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Palau de Pedralbes (Barcelona)

## INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH SEMINAR 2020-2021

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

This year, the seven sessions of the research seminar dealt with a wide range of issues inherent to conflicts in the region and issues to tackle, that were assessed through both a current vision and a historical perspective. Some of this year's topics revolved around migration and the role of cities in dealing with it, Islamism in international



Photo credit: Nicolás Carvalho Ochos

relations, and historical climatic and sanitary crises, as well as the case studies of Egypt, the Arab-Israeli conflict, and tensions in the Maghreb. 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 only to the academic world and experts on the Mediterranean region, but also to students and the general public.

This year's seminar gathered the work of the past two years after a pause due to the pandemic. This adds to the relevance of the seminar and gives a new perspective in its realisation. In this sense, some sessions were conducted in a hybrid format, facilitating the participation of foreign speakers in an appropriate and effective manner. Moreover, the seminar also included the second edition of the awards ceremony to the best master's Dissertation, awarded and hosted by the IEMed with the presence of the ministry of Foreign Action and Open Government of Catalonia.

### From Mubarak to Al Sisi: evolutions of Egypt's economic policies

The emergence of the cosmopolitan city during Mubarak's tenure, and its Bourdieusian style reintegration under the current period of Abdelfattah Al Sisi, has resulted in an increased interconnectivity and the inherent redistribution of economic resources. Facing this capital readjustment, whose emergence coincided with the first political reforms imposed by the IMF's Structural Adjustment Loan in 1991, and the subsequent neoliberal reinventions of 2003, Egyptian elites have devised all kind of mechanisms to maintain their dominant status and its echelons of power. Thus, scrutinizing the formulas that allow them to capture new resources and impose barriers to limit socioeconomic conditions, has gained special importance in the study of political economy.

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Laura Feliu and Sarah Smierciak during the panel "From Mubarak to Al Sisi: evolutions of Egypt's economic policies".  
| Photo credit: Nicolás Carvalho Ochos





Timothy E. Kaldas (left) during the session “From Mubarak to Al Sisi: evolutions of Egypt’s economic policies”, Laura Feliu (centre) and Sarah Smierciak (right) listening to his speech. | Photo credit: Nicolás Carvalho Ochos

The appetite of Gamal Mubarak, son of the deposed dictator Hosni Mubarak, to attract large investments and promote various market liberalisation platforms, perfectly illustrate the drawing of a cosmopolitan city in which distinctions between the economic agenda and the political sphere were too blurred. The creation of large investor forums such as Medinvest Associates Limited in 1996; The Egyptian Centre for Economic Studies, created as a reference hub for investors, etc., ended up setting the political guidelines in economic matters to such extent, that his circle of close associates turned into a political formation: the ‘Party of the Future’. This exemplifies how the consolidation of a cosmopolitan city and capital networks strengthen the elites’ seizure devices.

Following the dismantling of Mubarak’s period and his son’s claims, elitist dynamics remain unchanged, although the military has reaffirmed its position as the dominant actor in the regime. Echoing the phrase ‘weak state, strong regime’, the military legitimises its participation in any megaproject. Since the government is incapable of taking over the state, they presume, it is their responsibility to take the reins of building new cities like New Cairo, manufacturing and supplying food, etc.

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However, far from exacerbating the quarrels between one actor and another, the relationship between the two are cordial and allow them to maintain the status quo. For as long as the military maintains the monopoly of primary resources and prevents the accumulation of capital outside the regime’s inner circle, economic or ‘secondary’ elites—in the capacity of allies—will continue to enjoy the prerogatives granted by the regime. Regime owned enterprises (ROEs) are not taxable, have

access to state assets, and have fewer regulatory controls, among other legal anti-competitive advantages. The cosmopolitan city then becomes, paradoxically, a dual output conduct that sees how the attraction of international investors not only does not generate benefits but imposes restrictive monetary policies and has a negative impact on economic performance.

