Literary Exchanges in the Post-Cold War Mediterranean Area

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> "A New Europe based on commonly shared values that are no longer forced by the stronger, larger or more enlightened ones upon the weaker ones; a Europe where every nation retains its identity as an indelible part of the multi-layered European spirit. That is the Europe that we want to enter, to which we feel allegiance".
>
> (Václav Havel, Aleksander Kwasniewski, Rudolf Schuster, and Ferenc Madl, "*Nice Treaty – Step towards a New Europe*": n.p.)

> "La 'civiltà europea,' dopo millenni di formazione e di deformazione, è pronta ora, in queste condizioni conosciute e riconosciute, a decolonizzarsi dala sua malattia imperiale, dall' eurocentrismo rimasto comme residio 'nobiliare' della funesta volontà di potenza".
>
> (Armando Gnisci, *Decolonizzare l'Italia*: 121)

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1. Writing the Transcultural Literary History of the Mediterranean Region

Most of us will agree that the events that have unfolded since the tearing down of the Berlin Wall have undermined traditional polarizations between Eastern and Western Europe, but have at times replaced them with nationalistic and ethnocentric ideologies that promote no less violent divisions (to wit, the more recent events in the Balkans). Much of this new ethnic separatism has emerged in direct reaction to the pressure of the First World's "globalizing" ideologies that, far from being "deimperialized", reinforce the "international division of labor and appropriation […] benefiting First World countries at the expense of Third World" (Ebert 1996: 286). Add to this the growing economic tensions between North and South, or the geocultural tensions between First World canons and Third World counter-models, and we get a good sense of the persisting tensions at the level of the frameworks that we use to relate to each other.

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How do we write literary history in the post-Cold War world? Does globalization encourage "the cultivation of multilingualism, polyglossia, the arts of cultural mediation, [and] deep intercultural understanding" (Pratt 1995: 62), as the more optimistic among us have hoped? The skeptics have warned that neither an assimilative notion of globalism that recognizes the "unqualified multiplicity of cultures without positing ways for them to interact meaningfully" (Berry and Epstein 1999: 97), nor a defensive localism that unconditionally promotes one's own culture, ethnicity or origins can ensure a genuinely transnational consciousness. In fact, the "gestures of localism and globalism" may appear virtually synonymous insofar as they treat cultural difference in an essentialist way, as something fixed and final (Chow 1998: 10). The mediating consciousness between native and foreign, global and local must be sought elsewhere.

I would argue that comparative regionalist studies can play that mediating role, challenging monologic concepts of culture and emphasizing "interference" and "translation" between local and global, national and transnational. By comparing and interfacing cultures within a larger region such as the Mediterranean, this type of study can help us rediscover the middle ground between Eastern and Western, Northern and Southern, dominant and peripheral that we have neglected because of our polarized pre-1989 worldviews.

Similar regionalist approaches have been proposed for the literatures of Latin America (ed. Mario Valdés and Djelal Kadir, 3 vols, 2006), East-Central Europe (ed. Marcel Cornis-Pope and John Neubauer, 4 vols., 2004–2010), the Iberic peninsula (ed. Fernando Cabo Aseguinolaza, Anxo Abuín Gonzales, and César Domínguez, vol. 1, 2010), and Scandinavia (ed. Steven Sondrup and Mark Sandberg, 4 vols., in preparation) – all part of the ICLA series of histories of literatures in European languages. These projects have confirmed the fact that regionalism was historically an important paradigm and that it has not entirely lost its appeal in our age of globalization. For example, even though historically the writers of Eastern Europe knew relatively little of each other, "cast[ing] their glances towards Paris, from Warsaw and Prague, Belgrade and Bucharest", their work reflected a "shared world, […] an odd mixture of pain and nostalgia, […] affection and hate, gibes and national injuries" (Kiss 1989: 126, 127). Thus the work of the Polish Stanisław Wyspianski, the Hungarian Ady Endre, and the Croatian Miroslav Krleža revealed a similar turn-of-the-century worldview characterized by "decadence […] and the radical reformulation of national mythologies" (Kiss 1989: 126). Today, while the writers of this region reflect highly individualized projects, their works reinforce certain regional patterns. Therefore, their literature is an ideal object of study for a regional history that focuses on the interactions among diverse local entities, as well as the dialogue across the larger provinces of Europe.

