-bodied members of the community, in turn, those who had the best prospectives of improving their livelihood were people who had acquired Italian citizenship and who had enough savings to migrate to another European country with better labour prospects. Finally, those with the most precarious livelihood were either undocumented or on short-term residency permits, and thus could not count on access to state resources or onward migration to improve their livelihood. As a consequence, they were caught up in the vicious cycle of labour exploitation and the market of papers.

In brief, being legally incorporated into Italianness through naturalization or permanent residence allowed people of Tunisian descent to fall-back on the type of survival strategies on which southern Italians had long depended on: access to state-backed income and emigration. Even these options, however, hardly met the aspirations to a better life that people of Tunisian descent had come to search for in Sicily. In the following section, I will turn to analyze in more detail how people of Tunisian descent made sense both of their own situation, and of the condition of Sicily, in the context of the post-2008 recession.

Mediterranean Sicily. Racism, exploitation, or not being 'European' enough.

Mediterraneanism and exclusion

Mediterraneanist initiatives such as the *Tunisia: Mare Nostrum* event received two main reactions within Mazara del Vallo's Tunisian community. The majority of the community simply ignored these events. Some activists, instead, contested them. The reasons for both reactions were similar. With the exception of a few cherry-picked individuals of Tunisian nationality who were close to the municipal authorities, and who – as a consequence – were able to access the economic and political opportunities generated by the municipality's Mediterranean rebranding, these initiatives did little to address the mundane concerns of the majority of people of Tunisian descent, tied to employment and legal status. Thus, the more active members of Mazara's Tunisian community who were not able to access economic and political benefits – such as Farah and Ons, who were founding members of *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant* – complained of being simultaneously showcased and exploited by the local Italian political and economic elite.

To some extent, the complaints voiced by Ons at the *Tunisia, Mare Nostrum* event concerned issues of which the resolution lay beyond the jurisdiction of Mazara del Vallo's municipal authorities, such as difficulties caused by national immigration legislation, and by national labor and welfare policies. However, by failing to implement any sort of policy to address the material needs of the Tunisian community, local government officials actually exacerbated the effects of national immigration legislation. According to various Tunisian social workers, in fact, the lack of translators or 'cultural mediators' to facilitate the interaction between Tunisian migrants and local bureaucracy, was a factor that pushed many Tunisians to make use of paid intermediaries to deal with immigration paperwork. Activists from *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant* were particularly critical of this dynamic, as some of the most prominent individuals who provided licit and illicit paperwork were precisely the cherry-picked individuals that municipal authorities identified as the 'voices' of the Tunisian community. Thus, the activists critiqued the municipality's Mediterraneanist politics for both disregarding the material needs of the majority of the community, and for facilitating access to resources and political power for a few select individuals of Tunisian descent – a dynamic that Chapter 3 will explore in more detail.

Not 'yet' Italy, not 'yet' Europe

A few activists considered Italian immigration and citizenship legislation, as well as labour exploitation, to be a consequence of racism. However, in interviews with me, the majority of people of Tunisian descent rarely mentioned racism as an explanation for their struggles in accessing well-paying work, in fighting against exploitation, or in obtaining papers. An example of this analysis can be found in the words of Ahmad, Farah's husband. While he did underline how, despite having obtained Italian citizenship, he never felt like he belonged to the place, he did not explicitly frame this as a consequence of racism. Instead, by racism he meant the daily micro-aggressions that he had experienced in Northern Italy:

In Sicily there is no real racism. In the north there are some cafes where they won't even look at you in the face while they serve you coffee. When I was living up there, I started to avoid a lot of places for that reason, I would only spend time in places where other immigrants hung out. But, at the end of the day, up there they give you your rights. If you go to the municipality for anything, if you have the right to something, they will give it to you. In Sicily everyone takes advantage of you!

Instead of racism, amongst people of Tunisian descent in Mazara, a common explanation for their labour exploitation and their difficult interactions with bureaucracy was Sicily's 'backwardness' in comparison to Northern Italy or other parts of Europe. In other words, if they associated Europe with good jobs and full labour rights – as is suggested by the quotes on easy access to jobs in France and Germany in the previous section – then Sicily was 'not yet' or 'not fully' Europe.

To some extent, this was an old trope. Referring to his experience of migration to Italy in the 1990s, Mustafa Laouini, a Tunisia-born trade union worker – who had been one of the guests at the *Tunisia: Mare Nostrum* event – described his experience in different parts of Italy in the following way:

...I arrived to Agrigento [Sicily], where I found work in the countryside with a farmer. The work in the fields was tough...I realized it was time to move on...the farmer asked me where I wanted to go, and I answered 'to the North'. Very surprised, he warned me "Be careful, they are racist there, not like us Sicilians!" ...My journey ended in Modena [Emilia Romagna]...I called my mother and told her that I had arrived to Italy. She was alarmed 'Where were you before? Weren't you already in Italy?'. I reassured her immediately: 'I was...but this is a very different Italy from where I was before!'

Speaking twenty years later, Khaled and Majd, whom I interviewed in Tunisia where they had returned after multiple decades of working in different parts of Italy, made a similar reflection on differences between North and South, and on the causes of their exploitation in Sicily:

Khaled: To find work in Sicily, you used to wait around in a specific area until someone would come tell you that there was a job. In the North you just go put your name in the labour office, but in Sicily that doesn't exist! There are a lot of differences between Northern and Southern Italy in the way they treat you. Sicily is harder. In the north you get your rights, in Sicily no!

Majd: In Sicily they are like Arabs. Marocchini! [Laughs]. They don't give a damn!

The term 'Marocchini' (literally Moroccans) is widely used in Northern Italy as a deprecatory term to refer to Southern Italians. In this context, Majd was making a further play on the use of the term, by using it to argue that Sicily's informal labour market and lack of labour rights made

it similar to an 'Arab' country, thus definitely not Europe³⁶. Just as their own compatibility with 'Italianness' was being questioned through a tightening of immigration legislation, many people of Tunisian descent in Sicily were reifying a long-standing trope about the island as imperfectly Italian and European – and thus in need of 'modernization' and 'civilization' (Moe, 2002; Schneider, 1998). In essence, if the majority of Mazara's Tunisians were indifferent about the municipality's Mediterraneanist projects, as they did not perceive them to have much effect on their daily lives and material needs, they were similarly indifferent to ideas of Sicily's Mediterranean or 'in-between' nature, which they perceived – if anything – as the reason for their precarious livelihoods, lack of labor rights, and difficult interactions with public bureaucracy.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the precarious economic and legal condition of many members of Mazara's Tunisian community, a condition that persisted despite the municipality's sponsorship of Mediterraneanist events celebrating migrant integration. I have shown how the unstable lives and livelihoods of people of Tunisian descent were produced by their histories of incorporation at the bottom of the labor market, often with informal contracts, exacerbated by more recent Italian immigration laws that make legal status contingent on formal employment. Not all members of the Tunisian community, however, were in the same condition. People who had access to citizenship and permanent residency were not only shielded from threats of losing their legal status in Italy, but also had easier access to forms of state-backed welfare. However, due to the nature of the Sicilian labor market, even acquiring Italian citizenship or permanent residency did not necessarily guarantee a secure livelihood. Instead, it simply broadened the options available to deal with precariousness, providing the right to a state-backed safety net (old age and disability pensions), and the right to emigrate elsewhere in Europe. While these were hardly insignificant rights, overall material prospects in Mazara were far removed from the aspirations that had pushed many members of the city's Tunisian community to migrate to Sicily.

In this context, the majority of people of Tunisian descent in Mazara del Vallo were not only indifferent to Mediterraneanist politics, but also to more general ideas about Sicily's 'Mediterranean' nature, and its geographical and cultural proximity to Tunisia. Thus, in making sense of their situation, people of Tunisian descent in Mazara reified long-standing tropes about what 'Europe' is, and where its limits lie. In other words, by equating 'Europe' with economic prosperity and full rights, and consequently characterizing Sicily as 'not yet' and 'not fully' Italy and Europe, they reproduced long-standing tropes of Sicily as 'backward' and 'not yet civilized', in comparison to the Northwest of the continent.

This chapter has focused on how the Municipality's Mediterraneanist projects, articulated primarily as a multicultural discourse, did little to affect the material condition of people of Tunisian descent in Mazara, and on how different parts of the Tunisian community responded to this situation. In Chapter 3, instead, I will analyze how a different type of municipal Mediterraneanist project, focused primarily on regional development, affected the racialization

36 This sort of description has also been found by other researchers on migration to Sicily, such as Cole's research on West African migrants in Sicily, where he notes how some of them described the island as a "...well developed African country." (Cole & Booth, 2007).

of Mazara's Tunisian community. Thus, if this chapter has focused primarily on the perspective of Mazara's Tunisians, the next chapter will analyze how Mediterraneanist projects affected changing Sicilian views of Tunisian immigration and cross-Mediterranean cooperation.

Chapter 3

Mediterranean re-developments. Rebranding Mazara del Vallo's Casbah.

Introduction

On 13 December 2013, via Bagno, a sleepy old street at the heart of Mazara del Vallo's 'Casbah', saw an unusual bustle of activity. On an ordinary day, the street would mainly be populated by Tunisian men who congregated around a dimly-lit coffee house, its only operating business. The majority of via Bagno's buildings, in fact, were boarded up, and the street was generally avoided by local passers by, who preferred taking the parallel via Porta Palermo, considered less dangerous, or avoiding the historic core of the city altogether.

That day, however, was different. A well-dressed delegation of a dozen government authorities, headed by the Mayor, the Tunisian ambassador to Italy and the Tunisian consul in Palermo, marched through the streets of the town's old centre, surrounded by a thick array of policemen. About half-way up via Bagno, the delegation came to a halt in front of a recently-renovated building. Near the cut-stone decorations of its door-frame, and in front of the bilingual Arabic and Italian sign "Daar Tunis – Casa Tunisia", the Mayor turned to face the journalists:

"Casa Tunisia is a source of great pride for our administration. We have given a space to the Tunisian community, here not only to work but also to participate in our community's social life. We have the ambition to see Tunisians organize conferences, creating the conditions for dialogue not only on cultural, but also economic topics. Casa Tunisia will also be a place in which Sicilians will be able to participate in the daily life of the Medina and of the Casbah. My hope is that this new artifact will be a starting point to relaunch our historic centre, and the city of Mazara."

The Tunisian ambassador to Rome followed:

"Mazara del Vallo is well known for being a city that welcomes the Tunisian community, and we are grateful to the Mayor for this beautiful and generous initiative. This is not a surprise in a region like Sicily, where there was an Arab presence, so let us work together to promote economic and commercial initiatives, and give more visibility to this region of the Mediterranean, contributing to peace and solidarity."

As the Mayor reached for the scissors to cut through the inaugural blue ribbon strung across the building's door, Reem, a Tunisian woman in her early fifties active with *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant*, pushed through the police cordon surrounding the Italian and Tunisian authorities. "Why are you pushing me back?" she challenged an officer, moving him to the side "You are inaugurating this centre without letting Tunisians know!". As the head of the local

police and a couple of employees of the municipality attempted to quiet her, Reem continued “*We are in a democratic country, we have the right to speak!*”. The mayor turned towards her with a look of rage in his eyes: “*No! You cannot speak now*” he yelled “*You can speak when I say so!*”. Turning his back on her he cut through the ribbon, as the other members of the delegation clapped nervously, attempting to ignore the interruption. But Reem would not desist. Following the delegation into the building, she continued, switching to Tunisian Arabic “*No Tunisians were invited! And the Tunisian Community in Mazara del Vallo has 3,000 Tunisians. This is an insult to all Tunisians!*”. As the Mayor and the Tunisian ambassador shuttled over to a corner to talk to the press, Reem turned to the Tunisian consul in Palermo “*You told us I will let you participate, I will give you space. We spoke to you in Trapani and you said: 'since you have an association, I will let you participate'. What happened to your promises?*”. In essence, Reem's interruption transformed what was supposed to be an official ceremony of celebration of Sicilian-Tunisian friendship and of the municipality's exemplary treatment of Tunisian migrants, into a public display of underlying conflicts between the municipality and some Tunisian migrants.

The disruption of the opening of *Casa Tunisia* raised similar contradictions to the disruption of the *Tunisia, Mare Nostrum* event described in the previous chapter. On one hand, the city council was adopting a language of Mediterranean interconnection, spearheading initiatives of cross-border cooperation with Tunisia, and formally celebrating the presence and contributions of Tunisian migrants' to the city's economic and political life. This was a novelty, as people of Tunisian descent had long lacked any sort of public celebration or political voice in Mazara del Vallo. However, activists from the association *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant* complained that the municipality's initiatives of cross-Mediterranean cooperation were producing few financial benefits or avenues for political influence for the majority of people of Tunisian descent who lived in Mazara.

Taking inspiration from these complaints, this chapter analyzes the conditions that led the Municipality of Mazara del Vallo to embrace Mediterraneanist projects in the early 21st Century, and how these projects affected the racialization of the town's Tunisian population. It does so through the lens of the built environment, focusing on processes of urban change in the 'Casbah' neighborhood – target of a project of 'ethnic packaging'³⁷ (Hackworth & Rekers, 2005) that celebrated its 'Arab' character, which culminated with the opening of Casa Tunisia. More specifically, I trace the urban transformation of this zone from a Sicilian working-class neighborhood in the early 1970s, to a Tunisian 'ghetto' in the 1980s, to the showcase of the town's Mediterranean multiculturalism in the early 2000s. At each phase, I analyze the relationship between changes in the built environment and the shifting racialization of Tunisian migrants, studying these changes in the context of the town's transitioning economy – from one based on the boom of the fishing sector in the late 1970s and early 1980s, to a post-industrial economy attempting to reconvert to tourism and real-estate, and highly dependent on EU

37 By 'ethnic packaging' I mean a specific type of gentrification in which migrant or minority communities are formally celebrated in order to 'brand' cities, or specific neighborhoods, to attract private capital for investments (Davila, 2004; Leslie & Catungal, 2009; Zukin, 2008), wealthy residents (Diekman & Smith, 2015), and/or tourism (Boyd, 2011; Davila, 2004; Diekman & Smith, 2015; Parzer & Huber, 2015).

subsidies in the early 2000s. I argue that while the Mediterraneanist re-branding of the Casbah did partially change the public portrayal of people of Tunisian descent, as well as the symbolic boundaries between Sicilians and Tunisians, it did not translate into any substantial economic or political benefit for the majority of Mazara's Tunisian community.

While the chapter focuses on the context of Mazara, it considers both urban transformation and the changing racialization of Tunisians a product of larger-scale processes. At each phase of change of the Casbah, in fact, I show that the relationship between the organization of urban space and the racialization of Tunisian migrants within Mazara was influenced by shifting geographies of uneven development within Italy, and changing economic and political relations between Italy, the EU and Tunisia (see Chapter 1). Certainly, within Mazara del Vallo, changes to the built environment of the Casbah were central in modifying how Sicilians perceived and represented Tunisian migrants. However, both material transformations in the Casbah's built environment, and the way in which Sicilians interpreted them, were tied to changing notions of where Mazara lay in relation to broader geographies between wealth and poverty in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and – relatedly – what celebrating a Sicilian 'modernity' meant.

In the following sections, after a brief overview of the Casbah neighborhood, I will analyze three distinct moments in which Sicilians associated the physical state of Mazara del Vallo's old center with changing representations of Tunisian migrants. On the basis of this overview, I will then turn to examine the social and economic tensions deriving from the Mediterraneanist 'ethnic packaging' of Mazara's old center in the early 21st century, and its effects on the livelihood and political voice of the town's Tunisian community.

The Casbah

Porta Palermo, gate in the ancient Norman wall that surrounded the city of Mazara, marks the northernmost point of the Casbah. Most mornings and late afternoons, if the weather is not too hot, groups of men congregate in the area. Elderly Sicilian men sit on benches under the old gateway, while younger Tunisian men lean against the wall across the street, at the convergence of the two main roads that lead to the interior of the Casbah³⁸. If you follow via Porta Palermo to the left, past the Halal butcher and the Tunisian vegetable shop, two or three clothing and antique shops and a Tunisian restaurant, you reach the well-off part of the old city centre, via Garibaldi with its lively pub-scene, the old Jesuit Convent, the Municipality and the Mediterranean sea front. The other main artery, via Bagno, has no shops, only boarded up residential buildings interrupted by a few well-restored houses. A series of alleyways, too narrow for a car to pass through them, branch off these main arteries. Some of them are in a decrepit state, and their buildings have signs warning of their potential collapse. Others are well-lighted, decorated with ceramic tiles and ornamental plants. In the early hours of the afternoon and on winter nights, these alleyways are semi-deserted, with the exception of the occasional passer-by. On summer nights, instead, they transform into a lively outdoors living room. While these evening circles are separated by language and by background, many of the Sicilian and of the Tunisian families know each other well, and have cordial relationships. These daily relations between Sicilians and Tunisians, that exist alongside the invisible barriers traced through

³⁸ Women also pass through the area, however its use as a social space is almost exclusively male.

different use of urban space, are however not mentioned in public discussions about the Casbah, which is represented as a coherent whole - a stand in for Tunisianness that can either be accepted as an integral part of the city, or wholeheartedly rejected.

The Casbah

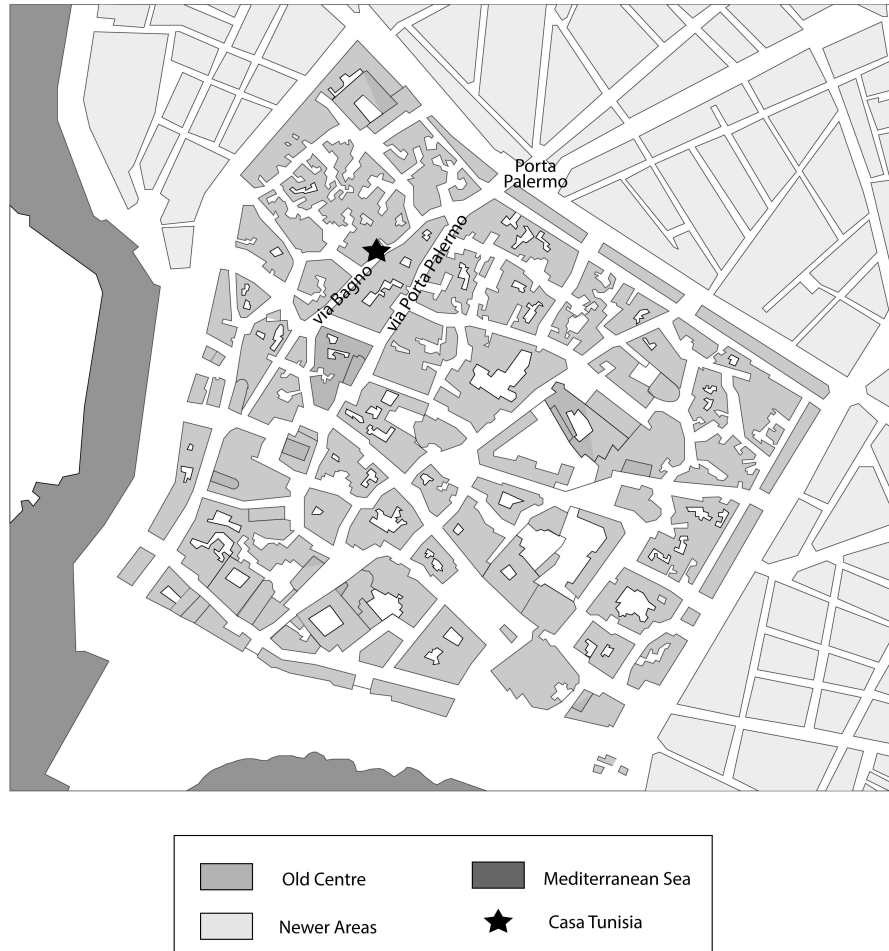


Figure 4. Map of Mazara del Vallo's Casbah

The pre-Casbah era

Until the early 1980s, Mazara's old center was not widely associated with Tunisianness, and the term 'Casbah' was only used sporadically to refer to the neighborhood (see Cusumano, 1976). Cusumano, 1976). Calogero³⁹, a sixty-year-old Italian lifetime resident of the area who sells fish in the marina, has no memories of this term. *"I don't know if it was called Casbah in old times"* he ponders in answer to my questions *"I can tell you that I don't remember it. And I*

³⁹ This and other names have been changed to ensure the confidentiality of interviewees.

never heard my mom say it either. I am sure they put this name later...". While the term occasionally appears in newspaper articles of the mid-1970s ("Il piccone ha fatto più del terremoto. A Trapani e nell'intera provincia I centri storici devastati dalla speculazione edilizia," 1976), the use is irregular and alternated with the name 'Cortigliazzo' (Tartamella, 1975).

According to a study by the University of Palermo (Buscarino, Campanella, Parisi, & Tumbiolo, 1980), in the second half of the 1970s the area was mainly inhabited by an elderly Sicilian working-class population who generally owned their modest homes, often in need of extensive repair. Key elements of what the study defines the 'islamic structure' of the neighborhood, dating back to the 9th Century Arab invasion of Sicily, were narrow alleyways that turned off into closed courtyards. These courtyards lay at the centre of neighborhood life, and were communal areas, used by surrounding houses both as a social space, and as one of domestic reproduction through tasks such as clothes-washing. Calogero remembers those days well. Over a cup of coffee in the living room of his house, he recounts:

"...only in this courtyard there were seven families...too many people. Each family had four, five, six children...everyone here was a fisherman or a farmer. In the centre of the courtyard there were stone basins to wash clothes, back then no one had running water at home. Some people had donkeys...old people used to tell stories, so in the evening we used to all get together..."

Shopkeepers who used to run businesses along via Porta Palermo have similar memories of familiarity and safety in the old centre, though not of its poverty. When asked about his memories of via Porta Palermo, the owner of a clothing shop recalled that *"...life was good before, commercially we did well, and children used to go to school without their parents!"*. His former neighbor has similar memories *"Via Porta Palermo was active, bustling, awake by eight in the morning. There was a pharmacy, clothing shops. Children basically lived in the street, they would only go home to sleep."*. While the University of Palermo study refers to one of the courtyards as 'curtile de li Tunisini' (Sicilian dialect for the Tunisians' courtyard), and a series of newspaper articles from the mid-to-late 1970s refer to Tunisians living in Mazara's historic centre (Betti, 1979; Tartamella, 1975; Vasile, 1979), neither Calogero nor the shopkeepers mention Tunisians, or cast the old center as an 'Arab' space.