### Models of reception of migrants and refugees in Mediterranean European countries: lessons learned and challenges for the future

During the past years, there have been a series of transformations in migration flows in the Mediterranean region that are posing new challenges on host countries. In this context, cities are increasingly in the spotlight, as their role is becoming crucial in rethinking reception models for migrants. In addition, this situation is especially critical in countries like Spain or Italy, where societies have been becoming more diverse for some decades. In this sense, cities, regional and national governments must stop considering migration a temporary or provisional phenomenon and start building a durable migratory legal framework.



From left to right, Elena Mut-Montalva, Sònia Parella, Gloria Rendón and Marco Gaspari during their session “Models of reception of migrants and refugees in Mediterranean European countries: lessons learned and challenges for the future”. | Photo credit: Nicolás Carvalho Ochos

Migration in the Mediterranean is not something exclusive of the past twenty or thirty years. Instead, it is important to understand migration as a continuous process in the history of the region. Accordingly, there is a need to historicise the present to understand that the conception of migration and of its policies are the result of a constant construction of a discourse around migration.

However, despite the historical persistence of migration, there are now new trends and challenges in this area that must be addressed, as policies from the 80s and 90s are not necessarily applicable today. Starting with Spain, 95% of applications for international protection are currently declined, leaving a great number of people living in a state of irregularity. Moreover, there is greater diversity in migrants' profiles as well as more diverse types of migration, ranging from cyclical to transitory or permanent migration. This issue is also relevant when dealing with citizens born where their parents migrated, who usually face administrative difficulties as well as having their identity questioned socially and politically. In this sense, legislation and public policies must be shaped according to the factual reality of nowadays and to facilitate integration against discrimination.

Cooperation at a multilevel scale between cities and governments is now more relevant than ever, especially as the pandemic has aggravated the sensitive living conditions of a large number of migrants

It is in this context where cities gain relevance, as reception is mostly tackled at local levels despite the fact that legislative power lies on national governments. Migrants now have a local focus in the sense that they generally choose cities, neighbourhoods or communities where they know they will receive support rather than aiming for whole countries to migrate to. This converts public policies in cities to an essential issue to tackle, as well as cooperation at a multilevel scale. In the case of Valencia, for example, immigrants have progressively been displaced to peripheral areas of the city, where the lack of public services and facilities puts them in a precarious situation. In this case, the multiculturalism of neighbourhoods can only be turned into intercultural through common initiatives for cohesion and integration.

Cooperation at a multilevel scale between cities and governments is now more relevant than ever, especially as the pandemic has aggravated the sensitive living conditions of a large number of migrants. Coordination in this sense is especially important taking into account the fact that cities are structurally heterogeneous and do not have a unified management system when it comes to migration. Neutral policies or inaction will only lead to worsening situations, sharper divisions, and the perpetuation of racism and discrimination.

## Democracy, Islamism and International Relations

The formulation of the European Union foreign policy shows, in some contexts, certain apprehension about which actors it can engage with. This is the case of the so-called hybrid actors in the Middle East, which do not fall within the range of state actors nor have been recognised by the International Community, either for

political reasons, or because their very nature grants them an ambiguous status among the resistance-governance binomial. These observations, which would not have been raised before on a theoretical level, have generated recent concern in Europe, with the number of hybrid actors becoming more and more likely to go from atypical cases to joining an enlarged list.

The EU's current stance shows a propensity for dialogue and interaction with these types of actors such as hybrid ones

What norms do we apply when existing ones are challenged by a new political context, when dealing with spaces prone to turn into volatile environments? How to deal with those situations where cultural relativism and universalism converge? The articulation of new European policies must account for this heterogeneity of actors and make stances more flexible, as continuing to apply an intransigent and Eurocentric approach will affect the maintenance of diplomatic relations.

The EU's current stance shows a propensity for dialogue and interaction with these types of actors. However, it does so from obtuseness; dealing with a region which has internalised as worthy of all kinds of prejudices and preconceptions. Given the prevalence of securitisation and (counter)terrorist speeches, engagement is considered a viable, objective option. The overcoming of these limitations will necessarily go through not only an effort to overcome a stigmatizing mentality, but also the implementation of initiatives that include the training of diplomats, the provision of a legal basis that regulates state-to-state relations, and the stipulation of the red lines as facilitating tools of a moderate and pragmatic interaction.



