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EuroMed Research Network on Migration



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Cosmopolitanism and Mediterranean cities

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Background Rationale and Content

In July 2018, a Euro-Mediterranean Research Network on Migration (*EuroMedMig*) was launched during the [15th IMISCOE Annual Conference](#) in Barcelona. The Steering Committee covers now: Albania, Algeria, Belgium, Egypt, France, Greece, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Palestine, Portugal, Spain, Tunisia, and Turkey. It initially received institutional support from The Union for the Mediterranean and it is academically recognized as an [IMISCOE Regional Network](#).

This WP Series is part of first a specific action within a three-year (2019-2022) Erasmus+ Jean Monnet Network Program (Project Reference: 611260-EPP-1-2019-1-ES-EPPJMO-NETWORK) entitled "[Mapping European Mediterranean Migration Studies](#)" (Acronym: *EUMedMi*) and coordinated by GRITIM-UPF. More information about the project can be found on its [website](#).

The main purpose of *EuroMedMig Working Paper Series* is to disseminate research-in-progress that may contribute to the development of Mediterranean Migration Studies, with an effort to go beyond Eurocentrism, promote knowledge exchange between scholars from all the rims of the Mediterranean and beyond, and foster a Mediterranean Thinking in Migration research agenda. It has also the purpose to promote the potentialities of Migration for Mediterranean Regional Development, and to place Mediterranean Migration Studies within the Global Migration Agenda. Mediterranean Migration dynamics and Governance systems with several clusters are covered: Migration and Mediterranean Geo-political international relations - Migration and Mediterranean Governance and Politics - Migration and Mediterranean Social and Cultural relations - Migration and Mediterranean Economic and Market relations.

The content is multidisciplinary, considering socio-demographic, political science, economics, law, anthropology and other social sciences disciplinary approaches. It has an explicit gender/ethical concern in dealing with migration related issues. It seeks to promote multi-sited comparative researches, multilevel analysis, intersectional focuses, both conceptual, theoretical and empirical led research. *EuroMedMig Working Paper Series* is blind peer-reviewed. Each Working Paper is open access with copyright creative common protection.

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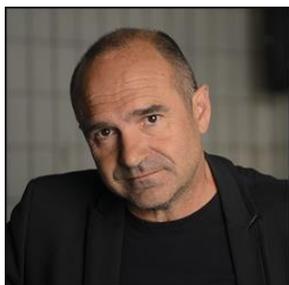
Abstract

What place is given to foreigners and migrants in the cities of the Mediterranean basin? At a time of radicalism and withdrawal, rethinking common values on the different shores is becoming an urgent necessity. In this context, the urban space as a place for deciding the place of the "Other" within society appears to be the best possible laboratory for mixing. In order to envisage the future, this article proposes a reflection on the past of Mediterranean cities and their real or supposed cosmopolitanism. This memory of cities with mixed and variegated populations, linked together by a common culture that is sometimes fantasized, can serve as a reference point for implementing tolerant urban policies capable of moving away from restrictive state management. Between reality and representation, we question the specificity of cosmopolitanism in Mediterranean cities, which, in spite of systems of domination sometimes difficult to support like the colonization, can be.

Keywords

Cosmopolitanism, Marseille, migrations, memory, colonization.

Author's biographical note



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particular, Yvan Gastaut is interested in questions of representation imaginaries, sport, identity, stereotypes that flow between the two Mediterranean shores, racism vs antiracism, public opinion and memory conflicts. He was the director of a program of de Agence Nationale de la Recherche in France "Ecrans et Inégalité" (ECRIN 2013-17) about the image of "Arabic" people in TV, cinema and internet (1962-2001). He is teaching a Master in Migration in Nice and CIFE formation (Nice-Tunis-Istanbul) as well as Master in Migration (ORMES) in Agadir University. Yvan Gastaut has 25 years of experience on the issue of representation of migration. Mediterranean has been taken as space of reference in his researches. For more information about his research activities and publications see [here](#).

