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Institut d'Estudis Catalans
Carrer del Carme 47, 08001 Barcelona

INTERDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH SEMINAR

This fourth edition of the Interdisciplinary Research Seminar Aula Mediterrània, organized with thirteen Master's programs of various Catalan universities, have a geographical common focus: the Mediterranean area.

Understanding the Mediterranean context is a fascinating challenge which needs to take into account different perspectives and fields of study. This is why this Seminar aims to foster an interdisciplinary approach to the region as a broad and necessary research method. Aula Mediterrània is thought as a platform for scholars to connect and as a space for debate in an era where quick and over-information may not be helpful to understand in depth the main issues at stake.



On this occasion, the matters discussed are not only a concern for scholars, but they are relevant for our societies as a whole. Therefore, exchanges between academic researchers and other actors are essential to boost the knowledge about our home and natural space which is the Mediterranean.

This year, the Seminar coincides with the 7th consecutive year of the Syrian

Opening words by Lurdes Vidal (left), Director of the Arab and Mediterranean Department at IEMed, and Isidre Sala (right), Director General of Multilateral and European Affairs (Generalitat de Catalunya).

War. Even though there might not be clear solutions, Aula Mediterrània intends to serve as a forum where contemporary issues are discussed and where critical thinking can be translated into policy-making.

Women in Islam: the (Spiritual) Revolution?

In light of the strong rallying, particularly in Spain, for the International Women's Day on March 8th, it is legitimate to wonder what is the current situation, the claims and the means of action of Muslim women as much in Europe as in Arab-Muslim countries.

Muslim feminists state that it is culture that is patriarchal, not religion

The first point is to undo binaries between West and East or feminism and religion highlighting the diversity and the heterogeneity of Muslim communities around the world. Islamic feminists started to reclaim their *Herstory* and place in their community as soon as the beginning of the XXth century. Muslim feminists state that it is culture that is patriarchal, not religion. Therefore, their aim is to think and develop tools within Islam, for instance by liberating the reading of sacred sources from an anti-patriarchal point of view. It is simply about transforming spirituality.

It is also interesting to emphasize that Muslim women can and already did reach the spiritual leadership of their community in the past. Since the end of the XIX century, for example, there are female imams in China. Their legitimacy and recognition must come from the same origins than male spiritual leaders: need, knowledge and theology. The evolution of the traditional family structure, especially the Muslim marriage agreement, is one of the demands that Islamic feminists convey. They wish to assert the right to divorce, custody, and equality before inheritance and interfaith marriages. Islamic feminists seek to counter islamophobia by relating untold narratives to change the image of Islam.



Sherin Khankan (2nd from right) during the session "Women in Islam: the (Spiritual) Revolution?" The fellow speakers Anna Gil-Bardaji, Itzea Goikolea-Amiano and Refka Smida listening to Khankan's speech.

By exploring the examples of Tunisia and Egypt, we become aware that women rights are fragile and cannot be taken for granted. Moreover, some governments throughout history have claimed to be “feminist” in order to provide an image of progressive states for electoral or diplomacy purposes. But their empowerment is merely cosmetic. The 2011 Arab Uprisings brought about major changes since women were very much involved in these popular social movements.

We can also ask ourselves if “feminism” is not just a Eurocentric concept totally disconnected from the reality of Muslim countries. In this sense, it is essential to overcome these manipulated dichotomies - Muslim or Islamic feminist, West/East, Muslim/non-Muslim. It is time to deconstruct them in order to join efforts in favor of women empowerment. The transformation within Islam and by the same Muslim believers is a social and spiritual revolution on the way.

Diaspora Governance and Transnationalism: Linking two Cross-Border Concepts through Migrant Entrepreneurship

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The original Argonauts, a band of heroes in Greek mythology, had the quest to find the Golden Fleece, which was held in Colchis around 1300 BC. Circa 3300 years later, a new kind of Argonauts determine today's patterns and trends of migrant transnational entrepreneurship. Highly skilled migrants, often coming from China and India, are not staying in the USA anymore to start their businesses, but return to their home countries to create new companies, allowing prosperity to spread. This phenomenon however is not experienced in the Mediterranean. Attracting highly-educated and skilled professionals back to their home-country for long-term employment and investment has proven especially difficult and challenging in the Mediterranean. The world's highest unemployment rate that persists in MENA countries (30.3% for youngsters between 15-24 years old) consequently explains why the Mediterranean is not experiencing the phenomenon of the New Argonauts.

