Gottmann and Mediterranean Iconographies

"As Gottmann points out, seeing what is happening today, reality is not all that simple. 'The old structures have been liberated from age-old threats to the promises of globalization – and this corresponds to a resurgence of nationalism, regionalism, local interests, age-old tribal instincts, parochialism. It is not the geography of matter which shapes the true compartmentalization of space. Nowadays in this field problems can be solved technologically and economically. It is in the hearts and minds that true blockages occur'."

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Introduction

"How can we best study the influence of religion in geography?" Pierre Deffontaines asked in 1966, adding that it is "worthy of further study for each religion, in order to establish a geographical hinterland of the influence of each religious system; this would doubtless be a useful exercise in the study of each religion. However, for a geographer, it is clear that this kind of study should begin by following the major flows of human geography and by observing the input of each different type of religion."

To be more precise, Jean Gottmann (1996) began his deliberations by observing that "the effect which each group may have does not in any way depend exclusively upon material conditions, nor does it depend upon movement or distribution mechanisms," but rather that they also depend upon prevailing emotional states, and that they are "difficult to define and to classify." He went on to say that "they are at times even difficult to follow, in that they are exceedingly volatile; nonetheless, one may grasp the most durable aspects by studying abstract principles, the deep-seated symbolism in which people have faith. This 'group iconography' includes a number of elements, ranging from flags, to the shape of bell-towers, to received social structures, and from religious beliefs to education principles. These include official vested interests such as popular ideas concerning what the group may and must do with its local habitat."

Michel Serres (1994) as well refers to transcendental universal truths and states that "less than a millennium ago, and more or less in the same venue – in the fertile crescent – arose the only two schools of thought which truly count for something; the previous one, God, and this one, geometry. Monotheism and rigorous science, these are the two universal transcendental truths."

And, continuing in his inspired vein, he wrote that "currently, at the end of the second millennium, a new universal truth is approaching, a universal truth which sums up the local sophisticated distinctions drawn by science, by laws, by politics and morality, so as to construct an entity marching towards a religious leader who has yet to be conceived of, whose reach and range unites and shall unite all others, whether together or dispersed, whether they exist collectively, objectively, subjectively, thus linking the faith of the individual ego to the infinity of the objects in the universe and the collective or universal love of mankind, i.e. the relevant reasoning of pathos, of aesthetic values, of the physical world, of technical and charitable activities ..."

It would appear that the reality of the Mediterranean condition sets aside as unimportant, indeed can even completely expunge, the hypothesis of collective and universal love; even the underlying tensions of connection which Serres seemed to
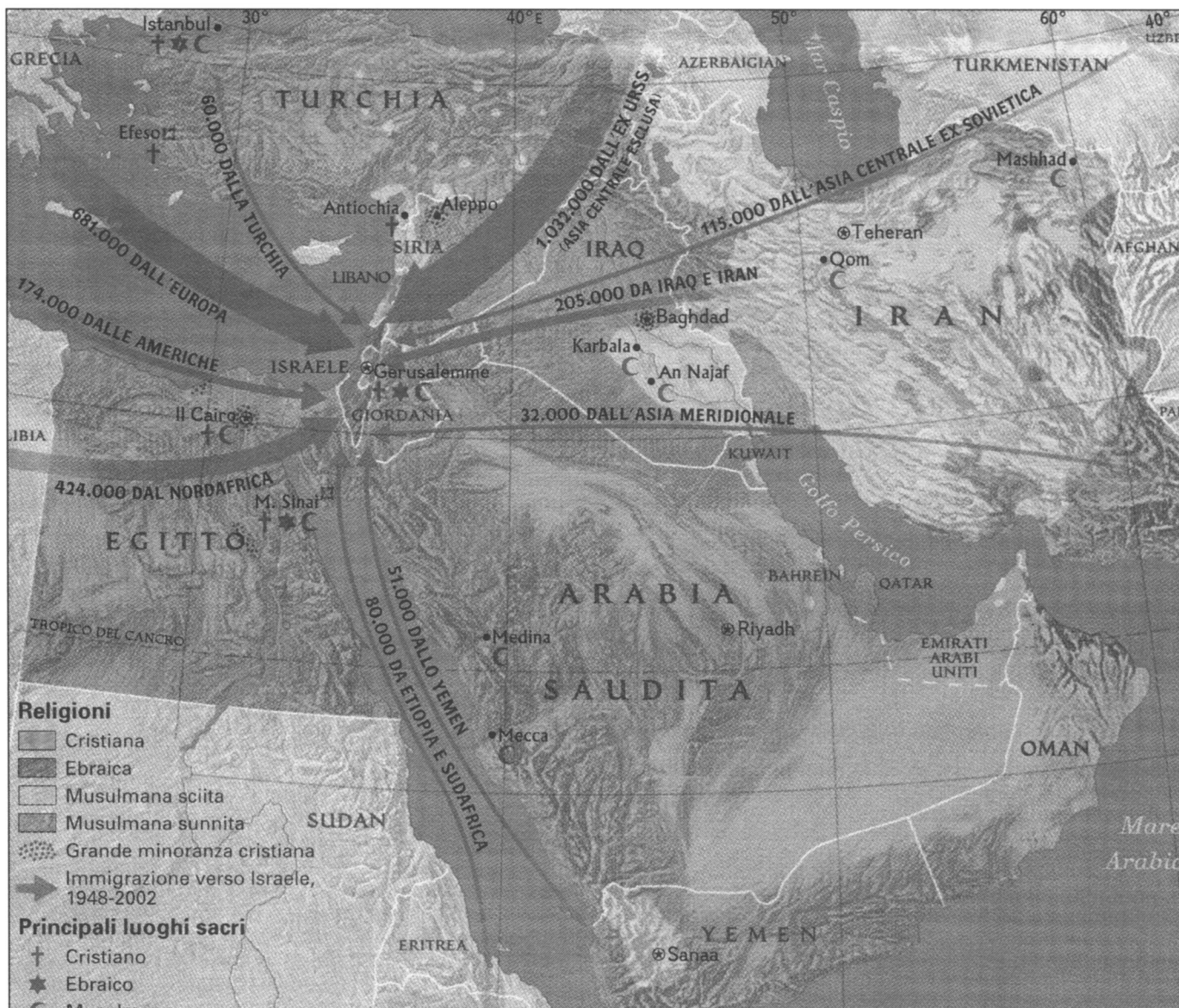
Fig. 1: The Middle East (*Source: National Geographic,* Washington, DC, 2002).

descry are wiped out and we are, instead, forced into a more dramatic reading of other issues, those of a dramatic deterioration and of a possible interaction between religion and conflict or, rather, between monotheism and conflict.