Cristina Sala during the session “Democracy, Islamism and International Relations” and Gabriel Garroum Pla listening to her speech.” | Photo credit: IEMed

A large majority of countries have partially engaged with Afghanistan, fearful that its exclusion from the international sphere results in a rise of insurrectional political Islam

The case of the Taliban regime in this case is paradigmatic. A large majority of countries have partially engaged with Afghanistan, fearful that its exclusion from the international sphere results in a rise of insurrectional political Islam. Thus, they have entered a dialogue with the regime that casts many uncertainties about the presumable moderate rhetoric of the new leader, eager to gain recognition from the rest of the world. Likewise, economic interests of neighbouring countries will determine the type of requirements necessary to strengthen ties with these “grey zone” actors. In no case potential scenarios predict the adoption of an isolating attitude towards them.

### Modern societies faced to climate and health crises (XV-XIX centuries)

Climate change is one of the most pressing issues affecting the international paradigm today. The Mediterranean region is a sensitive area in this regard, as it is already experiencing effects from the climate crisis and could suffer more severe consequences in the years to come. In addition, phenomena like the Covid-19 pandemic are the first signs of what could eventually become common consequences of climate change. In this sense and in the context of growing preoccupation by the international community and this year’s Climate Change Conference (COP 26), there is a pressing need for experts working towards this issue. In this regard, historical referents can give a new perspective to shed light on past climate and health crises and how they were dealt with.



From right to left, Mariano Barriendos, Kevin Pometti, Diego Sola and José Luis Betrán Moya during the session “Modern society in the face of climate and health crises (XV-XIX centuries)”. | Photo credit: IEMed

The current situation is uncertain and uncomfortable, global warming is an evident process that is directly attributable to human activity. In the Mediterranean, temperatures are rising and natural resources are becoming more scarce, as is evidenced by the hydric crisis or the increasingly regular droughts and floods in Catalonia.

In this context, there is a need for action at all levels of governance, and history can serve as a base for research and for shaping policies to combat climate change. In this sense, history and the reconstruction of severe past episodes can provide material to current scientific activities in order to have a broader perspective and to evaluate experimental impacts according to the vulnerabilities of each historical context. In this sense, the Mediterranean region possesses a wide variety of diverse atmospheric phenomena that have been documented since the medieval period like heat and cold waves, sea storms, unusual snowfall, heavy windstorms and hailstorms, droughts, etc. Moreover, the cases of epidemics that have affected Barcelona and the whole of Catalonia throughout the centuries, have allowed for the compilation of data and gathering of previous experiences that create a strong basis for studies nowadays.

Past experiences of epidemics in Catalonia and especially in Barcelona represent the first political and sanitary efforts to effectively manage large health crises through local and individual measures

Now, as the situation with climate change worsens and the Mediterranean region sees itself submerged into a climatic crisis, the study of climatic transitions throughout history becomes more relevant than ever. Catalan archives offer a solid database in this regard, with a wide variety of facts and historical contexts, so historians could without much difficulty contribute a multidisciplinary added value to studies that are currently being conducted by geographers, physicians, biologists or environmentalists. Past experiences of epidemics in Catalonia and especially in Barcelona as the most affected region, represent the first political and sanitary efforts to effectively manage large health crises through local and individual measures. Nowadays, with the increasingly strong effects of climate change and the forecasted coming pandemics, historical facts and databases can be liable sources of information for research and policymaking.

### Reflections on the Arab-Israeli conflict today

When reflecting on the Arab-Israeli conflict today, it is only appropriate to talk about it in the light of the two internal central developments that took place within the last year. On the one hand, it has almost been half a year since the Sheikh Jarrah

expulsions, the bombing of the Gaza strip during the holy month of Ramadan and the widespread disturbances and political instabilities. On the other hand, the current electoral cycles will equally have an impact on the state of conflict – the envisaged post Abbas scene, the political regeneration of the elite, and the dynamics with the new Israeli Prime Minister. Equally of importance for consideration are two external factors influencing the conflict: a change in the White House, which has a direct impact on the US as a mediator in the conflict; and a new president in Iran.

