Beyond Borders: What is Next for Mediterranean Civil Society

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The Arab uprisings and the revolutionary protest movements against crisis and austerity have called into question "the System" around the Mediterranean and have turned this part of the world into a pulse of change, where a new idea of civilization is being tested and challenged. These social movements share many similarities that represent an opportunity for common political action. Experiences like "Occupy the Buffer Zone" in Nicosia, the "Union of Unemployed Graduates" in Tunisia, "Teatro Valle" in Rome or "Start by Yourself" in Egypt are examples of successful projects created within civil society. They call for a reinvention of the relationship between state and citizen, given that the citizen must now assume new responsibilities that the modern state can or will no longer handle. Europe must exploit the potential that derives from its common roots and aspire to a project of transnational citizenship, bringing together citizens' groups beyond ideological or identity-related divides.

Before 2011: The Euro-Med Era

"[The parties] recognize the essential contribution civil society can make in the process of development of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and as an essential factor for greater understanding and closeness between peoples." With these words of the Barcelona Declaration (Council of the European Union, 1995: 6), the EU and *obtorto collo* the Mediterranean partner countries sealed the centrality of civil society as a social and political tool. For the last thirty years, the EU has in fact perceived civil society as valuable actors assisting political and socioeconomic transformation, commending the role played by civil society in Central and Eastern Europe as a watchdog against human rights abuses or providers of crucial expertise in designing and implementing reforms. This standpoint was behind the decision to make the reformative capacity of civil society an important component of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership launched in 1995, as well as of the following European Neighbourhood Policy (2003). After the Oslo Accords (1993), a window of opportunity opened for contacts between societies helping to normalize relations between states, to favour the emergence of more open societies on the southern shore, and to promote civil liberties. Along these lines, the European Union has offered financial support through different generations of programmes such as

MEDA and ENPI, and financed for several years the Euromed Civil Society Platform, as a hub for facilitating regional civil society dialogue.

This policy has certainly encouraged the aggregation of citizens in organized bodies and the adoption of less severe rules of law for civil society in the region, but the situation of civil society remained precarious at least up until the first decade of this millennium, showing how granitic the structural obstacles to liberal social developments in the Euro-Med area were: southern governments' resistance, the EU's internal structural deficiencies as foreign policy actor, and the mistrust of southern civil society actors of European overtures, seen as a "copy and paste policy" that does not understand cultural specificities, ignoring the importance of religious identity and family ties, and the impact of colonial history.

Take the case of Tunisia, portrayed as the closest neighbour country to European values. Running an independent association or any centre of social aggregation during the dictatorship was an exercise of daily resistance. Making use of public spaces or information tools was extremely complicated, and it was often not possible to hold meetings even in private facilities.[1] It was not forbidden in law but it was in practice: it was the paradox of a dictatorship which was dressed up as a democracy. Even hotels were refusing to rent a meeting room unless you had the Ministry of Interior's agreement, or the police were barring access to the room for "security reasons". Moreover, the Tunisian Institute for Human Rights was not authorised to invite members of the Conseil National pour les Libertés to its classes, excluding de facto independent civil society and only empowering the so-called GONGOs (Governmental NGOs). And on the role of Tunisian women: female trade unionists, leftist women activists or veiled girls did not have effective rights, they could not have a proper job or an academic career. "You could not talk about politics. Ben 'Ali was celebrating women's rights, women's freedom of expression, but that was only a cover image," as explained to me in 2012 by Abir Jibri, communication manager of the Islamist association An-Nisa at-Tunsiyat (Tunisian Women) (Solera, 2013: 501).

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Johannson-Nogués has qualified the EU's policy of failure: "The EU's failure as a norm-sender and its incoherent or stunted defence of milieu values has entailed that the EU as a democratic, pluralistic social model to emulate has been rather thoroughly undermined, and so has its attraction power" (Johansson-Nogués, 2006: 12). Southern Mediterranean societies have seen for too long the Union's approach as too Euro-centric and too collusive with their own authoritarian governments to have any relevance to the social reality. Things would have changed only through a dramatic rebellious contagion.

1. Such as the headquarters of an association or private houses, as reported by prominent Tunisian activists like Sihām Ben Sedrīne, one of the founders of the independent Conseil National pour les Libertés in 1998. When the Conseil submitted its statutes to the Ministry of Interior requesting legalization, the public administration denied them a copy of the receipt of the request submission, and when the Conseil sued the public administration, the case remained suspended until the arrival of the 2011 revolution! Even independent organizations that had obtained the registration, such as Ligue tunisienne des droits de l'Homme and the Association des femmes démocrates, were facing pressures and limitations.