In essence, in the memories of its long-time Italian inhabitants, the 'Casbah' of the 1960s and early 1970s was a space of nostalgic small-town familiarity. The fishing sector, that would gradually become the main economic motor of the town, was only beginning to pick up in those years, and had still to generate the accumulation of wealth that would substantially change the living standards of many Mazarese households. Similarly, while some Tunisian migrants had begun to settle in the old center, their presence was not highly problematized until the late-1970s. Certainly, the residential parts of the Casbah were characterized by poverty, and living in the crowded buildings of the old center was a marker of class. However, in the memories of the middle-class shopkeepers whose wares used to line Porta Palermo, the Casbah was not considered dangerous, and its inhabitants were not seen as external to Mazara, nor radically different from the rest of its population.

'A frontier land'. The appearance of the Casbah.

All of this would change by the early 1980s, when the old center became increasingly associated with Tunisian migrants, and cast as a space of 'backwardness', danger, and difference from the rest of Mazara. In these years, the town's fishing fleet was at its peak, due in part to generous national subsidies (Ben-Yehoyada, 2011a), and was attracting increasingly large numbers of Tunisian workers. The capital accumulated through the fishing sector allowed many Sicilians to abandon Mazara's old center. *"People were moving"* Calogero remembers *"because...they bought a piece of land and made new houses, with more comfort, more space: it was the time of the economic boom. Before that there were ten people to a house, even a donkey if there was one, but things began to change, people began to earn money: progress arrived!"*. A Mazarese Catholic priest with a long history of social work with Tunisian migrants provided a similar account: *"...slowly the Mazarese fishermen left. No one wanted to live in these houses, they were small, uncomfortable, and cars could not reach them. As soon as one could, one would build a house outside the old center..."*.

Sicilians' gradual abandonment of the area was accelerated by the earthquake of June 7th 1981 (Cole, 2003; Sbraccia & Saitta, 2003). In the wake of this event, government funding was available for homeowners whose houses had been damaged to either restore their houses, or leave them to the municipality in exchange for new housing on the outskirts of town. As many chose the latter option, this led to large quantities of semi-decrepit housing stock to be abandoned, and what remained habitable to be increasingly leased to Tunisian migrants⁴⁰.

When remembering these events, shopkeepers who used to run businesses in the area connect the Earthquake's physical damage to the old center to the 'degraded' nature of its now mainly Tunisian inhabitants. *"The 1981 earthquake was a catastrophe for the old centre!"* remembered a shopkeeper who has now moved his business to a well-to-do section of the old centre *"Apart from the physical decay, immigration also had a huge effect because the houses ended up in the hands of Tunisians. I lived close by there, but it became unlivable. It was really a frontier land, so we left."*. Another shopkeeper, his former neighbor, made a similar observation, but cast Tunisians as the *cause* of the physical decay of the neighborhood: *"The arrival of Tunisians was not a good thing because they took over the abandoned houses. A little at a time they began to occupy the streets, so they became more degraded. People were afraid to visit the zone, drugs also contributed to ruin the neighborhood."*. Some of Mazara's Tunisians also remember these tensions. Referring to her father's descriptions of that period, Afaf, a young Tunisian woman, recalled *"Italians were afraid because the majority of the neighborhood's inhabitants were Arab...there was a group of men who used to drink at night, so Italians had to run away because they didn't like that mess."*

In these years, the term Casbah, previously used sporadically to refer to the neighborhood's 9th Century Arab heritage (*"Il piccone ha fatto più del terremoto. A Trapani e nell'intera provincia I centri storici devastati dalla speculazione edilizia."* 1976), became increasingly common to refer to the area with a pejorative connotation. Preceding a widespread usage of the term on the national scale in the 1990s to refer to migrant neighborhoods (Dal

⁴⁰ Interviews with city council member and with NGO worker.

Lago, 1999; Merrill, 2006), both shopkeepers⁴¹ and the press (Betti, 1979; Cavallaro, 1981; “Immigrati nella terra dell’emigrazione.” 1980; Migliardi, 1980) used the term Casbah to refer to physical decay, uncleanliness, and immigration. This semantic shift is clear in the words of a shopkeeper who had moved out of the old center in the early 1980s: “*an invasion of foreigners occurred*” she recounted “*so the neighborhood became a Casbah. It was already called Casbah before, with its ancient name, but it became a REAL Casbah when Tunisians arrived.*”. The essential alterity of the Casbah and its inhabitants to Sicilian modernity also appeared in a 1981 article covering racial tension between Tunisians and Sicilians around the allocation of earthquake aid:

“...the earthquake has not erased the borders that Mazara has created everywhere for a community confined to the ghetto neighborhood [...] leaving via Bagno, a small street of the Casbah [...] means to come face-to-face with people [Sicilians] who clearly only tolerate them [Tunisians] reluctantly...when someone [a Tunisian] arrives to Mazara, he looks for friends in the port, and a bed in the Casbah. Three falling rooms cost about 200,000 lire, but Abib Kesraoni...doesn't complain. 'Eight of us live here, it is not that expensive'...Pacificaly expelled from the rest of the city, they [Tunisians] survive in a Casbah from which Mazaresi attempt to flee.”

(Cavallaro, 1981)

The association between marginalized populations and poor, cramped and insanitary living conditions is a common trope. It characterized working-class neighborhoods in 19th Century Europe (Engels, 1968), native ones in colonial contexts (Fanon, 1965; M Gandy, 2008; Kooy & Bakker, 2008), and immigrant neighborhoods in late 20th century Europe (Ross, 1995). In these contexts, differences in infrastructure development between different parts of the city both reflected and produced notions of different levels of 'cleanliness', and thus of 'civilization' of different populations (M Gandy, 2008; Giuliani & Lombardi-Diop, 2013; Kooy & Bakker, 2008; Ross, 1995). Indeed, the term 'Casbah' itself re-activated colonial notions of urban difference between 'Arab tradition' and 'European modernity'. Throughout the dual-city structure that characterized North Africa (Abu-Lughod, 1980; Wright, 1991), in fact, colonial planners considered the Arab 'medina' or 'Casbah', often separated from the European quarters by a cordon sanitaire (Abu-Lughod, 1980; Wright, 1991), as a space of frozen tradition, representing the alterity of the native population from European modernity.

In Mazara del Vallo, however, prior to the early 1980s, cramped living conditions and rudimentary infrastructural connections had not cast inhabitants of the Casbah as radically different from those of the rest of the city. Calogero's description of his childhood in the old center where “*there were eight people, maybe even a donkey, for each house*” is not that different from the conditions of eight Tunisians living in “*three falling rooms*” described by *Giornale di Sicilia*. However, another newspaper article from the same period recounts that Mazara's Tunisians lived “*...in houses where many Mazaresi would not even live for free.*” (*Paterno, 1980*). In other words, in only a few years, cramped living conditions had become a racializing characteristic that set Tunisians apart from Sicilians.

41 Interviews with shopkeepers.

In order for this change in perception to occur, Sicilian Mazarese had to relate the difference between the Casbah and the rest of the city to broader notions of difference between Southern Italy and North Africa. These differences were not widely discussed until the early 1980s. Instead, Italy's internal North-South divide had been the main focus of debates around social and economic difference, and overcoming internal territorial disparities was the focus of national economic programming (Ginsborg, 1990). Around 1980, however, in the context of the first public debates around immigration, references to Southern Mediterranean poverty began to appear in the Sicilian public sphere. Just as, in the spring of 1980, the regional capital Palermo was hosting the first national conference on North African immigration⁴², a series of newspaper articles were beginning to describe North Africa as an 'even deeper South' from which people were emigrating to Sicily (Conti, 1980; Hoffmann, 1980; Mignosi, 1980).

Public framing of North Africa as a site of extreme poverty was occurring just as internal economic differences within Mazara del Vallo were becoming less significant thanks to the booming fishing fleet that had allowed the long-marginalized Sicilian fishing population's living standards to soar (Ben-Yehoyada, 2011a). This boom had also made Mazara's overall wealth legendary, as income levels had little to envy to Northern Italy. In this context, associating the cramped living conditions of the Casbah with Tunisian migrants, and casting the neighborhood as an 'Arab' space, were a means of geographically displacing a recent history of Sicilian poverty to North Africa, and of depicting ways of life that working-class Sicilians had once shared with Tunisians as alien to Mazarese modernity. In other words, the difference produced through the built environment of the Casbah, once a marker of class, was re-interpreted as a deeper marker of racialized difference that re-echoed broader territorial divisions between Italian 'progress' (that included Mazara) and Tunisian 'poverty'.

The production of difference between Tunisians and Sicilians occurred despite Mazara's economic interests in North Africa, which on multiple occasions led the town's political and cultural elite to adopt a Mediterraneanist language, by rhetorically invoking a long history of connection and shared heritage between Mazara del Vallo and Tunisia (Ben-Yehoyada, 2014b). The early 1980s, in fact, saw both the completion of the Algeria – Tunisia – Italy gas line that joined the Italian mainland in Mazara, and a spike in the on-going 'fish war' between Mazara del Vallo and Tunisia (Ben-Yehoyada, Cusumano, Pipitone, Polizzi, & Sanchez de la Sierra, 2016) – a low-level conflict around fishing rights, during which Mazarese vessels fishing in Tunisian territorial waters were regularly captured by the Tunisian authorities, requiring diplomatic negotiations for their release. Official declarations of proximity and shared history with North Africa, however, failed to translate into a celebration of 'Tunisianness' within Mazara, and indeed, on a couple of occasions, tensions from the fish war erupted into violence against Mazara's Tunisian migrants (Ben-Yehoyada, 2014; Cusumano, 1976). While relations with North Africa might have been important for the city's economy, affirming Sicilian 'modernity' within Mazara meant asserting *difference* between working-class Sicilians and Tunisian migrants. All this would change by the early 2000s, when the decline of the fishing sector, matched by a renewed Italian and European interest in cross-Mediterranean relations, would lead to an official reclaiming of Mazara's 'Arabness'.

42 Interview with Agostino Spataro.

'...a piece of North Africa in Italy'. The 'Casbah' reinvented

By the first decade of the 21st Century, a series of tourist guides and glossy maps of Mazara described the 'Casbah' in new terms:

"...Mazara del Vallo is an important example...of a multiethnic and multicultural city, where differences are resources...a walk through the alleys and courtyards of its islamic urbanism makes the visit to Mazara interesting and engaging"
(Li Vigni & Mauro, n.d.)

"...what makes this area [the Casbah] characteristic, in addition to its 'arabisant' structure, is that one of the largest North African communities in Europe lives there, that increases its fascination making it...a piece of North Africa in Italy"
(*"Mazara del Vallo. Storia, cultura, leggenda. (city map),"* n.d.)

The text was accompanied by photos not only of the now renovated alleys of the old city centre, but also of the handful of Tunisian businesses scattered around it, thus drawing an explicit parallel between Mazara del Vallo's 9th Century Arab heritage, and its current Tunisian population.

Similarly to other cases of post-industrial restructuring (Hoffman, 2003), this change was part of a broader attempt of 'branding of difference'⁴³ (Leslie & Catungal, 2009) in order to reconvert Mazara del Vallo's economy from the secondary to the tertiary sector. At the turn of the 21st century, in fact, Mazara del Vallo's fishing-based economy, on which the city had thrived between the mid-1970s and the mid-1990s, had entered into an irreversible decline, producing widespread unemployment amongst both Sicilian and Tunisian fishermen. This decline occurred in the context of broader structural changes that accompanied the formation of the European Union. In 1992, in fact, the post World-War II national subsidies program to develop Italy's South was suspended in order to implement budget constraints necessary for Italy to enter the common market and to adapt its regional development programs to the European Commission's guidelines (Gualini, 2004; Schneider, 1998). This led to the decline of various of the Italian South's productive industries, including Mazara del Vallo's fishing fleet, which had relied strongly on these subsidies. In this context, local governments throughout Southern Italy had to turn to independent fundraising. The European Union was a key source of these funds, often through the intermediary of the Sicilian region. Drawing on this funding⁴⁴, in 2009 Mazara del Vallo's municipality commissioned a Strategic Plan to two consulting firms, one locally-based and one from northern Italy⁴⁵, that worked together to suggest possible development alternatives to the city's fishing-based economy.

The plan advised the city to rebrand itself as a tourist destination and as a strategic

43 Other Southern European cities such as Marseille or Granada adopted very similar policies in the early 2000s, celebrating their historic connections with North Africa as part of a broader attempt at regional development (Lafi, 2013; M. Rogozen-Soltar, 2007).

44 94% of the funding for the Strategic plan, which had a total cost of 260,000 Euros, had come from the European Fund for Regional development, channeled through the Sicilian Region. (Città di Mazara del Vallo. Deliberazione della Giunta Municipale [hereafter CMVDGM], 5 March, 2010, n. 31).

45 Euresgroup S.r.l. based in Marsala, Sicily, and Avventura Urbana S.r.l. based in Turin, Piedmont.

location for cross-Mediterranean relations – in other words to adopt a Mediterraneanist language and to promote Mediterraneanist projects as an avenue to regional development. Following the 1995 Barcelona declaration that created a framework for cooperation between the European Union and countries of the Mediterranean's Southern Rim, in fact, extensive funding was available for cross-border cooperation projects⁴⁶. In this context, it became beneficial for local governments to carry out an operation of 'ethnic packaging' (Hackworth & Rekers, 2005), in order to market themselves as part of a Mediterranean borderland, both geographically and culturally. "*For Mazara*" the plan stated "*the emergence of the Euro-Mediterranean perspective, promoted by the Barcelona treaty...appears to be the most promising scenario.*". The plan thus suggested that Mazara should "*...take advantage of the 'positional advantage' that the city acquires thanks to its close geographical proximity with the coast of North Africa.*" (Avventura Urbana Srl & Eures Group Srl, 2009, pp. 47–48).

According to a staff member of one of the studios that prepared the Strategic Plan⁴⁷, the renovation of the old center was one of the few recommendations of the plan that was fully carried out. Originally spearheaded by the center-left coalition administering the town at the time of the plan's preparation, the renovation was continued by the center-right coalition following its victory in the 2009 municipal elections, and was strongly promoted by the Mayor⁴⁸.

The renovation of the Casbah involved two main orders of projects. The first were large-scale, with budgets ranging from various hundred-thousand to over a million euro, for which the municipality received substantial outside funding. Casa Tunisia, the contested cultural center mentioned at the beginning of the paper, was one of these, and saw the collaboration of skilled artisans from Mahdia, a Tunisian municipality twinned with Mazara del Vallo since the early 1970s. Another similar project was the planned 'Multi-functional center for the dialogue between cultures of the countries that border the Mediterranean', right across the street⁴⁹. The second type of projects, on the other hand, did not involve substantial structural alterations to the old city, but mainly an aesthetic shift characterized by the whitewashing of walls, and their decoration with ceramic tiles depicting Mazara's 'traditions': its Arab past, its current connections to Tunisia, and its multicultural nature. Each of these mini-projects cost between 10,000 and 30,000 Euro, and was funded entirely by the municipality⁵⁰.

46 Interview with Sicilian Region employee.

47 Interview with studio employee.

48 This continuity was somewhat unusual, as in Italy the celebration of Multiculturalism and cross-Mediterranean connections is generally spearheaded by the left, while the mayor's right wing party is known for its xenophobic nationalism.

49 90% (200,000 euros) of the budget to restore Casa Tunisia came from the Regional Department for Family, Social Policy and Local Autonomy (CMVDGM, 29 January 2010, n. 6). 85% of the total budget (1,400,000 Euros) for the 'Multi-functional centre for dialogue between the cultures of countries that border the Mediterranean' was funded by the Regional Department of Infrastructure and Transport. (CMVDGM, 3 September 2010, n. 172).

50 The individual projects, usually involving one or two small alleyways, were approved in individual city council meetings starting in 2010 (CMVDGM, 6 December 2010, n. 239; CMVDGM, 10 September 2010, n. 176; CMVDGM 21 November 2011, n. 163; CMVDGM, 13 May 2013, n. 75). An older 1,500,000 euro project, dating back to 2006, had involved more substantial restructuring including the renewal of water and sewage networks, as well as the artistic lighting of the old centre (CMVDGM, 10 July 2009, n. 110).



Figure 5. Tiles celebrating multiculturalism.



Figure 6. Renovated courtyard with whitewashed walls and ceramic tiles.

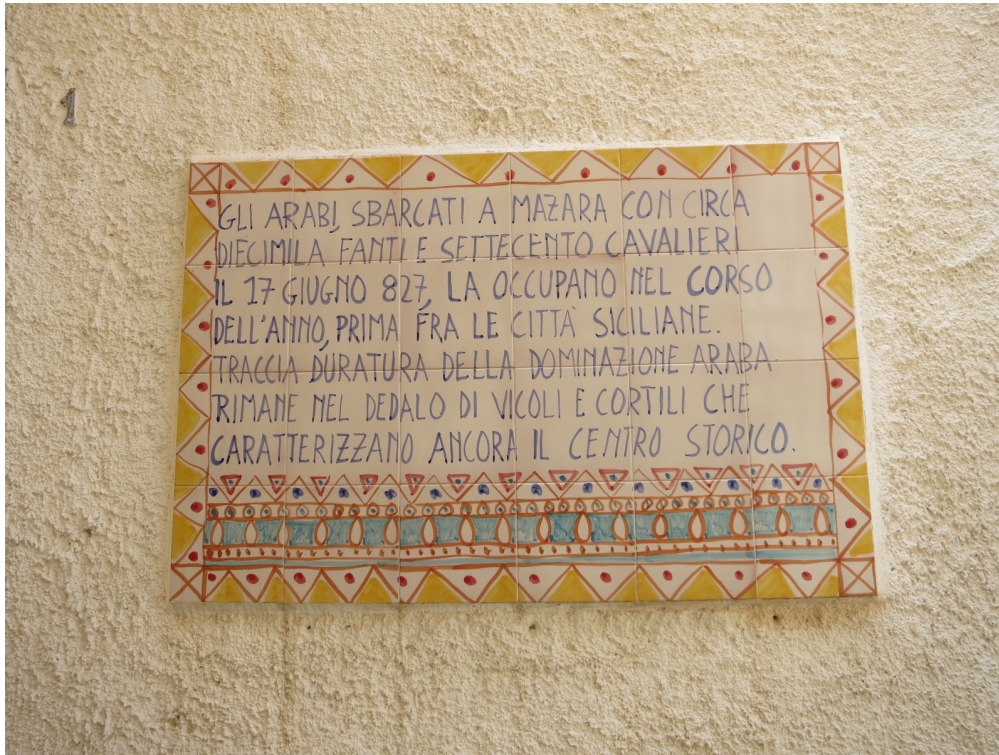


Figure 7. Tiles celebrating Arab history.

Socio-spatial change – a 'sanitized' Arabness

Both city council officials and Sicilian shopkeepers considered the physical renovation of the Casbah to have changed its Tunisian inhabitants. Evoking tropes of 'civilizing through cleanliness' (Matthew Gandy, 1999; Giuliani & Lombardi-Diop, 2013; McClintock, 1995; Rabinow, 1989; Ross, 1995), a city-council official who had spearheaded the renovation of the Casbah described it not only as a process of physical restoration, but also of social and moral regeneration of its inhabitants:

“...the rehabilitation of the Casbah was an urban, social and sociological rehabilitation. Before, the houses were basically caves. Immigrants who arrived were modest people who occupied these ruins – a material neglect that became social neglect. You could see this in their clothing, in their self-presentation. The restoration had a positive influence on them, you see a sociological change in this community, in the way they dress, they pay more attention to their appearance, they feel like full citizens.”

One of the former shopkeepers of via Porta Palermo had a similar opinion:

“With the ceramic tiles, the Mayor cleaned up the city. Before him, you couldn't pass through there, it was unlivable, there was a bit of everything. It changed radically, he involved the immigrants who lived there. You know, Tunisians at the beginning did not do much good for the zone, they didn't do anything, they would just drink. But later they integrated, there are even some Tunisian shops!”

This quote shows the importance of the built environment in changing how Mazarese Sicilians perceived Tunisians. Despite the fact that Tunisian migrants in Mazara were generally *worse off* in the early 2000s than they had been in the 1980s and 1990s, due to the crisis in the fishing sector, this shopkeeper, and various other ones, shared the perception that the once-lazy Tunisians had finally begun to work.

The municipality's attempts to rebrand the old center were somewhat successful in attracting outsiders. In the years following the renovation, about a dozen wealthy Northern Italians and Northern Europeans purchased and renovated houses in via Porta Palermo and via Bagno as vacation homes. They chose Mazara thanks to its 'exoticism' and 'authenticity' – classic attributes in the urban branding of 'diversity' to attract young, alternative consumers (Zukin, 2008). In the words of Fritz, a Northern European artist: *“...it was the African atmosphere that led us to chose Mazara, we liked the messiness, the authenticity!”*. Many of these home owners had previously spent time in Tunisia, or had considered buying property there, but had settled on Mazara as they considered it a safer alternative in the aftermath of the 2011 uprisings.