The current strategy of the government is to reduce conflict which holds a far more twisted reality than what Netanyahu used to show.

In the wake of the 30th anniversary of the Madrid Conference that brought the conflicting parties together, some commemorated while others took stock of its practicality. Regardless, the historical context it is important to take into account the continuities and what will come forward.

While having Netanyahu out of the picture might have come as a relief for some, it is important to note that by no means it translated into a change of position towards the conflict. If anything, the current strategy of the government is to reduce conflict which holds a far more twisted reality than what Netanyahu used to show. To elaborate on that, a reduction of conflict under this new strategy refers to making the conflict invisible to external actors and outside spectators. Above all, the conflict must be concealed from Israeli society before the international community, which is not an alien to dynamics on the ground. Instead of taking de-escalating measures to reduce the conflict such as lifting occupation forces, halting the denomination of Palestinian civil society or stopping violations of human rights,



From right to left, Itxaso Domínguez de Olazábal, Jordi Quero and Jofre Rocabert during the session “Reflections on the Arab-Israeli conflict today”. | Photo credit: IEMed.

the government has chosen to continue to do such acts only in secret. Such a strategy conveys one message that presents Palestinians with a sort of ultimatum: assimilate and follow the rules in order to live in better condition. In doing so, the Israeli government has also weaponized on terrorizing and alienating Palestinian civil society organizations in order to legitimise its strategy. The designation of six Palestinian NGO s as terrorist organizations in October of this year was a move by the Israeli state to “caution” international donors from collaborating with Palestinian civil society.

Another central development to the current situation is the intensification of colonization through the construction of new illegal settlements. The new Israeli PM, Naftali Bennett, has utilised the annexation of territories in such a way that does not grant Palestinians citizenship, a strategy that would maximize the occupation of territory while minimizing the presence of Palestinians.

These escalations brought a considerable level of violence with them, especially during the holy month of Ramadan, with bombardments, widespread uprisings, considerable fragmentations, displacement of Palestinians and protests on both sides of the Green Line. Such reality is not new to Palestinians, who had a decade characterised by forced displacement, land theft, incarceration, economic subjugation and deliberate processes of fragmentation. What is unique to this uprising, however, is its element of unity and digital mobilization. While it is difficult to measure and compare the magnitude of this intifada to the previous two, it is safe to say that this uprising saw more organisation and unity, which is ironic due to the recent disorganisation. This is where this uprising gets its name from: The Unity Intifada.

The role of international mobilisation and media coverage are especially important to note in the context of the Unity intifada. While international media had an agenda of interviewing Palestinians on the ground about the level of violence, Palestinians had a contrasting agenda and refused to talk about violence and shifted the focus to Gaza and the Palestinian Authority. Following the May 21 ceasefire between Hamas and Israel, international media drew particular attention away from the revolts and focused on the reconstruction of Gaza. While many Palestinians considered the outcome a victory, the situation in Gaza goes beyond Hamas and its victory. Beneficiaries of the Hamas performance were not the Israelis alone, but also the Palestinian Authority, meaning, three leaderships and three reactionary actors are comfortable with the situation as it serves their survival as entities.

Among all these escalations, Israel firmly adopted a policy of fait accompli throughout this year. The reality is that Israeli exercises sovereignty over the territory and has the upper hand, therefore, this year it afforded making announcements for the sake of applause, while it failed to stick to its words.

That being said, it is important to reflect on how one talks about the conflict today, on terminologies, concepts and discourse. On the one hand, Palestinians have time and again rejected the Arab-Israeli framework to naming the conflict, claiming the erasure or assimilation of the concept of Palestinian in it. Consequently, a new narrative is demanded, a new way of existence that is conscious of including Palestinians in discourse as well. On the other hand, there are also demands for development that come as a result of the characteristics of the new generation that recognize a new international context and consider that they are targeting international donors and the impunity of the state of Israel. Their criticism targets the occupation of Israel, the Palestinian authority and the international society.