Teatro Valle in Rome.

The Unexpected Contagion

When the so-called Arab Spring flared up, only a few people were expecting it, and even fewer were expecting such a contagious effect feeding the thirst for self-determination and dignity on both shores. Some scholars believe that the signs of an imminent bottom-up revolt had been present in the Southern Mediterranean countries at the beginning of the new millennium, but certainly nobody had imagined the protest connecting Arab and European youths.

What happened between 2010 and 2012 around the Mediterranean was extraordinary. Millions of people, especially young people, conquered the squares urging the "fall of the System". A sort of contagious effect spread the call for rebellion from Sīdī Bouzīd to many other cities, nurturing the insurgence of protest movements in different countries of the region, both in the South and the North. But what are the similarities between those movements? And do these similarities represent a space, an opportunity for common political action? Thinking about similarities between Cairo, Athens, Benghazi, Tel Aviv, Ljubljana or Madrid, the following elements come to mind:

- The occupation and the re-appropriation of public spaces;
- The creation of spontaneous and voluntary structures of assistance and support to the population;
- The mistrust of the mechanisms of institutional representation;

- The public denunciation of collusion between politicians and economic interest groups;
- The fight against corruption and against the expropriation of resources for the benefit of a few;
- The demand for "Bread, Freedom and Social Justice" (the Tunisian slogan which reached the other squares), or in other words "Commons, Democracy, Equality and Solidarity";
- The mobilisation through networking, interpersonal relations or through the social media;
- Civil society as guardian of constitutional principles and democratic accountability;
- The need to go beyond the borders, to look beyond the national or cultural fences; and
- A strong sense of dignity and respect, rejecting identity-related divisions.

Writing from Plateia Syntagmatos, the occupied Constitution Square, the Greek poet Costis Triandaphyllou said: "The open Assembly continues/ standing up/ breathing at last/ storms lie ahead of us/ she knows/ speak up!" (Triandaphyllou, 2011: 4). There was something that evoked the motion in those peaceful acts of re-conquest of urban territory occurring on both sides of the Mediterranean, something fluid that was flowing between people and places, recalling common questions and a shared political subjectivity. Something temporary, but persistent at the same time, something of the intimate and demonstrative, fragile and practical at the same time. That something was embodied by the tent, the tents that have been planted at the centre of many cities, the camps suddenly appearing in the urban fabric. That something was bringing us back to the nomadic condition, the condition of the one who moves and never arrives, who is chased away and always comes back to life, who ties the past to the future, who does not accommodate in the enclosure of the status quo and is also able to enjoy the little things in life. The tent has symbolized the nomadic character of these movements, both in the spatial as well as in the philosophical sense, carrying transnational values from one place to another. The fact that the Nomad is rejected in modern society – the Nomad represents in fact the unsuccessful, the marginalized – makes a "movement of campers" a revolutionary agent in itself, something which does not combine with the dominant idea of what human achievement should look like. And it fits perfectly with the history of this region, of the Mediterranean, a land (and a sea) of fugitives, colonized, merchants and travellers. A land of intermingling blends, of transition, a land of the middle.

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Suddenly, Euro-Med policies and institutions that aimed at forging new international relations and internal reforms in the region by using civil society as one of the key-levers were not simply seen as surpassed, but even as safety networks designed to save repressive and old political regimes, on the one hand, and disruptive neoliberal socioeconomic policies, on the other.

I would like to tell a story that explains a lot about the common ground between expressions of social uprising in the Mediterranean region. It is about Occupy the Buffer Zone, a movement that for several months invaded the interstitial zone that is administered by the UN between the Greek and the Turkish sides of Nicosia. The occupation began on 15

October 2011, on the occasion of the celebration by the Spanish *Indignados* of five months since the beginning of their movement. Greek and Turkish Cypriot activists occupied the check-post of Ledra/Lokmacı Street; then they put up tents, entered abandoned buildings and re-opened them for political and cultural activities, until the police intervened brutally and pulled away the occupants on 6 April 2012, after a campaign in which those people had been accused of being drug addicts, libertines and destabilisers. What was an empty space, abandoned, ratifying the definitive split of the city since 1974, became for a few months a meeting point for those young people who wanted to get rid of that political, social and territorial fracture. By redefining that space, the Nicosia Occupy movement (that many dismissed as radical) contributed to call into question the identity of its inhabitants. Even a few immigrants, including Arabs who were in the Turkish part, settled in the Buffer Zone, although they knew that if they had gone back they would have been arrested. "This movement was and is important because it's different from other movements, it happened in a no man's land. Nobody owns it. No country, no flag, no nation. It's a free zone, a gap," says one of the occupants (MIG@NET, 2012: 40). It is a remarkable story, because it took place in an area formally of nobody, suspended in an interlude of oblivion, and which for this reason symbolized the vacuity of current dominant policies, unable to solve the problems, but only to put them aside. Those youngsters were questioning the power relations that lie behind the production of urban space, "fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants" (MIG@NET, 2012: 41). The Mediterranean Sea has proved to be a kind of Buffer Zone, which someone would like to be a divisive border in order to preserve unjust power relations, and what has happened in Nicosia was a personification of it. The occupation of Nicosia's Green Line was removed before the Cypriot Presidency of the EU began (1 July 2012). It was, however, a cosmetic removal, because only a few months later the entire island, still divided, was brought to its knees by the economic crisis, and therefore became an entire "buffer zone", where nobody owns anything.

