

TEMES

Thoughts on Cultural History of Mediterranean World

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hat could the object and the method of a cultural history of Mediterranean area be in modern and contemporary period? ¹

Starting with Pirenne analysis, the Mediterranean world, has lost its unity of the Greek-Roman period, and the northern coast became the south of Europe since Middle Ages. Although the old Mediterranean characteristics of the

¹ Cultural History is a quite recent field. Its prehistory includes the history of Ideas and ideological trends, the history of High Culture. From history of Ideas historians have been moved to the history of mentalities (Marc Bloch, Lucien Febvre) and to the history of Representations (Chartier and others). Another legacy was the history of Low culture (Raymond Williams, Burke) and the study of culture as interpretation of social action (E.P. Thompson, N.Z. Davis). This field was influenced by social anthropology (Geertz and Shalin: culture as interpretative system) and connected to the "local knowledge". Local knowledge is the privileged locus of cultural history, not the great works of historical synthesis. That is, cultural history is written in a form of comments on the culture of the past, and not as a chronicle of cultural continuities. Foucault concept of discontinuity and genealogy has been proved more appropriate as method, and microhistory as form of cultural history.

long duree, based on geohistory, did not disappear (Braudel), the more dynamic elements and the transformation of Med. societies in 19th and 20th centuries have been connected with the experience of modernity:

- Enlightenment and the emancipation of culture
- Nationalism and the use of culture
- Capitalism and the change of culture

Through these elements we could establish a common language for a comparative cultural history of the Med. world. As a methodological point of departure, I propose the term *creative misinterpretations*. Misinterpretation because the transference of ideas, cultural roles and institutions, economic and political forms of organisation from area to area is not a clear mimesis. Everything has to be modified according to the structure of reception and the needs of respecting societies. On the other hand, the term misinterpretation does not imply a confrontation between a right and wrong interpretation, because it includes creative elements. The European South is part of this European experience of modernity, and we are looking for common misinterpretative cultural practices from a double aspect: culture as an interpretative system of modernity and, at the same time, culture as a dynamic element of change.

Enlightenment and the intellectuals. The great cultural confrontations between nativism and universalism. The formation of the intellectuals and their role in cultural changes.

Nationalism and the transformation of local culture as an element of national culture, the creation of nationalizing cultural institutions and the transformation of cultural environment.

Capitalism, élites and the means of cultural change

On the topic of culture, the question that arises is to what extent and in which way local/native elements influence the reception of Modernity. How does the “old” and the “new” refer to each other and what is the form of this “marriage”? How do specific cultural/mental patterns and socio-political structures determine the form of interpretation? Does Modernity take up and incorporate the value orientations of local societies, if then, which is the modality and what does this signify for the construction of identities? Is there an interrelation/communication between the adoption of new ideas and values

and popular culture? Which are the cultural traditions that help to sustain or reject an ideological message? Are these used as vehicles for the popularisation of ideology or are they rejected as vestiges of an old order that has to be overcome? What is the result of this amalgamation and what are the visions it sets forward? And finally, what can this tell us about these societies, but also about the function of ideology for the construction of mental spaces and identities?

For the purposes of this project I suggest that, drawing from the Greek case which I am familiar with, we could look at Med. intellectuals on the one hand as channels or vehicles for the dissemination of ideology and on the other hand as interpreters, mediators, adaptors of ideology within the Med. social, political and cultural fabric, as weavers of identities in an attempt to render old and new not only intelligible, but also tangible for their respective communities.

Historically, the role and the definition of the intellectual changes in the nineteenth century. It evolves from the broadly humanistic "man of letters" involved in an all-encompassing intellectual enterprise to a narrower definition where a collective, public identity is developed through the realisation of the right and the interest, often perceived as a duty, of bringing to voice a collective social critique.² This process of a collective social engagement expressing the "conscience of society" was strongly reinforced by the Dreyfus affaire in France at the end of the century.