Concerning specifically the Moroccan diaspora, making up to 15% of the population, there has not only been a shift in its image during recent decades, but also a change in the Moroccan policy paradigm concerning their diaspora engagement policy. Guest worker families, who moved to Europe to help rebuild after the WWII, are no longer only sending remittances back to Morocco. The trend in recent decades shows that transnational mobilization of skills has further emerged and Morocco has even included migration within its comprehensive strategy of development.

Nevertheless, there is still a gap between what the engagement policy intends to achieve and embraces, and the visions and experiences of Moroccan transnational entrepreneurs. There exists an overstatement of the potential for development that returning Moroccan entrepreneurs could imply in merely economic terms. However, from the political perspective, the diaspora has the potential for social, cultural and political transformation. Moroccans living abroad are not only economic players but more importantly political players. There is a general trend towards democratization influenced by the large diaspora living outside of the North African country.

Besides, there is also a need to place the diaspora engagement policy paradigm within the Moroccan dynamic context and to revise these policies based on ideals. One should not forget the national identity argument and the need of “Moroccanness”, the sense of solidarity with the motherland, the need to keep ties with Morocco and preferably doing business with Morocco, especially when living in the diaspora. Moroccan migrant entrepreneurs were either highly educated abroad or, as in most cases, they only received poor education and emigrated for economic reasons, becoming a transnational migrant entrepreneur simply by need.



From left to right, Giacomo Solano, Shahamak Rezaei, Victoria Hill, Ricard Zapata-Barrero and Zenia Hellgren during the session on “Diaspora Governance and Transnationalism”.

Activism in the Arab World after the 2011 Uprisings

In Morocco, the political power is still largely controlled by the monarchy. The political system was redesigned towards a multiparty one according to the *divide et impera* motto to ensure that no political party could overshadow monarchical power. Following the same logic, trade and labor unions have faced a clear

diversification process which has also been instrumentalised in favor of royal powers to hinder demands and revolts.

The democratization process has been accompanied by an increase of discontent among Moroccan citizens towards political parties, seen as too close to the monarchy economic interests. The 100 days of mobilization in 2011 were a clear proof of this rejection. They were headed by a progressive and mostly secular youth which collided with the reality of a much more conservative population. The immediate elections after 2011 revealed this societal polarization: the conservative background came to the fore with a clear victory for the Islamist party PJD.

Greater awareness of the domestic situation has taken over demonstrations during recent years, accompanied by a greater feminine participation

Each country has handled the Arab Spring differently and, in Tunisia, where 50% of the population is aged under 30, political discontent is still a reality, despite being a very young democracy. The number of associations rose from 9,000 in 2010 to 21,000 today. This quantitative leap is accompanied by a qualitative one: while demonstrations before 2011 were focused on issues like Israel, foreign interference and neo-imperialism, a greater awareness of the domestic situation has taken over demonstrations during recent years, accompanied by a greater feminine participation. The majority of protests in the post-2011 era are focused on the defense of Human Rights, socio-economic rights, as well as democratisation claims.

Therefore, renewing the discredited ruling class will imply making effective the requests of the already regenerated civil society through its associative network.



Speaking about "Activism in the Arab World after the 2011 Uprisings", from left to right, Bernabé López, Thierry Desrues, Ferran Izquierdo and Laura Galián.

Understanding political and social demands from 2011 requires bearing in mind that the protests were street protests. Thus, it is interesting to ask which role the public spaces played in this regard. Squares became real agoras, to the extent that some claim that the Tahrir Square in Cairo was already an anarchic experience in itself. To further develop this idea, there is the need to de-colonize the political philosophy of anarchy.

Tahrir emerged as a place of convergence and meetings, as a space of autonomous thinking and as a real experience of the revolutionary school. The power and demands of the people were centralized in the streets, concentrated on a public square. This redefinition of public space as a right is a democratising process *per se* and it epitomizes what the spirits and claims of the 2011 revolts were about.