The literatures of the Mediterranean basin are an equally apt topic for a regional literary history. But just as in the case of East-Central European literatures, the approach they require moves beyond both a fragmented focus on national literatures and a globalist one that ignores any local or regional specificity. While not rejecting wholesale the focus on national literatures, this approach questions the assumptions that "nationalism invariably leads to the establishment of states – each with a single homogeneous culture" and that "the creation of national cultures

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involves the imposition of a 'high' national culture where before a medley of 'low' folk-cultures had coexisted" (Cleary 2002: 52). According to Joe Cleary, we need a more refined understanding of cultural development that can account for the emergence of "multi-ethnic, multi-language, and multicultural states" (Cleary 2002: 52) as well as the continued cross-fertilization of "high" and "low" forms of culture in the Mediterranean area.

After the 1989 collapse of the Berlin Wall, one of the central sites of the Cold War confrontation, the Mediterranean, has become again a fertile crossroads for the interplay of Eastern (including East European) and Western, Northern and Southern (including African) literary traditions and for the pursuit of transnational agendas. In what follows, I will contrast pre-1989 literary works that described the Mediterranean as the hub of nationalistic and super-power conflicts with post-1989 literary works that bridge the former ideological divide, promoting transnational messages. I take my examples especially from the eastern and southern flanks of the Mediterranean, stressing their role in creating new cross-cultural hybrids.

2. The Mediterranean as a Multicultural Hub and Theater of Conflict

Many cultures from around the Mediterranean basin (including the countries of the Middle East and the Balkans) have traditionally linked their (most often metaphoric) definition to the Mediterranean maritime world. The Croat myth of ethnogenesis grafted a Slavic reed unto an olive tree under a blazing Mediterranean sun (see Ivić 2007: 395, 399–400). One of the earliest Romanian poets, Anton Pann, drew on folk material from the Balkans and the larger Mediterranean area, and historian Nicolae Bălcescu shuttled between the Romanian principalities, France and Italy, publishing towards the end of his life a multicultural reflection on the *Question économique des Principautés Danubiennes* ('The Economic Question of the Danubian Principalities'; Bălcescu 1850). Pann's Albanian counterpart, Zef Jubani (Giuseppe Jubany), born in Shkodra of an Albanian father and Maltese mother, published *Raccolta di canti popolari e rapsodie di poemi albanesi* (Trieste, 1881; 'Collection of Albanian Folk Songs and Rhapsodies'), which represents not only the first collection of Geg folk songs but also the first work of folklore published by an Albanian from Albania itself (see Elsie 2007: 335–338, "The Rediscovery").

We should not overlook the fact that the Mediterranean was also a theater of conflict, pitting West against East and South against North. One of the symbolic epicenters of these conflicts was the island of Malta, located strategically in the "Middle Sea," equidistantly between Gibraltar and Alexandria. Malta's history is interspersed with diverse cultural influences and foreign dominations, from those of the Romans and early Christians (St. Paul was allegedly shipwrecked on the island), to Arabs who ruled the island until 1090, the Norman Sicilians who pried Malta away from the Arabs and reintroduced Christianity, the Knights of St John of Jerusalem who defended the island against the Great Ottoman Siege of 1565, and finally the British, who occupied the island for 160 years, using it as a strategic naval base. After the defeat of sultan Suleiman the Magnificent, Malta's literature and arts establish themselves, often against great odds, at the crossroads of several

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cultural and linguistic traditions (Maltese, a Semitic language written in Latin script, as well as Arabic, Latin, Sicilian, Italian, and English).