Reconciling Civil Liberties with Social Justice and Common Goods

Fundamental demands shared between the Arab Spring and the protest movements not only included an effective democracy, civil liberties and freedom of expression, but also the question of reclaiming common goods of which they were dispossessed. Take the case of the Tunisian Union of Unemployed Graduates, whose youths played a major role during the Jasmine Revolution, and which has been pushing for reforms leading to a fairer and more transparent labour market and to the redistribution of public lands in depressed areas of the country. This peculiar union has ten thousand affiliates, twenty-four regional offices and almost two hundred local ones: it is a kind of brigade of a much larger army. Between the two hundred thousand and two hundred and fifty thousand out of the seven hundred thousand Tunisian unemployed are young graduates, and the employment rate among high school graduates who complete their studies does not exceed 10% per annum. The issue of the long-term unemployed is not a post-revolutionary phenomenon. In a country that had focused on higher education and learning, the state of affairs today is catastrophic. Unemployment among graduates grew 150% in five years between 2005 and 2010. Among the technical qualifications, the number of unemployed persons rose from 17,900 in 2005 to 57,900 in 2010, making it the category most

severely hit by unemployment with 41.6% of the total number of university graduates (Ben Hammadi, 2011).[2] Young people like Salem al-Ayari, the union's general coordinator, would like to have a proper job, but aim to become development actors in their communities as well. "In the Northwest, we are supporting local authorities which think intelligently about rural development centred on regenerating agriculture, including organic farming projects. But all that requires stability and investments," Salem al-Ayari says. "We are asking for direct public investment, because the private sector controls all major projects."[3] The union has been seeking dialogue with the National Union of Industry, Commerce and Handicraft, and wants to think big: transforming the movement into a centre for studies, research and training on development and employment, to devise new policies for the professional integration of young people. "If I had €500,000 and could invest this sum in Tunisia, I would think in a rural development project with young people, focusing on regional productions, and I would invest the benefits in other young people through vocational training and retraining," al-Ayari had told me, aware that large businesses do not invest in these local projects, but seek the benefit at close range. This is why he is struggling so that his union is assigned the management of 3,000 ha of state land in Sidi Bouzid for agricultural development through young unemployed graduates, instead of waiting for it to be sold to foreign investors.

On the other side of the sea, even artists are struggling against privatization of common goods. On 14 June 2011, the same day when a national referendum stopped privatization of water utilities in Italy, a group of artists occupied and reopened the public Teatro Valle, the oldest theatre in Rome (built in 1727), engaging in a "constitutional process for culture as a fundamental right that can spread and contaminate every public space, triggering a profound transformation of the way of acting and thinking" (Teatro Valle Occupato, 2013: 3). Since that day, and until summer 2014, when occupants agreed to move out of the theatre and find a legal arrangement with the City of Rome, the Valle has become a platform of expression for several citizen groups that are fighting for civil rights, solidarity, justice, peace and the environment. A unique case in Italy and Europe, Teatro Valle has proposed events that mix social and political debates with artistic performances. With donations (entrance to events is free), it has covered living costs for the occupiers and stage equipment rental, while none of the occupying artists has received a fee for the great work he/she does. "We receive proposals of any kind, groups are looking for us," explains Simona Senzacqua, actress, now director of communications. "The issues our events address are diversified: privatization, landfills, violence against women, Palestine, immigration, labour, prisons, and so on. The theatre has become the symbol of the struggle for common goods, and many groups are approaching us because they recognize the political significance of an artistic scene."[4] During the occupation, Teatro Valle has never closed, providing a variety of activities from morning to night, which would represent at least six years of exercise in a normal theatre. After a long process of online participatory consultation, on the second anniversary of the theatre occupation, the final version of their constitution was presented on their stage, and the theatre registered as a foundation owned

2. In the first trimester of 2013, there were 231,000 unemployed university graduates, which represents 33.2% of the total number of unemployed (Blaise, 2013).