Review of Forced Marriages in Europe: Between Normative Frames and Grey Zones

In general, the phenomenon of forced marriages is prevalent in migrant communities and takes place in particular in mainstream communities. In some of these communities, the term “forced marriage” is not used to describe this phenomenon, as it might be interpreted differently either due to culture or religion. Within registers of forced marriages documented in Europe, the intersection of gender, sexuality and migration plays an important role.

Both genders can be coerced into forced marriages. Nonetheless, men tend to receive emotional coercion rather than physical violence, as women do

From a feminist point of view, coercion in forced marriages is key to understand this phenomenon which goes often hand in hand with violence. However, it is important to draw a distinction between arranged and forced marriages. Actually, there is a continuum with different steps from consented or arranged marriage to a forced marriage. This continuum is very crucial as it allows to see the links between different forms of violence. What is important to understand is that both genders can be coerced into forced marriages, nonetheless the forms of coercion are different depending on gender. Men tend to receive emotional coercion rather than physical violence, as women do. Consequently, there should not only be a gender approach but also a cultural approach regarding what these communities think and on which basis community leaders interpret ‘consent’.

In Spain, the legal framework that rules forced marriages is criminal law, which is important but seems insufficient in the long run. Beyond extreme cases, it rather

causes hurdles than solutions since it does not have proper tools to deal with this phenomenon. Thus, transnational situations are one of the grey zones where forced marriages can ‘comfortably’ happen, since international law is not always applicable. When a marriage happens abroad, there is a very limited control regarding the legal matters. Due to centuries-old traditions in their home-countries, forced marriages are often legally recognized there, blurring the facts of coerced marriage when returning home to their diaspora community, making it impossible for embassies to intervene.



During the session on the “Review of Forced Marriages in Europe” the speakers, from left to right, were David Moya, Sundari Anitha, Berta Güell, and Elvira Méndez.

“Folding the Blanket”, a Documentary. How we made it, how we screened it

The documentary “Folding the Blanket” portrays the lives of people who arrive in Barcelona and try to get ahead despite the intrinsic circumstances of being immigrants and being street vendors. It is an attempt to show the multicultural reality existing in Barcelona not from a charitable perspective but giving voice to its main actors.

The Diomcoop cooperative, which brings together 12 men and 3 women from Senegal who make their living on street vending, emphasizes the change in opinion of the society after the broadcasting of the documentary on the Catalan public television (TV3). With an audience share of close to 500,000 viewers, the screening of “Folding the Blanket” on TV3 was a turning point for the whole group of the so-called “manteros” in the city. This project has broken with the immigrants’ fear to talk and appear in the media, which often used to criminalize them.

Equal opportunities, especially in terms of access to the labour market, are non-existent for immigrants

The main issue is that equal opportunities, especially in terms of access to the labour market, are non-existent for immigrants. The role of the media in raising public awareness is essential, especially concerning the informative treatment that is adapted to the complex reality of migration processes. To do so, it is necessary to put an end to the still too often hysterical and dramatic news-making and to abandon paternalistic stories in international reporting.

The screening of this documentary has been a breakthrough in the usual media coverage, which is not expected to be unidirectional or sporadic, and which may continue despite the economic crisis.



Speaking about his experience with the documentary "Folding the Blanket" is Thiakh Ababacar (right). Sònia Calvó Carrió (left) and Xavier Giró are listening to his presentation

Minoritarian Religious Communities in Arab-Muslim Societies

Religious minorities in the Muslim world are often victimized but such victimization is a result of an incomplete and biased view. Today this debate is more intense than ever due to the situation of some of these minorities in Syria, for example, which only contributes to further distorting this perception. These communities were called in the past *dhimmi* which meant they paid a tax in exchange for protection. Such taxation system may seem discriminatory from our current perspective, but it must be understood in the socio-political context of the time. At that period, these communities were socially organized on a theocratic basis and identified themselves as belonging to religious groups rather than as citizens.

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However, one of the main challenges is the very definition of the concept *dhimmi*. Coexistence and cohabitation of Muslims and non-Muslims was at the origin of the legislative regulation (*dhimmi* statute) to ensure that all peoples could live together peacefully. Nevertheless, this concept has evolved through times and spaces.

