

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH SEMINAR 2019

This fifth Interdisciplinary Research Seminar Aula Mediterrània, held annually in Barcelona by the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed), tackles a broad range of issues affecting the Mediterranean region. The seminar is framed within the interuniversity lectures programme Aula Mediterrània, jointly organised by the IEMed and several master's degree programmes of various Catalan universities.

Some of the 12 sessions of this research seminar deal with issues inherent to current conflicts in the region, historical conflicts or factors that could become their catalysers in the future. The remaining sessions address topics such as migrations, the transformation of Turkey, methodologies for teaching Arabic, and the portrayal of cultures and religions by the media. Given the relevance of the topics addressed as well as the diversity of subjects and voices present in the seminar, it is of interest not



Opening words by Josep Ferré (left), Acting Director General of the IEMed; Joandomènec Ros (middle), President of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans (IEC); and Mireia Borrell (right), Director General for Foreign Relations of the Generalitat de Catalunya. | Photo credit: Miquel Coll.

only to the academic world and experts on the Mediterranean region but also to students and the general public.

In addition, this fifth seminar incorporates a new element, an Open Mic session where master's degree students focused on the Mediterranean region can share their thesis ideas, the research they have carried out so far and their main goals with master's degree professors from several disciplines and other students. This allows them to gain feedback through interdisciplinary and expert insights and enrich their theses, and it is also a first step towards the best master's degree thesis contest that will be held during next year's research seminar.

From Exceptionalism to Normalisation: The Radical Transformation of the Republic of Turkey

In 2013, the protests organised in Gezi Park marked an important moment in the framework of the actions of the Turkish opposition because of several aspects that characterised both the objectives and the protagonists of the occupation. First, the main reason why protesters occupied Gezi Park was to demonstrate against the new government urban policy for Istanbul. Thus, anti-capitalism values can be considered one of the main aspects that brought people to protest. Secondly, it was also an opportunity to protest against the new authoritarian dimension of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). For these two reasons, the protests can be described as an anti-capitalist and anti-Islamism movement.

The two main aspects of the Gezi Park activism were inclusivity and spontaneity, which led to a new way of opposing power

In addition, the two main aspects of the Gezi Park activism were inclusivity and spontaneity, which led to a new way of opposing power. On the one hand, the movement's heterogeneous composition was an essential and unprecedented element. Different organisations were present in Gezi Park, and an alliance between environmental, anti-capitalist and pro-rights organisations was created. This diversity was also shown through the different types of activities that were organised during the mobilisation, such as workshops and cultural and sports activities. On the other hand, another crucial aspect of the occupation was the Friday prayer, a spontaneous action through which protesters showed that the occupation was not led by external influences and involved the Muslim communities – allowing the most conservative groups in the Turkish society to take part in the protest.

Meanwhile, the AKP government carried out its de-secularisation strategy. It did so through two main strategies: the transformation of the family institution and



From left to right, Olivia Glombitza, Özge Özdüzen, Sevgi Adak and Eduard Soler, during the session “From exceptionalism to normalisation: the radical transformation of the Republic of Turkey”. | Photo credit: Miquel Coll.

education. In this framework, the reform of the Diyanet (Directorate of Religious Affairs), used by the government as a way to change the idea of family and to indoctrinate society, was crucial. For instance, clear indications were given in order to put family at the centre of Friday sermons, and one of the main roles of Diyanet has become to encourage marriage and dissuade people from divorcing. Clearly, the idea of family that these policies tried to spread is a very traditional and patriarchal one. In addition, the government’s efforts to improve Diyanet’s role were also reflected in an increase in the Directorate’s budget, as well as the creation of new mosques and Koran courses. Diyanet’s external dimension is also one of the most important aspects of the new foreign policy of Erdogan’s government.

2015 could be seen as a turning point for Turkish foreign policy. From that year onwards, Ankara adopted a “fear-led” foreign policy. Some examples of this new strategy were the end of the traditional confidence toward the United States (US) and an aggressive policy in Syria. This new foreign policy approach provoked an extreme polarisation within the country, which was highlighted by the Syrian refugees and the Kurdish issues.