For a better conceptualisation of the distinct social function of the intellectual, the "negative" definition of A. Gramsci proves to be useful. According to Gramsci, although everybody in society could be considered to be an intellectual, not everybody functions as an intellectual.³ For Max Weber, intellectuals are a group of people who "by virtue of their peculiarity have special access to certain achievements considered to be 'cultural values,' and who therefore usurp the leadership of a 'culture community'."⁴ In a similar manner, Karl Mannheim, defined intellectuals as a *Freischwebende*

² Noutsos, Vol. B, part A, p. 25.

³ Gramsci, Antonio, *The Prison Notebooks: Selections*, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1973, p. 69.

⁴ *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Gerth H.H and C. Wright Mills (ed), London: Routledge, 1995 (4), p. 176.

Intelligenz, considering them as a socially unattached, 'classless' social stratum with a claim for a cultural mandate.⁵ Edward Said stresses more the public aspect of communication, defining an intellectual as an "individual endowed with a faculty for representing, embodying, articulating a message, a view, an attitude, philosophy or opinion to, as well as for, a public."⁶

Through their intellectual and political work, intellectuals, reserve for themselves the right to act as "interpreters of the world,' 'producers of collective consciousness,' 'conduits of secular and progressive change.'"⁷ As a consciously and voluntarily much politicised stratum, intellectuals, commit themselves to articulations of alternatives by questioning the past and the present and by providing alternatives for the future. By means of this "futuristic" orientation, they are inclined to be more inspired by the "uncharted possibilities of the future." As such they are "among the most concerned, searching, reflective, and attentive observers of [...] cultural transformation". They are also "some of its most vociferous participants."⁸

The social role of the intellectual is determined as much by the public space he/she occupies in social life as by his/her self definition of the same mission. For L.S. Feuer the "sense of mission is intrinsic to the consciousness of the intellectual. It goes together with his sense of alienation."⁹ Although defined also through other attributes, I would argue, that it is precisely the quality of seeing things "with the eyes of a stranger,"¹⁰ the possibility of seeing things simultaneously from the inside and the outside perspective that endows an intellectual with a particular view and a particular social status. Intellectuals emanate from and are part of a society, yet, at the same time they have to distance themselves from it in order to understand and analyse it. This capability of switching locuses of observation creates a mental space, which is

⁵ Mannheim, Karl, *Ideology and Utopia, An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*, London:Routledge and Kegan, 1936, p. 82.

⁶ Said, Edward, *Representations of the Intellectual*, N.Y.:Pantheon Books, 1994, p. 11.

⁷ Boroujerdi, Mehrzad, *Iranian Intellectuals and the West, the Tormented Triumph of Nativism*, N.Y.:Syracuse University Press, 1996, p. 21.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.22.

⁹ Feuer, Lewis S., "What is an Intellectual?" in: Gella, Aleksander (ed), *The Intelligentsia and the Intellectuals*, London:Sage, 1976, p. 50.

¹⁰ Boroujerdi, p. 20.

flexible and allows for a change of perspectives. "These permanent strangers who float freely among society often concern themselves with the issues of how identity, value, and culture are created and transmitted from one collectivity to another."¹¹

The process of ideological adaptation is a process of diffusion and osmosis. It is a creative act, an act of engineering. It is an intellectual act involving the development of an interpretative framework for coping with the historical constellation of past-present-future. It is often conditioned by the necessity to adapt a new theory within a concrete environment, to provide exegesis for the present, reorganize the narrative of the past, ease out its tensions, reconcile discrepancies, make comparisons, accept or reject traditions. This latter process of selection involves inclusion and exclusion as well as practices, and necessitates the development of an evaluation system.)

I'll try to see these premises through an approach to Greek cultural history using these three points of modernity:

1. Enlightenment and the intellectuals

The institutions and practices constituting and defining Greek intellectuals as a particular social category could be summarized approximately in the following points:

1. *Academic education, completed or incompleted, mostly in a foreign academic institution.* The majority of the Enlightenment intellectuals were educated in the great European university centres of North Italy, France, and Germany. This tradition proved to be long-lasting. The leader of the Greek Enlightenment, Korais, has studied medicine in France. The intellectual elites of the new independent state were born in Constantinople and in Ionian Islands and educated in Western Europe. It was in Western Europe that the professors of the University of Athens studied too, as well as the important intellectuals. During all this period the main influences in art and literature came from France, although the University followed the German model. English influence was felt mainly in the late interwar years and in the post war period, with the coming of Americanization in cinema and consumerism. Diaspora intellectuals or students in Germany were the

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.20.

leaders of the Demoticism and some of the first socialists. The question where the leading intellectuals have been educated, abroad or at home, may be useful for comparisons.