These purchases, however, were sparse in relation to the available housing stock, and failed to generate substantial economic or demographic change in the Casbah. While Mazara's Strategic Plan, as well as discussions in city council meetings⁵¹, had called for the creation of 'characteristic' Arab businesses in Mazara's old center, by early 2013 no thematic, Tunisian-owned business had opened⁵². The aesthetic renovation of the old center, in fact, had not been accompanied by any economic support or capacity building program aimed at the creation of Tunisian, or indeed any, businesses. If anything, the economic crisis that was hitting Sicily in the second decade of the 21st Century was forcing many small businesses to shut down. As a consequence, despite the assertions of the city council and of some shopkeepers, the old center's connotation had not substantially changed. *“People from Mazara don't go to the old center”* observed Fritz, the northern European artist *“When talking to locals, there is the notion the the Casbah is a dangerous place. We noticed that Italians don't like Tunisians!”*. A real estate agent who dealt with the majority of the housing stock of the old center confirmed this perception, noting how Mazarese Sicilians would never buy houses in the old center to live there. Indeed, some Tunisians also considered the area to be dangerous, and despite their modest economic means, had chosen to leave the area. Bassma, a stay-at-home mother of three, whose husband who used to work in the marina was now on disability benefits, described this clearly: *“We lived in the old center for a few years. We really liked the house, but we left because the environment was not good”*. After a pause, she then turned to warn me *“Don't go there, and don't walk there at night. You should be scared, because they might steal your purse.”*

51 Città di Mazara del Vallo. Deliberazione di Consiglio Comunale [hereafter CMVDCC], 26 March, 2012, n. 44. “Mozione: problematiche attività commerciali extracomunitari”.

52 Mazara municipality data.

In essence, apart from the aesthetic renovation of the Casbah and the structural restoration of a few buildings, not much had changed in the old center. While a couple of successful sales had prompted Mazarese homeowners to put their old houses up for sale, the market remained weak. Though real estate was cheap in comparison to Northern Italy or Northern Europe, the agent who dealt with most of the housing stock in the old center confessed that he would spend the majority of his days alone in his office. The economic crisis was also affecting Mazara's Tunisian migrants, inducing many of them to consider emigrating to Northern Italy, France or Germany (a process which I will discuss in more detail in chapter 3). In this context, despite the official assertions of the municipality, the Tunisian community was mainly visible as unemployed men clustering around Porta Palermo at the entrance of the Casbah in search for day labor – hardly the 'full citizens' that the old center's restoration should have produced.

Valuing 'Tunisianness'. The politics of Mediterraneanist 'Ethnic Packaging'.

As the previous section has shown, the 'ethnic packaging' of the Casbah had not led to substantial economic or demographic changes in the old center. It had failed to attract private capital, to generate appreciation of buildings, and – as a consequence – to generate displacement. Nonetheless, tensions around who could benefit from mobilizing 'Tunisianness' were high, and had exploded around the opening of Casa Tunisia. This derived from the fact that mobilizing 'Tunisianness' generated both economic and political benefits. Regarding the former, while the renovation of the Casbah was not attracting *private* capital, public subsidies captured by this restructuring were in of themselves important resources. In a moment of national and European debates on migrant integration and relations with North Africa, Mazara del Vallo's Tunisianness represented an asset to obtain funds⁵³, which often could translate into jobs in migration or 'diversity' management. Regarding the political effects, by the second decade of the 21st century, enough Tunisian migrants had acquired Italian citizenship to lead aspiring municipal council members to cater to the 'Tunisian vote'. Thus, candidates across the political spectrum would at least pay lip service to the needs of the Tunisian community, and in the 2009 and 2014 elections, all running political parties included at least one candidate of Tunisian background (Ben-Yehoyada, 2011b). Being elected on the city council also had economic reverberations, as in the context of crisis-stricken Mazara, the modest yet regular monthly salary of a city council member represented a coveted source of income⁵⁴.

Tensions around access to both types of resources erupted both between the mayor, his political opponents, and some Tunisian migrants, and within the Tunisian community itself. The Mayor of Mazara, in fact, was a former deputy of the European Parliament and President of the Sicilian Regional Assembly, and had started his political career in the ranks of the Movimento Sociale Italiano, a far-right wing party that had mobilized against Tunisian migrant workers in Mazara del Vallo in the 1970s and 1980s⁵⁵. At the national level, his current political party was also known for its nationalism and xenophobia. This, alongside his alleged ownership of

53 This logic is explained clearly in the words of an opposition city council member during a meeting in mid 2012: "...we pay a consultant abundantly...I would have imagined that...[this] would have facilitated the city to obtain... privileged channels, sources of external funds..." (Mauro in CMVDCC, 26 March 2012, n. 44).

54 Interview with family of candidate in 2014 municipal council elections.

55 Interview with former mayor of Mazara del Vallo.

property in Mazara's old center⁵⁶, led some Tunisian activists, the broader community invested in Tunisian migrant rights, and his political opponents to consider his emphasis on Mazara's multiculturalism as a strategic move to adapt a dominant discourse to further his own economic interests.

Within the Tunisian community, tensions erupted between *Friends Without Borders*, an association headed by the Mayor's consultant on diversity, a Tunisian national with strong ties to the consulate, and *The voice of the Tunisian Migrant*. Members of the *Voice of the Tunisian Migrant*, who had organized the protests around the opening of *Casa Tunisia* and at the *Tunisia: Mare Nostrum* event of the previous chapter, were strong critics of the Mayor, his entourage, and the Tunisian diplomatic authorities. At the event itself, on online fora⁵⁷, and at a subsequent meeting in early 2014, they made two main accusations towards the Municipal Authorities and Tunisians who collaborated with them. The first was disregard for the material needs of the community. More specifically, they accused the Municipality and Tunisian consular authorities of ignoring the extreme poverty in which large sectors of Mazara's Tunisian population lived, and of wasting money in official initiatives of representation instead of providing much needed services to migrants. The second accusation was of lack of transparency in the management of *Casa Tunisia*. The local administration, in fact, had handed over the building to *Friends Without Borders*⁵⁸, which activists from *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant* considered a 'fake' association created to allow a few cherry-picked individuals, close to the Mayor, to speak in the name of Mazara's Tunisians, and to get paid to do so⁵⁹. The choice of this organization was particularly contentious, as the director of the association *Friends Without Borders* was well-known to provide both licit and illicit services (ranging from passport renewal to fictitious work contracts) to members of Mazara's Tunisian community for a fee, a relationship of patronage which members of *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant* considered to further consolidate his political power and economic advantage. In addition, thanks to his proximity to the Tunisian consulate, they considered his management of the center an attempt to monitor the types of activities that would take place there.

The independent mobilizations spearheaded by *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant* between late 2013 and early 2014 had taken the Mayor and his administration by surprise. As they had done with little opposition in the past⁶⁰, the municipal authorities had involved the

56 Interview with city council member.

57 In a Facebook group for Tunisians abroad, activists from 'The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant' posted a photo of two homeless Tunisian men, a local Tunisian social worker, and two representatives of the consulate with the caption: "100 meters away from the headquarters of 'Casa Tunisia', members of the Tunisian community who have been without shelter for months denounce their situation to the social services representative from the Tunisian consulate in Palermo."

58 Originally, the management of *Casa Tunisia* was supposed to be carried out by the Tunisian consulate in Palermo (CMVDGM, 3 March 2013, n. 44; CMVDGM, 11 April 2013, n. 60). However, the initial agreement was later amended to leave the management of the house to the Tunisian association 'Friends without Borders' (CMVDGM, 9 May 2013, n. 72; CMVDGM, 19 December 2013, n. 193).

59 Article 2 of the memorandum of understanding between the City of Mazara del Vallo and the association 'Friends without Borders' stipulated that the municipality would give the Association 10,000 euro a year to manage the centre. Some activists interpreted this as a monthly salary that would go to the president of the association (Amici Senza Frontiere and Città di Mazara del Vallo, 2013).

60 In 2002, when the municipality had created the seat of an 'additional' city council member representing the Tunisian community, it had asked the Tunisian consulate to identify possible candidates (Interview with former mayor of Mazara del Vallo).

Tunisian consulate, and the individuals it designated, as official interlocutors representing Tunisian migrants, and counted on their patronage networks to obtain political support. The national and international context, however, had changed. In Mazara, as elsewhere in Italy, increasing numbers of people of Tunisian descent had acquired Italian citizenship, giving them a new electoral weight. At the same time, the fall of Ben Ali in Tunisia in early 2011 had given Tunisians – both within the country and abroad – a new freedom to organize independently, allowing the *Voice of the Tunisian Migrant* to carry out activities that would have been unthinkable before for fear of repercussions from the Tunisian consular authorities⁶¹. The combination of these two factors had allowed for unprecedented organization within the Tunisian community in Mazara, as various activists began to question the terms of the municipality's formal politics of recognition. By so-doing, they transformed a de-politicized celebration of ethnicity, typical of 'ethnic packaging' and of multicultural city 'branding' (Davila, 2004; Goonewardena & Kipfer, 2005; Leslie & Catungal, 2009) into a political claim to resources and representation.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzed the conditions of emergence of Mediterraneanism as a regional development strategy in Mazara del Vallo, and – through the process of 'ethnic packaging' of the Casbah – its effect on the racialization of the town's Tunisian population, as well as on their material condition and political voice. In appearance, the adoption of a language of Mediterranean interconnection by Mazara's elected officials created an open and inclusive atmosphere for the city's Tunisian population – a situation markedly different from that of some Northern Italian regions, where economic restructuring of the mid-1990s had led public authorities to adopt an explicitly anti-immigrant rhetoric⁶² (Carter & Merrill, 2007). In addition, this Mediterraneanist language did somewhat lessen the racialization of people of Tunisian descent, as it changed the symbolic boundaries between Sicilians and Tunisians, and partially modified the public portrayal of Tunisian migrants⁶³. However, this was not the primary objective of municipal authorities, who had adopted the language as a means to attract tourism and to access National and EU subsidies⁶⁴, and, consequently, had not created channels for Mazara's Tunisian population to access the economic benefits of Mazara's re-branding.

The city council's adoption of a Mediterraneanist language, however, had unexpected effects, as it created a window of opportunity through which some people of Tunisian descent

61 Interview with member of 'The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant'.

62 In the North, in the 1990s regionalist movements that had traditionally expressed an anti-South prejudice, posited on a distinction between an 'efficient' and 'modern' North and a 'wasteful' and 'parasitic' South, rephrased this dichotomy as one of Italy as a whole vs. North Africa, thus adopting an explicitly anti-immigrant stance.

63 While many Sicilians continued to express prejudice towards Tunisians, associating them with urban insecurity, people of Tunisian descent repeatedly stressed to me in interviews that the attitude of Mazara's Sicilians had become much more welcoming than in 1970s and 1980s.

64 By doing so, they drew on and reactivated older tropes invoked by the island's political and intellectual elite at various moments of the last two centuries, who invoked the island's Mediterranean nature in order to reposition Sicily from a periphery of Italy or Europe to a strategic central location in the Mediterranean sea (Frusciante, 2012; Mallette, 2010; Spataro, 1986; Vella, 1999). Similarly to the present, these previous articulations of Mediterraneanism did not aim to underline similarities between Sicilians and North Africans, but to assert the centrality and modernity of Sicily vis-à-vis the Italian and European north.

could invoke this language to voice complaints and make substantial demands. Indeed, activists of *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant* had done so by criticizing the municipality's prioritization of its diplomatic relations with Tunisian consular authorities and some members of the Tunisian business elite over the material difficulties and structural inequalities lived by the majority of Mazara's Tunisian community. In addition, they had also critiqued the municipality's politics of patronage, commenting on how the Mayor had cherry-picked only a few Tunisian nationals to run Casa Tunisia (and thus be remunerated), choosing individuals who could mobilize votes at the next local government election, and who could keep an eye on political organizing within the community for the Tunisian consulate.

Taken together, this chapter and the previous one have shown how Mediterraneanist projects embraced by Mazara's municipality did little to address the structural inequalities that had made the lives and livelihoods of the city's Tunisian community precarious by the second decade of the 21st century. This was true despite the slightly different aims of the Mediterranean projects described in the two chapters. The redevelopment of the Casbah and the opening of *Casa Tunisia*, in fact, were explicitly framed by the municipality as local development projects. The organizers of the *Tunisia Mare Nostrum* event described in Chapter 2, instead, had framed this as an event addressing the problems of migrant integration. However, these aims were connected. The celebration of a visible presence of Tunisian migrants, in fact, was integral to the redevelopment of the Casbah. At the same time, hosting a meeting on 'migrant integration' was a way for Mazara's municipality to place the city on the Italian and European map. Thus, it is possible to consider both projects as part of a municipal Mediterraneanist strategy that celebrated Mediterranean coexistence as a means to bring together people from different 'cultural' or religious backgrounds, but that carefully avoided structural issues, such as labor exploitation.

If the Mediterraneanist projects described in Chapter 2 and 3 were spearheaded by secular actors, the next chapter will broaden the analysis of Mediterraneanist projects in Mazara by focusing on the other main actor that framed discussions and enacted policies of 'migrant integration' and cross-Mediterranean relations: the Catholic church.

Chapter 4

Catholic Mediterraneanisms. The New Church of Africa.

Introduction

“Our city, Europe’s closest tip to Africa...can represent a model for peaceful coexistence between people from different cultural and religious backgrounds. This model is the result of a migratory movement that used to flow towards Tunisia between the late 1800s and the early 1900s. At the middle of the 20th Century, this movement changed direction, coming towards our coasts, and we returned the welcoming we had received with the same attitude...Perhaps this is the secret of our unusual situation! However...we do not really have inter-religious dialogue here...alongside the general difficulties that come with it, in Mazara we do not have a stable presence of people who can promote it.”

Bishop of Mazara del Vallo, interview to *Giornale di Sicilia*, January 27 2011⁶⁵

With these words, the Bishop of Mazara del Vallo Vincenzo Mogavero explained the objective of his January 2011 visit to Tunisia and Algeria, where he would meet the bishops of Tunis and Algiers, in order to “*bring the example of integration and coexistence of Mazara del Vallo*” (Firriero, 2011). This type of visit was not a novelty. The diocese of Mazara del Vallo had been twinned with the diocese of Tunis since 1999, and bishop Mogavero was a strong advocate for cross-Mediterranean cooperation with the Catholic Churches of North Africa. In order to further this vision, he organized a recurring conference with North African bishops, and had founded and managed a small research institute for cross-Mediterranean cooperation⁶⁶. Alongside these activities of cross-Mediterranean co-operation, Catholic institutions in Mazara del Vallo, such as the Caritas, Catholic foundations, and individual religious orders, were also engaged in service-provision to Tunisian migrants, and were consequently key voices in the public debate about Tunisian migration. In brief, Catholic institutions, as well as individuals with strong ties to the Catholic church, were key proponents of Mediterraneanist visions and projects.

Catholic Mediterraneanist projects focused on migrant integration, inter-religious dialogue and cross-Mediterranean cooperation existed alongside those promoted by Mazara's municipality (described in Chapters 2 and 3). Despite their different orientations, municipal and Catholic Mediterraneanist projects shared an ambiguous politics of officially recognizing and celebrating the presence of Tunisian migrants in Mazara, but ignoring or perpetuating structural inequalities and material and symbolic hierarchies between the two populations. Municipal institutions had done so by failing to address the pressing material needs of the city's Tunisian community, as well as by excluding or only minimally incorporating people of Tunisian descent

⁶⁵ See (Firriero, 2011)

⁶⁶ This was called the Mediterranean Center for Intercultural Studies, and was funded by the Trapani province (interview with Domenico Mogavero, February 2018).

into its Mediterraneanist projects. On the surface, Catholic institutions differed, as they provided a series of services to Tunisian migrants, such as financial assistance, after-school programs and aid in finding housing. However, when intervening in the public debate about Tunisian migration, Catholic institutions reinforced symbolic hierarchies between Sicilians and Tunisians, by framing (Catholic) Sicilians as 'modern' Mediterranean subjects, open to cultural and religious diversity, as opposed to closed-minded (Muslim) Tunisians, for whom religion had a totalizing role.

Catholic voices did not only explain Sicilian openness to inter-religious and intercultural dialogue through references to their Catholicism, but also to their long history of cross-Mediterranean connections – in particular the history of Sicilian southward migration and settlement in turn of 20th Century colonial Tunisia. In order to deploy the history of Sicilian southward migration and settlement in colonial Tunisia as both an explanation and a proof of Sicilian open-mindedness, however, Catholic figures had to make three assumptions about this history. Firstly, a history of poverty and emigration had inoculated Sicilians against racism. Secondly, the history of Sicilian southward migration towards colonial Tunisia⁶⁷ was structurally equivalent to the current situation of contemporary Tunisian northward migrants to Italy. Finally, relations between Sicilians and Tunisians in colonial Tunisia were peaceful relations between equals. In other words, they needed to paint a long history of interconnection between Sicily and Tunisia without an analysis of uneven power relations between Sicilians and Tunisians.

In this chapter, I analyze how different articulation of Catholic Mediterraneanism in Mazara del Vallo construct symbolic hierarchies between 'open-minded' Catholic Sicilians and 'closed-minded' Muslim Tunisians. By doing so, I will show how Catholic voices consider Sicilians and Tunisians to be primarily distinguished by their different 'cultures', and not by structural inequalities, and consequently idealize past moments of colonial coexistence as a model for the present. The politics of Catholic Mediterraneanism in Mazara, however, can only be understood within the broader context of the Italian public debate on Muslim immigration, the role of Islam in Italy, and Catholic-Muslim relations. Thus, in the first two sections of the chapter, I will frame the tensions that characterized Mazara del Vallo within a broad analysis of the Italian public debate on Islam, secularism, and Muslim immigration. Then, I will turn to analyze Catholic forms of Mediterraneanism in Mazara.

The terms of the debate. Islam, Catholicism and Secularism

I had begun this research project unprepared to talk about about religion. As the 'common-sense' explanation of difference between the Northern and the Southern shore of the Mediterranean, I had considered it an all-too-obvious object of research, and had explicitly decided to not focus on it as an arena of boundary drawing between Sicilians and Tunisians. A few weeks into my field research, however, I was forced to reconsider this position. Towards the end of a two-hour interview with a former Christian Democrat mayor of Mazara del Vallo, just as I had turned off my recorder, and – on my way out of the office – had paused to observe one of the many photos that depicted him shaking hands with major Italian and Tunisian politicians of the 1980s, he suddenly inquired: *'Miss, I presume that you are Catholic?'*. A little taken aback

67 In other words, a southward migration of European settlers to a colonial context in which they were conferred structural privileges.

by this question, especially coming from a middle-class politician, I mumbled something about coming from a historically Catholic family. This, however, was clearly insufficient. *'But miss'* he persisted *'you must be baptized?'* As I confessed reluctantly that I was not, but that sometimes people tell me I should – just to be on the safe side – he chuckled, as he showed me out the door *'Listen to them, they are right! You really should get baptized.'*

This was but the first of many episodes during my fieldwork when I was explicitly interrogated about my religious affiliation. A couple of days later, as I was spending time in the living room of Reem, one of the activists from *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant'*, her gaze suddenly shifted from the Tunisian news report over to the sofa where I was sitting. *'I don't want to offend you'* she started, testing the waters *'but can I ask you a question?'* *'Of course'* I answered, not really sure of the direction of the conversation. *'You speak Arabic, you have travelled a lot in Arab countries, you have lived with us. Have you ever thought of becoming Muslim?'* Less taken aback from the question this time, I answered carefully, in order to close the subject *'Honestly, I never have. But don't worry, please feel free to ask me these types of questions!'*

At a first glance, these conversations might simply appear as interesting anecdotes from ethnographic research. However, over the course of the year, I would be asked about my religious views many times. My knowledge of Arabic sparked many Tunisian acquaintances to pose similar questions to Farah's, about a possible conversion to Islam. Similarly, in my interaction with Catholic institutions, my supposed Catholicism was either assumed as a consequence of my Italianness, or – on some occasions – explicitly questioned. Rather than a sign of religiosity of individuals, I interpreted these questions as proof of the significance of religious affiliation as a marker of belonging and of sympathies. In other words, I came to the conclusion that it was necessary to pay careful attention to religion as a central theme that shaped conversations about borders, citizenship and cross-Mediterranean relations.

Much of the critical literature on European Islamophobia highlights how the European public debate counterposes Islam to secularism (Dakhli, 2005; El-Tayeb, 2011). Certainly, some scholars underline how European models of secularism are based on the secularization of Christianity, and thus derive from a specific localized religious history (Mahmood, 2009; Sayyid & Dabashi, 2015). This interpretation, however, remains largely within the realm of specialized scholarship, and in public debates about secularism in North-Western Europe, any mention of Christianity is usually absent. In the context of Mazara del Vallo, on the contrary, public discussions about Islam were inevitably centered on the counterposition between Islam and Catholicism. Secularism, instead, was hardly ever mentioned.

The nature of the debate in Mazara del Vallo is not unique, but emblematic of the counterposition between Catholicism and Islam in the Italian public debate. This Italian peculiarity in can be explained by two reasons. Firstly, Catholic institutions have historically been service providers to migrants, offering services not provided by national or local institutions. As a consequence, Catholic voices played a central role in framing the debate about Muslim immigration to Italy. Secondly, Italy has adopted a 'weak secular' model (Frisina, 2010, 2011), characterized by an imperfect division between church and state, and an on-going privileged relationship of the Catholic church with the state. The public debate about the role of religion in public institutions exemplifies Italy's 'weak secularism'. Differently from France and Germany (Dakhli, 2005; El-Tayeb, 2011), in fact, debates about women wearing the hijab in

public institutions have been relatively absent⁶⁸. Instead, a recurrent debate which periodically appears in the local and national news is whether schools and other public buildings should continue to display crucifixes, as they traditionally have, or whether they should be removed in the name of secularism and pluralism.

The centrality of Catholicism to the Italian public debate on Islam, however, does not mean that the binaries that characterize the European debate on secularism vs. islam are not present in the country. Counterpositions such as 'western democracy' versus 'eastern despotism', or ideas that Europe represents the land of individual rights, while the Muslim world oppresses individual freedom, are also common in Italy. However, the Italian public debate is singular as it firmly places Catholicism (and not secularism) as emblem of the progressiveness of the 'west'. An example of the specificities of the Italian debate is represented by the high-profile conversion story of the Egyptian-born journalist Magdi Allam, which adds a distinctive Catholic tone to the common 'escape narrative' trope invoked by some people of Muslim descent in Europe (El-Tayeb, 2011). According to this narrative – exemplified by high profile politicians and public figures such as the Dutch Ayaan Hirsi Ali or the French Fadela Amara (El-Tayeb, 2011) – a person of Muslim heritage publicly renounces Islam, due to its 'oppressive nature', to embrace the secular state as the guarantor of individual rights. Magdi Allam's story, however, has a different twist. Historically a progressive commentator on immigration and Islam in the Italian media, he became increasingly critical of Islam and of Italian Muslim organizations in the 1990s, only to publicly convert to Catholicism in the early 2000s through a public baptism by the pope, while continuing to play an important public role in shaping the debate about muslim immigration to Italy. In brief, Allam's 'escape narrative' ends not in a conversion to secularism, but in a conversion to Catholicism.