Regarding Diyanet’s external strategy, it will be interesting to see the future developments concerning the “propaganda competition” between Saudi Arabia and Turkey. The two countries use their views on Islam to expand their influence, and in some cases they competed over the same regions – the Horn of Africa, Libya and also the Balkans –, although there are also other countries, such as Morocco, that are pursuing their interests via the religious factor.

Mediterranean Migration within the Global Agenda: Perspectives, Dynamics and Policies

Due to recent regional crises, the European Union (EU) member states as well as Turkey have become major destination and transit countries for migrants fleeing conflict and poverty. Moreover, since the Arab Spring there has been an increase in the number of migrants using the services provided by smugglers when attempting to cross borders – whenever they do not have the option to migrate in a regular manner. Migrants who resort to these services are often vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and have many chances of being trafficked or losing their lives.

In the light of these migratory challenges, the limits of the Common European Asylum System (CEAS) have been revealed, opening a debate on what European solidarity and “burden-sharing” are and what they should be. The Dublin system, which stipulated the specific countries where people seeking protection should apply for asylum in each case, has shown its weaknesses and its need for reform. A solid common European migration policy does not exist yet, although there is a



Ayselin Yildiz (2nd from right) during the session “Mediterranean migration within the Global Agenda: Perspectives, dynamics and policies”. The fellow speakers Abdellatif Bensfia (left), Zouhair El Hairan (2nd from left) and Luisa Faustini (right) listening to Yildiz’s speech. | Photo credit: Miquel Coll.

common external migration policy that has a direct effect on migration management in countries like Turkey. The externalisation of EU immigration policy has been controversial, though, because of decisions such as the EU-Turkey statement of 18 March 2016, which stated that migrants crossing from Turkey to the Greek islands will be returned to the former country. Since Turkey does not

give refugee status – only conditional refugee status – there is an important debate on whether it can be considered as a safe third country; that is, a country from which migrants are later relocated.

There has been a relative failure to address the root causes that bring people to migrate

In this context, we may ask: do EU external migration policies have an impact on the EU's external dimension of democratisation? Southern Mediterranean countries constitute the space where most EU cooperation efforts have been concentrated, both politically and financially, and in the last 20 years policy processes to stop and prevent irregular migration have been developed. But despite investment of vast amounts of money in projects such as the EU Trust Fund for Africa (EUTF), there has been a relative failure to address the root causes that bring people to migrate. EU-funded programmes that address the root causes of this migration focus on governance and conflict prevention, providing greater economic and employment opportunities, but there is also an opacity in the use of the fund and a deviation of the development aid towards more militarisation. Considering these factors, the EU's effectiveness in promoting democracy in its southern neighbourhood is put into question.

At the local level, migrants are also affected by public administration and civil servants. The case of Morocco, for example, shows that when there is an influx of migrants in a country, there is also a rise of xenophobic acts and opinions. The training of civil servants who work in the field of migration, however, has an effect in addressing xenophobia, and is therefore extremely necessary. All in all, it is imperative to change from a securitisation approach to migration to a humanitarian approach.

Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language in the 21st Century: New Paradigms and Teaching Methodologies

Although the teaching of Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL) in Europe dates back to the 13th century, until recently it was regarded as a classic or “dead” language – like Latin or classic Hebrew. Modernisation of TAFL came quite late in relation to other languages. In the 16th and 17th centuries there was renewed interest and Arabic was taught throughout Europe, related to a colonial interest, and from the second half of the 20th century TAFL was normalised.

Given that there is a diglossia of Arabic language registers between Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and several dialects, one of the most debated questions

Due to the diglossia of Arabic language registers between Modern Standard Arabic and several dialects, there is a debate on which Arabic should be taught in classrooms

concerns which Arabic should be taught today in classrooms. There are three main methodological approaches. First, the traditional method, which is the teaching of MSA. Second, a free choice by the students on whether they prefer to study MSA, dialects, or both registers. And third, an integrative model, which advocates the joint teaching of both with a division of competences. A language is an instrument of communication between cultures, and that is why some academics consider that studying the MSA register is important, but that dialects are needed to communicate orally with native speakers in the street – otherwise they consider that a sociocultural barrier hard to overcome is imposed. Thus, they advocate the teaching of written MSA and at least one dialect orally from the start of Arabic students' learning process.