Twentieth-century writers like Thomas Pynchon (b. 1937), Nicholas Monsarrat (1910–1979), and Anthony Burgess (1917–1993) have all been fascinated with the layered and contradictory history of Malta. Monsarrat's *The Kappillan of Malta* (1973) is as much a story of Malta, where Monsarrat resided for a significant part of his life, as a narration of tumultuous years 1940–1942 in the history of the Mediterranean basin. Monsarrat focused his intriguing narrative on the historical figure of Father Salvatore Santo-Nobile, a Catholic priest from a prominent Maltese family who, during the war, turned the catacombs of the port city of Valetta into a shelter and church for the poor (see Danica Anderson). During the dramatic German siege of Malta, the Kappillan's sermons focused on legendary moments in Malta's ancestral history as examples of the Mediterranean island's survival against all odds.

Anthony Burgess's narrative *Earthly Powers* (1980) similarly combines panoramic history with reconstructed biography, focusing on the figure of the gay expatriate writer, Kenneth Marchal Toomey. On his eighty-first birthday, Toomey is asked by the archbishop of Malta to assist in the canonization of the "people's Pope", Carlo Campanati, by recording a miracle performed by him as Pope Gregory XVII. This assignment triggers a memorialistic effort on Toomey's part: the novel's eighty-two chapters, which emphasize the parallelism between Mediterranean history and Toomey's own life, record his encounters with major events and figures of the 20th century, from the Great War, to the 1918–1919 flue pandemic, the rise of fascism, World War II, the Holocaust, the Jonestown massacre, and postcolonialism in Africa. Toomey, who is exiled from the church because of his homosexuality, discovers that the head of the Catholic Church condones, however inadvertently, zealotry and violence in the name of the Church.

The most intricate recapitulation of twentieth-century history from the perspective of its Mediterranean nodes can be found in Thomas Pynchon's novel, *V.* (1963). Pynchon's anticolonialist vision is built through a critical focus on several key multicultural Mediterranean locations, Alexandria, Naples, and especially Malta (see Cornis-Pope 2001: chap. 6; also Bianchi, Cassola and Inglott 1995). In Pynchon's novel, like in those of Monsarrat and Burgess, the Maltese (and by extension Mediterranean) multicultural world is disturbed by the nationalist and imperialist conflicts of the twentieth century. For the character Fausto Maijstral, the "freak show" of twentieth-century history (*V.* 287) is directly connected to the imperialist battles that take place on Maltese soil during and between the two world wars. Maijstral's own vexed identity as a "dual man" in Anglo-Maltese culture enhances his sense that the twentieth century pits an insular vision of history, in which an order of knights defends an archetypal mother-island (Malta, Western civilization), against an entropic vision that sees history as a meaningless disorder.

While Fausto inhabits a dark interwar world, Benny Profane, the novel's 1950s wanderer, shuttles through a degenerate postwar world. A stranger in his own American culture (like Leopold Bloom, he is the son of a Jewish mother and a Catholic [Italian] father), Benny wonders from Norfolk, to Washington, New York, and Valletta, on the island of Malta. Trying to find his bearing in the unstable Cold War world, torn by the political confrontations of 1956 in the Middle East, Hungary,

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and Poland, Benny becomes mildly interested in the symbolic center of Malta, thinking that he may get there answers to the puzzle of Cold War history. But he soon loses interest in his quest and runs off with an Anglo-Saxon mistress toward the edges of the Mediterranean.

If exile, scattering and loss, are important motifs in Pynchon's *V.*, they become central in the postcolonial works of André Aciman. Aciman's *Out of Egypt* (1994) and *False Papers* (2000) were both inspired by the loss of the writer's native Alexandria, the city that Lawrence Durrell called the capital of memory. Aciman's *False Papers* brings together love and exile in a double existential metaphor (see Jerzak 2006: "Paris" 438). In Aciman's redefinition, an exile is

> not just someone who has lost his home; he is someone who can't find another, who can't think of another. Some no longer even know what home means. They reinvent the concept with what they've got, the way they reinvent love with what's left of it each time. Some people bring exile with them the way they bring it upon themselves wherever they go (*False Papers*: 39).

In *Out of Egypt*, Aciman describes not so much the real Alexandria but an Alexandria he reconstructs from memory. The lost Mediterranean home can only exist in the world of words, in a living story.