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Cities and cosmopolitan situations in the Mediterranean area

In the Mediterranean basin, closely linked to urban space, cosmopolitanism evokes situations of population mixing. For several generations of historians of the twentieth century in the universities of different riparian countries, it was classic to label Mediterranean cities as cosmopolitan spaces. In recent decades, this presupposition seems less and less valid among researchers in the humanities and social sciences in particular around Fernand Braudel's work in the context of colonization and the beginning of independences with the positive moment of the two decades of independence with extensions in terms of vision of a global Mediterranean and without major clashes. We can find this vision in André Nouschi, Paul Balta or François Lebrun. Whether historical reality or fantasized vision, this widespread analysis or representation seems to be dissipating nowadays. The failure of the Euro-Mediterranean process, political problems, radicalism of all kinds and the serious "migrant crisis" attesting to the fact that for a decade now, the sea has been more of a cemetery for travelers than a bridge between the two shores: societies appear to be more inclined to withdraw into themselves than to be open to the "Other". This pessimistic observation at the beginning of the 21st century forces us to consider certain past forms of cosmopolitanism as a heritage to be defended as a basis for building the "welcoming" dimension on both shores. Recalling the intermingling of the past in order to envisage the diversities of tomorrow is the challenge, as Anissa Barak did in 1994, evoking the use of the spirit of tolerance in the "plural cities" of the Mediterranean.

Cosmopolitanism and welcoming cities: the weight of a Mediterranean past between fantasy and reality

Forced, fortuitous or voluntary, the mixing of different populations is often the consequence of an economic, political or cultural context when individuals or groups of individuals are brought to frequent the same space, observing rules together, sometimes participating in the same project. As variegated as the population described by cosmopolitanism may be, the notion of degree can be introduced in the mixing according to the situations: if it is only a more or less structured coexistence, sometimes things can go deeper, leading to forms of mutual integration or crossbreeding. Cosmopolitanism does not necessarily represent a "melting pot", it can also be an assembly of situations, of

juxtapositions of populations which can lead to closer mixtures. In this respect, the mixed union is revealing, obvious in a context of miscegenation, it is not necessarily so in a cosmopolitan situation. Populations of multiple origins and denominations were able to meet despite the divisions in common places such as markets, certain collective events, places of tourism and sports areas. Thus a "cosmopolitan situation" can be learned to be together without there necessarily being an investment by the populations concerned. It can sometimes be just a sum of more or less fortuitous encounters linked to the activity of each one which intersects with that of others in the same space-time.

The term "cosmopolitanism" is sometimes controversial in the social sciences, and appears to be a vague notion, with ill-defined contours that are illustrated by practices and languages that are scattered according to the disciplines and countries. Among historians, Robert Ilbert's thesis on Alexandria offers a masterly basis for work. But the journalist and historian Peter Coulmas (1914-2003), before the sociologist Ulrich Beck (1944-2015), undertook a global analysis of cosmopolitanism, while others in France, such as Guy Scarpetta and Jacques Derrida (1930-2004) or later the sociologist Vincenzo Chichelli, praised its merits on a political level. Today, for the EuroMedMig project and other researchers' works, the notion of cosmopolitanism is part of the reflection on "welcoming cities", based on field experiences, a fertile basis for scientific analysis as in an issue of *Migrations Société* in 2021, even if the Mediterranean is not the horizon of reflection.

Historically, the notion of cosmopolitanism was used at the beginning of the 20th century, in the context of the development of aristocratic tourism in various Mediterranean areas, including certain colonies. It was a question of describing the presence of multiple nationalities in the cities of leisure and pleasure and more broadly on the Mediterranean coast, following the example of the city of Nice and the French riviera: commentators, observers, journalists and novelists did not hesitate to use this term to describe the situation of the cities. As proof of a certain success, each city has its hotels and restaurants claiming the "cosmopolitan" label. In the same way, some places are cosmopolitan, whether by their regular, not to say routine, functions such as train stations or markets, or by more exceptional circumstances. The word is not overused, on the contrary, its use, far from being pejorative, serves rather to highlight the resolutely forward-looking vocation of these welcoming cities in the sense of a transnational elite on the scale of mainly western Europe. With the decline of luxury tourism in the 1930s, the word "cosmopolitanism"

became obsolete. And it is no longer used to describe popular mass tourism after the Second World War, although it is also based on circulation and mobility. But let's not forget that during the same period, another use of "cosmopolitanism" took place, an expression of anti-Semitic rhetoric: the figure of the Jew, considered in the common sense as "stateless", was perceived as the preponderant factor of a cosmopolitanism that destroyed national identities. In this context, the idea of mixing develops a largely negative and subversive vision: cosmopolitanism is the work of a Jewish plot. This usage almost disappeared with the end of the Second World War and a certain obsolescence will accompany this word until today.