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On a different note, in reflecting on the role of international organisations in the conflict, there is a noticeable and gradual detachment from the conflict. The United Nations is no longer a legitimate actor in the conflict and the Arab League demonstrated time and again that defending the rights of Palestinians is not a top priority. What has been reflected and widespread in public institutions is the exhaustion of all actors involved and a process of delegitimation of the parties they represent. This further demonstrates that the international community is not up for the job it has claimed.

### Mediterranean cities and migration governance

In view of migratory challenges posed to the current model of migration governance in the Mediterranean, more is revealed about the role of Mediterranean cities in dictating migration organisation, a phenomenon connecting the two shores of the Mediterranean. Traditionally, the Mediterranean came to be known as a region where European Union narratives and practices very much prevailed over those of subnational levels. That is to say, EU-Mediterranean policies have often been built around EU-states geopolitical relations through EU-multilevel governance and policy programs dominated by conditionality and bilateralism. Meanwhile, cities have time and again demonstrated their increasingly sensitive approach to humanitarian challenges, and their growing pragmatic diagnoses to processes and

problem-solving. On the one hand, cities are becoming new-agers and interlocutors with the EU in relation to human mobility challenges, integration policies and diversity management. On the other hand, it has been widely accepted that the so-called 2011 Arab Revolutions have virtually been an open phenomenon and an action taking place in the city's public spaces. For this reason, it becomes timely to reflect on how cities' governance perspectives can be incorporated within the Mediterranean migration agenda. The preliminary premise is that today's cities can foster cooperation based on common values and frameworks through principles of dialogue, coordination and cooperation in action.



From right to left, Gemma Aubarell, Aida Casanovas and Ricard Zapata during the panel "Mediterranean cities and migration governance". | Photo credit: IEMed.

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To frame the discussion from a normative standpoint, it is important to introduce the category of regional cities in the Mediterranean migration debate: creating an umbilical cord between urban-thinking and regional-thinking whilst strengthening the view that cities may contribute to the formation of regional domains. The increasing pressure of migratory flows is forcing most cities to increase multiscale alliances with international civil society organisations and translocal cities with other cities, sharing activist concerns, practices and knowledge. This creates an urban system in the Mediterranean, which is the new driving force of a new region-making process from below. In other words, this current trend is driving a paradigm change in Mediterranean Migration Governance, readjusting the dissonance between the historical and current topographical construct of the Mediterranean as a geographic area of interconnected cities by the same migratory routes, while eliminating the current top-down state-based Euro-Mediterranean process of

region-making. Not to mention, it suggests that the Mediterranean region should not be seen as a bounded territory but as a canvassed space of nodal places with given practices and narratives that have their origin in Mediterranean cities.

To enforce this narrative from a practical, research-based approach, observations in the increase in interest of regional and local networks of cooperation have been evident. When looking at migration initiatives in the Mediterranean, it becomes clear that they are mostly dictated by local and regional networks. This begs the question: to what extent have these local and regional networks been placed as leading actors in the governance around migration? To reflect on this question, it is appropriate to refer to the Refugee Crisis of 2015 as a significant phenomenon for observation, where the conduct and response of networks towards migratory challenges became evident for the first time through their humanitarian approach to the matter. From this outset, networks have insistently proven their relevance to migration governance. Primarily, networks have not only been able to lobby and create space for new knowledge production and awareness raising, but they have also served as promoters for new debates, which these regions and cities have not been able to think about. Moreover, these networks create an important regional stakeholder space, providing a possibility to link a wide range of actors such as states, governments, local and urban spaces, for internal and external migration perspectives, once again proving their relevance in migration governance. Finally, while it is important to pivot the discussion from the perspectives of cities and regional networks, it is also important to be cautious of their distinct interests, realities and dynamics, therefore is it not right to talk about both realities at the same level.