On the northern and eastern flanks of the Mediterranean basin, similar narratives of loss were connected to real or imaginary spaces such as the Pannonian plains. For example in "Itália és Pannónia" (Italy and Pannonia), the Hungarian poet Mihály Babits describes Pannonia as an outpost of Mediterranean culture. Likewise, in Danilo Kiš's travel pieces, "A" and "B," the Mediterranean, Montenegro, and Central Europe are contiguous spaces. In "A" for example, the reader is offered an account of a journey to the Bay of Kotor/Cattaro on the Adriatic shore, in search of an "oceanic feeling" but also of the lost father, whose cultural traces are discovered by the narrator in the coastal areas of Montenegro (for a discussion of the Pannonian motif, see Snel 2006: 333–343).

We can also recognize a distinct "orientalizing" dimension in the way the connections with the Eastern Mediterranean are treated not only by Western writers but also by some writers indigenous to the area. However, while Edward Said's term "Orientalism" (Said 1978) describes well the perspective of Western writers on the Eastern Mediterranean, it does not reflect accurately the more complex attitude of East-Central European writers towards the East. Other, more flexible terms have been suggested for the latter, from "literary Balkanism" (Todorova 1997: 27) and the "South-Eastern European spirit" (Muthu 1976), to the "temptation of the Orient" (Vighi 1998: especially 1–12). Whatever concept is used to describe it, this cultural paradigm has been associated with a number of specific themes and character types: the predominance of the aquatic (Mór Jókai, Attila József, Mihail Sadoveanu; see Vighi 1998: 13–14); Oriental escapism and hedonism (as in the "Turkish" novels of Mór Jókai or in the picaresque novels of Panait Istrati); seditious passion (Attila József, Ladislav Novomeský) but also political stagnation and (false) utopianism (Ştefan Bănulescu, Milorad Pavić, and Ismail Kadare); uncomfortable encounters between the European and Ottoman cultures (Ivo Andrić, Zaharia Stancu), or between different regional cultures (Germanic, Slavic, Hungarian, Romanian –

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Miroslav Krleža, Miloš Crnjanski, Mihail Sadoveanu). Typologically, the literature of the Eastern Mediterranean is often populated with "Balkan peasants," "hajduks" and trickster/sages, but also with figures of "others" (Gypsies, Jewish, Greek, and Arab merchants, Turkish administrators, or "German" travelers – Vighi 1998: 103–123, 125–127).

3. Multicultural Negotiations in the Post-1989 Mediterranean Basin

Malta, the island at the crossroads, epitomizes the hybrid culture of the Mediterranean. Repeatedly besieged, by the Turks in the sixteenth century in an effort to turn the island into a base from which the Ottomans could attack Southern Europe, by the English several centuries later, and by the Germans in 1942 when more bombs were dropped on Malta in two months than on London during the whole blitzkrieg, Malta could not be overcome. In 1964, Malta was granted Independence and in, after the British military bases were closed, the island declared its neutrality in the war between the superpowers. It was this neutrality, written into the Maltese constitution, that led Presidents Mikhail Gorbachev and George H. W. Bush to choose the Malta harbor as a location for their political summit on December 2–3, 1989. As a symbolic counterpart to the 1945 Yalta conference, the Malta Summit signaled a reversal of many of the decisions taken at Yalta. It officially ended the Cold War, lifting the Iron Curtain and promoting new reductions in conventional forces in Europe.

Drawing on the hybrid traditions of the Mediterranean, the recent history of Maltese literature emphasizes, according to Arnold Cassola, unity in diversity, positing a model of European integration or at least of nonbelligerent cohabitation of opposites in the fields of literature and culture. The works of established figures like poet Oliver Friggieri, playwright Francis Ebejer and a host of fiction writers depict Malta's uncertain political fate through a century of two major world wars and a Cold War period. But the Maltese literature at the turn of the New Millennium also suggests that the local writers, like their Balkan or Middle Eastern counterparts, are beginning to see themselves as members of a global community, reacting to events beyond their shores.