If Catholicism has played a central role in shaping the Italian public debate on Islam, in what way did Islam then begin to appear in the debate? In the next section, I will trace the emergence of a public debate on Islam in Italy and Sicily, focusing on how the framing of Islam changed over time as a consequence of shifts in immigration flows and changing national migration policies.

Immigration, Catholicism and Islam in the Italian public debate.

The 1970s and 1980s

Prior to the 1990s, Islam received limited public and political attention in Italy. When it did, this was mainly in the context of initiatives of cross-Mediterranean diplomacy spearheaded by the national government, or by the main Italian political parties⁶⁹. While a range of different parties shared an interest in cross-Mediterranean diplomacy, in the post WWII period Catholic visions of cross-Mediterranean relations had a prominent role. Catholic Mediterraneanism, championed by the Christian Democrat mayor of Florence Giorgio la Pira⁷⁰, was based on an

68 This may be partially explained by the limited number of Muslim women employed by state institutions.

69 A range of political parties shared an interest in cross-Mediterranean cooperation, as is exemplified by the work of the National Cultural Association for Italo-Arab cooperation in the 1970s and 1980s, which brought together Communists, Socialists and Christian Democrats (interview with Agostino Spataro, March 2014).

70 Giorgio la Pira was a complex figure, whose influence went well beyond the city of Florence. Professor of Roman Law at the University of Florence, he had been part of the Italian constitutive assembly, as well as

ecumenical approach that saw Christians, Muslims and Jews as three Abrahamic people who, if they coexisted peacefully, could bring together the whole 'family of mankind' (Muci, 2009). As a central meaning point between these three peoples, the Mediterranean sea was thus a strategic area to mediate both regional and global conflicts (Giovannoni, 2014; La Pira & Giovannoni, 2006). This vision was closely related to the position adopted by the Catholic Church following the II Vatican Council⁷¹, which officially accepted and celebrated Ecumenical dialogue with non-Christian religions. It was, however, also aligned with the 'neoatlantic' orientation of Italian foreign policy, according to which Italy should play a key role in mediating between NATO and newly decolonized Arab countries, in order to avoid them entering under the Soviet Union's sphere of influence (Giovannoni, 2014).

In the context of Sicily, the public debate on Islam in the 1980s was also focused on the Island's cross-Mediterranean relations. Newspaper coverage of Islam in the decade between 1980 and 1990 was almost entirely centered on the opening of mosques in the major cities of the island: Palermo and Catania. The founding of these mosques, however, was not a consequence of mobilization of Sicily's immigrant muslim community. Instead, it was strongly tied to aspirations of Sicilian politicians and public intellectuals of strengthening their political connections with North Africa⁷², and launching initiatives of urban regeneration⁷³. The press coverage of the opening of these mosques focused both on their role in bringing to light the island's Arab and Islamic history, and in forging contemporary cross-Mediterranean political and economic relations. A 1980 article in *Giornale di Sicilia* entitled *Allah returns after eight centuries with a mosque* reported how:

'...a mosque, the first in Italy in modern times, has been built in Catania, a city that has recently re-directed its traditional dynamism in commerce towards Mediterranean Africa'
(Quatriglio, 1980)

Similarly, in 1990, an article in *L'Ora* reported the words of the councillor for culture of the Sicilian region, who described the event as *'...an act of civility...'*, then going to explain that:

mayor of Florence during the 1950s. La Pira was an active voice in cold-war Mediterranean diplomacy, as well as tensions around decolonization, such as the Suez Canal crisis, and the creation of the state of Israel (Giovannoni, 2014; La Pira & Giovannoni, 2006).

71 See the 1964 *Nostra Aetate* encyclical on the relation of the church with non-christian religions, spearheaded by Pople John XXIII. The document contains references to a number of religions, but its main focus is to establish commonalities between the three Abrahamic religions: Christianity, Islam and Judaism. This document was originally supposed too cover the relationship between Catholicism and Judaism, but was broadened to include Islam to address tensions around the Palestinian Nakba and the creation of the State of Israel.

72 Catania's mosque was founded in 1980, under the private initiative of Michele Papa, a Sicilian lawyer and advocate for Sicily-Libia cooperation, who had received funding from the Libyan government to fund the construction of the mosque in a restored building in the old center of Catania (Allievi, 2003; Bolzoni, 1980).

73 Palermo's mosque was opened in 1990, in a former church in the historic center of the city. The mayor of the city Leoluca Orlando promoted the opening of the mosque as part of a broader project to regenerate the city's historic core by restoring monuments from its Arab and Islamic past (Merosi, 1990; "Moschea a San Paolino. Zisa: museo dell' Islam," 1990). Inaugurated on November 6th 1990, in the presence of Sicilian public authorities and Tunisian diplomatic ones, the operation of the mosque was strongly influenced by the Tunisian consulate, sparking some commentators to underline its role in surveilling the island's Tunisian diaspora (Allievi, 2003).

'...Sicily can have a unique role in the Mediterranean area, both from a political and economic perspective, and from a cultural one. An island / bridge between Europe and North Africa...'

(Merosi, 1990)

In sum, in the 1970s and 1980s, in Italy in general, and in Sicily in particular, Islam received relatively limited public attention. When it was present in the public debate, this was generally in the context of forging cross-Mediterranean relations with North Africa. In other words, Islam was not an Italian problem.

The 1990s and the 2000s

By the late 1990s, the role of Islam in Italy was at the center of a vivid public debate, largely in the context of a broader discussion on immigration⁷⁴. The key themes in the debate were the compatibility of Islam with Italian and European 'values', and – consequently – the ability of Muslim immigrants to successfully integrate into Italian society. Both of these themes were heavily debated both within the Catholic church and by Italian political parties. Within the Catholic church, Pope John Paul II⁷⁵ and Catholic grassroots organizations⁷⁶ that had been providing services to migrants since the 1980s, embraced an explicitly pro-dialogue position. The Pope, in particular, framed Catholicism and Islam as a common 'front' against the decline of religiosity in Europe⁷⁷. In contrast, more conservative bishops critiqued the Church's excessive opening to inter-religious dialogue and to immigration from Muslim countries. Some of these bishops justified their position by citing incompatibility between Catholicism and Islam, and thus advocated for the the Italian state to privilege the entrance of Christian immigrants into Italy⁷⁸. Other bishops, instead, framed their opposition to Muslim immigration by casting supposed Muslim conflation of religion and politics as a threat to Europe's secularism and enlightened tradition⁷⁹ (Guolo, 2003). Tensions between the conservative and the pro-dialogue position exploded at the 1998 national episcopal conference⁸⁰, which ended up adopting the more conservative stance with a declaration discouraging mixed marriages between Catholics and Muslims⁸¹ (Guolo, 2003).

74 Islam followed the peak in public discussion of migration (which began in the early 1990s) by a few years. Islam, however, received much less public attention than immigration. In *La Repubblica*, for instance, in the early 2000s only 30 articles discussed Islam, as opposed to over 200 articles on immigration.

75 John Paul II was pope from 1978 to 2005.

76 These included the Caritas, or the Migrants association.

77 John Paul II had an open position towards Islam. However he also coined the concept of a 'cultural balance of a territory', according to which minority religions should be respected and protected by the state as long as they did not question the religious majority (Guolo, 2003).

78 Giacomo Biffi, bishop of Bologna between 1984 and 2003, adopted this position.

79 Carlo Maria Martini, archbishop of Milan between 1979 and 2002, adopted this position.

80 The Italian national newspaper *Repubblica* described these tensions in the following way: *"When the theme of immigration emerges, the assembly of Italian bishops looks like a sea crossed by contrasting winds. Because on the one hand, there is the Christian duty to welcome whoever knocks on your door. But on the other, there is the fear of bishops who see their territory invaded."* (Politi, 1998)

81 This position, which was also espoused by Cardinal Ratzinger (later Pope Benedict XVI between 2005 and 2013), was based on the assumption that these inter-religious marriages generally eventually led to a conversion of the Catholic spouse towards Islam (Guolo, 2003).

Italian political parties were similarly divided. In general, their differing positions on Islam were similar to those of analogous parties elsewhere in Europe: the far-left adopted a multicultural position, the center left a secular-liberal one, while the right espoused more openly Islamophobic views. However, these differences were not always clear cut. In the late 1990s, in fact, center-left wing parties re-echoed fears of Muslim fundamentalism⁸², as well as associations between Islam and the lack of women's rights⁸³. At the same time, while some right wing intellectuals explicitly adopted a 'clash of civilizations' theory⁸⁴, a few center-right wing politicians schooled in La Pira's Christian Democrat vision of inter-religious dialogue and cross-Mediterranean diplomacy, were more open to the presence of Muslims in Italy. The most openly and unapologetic Islamophobic party, however, was the Northern League (Guolo, 2003; Massari, 2006). This formerly regional secessionist party, which – in the 1990s – had shifted its discourse from a critique of Southern Italians to an opposition to immigration, expressed its opposition to Islam as part of a broader discourse around the defense of regional identity against the transnational flows of capital and people, and against centralized political power⁸⁵.

In the context of Sicily, the public debate around Islam also shifted in the 1990s from an attention to cross-Mediterranean diplomacy to a focus on Muslim immigration, as well as an association of Islam with risks of possible terror attacks. The debate, however, was infused with regional specificities, as public commentators would often underline Sicily's unique geographical and cultural proximity to North Africa. In some cases, they would do so to underline the island's supposed vulnerability to a terrorist attack, be it originating from North Africa or from the island's Muslim population⁸⁶. More frequently, instead, commentators would cast Sicily as an example of dialogue and coexistence with the Muslim Southern Mediterranean⁸⁷. An example of this position is represented by the editorial of the history and philosophy high school professor Maurizio Barbato, who – writing in the immediate aftermath of the 2001 September 11 attacks on the World Trade Center – pondered:

“...what meaning can expressions such as... 'a war on western civilization' have for us, Mediterraneans of the South?...living in an in-between zone...allows us...to be Americans and Arabs at the same time, and to chose a future of coexistence...being cosmopolitan and capable of coexistence are the most distinctive signs of western civilization...”

(Barbato, 2001, pp. i, xv)

82 The center left wing paper La Repubblica, for instance, published a series of articles with titles such as *'Islamic peril in Italy'* (Allam, 1998a) or *'Italy ready for the challenge against Islamic terror'* (Allam, 1998b).

83 An example of this is Magdi Allam's La Repubblica editorial entitled *“The other half of Islam. Voyage to the Italian harems”*, in which he suggested the presence of widespread practices of polygamy in Italy. In the article, he warned the reader that *“...while politicians and journalists discuss the chador in schools, they do not realized that the real attack has already started against the pillar on which Italian society is erected: the monogamous family”* (Allam, 1998d).

84 See, for instance, the work of Oriana Fallaci and Giovanni Sartori (Sciortino, 2002).

85 This position is clearly stated in the party's 1998 statement 'Padania, identity and multi-racial societies' (see <http://www.network54.com/Forum/151860/message/999783871> accessed 9 March 2018).

86 See for instance (Lauria, 2001; Lopapa, 2001a, 2001b) Some commentators also pointed to the presence of Nato military bases on the island as a reason for its vulnerability (Lopapa, 2001a).

87 A key proponent of this position was Salvatore Cuffaro, the center-right President of the Sicilian region at the time of the World Trade Center attacks in 2001 (Lopapa, 2001a).

In newspaper articles adopting this type of rhetoric, Mazara del Vallo repeatedly appeared as an example of Sicilian traditions and aptitude towards peaceful coexistence and inter-religious dialogue (Giacalone, 2002; Transirico, 2002). But how did the Mazarese public and political debate address questions of Muslim immigration, Islam in Sicily, and inter-religious dialogue? In the following sections, I will turn to analyze this debate.

Immigration, Catholicism and Islam in Mazara del Vallo

On one of my first visits to Mazara del Vallo, as I was strolling through the streets of the old Casbah, I was startled by the call of the Adhan interrupting the silence of the afternoon siesta. A customary part of the soundscape of many parts of the Middle East and North Africa, it caught me by surprise, as this call to prayer is hardly ever heard in Italy or elsewhere in Europe, regardless of how many mosques are present in the territory. Despite its audible Adhan, however, Mazara del Vallo does not have a mosque. In the 1980s, under the mayorship of the Christian Democrat Nicola Vella, there had been some talk of constructing one. As a strong advocate of cross-Mediterranean diplomatic relations, Vella had pushed for the construction of a mosque, and sought to donate a municipally-owned piece of land on the outskirts of the town for this purpose. The explanations for why this construction never took place are varied, ranging from a lack of funding (Corleo, 1981), to a lack of political will of the following administration⁸⁸, to an indifference of the Tunisian community⁸⁹, to an opposition of the then-bishop of Mazara del Vallo⁹⁰. Regardless of the reason, by the early 2000s the call for prayer was emitted from a store-front converted into a prayer room on one of the small side streets of the Casbah, marked only by a small bilingual Arabic-Italian sign ‘*Masjed Al-Taqwa*’ / ‘*Moschea Ettakwa*’⁹¹.

If a contemporary Muslim presence in Mazara del Vallo is scarcely visible, this is not the case for the history of Catholic/Muslims relations in the area. A mere five minute walk from *Masjed Al-Taqwa*, above the door of the Cathedral on the main square of the city's old center, a marble statue depicts a triumphant count Roger of Altavilla wielding a sword on horseback, as he tramples over a cowering 'moor', thus completing the 'reconquista' of Sicily from two centuries of Arab and Muslim rule⁹².

88 Interview with Nicola Vella, March 2014.

89 Interview with long-term Sicilian activist for Tunisian migrant rights, January 2014.

90 Interview with locally-based L'Ora and La Repubblica journalist, February 2014.

91 This prayer room was managed by an Islamic cultural association, founded by a Moroccan national and two Italian converts to Islam. The association had no official relations or funding from the municipality (interview with Tunisian social worker, February 2014).

92 Roger I of Altavilla was the Norman count who led the conquest of Sicily, thus ending two centuries of Arab rule in 1071.



Figure 8. Statue of Roger of Altavilla on the facade of the Cathedral of Mazara del Vallo

The Casbah

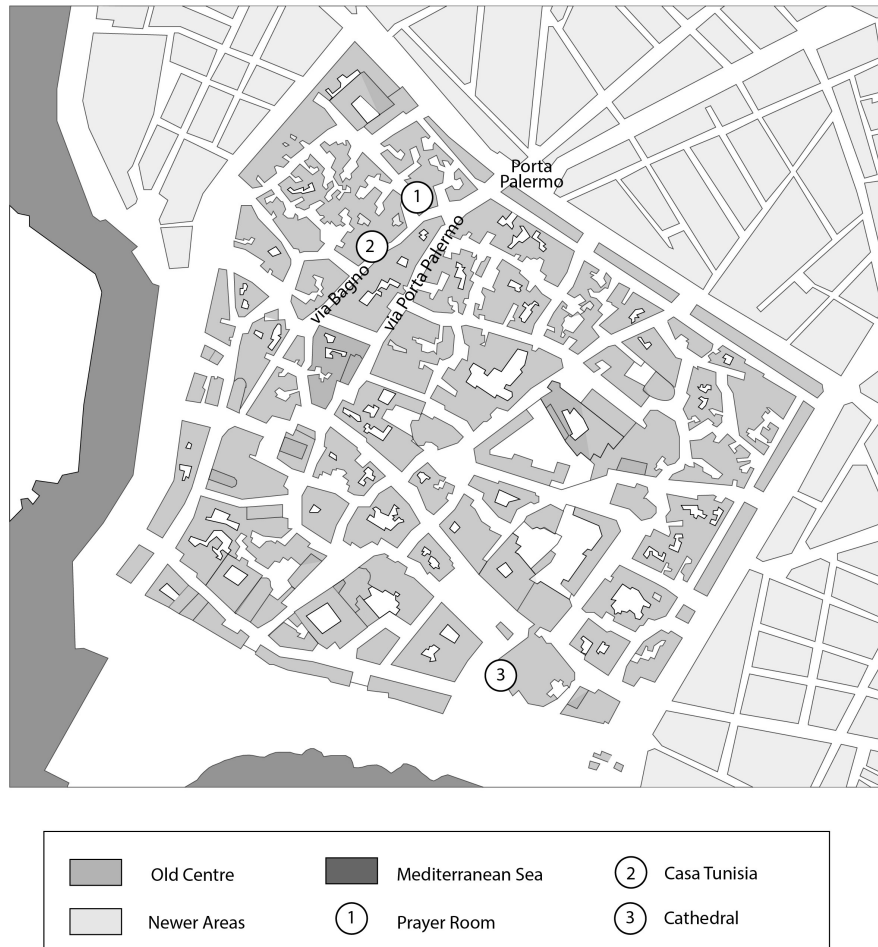


Figure 10. Map of Prayer Romm and of the Cathedral of Mazara del Vallo

This history of 'reconquista' was explicitly invoked by Pope John Paul II in his visit to Mazara del Vallo in 1993. In his homily during the Mass of May 8th on the Mediterranean seafront, he invoked this history both to celebrate Mazara's return to Christianity, and to celebrate the city's 'natural' propensity towards inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue:

“During the last nine centuries, different events have marked the destiny of these lands: there have been multiple dominations and civilizations...of which the memory lies impressed...in the monuments of this City....ever since, nine centuries ago, the Great Count Roger of Altavilla put an end to almost three hundred years of Islamic presence...and founded this Church, the Gospel has continued to echo on these shores. True crossroads of the history between two

civilizations, your frontier Church has always represented, and continues to represent, the natural point of contact and dialogue between the Christian and the Muslim world, contributing...to a culture of tolerance and peace.”

John Paul II, Mass on the Lungomare San Vito, Mazara del Vallo, Saturday May 8th 1993

It may appear a paradox that a call to dialogue, tolerance and peace in the Mediterranean would celebrate a bloody 'reconquest' of Sicily from Muslim rulers as a testimony to a long history of coexistence. Similar contradictions, however, characterized the Catholic Mediterraneanist projects promoted by the diocese of Mazara del Vallo. While Catholic voices in Mazara del Vallo were strong advocates for migrant integration, inter-religious dialogue, and cross-Mediterranean cooperation, they always implicitly assumed a Catholic imprint to these initiatives. They considered, in fact, that Catholicism (sometimes conflated with Italian-ness and European-ness) was a 'modern' and open-minded religion, able to accommodate democracy and diversity in a way that Islam was not.

Three main catholic voices articulated this discourse, in the context of their broader activities of service provision to migrants and of cross-Mediterranean programs. The first were institutions of the 'high' church, such as the Bishop of Mazara del Vallo, or the diocese's office for ecumenical dialogue. They mainly operated at the political and intellectual level, and had little grassroots contact with Mazara's Tunisian (or, for that matter, Sicilian) community. The second were grassroots Catholic organizations, which had been providing services to Tunisian migrants, such as after-school programs, or translation services, since the 1970s. By the early 2000s, the main organizations offering these types of services in Mazara were a group of Franciscan Nuns⁹³, and the Fondazione San Vito⁹⁴ – a Catholic foundation connected with the Caritas. The third Catholic voice framing the public debate about Tunisian immigration and Islam in Mazara were Catholic religion teachers in Mazara's public schools. While they did not directly provide services to the Tunisian community, they were nonetheless prominent voices discussing the 'integration' of Tunisian children. In the following section, I will analyze the discourses and practices of these three Catholic voices in two types of Mediterraneanist projects: ones focused on migrant integration – and consequently inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue – and ones focused on cross-Mediterranean cooperation.

93 Franciscan Nuns had been called to Mazara del Vallo in the 1970s, under the auspices of the then-bishop of Mazara del Vallo, Monsignor Costantino Trapani (Marusso, 1980). The nuns ran a series of social programs, including an after-school program, a donation center for clothes, and assistance with paperwork. Located at the heart of the Casbah, they worked closely with the Municipality, which funded some of their activities (“Il sindaco regala tre computer alle suore,” 2011).

94 The Fondazione San Vito ran an after-school program for middle school and high-school age children, provided social services through a Tunisian social worker, and organized job-training programs. The foundation had a conflictual relationship with the municipality, as its director was an outspoken critic of the lack of public services for migrants, and of the municipality's Mediterraneanist projects. In reference to this situation, the director of the foundation commented *'the municipality has always been absent...apart from big declarations, or paying so-called 'expert consultants' who do not do much 50,000 euros. It is really a disgrace! We have proposed various projects to the municipality, but all they are interested in is marketing, publicizing Mazara as the capital of tolerance, you know...things like that!'* (Interview, February 2014).

Catholic Mediterraneanism. Integration and inter-religious dialogue.

All Mazarese Catholic institutions that provided services or worked closely with Tunisian migrants considered inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue to be central pillars of their work. When discussing this, however, they were extremely careful to distance themselves from any explicit effort to convert Muslim Tunisians. This approach had been in place since the first days of Catholic service-provision to Tunisian migrants. In a 1984 article to the Catholic paper 'Nigrizia'⁹⁵, in fact, Franciscan Nuns had explained:

“We...have been living amongst Tunisians since 1978...in the Casbah...we try to help them in their needs...but we stay away from teaching them catechism, or pushing them to baptize. We encourage them to be good muslims, to observe Ramadan, and to pray...”