Some academics are adopting new paradigms in the teaching of Arabic. The lexicon is essential for successful reading comprehension, and it is believed that for adequate comprehension readers must know the 95% of a text's vocabulary. Given the complexity of the Arabic language, some academics have started developing reading materials based on "frequency lists" in order for beginner Arabic students to develop sight vocabulary: they are creating reading material adapted to beginner-level students with the words that are mostly used in different literary contexts (different styles, authors, topics, ages, and so on), which are selected through specialised software.



Laila Familiar (2nd from left), during the session “Yallah nataallam al-arabiya! The teaching of Arabic as a foreign language (TAFL) in the 21st century: new paradigms and teaching methodologies”. The fellow speakers Anna Gil-Bardaji (left), Victoria Aguilar (2nd from right) and Tànit Assaf (right) listening to Familiar's speech. | Photo credit: Miquel Coll.

Arabic teachers need to get involved with new technologies and interactive applications to keep students connected with the language

Finally, professors consider that listening to the students and connecting with them and their interests is key, as is positive communication. Some of them consider that, in order to do so, Arabic teachers need to get involved with new technologies and interactive applications, which makes it easier for students to stay connected with the language.

The Multiple Faces and Challenges for the Education of Children in the Post-Conflict MENA Region



During the session on "The multiple faces and challenges for the education of children in the post-conflict MENA region", the speakers, from left to right, were Lina Farouqi, Silvia Carrasco and Viola Raheb. | Photo credit: Miquel Coll.

The issue of education is especially important in the MENA region, as kids and youths are the majority of its population

The issue of education is especially important in the MENA region given the particularity of its demography, as kids and youths are the majority of its population. This means that education of children in MENA countries refers to education of most of the society. There are currently different perspectives regarding education in the MENA region. Some consider that education instils hope as it can become a tool to support personal development, emancipation, critical thinking and personal realisation in both war-torn and impoverished areas. However, others believe that education could be used as an instrument to indoctrinate children, both in conflict and post-conflict contexts, with the purpose of building up and strengthening certain narratives.

The advocates of the first point of view includes the Middle East Children's Institute (MECI), an NGO founded in New York in 2005. Its mission is to address the educational, psychosocial, health-related and other basic humanitarian needs of Middle Eastern children. Their aim is to empower children from vulnerable areas to

become agents of change in their communities through education and the development of personal skills. MECI's non-formal educational projects have been implemented in Palestine and Jordan with curriculums focused on teaching Arabic, English, art and physical education.

In the case of Jordan, MECI felt the need to implement non-formal educational programmes on the ground to assist large numbers of out-of-school Syrian children that after fleeing from war did not have access to formal education. The project, which has had the support of UNICEF and UNESCO, has provided access to education to over 3,300 out-of-school Syrian refugees and disadvantaged Jordanian youths (70% Syrians and 30% Jordanians) in 16 schools across Jordan. The programme also offers sessions to raise awareness on children's rights and protection.

The challenge of the post-conflict period will be on Syrians' construction of their own narrative

Among those who advocate that education is an issue of concern, Viola Raheb monitored the changes on the Syrian education system until 2016, focusing on the content taught in schools through school textbooks. This research tracked six changes in schoolbooks distributed in different regions of the country, resulting in enormous fragmentation of education – leaving aside the difficulty of accessing school in times of war. The study, which was indeed a political act, showed that most interest in such times of conflict in Syria has been in trying to make certain narratives prevail above the others. The challenge of the post-conflict period will hereby be on the sovereignty of Syrians over the construction of their own narrative, given the fact that one in every two Syrians is currently internally displaced or a refugee.

Access to Water: From Conflict to Cooperation in the Mediterranean?

Water is a key element in the cooperation and conflicts in the Mediterranean, given that it is a limited resource and the difficulties related to its control and distribution. Water became a relevant topic in the international arena with the United Nations Conference on Water (Argentina) in 1977, where cooperation among nations regarding water began. Nowadays, water has become an even more popular topic as it has been included in the Agenda 2030, as its Goal 6 (Clean water and sanitation). This Goal 6 is focused on water management, which is based on three principles: first, the framing of the right to have access

to water as a universal right; second, the sustainable development of water; and, third, the economic perspective of water based on the equal principle of the natural resources sovereignty.