Judaism, Christianity and Islam: these are revealed religions to mankind through the word of God, which has come down to us through history and which is directed to each and every person on his or her path; each human being is treated as an intelligent individual capable of laughing and suffering, and forces each human being to face his or her choices and bear his or her responsibilities (fig. 1).

Thus, is it utterly utopian to imagine that one can still perceive the presence of a force which – notwithstanding even dramatic resistance – can move the peoples of the Mediterranean? This is a converging force which can shape and impress the historic movements of these peoples (LA PIRA, 1961).

It is as if an old prophecy of Giorgio La Pira had taken shape: once more we move from the slavery and suffering of Babylon towards the freedom and joy of Jerusalem.

The point is that, notwithstanding present events, everything might actually be possible once more, given peace, which can be obtained, notwithstanding a thousand difficulties, notwithstanding schizophrenic highs and lows.

The Mediterranean complexity

One starts from Abraham's family, in a triple line of descent: these are the people of the book which one Islamic mystic (SCHWARTLANDER and BIELEFELDT, 1993) defines as follows: Israel is the "religion of hope," Christianity is the "religion of love" and Islam is the "religion of faith." The people of the book are thus called not only because of the spoken word but also because of the written word – the Torah, the Bible and the Koran. There are indeed fundamental differences between the oral and written cultures, particularly as far as religious creeds and practices are concerned, and they depend upon the cultural systems and upon the modes of communication, as can be deduced from Goody's (1988) very abstruse and dense analyses.
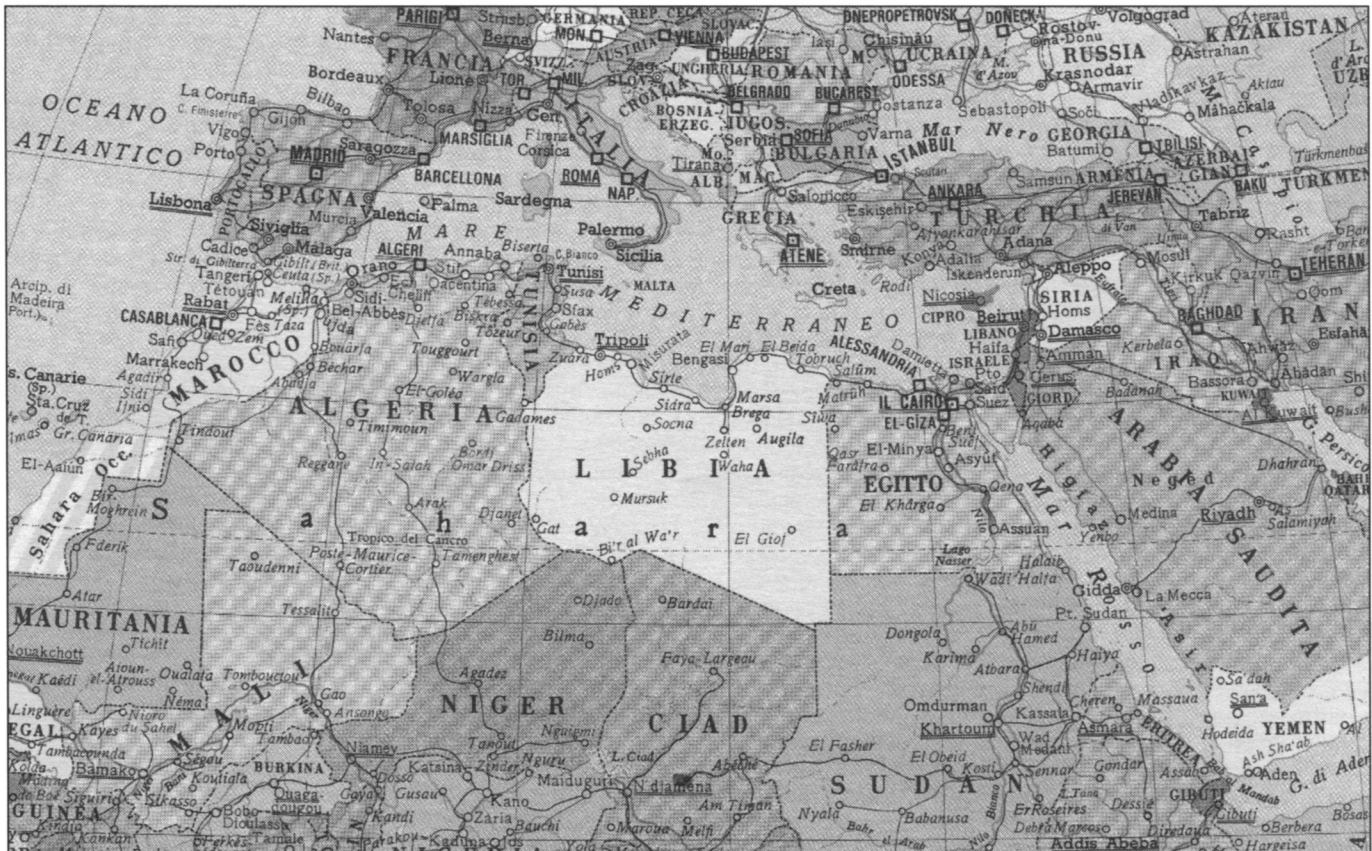
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Fig. 2: The Mediterranean region (*Source: Istituto Geografico DeAgostini,* Novara, 2000).