3. Interview conducted in April 2012.

4. Interviews conducted in April 2012 and June 2013.

by its 5,000 current members. The constitution states among other things: "With the present act of private autonomy, we hereby proclaim that an ancient and unique physical space like Teatro Valle is a fully common good. It is inseparably connected with culture, a fundamental need and right of every person, and as such it should be part of a large project that involves the workers of culture and all citizens for the full recognition of their crucial economic, political and cultural role of resistance to commodification and social decadence" (Teatro Valle Occupato, 2013: 3).

The Explosion of Arab Activism and the Donors

The very first positive effect of 2011 in the Arab region was the enfranchisement of civil society's potential. During the first six months following the 2011 revolution, around 2,500 civil society organizations were created in Tunisia alone, compared to 120 new political parties! And two years later, the registered associations were already six thousand![5] Similar figures could be registered even in a country such as Libya, where independent civil society under Gaddafi was non-existent. Five-hundred associations were created only in Benghazi in the year after the collapse of the Colonel's regime, and more than one hundred publications, of which twenty were newspapers. In 2012, I visited the NGOs Support Centre located in Benghazi, a public agency under the Ministry of Culture. Director Khaled al-Mahjub explained: "We need capacity building around three main issues: freedoms and civil liberties, democratic governance, and transitional justice."

The European Union offered generous support in the aftermath of Arab revolutions. The Civil Society Facility 2011-2013, amounting to €22m, was one of the rapid response instruments adopted at that time. EU Delegations adopted tailored programmes trying to meet local challenges: in Libya, for instance, as of 2012 the Delegation invested in dialogue between institutions and civil society, youth leadership in electoral processes, national reconciliation, and rehabilitation of torture victims.[6] Generous support also arrived from the Americans, the Gulf States and other European countries, reflecting their own political priorities in the region.

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The newly created and fragile associations have required and still require international support, but many doubts have been raised on the quality of support offered so far, and on its effects. According to Siham Ben Sedrine, "foreign donors have offered generous support, although often through training schemes, not structural funding. They have not understood that a new association does not have an office, or staff, or infrastructures, and without it an association cannot live long. The donors' policy is wrong; they believe they know the needs of local civil society, but without structures, no long-term action is possible" (Solera, 2013: 423). Tunisian activist and journalist Thamer

5. Source: Ana Tounsi Radio, 2014.

6. With the following platforms: ACTED (Agency for Technical Cooperation and Development), EUNIDA (European Network of Implementing Development Agencies), IDEA (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance), and IRCT (International Rehabilitation Council for Torture Victims).

Mekki considers that Arab civil society needs to learn (Solera, 2013: 424):

- How to conduct advocacy and influence public decision-makers;
- How to establish effective dialogue with institutions and authorities;
- How to establish consultation tables with the economic sector ready to enhance civil society; and
- How to reach the regions and peripheral districts, going beyond the usual urban centres.

And he expects foreign support to be focused along these lines. Administrative and political constraints have limited the scope of foreign support. The rigidity of EU funding procedures, for instance, has often discouraged non-European civil society actors from requesting financial support, being in many cases EU technical requirements beyond the capacities of local associations and groups. As a result, large international NGOs who are in fact not well-rooted in local communities have largely benefited from EU schemes, receiving more than 2/3 of the funds.[7] On the other hand, foreign funding has been targeted by several local governments in order to undermine democratization efforts. Egypt has been particularly aggressive in this respect, with the argument that foreign funding was a matter of political interference and complottism. On 4 June 2013, as a result of a famous trial, five major international organizations were closed (the American International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, Freedom House, the International Centre for Journalists, and the German Christian-Democratic foundation Konrad Adenauer Stiftung), and 43 staff members of international organizations were condemned to up to five years of jail accused of operating without authorization. Even regularly registered organizations have revealed that the Egyptian Ministry of Social Affairs used to delay the authorization for them to benefit from foreign support up to sixteen months, thus paralysing their operations, especially targeting human rights organizations (Amnesty International, 2013). In contrast, criticism of foreign funding in Tunisia has been more focused on administrative procedures than political ones, without putting into question the need for international support. "Large sums of money have contributed to creating a civil society segment oriented to business-style work, where funding hunting has replaced the original mission of those associations," according to Kristina Kausch, who stresses that this development has also been the result of donors caring more about their image and domestic public relations, than about responding to the needs of local civil society. Among the general Tunisian public, European support for democracy has generally been seen more sympathetically than the American or the Arab ones, which are seen as giving priority to the Islamic field above the secular one (Kausch, 2013).