Water distribution is one of the biggest challenges that the Mediterranean region must face

Water distribution is one of the biggest challenges that the Mediterranean region must face given the uneven distribution in space and time, the high demand – due to population growth, urbanisation, tourism and migration –, the climate challenge, and political instability and conflicts in the region.

Water issues are usually managed at a national level in the region, and thus do not become international problems – meaning that international cooperation is not necessary but rather voluntary. Only when rivers or aquifers cross different countries does it become an international issue. The main transboundary water resources in the Mediterranean are the Nile, the Jordan River, the Orontes River, the Nahr el Kebir Al Janoubi and the Medjerda River; and the main transboundary aquifers are the North Western Sahara Aquifer system, the Nubian Sandstone Aquifer System, the Coastal Aquifer, and the Mountain Aquifer.

In order to understand the international legal framework for transboundary waters, it is important to refer to the International Water Law (IWL). The set of laws that establish the IWL instruments are the Law of the Non-Navigational Uses of International Watercourses (1997) and the UNECE Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992). These laws are instruments that detail how actors should proceed in



Miguel Garcia-Herraiz (left) during the session “Access to water: from conflict to cooperation in the Mediterranean?” and Anna Badia (right) listening to his speech. | Photo credit: IEMed.



Raya Marina Stephan (right) during the session “Access to water: from conflict to cooperation in the Mediterranean?” and Anna Badia (left) listening to Stephan. | Photo credit: IEMed.

global and regional processes related to water, such as international water conflicts and transboundary water courses. In addition, water issues are protected by international humanitarian laws in specific cases, especially in failed countries or countries immersed in wars.

The main problems related to water in the Mediterranean region, however, stem from the complexity of IWL instruments, as well as poor governance, the diversification of water management and control into different ministries of Southern Mediterranean governments, the need to create a circular economy – understood as an economic system aimed at minimising waste and making the most of the water resources – and, last but not least, the scarcity of water in the whole Mediterranean region.

Nonetheless, it is important to note that countries in the Northern and Southern Mediterranean are more interconnected in terms of water provision than countries in Northern and Southern Europe, as they have common problems related to water scarcity and similar goals, expectations and instruments to solve those problems. Moreover, this common concern could become the base for future dialogues, leading to the discussion of other topics.

Religion and Violent Radicalisation: Challenges and Limits

Within the broader debate of the relationship between ideology and action, there is the idea that one can adopt radical ideas, but this does not imply that he or she will become a violent extremist. Violent radicalisation is the result of two forms of extremism: cognitive (adoption of radical ideas) and behavioural (violent actions). However, there is no evidence that cognitive extremism leads to behavioural extremism.

Many European countries consider that there is a link between adopting radical ideas and violence, which shapes EU's PVE programmes

There are different models used in academia that try to explain how someone becomes radicalised, such as the Four-Stage Model, the Staircase to Terrorism and the Pyramid Model of Radicalisation. The latter model was updated to the Two-Pyramid model, adding an Opinion Pyramid to the previous Action Pyramid, thus separating opinion from action and showing that while most terrorists have radical beliefs, not all radicals become terrorists.

Nonetheless, many European countries consider that there is a link between adopting radical ideas and violence. This results in many components of the EU's PVE

programmes assuming that there is one. This is shown, for example, through the use of “indicators” of terrorism – most of which are based on religious practices, such as growing a beard, wearing a hijab, not eating pork or praying – or in the efforts to spread a “moderate Islam” to prevent radicalisation, or in the dollars spent on counter-narratives.

Similarly, in the US, the New York Police Department (NYPD, US) – which following 9/11 decided to equip itself to be able to respond to terrorist attacks – issued a report that scholars consider simplistic. It identified a very broad population at risk of radicalising based on the aforementioned religious indicators, and it established a geography of radicalisation through the creation of a list of nationalities and ethnicities “of interest” – this covered most of the Muslim world, and considered mosques as well as places usually frequented by certain ethnicities as a “hot spot” and an “incubator” of radicalisation, which enabled them to establish informants and surveillance there. The report was taken down in 2017 following a lawsuit from the Muslim community.