Malta's acknowledgment of its own strategic location at the crossroads of cultures, is only one aspect of the larger narrative of Mediterranean transculturality. After 1989, the process of migration increased especially from southern and the eastern flanks of the Mediterranean, as the Soviet block fell apart and postcolonial mobility increased. Dubbed by Hans Magnus Enzensberger "Die Grosse Wanderung," this late twentieth-century migration towards Western and Southern Europe has caused xenophobic anxieties in the receiving cultures but has also emphasized their permeability and capacity to change under the impact of multicultural trends from outside. In a number of recent publications, including his edited collection *Nuovo Planetario Italiano. Geografia e antologia della letteratura della migrazione in Italia e in Europa* ('The New Italian Planetarium. A Geography and Anthology of Migration Literature in Italy and Europe', 2006), Armando Gnisci has focused on the impact of migrant literatures on Italy, but also on Germany, Great Britain, France, and Switzerland. The general introduction to *Nuovo Planetario*

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Italiano (13–39) emphasizes a number of Gnisci's favorite themes: the anthropological significance of migration and its literary expression, the emergence of a postcolonial Italian literature, the decolonization of Europe and the creolization of its languages (see also Gnisci's 2003 work, *Creolizzare l'Europa*). Gnisci's analysis is framed by the concepts of "dispatrio" (being unhomed), as the defining human condition in the 20th century, and of "Patrie imaginarie" (imagined homelands, borrowed from Salman Rushdie), as an antidote to uprooting.

Gnisci's more recent works, especially *Decolonizzare l'Italia* ('Decolonizing Italy'; 2007), have continued the elaboration of a transcultural episteme for our age of the "Great Migration in Europe" (20). Drawing on theorists of decolonization, from Aimé César and Franz Fanon to Robert J. C. Young, Gnisci does not reject his European positioning but rather opens it up to the voices of the "forgotten" migrants (*Decolonizzare l'Italia*: 26) and to a rediscovery of Europe's "world-embracing mind" (2007: 30; see also his 2006 book, suggestively titled *Mondializzare la mente/*The Worldification of the Mind).

One of the effects of Italy's recent transformation from a country of emigration into one of immigration has been the publication of literary texts by migrant writers coming from European and non European countries (the Balkans and the countries of the former socialist block, the Magreb area and the former Italian colonies in Africa, the Middle East and the Far East, and Latin America). "Il dispatrio e i confini letterari" (Unhoming and Literary Boundaries), the theme of a special conference on Italophone migrant literature held in 2005 at the Università di Roma "La Sapienza" (where Gnisci teaches), suggests very well the paradoxical dialectic of deconstructing/ reconstructing the boundaries of a national culture through immigrant transplants.

Two of Gnisci's disciples and associates, Maria Mauceri and Franca Sinopoli have also interrogated the monocultural concept of Italian literature, focusing on nonnative writers who live in Italy as well as on Italian writers who have moved to other parts of Europe, thereby rendering the national boundaries of Italian culture permeable. Mauceri's articles, for example, often deal with Eastern European writers who have migrated to the Mediterranean area. Particularly intriguing are the cases of the Albanian Ornela Vorpsi who lives in France but who writes in Italian; or of Barbara Serdakowski who, born in Poland, grew up in Morocco, moved to Canada, married an Italian artist who emigrated to Venezuela, finally to settle in Italy and write in a plurilinguistic idiom. Another intriguing example is the Romanian Mihai Mircea Butcovan, born in Transylvania but who emigrated to Italy at the age of twenty to reinvent himself as a transcultural writer. His novel-diary, *Allunaggio di un immigrato inamorato* ('The Moon Landing of Love-Struck Immigrant'), revolves around the autobiographical character's failed love relationship with a rich Italian lawyer-activist while at the same time developing a narrative of cultural uprooting and readjustment to the metropolitan West, Milano in this case.

Mauceri has also written an important overview of Eastern European émigré writing in Italy, "L'Europa venuta dall'Europa (dall'Albania alla Russia)" ['The Europe which Has Come from Europe (From Albania to Russia)'], published in Gnisci's *Nuovo Planetario Italiano.* As she argued in that chapter, and in the one preceding it ("Scrivere ovunque. Diaspore europee e migrazione planetaria"/Writing

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Everywhere: European Diasporas and Planetary Migrations; Gnisci 2006: 41–85), the new immigrant writers from Eastern Europe and the Third World do not fit the traditional paradigm of a cross-cultural writer like Joyce or Beckett, whose transcultural movement did not take them out of the Western literary canon. By contrast, the

> current migrant writers are viewed with indifference by the institutionalized literary world, being considered an exotic ethnic phenomenon that some publishers exploit according to the fashion of the moment; they are ignored even in their countries of origin where they represent writers without a home country. In effect, they do not have a unique home, if by this term one understands a country of origin; in reality they have found a common home without boundaries: literature itself" (Gnisci "Scrivere ovunque," 2006: 49).