Organized Solidarity as a Political Alternative

Following the 2011 events, structures were created by citizens offering alternative opportunities to socialise or to meet basic needs that were not guaranteed by the state institutions, or addressing urgent issues such as unemployment, commodification of common goods, or immigration flows, whereby the last issue has generated both groups in favour of liberal policies and the delivery of essential services, on

7. Source mentioned by Johannson-Nogués: Netherlands Institute for Multiparty Democracy, 2005.

the one hand, and (unfortunately) restrictive policies, on the other.

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The specificity of these experiences has been in the informal character, which has opened new windows of citizen initiative. In Egypt, for example, the artist community has been very active. Ibda' bi-Nafsik, Start by Yourself, was for instance a series of artistic and social events launched by Agora, a network created after the revolution in the city of Alexandria for community involvement through education and artistic production, in order to generate opportunities for development and art and crafts and to recuperate rejected urban areas for public cultural happenings. This network of volunteer artists replicated creative events five times in two years, bringing together young musicians, painters, craftsmen, writers and so on, thanks to the initiative of Rim Qasem, a kind of modern Hypatia. "Locally, we have changed the lives of many volunteers and we have promoted a group of low-income women, who were home maids and now produce and sell jewellery. Our success story is becoming a model for other Arab countries. Local groups in Tunisia and Morocco contacted me and I have authorized them to use our name for similar initiatives," says Rim.[8]

The Greek scenario of growing impoverishment has been particularly fertile for these experiences. Architect Nikos Anastopoulos, who invented the Marathon Ecofestival, an event of exchange on de-growth, participation, cooperative economy and local transition practices, taking place in the same district of the famous Greek-Persian battle of 490 BC, has enumerated the similar anti-crisis initiatives recently emerged in Greece with the austerity grip: thirty among local/national goods and services exchange systems, time banks and producer-to-consumer networks; five goods exchange bazaars; five fair trade groups; twelve collective enterprises; nine eco-communities; twelve experimental and urban agriculture centres; five seed banks; four organic building groups; two self-management centres; five collective initiatives for participatory sustainable development; four community kitchens; two centres for free education; six popular arts centres, and five eco-festivals. Furthermore, during the Alter Summit, an international solidarity gathering for Greece (Athens, June 2013), a guidebook of the new solidarity groups were produced, listing around forty initiatives among grassroots food sale chains, social clinics and pharmacies, clothes distribution centres, and others.

Many of these initiatives have challenged production rules in different sectors:

- In factories, for instance. The workers of Viomichaniki Metalleutiki (Vio.Me), a Thessaloniki-based factory providing construction materials, after having been abandoned for bankruptcy by the owners in May 2011, reopened in February 2013 as an enterprise self-managed by its workers, producing organic hygiene products. In the factory, wages are the same, and decisions are taken by the workers' assembly;
- In rural areas, such as with the Potatoes Movement. An idea of Christos Kamenidis, a professor at the Thessaloniki Faculty of

8. Interview conducted in March 2013. See AGORA Arts Culture Facebook page.

Agriculture, it started with a self-managed public market of potatoes produced in the provinces of Serres and Drama, it became an alternative channel to bypass the speculation on vegetable prices imposed by wholesalers supplying big supermarkets and commercial centres. The campaign, launched in January 2012, had an amazing success, and inspired similar networks all over Greece;

- Against speculation in transport, housing and energy services, such as with the Den Plirono campaign, aimed at boycotting the payment of urban highways' fares, at the campaign's beginning, and then other fares that were considered unfair, such as local transportation fares, or the Haratsi tax on houses approved by the Greek Parliament in September 2011, and which was included inside the energy bill, forcing all families to pay it if they wished to remain connected to the electricity grid. Started as a disobedience campaign, with cars entering urban highways without paying the ticket, Den Plirono became a symbol of resistance against fiscal measures, which were seen punishing ordinary people, while enriching big private companies, such as those running the highway system.

Interesting developments in terms of new patterns of civic engagement have also taken place in Croatia, where from the experience of the 2009 two-times occupation of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences of Zagreb against tuition fees – a measure that was presented by the authorities as necessary for the modernization of the country, with a view to its entry into the European Union – new aggregations were formed, influencing the spectrum of progressive civil society in the whole of the Balkans. Two original groups that emerged from it were the higher education trade union Akademska solidarnost, a new generation of non-corporative trade unions open also to unemployed professionals, not only to workers in the sector, and applying internal management rules according to the principles of direct democracy; and Direktna demokracija u skoli, which is bringing together teachers promoting direct democracy practices in schools as the beginning of a new way of interpreting democracy and the relations between institutions and citizens. With the issue of transformative democracy at the centre of their focus, these groups have permeated the nature of new social movements in the Balkans, making them less authoritarian and more fluid, less ideological and more diversified in their action modalities.