Goody states that where there is the written word, both the liturgy and prayer practices may change. There may well be a difference between the orthodox and reformist creeds, but "the word, as such, remains unchanged ... and where there is change, it takes, in the main, the form of a schism." However, in the case of oral religions, there may well be a process of assimilation in that the frontiers, the outer limits, allow for a "crossing of boundaries," exactly where in religions with a written creed, there may be only and exclusively conversions, even radical ones, and where overcoming the boundaries – where possible – turns out to be, in the final analysis, irreversible.

Indeed, it is the written word which is the strongest enforcer of identity and differences, above all in the Mediterranean, which is characterized by what can be called "hard-line regionalisms." Everything in the Mediterranean tends to be imbued with "exclusively local color" (fig. 2). In order to foster development and peace in this sea of compartmentalization, it is necessary to solve a "puzzle": the infinitely complex puzzle of ethnic groups and countries, of peoples and religions, with many opposing factors, both structural and symbolic, acting as dividing lines – North-South, West-East, Europe-Arab World, Christianity-Islam. These are oppositions which also entail further divergences and asymmetries. Nonetheless, various psychological universes do attract each other in an intertwining of spatial dealings, relationships and connections. At the end of the day, these are the real issues involved in the complexity of the Mediterranean so strongly felt by Braudel.

It is impossible not to dwell – in this sea of "infinite varieties," whose history is inseparable from the history of the surrounding land – on the impact that the three great monotheistic religions have had on the history, the culture and the very identity of these places.

It is also impossible not to dwell on the fact that the various subjects in the area are far from melding into one another in an integrated fashion which would appreciate the differences while promoting the affinities, overcoming mental blocks and biases, and establishing new relationships. It is indeed most difficult to try to move beyond the stereotype whereby the Mediterranean world is forever condemned to remain – and visibly so – on the periphery of life, far from the centers of world dynamism (C. MUSCARÀ, 1993), in that the Mediterranean essence, notwithstanding decades of European declarations, tends to be self-involved, locked in a process which accumulates the negative effects of life on the fringes, in the embrace of a vicious cycle of underdevelopment, afflictions and conflicts.

The geopolitical approach

Reconciling this Mediterranean backdrop teeming with ancient and modern unresolved problems would require a re-thinking of historical and political facts and their relationship with the geopolitical situation; in other words, it is imperative to deal with geopolitics in a way which does not necessarily involve tactical and strategic issues mainly linked, as has been the case in the past, to "imperialist adventures or the even more terrible events of totalitarian regimes" or, at any rate, to a new type of geography of power (CAMPIONE, 1995 and 1996a).

If it is a given that political geography, or rather geopolitics *tout court*, is a dynamic way of embracing a series of issues pertaining to political organization and the way in which it is concretely implemented, the way in which it expresses itself

regionally, its cultures in the broadest sense of the term and the divisions substantiated by said cultures, then iconography must of necessity be the object of study and analysis within the confines of a type of geopolitics which transcends mere diplomatic and military events but which, in an attempt to identify and understand phenomena, focuses attention on other factors, such as religions, in order to grasp specificities which might be contained in the almost genetic bond existing between religious features and national and nationalistic phenomena (THUAL, 1996).

Indeed, Gottmann's keywords on geographical theory are an initial approach to defining iconography – that is, a set of symbols people can believe in even – well, why not? – in an acritical way which, however, has accreted over time, in the guise of something (some force?) which might well shape how spaces are organized. Iconography is thus a discriminating, a *cloisonant* – partitioning – element precisely because it does, indeed, express quite thoroughly "the nature of social groups to find religious identities, national identities and cultural identities by constructing a defined set of creeds, of ideas and of icons on a local scale" (L. MUSCARÀ, 1995).

As Gottmann points out, seeing what is happening today, reality is not all that simple. "The old structures have been liberated from age-old threats to the promises of globalization – and this corresponds to a resurgence of nationalism, regionalism, local interests, age-old tribal instincts, parochialism. It is not the geography of matter which shapes the true compartmentalization of space. Nowadays in this field problems can be solved technologically and economically. It is in the hearts and minds that true blockages occur" (GOTTMANN, 1992). At any rate, if it is true that it is indeed these factors which are *à la fois matériels et spirituels* – both material and spiritual in nature – but particularly spiritual, indeed one could say cultural in nature and which are the prime cause of the political *cloisonnement* or partitioning of the world – then it is also true that iconography "is a way of selecting amongst a number of cultural factors those which influence the creation of *cloisonnement*, of regionalism," whilst also creating "the key to a dialogue between cultural and political geography" (SANGUIN and PREVELAKIS, 1996). It is precisely this dialogue which will ultimately shed light on kinships, deeply-rooted identities, hand-me-down ideas, myths, languages, symbols and even icons; this entails ritual behavioral patterns apparently deriving from a kind of a *opinio iuris ac necessitatis*; this is far from the realm of ideology in that these are things that speak more to the heart than to the mind (PREVELAKIS, 1995).

And so, generally speaking, iconography is essentially a barrier to change, to innovation and to movement. Indeed, it is as if in trying to read the icons made in the Byzantine figurative tradition, one were able to grasp that they are in essence inward-directed and one-dimensional; they are static in their representation and they have what could be called an objective self-identity and their structure is ahistorical – all traces of history have been removed (FARINELLI, 1994). They exist in an eternal present – the shape of which has definitively congealed (AVENICEV, 1994) – and where the past might well become a memory but where there appears to be no future of any kind.

Thus, the whole point is understanding whether, given the static nature of these entities, they may in some way shape or create change in nature, and if so, how.