From left to right, the speakers of the session “Religion and violent radicalisation: Challenges and limits” were Ibrahim Bechrouri, Sonia Andolz, Moussa Bourekba and Sawsene Nejjar. | Photo credit: IEMed.

In the MENA region there have also been efforts to deconstruct radical discourses. In Morocco, for example, there has been a domestic and international effort to establish several religious organisations – such as the Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams in 2015 and the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema – that have taken a holistic approach in their fight for de-radicalisation. These institutions were initially built for security purposes but also out of political concerns.

Finally, and making reference to the recent terrorist attack in a New Zealand mosque, some scholars consider that it is very political and subjective to choose

Scholars consider that it is political and subjective to choose when an action is considered terrorism

when an action is considered terrorism and when it is not, and some suggest that concepts themselves should be redefined.

Securitisation of Identities and Regional Conflicts in the Middle East

Sometimes it is difficult to separate politics from religion, as agents of sectarianisation in the region have sectarian and political agendas

Identity politics is one of the drivers of Middle Eastern politics, both at domestic and regional levels. But how do we define identity? This is one of the main problems, according to scholars, as there are different levels of identity that often overlap. It is thus very complicated to separate and treat them as different levels of analysis. Ethnicity, for instance, is something people inherit – although within one ethnic group there can be many different identities as well – while people can accept or reject a community's religion. In addition, sometimes it becomes difficult to separate politics from religion, as agents of sectarianisation in the region do not only have a sectarian agenda but also a political one. The division between Sunnis and Shias, for example, was a political issue from the beginning, and it still is.

Sectarian rivalries existed in Syria before 2011 and they have been a key element in the war, but they alone cannot explain the current conflict

Regarding particular cases in the region, Syria is considered to be a mosaic of mosaics, and it already was before the current war, with a broad majority of Sunni Arabs (65% of the population in 2010) but also Kurdish (15%), Alawites (10%), Christian (5%), Druze (3%), Ismaili (1%) and Twelver Shia (1%). It is important to note that Bashar al-Assad established a strategic urban planning in Syria that prevented the establishment of homogeneous communities, and the country's leader also exploited differences between those communities. Thus, sectarian rivalries existed in Syria way before 2011, and while they have been an essential element in the war, they alone cannot explain the current conflict. It is important not to downplay other factors that have been relevant in the war by placing too much focus on sectarianism and identities – for example the rural-urban, the old-new urbanities and generational divides, as well as economic factors or class grievances. Among these, however, it is considered that the two main cleavages in the Syrian war have been the sectarian and the socioeconomic divides.

In addition, sectarianism in Syria was also a consequence of the current conflict. The regime did everything it could to sectarianise the conflict in order to gain support, while external influence in the war also brought more sectarianism into Syria, and Jihadists also promoted a sectarian agenda. It is also important to consider that there has been a substantial change in the country's demography

because of the war. Most of the people who left Syria were Sunni Arabs, which added to the ethnic cleansing that took place in the country has led to a very different Syria in terms of demographic distribution.

Several other countries of the region, such as Turkey, where the shocking results of the last elections have raised some hope between some of its citizens although there is still no acceptance of dissent, also form what looks like an archipelago of different communities. According to scholars, the country's leader also makes the differences between these communities more profound, while the opposition is similarly divided.



Eduard Soler (2nd from right), during the session "Securitisation of identities and regional conflicts in the Middle East". The fellow speakers Umut Ozkirimli (left), Ana Ballesteros (2nd from left) and Lurdes Vidal (right) listening to Soler's speech. | Photo credit: IEMed.

Regarding South Asian countries, Pakistan is also a very heterogeneous country, creating another mosaic. Although 95% of its population is Muslim, there are many differences between these Muslims. Regarding its regional involvement, Pakistan is mainly an ally of Saudi Arabia, and has helped it in many conflicts militarily. Afghanistan, on the other hand, has had lesser involvement in the Middle East, while many other countries have been involved in Afghanistan – and not necessarily through sectarian terms, but rather through fluid alliances driven by other interests.