In the pre-Islamic period, there were different tribal realities that will progressively form a cohesive entity. The Arab identity was built on a factor of ethnicity - nomadic or semi-nomadic- which represented a reality attached to a territory but at the same time it implied a certain *modus vivendi*. Islam appeared at a crucial transition moment with the collapse of various Empires: Byzantium, the Persian-Sassanid Empire and the Kingdom of Aksum. The Prophet Mohammed used this latent socio-historical component of the Arab identity to unify the tribes. It is essential to emphasize that this Arab reality had a strong Christian, Jewish, Zoroastrian and polytheistic (pagan) component since Arabia was a home of ideas, ethnicities and cultures. In fact, in the VIth and VIIth centuries, Mecca had a strong Judeo-Christian component. The Prophet Mohammed's achievement was his ability to bring together these various religious communities. Moreover, the multilingualism of these Christian communities (Greek, Arabic, etc.) favored the circulation of written texts and essential cultural exchanges. The Muslim thinker Al-Fârâbî is a perfect example of this cohabitation.



During the session on “Minoritarian Religious Communities in Arab-Muslim Societies” the speakers, from left to right, were Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, Emilia Calvo Labarta, Theo Loinaz and Francisco Del Rio.

In the modern period, Christian communities underwent a process of Arabization and Ottomanization. Pragmatically, the Ottomans continued to follow the Muslim legal principle of *dhimmi* until the XVIIIth century. Afterwards, the new *millet* system was created. From the XXth century, European countries such as England and France took advantage of these *millet* statutes in order to protect certain communities and expand their area of influence. In fact, the current system in Lebanon is inspired by the *millet* system with a religious division into communities.

Spring and Winter concerning the Freedom of Information in North Africa

The 2011 Arab revolutions showed that citizens were eager for more information and a greater degree of freedom of expression. These winds of change and freedom resulted in the MedMedia, a project aimed at supporting the institutions and individuals committed to reforming the media sector in the Southern Mediterranean Region.

Analyzing the North African media outlook is thus of great importance. The starting point is the World Press Freedom Index of RSF 2017, which indicates that in recent years the media landscape has been fragmented but not diversified in countries such as Egypt, Libya, Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, without achieving full freedom of expression in journalism. Red lines and restrictions imposed by the Egyptian government have worsened considerably Egypt's position in this world ranking, going from 131 to 163 in just seven years. Egypt is the country with the highest number of journalists imprisoned and whose digital environment has most changed in terms of freedom of expression.

The argument of national security continues to be raised when dealing with the limitation or closure of many media, especially digital media outlets

On the other hand, the situation in Morocco remains stagnant. Despite the adoption in 2016 of a law prohibiting the imprisonment of journalists in the exercise of their profession, it continues to be recognized in the Penal Code and restrictions on freedom of expression remain in place. Some reforms have an aesthetic character but their effectiveness is conspicuous by its absence.

In Tunisia, the internal dynamics of the private press favour self-censorship and the limited emergence of new media. The argument of national security continues to be raised when dealing with the limitation or closure of many media, especially digital media outlets.

The use of social media also contributes to revalorize citizen journalism as a channel for the transmission of opinions contrary to the official narrative

In this context, there is a tendency to relativize the role of social media in citizen mobilizations, understanding Facebook more as a loudspeaker of an organized civil society than as an actor in itself. However, the use of social media also contributes to revalorize citizen journalism as a channel for the transmission of opinions contrary to the official narrative, which could rarely find an outlet in traditional media.

Exercising journalism remains a challenge in most North African countries: a slow but steady deterioration in freedom of expression is witnessed by international organizations. The attempt to homogenize mass media is still in force. Even so, some positive initiatives stand out, such as Mauritania's progress on issues of freedoms, except for the question of apostasy, or the rise of slow and investigative journalism, such as the Inkyfada website in Tunisia.



From left to right, Ricard González, Carlos Bajo, Youssef Ouled and Montserrat Arbós during the debate on "Spring and Winter concerning Freedom of Information in North Africa".