2. *Engagement in great cultural debates, mostly in the form of "universalism vs. nativism"*. The first great movement, constituting the role of the intellectuals was Enlightenment and secular education vs. Religious education (1870-1820). In 19th century the prevailing debates were 1) around the continuity or the discontinuity of Greek History, and 2) around the westernization of Greek society and the reactions to it. In the first half of 20th c. a long debate was devoted to the reformation of language and education (demoticism), and later around the confrontation between Marxism and idealism. In inter-war years, two intellectual groups emerged, the first in literature and humanities introducing modernism in a national context. The second one was organized around the concept of social engineering and of "technocracy". The description of these great debates in Med. societies could be proved as a useful comparative approach, although it is difficult to establish a common typology.

3. *Engagement in the production of the printed word*. It encompasses a wide range of publications, books, reviews, and newspapers. Equally important and characteristic of their mediating and communicative role is their translating activity. The most famous case in propagating new ideas through publishing and translating was the case of Korais in Paris. Another intellectual circle producing ideas and printed material was in Vienna, where the first Greek reviews and newspapers have been published. More than the 90% of the Greek books, were printed outside the territories later included in the Greek State. In Venice only, the 50%, and in Vienna the 25% of the Greek book have been produced, in the period 1800-1820. After 1830, the centre of print capitalism has been transferred in Athens, and it was mostly the work of intellectuals. The transformation of the publishing activity from an intellectual to a capitalist enterprise is an important question in comparative perspective.

4. *Establishment of a connecting and communicative network* as an interactive channel for the exchange of information and the planning of conspirative activities. These networks were established first, between the Greek Enlightenment intellectuals and Philellenes during and after the Greek revolution of 1821, second, between Greek and Italian patriots during the

period of Risorgimento, third, between Greek and European socialists, and fourth, between Greek and Soviet communists in a more solid form in interwar years. These connections proceed as much through personal ties as through organizations. What matters here is the geography of these connections.

5. *Involvement in the educational establishment (teaching activity), and in non-academic intellectual activities.* From Korais to the leaders of Demoticism, education was conceived as the main tool of change and progress, and as a primary field of action. On the other hand, intellectuals production of critical discourse and essay, but also their contribution to belletristic and literature in general and their preoccupation with linguistic activities of all kinds reserves them a special role in the sphere of culture.

Coming to conclusion in this chapter, the important question to discuss is whether it is possible to construct a model of *Mediterranean intellectual*.

2. Nationalism and the use of Culture

Nationalism and culture are the two faces of Janus. As much as changes in culture are a precondition for the emergence of nationalism, in the same way nationalism implies the politicization and the manipulation on the part of the state of a vast variety of cultural forms.

1. *Nationalism and the cities.* A century ago, Thessaloniki, was the second capital of the Ottoman Empire. Half of its population were Jews, and the rest Turks, Greeks, Bulgarians, Armenians, Vlachs, Circassians, Albanians, and Donmeh (Muslim crypto-Jews). Now Thessaloniki is the second capital of Greece, with a population of one million Greeks, no Turks, no Bulgarians, less than two thousand Jews. A century ago, Ismirn (Smirna), was a great center of Greek commerce and culture. Greeks, Armenian, Jews, Turks were its inhabitants. Now, Ismirn is a metropolis with a population of more than one million of Turks and Kurds, no Greeks, no Armenians, no Jews. Along with Thessaloniki and Smirna, other cities like Constantinople, Alexandria, Trieste, Odessa, Bucharest, and others are typical examples of the transformation of the city in East Mediterranean, in the era of nationalism; *From the multiethnic, multireligious, and polyglot city of an Empire, to the monoethnic city of the national state.*

The transformation of a multiethnic to a national city is the first model

of the impact of nationalism to the city. The other model is the creation of an entire new city. This is the case of Ankara, the capital of Turkey, and not surprise, this is the case of Athens too. In 1830, Athens was a village of Albanian speaking population living in the remnants of the ancient glorious city. The plan to build a new city, in a classical style, was the decision of the new King and the immediate consequence of the ideology of national revival.