In a 2014 interview, the director of one of the Catholic after-school programs – an ordained priest – made analogous observations:

“...what people appreciate the most, coming from a different religious background, is gratuitousness – we don't ask for anything in exchange – and respect for their religious culture...in our after-school center, we celebrate both Christian and Muslim holidays”

Promotion of inter-religious dialogue, however, did not mean that Catholic figures considered Islam and Catholicism as two religions with equal footing. Indeed, a common trope that emerged in the words of a range of Catholic voices, was that Catholicism was much more open to inter-religious dialogue than Islam. This vision was embraced most strongly by organizations of the 'high' church, such as the diocese's office for ecumenical dialogue, or – indeed – the bishop himself⁹⁶. However, Catholic figures working with Tunisian migrants would often echo similar sentiments. Indeed, the same priest who had celebrated inter-religious dialogue in his after-school programs, also explained how this dialogue could also be difficult, due to a supposed totalizing role of religion for Tunisian migrants: *“For them”* he explained to me in an interview *“Islam is not really a choice, but a culture. For them religion and culture are connected, so if you convert you are a traitor”*.

Catholic religion teachers would often invoke similar ideas as an explanation for the lack of 'integration' of Tunisian children in schools. Speaking of the situation in her middle school, for instance, Alessandra – a Catholic religion teacher – explained:

“There is integration at school, but...outside...the roads are separated. And this is because of a specific cultural process of [Tunisian] kids: religion, tradition. At school these children live in a western framework, but at home they are immersed in Islamic culture. At school, they enter Western culture, and they also

⁹⁵ Nigrizia is a magazine founded by the Catholic combonian missionaries, active in the African continent.

⁹⁶ In an interview in February 2014, the bishop of Mazara explained to me how *“...we attempted to create an intercultural dialogue as a premise to start an inter-religious dialogue, which is very difficult, and far from happening organically...”*

participate in religious activities. At the beginning, if we organized a visit to a church (even as a cultural activity) they would refuse to go, but then they realized that they could visit, nothing would happen to them! But the problem is that at home they breathe Arab culture... ”.

These words not only assume that Tunisian children are not mixing with their Italian peers due to the 'totalizing' role of their religion, but also create an implicit hierarchy between an assumed 'closed-minded Arab-Islamic culture', and a Western/Christian one which is open to inter-religious dialogue. This assumption implicitly suggests that proximity with Catholic institutions, and interaction with Catholic students, is thus a means to open the minds of Muslim students to dialogue.

This type of analysis, articulated by Catholic grassroots service providers, was also echoed by the higher echelons of the catholic church. In an interview I carried out with the Bishop of Mazara del Vallo in 2014, in fact, he explained the difficulties of inter-religious dialogue in Mazara, and in the Mediterranean region more generally:

“...the contact with Islam is provocative, because it has the religious element in its DNA...it is part of their identity...we come from an evolution in which the civil and the religious...have found a distinction and an equilibrium...in the Islamic world this distinction between civil and religious...does not exist. So everything that they live is three or four centuries behind our cultural standards...The West, and Europe in particular, is the land of law and rights...In the Muslim world, the culture of participation does not exist...so it is difficult for that cultural context to understand the value of a democratic system. ”

This framework of analysis is not surprising. It echoes well-rehearsed Orientalist tropes counterposing an enlightened democratic West to an 'obscurantist' and 'despotic' East (Said, 1979), as well as the position adopted by some Italian Catholic bishops in the 1998 episcopal conference, who had opposed Muslim immigration on the grounds that it threatened a tradition of European secularism and enlightenment. By adopting this position, however, the bishop ignored processes of secularization that occurred over the previous century in different parts of the Middle East and North Africa, including Tunisia itself (El-Tayeb, 2011). In addition, he also ignored the vivid political debates that were occurring within Mazara del Vallo's Tunisian community. Indeed, following the 2011 Tunisian revolution, this working-class community which had historically not engaged politically, was openly discussing politics. Far from being a compact unit, Mazara's Tunisians were debating support for different Tunisian⁹⁷ and Italian political parties. Certainly, before 2011 Tunisian political organizing leading to events such as the contestations described in Chapters 2 and 3 was rare. This, however, was largely due to surveillance from the Tunisian consulate under the dictatorship of Ben Ali⁹⁸ – a regime which democratic Europe had actively supported.

Alessandra's identification of 'Islamic culture' as the reason for Tunisian immigrant

97 In 2014, the main political division with regards to Tunisian politics was between supporters of the Islamist party Al-Nahda, and the secular party Nidaa Tounes.

98 Interview with Tunisian activists from *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant*, February 2014.

children's difficulty of adaptation is also a common trope. Fatima El-Tayeb (2011) and Salman Sayyid (2015) underline how the European public debate often explains the marginalization of youth of immigrant descent by attributing it to their 'culture', rather than to limited employment opportunities, or systemic racism. Identifying 'religion' or 'culture' as a source of marginalization then creates a static and monolithic picture of Muslim immigrant communities, who – it is assumed – can only be changed through their gradual approximation to 'European culture'. When Alessandra articulated this trope, she ignored the diversity of views and internal debates on religion within Mazara del Vallo's Tunisian community. Indeed, throughout my fieldwork, in the working-class families of Farah, Hiba and Ons (whom we met in Chapter 3), as well as in others, religious themes – such as what being religious meant or differences between Catholicism and Islam – were constantly debated, and the conclusions were often anything but conservative. For instance, marriage between Christian men and Muslim women, a union that was not legally recognized by the Tunisian state until 2017, was often justified in these conversations through references to love⁹⁹, or class-considerations, such as *“I would rather my daughter marry an educated Italian, than one of those unemployed Tunisians who sit around all day in Porta Palermo”*¹⁰⁰. In addition, in these conversations, the de-facto rareness of these marriages within Mazara's Tunisian community was explained by racism as much as by religion¹⁰¹. In brief, if Catholic voices in Mazara identified a binary opposition between 'closed minded' muslims and 'open minded' Catholics, and cast approximation to Catholicism as a means of 'moderating' and 'modernizing' the views of Tunisian migrants, debates about religion and politics were raging within Mazara's Tunisian community.

Overall, this section has shown how notions of inter-religious dialogue, which inspired the activities of Catholic organizations and individuals working closely with Tunisian migrants, were rooted in the assumption that Catholicism was a 'more progressive' religion than Islam (due to its intrinsic nature, or to a European history of secularization of Christianity), and – consequently – that Catholics were more open to inter-religious dialogue¹⁰². This assumption was clear in the bishop's interview, in which he explicitly stated that Europe was 'ahead' of the Middle East and North Africa, a region in which he assumed that religion had a totalizing role. However, it was also implied by various Catholic service providers and teachers, who cast religion and 'culture' as the reason for the difficult 'integration' of Tunisian schoolchildren. In essence, Catholic celebrations of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue and coexistence implicitly or explicitly assumed a hierarchy between 'European Christian culture' and 'North African Muslim culture', in which the former was assumed to be a more neutral terrain of dialogue and exchange, to which Tunisians should adapt in order to successfully integrate. In the next section, I will show how similar hierarchies emerged in the other main Mediterraneanist

99 During a conversation at Hiba's house, for instance, one of her female cousins explained *'Of course, our religion prefers it if you marry someone from the same religious background. But what if you fall in love with someone else? We also have to respect that!'*

100 Interview with Tunisian mother, Mazara del Vallo, March 2014.

101 In an interview with a Tunisian social worker on the topic, she explained: *'Of course, it is forbidden for a Muslim woman to marry a non-Muslim. But also, a mother might tell her daughter “Be careful about marrying an Italian. At the end of the day, his family will never really consider you an equal.”'* (Interview, Mazara del Vallo, February 2014).

102 The assumption that Catholics were more secular than Muslims also emerged occasionally in the Italian press. For instance, a 1998 article in the national section of La Repubblica defines secular non-practicing muslims as 'Christianized Muslims' (islamici cristianizzati) (Allam, 1998c).

catholic project: cross-Mediterranean cooperation.

Catholic Mediterraneanism. Cross-Mediterranean cooperation and the politics of the past.

Mazarese Catholic institutions' advocacy for inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue was also connected to a broader vision of cross-Mediterranean relations. In an interview I carried out with the Bishop of Mazara in early 2014, he explained this vision through a language that echoed a longer tradition of Catholic Mediterraneanism:

“For more than a millennium Sicily has been a meeting place and a bridge between civilizations and cultures...the vocation of this land is to provide a cultural basis for the Italian government's vision of the Mediterranean as a development opportunity...this draws on the political tradition of great enlightened men of the past, such as La Pira, who...saw the Mediterranean as a site of peace and a model for new ways of being between people: in other words, a Mediterranean humanism...”

In practice, this vision was materialized in the twinning activities between the diocese of Tunis and the diocese of Mazara del Vallo – an agreement which had been in place since 1999, but to which Domenico Mogavero gave new life once he became bishop of Mazara in 2007. Under a vision of cross-Mediterranean dialogue between Catholic institutions in Sicily and in North Africa, he organized a periodic meeting of North African bishops in Mazara del Vallo, framing this as a “...*dialogue between churches, as a first step to create an inter-cultural dialogue, and – eventually – an inter-religious one*”¹⁰³.

In order to comprehend the contemporary context in which Catholic institutions were operating in North Africa, however, it is necessary to briefly examine their history. The modern development of Catholic institutions in Tunisia was strongly connected to the establishment of European interests in the territory. The institutional presence of the Catholic church in Tunisia was consolidated in the mid-19th century, when the growth of the European population in the territory led to the creation of an Apostolic Vicariate in Tunisia¹⁰⁴ (Soumille, 1975; Sugiyama, 2007). This would soon be transformed into a full diocese¹⁰⁵, following the establishment of the French Protectorate over Tunisia in 1881. Thanks to the French Government's pressure, the Vatican placed the French bishop Charles Lavigerie, former archbishop of Algiers and strong supporter of the French colonial project, at the head of the diocese. Under the French Protectorate, Catholic infrastructure in Tunisia grew through the establishment of a network of parishes throughout the Tunisian territory, reflecting the growing Catholic population in Tunisia thanks to Sicilian immigration (Soumille, 1975). French Catholic circles applauded the expansion of the Catholic church in Tunisia in a language not that different from the bishop of Mazara Vincenzo Mogavero. More specifically, they celebrated the establishment of a 'new

103 Interview with Bishop of Mazara del Vallo, February 2014.

104 An apostolic vicariate is a form of territorial jurisdiction of the Catholic church in contexts characterized by a minority of Catholics, where other structures of the Catholic church are not present. It is usually part of the infrastructure of missionaries.

105 This was established formally in the 1893 concordat between the Vatican and France that allowed France to appoint the bishop of Carthage in exchange for funding for the diocese from the French State.

church of Africa' – part of a broader reaffirmation of the 'latin' character of North Africa, and a return to First Century catholicism of St Cyprian and St Augustin¹⁰⁶ (Soumille, 1975).

Following Tunisian decolonization in 1954, and the departure of the majority of the European population of the territory, the Catholic church saw its power and influence greatly reduced. The newly independent Tunisian state allowed the presence of the Catholic church in Tunisia as long as it did not intervene in politics, but greatly curtailed its privileges, obliging the restitution of the majority of Church properties to the Tunisian state (Tartamella, 2011). By the early 2000s, the activities of the diocese of Tunis were quite limited¹⁰⁷, as were Catholic communities in the territory, mainly comprised of descendants of European settlers and Subsaharan African migrants.

The presence of a small yet long-rooted Catholic community in Tunisia, however, was central to the twinning program between the dioceses of Mazara del Vallo and of Tunis. The bishop was a strong advocate for this twinning program, but its operational side was managed primarily by the Fondazione San Vito – one of the Catholic grassroots organizations that provided services to Mazara's Tunisian community. The twinning program involved three main activities. The first was support to Catholic institutions in Tunisia, through the organization of trips for Sicilian Catholics to carry out volunteer work, such as the restoration of buildings owned by the diocese of Tunis¹⁰⁸. The second activity was bureaucratic and economic assistance to the Tunisia-based family members of Tunisian migrants in Mazara del Vallo – thus a territorial extension of Catholic service-providers' work in Sicily¹⁰⁹. Finally, the third activity involved service-provision to the 'Sicilians of Tunis': a small elderly community of descendants of Sicilian settlers who had migrated to Tunisia at the turn of the 20th Century, and whose extended family had generally left Tunisia following decolonization.

The presence of this community was key to the vision of cross-Mediterranean relations and inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue promoted by Mazarese Catholic institutions. When describing his work with the elderly descendants of Sicilian settlers in Tunisia, in fact, one of the Mazarese Catholic priests who had spearheaded the twinning program underlined how their presence was proof of a long history of cross-Mediterranean connections between Sicily and Tunisia – a history which could serve as a model for the present.

“During one of our trips” he explained “we realized that there was still a Sicilian community in Tunisia, mainly seniors...in Tunis, we can still see one of

106 Two figures from the early evangelization of North Africa under the Roman Empire.

107 Catholic missionaries were active in providing medical assistance in marginalized regions and communities, as well as providing refuge for victims of domestic violence and single mothers. In addition, the order of the White Fathers (originally brought to Tunis by Lavignerie to run Catholic schools) had a small library and research center, through which they promoted and facilitated the work of foreign academics. Officially, the Catholic church in Tunisia did not engage in proselytism, however – informally – some Catholic clergy members would discretely celebrate the occasional conversion.

108 The organizer of these trips would often stress how they also had a cultural exchange objective, as participants in these volunteer missions would then have the chance to get to know Tunisia and challenge their stereotypes about the country.

109 One type of service included helping the families of Tunisian migrants in Mazara del Vallo access the pensions of deceased spouses – a service that Tunisia-based families of migrants should have been able to access through the Tunisian social security system, but which, in practice, was fraught with delays and inconsistencies (for a more detailed discussion, see Chapter 3).

the signs of their historic presence: there is still a church in the 'Petite Sicile' ...relationships were easier back then¹¹⁰ ...Sicilians and Tunisians were close to each other than the French...for the day of the Assumption¹¹¹ on August 15th, both Muslims and Jews would participate in processions. People would celebrate together, it was a lot more natural, as it should be”

This priest was hardly the only Mazarese Catholic figure to reference late 19th and early 20th Century Tunisia as a model for contemporary coexistence between (Muslim) Tunisians and (Christian) Sicilians. As the quote that opened the chapter has shown, the bishop of Mazara mobilized this history both as a model for his vision of Mediterraneanist inter-religious dialogue, and as testimony of Sicilian experience and propensity to deal with religious and cultural diversity. In an interview in February 2014, he elaborated further on the significance of this history:

“...when Tunisians arrived to Mazara...what taught us how to handle these situations was the reception that Sicilians had received in Tunisia, when – at the beginning of the last century – migration used to go in the opposite direction. Sicilians went there not to colonize, but to work, and they brought with them a large part of our civilization and our christianity. So they were not treated as invaders, but as friendly people – if different. For this reason, when migration changed direction, and Tunisians started migrating to Mazara, it was not difficult for us to welcome them!”

While at the heart of both the Catholic priest and the bishop's words was an invocation for peaceful coexistence, neither of these quotes celebrating inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue mention the structural conditions under which Sicilians and Tunisians were meeting in colonial Tunisia. Indeed, directly or indirectly both quotes distance Sicilians from European colonial projects over North Africa, casting a structural equivalence between Tunisian contemporary northward migration to Sicily and Sicilian southward migration and settlement in colonial Tunisia. Additionally, neither the bishop nor the Catholic priest mention the conditions under which churches were built in North Africa, nor the tight relationships that existed between the Catholic Church and French colonial authorities.

Two elements of this invocation of the past echo some of the hierarchies implied by the Catholic Mediterraneanist view of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue in Mazara described in the previous section. The first is a reference to Muslims participating in Catholic celebrations as an example of inter-religious dialogue – a framing similar to that of the Catholic religion teacher who had pointed to Muslim students' visits to Churches as proof of their gradual integration and opening up to religious diversity. This framing implies that in order for inter-religious dialogue to be possible, Muslims must be open to Christianity, as no Catholic figures in Mazara mention Catholics participating in Muslim holidays in contemporary Mazara, or in historic Tunisia. This framing implicitly reinforces the notion that Christianity is a more 'open-

110 Under the French Protectorate, which lasted until 1954.

111 Catholic holiday celebrating the assumption of the Virgin Mary into heaven after her death. In Italy, this is a national holiday, widely celebrated as the de-facto summer holiday, devoid of its religious connotations.

minded' religion to dialogue. The second element is the bishop's assertion that Sicilians are open to Tunisian immigration, as well as intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, thanks to their history of Southward migration and settlement in colonial Tunisia. By casting Sicilians as modern Mediterranean subjects, not only thanks to their religion, but also to their history of migration, this framing contributes to the broader assumption that Sicilians are more 'modern' and 'open-minded' than Tunisians.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed the Mediterraneanist visions and projects of Catholic institutions, that – alongside the municipality – framed the Mazarese public debate about immigration and cross-Mediterranean cooperation. All Catholic voices in Mazara embraced ideas of inter-religious and inter-cultural dialogue, and thus rejected ideas of a 'clash of civilizations', and notions of the Mediterranean region being prone to religious conflict. However, their vision did not cast (Catholic) Sicilians and (Muslim) Tunisians as equal participants in this dialogue. Drawing on well-rehearsed orientalist tropes of eastern 'despotism' vs. western 'democracy' (Said, 1979), as well as a pan-European framing of Islam as difficultly compatible with diverse and pluralist societies, they considered Catholicism as a more 'open-minded' religion than Islam, and thus exposure to Catholicism as a means to 'modernize' Mazara's Tunisians. In essence, Catholic Mediterraneanist projects created a symbolic hierarchy between Sicilians and Tunisians in the realm of 'culture'.

Structural inequalities between Sicilians and Tunisians, instead, were not addressed in Catholic Mediterraneanist projects¹¹². By casting Islam as a more 'closed-minded' and 'totalizing' religion to Catholicism, in fact, Mazarese Catholic voices framed 'culture' as the source of the marginalization and of Tunisian youth, rather than – for instance – their precarious economic situation described in Chapter 3. This focus on cultural difference as the reason for difficult coexistence implies that Sicilians and Tunisians are intrinsically different, and that consequently it is necessary to find the right model of coexistence in order to avoid conflict. Catholic voices identified this model in late 19th and early 20th Century colonial Tunisia, which – thanks in part to their lack of attention to structural inequalities – they considered a space of peaceful coexistence between Sicilians and Tunisians. In other words, they framed cosmopolitan colonial Tunisia as a site of coexistence between difference that could form a model for contemporary multicultural Europe¹¹³. In the next chapter, however, I will provide a different reading of colonial Tunisia, focusing on the hierarchies and uneven power relations that characterized that space, and showing how the celebration of Mediterranean coexistence alongside the production of inequality has a long history.

112 Certainly, some of the Catholic grassroots organizations explicitly criticized Tunisian labor exploitation, as well as the lack of public services for Tunisian migrants. However, this did not prevent them from still casting 'culture' as a source of difficulties of adaptation faced by Tunisian youth in Mazara.

113 As the conclusion will show, this vision is also shared by Sicilian intellectuals and migration activists (see, for instance Blandi (2012)).

Section Three

Mediterraneanism and the Politics of the Past

Chapter 5

'Fusion des races'. Tracing of the boundaries of Europeanness

Introduction

“...when I was young, I used to live in the Medina...our Arab neighbors were very nice...but the Arabs were very much oppressed by the Europeans. Poor things, they didn't count for anything!...the first time I went to Palermo, just as the ship entered port I started crying. When my father asked me why, I answered: 'How is it possible that Italians are sweeping the streets?'. You see, in Tunisia I was used to only see Arabs do this type of job, never a European!”

With these words, 93-year old Giuseppina described her childhood memories growing up in 1930s and 1940s colonial Tunisia. Giuseppina, who now lives in a comfortable apartment on the outskirts of Florence, was born in Tunis in the second decade of the 20th century. Her family had a similar history to that of the other 'Italians of Tunis' of the pre-WWII years: originally from the Sicilian countryside, they had emigrated south to French Protectorate Tunisia at the turn of the 20th Century, in order to flee from the poverty that characterized the island in the decades following Italian unification. Differently from the majority of this community, however, Giuseppina had remained in Tunisia following decolonization, only moving to Italy in the 1970s for her children's higher education.

Giuseppina's description of her childhood points to a series of characteristics of colonial Tunisia. On one hand, she describes a situation of proximity and familiarity between Sicilians and Tunisians. Her family, similarly to many other Sicilians, lived in the old Arab neighborhood (the Medina), and had frequent and friendly daily relations with Tunisians. On the other, however, her words clearly describe a society marked by hierarchies between Sicilians (Europeans) and Tunisians – a hierarchy that was clearly visible to her eyes as a small girl, who clearly associated menial tasks such as street cleaning with work done by Arabs. Indeed, as she continued the interview, Giuseppina would further elaborate on Sicilian prejudice towards Tunisians, when she explained how, following decolonization, her father Vito had closed his tailoring business as “...he could not accept that he would have to make clothes for Arab clients! Because before, he had only worked for French or Italians.”

Giuseppina's words provide a more complex portrait of colonial Tunisia than the accounts of the bishop of Mazara del Vallo and of the Catholic priest described in Chapter 4. These Catholic figures, in fact, had portrayed French Protectorate Tunisia as an example of peaceful coexistence between Sicilians and Tunisians, two equal populations divided by their different religions and cultures, but who had learned to coexist in cosmopolitan Tunis. In other words, they had described colonial Tunisia as a model of coexistence between difference. Moreover, by casting histories of Sicilian southward migration to Tunisia as structurally equivalent to contemporary Tunisian northward migration, they had completely ignored the broader colonial context within which Sicilian southward migration occurred, as well as the

position of Sicilians with this North African colonial society.

In this chapter, taking inspiration from Giuseppina's words, I will provide a quite different reading of colonial Tunisia from that of Mazarese Catholic figures. Through the lens of colonial schools, I will argue that French Protectorate Tunisia was not so much a site of coexistence between Sicilians and Tunisians, but one of their differentiation. Colonial schools, as – indeed – other agencies of socialization, played a key role in 'modernizing' and 'civilizing' a poor Sicilian population, and thus differentiating Sicilians from Tunisians. Additionally, I will show that while French authorities in the territory explicitly embraced theories of Mediterranean coexistence, this was a vision of coexistence that was perfectly compatible with material inequalities and symbolic hierarchies between the different populations who lived in the territory. In brief, through this analysis, I frame colonial Tunisia as a site of material and symbolic drawing of the boundaries of European-ness, and I argue that – in this context – notions of mixing and coexistence were integral to colonial rule.