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

The Ottoman Empire was at the center of Venetian politics from the fall of Constantinople until two centuries later. Venice was characterized by its offensive capacity over the sea and its mercantile skills. Therefore, its status within the Ottoman Empire was unprecedented, both because of its geostrategic situation (to secure the Empire's border and as a commercial enclave) and its cultural and political particularities. Indeed, the relationship between the Empire and Venice could be defined as a mutually beneficial one in which Venice enjoyed a certain

degree of autonomy. Facing the decline of the Ottoman Empire, it allowed the city to survive due to its political, economic and intellectual myth.

Antwerp, Seville, Venice or Genoa were erected as interconnected mercantile nuclei, in parallel to the capitals of the Nation-States, linked to the traditional aristocracy

Another geostrategic enclave in the area was the Republic of Genoa, which, like Venice, heralded a new modernity where trade was the epicenter of the empire. Genoa was a great vector of circulation and communication.

The urban world vitality linked to the commercial bustle of the time was evident. Antwerp, Seville, Venice or Genoa were erected as interconnected mercantile nuclei, in parallel to the capitals of the Nation-States, linked to the traditional aristocracy. These commercial centers showed the tendency of the Mediterranean to move towards the dynamism of the Atlantic.

Although the Mediterranean was an area of exchanges during Modern times, it was not free of conflicts, both at regional and local level. The increase in cases of Moorish banditry in modern Valencia was an expression of the existing hostilities between new and old Christians within the kingdoms of Granada and Aragon, and has to be understood within the context of conflict between civilizations, i.e., between the Ottoman Empire and the Spanish Crown. This, indeed, shows the dynamics of struggle for control over the Mediterranean.



During the panel on "The Mediterranean in the Modern Period", from left to right, Rosa Maria Delli Quadri, Jordi Català, Stefano Andretta and Manuel Herrero.

Communication for Social Change and Intercultural Mediation in the Mediterranean

Social media have irrefutably an enormous potential for providing social spaces of contact and diversity but this does not imply a change in opinion. Even though they provide an opportunity for each other understanding, during tense moments, debates on social media are more virulent and the trend is to obviate people with different opinions. Such tendency leads to create more and more homogenous social media contexts. On the other hand, in many countries self-censorship and fear are widely spread. Indeed, in the beginning of the so-called Arab Spring, social media supported civil demonstrations, but now they are used by governments to pursue and control people with the threat of prosecuting them legally, the systematic use of troll groups to mob critics and to manipulate public opinion and finally by blocking websites or deleting critical posts. To cope with this sort of pressure, people use VPN and create anonymous accounts with pseudonyms. These threats also explain the move towards the use of instant messaging and closed groups seen as safe alternatives for political debates. The issue is that such groups end up being homogeneous.

Cafés also represent an essential space of socialization and debates. The example of the “Café Rawda” in Beirut epitomizes this idea. However, it went through changes due to TV screens and an alcohol ban which introduced a demarcation between conservative and progressive clients. But going to these cafés is yet consuming a certain image of the past. It is another conservative trend, which is not linked to religious or moral values, but that additionally grants value to the past, to its conservation and idealization.

The combination of both spaces of action (offline and online) is necessary to implement changes in society.

Tunisia is seen as the symbol of the Arab Spring, which is why it is the country where the European Union is investing more intensely. Despite its positive image, Tunisia is also covered with some shadows with the increasing number of extremist violent groups and terrorist attacks. As a consequence, since 2015 the government implements counter-terrorist measures whose effectiveness is called into question and which are causing violations of human rights. Moreover, the “pouring of money” on Tunisia to support civil society projects reveals a clear lack of coordination between the different initiatives leading to a lack of effectiveness.

It is essential to strengthen the collaboration between NGOs and the academic world because social sciences do not only allow us to understand our reality but also to criticize it and to imagine alternatives realities.

However, in a much fragmented world, we turn to our community of ideas to be with like-minded people. So our view of reality is partial and distorted. Moreover, it is difficult to prevent or regulate hate speeches online since it could become a way to control critical opinions. In sum, the combination of both spaces of action (offline and online) is necessary to implement changes in society.



Speaking about “Communication for Social Change and Intercultural Mediation in the Mediterranean” are, from left to right, Çiğdem Bozdağ, Teresa Velázquez, Helena Nassif and Laia Vila.