The Mediterranean region has been a space for rich cultural and economic exchange and political development

The Mediterranean in the Modern Era: Space of Nexus and Conflict

Historically, the Mediterranean region has been a space for rich cultural and economic exchange as well as political development. Three cases are very illustrative of this. First, in the conflict between Palermo and Messina in the 1600s,

a period in which the two cities competed to be the most important city in Sicily under the rule of Philip IV of Sicily, better known as King Felipe V of Spain. While Palermo was the political capital that traded in wheat, Messina was the city of merchants and traded in silk, sparking a rivalry between the cities over which one had more power, and building a clash between political and economic identity. Palermo was loyal to the king, while Messina was more loyal to the privileges of the city and therefore more republican. Messina requested that the island of Sicily be divided in two parts, with independent capitals and autonomous courts, in exchange for a big sum of money, yet that never came into fruition. In 1674, Messina revolted against foreign occupation, and while it remained independent for some time, in 1678 it was reconquered by Spanish forces with the aid of King Louis XIV.



Rossella Cancila (2nd from left), during the session "The Mediterranean in the modern era: space of nexus and conflict". The fellow speakers, from left to right, were Andreu Bibiloni, Mariela Fargas Peñarrocha and Manuel Lomas. | Photo credit: María Ángeles Pérez Samper.

The second case would be the fall of the Doria line. While this family was a powerful political actor in the 16th century, the name progressively lost relevance in the 17th century. There was a progressive decoupling of the Doria family to the service of the Hispanic monarchy under Felipe II and Felipe III, in a complex scheme by Andrea Doria I to try stay relevant and maintain power.

And the third case was the foreign trade of the island of Mallorca during the years 1650 and 1720. These were two relevant dates, as they mark the plague of Alger, when more than 25,000 people died in the island, and the plague of Marseilles, in which there were no deaths but it greatly reduced maritime trade. The basis of

trade in Mallorca were oil – of poor quality and cheap – and wheat. Between 1661 and 1691 there was a surplus in the economic balance, while between 1698 and 1718 there was a huge trade deficit – resulting from huge imports of rice after having had bad harvests of wheat.

It is said that the sea can isolate islands, but it can also connect them. The sea means trade and cultural exchange, which made Mallorca a place worthy of study in the Mediterranean during the 17th and 18th centuries.

The Origin of Protests in the Rif Region (2016-2018)

Protests and demonstrations are not unknown to people from the Rif region. These have been the result of the occupation and repression that the Rif has endured and fought against since the beginning of the 20th century. For revolutionaries all over the world, the Rif War is still a symbol of the fight against colonialism.

Two European powers, France and Spain, occupied the country in the 1900s, enjoying the support of the Moroccan sultan. By challenging them, a Berber leader emerged: Mohamed Abdelkrim El Khattabi. He led the Rif War from 1910 to 1926, and in February 1922 he proclaimed the Confederate Republic of the Tribes of the Rif, where the Rifians hoped to rally the tribes of the area under the French protectorate against the French occupation. The French Marshal Petain and the Spanish General Primo de Rivera launched a vast offensive with chemical weapons, which resulted in thousands of deaths. In 1925, Abdelkrim was forced to surrender and was sent to exile to Reunion Island, signalling the end of the Republic of the Rif.



Badiha Nahass during the session on “The origin of protests in the Rif (2016-2018)” and Carles Múrcia listening to Nahass. | Photo credit: IEMed.



Mustapha Qadery during his speech on “The origin of protests in the Rif (2016-2018)” and Asmaa Aouattah. | Photo credit: IEMed.

Since then, the Rif region has seen several waves of uprisings by the Rifians, which have been systematically repressed with disproportionate violence. In October 2016, the Hirak Rif – also called the Rif Movement – emerged as a social movement that involved the Rifian population of Al Hoceima, Nador, the Rifian diaspora in the Benelux region and, to a lesser extent, some large cities in Morocco. Nasser Zefzafi stood out as the leader of the Rif mass protests and became a symbol of Hirak by denouncing the bad infrastructure of the Rif. However, the event that triggered the movement was the death of a fisherman in Al Hoceima at the hands of local authorities, spreading outrage among Rifians. The mass protests faced violent repression from the Moroccan regime and led to the arrest of more than 150 Moroccans seen by the state as the movement’s leaders or activists. On 29 May 2017, Nasser Zefzafi was arrested, and he is still being judged for charges of sedition and conspiracy. In addition, the arrest of the journalist Hamid El Mahdaoui and the deaths during the demonstrations triggered a fight on the human rights front.