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Beyond their significance at the regional and international level in migration debates, cities have been evident drivers of socio-economic transformation and key players in managing diversity and migration. To materialise these narratives, one could appropriately refer to the case of Izmir, a port city in the Eastern Mediterranean, known for its migration hub reputation. Cosmopolitanism and cultural diversity are not new to Izmir, a port city with deep rooted cosmopolitan values, and hybrid identity. Prioritisation of economic development and gains by groups that have historically inhabited the city is what has helped Izmir in fostering coexistence and tolerance. However, current world politics dictated the migration governance of Izmir to take a different path. With profound transformations and rapid urbanisation of the city, perception of migratory flows changed, and became

accompanied with realities of social exclusion. Such transformations to the perception of migration in the city is a significant reflection and indication of the unprecedented nature of population movements experienced today in the Mediterranean.

### Burning issues in the Maghreb

One of the conflicts that has remained high on the international political agenda since 1976 is the situation regarding the Western Sahara, following Morocco's annexation of the territory through the Green March. As a result, in 1991, the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was established in accordance with the settlement proposals accepted in 1988 by Morocco and the Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Rio de Oro (Frente POLISARIO).



Juan Soroeta Licerias during the session “Burning issues in the Maghreb” and Laura Huici listening to his speech. | Photo credit: IEMed

After 46 years on the international agenda, on 10 December 2020, the then president of the United States, Donald Trump, recognised Moroccan sovereignty over the Western Sahara and in exchange announced the normalisation of diplomatic relations between Morocco and Israel. A new regional geopolitical scenario is thus taking shape. Furthermore, the Resolution adopted by the UN Security Council on 29 October 2021 extends MINURSO's mandate until 31 October 2022. It also emphasises the need to reach a political solution to the Western Sahara issue that is realistic, viable, lasting and acceptable to all parties. Another political and diplomatic aspect that has triggered such a conflict is the

What is most worrying, in addition to the escalation of armed tensions, is the lack of dialogue between Morocco and Algeria

ongoing political and diplomatic crisis between Morocco and Algeria. The main element of controversy is the clash of their respective political models and the dispute over African leadership, as well as their different international alignments. The background to the current crisis is the rupture of diplomatic relations between 1976 and 1988 and the closure of borders by Algeria in 1994. Both countries are currently engaged in a worrying arms race. Also, following an extraordinary meeting of Algeria's High Security Council, chaired by Abdelmadjid Tebboune, the decision was announced to review diplomatic relations with Morocco, which was accused of hostile acts. Consequently, on 24 August 2021, Algeria announces the severance of diplomatic relations with Morocco.

Likewise, Moroccan commercial and military flights have been banned in Algerian airspace, and Algeria is not renewing the Maghreb-Europe gas pipeline agreement, which is having a profound financial and energy impact on Morocco. In addition, Algeria rejects any external mediation, thus breaking the channels of communication between the two countries. As a result, what is most worrying, in addition to the escalation of armed tensions, is the lack of dialogue between the two countries.



Isaías Barreñada during the session “Burning issues in the Maghreb”, Juan Soroeta Licerias (left), Laura Huici (centre) and Anna M. Badia (right) listening to his speech. | Photo credit: IEMed.

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

- Master's in International Relations, Security and Development, Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB)
- Inter-university master's degree in Contemporary Migration, Rights and Social Cohesion, Autonomous University of Barcelona (UAB) and University of Barcelona (UB)
- Master's in International Relations, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI)
- Master's of History and Identities in the Western Mediterranean (XV-XIX centuries), University of Barcelona (UB), University of Alicante (UA), University of Valencia (UV), University Jaume I (UJI)
- Master's in Diplomacy and International Organizations, Centre for International Studies (CEI) and University of Barcelona (UB)
- Master in Migration Studies, Interdisciplinary Research Group on Immigration - Pompeu Fabra University (GRITIM-UPF)
- Master's in International Studies – Organizations and International Cooperation, University of Barcelona (UB)

This report was written at the IEMed by Maisara Sassi, Clara Vila, Melania Brito and Oumaya Amghar. The seminar was coordinated by Elisabetta Ciuccarelli and Lurdes Vidal.