A possible object of our project is to examine the typology of the impact of nationalism and the national state in the cities, and to compare the various national experiences. How city planning, monuments, style of architecture have been used to transform the old med. city to the new national city.

2. *Nationalism and cultural institutions.* One of the most powerful points of nationalism's intervention in culture, is the creation of cultural institutions. In 19th c. Athens, the National University (1837) the National Museum (1866-1880), the National Library (1884-1902), the National Theater (1895-1901) was created. Alongside these visible institutions, "National Literature and Poetry", "National History", "National Music" were the organizing concepts of the High culture. All these foregoing visible or invisible institutions, are the ways of cultural capital accumulation of the national states. It is interesting to try a comparative approach to the creation of national cultural institutions and to know the interplay (including resistance or cooperation) between the state, the civil society, the church and the local authorities in creating cultural institutions.

3. *The use of the Legacies.* In constructing the Greek national ideology, in 19th century, the prevailing problem was how to combine various cultural legacies. National ideology in the era of Enlightenment had emphasized the Classical Antiquity. According to this narrative, the ancient Greek nation was re-born after a long time of servitude to Romans, Byzantines and the Turks. The cultural implications of this ideology was the hellenization of language (katharevousa and the purification of language from foreign influence) and the adoption of a neo-classical style in architecture and the various symbols: from the coins and banknotes to the official seals and stamps. The defect with this version of the national narrative was that it could not include the religious experience and the period of Middle Ages, that is the Byzantine era. The first archeologists, in order to excavate ancient sites, demolished 70 churches only in Athens, some of them with Byzantine iconography. So, in the mid-19th

century a vivid debate had developed in order to incorporate in the national narrative the Byzantine era and the Christian art. The first museum of the Byzantine art has only been founded in the beginnings of the 20th century. Beside this debate, another one was dealing with the value and the incorporation of the popular, folk culture. Being dismissed as a remnant of the Turkish occupation of Greece, as a regeneration of the Greek high culture and as sign of barbarism and superstitions, popular culture at the end of 19th century came to the centre of a new interest. Ethnography (in Greek "Laography") has been constituted as a new field and folk culture has served as a sign of continuity of ancient tradition among the people, and as a manifestation of an always existing national *volksgeist*. Finally, the role of religion, and particularly of Orthodoxy, was a constant point of dispute. In the eve of the revolution, Orthodox church had reacted to and condemned the revolutionary ideology. After the establishment of the Greek state, an autocephalous church of Greece was founded and Orthodoxy fused with the national ideology in education and in the official rhetoric. This excursion to the construction of the Modern Greek national ideology could offer three points for comparative approaches: A) The use of various pasts for the construction of a national memory. B) The use of local culture, and C) the relationship with the church and the religious sentiments. These three points could be seen not only in the realm of ideology, but in aesthetic and popular perceptions too.

3. Capitalism and Culture

Under the concept of capitalism I'll treat the impact of social and economic transformation on culture, and the expansion of the market to the cultural activities and products.

1. *Social transformation and culture.* In 19th c. Athens two distinctive parts of the city came into view. The first and more glamorous, was the part of the modern city with the Royal Palace, the public buildings and the houses of rich people, with large boulevards, public gardens, hotels and coffee-shops. The other part, hidden in the periphery, was that of popular neighborhoods, of small houses of people coming from villages and islands to work as builders, servants and labourers. There was a great difference in style between these two parts. The first one, was built in neoclassical style and it was similar,