There is a juxtaposition which always underlies the shaping of public authority and the political life of peoples, whilst bearing within itself the seeds of conflict. It might very well be that iconography tends to use circulation in order to establish and extend its authority and that, vice versa, circulation – of ideas, capital, traffic, technologies, goods – might show strong signs of allowing different forms of iconography to flourish where they cross the areas in question (GOTTMANN, 1966).

Indeed, "the two main factors of movement and iconography would appear to work at cross purposes: movement promotes change, given the greater spatial fluidity, while iconography promotes the conservation of the established order and the strengthening of existing division. Nonetheless, the two factors combined generate what might be called an equilibrium which promotes the working of a local-global continuum inside the total geopolitical area which is open to human activities. This equilibrium is undoubtedly an unstable equilibrium. It is fluid, local details change, but this fluidity does not halt the entire global system in its tracks" (GOTTMANN, 1996).

The Mediterranean

Thus, to come back to the Mediterranean area, which is to all intents and purposes the symbol of the considerations made above, it appears clear that this area, particularly, though not exclusively, the Arab world, bears the weight of all the tensions of the West, making it almost the "world's powder keg," precisely because it bestrides the world's fault lines. Its central position is defined in historical and geographical terms in relation to the west and is referred to an Islam which perceives a new-found cultural identity in that "wide-spread need for the meta-rational, bringing to the fore both cults and faiths." Indeed, part of this perception is of Islam "as a religion which redeems the oppressed and the wretched of the earth, bringing new tensions to bear between the northern and southern hemispheres" (CARDINI, 1994).

The arousal of a state of fear in the West is to a great degree due to the neglect, deferment and shifting of priorities. Nor has it been possible to convey the idea that such a broad range of crisis points would in the end have a negative impact on internal relations inside the European Union. To tell the truth, for the longest time it appeared that the prevailing reasoning was to promote a strategy aimed at integration. However, the philosophy of dominion of a bipolar division of the world held sway and ensured a situation whereby the entire Mediterranean area remained an external backdrop to the skirmishes and disputes for spheres of influence and use of resources. In other words, an important iconography that must be kept under control so as not to jeopardize in any way the bipolar leadership of the world by, for example, using the "oil issue," pitting producing countries against the west but also pitting Arab country against Arab country and the "confrontation" countries against the "rejection" countries (FARINELLI, 1992).

These events took place against a backdrop of boldness and caution, vigilance and denial, in a sinusoidal process. The southernmost parts of Europe shifted the center of gravity of Community policies even further south, Delors' "White Paper" (1994) was ignored and welfare policies were thrown into a state of crisis. Part of this was due to the changes under way caused by globalization and at the end of the day attention was drawn away from the area.

It appeared that Barcelona sparked a return of European interest in the area, with declarations, complete with literary references and rhetorical flourishes, that the region shares a common history, a common identity and common values. The truth is that this resurgence in interest felt by Europe was mostly spurred by a renewed awareness of (and – let's be frank – fear of) mass migratory flows from south to north.

The ultimate goal seemed to be to take steps to ensure that these flows be gradually stopped or at least contained by establishing and regulating partnerships aimed at providing new economic prospects. These objectives, however, were slightly dimmed in the final declarations by the long list of proposals. The determining factor was the demographic forecasts put forward by the United Nations at the Cairo conference and which, however approximate, are probably fairly

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close to the truth or at least as close to a vision of the truth of such complex situations as is possible. The forecasts are for enormous differences between the northern and southern rims of the Mediterranean. The southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean have a population of 321 million inhabitants as compared to 143 million along the northern rim. Forecasts for the year 2015 are for the population along the northern rim to remain stable at 143 million inhabitants but the southern and eastern parts of the Mediterranean will have a projected population of 489 million; by the year 2050, the population living along the northern rim will have dropped to 123 million, while the south and the east will have a population of 738 million people (UNITED NATIONS, 1994a). Clearly, the type of demographic policies debated at the Cairo conference alone will not suffice to deal with problems of this magnitude, nor will defensive or, worse yet, substantially repressive policies work (CAMPIONE, 1994 and 1995; UNITED NATIONS, 1994b).

One thing, however, remains clear, and that is that notwithstanding renewed attention to the area, no feasible and viable projects are forthcoming.

The situation is still spiraling downward, with intractable problems still persisting, iconographies increasingly frozen, ending up in large swathes of violence and conflicts. It might be useful, in an attempt to come to grips with the reasons behind this downward spiral, to re-exhume the definitions of the circular nature of the cumulative cause of underdevelopment, as analyzed by Gunnar Myrdal (1957) in the second half of the 1950s. A vicious circle, whereby "poverty becomes the cause of poverty"; the free play of market forces contains within itself the seeds of imbalance; the poorer the country, the greater the imbalance. Of course, the whole concept of cumulative circular process implies an entire series of interacting and reacting forces, so as to keep a poor country ever poorer, until the downward slide is complete.

Utilitarianism, vested interests and fear underpin geopolitics. Any and all assessments included in the strategies of the powers that be have essentially been literary in nature, assessments concerning the tribal and pre-modern nature of these countries, with an emphasis on the folkloristic nature of their mores, the entire thing wrapped up in ethnographic and anthropological terms. All of this serves to consolidate the ghettoization of iconography. Indeed, in these closed systems where there is increasing deterioration, there is an irreversible speeding up of entropy and order is continuously destroyed (VALLEGA, 1982; VON BERTALANFFY, 1968).

There are, however, others – particularly in the south, and not out of nostalgia – whose narrative regarding the Mediterranean describes a place where "the universal principles of democracy, of human rights and the rights of communities originated." For example, Paul Balta (1994) came up with the idea of a Mediterranean Charter. He said that these values, restored and updated, could form the basis and would spread to other shores (as if there could ever be a recurrence of a situation such as: *Graecia capta ferum victorem coepit*). One can perceive the glimmerings of a desire to overcome this dead end and move towards a rediscovery of relationships.