Political Islam: Overcoming Divisions for Social Change

A specific point to be addressed in this overview of civil society developments in the region, should we wish to shape a common destiny for Mediterranean citizens, concerns the role of Islamist movements. Let us take, for instance, the Egyptian crisis after the downfall of President Mohammed Morsi. The country has slipped into ideological intransigence and frontal opposition, which does not help the cause of national reconciliation, nor the revitalization of the 2011 revolution, which so far has not produced any substantial reform of the institutions nor of its public policies. On the other hand, civil society in the region has witnessed further divisions between activists who are pro-dialogue and those who are anti-dialogue with political Islam, thus making the opportunities for the development of common campaigns and strategies between the two shores fragile, and radicalizing anti-System religious wings. Ibrahim el-Hodhaibi, whose great-grandfather Hassan and grandfather Ma'moun were supreme guides of the Muslim Brotherhood, during a long interview in spring 2013 explored

with me an interesting path of review of the roots of the current political crisis: "In the 19th century, the Grand khedive Mohammed Alī [considered the founder of modern Egypt] built strong state bureaucracies that replaced social institutions within the framework of a powerful nation-state. The endowments were nationalized and the system of local government centralised; those institutions that traditionally exercised a very important social function have not been replaced by modern indigenous institutions, which reflect the complexity of our times" (Solera, 2013: 130). The policy of centralization and control of social instances which started with Mohammed Ali was continued by his successors until Mubarak. The result is that now there are no intermediate bodies between the individuals and the state; there are therefore no spaces facilitating the process of socialization, there is no culture of social consensus building: today's fractures are thus the expression of this development. In order to drive society out of the crisis, el-Hodhaibi proposes to deal with two spaces, municipalities and trade unions. Developing these two spaces would help Arab societies to get rid of the current polarization. When you manage a city or defend workers, it does not matter any more whether you are secular or Islamist. You must ensure services and preserve rights. Building democracy from the bottom would help the emergence of leaders who are not the expression of an authoritarian vision of the state, and winning elections at local level or in a factory would use less energy, so there would be more chances for off-siders to win. "At the end of the day, those who represent the majority or the minority are always wealthy persons, who are rather conservative," el-Hodhaibi pointed out during our interview, concluding: "Our problem is that the division between Islamists and seculars is a division between the extreme right and the extreme right, so it is no division! They are both centralist and neoliberal in their views." And what should the commitment of Mediterranean citizens and European activists be to avoid the worst in this "Arab Fall", where the achievements of the 2011 revolutions seem to be losing ground? They should show firmness in rejecting any kind of bloody violence, whether it comes from state institutions or from organized political forces, in demanding an independent investigation of dramatic events such as the evacuation of Rabiʿa al-ʿAdawiya Square in Cairo or the killing of prominent politicians such as Shokri Belʿaid, in condemning massive incarceration campaigns such as the one led against the Egyptian Brotherhood in the second half of 2013, and in facilitating the rapprochement between political and cultural communities in the post-revolutionary countries. In order to contain regimes' propaganda that feeds theories of international conspiracy and breaks progressive revolutionary processes, channels of exchange should be strengthened between revolutionary and democratic forces of post-revolutionary countries, including forces of Islamic tendency.

Civil Society's Challenges for National Progress

Civil society has major responsibilities and opportunities in the region, especially after 2011, in a context of loss of trust in political parties and public institutions in Mediterranean countries. Civil society has the mission to reinvigorate social spaces and solidarity in a disoriented society, which feels that its social rights are at stake, and it has the mission to reshuffle the legitimacy of democratic institutions, in a context where global bodies and corporations determine national policies, and corruption drags public resources away from citizens. Participation in decision-making cannot be achieved by demonstrations alone, without coherent advocacy and political struggle

featuring broad-based coalitions of committed democratic actors.

The relevance of civil society's advocacy role has for instance proved to be decisive in the Tunisian context, during the work of the Constitutional Assembly – making sure that the chamber's sessions were broadcast live and proposals were published, or peacefully laying siege to the chamber's headquarters during the most controversial debates often before any oppositional political party – or when preparing a peaceful transition toward a national unity government, upon the leadership of trade unions, after the murder of political leader Shoukrī Bel'aīd.

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"In Poland, the Gdansk Labour Movement would not have been able to precipitate the downfall of communism without the coalitions it crafted alongside powerful student movements and underground groups of journalists and intellectuals," recalls the Economic and Social Commission for Western Africa (ESCWA, 2013). A similar configuration of power is needed in the countries under democratic transformation.