grosso modo, to the European quarters of 19th c. The second one was a copy of the traditional villages; neither straight streets, nor a clear distinction between public and private space. The neighborhood of Anafiotica, under the shadow of Acropolis, was a typical village of an Aegean Island, Anafi, where the inhabitants came from. This discrepancy was visible in the manners also. A “European” style of life, on the one hand, and a rural, and what was called “oriental”, on the other. The Royal Government employed German or educated in Germany architects. Rich families employed French teachers of savoir-vivre, of the French language and music. The furniture of their houses were imported from Vienna and Paris, they used to listen to Italian musicians, to drink Bavarian beer, to read French literature or “paraliterature”. Thus, the élites were the agent of acculturation of the Greek society. This social and cultural transformation did not proceed in a linear way. First of all we can distinguish three periods. A) 1830-c.1870. During this period, the élites which imported modern manners were the Royal Court, the Foreign subjects living in Athens, and the Greek intellectuals educated abroad. B) 1870- WW1. In this period a new aristocracy, mainly rich Greek merchants and bankers from Constantinople, Odessa, Alexandria, that is from the Greek Diaspora, was the leading force of modernization and acculturation. Modernization continued to be synonymous to westernization and upper class behaviour. But in this period the middle strata started to create and use an adapted version of this modern way of life. C) The period between the I and the II World War. In this period, due to the internal migrants and to the refugees from Asia Minor, Athens and the principal cities of Greece changed. A new urban and popular culture was created, and the symbol of this culture were the rembetica-songs, a kind of popular music of east Mediterranean cities.

In this section, the main themes that could be translated in a comparative language are 1) the relationship between social transformation and cultural change, 2) the way modernization of manners has been implemented, understood and used, 3) the different temporality of acculturation between West and East Mediterranean areas, and 4) the roots of external cultural influences and the social strata they have affected. For example, in the first and second period the élites were influenced by French culture. Mediterranean influences, mainly from Naples and Smirna, were visible in the lower social strata. Due to the refugees from Asia Minor, East

Mediterranean impact was stronger in the third period, along a diffused westernization.

2. *Commercialization of cultural activities.* Culture is a privileged field for capital investment today. What is the history of this expansion? We could proceed investigating, the commercialization, first, of leisure time, second, of cultural products, and third, of cultural capital. In the early 19th c. Athens, the building of Hotels, restaurants, theatres, coffee-shops and patisseries was a novelty and their owners were, mainly, Italians, using often Italian names as "locanda". Some of them were made in a pure European style, some others used the traditional ways of eating and drinking. All of them suggest a transformation of the leisure time and a commercialization of the activities to use this time. This time was more regular than the traditional time of religious feasts and social gatherings at home or in "piazza". Not all the social strata could afford this kind of leisure activities. Even more, as the lower people were adopting these habits, the élites used to change them and to introduce new ways of cultural activities. This was visible with the introduction of the sports in the leisure activities and their popularization, mainly football, although the commercialization of the sport came in the post world war period. A great novelty was the introduction of cinema as mass cultural entertainment and its rapid popularization..

The commercialization of the cultural products has to do also with the transformation of the editorial activity. Editing newspapers, magazines and books, was a personal enterprise, mainly for intellectuals and printers. Publishing houses, popular magazines and newspapers as enterprises was the result of the expansion of literacy mainly in the interwar period. Greece was a latecomer to print capitalism.

As for the commercialization of cultural capital, this activity is connected with tourism's exploiting of classical past, sun, sea and of the Aegean images. Besides that, cinema (Jules Dassen, *The boys of Piraeus* with Melina Mercouri), novel (Zorba by Kazantzakis and the film by Anthony Quinn) and music by Theodorakis and Chatzidakis, created an image of Greece for tourist exploitation. As tourism now is one of the main industries in Mediterranean world, and the main way of knowing this world from the outside, it is useful to have a comparative history of tourism.

What is a critical question in this chapter is the distinction between

popular and mass culture although I think that this distinction could not be treated without the period of post world war II and the political experience of Med. countries.

Conclusion

I think that for a Mediterranean cultural history, there is a vast thematology, impossible to cover in a systematic way. What a project of comparative history could do is to proceed with small subjects in various ways, that is with a kind of local knowledge, which could be discussed in a comparative way.