One must understand, as Claval (1996) stated, that notwithstanding "the similarities and parallels deriving from nature and history," the Mediterranean, even the northern and western parts of the Mediterranean, "is to be considered a fragmented area, though there is now greater access to Europe and to the world: the current conditions reiterate the image of a badly integrated part of the world." The question is whether there can be hope that the situation will improve soon. "It certainly can, particularly if efforts are made to restructure connections." These are what will, in the final analysis, "ensure that a deeper form of solidarity and more substantial affinities might be created." This is very much in line with the draft Charter of the

Communities of the Peoples of the Mediterranean (BALTA, 1994). The draft states that these communities intend to anchor their future to the international community and, in particular, to a system of meaningful relations with Europe. Trade (but above all history, culture and thus politics) has always occurred within the confines of the Mediterranean basin and for that reason the citizens of the Mediterranean wish to "take their destiny into their own hands" and work hard to ensure that the Mediterranean basin be recognized in national, regional and international fora as "a geographical entity and a geopolitical assemblage," even though the rim countries at the moment belong to an array of international institutions.

It is for that very reason that the document, amongst other proposals, "calls upon regional political organizations to establish a Mediterranean project. This project should promote the establishment of a Baltic-Mediterranean axis embracing Africa and the Near East, whose waterways would be the Rhône, the Danube, the Black Sea, the Euphrates, the Nile and the Suez Canal; endeavour to consolidate the Latin arc of countries, establishing a pole of development extending to the Maghreb countries and establishing another pole to the east, covering an arc ranging from Egypt to Turkey and from Greece to the countries of the former Yugoslavia; provide support for all bodies involved in co-operating and networking, including Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs), and particularly those working in the field of culture, environmental issues and the economy, in order to ensure that the Mediterranean become, once more, an area where there may be the free circulation of peoples, of cultures and of goods forevermore; contribute towards the co-development of the northern and southern rims of the Mediterranean in a spirit of partnership in order to achieve, at a later stage, co-prosperity."

In essence, this would constitute an attempt to turn around the current situation, whereby the Mediterranean reflects the conflicts (Kliot) of the countries along its rim. Up until now, the networks reflect above all the immense diaspora which has "brutally transformed the daily life of millions of citizens of the basin ... and which, used correctly, could play a very important socio-economic role, providing ethnic bridges proving to be both solid and flexible" (BALTA, 1992).

Should we entrust this new beginning predicated upon values to the peoples of the book? It has been said that they are the people to whom the book was revealed and who might well become once more a source of salvation and liberation even though many facilely assume that it is the religious element which is the source of the tensions and malaise that have accumulated in the region over the years. They forget, however, that even the west has malaise and tensions on its conscience and that, after decolonization, the tensions have increased over time, the epiphenomena of globalization, of monetarist theology and of the harsh processes of capitalist restructuring, as Hobsbawm or Dahrendorf would say. These processes of the west have sparked Darwinian selection and marginalization and are responsible for the shocking increase in poverty and the huge gap between rich countries and poor countries. Indeed, even in countries with an advanced economy where the marketplace is the sole regulator, the marketplace has caused or at least highlighted social traumas and enormous imbalances.

Why then not simply state that marginalization, poverty, degradation and underdevelopment are the causes of the hardening of age-old enclaves and the proliferation of new ones?

Taking a moralistic stance is neither helpful nor useful in sorting out such an unwieldy situation and coming to grips with revolutionary events such as the rise of terrorism. Nor will prejudice and over-simplification help. Indeed, it would be most useful to understand the underlying concepts and the yard-

sticks used in passing judgment on the basis of a moralistic assessment.

One must also stress that in the west, public opinion is basically uninterested in fundamentalism. Fundamentalism is something bloody and separate from us, we deny it by demonizing it and consider it something almost exotic, medieval and, in general, something that belongs to the Islamic countries. Fundamentalism is a demon from another world. And yet it isn't. Fundamentalism as a phenomenon, with its ferociousness and use of modern technology (consider, for example, the horrifying attacks on New York), with its harsh relegation of women to suffocatingly traditional pre-modern roles, is something which arises from the crises of the modern-day world, something which arises from our time.

The overarching ideologies and the ambitious agendas of social transformation have collapsed, bringing widespread economic security and a deep-seated crisis of stable moral values in their wake; fundamentalism provides a refuge, provides a sense of identity, strength and certainties which are irresistible lures for millions of people.

This happens in the Christian world as well as the world of Islam, in the Jewish world as well as among the Hindus. Not all phenomena are equally widespread, but they all have the same root cause: hatred arising from deep-seated fear (DONI, 1995; POLITI, 1996). As often happens, pitting one type of fanaticism against the other creates monstrosities much greater and more dangerous than the original monsters which aroused such great fears. It would be worthwhile to meditate on the fact that it is precisely the unresolved problems of the Muslim world (FULLER and LESSER, 1996) or rather, more generally, the unresolved problems of the Third World, which feed tensions and ignite a continuous escalation of violence. Harshness or, worse yet, repression in no way resolves the issue; indeed, it simply plunges that world into a tempestuous vortex of endless tensions.

Against this backdrop of what might be termed an international division of labor, rather than compartmentalization, there are enormous benefits deriving from circulation, which causes and indeed strengthens and uses the unleashed energy released by the downward spiral of dead-end situations and whose *raisons d'être*, to quote Gottmann, can be found in the complex motivations of iconography. What can one say about these Mediterranean tragedies, with the attendant halfhearted attempts at mediation, the wait-and-see, non-interventionist attitudes, the resigned impotence of the international community in the face of massacres, genocide, ethnic cleansing in the daily headlines? One merely becomes used to it, it becomes part of daily life and in the end one loses even the comfort of indignation, ever more thinly veiled by the useless cant of declarations.

Our understanding is shallow (is this an alibi?), and the west harbors fear and dread. This leads to a sterile casting of blame elsewhere, as if in an attempt to exorcise a very faintly perceived sense of guilt.