Another important task for civil society is to ensure that new constitutions in countries in transition realize the aspirations of the people by accompanying and monitoring constitutional drafting, and that reforms of a political and socioeconomic nature in countries under structural crisis and growing de-connection between citizens and institutions are precisely monitored. This will require civil society to move from protest to proposal, and begin to develop issue-based political programmes articulating the interests and views of citizens. This will enhance the role of civil society in building a new political regime based on democratic principles and national solidarity, respect for the other, tolerance for dissent, and renewed popular participation in public affairs. This is, however, in my view, only half of what the Mediterranean civil society is called upon to do.

Beyond Borders: A Trans-Mediterranean Vocation

A specificity of the movements that have emerged in recent years is their vocation for a regional perspective and for getting together for transnational action, beyond the nation-states. We can name the international campaign Solidarity for All in favour of the Greek people, which involved organizations from different European countries and was launched in 2012. It was not until the war in Bosnia that a transregional initiative targeting a European country took place, and especially in a country which symbolizes the socioeconomic distress experienced by Northern Mediterranean countries. The Assemblée des Citoyens de la Méditerranée, on the other hand, established in 2009 upon the initiative of three bodies (Centro de Estudios Rurales y de Agricultura Internacional-CERAI, Mouvement Européen International, and the European University of Tirana), and funded by the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation, had the ambition to gather personalities from different sectors (popular movements, institutions, companies, associations, trade unions or universities) with the aim of creating a critical mass in the region in favour of moving forward an agenda of cooperation and integration. Unfortunately, the lack of internal democracy, the uncertainties in defining its mission and old-fashioned ways of holding its meetings have recently made the project lose ground. Other networks that we could mention are: the International Citizen Debt Audit Network, to

monitor the public debt in Europe and Northern Africa, established in April 2012; the Euro-Mediterranean forum against imposed and unnecessary large-scale works, also established in 2012, and inspired by the struggle of the Piemontese social movement against high-speed trains in Italy (No TAV); migrant-related initiatives such as the campaign Watch the Med, and others, which aim to denounce how migrants are treated, the tragedy of the deaths at sea, and the need to widen mobility rights in the region, connecting groups and organizations from both Mediterranean shores.

The fact that the Secretariat of the World Social Forum (WSF) moved from Brazil to Tunisia after 2013 is an indicator of the recognized centrality and vitality of Mediterranean civil society. At the 2013 WSF, however, the necessity was again expressed to go beyond the ephemeral nature of big events like the Social Forum to create an infrastructure beyond periodical meetings of activists, where the contribution of grassroots actions for social change is made known, lessons are learnt and practices are shared among different communities of activists and civil society players. A continuous space to analyze collectively, train professionally, think strategically, and plan joint actions. Although the desire to change and fight among the youth in the region is widespread, an infrastructure is still needed for the formation of a critical mass for effective and responsible activism, acting in a strategic and coordinated way on a regional level. The environment for such an investment could be offered by the Mediterranean, where these infrastructures could have a recognised geographic scope, and respond to a stimulating political vision, Mediterranean Citizenship: a vision of integration, challenging divisive identity-based religious and political narratives, on the one hand, or exploiting neoliberal socioeconomic receipts, on the other. The vision of Mediterranean Citizenship would fully justify the strategic development of a space where it is possible to shape a new transnational citizen activism that is critical and responsible, one that is able to innovate through cultural and artistic expression around citizenship and sense of belonging to communities sharing a common history, geography, lifestyle, and values – and, therefore, a common destiny. It is about the destiny of the Mediterranean region, the cradle of civilizations, where East and West meet.

The Mediterranean has become a fulcrum of civil resistance against wild capitalism, de-democratization and cultural trivialization

But why could all that happen in the Mediterranean region, which has been seen in contemporary history as a backward region? Because of its history of superposition of multiple civilizations, and because of the common values that its peoples embody (a strong sense of community, the attachment to family, the taste for beautiful things, the connection with the territory and the food, the cult of hospitality, spirituality, creativity and industriousness, and the exposure to coexistence with the other), the Mediterranean has become a fulcrum of civil resistance against wild capitalism, de-democratization and cultural trivialization. All that we would associate with the idea of the Mediterranean constitutes a natural antidote to mercantilist globalization and individualism.[9] For all that, the Mediterranean could again become a cradle of a new Renaissance

9. A survey conducted by Gallup-Europe and the Anna Lindh Foundation on intercultural trends shows that the majority of respondents in thirteen Euro-Mediterranean countries associate more positive values with the idea of Mediterranean (lifestyle, family, cultural heritage, and so on) than factors that divide us or issues of political, environmental or social crisis (Anna Lindh Foundation, 2010: 19).

if conditions were put in place for a project of *transnational citizenship*. This means a shared political initiative putting together the various experiences of resistance, protest and popular alternatives, carried out mostly by young people, and building a Mediterranean platform for a new social contract, so urgent in times of profound crisis both in Europe and in the Mediterranean. A social contract that rewrites the foundations of the relations between institutions and citizens, where communities can govern the transformation of their territory and influence the allocation of economic and social resources by challenging the centralization of capital and resources in the hands of a few and by reforming the rules of participation and democratic representation.