Is there a cosmopolitan dimension to the cities of the Mediterranean basin? Since the masterful work of Fernand Braudel (1902-86) in particular, the human and social sciences have reflected on a Mediterranean model of cosmopolitanism. This model refers to the situation of cities in the past, essential ports during the period of Ottoman domination and colonization. In addition to Alexandria, a few cities such as Tangiers, Thessaloniki and Beirut have been the subject of studies on their capacity to mix populations. This cosmopolitanism, which is now a thing of the past, highlights an urban framework in the Mediterranean based on or marked by the multiplicity of affiliations, ways of life and the coexistence of populations, all positive signs of tolerance of the "Other". Robert Ilbert, analyzing the organized system of Alexandrian cosmopolitanism, evokes, for example, that a family of immigrants is welcomed on their arrival in the city by an employment office. The city functions from a recognition of the autonomy of the different groups: the awareness of a community of interests allows to control tensions, antagonisms and violence between communities. French historian Marie Carmen Smyrnelis also stages it in her enlightening works on the city of Smyrna. She evokes for example the merchant Georges Baltazzi, member of a Greek family originating from the island of Chios, which lives in Smyrna between 1778 and 1850. Several research works insist on the fact that Mediterranean cities have experienced cosmopolitanism thwarted by multiple geopolitical evolutions. In a way, referring to cosmopolitanism to talk about Mediterranean cities often unconsciously feeds both nostalgia and fear for the future of the basin: Cairo-born Illios Yannakakis (1931-2017) believes that cosmopolitanism was only a moment in the history of the Mediterranean, while Robert Escallier and Thierry Fabre oppose the monotheism of today's Mediterranean cities to their cosmopolitanism of yesterday.

Consequently, if for Pascal Bruckner in *Le vertige de Babel* written in 1993, true cosmopolitanism is learning the language of others, a foreign culture while at the same time deepening one's own culture, cosmopolitanism, far from resolving itself to the sole questions of integration, would engage modern societies to turn towards the diversity and plurality of belonging. Cosmopolitanism is a kind of general philosophy, advocating a humanism of good will within globalized societies. The word cosmopolitanism is therefore no longer the exclusive domain of the mixing of populations, nor even of the Mediterranean space alone. The term "cosmopolitanism" is therefore of variable and ambiguous use: sometimes it tends to describe a plague, sometimes a positive movement of society, depending on whether one rejects or defends the mixing of populations. The term also alternates between scholarly and popular language. Similarly, cosmopolitanism is described at the beginning of the 20th century and at its end. And although it is not only applicable to the Mediterranean basin, it would seem that this space is particularly suited to the urban environments of this area.

The case of Marseille, a reconstruction of a welcoming city at the end of the twentieth century

In the mid-1980's, despite the efforts of the public authorities, the city of Marseille suffered from a bad image of racism. Since the 1973 racist riots, misunderstandings, tensions and tragic events continued to punctuate local immigration news. As in other regions, the rise of the National Front from extreme right, starting with the municipal elections of 1983, revealed a tendency to reject the people of Marseilles: The National Front received twice as many votes in Marseilles as the national average during the elections held between 1983 and 1986. Racist murders, xenophobic behavior by police officers and cab drivers, attacks such as the one at the Saint-Charles station in 1982 attributed to Muslim fundamentalism, campaigns linking insecurity and immigration from 1983 onwards: according to numerous articles in the press, Marseilles was "sick of its immigrants" ("*Marseille, malade de ses immigrés*", 1986). Moreover, the March for Equality and Against Racism, a consequence of the death of a young immigrant, was launched from Marseilles in the fall of 1983, but to general indifference: a sign of local opinion's lack of interest in the anti-racist struggle?