It is legitimate to wonder to what extent religion – specifically monotheism – is the source of these very complex situations. Is it not possible that religion might well act as a detonator of an already explosive situation, brimming with ideals and above all imbued with fiercely-held motives against a complex iconographic background?

The answer might lie in a key point which could well spark off a virtuous cycle which might dampen passions underlying the explosions, as Bonanate (1994) observes – despotism or rather illiberalism, closed-mindedness and rejection of liberating relationships, ancient blood-feuds over land – and thus restrict the opportunities for conflict.

Or is it at the end of the day easier to embark upon the path of kangaroo courts and shop-worn clichés?

Since we are on the subject of the fears the west harbors, particularly with regard to Islam, how then can we defend this hostility towards a religion espoused by over a billion people, which is present throughout the entire area of Christianity, which is 14 centuries old and whose contributions to civilization are beyond dispute; how can we accept that we dismiss this religion out of hand as inferior while knowing so little about it?

Conversely, a more mature attitude would allow us to grasp the fact that we are, de facto, living through "the most cruel war of religion"; even though it is an undeclared war, as Roger Garaudy (1995) says, it "colors social relations and international relations. We practice a form of market monotheism with, however, a cult of adoration of many idols: money, power, nationalism and various forms of fundamentalism. The most pressing task now in order to come to grips with this monotheism is to call upon the good offices of those for whom life has a special meaning and who are capable of finding it and putting it into practice ..."

Pierre Claverie, the bishop of Oran (1995), who witnessed the bloody protests coalescing around the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS), said that he was convinced that the fear of Islam arises from disinformation, as is always the case with religions other than one's own, and added that fundamentalism is like "a fever spreading when the political structures are weak or are crumbling and governments no longer represent the people ... but Algerian society is healthy, strong, civil and wise. It has shown itself capable of co-existing with death, while emerging alive from the fire. What we need now is to re-establish democratic rules to shut the fundamentalists down – nobody wants it."

How to recover from these fevers? The three Mediterranean religions must carry on a dialogue, "starting from real problems – what respect for human life means, what respect for the dignity of man means, what justice means ... These are the issues which unite us," and so by sharing joys and pains, problems and worries, Christians and others work together in the hopes of growing together, learning more about each other's religious heritage, in a spirit of reciprocal respect for each other's values, religious traditions and spiritual richness.

And yet, the Bishop of Oran died while bearing witness to the fact that "Thou shalt not kill in the name of God," (CAMPIONE, 1996b).

Jews invoke a culture of dialogue as well: for example, Borowitz (1990) refers to the enslavement and the exodus, to the centuries of persecution and degradation, to the emancipation from the ghetto and, lastly, to the Holocaust. He uses this often tragic history to teach a lesson in ethics which "must be part of our Jewishness." Jewishness is the deep-seated and absolute respect for the value of universal human rights which must be "extended to every living creature."

Nonetheless, as the Dutch theologian Walf (1990) insists, if the values of experience are to apply with any degree of probity, then in that same spirit of probity, one must also acknowledge those "lacks which the Judeo-Christian tradition acknowledges and maintains with regard to human rights" (fig. 3). He goes on to say that this heritage can and must be overcome within the very heart of institutionalized religions. Often, in a more or less open fashion, institutionalized religions have tried to envelop power in a holy shroud, as Garaudy feels from the Islamic point of view. Whereas in truth it is power which has, at the end of the day, used religion; the upshot is an exploitation of divine law (the shari'a) for its own needs, thus creating a tradition (Sunna) which at times is in radical opposition to revealed truth – indeed, the worse violations of human rights are in line with this philosophy.

Well then, continues Garaudy, and here he still is referring to Islam, the very heart of this reasoning could well refer to other religions. The point is that it is high time to end a literal inter-
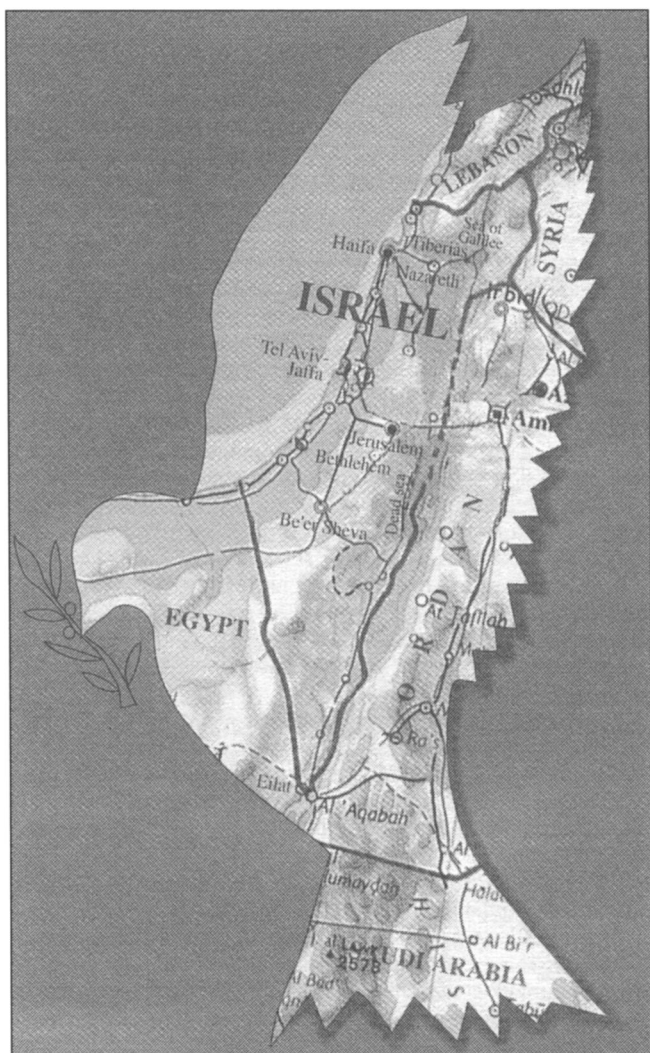
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Fig. 3: Israel and the representation of peace. (*Source:* F. Encel, *Géopolitique de Jérusalem,* Paris, Flammarion, 1998).

pretation, i.e. to stop reading the Koran with the "eyes of a dead person," as if being a Muslim meant being frozen in a remote era of time, completely immobile. It is also time to stop this idolatrous cult of tradition which, as has already been said, ends up contradicting itself. It is also high time to put an end to the infinite number of sayings of the prophet, which have been "brooded over for centuries"; this is undoubtedly "the source of garbled messages." And lastly, it is high time to stop legal hair-splitting which "robs Islam of its charitableness and love."