Scholars consider that the marginalisation of the Rif region is linked to the Rif movement and the notion of “dissent”

It is important to note that there is a discourse marginalising the Rif region by reducing it only to its economic dimension, characterised by a non-negligible poverty. Scholars consider that this marginalisation of the Rif region is directly linked to the Rif movement and the notion of “dissent”. The discourse on dissent, in turn, is believed to be an invention by central governments – either colonial or Moroccan – to discredit social demands or to justify repression. At the beginning of the Hirak, for example, the presence of the flag of “The Republic” was enough to accuse the movement of being separatist, without considering that although the Hirak is a movement in favour of autonomy its flag has become a symbol with different meanings within the movement.

Nowadays, the Rif protests are still ongoing. The Rifian popular movements have spread through the whole region, although they are obviously not the same as before given the state of constant persecution. Nonetheless, Hirak’s philosophy and the determination to fight for a better Rif is ingrained in the minds of Rifians.

The EU’s Asylum Policy Dilemma when facing the “Mare Mortum”: Practical and Legal Perspectives

The current problems related to migration are not new, and through history there have been several waves of refugees looking for a brighter future. However, the current crisis of the “mare mortum” in the Mediterranean has reached huge

dimensions. The current approach to migration would require a change of paradigm, shifting the debate from whether to welcome refugees or not – a somewhat catastrophic perspective – to the need to redefine cooperation as the way to deal with the causes of migration in the first place.



Ousman Umar in his speech during the session on “The EU’s asylum policy dilemma when facing the “mare mortuum”: practical and legal perspectives”. Helena Torroja listening to Umar’s insights. | Photo credit: IEMed.

However, before that, in order to really understand migration and the refugee crisis it is essential to have some insights from within. Ousman Umar is a survivor of a five-year migratory path from Ghana to Barcelona; his story is the story of hundreds of other people who believe Europe is the paradise where they will achieve success. Nonetheless, migration is a very profitable human business based on continuous human rights violations, including policies where economic recompenses are granted from Europe for every migrant blocked by African authorities, as well as the huge role of mafias. According to Ousman, the problem is not in the Mediterranean, as at that stage the battle is already lost; the problem is in the countries of origin of migration, and that is where actions should be directed. The history should be changed from those countries, and education may be one of the keys for that change. This is why Ousman founded NASCO Feeding Minds, a project that works with up to 11,000 kids from 19 schools, offering them access to education and particularly to new technologies.

The problem is not in the Mediterranean, as at that stage the battle is already lost; actions should rather be directed to the countries of origin of migration

The EU's asylum-seeker policies present three main challenges. First, how to prevent migrants from dying in the Mediterranean, which shows the system's inefficiency. Second, how to distribute asylum-seekers' requests among the 28 EU member states. So far, asylum-seekers arrive disproportionately to southern countries by reason of their geographical situation, as well as to those countries where they believe their requests will be more easily processed. And, third, there is the problem of the externalisation of frontiers and migration control, which outsources the management of asylum requests to neighbouring countries such as Algeria, Libya, Morocco or Turkey.



Joana Abrisketa during the session "The EU's asylum policy dilemma when facing the "mare mortuum": practical and legal perspectives". | Photo credit: IEMed.

The Dublin regulation – which establishes that the first state where asylum requests are presented by asylum-seekers, which are often the frontier states, are responsible to process them – is not working, according to experts like Professor Joana Abrisketa, but it is maintained regardless. Despite the fact that the CEAS is part of EU legislation – included in the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union –, its application has been implemented through directives that only set out goals for EU countries, hindering the establishment of an egalitarian and well-balanced scheme. The only way to achieve this would be through the implementation of regulations as binding legislative acts for EU member states, and through the establishment of an institution controlling the whole process and tackling the deep causes of displacement.