Mediterranean Citizenship: A Roadmap

Such a transnational movement would act as a political entity, operating in a coordinated manner, to launch joint initiatives, form cadres, share knowledge and services, fund innovative practices, or prepare for electoral deadlines, facing the political, socioeconomic, cultural and environmental crisis beyond national borders. The momentum for a new space of political and social engagement for regional integration around the Mediterranean is now there; common roots, cultural patterns, history and zest for life shared by its peoples could be a unique substrate for making the Mediterranean a new social laboratory. It will be up to the leaders of these movements and citizens' initiatives to perceive this historical opportunity and shape a common destiny for the region, Europe and the Arabs, the West and the East, which regimes and governments are not able to envision because they are prisoners of national or corporate interests, identity-based ideologies and old cultural paradigms.

In September 2014, around thirty-five activists from twelve countries met in Messina, Sicily, in a first forum for Mediterranean Citizenship called Sabir Maydan, where participants discussed this concept from different perspectives, such as social mobilisation, trans-Mediterranean civil society strategies, fight against identity-based narratives, social justice and redistribution of resources, active citizenship capacity building, grassroots media, or women in society. As a result of this exchange, participants have proposed drawing a possible roadmap for Mediterranean Citizenship, which I could sum up along the following lines:

Common roots, cultural patterns, history and zest for life shared by its peoples could be a unique substrate for making the Mediterranean a new social laboratory

First of all, drafting a Manifesto for Mediterranean Citizenship, advocating the Mediterranean as a common destiny and a shared house to be consolidated through gradual integration, inspired by the manifesto in favour of European integration, which was first written in 1941 by a group of intellectuals.[10] The Manifesto as a political charter for Mediterranean integration should be the result of a participatory process, with recognised thinkers and activists of the region.

Secondly, creating a steering group of planners and promoters of projects consolidating the idea of Mediterranean Citizenship; a set of infrastructures is indeed required to lay the bases for a transregional grassroots movement

10. The so-called "Ventotene Manifesto", written by Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi and others, during their confinement imposed by the Fascist regime on the island of Ventotene.

for integration. The most important infrastructures highlighted in the exchange are:

- A yearly or bi-annual Mediterranean Festival on Citizenship and Activism, where culture and politics meet and discuss visions, ideas and current affairs related to the Mediterranean; it would be both a cultural happening and a political forum;
- Specific trans-Mediterranean campaigns, involving citizens and groups from the two shores on subjects of common interests, first among them the issue of freedom of expression, followed by the right to mobility and the struggle against racism and hate speech;
- The promotion of a trans-Mediterranean Radio-TV citizens' channel through new technologies, where news is produced by community-based editorial offices and disseminated in several languages;
- An exchange and mobility programme for activists and civil society organizations of the region, to reinforce partnerships across the shores;
- A training, strategizing and project-making institute for activism in the region, offering capacity building, analyses, and sharing best practices.

This roadmap would symbolically represent – if you allow me to use this image – a citizens' trans-Mediterranean shadow government promoting the cause of Mediterranean unity.

The Duty of Generating Hope

This is, of course, not easy, but nothing is easy. We must be moved by the ambition to design a new space of political, social and economic integration, built upon the cultural diversity that characterizes its peoples. The Egyptian crisis is not only about Egypt, and the same can be said for Greece, Spain or even Syria. It shows that the cycle of 2011 revolutions and protest movements is not yet accomplished, and that the crisis of legitimacy of governmental and state institutions is present wherever we go, in Rome and in Cairo, Madrid or Tel Aviv; the same can be said for supranational institutions. It is the relationship between state and citizen that needs to be reinvented, and the dialectics of identity that must be called into question. A new concept of identity, a multipolar and regional identity, is needed for the Mediterranean. Independent civil society has a special responsibility in preparing the future, reanimating the spirit of 2011, bringing together religious and secular wings in order to address the socioeconomic, political or cultural problems in a regional perspective, beyond the national borders and the regimes' propaganda. This is the best social legacy the Mediterranean region deserves now.

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