These doctrinaire statements, born of experience, were a warning to millions of men who, in fighting injustice, might at the same time, harm the image of God.

As the French philosopher says, "Islam, as well as Christianity, needs a theology of liberation."

One of the main topics addressed by the Italian Church in Palermo, in its meeting held once every ten years, was the construction of a new society upon the foundation of the commandment to show charity "at the moment in which charity is lacking or cold-hearted ... because of long-standing divisions."[1] At the meeting there were moments of great ecumenicity, and dialogue and prayers were put forward in an attempt to establish a sort of communion as a sign of the possibility of reconciling diversity.

Indeed, the meeting in Naples on Monotheism and Vio-

lence[2] as well was useful in order to come to a full understanding of the fact that monotheism does not necessarily mean the rise of pride, arrogance and religious fundamentalism or wilfulness and power and the desire to prevail at all costs.

Let us look to the Koran: Faith requires no force, the straight and narrow path of righteousness is easy to see, those who turn away from Tàgut (i.e. idols) and believe in God have an unbreakable grip on righteousness; God listens to them and knows who they are (Koran II, 256). Thus "Muslims and Christians stand face to face, as human beings in a society becoming ever more varied and in a world which is becoming ever smaller, until they actually touch" (KHOURY, 1985).

Nonetheless, the difficulties of reconciling the two opposite forces remain, as do the difficulties in conducting a dialogue.

Though it is true that tolerance and dialogue are the very basis of human society, it is also true that the "word," i.e. considering one's own truth as the only truth, must of necessity lead to dogmatism, as Vitiello, the philosopher, observes. It is clear that religion requires verities – verities which each religion assumes it has and which are different from those of other religions and, being different, the opposite.

It is perhaps on the basis of this assumption that, were we to "assess this based on our criteria," as Karl Rahner (1985) writes, we would understand that the history of Christianity has also, to an appalling degree, been "the history of intolerance, the persecution of heretics, wars of religion and the crushing of individual consciences by ecclesiastic and state authorities."

And so it should be understood, as *Civiltà Cattolica* has written, that when people state that "Christianity is the one true religion," then that means that "the absolute truth and holiness inherent in the Christian religion does not apply to Christianity as it has existed in history, but to Jesus Christ. Over the course of time, Christians have mingled verities and errors, holiness and sin; they have committed the sin of domination and oppression of other religions. Thus the true way is to go along this path: from the word to dialogue, i.e. from identity to the Other, face to face, the believing Christian and the other.

This means an open-hearted acceptance of the other – accepting him and his otherness; this is the beginning of communication and the true path towards reconciliation as Pittau says. Today we are living in an extraordinary world of racial, religious and cultural pluralism; we must of necessity ensure that the culture of otherness be accepted as the first step towards true communication.

As Bruno Forte, the theologian says, that is why in our relationship with other religions, all religions which are different from Christianity should be treated by Christians with dignity and forbearance, which "should never be sullied by the presumption that Christianity is the only religion," even though it is clear that this attitude of profound respect for other religions does not exempt a Christian from "living his faith fully and completely." Thus, tolerance and respect should become a living embodiment of faith and at the same time a form of dialogue. Bruno Forte wrote in a text on ecumenism that "The Gospel of the Church is against ideological standardization, it invokes the infinite dignity of human beings before God and before other men, irrespective of who they are and irrespective of their station in life ... what the Church's Gospel offers the world is neither standardization nor nihilism. What it offers is the coming together and union of differences, of God and man, of the individual and his neighbor, of races and cultures in all their inimitable originality."

The religions shall confront one another – but not as espousing the one, the true religion, but rather as the upshot of that give and take which history provides, without however fearing that religious truth be downgraded to a mere historical fact or mere affirmation of ethics. Attention must be paid to the otherness of the world, which is expressed in other religions and

which is a reaffirmation of true exchanges, of dialogue and sol-idarity, "both freely given," in the mystery of the meetings aris-ing from human exodus and divine advent. One must over-come, though not deny, the weight of so much scandal which true believers have caused throughout history. "How many horrors have been committed in the name of the absolute truth of Christianity, how many pyres have burned in the name of the truth of Christ!"

That is why true believers must ask themselves every day whether "the Light can help overcome the darkness of scan-dal." Interreligious dialogue aims not only at mutual under-standing and at friendly relations, but also must turn into a mutual act of bearing witness to one's own creed, precisely because on the one hand there is an acceptance of differ-ences while on the other there is a respect for "freely-taken decisions of conscience," in order to establish reciprocal forms of appreciation. The Second Vatican Council, in fact, acknowl-edges that all men, of whatever religious persuasion, are all basically just waiting for an answer to the most hidden secrets of the human condition which deeply trouble the hearts of men, today, as ever always.

It is therefore inevitable that any of the monotheistic reli-gions, as they have always stated, must of necessity operate in a unified sort of pluralism, and must work towards bettering the values of loving one's neighbor, of justice and of peace. In other words, working for liberation.

Quinzio would say that, with the help of faith, religion is far from being something conservative, something which keeps public order, something socially static. In the truest sense of the term, history has proven religion to be a subversive critical force, a force for change, an initial spark of eschatological protest against the powers that be and against the prevailing order.