Debates on Islam in Europe: Interculturality, Citizenship and Public Policy

We are living at a time in which, in a context of globalisation, a religion such as Islam becomes visible in many different political spaces and contexts. Europe, conceived as a land of freedom of expression and religion where critical thinking and debate are jealously guarded, is, paradoxically, a space where Islam is currently thought of in terms of a clash of civilisations. Concepts such as interculturality, citizenship or public policies, for example, are conceived from a perverse framework: the binomial between Islam and immigration. This reductive paradigm inhibits the points of view of those concerned and marks the terms of the debate with an external narrative. However, we must take into account that Europe does not have a unique way of thinking about Islam, as in each country there is historical attention to diversity and each territory generates its own narrative and policies.



Ana Planet during the session on “The Mediterranean and its communicative, cultural and symbolic intersections” and Lucía Molina listening to Planet’s explanations. | Photo credit: IEMed.

In addition, the diversity of the Muslim communities in Europe cannot be defined by labels, but rather by practices ranging from popular culture to new practices resulting from the use of social networks. This, in turn, opens up numerous debates within these communities when it comes to defining and projecting themselves to the world.

Sociological studies carried out at the Autonomous University of Madrid contest the idea of Islam as a “substitute citizenship” for young Spanish Muslims – i.e., understanding Islam as the only expression of belonging and collective identity. Islam in non-Muslim majority countries is not associated with any state or power, it is rather a “de-culturalised” Islam, meaning that it is transmitted without rigorous



Lola Bañón in her speech during the session "The Mediterranean and its communicative, cultural and symbolic intersections". | Photo credit: IEMed.

formation through family and social environment. The conclusions of these studies indicate that believing in Islam does not predispose individuals to a concrete political or social action and that there are other categories that define identity – particularly social class, challenging the globalising categories linked to a national or religious belonging.

Television series, and foreign productions in particular, are exponents of intercultural encounters in the Arab world

The media has an important role and power in this regard, and it is relevant to highlight the capacity of television series, and foreign productions in particular, as exponents of intercultural encounters and influences in the Arab world. In that respect, both the success of the dubbing of soap operas that turned Syrian into a hegemonic dialect and the historical narratives referring to a common past progressively led to a common transnational identification through media representations.

A key question that we must address is: Where are the Mediterranean people on the media's thematic agendas? When do they appear, why, and how? Nowadays, we find media representations of the Mediterranean that ignore humans, that disseminate stories focused on conflict situations – wars, refugees or immigration – and where political regimes are portrayed as inflexible and unstable systems of government, incapable of responding to current challenges. The message has thus shifted from the ancient Orientalist discourses of fascination with the region to a narrative focused on "the danger that comes from the South."

Considering that information is an element of collective cohesion, the absence of representation or the misrepresentation become political and geostrategic indicators. In order to revert these narratives, the “embargoed” agenda must be diagnosed through an academic militancy, thus situating the Mediterranean in the fields of media discussion.

The Interdisciplinary Research Seminar has been organised by the IEMed, in collaboration with 12 different university programmes. Each master's degree programme suggested an area of interest for a session, and provided the lecturers and the discussants. The participant master's degrees are listed below:

- Master's degree in the Arab and Islamic World, Universitat de Barcelona (UB)
- Master's degree in Contemporary Arab Studies, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)
- Master's degree in Diplomacy and Public Service, Centre for International Studies – Universitat de Barcelona (CEI-UB)
- Master's degree Erasmus Mundus in Inter-Mediterranean Mediation: Towards Investment and Integration (MIM), Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)/Università Ca' Foscari di Venezia/ Université Paul-Valéry Montpellier
- Master's degree in History and Identity of the West Mediterranean (15th-19th centuries), Universitat de Barcelona (UB), Universitat d'Alacant (UA), Universitat de València (UV), Universitat Jaume I (UJI)
- Master's degree in International Relations, Blanquerna - Universitat Ramon Llull (URL)
- Master's degree in International Relations, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI)
- Master's degree in International Relations, Security and Development, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)
- Master's degree in International Studies: International Organisation and Cooperation, Universitat de Barcelona (UB)
- Master's degree in Journalism and International Relations, Blanquerna-Universitat Ramon Llull (URL)
- Master's degree in Migration Studies, Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF)
- Inter-University Master's degree in Contemporary Migrations, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) and Universitat de Barcelona (UB)

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