This chapter focuses primarily on the first three decades of French colonial rule in Tunisia, between 1881 and 1911. Certainly, over the seven decades of French rule between 1881 and 1954, colonial institutions and policies changed considerably¹¹⁴. In addition, shifting geopolitical configurations in Europe¹¹⁵ had repercussions on inter-communal relations in Tunisia, as well as French colonial policy. However, the first three decades of the protectorate period are particularly significant for two main reasons. Firstly, as the establishment of the French protectorate re-organized long-standing relations between different national and linguistic communities, this was a moment of profound debate between French colonial authorities, European diplomatic missions and the Tunisian Huseinid ruling family about the status of different populations in Tunisia (Largueche, Clancy-Smith, & Audet, 2001). Secondly, this was the moment of establishment of a series of institutions (such as the legal system) that classified Tunisia's population, and governed it according to this classification (Lewis, 2014).

The chapter will firstly provide a background on the demographics and politics of turn of 20th Century Tunisia, and on elite French and Italian views of Sicilian migrants. Then, it will turn to analyze how French and Italian schools attempted to 'modernize' and 'Europeanize' Tunisia's Sicilian population. In particular, it will show how French educational policies focused on Mediterranean mixing maintained symbolic hierarchies between the populations of colonial Tunisia. Finally, the chapter will situate schools within the broader situation of proximity and hierarchy that characterized colonial Tunisia.

Politics and demographics in late 19th century Tunisia

When the French government took control over Tunisia in 1881, the territory's Italian population outnumbered French nationals by ten to one (Davi, 2000). Southern Italian immigration to Tunisia continued to grow following the establishment of the protectorate, and by the Turn of the Century there were approximately 55,000 Italians in Tunisia – a number that was still three times larger than that of French nationals¹¹⁶ (Davi, 2000).

114 See, for instance, the justice system (Lewis, 2014), French naturalization policies (Loth, 1905; Pasotti), or colonial urban planning policies (Beguín, 1983).

115 For instance, Italo-French rivalries following the establishment of Mussolini's regime in Italy and during World War II (Jerfel, 1999).

116 In 1896, the European population was made up of 16,207 French citizens, 55,572 Italians, and 10,247 Maltese

Following the establishment of the protectorate, the French authorities carried out a complete reform of the legal system, which simultaneously limited the influence of other European nations in the territory, and created a unified group of 'Europeans' out of the Italian, Maltese, Spanish and French populations who inhabited Tunisia. Before the establishment of the protectorate, in fact, European nationals in Tunisia¹¹⁷ were subject to the 'capitulations regime' – a system according to which all of their affairs, including the administration of civil and criminal justice, were regulated by their respective consulates¹¹⁸ (Clancy-Smith, 2010; Jerfel, 2001). In 1883, in an attempt to limit the influence of other European governments (Lewis, 2014), French authorities abolished the capitulations regime. In its place, they established a dual legal system, according to which all European nationals would be tried by French courts, while the affairs of Tunisians would be regulated by 'native' courts¹¹⁹ (Jerfel, 2001; Lewis, 2014; Nouredine, 2001). Thus, this legal reform transformed the mosaic of communities that had characterized Tunisia into two clear camps: Europeans (regardless of their nationality) and Tunisians¹²⁰ (Jerfel, 2001; Nouredine, 2001).

The establishment of the French Protectorate over Tunisia had sent political shockwaves to Italy, which had its own colonial ambitions on the territory, and had cost the Italian prime minister Benedetto Cairoli¹²¹ his seat (Choate, 2010). Support for Italian control over the territory also came from a small but well-established group of Italian professionals, largely from Jewish families, established in Tunisia since the turn of the 19th Century (Clancy-Smith, 2010). This group of professionals was both a strong advocate for Italian presence and influence in Tunisia, and very well-connected to the Husainid ruling family which had governed Tunisia prior to French take-over. Under pressure of this Italian bourgeoisie elite, the Italian government was able to negotiate accords with French colonial authorities to maintain a series of privileges

(Davi, 2000).

117 This system was also in place elsewhere in the Ottoman empire.

118 This was due to the notion that different religious communities should be tried through separate justice systems, with the specific aim of avoiding that non-muslims be tried through an Islamic justice system. According to Clancy Smith (2010), the capitulation system allowed growing European imperial powers to spread their influence over Tunisia. The plurality of legal systems also created opportunities for 'forum shopping', as individuals would often strategically claim a national or religious identity in order for their affairs to go through the court which would give them the most favorable outcome.

119 This dual system was also created to maintain a formal authority of the Tunisian ruling family, alongside a parallel system of French rule. In this sense, Tunisia's status was completely different from Algeria, that was directly annexed to France.

120 This division was mainly conceptual. In her detailed study on the evolutions of the plural legal regime in colonial Tunisia, Lewis shows how the demarcation of identity was somewhat fluid. As they had done under the capitulation system (Clancy-Smith, 2010), both Europeans and Tunisian colonial subjects would often claim different identities in different moments in order to better protect their interests. The question of who was 'European' became increasingly complicated with the arrival of Algerian migrants (formally French nationals), as well as Libyan ones (Italian nationals following 1911), who argued that they should be classified as Europeans in Tunisia.

121 Cairoli was opposed to Italian colonial expansion.

for Italian nationals¹²², and to authorize the continued operation (though not the expansion¹²³) of existing Italian institutions in the territory – namely hospitals and schools (Lewis, 2014; Sugiyama, 2007). Thus, despite the establishment of the French Protectorate, Tunisia remained an on-going site of production of Italianness.

Sicilians of Tunisia: '...an undeniable racial affinity with the Tunisian people'.

The majority of turn of 20th century Tunisia's Italian population, however, was Italian only in name. According to an estimate of the Italian consul¹²⁴, in 1900 approximately 75% of Italian nationals were of Sicilian origin, coming primarily from the areas of Trapani, Marsala and Mazara del Vallo (Loth, 1905; Melfa, 2008), as well as the island of Pantelleria. This was primarily a working-class population¹²⁵, largely illiterate or with very little formal education¹²⁶, and very little sense of identification with recently unified Italy. A small part of this population was rural, but the majority of Sicilians settled in cities, primarily in the capital Tunis (Loth, 1905; Melfa, 2007).

In rural areas, Sicilians settled either on small farms or in villages that were almost entirely made up of Sicilians¹²⁷ (Melfa, 2008). In urban centers, on the contrary, they generally lived in immediate proximity with Tunisians, either in the same neighborhoods, or in adjacent ones. In the capital Tunis, as well as in other major cities, poor Sicilians initially settled within or in the immediate vicinity of the old Arab medina (Sebag, 1998). With the establishment of the protectorate, and subsequent waves of migration, Sicilian informal neighborhoods sprung up in the European quarters of various Tunisian cities¹²⁸, often on less desirable – and thus cheaper – land (Giudice, 2006; Melfa, 2007). In central Tunis, for instance, Sicilian migrants settled in a swampy area that was the property of one of the established bourgeois families of Tunis (the Gnecco family), who allowed Sicilians to build small houses on the property in exchange for a modest rent¹²⁹ (Giudice, 2006).

122 Legal and commercial privileges derived from an 1861 convention between the newly unified Italian state and the Bey of Tunis, which was then renovated in 1896, when the French government had already established control over Tunisia. Privileges guaranteed by these accords included the right to maintain their nationality (later opposed by the French, who starting in the 1920s considered all Europeans born in Tunisia as French citizens, and who eventually revoked this treaty in 1944), and a series of commercial privileges such as the right to 'cabotage' (transport of people and goods along the Tunisian coast), fishing rights in Tunisian territorial waters and access to liberal professions for Italian nationals despite their lack of French university degrees.

123 This exception was important, as the growing number of Italian nationals in the territory would soon make these institutions insufficient to serve the population, which would consequently turn to French schools and hospitals.

124 Until the first French census in Tunisia in 1911, estimates of the Italian population vary widely.

125 According to Gaston Loth (1905), about 86% of the Italian population of Tunisia at the turn of the 20th century was working class.

126 According to the Italian consul to Tunis Carletti, at the turn of the 20th Century, 45% of this population was illiterate (Carletti, 1903).

127 Final report of director of the night school of the Principe di Napoli Boys' Elementary school, 1901 (MAE archives).

128 These included the Petite Sicile and the suburb of Halq-el-wad (La Goulette) in Tunis, or the neighborhoods of Cappaci Grande and Cappaci Piccola in Sousse (names which refer to the Sicilian town of Capaci).

129 This neighborhood had the reputation of being a poor and sordid space. Writing in 1905, Gaston Loth, professor at the French lyc e of Tunis, described how "...in the 'Petite Sicile' ... Children live in the street, learn

Following a common trope that associates poor, insanitary and cramped living conditions of neighborhoods with a 'lack of civilization' of their inhabitants (Fanon, 1965; M Gandy, 2008; Kooy & Bakker, 2008; Ross, 1995), middle-class French and Italian commentators¹³⁰ identified the precarious living conditions of Sicilians as proof of their 'backwardness' and 'dangerousness'. The Petite Sicile of Tunis, for instance, had the reputation of being characterized by *'bad odors during the summer period, activities of little nobility, and a Sicilian population of modest condition... hardly associable and dangerous...'* (Giudice, 2006, p. 185). Proximity and similarity in dwellings between Sicilians and Tunisians also led middle-class commentators to describe these two populations in very similar terms. Gaston Loth, for instance, French director of the Alaoui teacher training college in Tunis, described Sicilian settlements in the following way:

“Coming from...slums or the frightful little houses of the Sicilian countryside, how could the poor immigrants not accept to settle at the beginning in the fundouk of Arab towns, all jumbled together people and animals...” (Loth, 1905, p. 335).

Similarly, a 1903 report by the Italian consul in Tunis, noted how how:

“In the urban centers (and also in rural agglomerations) the Italian colony represents the point of connection between the indigenous and the European element, partially because...Sicilians...have an undeniable racial affinity with the Tunisian people. And one may say that, even topographically, the working-class strata of our colony play the function of bringing together and fusing the different sections of the population of Tunisia¹³¹” (Carletti, 1903)

Alongside Sicilian proximity and similarity to Tunisians, both French and Italian commentators re-evoked longstanding tropes of Sicilian impulsivity, violence, and propensity to criminality. Indeed, in the last decade of the 19th Century, the Francophone press in Tunisia

Arabic easily...hardly dressed, they spend their time bothering people asking for money...Sicilian proletarians have gathered around the Souks, in the Kasbah, Halfaouine, and in the neighborhoods near the Porte de France, not for their own wishes, but due to the cheapness of lodgings...” (Loth, 1905, p. 335).

130 To some extent, the Italian bourgeoisie resented French descriptions of Sicilians as 'uncivilized'. A 1901 article published by the Institute de Cartage (a French cultural institute in Tunis) entitled 'Our Sicilian migrants in their own land', which described the deep poverty of late 19th century Sicily (Germain, 1901), had been met by such outcry by the Italian bourgeoisie in Tunis, that the magazine was forced to publish the following disclaimer: *'Some sentences...in the last issue of La Revue Tunisienne have bothered a part of the Italian colony of Tunis. The translator...made a point to declare...that his thoughts had been wrongly interpreted, and that...no one could imagine associating the population of an entire country with a fraction of it that has remained in a savage state...'*(Germain, 1902). The content of the offending article, however, was not the product of its French author, but the translation of an 1876 Italian parliamentary report investigating the cause of Sicilian 'backwardness'. In the context of Tunis, despite hostilities between French and Italian elites, their descriptions of working-class Sicilians were remarkably similar.

131 Carletti then goes on to describe how Sicilians live between the Medina and the new European quartersL *“So, for example, in Tunis, between the indigenous quarters around the Suk, the Kasbah, and the Halfaouine, and the neighbourhods that have risen beyond the Porte de France, there is a sort of intermediate zone, of which the backbone is formed by rue de la Commission, rue des Glacieres, and rue des Maltais, crowded by Italian and Maltese who serve as a cement between natives and Europeans”*.

raged a vicious campaign against Sicilian immigration, cause of the 'Italian peril'¹³² (Noureddine, 2001). While this specific campaign mainly reflected labor competition concerns of a small French settler lobby¹³³, similar references to Sicilians' nature were also echoed by Italian elites, who often used the language of positivist criminology¹³⁴. In his end of the year report of July 28th 1899, for instance, the director of the Italian Elementary School Principe di Napoli, located in proximity to the Medina of Tunis, described the background of his students in the following way:

*“This colony is primarily made up of co-nationals coming from Sicily...they would be happy people, if atavistic tendencies, favored by the ignorance under which people of those lands lay for the longest time, did not make them...waste their salary in parties and clothes, and...consider it cowardly to not create justice with their own hands...bloody crimes are committed frequently, almost daily...as acts of bravery and revenge.”*¹³⁵

Sicilian supposed propensity to criminality, or similarity to Arab customs, however, did not prevent both Italian elites and some sections of the French elites and colonial authorities from considering Sicilians to be an essential aid to European control over the territory (Melfa, 2008). Indeed, some of the very same sources that described Sicilians as primitive and uncivilized also noted how they were good workers, resistant to the heat, and thus a precious aid to French colonization¹³⁶. In order for Sicilians to be a full support to Italian or French ambitions over Tunisia, however, this population had to be 'modernized', civilized, and made into *national* (French or Italian) subjects. More specifically, it was necessary to correct defects in Sicilians' language, cleanliness and demeanor acquired through daily life in poor neighborhoods in close proximity to the Medinas, and through daily interactions with Arabic speakers. In the following section, I will describe competing aims to do so through Italian (and,

132 A 1898 letter by the French resident general René Millet to the French ministry of Foreign affairs provides an example of these depictions of Sicilians. In this letter, René Millet complained how “...we cannot...soften Sicilian habits and prevent working-class Italians from satisfying their passions or their personal revenges through the knife and the revolver; as they do in their native land. This is an evil towards which Tunisia must resign itself” (quoted in (Noureddine, 2001, p. 89).

133 Indeed, the 'criminal nature' of Sicilians was not universally accepted by the French educated elite in Tunisia. Gaston Loth, for instance, described Sicilian criminality as a consequence of the Sicilian community's infiltration by networks of organized crime, and not of Sicilian 'nature', and accused the French settler press of exaggerating the phenomenon in order to limit Sicilian immigration to Tunisia. Melfa (2008) provides an example of the French settlers' fear of labor competition, citing a passage from the settler paper “*La Tunisie franchise*” that describes Italian workers as “*half savage, not having neither the need for an improved material existence, nor the sentiment of human dignity, works for a very low wage and represents competition*” (Melfa, 2008, p. 75).

134 The influence of positivist criminology also made its way into French descriptions of Sicilians. Noureddine (Noureddine, 2001) recounts how accusations of certain Sicilians brought before the penal court of Sousse described them as 'born criminals'.

135 Final report of the director of the Principe di Napoli Boys' elementary school, 1899 (MAE archives).

136 See, for instance, Gaston Loth's description of Sicilian peasants: “...in all the regions in which they are implanted, Sicilian farmers show the same endurance, the same qualities of sobriety and of economy. They are happy, simply, to be a little less poor than in their homeland...as soon as they have built...a sort of hut, similar to the humble cottage of the Arab, they get to work” (Loth, 1905, pp. 219–220).

to a lesser extent, French) schools operating in colonial Tunisia¹³⁷.

Producing Europeans. Colonial schools.

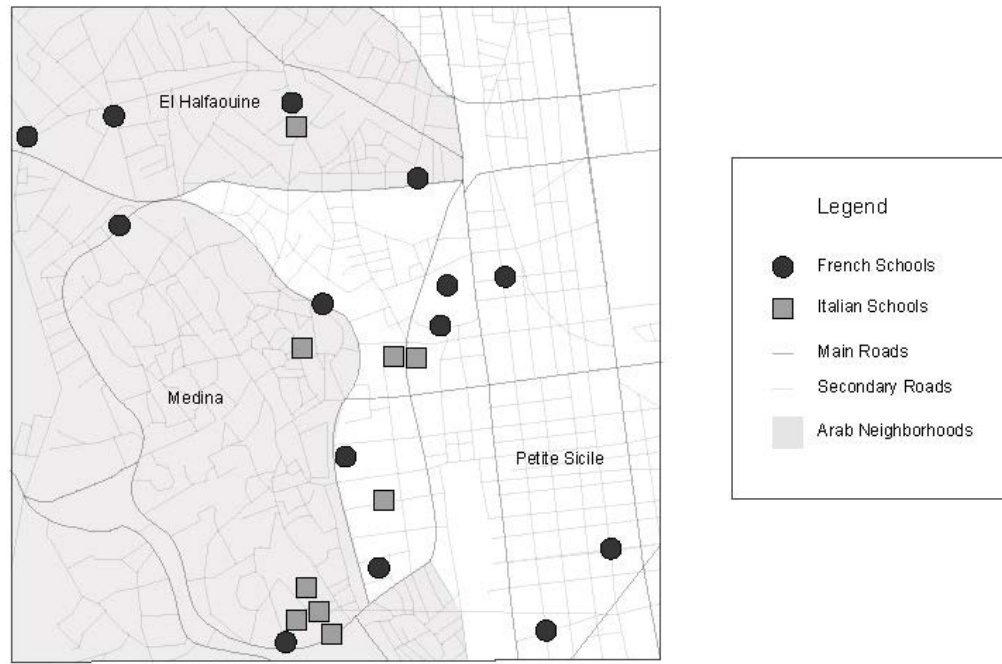


Figure 12. Map of Italian and French schools in Tunis, 1906

According to a 1906 report by the director of public education in Tunisia Louis Machuel, at the turn of the 20th Century, 21 Italian schools were active on the Tunisian territory. Despite the considerable number of institutions, the quantity of Italian students greatly exceeded their capacity, and – consequently – French and Italian schools had roughly equivalent numbers of Italian students¹³⁸. In the capital Tunis, there were fourteen operating French schools, and twelve Italian ones¹³⁹. With the exception of the Margherita di Savoia girls' elementary school and the Garibaldi kindergarten, situated in the new French quarters of the city, all other Italian schools

137 Certainly, struggles between French and Italian authorities over who would educate Sicilian students were a key arena in which broader power struggles over influence in Tunisia were fought out (Choate, 2007, 2008). In this chapter, however, I will focus primarily on the similarities in the way in which Italian and French educators saw their mission with regards to Sicilian students.

138 Machuel identifies 5,921 Italian students in French schools, and 6,224 in Italian schools (Machuel, 1906). It is important to note that French schools had considerable more influence in rural areas outside the capital, where there was a dearth of Italian institutions. (Final report of the director of the Principe di Napoli Boys' school, 1901, MAE archives).

139 Italian schools included three kindergartens, five elementary schools, a teachers' college, two secondary schools, as well as a boarding school for Italians living outside the capital (Machuel, 1906).

were in close proximity to the old Medina¹⁴⁰, in neighborhoods inhabited primarily by poor Sicilians and Maltese, as well as by Tunisians¹⁴¹.

The bulk of students in Italian elementary schools were working-class¹⁴², and quarterly and yearly school reports are peppered with accounts of students that reflect the class and regional prejudice of professors. While some reports paint compassionate pictures of the children, the majority of middle-class Italian teachers attributed the lack of interest and success in school to the scarce intelligence of the students. For instance, in the 1906 end-of-the-year report of the Margherita di Savoia girls' elementary school, of one of the first grade teachers justified over fifty percent of her students failing the school year by describing how:

*'I found myself faced with a numerous, loud and rebellious group of students ...intellectually I found myself faced with a mediocre element...lively girls, and generally truthful, but...having grown up in misery and often in the streets, I found in them the faults of an uncivilized environment''*¹⁴³.

Similarly, in his 1895 final report on the night-school section of the Umbero Primo boys' elementary school, the director attributed a lack of interest in Italian history to both the class background and to the regional origin of the students:

*“The Southern worker...only goes to night school to learn how to write a letter and to learn elementary arithmetic...his indifference for all other aspects of civic life is deplorable...the Società Operaia attempted last year...with a recreational aim...to organize conferences on themes such as history, geography, hygiene...Captain Pierotti [a speaker] lecturing one evening on the Italian Risorgimento¹⁴⁴, began with twenty people in the audience and finished with only six, half asleep from boredom! We can conclude that the southern worker remains unprepared to receive the benefits of education.”*¹⁴⁵

If Italian teachers complained about the lack of preparedness of their students, and, consequently, about the fact that schools largely had the function of a 'holding pen' for children

140 This location reflected limitations to the constructions of new schools as a consequence of the 1896 treaty between the Italian government and the Bey of Tunis (Choate, 2010).

141 Most of these schools were grouped into the area immediately south of the Medina. The only school situated to the north was the elementary school Umberto I. Correspondence between the director of the school and the Italian minister of foreign affairs continuously underlines the need for larger classrooms for the school, insufficient to meet the needs of Italian children in the area. (MAE archives)

142 In 1897, for instance, the director of the boys' elementary school 'Principe di Napoli', located in the Medina, underlined how only two of his students came from professional families (one lawyer and one engineer), compared to 96 children of construction workers, 53 children of day-laborers, and over 300 children of skilled and semi-skilled laborers, artisans, or small-scale merchants. Final report of the director of Principe di Napoli Boys' Elementary school, 1897 (MAE archives).

143 Final report of the director of the Margherita di Savoia Girls' Elementary School, 1906 (MAE archives).

144 The Risorgimento is the movement for and process of Italian national unification which took place in the first half of the 19th Century.

145 Final report of the director of the Umberto I Elementary Schol, 1895 (MAE archives).

who would otherwise be roaming the streets¹⁴⁶, they were also conscious of the importance of their work in creating a sense of Italianness amongst poor Sicilians workers¹⁴⁷. This mission was, in fact, a central policy of the Italian government, that supported Italian schools abroad as part of a vision of 'emigrant colonialism' (Choate, 2008): the attempt to expand Italian influence abroad through the loyalty and support of Italian emigrants¹⁴⁸.