It is important not to confuse faith with religion, given the institutional nature religions acquire over time, to the detriment of the original drive of faith [...].

On the contrary, faith is "totally other" as far as the world is concerned; it welcomes the pronouncement and proposition from God that faith "should be" something different from "being" in the world we experience on a daily basis.

Faith is "the realization of what is hoped for" (Hebrews 11, 1), and we hope from it the prophecy, "Behold, I make all things new" (Revelations 21, 5), and that "we await new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Peter 3, 13) (QUINZIO, 1989).

Throughout history, religions have structured in social terms these paths to faith. Bygone religious ages were capable of "establishing societies which survived for long periods of time in which tolerance was much more than merely abstention from open warfare." The rights of outsiders are well established in the Bible, as in the Koran, which bans enforced conversions (QUINZIO, 1995), so much so that, in a splendid display of the concept of mercy, the very concept of the enemy is super-seded (QUINZIO, 1995). There are other religious periods of history, even recent history, and in other parts of the world, in which the opposite was true: was this because of nationalism or the raw appeal of power?

But now this issue has once more become topical, because we still need hope in our lives. That might be why, on the eve-ning of Holy Thursday in Jerusalem, in the cenaculum where Christian tradition has it that the Last Supper was held, time is taken away from war to celebrate.

This is where, in a "universal plea," it is said: We, the chosen children of Abraham, who have descended from him in three family lines: Jews, Christians and Muslims, but who are united in venerating one god, ... are here united to honor a com-mandment issued two thousand years ago – to "love one another as I have loved you" (MONAR, 1996).

Conclusion

It now becomes quite clear how it is that with regard to the issues which we have quite amply discussed there appears to be a clear awareness of how much guilt and how many errors there are in history. They have immensely aggravated ten-sions and conflicts which have become internalized and which have caused the continuous spasms of fierce violence in the Mediterranean.

Indeed, one could well say that it is precisely these elements which imbued wars of religion and conflicts with meaning and which – though the wars might have had other root causes – made them even more ferocious and inhumane.

It would appear that at this juncture, the most important point would be to wonder about the underlying causes and effects of an unstoppable downward spiral of malaise and degradation.

An inward look, without pretence, painful even; it is a ques-tion of passing in review the history of groups and of individu-als – something which might well, one hopes, become the pre-lude to painfully reconstructed and carefully judged elements of sharing and disengagement. These elements must be inter-twined and assessed without bias and without the intrusion of egos, because not everything can be resolved within the con-fines of the endless mediation of diplomatic ritual. Everything must be carefully assessed, of course. But it is also important to break the silence.

Tahar Ben Jalloun (1996) is deeply convinced of the fact that, though it might well be true that "without a religious conviction" so many things are destined to fail, it is also true that very often things such as lynchings, unspeakable violence, etc., would have happened anyway, for other reasons, without any need for justification.

What can we do to salvage Islam and the Koran from this "casting of stones"? ...

"Is Islam fundamentally the people who practice it or does it exist outside the human framework?" ...

Isn't Islam what men make of it? It is high time for cultivated Muslims, who deeply believe in the message of Allah and his prophet Mohammed, for enlightened Muslims, who are mod-ern and democratic, to rise up against the massacres perpe-trated by the warriors who think they speak on behalf of Islamic culture and civilization.

These men do exist. They are discreet. The only question is – for how long will they give free rein to these barbaric acts whose repercussions are felt by the entire Muslim and Arab population of the world?

These are questions which are not meant to be excuses. They are also questions which might well be asked in other spheres as well, unless one wishes to establish that everything in the area is pre-destined, as Gottmann wrote on the recon-dite meanings of iconography. The crux of the issues perhaps lies in these heartfelt writings. In other words, once more it is possible to put a different spin on the history of these territo-ries, a spin which is in the hands of man, but only if everyone involved were to consider themselves part and parcel of the same adventure, having the same – or almost the same – resources and worries. As Olivier Carré (1997) says, the strug-gle should not founder, in the light of a possible secularization, in the name of God's vengeance. It is of the utmost impor-tance to fight for a lay interpretation of the Koran and to ensure that three separate issues remain separate: religion, state, world.

This, however, is a truth which applies to all. To take arms in favor of cultural modernity and thus remain open to other civilizations and cultures requires a modus operandi which is not in contradiction with warning against the effects funda-mentalism has on all religions in its neo-absolutist mode (TIBI, 1997).

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Notes

1. The Third Ecclesiastic Meeting, 20-25 November, 1995, used the conclusions drawn by the Italian Episcopalian Conference, "The Gospel of Charity for a new society in Italy," *Magistero* 235, Edizioni Paoline, Milan, as the basis for its deliberations; G. Campione, comments on 'Il Sole 24 Ore,' November 17, Milan; *Il Popolo*, 16-21-22-23-24-25 November, Rome; *La Gazzetta del Sud*, 14-20-21-22-23-24-24 November, Messina.

2. International Study Days on "Monotheism and Conflict. How to prevent and resolve conflicts between monotheistic religions in the Mediterranean," held in Naples at the Istituto Suor Orsola Benincasa on 13-15 December, 1995; participants included Italian, French, German, Israeli and Arab, representing institutions, academies and embassies. There was an intense debate of profound interest. See: P. Claverie, "Les derniers et 'le royaume de l'homme' " (The last and the kingdom of man); B. Forte and V. Vitiello, "Il dialogo e le ragioni dell'altro" ("Dialogue and the arguments of the other"); R. Garaudy, "Islam, margination et émancipation humaine" ("Islam, marginalization and human emancipation"); G.S.I. Pittau, "Gesù Cristo: alterità e interiorità" ("Jesus Christ: otherness and the spiritual life"); S. Quinzio, "Se vedi l'asino di chi ti odio" ("If you see your enemy's donkey…") "Justice and Solidarity." These are the texts in E. Ferrie (1997), *Monotheism and Conflict* (Naples, Cuen).

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