Woman Empowerment in the Mediterranean

Gender issues are of increasing interest in academic fields as well as in society at large. At a linguistic level, it may also be noted that the word “empowerment” continues to convey the same issues of power and domination. In fact, these various concepts of “autonomy”, “emancipation” or “empowerment” convey fundamentally the same idea: it is about giving prominence but also recognizing the leading role that women already play.

For instance, women play an important role in migratory flows since nowadays more than half of migrants are women. Their role changed from a passive one - migration to follow their husband-, to an active implication - migration for a personal working project-, responding thus to the high demand of caretakers in Northern countries, for instance. This economic emancipation often goes hand in hand with new situations of scarcity and exploitation. However, victimization of migrant women is also harmful as it usually leads to paternalism. Besides, it is important to add that thanks to legal activism, political asylum is now beginning to be recognized

Only economic autonomy leads to physical and political emancipation.

also on the grounds of gender-based violence. But, the problem of identification of women victims of such violence remains unresolved.

Gender equality is one of the objectives of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM). The UfM's general goal is to enhance regional cooperation, dialogue and the implementation of concrete projects and initiatives with tangible impact on citizens. It builds a common regional agenda, defining the priorities with the 43 member's states, and coordinates regional dialogue between various counterparts to set up cooperative networks and create synergies for partnerships.

It can also be noted that in most Mediterranean countries women have a higher level of education than men but they are more affected by unemployment and precariousness. This is a determining factor since only economic autonomy leads to physical and political emancipation.

“Empowerment” should be a collective project of transformation to de-construct power and domination relationships

The concept of empowerment, originated from feminist movements, is nowadays widely spread in institutional speech. Its overuse is criticized because it can be misused and emptied of its meaning. Moreover, “empowerment” is now often understood as an individual goal of personal success whereas it should be a collective project of transformation and deconstruction of power and domination relationships.



Discussing “Women Empowerment in the Mediterranean” with (from left to right) Natalia Caicedo, Laura Huici Sancho, Fatiha Hassouni and Marina Casas.

Challenges in the Detection and Identification of Potential Victims of Human Trafficking in Europe

Concerning human trafficking, one needs to question the applicable international legislation as well as the action that Europe and, in particular, Spain are undertaking against modern slavery. In particular, the detection and identification of possible victims of trafficking is a remaining challenging task.

The need of revisiting the definition of refugee is still considered a challenge in order to protect some victims of trafficking

Regarding the international legislation that protects victims of trafficking, the need of revisiting the definition of refugee is still considered a challenge in order to protect some victims of trafficking, since they can obviously be refugees as well. Some international regulation exists: the right to *non-refoulement* of refugees under the Geneva conventions, which protects refugees from being returned to their unsafe home countries, could be applied to victims of trafficking as well.

Besides, there are great problems when it comes to the detection and identification of possible victims of human trafficking. The lack of acknowledgement of the needs of international protection makes the identification a severe problem since trafficking is not viewed through 'protection lenses'. Particularly in Spain, these challenges reach a completely different level, since only State security forces are legally authorized to identify a potential victim of trafficking. In spite of this, security forces do not have enough tools or training and follow strict standards of identification: too many evidences are demanded, which hinders the detection process and potential victims may remain unperceived.

The lack of acknowledgement of the needs of international protection makes the identification a severe problem since trafficking is not viewed through 'protection lenses'

Therefore, there is a need to establish protocols to be implemented in centers for the internment of foreigners that should include international protection laws. Simultaneously, longer stays in these centers would be advantageous in order to properly accomplish the detection of trafficking victims. The Spanish national plan against human trafficking and sexual exploitation is systematically aimed at sex trafficking, not taking into account other forms of trafficking like labour trafficking. Thus, Immigration Law needs to be questioned since it still has limitations regarding victims from the European Union, who do not get the same benefits as non-EU victims. Besides, when the victims are minors there are not enough tools to address an effective protection: specialized protection centers for these cases are urgently needed.

From the perspective of international protection, civil society should play a greater role and make use of strategic litigation and other mechanisms. Moreover, offering spaces to these victims for their self-expression as well as providing them with tools allowing them to take back the control over their lives remain an urgent challenge.