The 'modernization' and the nationalization of these 'backwards' Sicilians rested on three key subjects: hygiene, national history, and Italian language. Hygiene was both a specific subject of instruction¹⁴⁹, and was constantly mentioned as a key habit that needed to be learned by students. In an 1896 trimestral report, for instance, the director of the Umberto Primo boys' elementary school underlined the importance of hygiene, particularly for students living in Arab neighborhoods:

“Here, in the Arab neighborhood, the poorest Europeans come to live...our students are in miserable conditions...they are ill-dressed, yet they keep themselves fairly clean and pay attention to hygiene, because we do not stop threatening them, scolding them...persuading them”¹⁵⁰.

146 These words are clearly expressed in the final reports of teachers. For instance, the director of the Umberto I elementary school justified the need for a night school, explaining how *“if I had sent them away they would have learned nothing, and would have remained in the streets...committing all sorts of pranks”* (Final report of the director of the Umberto I night school, 1903, MAE archive). Similarly, the 1905 trimestral report of the Crispi Kindergarten underlined how *“This kindergarten is almost entirely working class...but it is also a place in which the dear name of Italy is blessed...by many poor families that, constrained by their daily work, can send us their children...without worries”*. (Trimestral report of the director of the Crispi Kindergarten, 21 January, 1905, MAE archive).

147 See, for instance, the words of the director of the Italian commercial school, who – writing in 1896 – simultaneously complained about the class background of his students, and underlined the political mission of the school *“Most of the students come from families lacking in education: the home is damaging to school, not helpful. The country is corrupted, customs are free, morality is little appreciated...[academic] success was little or none...one of the causes of this unfortunate fact is the need to accept all those who ask for it to the school. Italian school abroad...has primarily an attractive aim...not only scientific and literary propaganda, but more importantly national propaganda, Italian propaganda...”* (Final report of the director of the Italian commercial school, 1896, MAE archives).

148 In 1889, the Italian prime minister Francesco Crispi expanded this program as part of his foreign policy goals to expand Italian influence in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. This regional focus was hotly debated in Rome, as this meant that, by 1901, 9/10ths of the budget for Italian schools abroad went to Italian schools in the Mediterranean (Tunisia, Tripolitania, Egypt, Greece and the Ottoman Empire), leaving only 1/10th of the budget for schools in the Americas, where the bulk of Italians abroad lived (Choate, 2008). The Italian bourgeoisie in Tunisia was strongly supportive of funding Italian schools abroad, even where the number of Italian students was small. In a document written by the Dante Alighieri society of Tunis, an Italian organization dedicated to the spread of Italian language and culture, the organization argued that the key criteria to open Italian schools abroad should be determined *“...not so much by the number of local Italians who would probably attend...as by the statute and importance of Italy’s traditional interests in these countries: ...Italy should spread the essential ideas of her modern civilization along with her language...”* (Società Dante Alighieri di Tunisi, quoted in Choate, 2008, p. 114). In the context of Tunisia, differently from elsewhere in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, where schools mainly educated the children a transnational bourgeoisie, Italian nationals made up 99% of the students.

149 Hygiene was taught as part of the 'General knowledge' class for third grade students. Final report of the Margherita di Savoia Girls' Elementary School, 1896 (MAE archives).

150 Trimestral report of the director of the Umberto Primo Boys' Elementary School, 1896 (MAE archives).

A similar report, written in the same year by the director of the Principe di Napoli boys' elementary school in the old Medina, also frames students as a conduit to educate their family about hygiene:

“We diligently watched over the personal cleanliness of students and of their clothes. If they showed up without sufficiently clean clothes, we would send them home to ask their mothers to wash and mend them...we never missed an occasion to teach students some principles of hygiene, in order for these notions to arrive to families through their children...”¹⁵¹.

With regards to history, the curriculum was centered on Italian unification (the Risorgimento), which represented the sole focus of the curriculum in the first three grades of elementary school, after which the majority of students left school. Reflecting on the appropriate pedagogical method to teach Italian history to her students, a teacher in the Margherita di Savoia girls' school explained how:

“The teaching of history should not be a cold exposition of facts and dates, but should be lively, so as to speak to the imagination of girls and to fill their heart with love for our homeland...”¹⁵².

References to the Italian royal family and to key figures of the Risorgimento also had a prominent role in Italian composition and memorization classes in the first years of elementary school¹⁵³. The director of the girls' elementary school Margherita di Savoia outlined the importance of this focus in her 1898 end of the year report:

“...all compositions, dictations, readings, stories, poems...are inspired to the great Italian homeland, nor does any national festivity, be it happy or sad, pass unobserved in this temple dedicated to keeping our love for Italy alive...”¹⁵⁴.

The third vehicle to nationalize Tunis's Sicilian population, Italian language, was fraught with difficulty, due to the distance between the formal Italian language taught at school and the daily languages of communication in turn of 20th Century Tunis: Sicilian dialect, Tunisian arabic, or French. The following quotes represent but a small selection of elementary school teachers' attempts and frustrations in teaching Italian, meticulously documented in their yearly reports:

“...We used the greatest care in teaching the Italian language, because it is...difficult because of the mixing of languages [in students' daily speech], and because it forms the strongest

151 Final report of the director of the Principe di Napoli Boys' Elementary School, 1896 (MAE archives).

152 Final report of the fourth grade teacher of the Margherita di Savoia Girls' elementary school, 1898 (MAE archive).

153 Final report of the director of the Margherita di Savoia Girls' elementary school, 1896 (MAE archive).

154 Final report of the director of the Margherita di Savoia Girls' elementary school, 1898 (MAE archive).

*connection between the colonies and the mother country”*¹⁵⁵

*“We carry out frequent...exercises of conversion from singular to plural, from masculine to feminine, and vice-versa...these exercises could seem superfluous or premature elsewhere, but they are extremely useful with [Sicilian] students used to speaking the Arabic language”*¹⁵⁶

These pedagogical difficulties in elementary schools were exacerbated by their chronic overcrowding, particularly in the lower grades¹⁵⁷. The size of classes, often of over 100 students in the first years of elementary school, was such that students would often repeat grades multiple times, and – eventually – either leave school, or transfer to the growing French schools¹⁵⁸.

Despite the efforts of Italian schools and diplomatic authorities, in fact, the number of Italian students in French schools continued to rise. French teachers', directors' and inspectors' descriptions of Sicilian students, and their observations on the difficulties of modernizing this population, were very similar to those of their Italian colleagues. In his speech at the distribution of end-of-the-year prizes in 1901, the French director of education Louis Machuel reflected on progress in one of the rural elementary schools for girls, attended almost entirely by Sicilian students:

*“Four years ago I went to inaugurate a girls' school...in the countryside, in the midst of a population of simple workers, largely of foreign nationality...The teacher thus had the difficult and delicate task, not only of teaching...French to the girls...but also of polishing their primitive nature, of giving them...habits of politeness, good manners, cleanliness and morality that often they did not have in their families...eight months later I returned to see this school...I saw...our young students...clean, their hair carefully combed...their clothes in a perfect state...once the cleanliness inspection was finished, they entered into the classroom singing a simple verse, correctly pronounced, but with a slight foreign accent...”*¹⁵⁹

155 Final report of the director of the Principe di Napoli Boys' elementary school, 1897 (MAE archive).

156 Final report of the director of the Collegio Italiano, 1897 (MAE archive).

157 The 1896 accords between the Italian government and the Bey (under the auspices of the French) had only authorized the ongoing operation of existing Italian schools in Tunisia, but did not authorize the opening of new ones. These limitations coincided with a boom of the Italian population of Tunis (Choate, 2008). Requests to add additional classes to schools, or to move schools to larger buildings, were often met with bureaucratic obstacles by French authorities which sought to contain Italian influence.

158 See the 1896 final report by the director of the Principe di Napoli Boys' elementary school (MAE archives): *“When a class is that large, many students repeat the grade up to three times. The parents become tired of this situation, and send them to a foreign school. This is one of the causes of the extreme lack of culture amongst [Italian] workers, and the number of illiterates remains large.”*. Competition from French schools did not only exist amongst working-class students. Due to a mix of class prejudice, and the desire to prepare their children for the new political reality of Tunisia, elite Italian families increasingly sent their children to French schools (Letter to the consul of Tunis written by prominent members of the Italian community, 11 May 1897, MAE archives)

159 Transcript of speech in La Depeche Tunisienne, cited in Loth (1905, p. 447)

In sum, in this section I have pointed out how, in turn-of-20th Century Tunisia, Italian and French educators saw one of their central missions to be the 'modernization' and 'civilization' of working-class Sicilian students, whom they often racialized in similar ways to Tunisian colonial subjects. Indeed, Italian educators in particular often expressed explicit concern with the proximity in dwellings between Sicilians and Tunisians – which they associated with a lack of hygiene of Sicilian students – and with Sicilian familiarity with Tunisian dialect – which made their learning of the Italian language particularly difficult. If French and Italian schools shared the educational mission of 'modernizing' and 'civilizing' poor Sicilians, French schools were also a key site of theorization of 'coexistence' between different national, linguistic and religious communities. In the next section, I will turn to discuss French schools as part of broader French notions of Mediterranean mixing and coexistence in colonial Tunisia.

Mixing, coexistence and colonial rule

Debates over education in the early years of the French protectorate reflect broader debates amongst French government authorities, intellectuals and exponents of the settler lobby on the nature of interaction between the different populations that inhabited the territory (Sugiyama, 2007). The official French educational policy in Tunisia was inspired to the idea of the 'fusion des races' (Sugiyama, 2007). This was a polysemic term that appeared in texts by French authorities, intellectuals and political activists with a wide range of meanings. Diverse articulations of this concept, however, shared the common assumption that some type of mixing through which people from different backgrounds could come together through the universalism of French language and culture would be beneficial to consolidate French control over North Africa.

The range of meanings of the concept of the 'fusion de races' can be divided into two main categories. On one side lay theories of biological mixing, intended primarily as intermarriages between Italians and French (Loth, 1905), in order to create one unified 'latin race' in North Africa (Bonurra, 1922)¹⁶⁰. In the writings of French intellectuals and colonial authorities in neighboring Algeria, this vision sometimes extended to marriages between French men and Arab women, as a means to create a single 'Mediterranean race', particularly suited to the heat of North Africa (Abbassi, 2009; Gastaut, 2001; Streiff-Fénart, 1990)¹⁶¹. Other proponents of the 'fusion de races', instead, understood this in cultural terms, as a form of acculturation (Sugiyama, 2007). This vision, however, did not represent a roadmap for a culturally mixed Tunisia, understood as a synthesis of the different populations that inhabited the territory. Instead, it represented an assimilationist project, according to which French language and culture should form the universalist basis for the coming together of difference. As such, it was clearly connected to the notion of 'moral conquest' espoused by the founders of the

160 An example of this vision is provided by the views of Dr. Bertholon, a French military doctor stationed in Tunisia since the mid-19th century, who underlined how Italians were “...an extremely useful aid to the French, and in any case much more capable of assimilation than the natives...they blend fairly quickly with the French component...” (Loth, 1905, p. 435).

161 Eventually, a similar vision of the 'fusion des races' would be adopted by French socialists in Tunisia. This vision led to their clash with the Tunisian independence movement that considered this to be a French assimilationist project (Ben Hamida, 2000; Soumille, 1977).

Alliance Française of Tunis¹⁶² (Sugiyama, 2007).

This 'culturalist' vision of the 'fusion des races' was central to the French educational policy embraced by Louis Machuel, director general of public education in Tunisia between 1883 and 1910. He saw the 'fusion des races' as a means to create consensus to French rule amongst both Europeans and the Tunisian elite, and thus to create a 'softer' form of colonial rule than in neighboring Algeria (Sugiyama, 2007). This philosophy emerges clearly in the words of Gaston Loth, director of the Alaoui teaching college in Tunis, who explained the utility of having children from different backgrounds learn in the same classroom:

“...side by side, on the same desks, little girls from different races and nationalities become neighbors...it is thanks to our work that foreign girls – Italian, Maltese, Jewish Tunisian, will be and will remain friends of the French school, in other words friends of France.” (Loth, 1907, p. 92)

French educational policy, however, was not monolingual. Born and raised in Algeria, and fluent both in Arabic and in French¹⁶³, Machuel sought to simultaneously Francophonize European residents in Tunisia, to expose the indigenous Tunisian population to French language and culture¹⁶⁴, and to expand the knowledge of Arabic amongst the territory's French population. In order to do so, he oversaw the creation of a large-scale program of bilingual French and Arabic education, both for indigenous Tunisians and for Europeans. This did not necessarily mean, however, that students would study at the same establishments. While French colonial schools such as those mentioned by Loth were formally open to all, it was mainly the Tunisian elite that studied in these schools (Bachrouch, 1985; Sugiyama, 2012). The bulk of Tunisian children, instead were to be educated in specific Franco-Arabic elementary schools, or in modernized religious schools¹⁶⁵ (Bachrouch, 1985; Sugiyama, 2012).

In addition, the inclusion of Arabic in French educational curricula did not mean that the two languages were accorded the same status. French educators considered French to be the language of science, knowledge and progress, differently from Arabic (specifically Tunisian colloquial Arabic) which was a necessary and practical tool to govern the territory, and to limit

162 Paul Melon, one of the founders of the Alliance Française of Tunis, explicitly stated that “...spreading ones language amongst a subject race means giving it one's customs and one's tastes, thus boosting the importance of one's nationality” (quoted in Sugiyama, 2007, p. 48).

163 Louis Machuel had been a professor of Arabic in Oran, Algeria, before taking up his post in Tunisia, and had the reputation of being an 'arabophile' (Sugiyama, 2012).

164 Machuel's program of educating Tunisians was not universally accepted by the French population in the territory. Indeed, some elements of the settler lobby considered the expenditures for the education of the 'natives' to be excessive, and who refused the idea that Europeans and Tunisians should study in the same spaces. At the heart of their opposition was a fear that educating Tunisian colonial subjects would produce a class of 'declassés', who might eventually lead an anti-colonial movement – as, indeed, they did (Soumille, 1975; Sugiyama, 2012).

165 These schools were created with the support of the newly created Tunisian bilingual elite, a cooperation that was not without tension due to substantially different ideas between this elite and French protectorate authorities about the status of Arabic, as well as French concerns that widespread education would eventually lead to the development of an anti-colonial movement (Bachrouch, 1985). Bachrouch (1985) underlines how the development of Franco-Arab schools was also geographically uneven. By mainly privileging the coasts, it left large parts of the interior of the country with limited educational infrastructure – a pattern which continues till this day.

the influence of the Italian elite, who was often fluent in this language (Sugiyama, 2007). This vision is clearly expressed in the words of Gaston Loth, who argued for the benefits of including Arabic in the curriculum of French schools¹⁶⁶ in the following way:

“It is indispensable...that French students...learn the language of the natives. So...in almost every school in Tunisia...we have organized... Arabic courses...only spoken Arabic...of which knowledge is fundamental in...daily relations with Muslims...most Maltese, Italian and Greek children speak Arabic. We would have left our compatriots in an inferior situation if we had not given them the means to...acquire this language...” (Loth, 1907, p. 84)

French authorities advocacy for multi-lingual competence, however, went hand in hand with an extremely critical vision of the creolization of language that occurred in practice on the streets of Tunis, out of daily contact between speakers of different languages and cultures. Indeed, French teachers (as well as Italian ones) would often complain about a 'bastardization' of language which occurred through daily practices of mixing languages and code-switching¹⁶⁷.

In essence, while French colonial policy embraced ideas of mixing and coexistence between the different populations, languages and 'cultures' present in colonial Tunisia, and, indeed, made ideas of mixing a central tenant of educational policy, this was a vision of coexistence that was perfectly compatible with hierarchy. On one hand, this meant a hierarchy between different languages and 'cultures', as French protectorate authorities were convinced of the superiority of French language and culture as a vehicle through which people of different backgrounds could coexist. On the other, this also meant a substantial hierarchy between the different populations who lived in the territory, which could not be substantially equal. French educational policies, in fact, sought to 'modernize' Sicilians and make them Francophone, with the eventual aim of transforming them into French citizens. French educational policies for Tunisians, instead, aimed to create a bilingual educated elite that could act as an intermediary for French colonial authorities, but who had limited possibilities of becoming French citizens¹⁶⁸. In essence, even theories and policies of coexistence were compatible with processes of boundary drawing between Sicilians and Tunisians, and – thus – the tracing of the boundaries of European-ness.

166 Gaston Loth also advocated for teaching French to Tunisians for a similar reason, arguing that *“The natives...will learn Italian...spoken by a large part of the population. Italians, once they find that the natives speak their language, will be less open to learning French. Instead, if we drown the Italian influence in a native population that speaks French...Italians will learn French”* (Loth, 1905, p. 449).

167 In 1922, for instance, the French scholar Albert Canal complained that *“...in North Africa, French is badly spoken. It is a sad but incontestable truth...people who, as children, have played in the streets with little Arabs...little Italians, little Maltese, have acquired...defects in expression that are really hard to eliminate. A child will say...‘What a piece of hat!’ which is the literal translation of the Italian ‘Che pezzo di cappello!’, but is not French!”* (Sugiyama, 2007, p. 189). Similarly, the director of the Italian technical school of Tunis complained in his 1896 final report that his students spoke *“...a real mix of the most barbarous elements of the different languages and dialects spoken in this cosmopolitan city...”* (Report by director of the 'Scuola Commerciale Italiana' to the Italian Minister of Foreign Affairs, 8 July, 1896, MAE archive).

168 This was true for both Muslim and for Jewish Tunisians. In this sense, French authorities adopted a different policy in Tunisian from Algeria, where – instead – they provided preferential avenues to citizenship for Jewish Algerians (Lewis, 2014).

Cosmopolitanism and Conflict

Colonial schools, of course, were but one site of socialization of Sicilian settlers in Tunisia, and Sicilians and Tunisians regularly interacted in a range of social spaces. But what did these daily relations look like? Accounts of this time period describe relations between Sicilians and Tunisians as relatively peaceful (Alsgheir, 1999; Jerfal, 2001), underlining how they cooperated in the workplace, lived in the same neighborhoods, and – in later years – joined the same unions (Jerfal, 2001). This however, does not mean that there were no tensions between these communities, nor that Sicilians did not have prejudice and a sense of superiority towards Tunisians (Jerfal, 2001).

Tensions often emerged as a consequence of French or Italian colonial policy. In the city of Sousse, for instance, Jerfal (2001) underlines how initially good relations between Italians and Tunisians (who shared a concern with the establishment of French control over the territory) deteriorated once Italian commercial elites grew closer to French authorities in order to safeguard their economic interests. The turn of the 20th Century, thus, witnessed a surge of violent crimes committed by Italians towards Tunisians, and Tunisian robberies from Italians¹⁶⁹. In the city of Tunis, in turn, tensions between Sicilians and Tunisians exploded in the aftermath of the Italian conquest of Libya, which was met by celebration and popular support by the Sicilian population¹⁷⁰, but was described as an attack on Islam by the Tunisian Arabic press (Alsgheir, 1999). The November 2011 issue of the Sicilian satirical newspaper *I simpaticuni* provides a sample of Sicilian working-class reactions to these events, testifying to the simultaneous proximity and prejudice that existed between Sicilians and Tunisians. Written largely in Sicilian dialect interspersed with words of Tunisian Arabic, this issue contains a celebratory account of the Italian victory in Libya¹⁷¹, as well as a fictional account between two housewives in the Sicilian neighborhood of the Petite Sicile, who, commenting on recent riots between Sicilians and Tunisians¹⁷², observed how “...these Moors are real swine...it is a good

169 Jerfal bases his analysis on the study of documents from the French criminal court in Sousse, focusing specifically on crimes committed between people of different nationality. He argues that following the 1896 accords between the Italian and the French government (that re-negotiated the 1861 accords between the Italian government and the Bey of Tunis), Tunisian robberies increased as “...a reaction against poverty and exploitation, especially because they were committed against sections of society that had benefited from the colonial system.” (Jerfal, 2001, p. 338)

170 Alsgheir (Alsgheir, 1999) describes how celebrations of this victory made their way into daily interactions between Sicilians and Tunisians, as the former would taunt them through expressions such as ‘*Today we took Tarablus, tomorrow Costantina or Mecca*’ or ‘*Italy raped the Turkish girl!*’ (the city of Tarablus, Libya, a territory which had been under control of the Ottoman empire) (Alsgheir, 1999, p. 18).

171 The celebratory article opened with the words: “*Long live our army, that reacquiring today what once belonged to the teacher of the word [Rome], has taught these barbarous people a lesson...*” (“*Evviva!*,” 1911, p. 1).

172 Latent tensions between Sicilians and Tunisians had exploded in November of 2011. A rumor that French authorities were planning on subdividing land of the Jellaz muslim cemetery in Tunis in order to construct a branch of the Italian-owned and operated tramline led a large crowd of Tunisians to gather in protest. Allegedly, an Italian national fired into the crowd, killing a Tunisian protestor. This led to multiple days of violent confrontation, in which various Tunisians, Italian and French died. In the trials of June 1912, seven muslim Tunisians were sentenced to death for participating in these riots, but no Italians were punished. Tensions continued later in the year, when an Italian-owned and operated streetcar struck and killed a Tunisian

thing that they didn't come here to the Petite Sicile, or we would have given them a good beating!" (La Redazione, 1911, p. 2).

The paradoxes of simultaneous proximity and familiarity between Sicilians and Tunisians on one hand, and hierarchy and uneven power relations on the other, would be most famously captured by Albert Memmi's account of relations between Sicilians and Tunisians in Tunis of the mid-20th century:

"...almost all the Italians speak the language of the colonized, make long-lasting friendships with them...but they are in a better situation than the colonized...[they have] advantages which the colonized certainly does not have: better job opportunities, less insecurity against total misery and illness, less precarious schooling...as much as they may be outcasts in the absolute sense, their behavior vis-à-vis the colonized has much in common with the colonizer"

(Memmi, 1965, p. 14)

The de-facto difference between Sicilians and Tunisians would become clear at a moment of decolonization, when the bulk of Tunisia's Italian population lost the privileges they had previously had, such as access to land and preferential access to certain professions, and thus left the country¹⁷³ (Kazdaghli, 1999). If the bulk of Sicilians left for major metropolitan areas of Italy or areas of Southern France where they could find employment more easily, some ended up returning to the areas from which their family had departed. Till this day, a small number of Sicilians of Tunisia live in Mazara del Vallo. Their status of 'Sicilians of Tunis', however, is hardly visible: they do not represent a compact community, and they are absent from the public debate on Tunisian migration or on cross-Mediterranean connections (D'Arrigo, 2006).