Refusing to give in to catastrophism, some of the Marseillais most sensitive to tolerance, generally representing left-wing and Christian sensibilities, tried to react. A symposium organized by the French Union of Holiday Centers (UFCV) and the university of Aix-Marseille in May 1986 was entitled "Marseille cosmopolite" and gave the floor to local academics Philippe Joutard, Lucien Tirone and Alain Hayot, as well as to representatives of the different communities, to remind them that Marseille's identity was based on mixing. In November 1986, a group of associations got together to distribute leaflets and posters on the theme of "Marseille, city of immigration", which was relayed by the local press. But, above all, a large demonstration organized on June 23, 1987 brought together 25.000 people on the Canebière, in the presence of Lionel Jospin and Jack Lang from the Socialist Party, under the banner of "Marseille fraternité", a collective of 120 associations, with as a profession of faith, the concern to break the racist image of the city:

"Because we can no longer stand Marseille being presented as the capital of racism; because Marseille is worth more than these extreme right-wing politicians who only know how to reject, exclude and banish; because we believe that today it is in Marseille that we must affirm the values of equal rights and fraternity (...), together for Marseille fraternité" (*Le Provençal*, 1987, June 11).

During this demonstration, one of the leaflets distributed and entitled "*Marseille is a symbol*" emphasize the desire to model a different image of the city:

"Since the Greeks made an alliance between the peoples of the Mediterranean and those of this land, Marseille has welcomed and integrated millions of immigrants who have made its economic and cultural wealth. Has Marseilles changed to the point where hatred, violence, intolerance and racism have become its daily life? Will Marseille accept that sorcerers' apprentices play with its identity and want to transform it into a city of exclusion? We, Marseillais of all origins, philosophies and religions, say no (...)" (*Le Provençal*, 1987, June 11).

This reaction illustrates the desire to take cosmopolitanism back into account as a positive value of the Phocaeen identity. Loaded with political meaning, the version defended by the progressive sensibility, close to the Socialist Party, encourages the idea of integration, which has the wind in its sails in both national and local programs. When the emblematic mayor Gaston Defferre died in 1986, an important symbol, eight young people of different ethnic origins were charged with carrying his coffin. And above all, the

electoral victory of Robert Vigouroux (1923-2017) in the 1989 municipal elections was largely built on values of tolerance. As early as 1990, the new mayor decided to set up a specific structure in the form of an association, "Marseille Espérance", whose aim was to promote intercultural encounters and avoid racial tensions. However, the context was not very favorable: the rise of fear of Islam with the first headscarf affair or the development of terrorism, concerns about the Middle East, the question of the "banlieues". On a regular basis, "Marseille Espérance" brings together representatives of different religious communities to foster a dialogue not of a theological nature but rather of a social and cultural nature on the management of the city. We find with the mayor Robert Vigouroux, msg Vartanian for Armenian community, the vénérable Tich Thien Dhin for Buddhists, Msg Coffy for Catholics, le grand rabbin Jacques Ouaknin for Jews, imam Boughouma Seck for Muslims, reverend father Cyrille for Orthodox and pasteur Dodré he for Protestants. This form of organization is not without echoes in Alexandrian cosmopolitanism as described by Robert Ilbert. The issue, no longer "French", but "Marseillais" as Robert Vigouroux notes: "I am not in favor of integration at all costs. The important thing is to have the common goal of being Marseillais" (Vigouroux, 1993, September 27). The initiative was a success: "Marseille espérance" became a regulatory body, respected by the people of Marseille, always called upon for local, national or international events that could provoke community tensions. However, Marseille's cosmopolitanism has proved difficult to manage on the ground, with limited progress: the problem of the mosque has not been solved, the presence of immigrant populations on electoral lists remains rare, as shown in Michel Samson and Jean-Louis Comolli's 2003 film, *Rêve de France*. Ordinary racism persists, as illustrated by the tragic death of the 17-year-old French-Comorian boy Ibrahim Ali on February 21, 1995, who was killed by National Front campaigners. However, during the 1990s, the image of Marseille, beyond this reality, evolved in the imagination by the cumulative effect of cultural productions, political will and associations, the city assumed openness and tolerance, living its cosmopolitanism as an opportunity. The promotion of crossbreeding has contributed to forging a Marseille's identity based on particularism and tolerance: for example, the repeated slogan "*Proud to be Marseille*" invites people to place themselves on the bangs of the national identity. Not only does Marseille present itself but also thinks of itself as cosmopolitan through various channels relayed by the national

media. What had begun without much success in the early 1970s found a much stronger echo twenty years later in a favorable context.