Eva Menéndez (left) during the session on “Challenges in the Detection and Identification of Potential Victims of Human Trafficking in Europe”. Listening to her presentation are Arnau Formiguera, Alba Alonso and Santiago Yerga.

An Unborn Empire in the Old Sea?: China and the Mediterranean

Under the lead of Chinese president Xi Jinping, China experienced a shift from “keeping a low profile to striving for achievement”. One of China’s national priorities nowadays is the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is seen as the modern version of the Silk Road. In this regard, especially the Balkans play an important role in the Chinese vision of an “enlarged Mediterranean”. This vision is not centered on conflicts and division, but rather on linkages to tap into economic potential. In general, the whole BRI project is about building linkages and strengthen Chinese connectivity. The Balkans, the underdeveloped part in southeastern Europe, is especially attractive for China. There is a complementarity between the regional needs and China’s offer. Compared to other regions like the EU, China follows a different approach. It does not set conditions like the EUs’ “stick and carrot” approach to the Balkans. It seeks to boost economic flows via state-led cooperation in the post-crisis context.

The case of Egypt in the Southern shore is also enlightening. The North African country suffered after the Arab Spring a severe economic decline and major

security threats. Nevertheless, China has been a consistent economic and political partner of Egypt before and despite the 2011 uprisings. Mega-infrastructure projects like the New Capital outside Cairo, heavy economic cooperation on electricity and energy, further strengthen China's position as being Egypt's largest trading partner. The cooperation is not only economic, but also cultural and identity-based (e.g. Egyptian-Chinese university) as well as politically and security-wise. Both countries do not care much about the political relations of their partners with other countries or regions, not to mention human rights violations. Regarding Egypt in the context of the Mediterranean, the question arises whether to what extent China's approach to Egypt is a representation of its approach to countries south of the Mediterranean in general. The reality is that Egypt is a stand-alone country and a particular case, while Libya is unapproachable, and Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia are closer linked to Europe.

China is neglecting the involvement in security issues as well as any political conflict and only looks at economic dimensions

Regarding the Chinese involvement in the Middle East region in general, China is neglecting totally the involvement in security issues as well as any political conflict and only looks at economic dimensions, while the US for instance has never neglected the political dimension of connections to the region. Nonetheless, the cooperation between the MENA region and China booms, especially due to the Chinese interpretation of non-interference based on their 5 Principles of Peaceful Coexistence. In the long run however, it is yet to see if this apolitical Chinese approach is sustainable.



Yossra M. A. Taha (left) presenting on Chinese-Egyptian relations. Lurdes Vidal moderated the debate.



Anastas Vangeli (left) and Jordi Quero (right) during the discussion on "China and the Mediterranean".

The interdisciplinary seminar was organized by the European Institute of the Mediterranean, in collaboration with 13 different university programs. Each master's program suggested an area of interest for a session, and provided the lecturers and the discussants. The participant masters degrees are listed below:

- Master's in Arab and Islamic World, Universitat de Barcelona (UB)
- Master's in Communication on Armed Conflicts, Peace and Social Movements, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)
- Master's in Contemporary Arab Studies, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)
- Master's in Diplomacy and Public Service, Centre for International Studies – Universitat de Barcelona (CEI-UB)
- Master's 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 In History and Identity of the West Mediterranean (XV-XIX centuries), Universitat de Barcelona (UB), Universitat d'Alacant (UA), Universitat de València (UV), Universitat Jaume I (UJI)
- Master's in International Relations, Blanquerna - Universitat Ramon Llull (URL)
- Master's in International Relations, Institut Barcelona d'Estudis Internacionals (IBEI)

- Master's in International Relations, Security and Development, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB)
- Master's in International Studies: International Organization and Cooperation, Universitat de Barcelona (UB)
- Master's in Journalism and International Relations, Blanquerna-Universitat Ramon Llull (URL)
- Master's in Migration Studies, Universitat Pompeu Fabra (UPF)
- Inter-University Master's in Contemporary Migrations, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona (UAB) and Universitat de Barcelona (UB)



This report was written at the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) by Margot Maisy and Britta Weppner, with the inputs of Elisa Pont, Ainara Huarte and Sílvia Regalón.

The Seminar was coordinated by Elisabetta Ciuccarelli.