Conclusion

In this chapter I studied colonial schools in order to analyze processes of boundary drawing between Sicilians and Tunisians in turn of 20th century colonial Tunisia. I showed how these two populations lived in close proximity to each other, had similar living habits, and often spoke elements of each other's language – characteristics that led French and Italian elites to describe them as similarly 'backward' and 'uncivilized'. In this context, both French colonial authorities and Italian diplomatic ones sought to 'civilize' and 'modernize' Sicilians, in order to transform them into European (French or Italian) citizens, and thus distinguish them from Tunisians – a process that they saw crucial in order to consolidate French colonial control or Italian influence in the territory. While French colonial authorities embraced notions of Mediterranean mixing and coexistence, this was a vision that was perfectly compatible with

muslim child, leading to a Tunisian boycott of the streetcars (Alsgheir, 1999).

173 Oral histories of Italian settlers whose family left following 1956, often describe their departure invoking a clear dichotomy between Europeans (a group whom they belonged to) and Arabs. For instance, describing the reason for her family's departure from Tunisia in the 1960s, Claudia (whose family had returned to Mazara del Vallo) explained how *"If someone wanted to stay in Tunis, they had to become Arab"*. This was not technically true, as Europeans who remained in Tunisia post decolonization were allowed to maintain their nationality, and were simply given a residency and work permit in Tunisia. However, these words reflect the extent to which ideas of Arabs vs. Europeans were predominant.

notions of hierarchy between different populations. In essence, colonial Tunisia was a key site of negotiation of the boundaries of Europeanness.

The complexity of interactions between Sicilians and Tunisians, in which daily relations of familiarity – and even friendship – existed alongside prejudice and inequality, was absent from the Catholic accounts of colonial Tunisia described in Chapter 4. Mazarese Catholic figures, in fact, considered this period as one of peaceful coexistence between difference, and thus as a model for contemporary multicultural Europe. By providing an alternative account of inter-communal relations in French Protectorate Tunisia, my aim is then not to show 'what really happened' as opposed to a 'false narrative' of what happened. Certainly, colonial Tunisia was a multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-national space, characterized by little organized conflict between different groups. However, it was also a space of differentiation, uneven power relations, and privilege for Europeans. The stakes, then, are not so much what happened in this period, but how we remember it, which of its characteristics we emphasize, and how this memory plays into contemporary Mediterraneanist politics. In the next concluding chapter, I will discuss the implications of recognizing uneven power relations in colonial Tunisia for the present.

Conclusion

Mediterraneanism, colonial cosmopolitanism and the politics of memory

History is the fruit of power, but power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous.

Michel-Rolph Trouillot¹⁷⁴

Mediterraneanism and the politics of memory

The transformation of the Mediterranean border into a mass grave, combined with the rise of right wing nationalisms throughout Europe, has created a sense of urgency to develop a vision of the Mediterranean sea alternative to that of a fortified border of the West. Mediterraneanist visions and projects developed throughout Europe¹⁷⁵, of which the ones elaborated in Mazara del Vallo are but one example, are seeking to do so by arguing that the Mediterranean sea represents a space of interconnection and exchange, by advocating for the intensification of economic and cultural relations between Europe and North Africa, and by celebrating the 'cultural mixing' in Southern Europe's Mediterranean cities. The search for idealized pasts of Mediterranean coexistence is key to these Mediterraneanist visions. These idealized pasts, in fact, serve both as proof of the possibility of peaceful coexistence of people from different national, linguistic and religious backgrounds, and as a model for contemporary multicultural Mediterranean societies. Far from being unique to Sicily and to Southern Europe, Mediterraneanist visions represent a specific example of a more general rise in interest in 'the cosmopolitan', in the Mediterranean¹⁷⁶ (Ben-Yehoyada, 2014; Dakhliya, 2005; Haller, 2004; Lafi, 2013) or elsewhere (Jazeel, 2011), as an alternative social and territorial vision to ethno-nationalism.

Moving from an abstract notion of Mediterranean mixing to an analysis of daily interactions in Mediterranean 'cosmopolitan' contexts, however, provides a less optimistic view of the potential of Mediterraneanist projects to provide justice in the Euro-Mediterranean region. My ethnographic study of Mazara del Vallo in Chapters 2, 3 and 4 – in fact – has shown how

174 Trouillot (2015), p. xi.

175 See, for instance, former French president Sarkozy's vision of the 'Union of the Mediterranean, activist projects that produced documents such as the 'Charter of Lampedusa', or the 'Manifesto for Mediterranean Citizenship', or academic projects such as Ian Chambers's 'Mediterranean Crossings' (Chambers, 2008).

176 Mediterranean cosmopolitanism generally refers to the situation of the late 19th Century (urban) Southern and Eastern Mediterranean coast, characterized by multiple national, linguistic and confessional communities living in the same space, and – in some occasion – participating in its governance (Ben-Yehoyada, 2014; Bromberger, 2007; Haller, 2004; Lafi, 2013; Lagueche, Clancy-Smith, & Audet, 2001). This situation occurred under two main configurations: cities of the Ottoman empire (Ben-Yehoyada, 2014; Giaccaria, 2012; Lafi, 2013; Lagueche et al., 2001), and in European colonies in the southern and Eastern Mediterranean (Bond & Melfa, 2010; Haller, 2004).

Mediterraneanist projects spearheaded by local government authorities and Catholic figures formally celebrated Mediterranean mixing and interconnection, but perpetuated uneven power relations between people of Italian and of Tunisian descent. This occurred in two ways. The first was through a reluctance by both local government authorities and Catholic figures to address the deep structural inequalities that affected the lives of people of Tunisian descent. The second was through the creation of a symbolic hierarchy between 'universalist' (Catholic) Italianness – assumed to promote coexistence, and 'particularist' (Muslim) Tunisianness – an assumed obstacle to coexistence. The creation of this symbolic hierarchy has important material repercussions, as local government authorities and Catholic organizations picked people of Tunisian descent whom they perceived as 'Italianized' as the official 'voices' of the Tunisian community, who could thus access some of the funding mobilized through Mediterraneanist projects¹⁷⁷.

Mediterraneanist projects did not only perpetuate inequalities between people of Tunisian and North African descent, but also reified understandings of difference between these two populations. By casting Mediterranean 'coexistence' as an answer to tensions around immigration, in fact, Catholic figures assumed that the main cause for a lack of 'integration' of Tunisians was 'cultural difference' between Sicilians and Tunisians, and not, instead, the precarious economic situation of Tunisians (see Chapter 4). The assumption that Sicilians and Tunisians are 'culturally different', then, implied that it was necessary to look for a model that could bring them together: the 'cosmopolitanism' of late 19th and early 20th Century colonial Tunisia.

Mazarese Catholic figures, however, were not alone in idealizing colonial Tunisia as a model for contemporary multicultural Europe. Since the early 2000s, Sicilian film makers¹⁷⁸, journalists¹⁷⁹ and immigration activists¹⁸⁰ have also been invoking this history of Sicilian southward migration, in a simultaneous attempt to provoke Sicilian empathy to the plight of immigrants, and to demonstrate the possibility of coexistence between Sicilians and Tunisians. This interest came on the heels of a precedent effort by scholars situated in the Francophone Tunisian and French academy to study the social 'mosaic' of colonial Tunisia (Davi, 2000), in order to frame Tunisia as a country with a diverse Mediterranean heritage – a counter-discourse to the resurgence of Islamism in the country¹⁸¹.

The diverse range of actors who are mobilizing the history of colonial Tunisia share a similar vision of this period. They describe it, in fact, as a moment of cosmopolitan mixing and of peaceful coexistence between communities¹⁸² - a very different focus from the account I

177 For instance, the president of the Tunisian association 'Friends without borders' to whom the Municipality had accorded the management of Casa Tunisia.

178 See, for instance, the documentary project 'Vento', directed by Enrico Montalbano <https://filmvento.blogspot.it>

179 See for instance, the newspaper article 'Quando erano I Siciliani ad emigrare in Tunisia' *Giornale di Sicilia*, May 20, 2011. ("Quando erano i Siciliani a emigrare in Tunisia," 2011).

180 See, for instance, the work of Franco Blandi, a service provider to migrants who – as part of his vision – published a book bringing to light the memory of Sicilian migrants to the Sicilian port of La Goulette (Blandi, 2012).

181 This interest in Tunisia's colonial history was part of a broader public embracing of Tunisia's *Mediterranean* character in the 1990s.

182 Francophone research on this period tends to focus on political and intellectual collaboration across communities, such as the connections between French socialists in Tunisia and the Tunisian national movement (Bond & Melfa, 2010), or to provide a detail description of the different communities in the territory (Davi,

provided in Chapter 5, where I showed how daily familiarity and coexistence between different populations in colonial Tunisia occurred alongside the production of hierarchy and inequality. Ignoring the uneven power relations and the material and symbolic hierarchies that characterized French Protectorate Tunisia, however, has significant implications for the present, both in the analysis of what the 'challenges' of immigration are, and in a search for solutions to these 'challenges'. As I have shown in my analysis of Catholic Mediterraneanist projects in Mazara, in fact, posing Mediterranean colonial cosmopolitanism as an answer to the tensions of immigration, identifies the source of tension to be difficult coexistence between 'different' and 'difficultly compatible' populations. This framing, however, does not take into account structural inequalities and institutional racism towards people of North African descent. At the same time, casting colonial cosmopolitanism as a model for the present, risks reproducing in contemporary Europe the uneven power relations and material and symbolic hierarchies between Europeans and North Africans that characterized colonial spaces.

In these concluding pages, I will discuss how acknowledging the hierarchies and uneven power relations of colonial Tunisia allows for a critical analysis of the inequalities perpetuated by Mediterraneanist projects in Sicily, and of notions of Mediterranean mixing and coexistence more generally. On the basis of this analysis, I will suggest how Mediterraneanist projects might tackle the structural inequalities that affect people of North African and Muslim descent in Europe, and how we may develop a counter-narrative to the fortification of the Mediterranean border that goes beyond simply celebrating and advocating for coexistence.

Mediterraneanism, power and difference

A critical analysis of the uneven power relations of colonial Tunisia both sheds light on the material and symbolic hierarchies perpetuated by contemporary Mediterraneanist projects, and shows how the celebration of Mediterranean interconnection has long coexisted with the production of difference between people of European and North African descent. Understanding this longer history, then, points to the limits of notions of Mediterranean mixing as a vehicle to promote more just and equitable relations in the Mediterranean region. More specifically, it does so in two ways. The first way is by showing that the celebration of coexistence and mingling does not necessarily challenge structural inequalities between two entities that are mixing¹⁸³. In colonial Tunisia, for instance, formal celebrations of coexistence between people of different national and linguistic backgrounds existed alongside the production of inequality. As I have shown in chapter 5, French educational policies of bringing students of different backgrounds together on the same school desks did not mean extending equal rights to European settlers and colonial subjects. Indeed, throughout French control over Tunisia, Sicilians had preferential access to land, jobs and French citizenship vis-a-vis Tunisians (Memmi, 1965). A similar dynamic was at play in Mazara del Vallo, where municipal authorities' celebration of Mediterranean mixing did not include programs to broaden access to public resources for people

2000). Italian autobiographies and non-scholarly accounts, in turn, describe French Protectorate Tunisia as a period of lively cosmopolitanism, focusing on the contribution of Italians to the 'development' of Tunisia (see Bond & Melfa, 2010 for a detailed discussion).

183 Critics of Mediterranean cosmopolitanism also make this argument in reference to a diversity of cities of the 19th Century Mediterranean, such as Alexandria and Istanbul (Cassano, Bouchard, & Ferme, 2012; Dakhliya, 2005; Mills, 2010).

of Tunisian descent, nor efforts to address their labor exploitation or difficult access to immigration status – a situation which had led activists of *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant* to publicly protest the city's Mediterraneanist events.

The second way in which the celebration of mixing creates and perpetuates inequalities, is by creating a symbolic hierarchy between different types of mixing, and – consequently – between the different 'cultures' that are mixing. The French colonial vision of the 'fusion des races', in fact, was a celebration of the assimilation of diverse populations into French language and culture, which colonial authorities considered a privileged vehicle for universalism. However, they had a very different analysis of linguistic alterations to French that emerged out of daily interactions between native and non native speakers – a form of mixing that they considered to corrupt the French language. In other words, their vision of cosmopolitanism was based on the incorporation of subordinate groups into the dominant one. In a similar manner, the type of Mediterranean mixing celebrated by Mazarese city authorities was an aestheticized incorporation of Tunisian 'culture' into the cityscape that served to render Mazara del Vallo more 'exotic' (see Chapter 3). Municipal authorities and Catholic figures, however, did not see other forms of 'mixing' and 'in-betweenness' in the same positive light, as they cast children of migrants as lost and rootless subjects, 'neither here nor there'¹⁸⁴, who had difficulties assimilating into Italian culture¹⁸⁵, and who thus represented a threat to social stability. In other words, both municipal authorities and Catholic figures considered Italian and European 'culture' as a privileged arena of mixing, and thus considered that Tunisians must 'westernize' in order to peacefully coexist with Sicilians (see Chapter 4). Overall, this understanding creates a symbolic hierarchy between 'Frenchness' (in colonial Tunisia) and 'Italian-ness' (in contemporary Sicily), understood as universalist and neutral terrains of mixing, differently from 'Arabness and Tunisianness' which cannot be. In addition, in the present, this understanding casts the boundaries of the national community as a 'given', and thus places the onus of change on the subordinate group, which must change in order to successfully integrate.

A critical analysis of colonial Tunisia does not only shed light on how notions of Mediterranean mixing can create and perpetuate uneven power relations, but also shows how the celebration of Mediterranean multiculturalism is based on an a-historical assumption of difference. When Catholic figures in Mazara del Vallo paint French Protectorate Tunisia as a moment of coexistence between difference, in fact, they assume the pre-existence of separate coherent units (Italians vs. Tunisians), who were then brought together in Tunisia. In other words, they assume that pre-existing differences between poor Italians and Tunisians were greater than internal class or regional differences within the Italian community. In more general terms, considering cross-Mediterranean mixing and dialogue as an answer to the 'clash of civilizations' assumes the existence of two independent and largely incompatible units (Italy/Italians vs. Tunisia/Tunisians) that can be brought together in a third blended unit of the Mediterranean. My analysis, however, has shown the historical production of difference between Sicilians and Tunisians. As I have shown in Chapter 5, in fact, colonial schools in Tunisia sought to 'modernize' Sicilians, and thus differentiate them from Tunisians with whom they shared living conditions, and to whom they were racialized in a similar manner by French

¹⁸⁴ The Italian expression for this is 'ne carne ne pesce', in other words 'neither meat, nor fish'.

¹⁸⁵ Ben-Yehoyada (2011) makes a similar argument about the political inclusion of people of Tunisian descent in Mazara del Vallo's municipal elections.

and Italian elites. Subsequently, the implementation of Italian regional development policies aimed at 'modernizing' the South, and – in the early 1990s – the implementation of strict immigration policies, led Italian and Sicilian media to draw a net distinction between Sicilians and Tunisians, whom they had previously described as similarly marginalized, and thus to identify the Mediterranean as the key 'dividing line' between development and underdevelopment (see Chapter 1). Understanding difference between Sicilians and Tunisians to have been historically produced, then, allows us to argue against the fortification of the Mediterranean border not by celebrating coexistence – and thus implicitly reinforcing an assumption of difference and incompatibility between Europeans and North Africans – but by showing how the boundaries of European-ness were historically produced, and thus are susceptible to change.

Rethinking Mediterraneanism, un-making the Mediterranean border

The official celebration of Mediterranean interconnection alongside the creation and perpetuation of inequality is not unique to Sicily. It characterizes other cities and regions of Southern Europe that have sought to brand themselves as sites of Mediterranean mixing, but that also continue to be marred by deep structural inequalities between people of European and of North African descent (Lafi, 2013; M. Rogozen-Soltar, 2007; M. H. Rogozen-Soltar, 2012). More generally, tensions around invocations of the Mediterranean also exist in North Africa, where claims to 'Mediterranean-ness' are strongly connected to the European Union's economic, cultural and security cooperation programs in the region. In the context of Tunisia, for instance, the national government began to promote the country's 'Mediterranean character' in the 1990s, in order to boost Tunisia's growing relationship with the European Union (Abbassi, 2005), with which Tunisia was the first country to sign an association agreement¹⁸⁶. Interestingly enough, it was precisely through cooperation programs with the European Union that funding became available to restore some of the European colonial neighborhoods of central Tunis¹⁸⁷. Embracing Tunisia's 'Mediterranean' character, however, was not only a discourse facilitating economic and cultural cooperation with the EU, but was also an anti-Islamist discourse based on celebrating Tunisia as a 'mosaic' of different linguistic and cultural elements – a discursive opposition that also exists in other parts of the Maghreb¹⁸⁸ (Sayyid & Dabashi, 2015). Tensions between different ideological and geopolitical visions for Tunisia emerged clearly following the 2011 revolution. The constitutive assembly responsible for drafting the new constitution, in fact, became a site of conflict between differing visions of whether Tunisia should underline its 'Mediterranean' nature, or its 'Arabness, and – consequently – whether a clause on Tunisia's 'Mediterranean Heritage' should be part of the preamble of the constitution (AlFatlahi, 2014; Alkakli, 2014). While a detailed analysis of the politics of Mediterraneanism in Tunisia lies

186 See <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/tunisia/> accessed on 26 April, 2018. In a similar vein, during my fieldwork, some Tunisian entrepreneurs who regularly conducted business with Italy, went to great pains to underline how Tunisia's 'Mediterranean' character made it 'European', and thus fundamentally different from the rest of the MENA region, and particularly from the Gulf.

187 The 'Mutual Heritage' program (part of the Euromed Heritage 4 framework) provided funding for the architectural restoration of colonial European quarters of major Tunisian cities (Bond & Melfa, 2010).

188 Sayyid underlines how in Algeria, embracing the country's Mediterranean character was a common argument embraced by opposers of the country's Islamic Salvation Front.

beyond the scope of this dissertation, it is important to be aware of these debates when thinking through how to develop Mediterraneanist projects that address hierarchies and uneven power relations between people of European and North African descent.

By pointing to the tensions and contradictions in contemporary Mediterraneanist projects, in fact, the intent of this dissertation is not to reject Mediterraneanism. Ideas of Mediterranean mixing and interconnection may well have emancipatory value. Activists from *The Voice of the Tunisian Migrant*, for instance, embraced a language of Mediterraneanism in order to claim a space for their political voice and to demand a more equitable distribution of resources. In more general terms, ideas of mixing and 'in-betweenness' across the Mediterranean (or other material and symbolic borders) have long been a platform of mobilization for people on the marginalized side of the border. Writing from Morocco, for instance, Khatibi (1983) considers the position of 'in-betweenness' represented by the Mediterranean as a means to simultaneously critique Eurocentrism and nativism, in order to develop an 'other thinking' that transcends these dichotomies. Similarly, Anzaldúa (1987) claims a queer Chicana position of 'in-betweenness' as a means to critique bounded notions of national identity and ideas of purity along lines of race, gender or heteronormativity. De la Cadena (2005), in turn, shows how some indigenous intellectuals in Peru make claims to mixing in order to question bounded and a-historical conceptions of indigeneity. In brief, for all these authors, claiming mixing and in-betweenness across material and symbolic borders can be a source of emancipation for people oppressed by these borders.

On a more personal level, it was precisely in the context of rallies and demonstrations at the time of the Iraq war that I – as many others in Italy – turned to the Mediterranean as a means to challenge hierarchies and dichotomies between 'the West' and 'the Rest' that were commonly used as a justification for military intervention. However, it was also through participating in cross-Mediterranean human rights networks to support Tunisian political prisoners, that I became uneasy about unproblematic depictions of the European Union as a beacon of light and bestower of human rights in the Euro-Mediterranean region – a depiction that obscured both the EU's collaboration with North African authoritarian regimes in the name of control of terrorism and immigration, and the longer history of European colonialism in North Africa.

In this dissertation, then, I have analyzed the implicit hierarchies and uneven power relations in contemporary Mediterraneanist projects not to dismiss Mediterraneanism, but to develop a Mediterraneanist vision that addresses both structural inequalities and symbolic hierarchies between the Northern and the Southern shore of this sea. Analyzing past histories of Mediterranean interconnection is key to develop this vision, but not with the intent of searching for a 'model' for the present. Searching for a model in the past, in fact, may actually limit our visions of what the future of interactions between people of European and North African descent may be. Instead, analyzing histories of cross-Mediterranean interconnection allows us to understand how uneven power relations and symbolic hierarchies between Europe(ans) and North Africa(ns) were created, how they continue to be perpetuated, and – consequently – how we may imagine Mediterraneanist projects that acknowledge and address processes of racialization, uneven development and material inequalities in the Mediterranean region.

In order for this to occur, a series of considerations are necessary. The first is for Mediterraneanist projects promoting 'coexistence' to advocate for equity and redistribution, both within Europe and across the Mediterranean. In tangible and immediate terms, in contexts such

as Mazara del Vallo, this means advocacy for fair labor conditions, for access to jobs, for equal access to public resources, and for simpler roads to citizenship for North African (and other) migrants. The second is for Mediterraneanist projects to explicitly reject a politics of assimilation, and – by so-doing – the equation of European-ness with the 'universal', into which some elements of 'the particular' must be incorporated. This means rejecting symbolic hierarchies between 'Italianness' and 'Tunisianness', but also being aware of new symbolic hierarchies that may be created by embracing 'the Mediterranean', such as those between Mediterranean North Africa(ns) and Sub-Saharan Africa(ns). Thirdly and finally, in order to not reify material and symbolic boundaries, Mediterraneanist projects should shed light on the historical production, and thus the contingency and possibility of change, of the boundaries of Europe, carefully guarded by the fortified Mediterranean sea.

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