Among these productions, we find first of all works of historians who, beyond the sum of knowledge provided, shape a welcoming image of the city, like the works of Emile Temime without taking anything away from their rigor and their quality. Released in 1990, the *Migrance* series came at the right time to give scientific backing to a Marseilles identity that was open to plurality. The inescapable story of the founding myth of the city based on a mixed union has served as the basis for most of the works on the history of Marseilles, notably that of Edouard Baratier, which has been republished several times. Jean-Claude Izzo (1945-2000), a successful author of detective novels, narrated the adventures of the policeman Fabio Montale in a Marseille that was wide open to all kinds of migrations. In 1999, in *Le soleil des mourants*, he evokes the wanderings of a homeless man who comes to die in Marseille because "here it looks like anywhere". With just as much success, Robert Guédiguian's films, among which the unmissable *Marius et Jeannette* released in 1998, have found a strong resonance in French opinion. A few years earlier, in 1993, Bertrand Blier in *1, 2, 3 Soleil* presented a fable on the mixing of cultures in Marseille, as did director Karim Dridi in 1997 in *Bye Bye*. At the same time, Marseilles musical groups based on musical and cultural crossbreeding had a large audience, such as IAM, whose main leader Akhenaton is the son of an Italian immigrant, or the "raggamuffin" group Massalia Sound System. Television has also made its contribution, notably through the thematic evening *1, 2, 3 Marseille* programmed on Canal+ in October 1999, which included a documentary on intercultural relations entitled *Tellement Marseille*. Sport is not to be outdone: the Olympique de Marseille, the city's emblematic soccer club, has crystallized local opinion in the same direction. A true cosmopolitan situation, the soccer match at the Velodrome stadium gives the opportunity for scenes of fraternization in the stands. Christian Bromberger's studies of fan groups in Marseille during the 1990s have shown that at the Velodrome stadium, inter-community tensions tend to fade. Among the seven main groups of supporters, the "Winners" have based their existence on "interethnic fraternity" and solidarity. In 1995, following the murder of Ali Ibrahim, a minute's silence was scrupulously observed in the stadium to salute his memory. In 1998, during the world Cup, some matches were scheduled in Marseille: during the Tunisia-England match, Marseille fans fraternized with Tunisian fans when clashes occurred around the stadium. Even more

clearly, festive events sought to showcase Marseille's crossbreeding. The "Massalia" festival, largely financed by the city in June 1999, commemorated the city's 2,600th anniversary. All the components of local cosmopolitanism were brought together: 6,000 artists of all origins, affirming their pride in being Marseillais, offered performances as diverse as oriental dances, hip-hop, rap, Provençal songs, techno, African percussion, Corsican polyphonies and French variety. Its success was made possible thanks to a strong mobilization of artists, teachers, city hall employees, all volunteers and the opportunity for Jean Contrucci to publish with Roger Duchêne a history of Marseille with a special emphasis on crossbreeding. This solidly organized ensemble contributed to presenting the Phocaeen city as a true "laboratory of cohabitation between communities" as noted by the journalist of *Le Monde* Michel Samson:

"The major question that Marseilles asks itself is that of cohabitation between communities. As a frontier city, it has been welcoming the world's misery or its adventurers for centuries, willy-nilly. It must therefore invent and reinvent a cohabitation contract with each new wave of immigration and, above all, imagine how to live with people from other economic, social, cultural or religious worlds" (Samson, 1998, June 22).

The same Michel Samson who wrote later a sociology of Marseille had already noted in 1998, not without questioning, that "the identity of Marseilles is to welcome the Other" (Samson, 1998, October 15).

If we put aside its ideological use, cosmopolitanism as envisaged by scientific works goes beyond migratory phenomena alone to describe some situations at a more or less long time in history. It is a situation of mixing, often spontaneous, sometimes organized and structured, taking another dimension. In this context, the cosmopolitan situation refers to a particular relationship to difference: without removing from the individual the awareness of belonging to his own community, it allows him to go beyond this state by building another more universal, timeless and delocalized feeling of belonging. Hence the idea that cosmopolitan situations that reduce differences are prevented as soon as fundamentalism or radicalism develop at the level of public policies and between communities.

The artificial character of cosmopolitanism is expressed by historians in the form of the myth of a "golden age", often long gone, during which different populations lived together in harmony. As a linear narrative, the study of these past cosmopolitanisms has no other function than to develop a network of nostalgia that is particularly sensitive for those who lived or at least indirectly concerned by these periods. In the present, as in Marseille, cosmopolitanism is just as much a construction of identity intended to attest to the dynamism, openness and even modernity of a given urban space.

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