The writers who illustrate this transcultural movement in Mauceri's "Europa venuta dall'Europa" include the Albanian Gëzim Hajdari and Ron Kubati, the Croat Vesna Stanić, the Bosnian Božidar Stanišić and Tamara Jadrejcić, the Romanian Mihai Mircea Butcovan, the Slovak Jarmila Očkayová, and the Polish Barbara Serdakowski. Gnisci's *Nuovo Planetario Italiano* includes also a chapter from the southern side of the Mediterranean, focused on Maghreb authors (the Algerian Amara Lakhous, Brahim Achir and Tahar Lamri; the Tunisian Salah Methnani and Mohsen Melliti; the Moroccan Mohamed Bouchane, Mina Boulhanna and Bouzidy Aziz). There is also a chapter from the eastern flank, which features especially poets: Hasan Atiya Al Nassar (Iraq), Alon Altaras (Israel), Nader Ghazvinizadeh (Iran), Rula Jebreal (Palestine), Thea Laitef (Iraq), and Yousef Wakkas (Syria). Several of these writers have had tragic careers, negotiated in exile or captivity (Wakkas), or cut short by AIDS (Laitef).

Many of the authors mentioned above have written primarily in Italian, but in their literature one still hears the anxiety of the uprooted. The harried condition of migration is well summed up in the title of Jarmila Očkayová's novel, *L'essenziale e invisibile agli occhi* (The Essential Is Invisible to the Eyes). Responding to this vexed condition, the Ukrainian Marina Sorina has tried to find a home in the interplay of languages, translating her own message and those of others between Russian, Ukrainian, Hebrew and Italian. Her first novel, *Voglio un marito italiano* (I Want an Italian Husband), written directly in Italian, tried to stop the cultural and linguistic drifting and find some stability (in seriousness or in jest) in the new culture. Yet, as Stephen G. Kellman warns us (see his studies *Switching Languages* and *The Translingual Imagination*), immigrant writers cannot escape their translingual and transcultural condition, having to resort to continuous code switching that problematizes any medium of communication.

One of the best contemporary poets in Italian, the Albanian émigré writer Gëzim Hajdari has described memorably his effort to recreate a home in exile: "Ogni giorno creo una nuova patria/ in cui muoio e rinasco quando voglio" ('Every day I create a new home country/ in which I die and are reborn at will'). In her own article on Hajdari, Franca Sinopoli foregrounds his two major themes: exile and absence, vision and blindness, or as Hajdari put it in a poem from 1993, "Il mio corpo/ nato in un paese povero/ è un verso cieco/ senza memoria" ('My own body/

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born in an impoverished country/ is a blind verse/ without memory'; Hadjari 1995: 25). As Sinopoli argues, Hajdari rewrites his themes of exile and absence, moving from autobiography (his own uprooting) to a mode of feeling and knowing that transcends the circumstances of migration. The poetic symbols become more inclusive, linking important archetypes together (stone, shadow, songs of water and fire), even while the emotion continues to darken ("perché sempre più tenebrosi/ i miei pensieri/ in Occidente?" / Why are my thoughts/ increasingly darker / in the West? – Hajdari 1998: 31). The realization of being an "other," caught between cultures is very much part of the literature written by Hajdari and other of his intercultural colleagues (see *Representation of the 'Other/s' in the Mediterranean World*, ed. Nedret Kuran Burçoğlu and Susan Gilson Miller) but their vision challenges the existential and cultural impasse, foregrounding the real or imagined openings between languages and cultures.

In the spirit of Dionyz Durisin and Armando Gnisci's redefinition of the Mediterranean area as "*Una rete interletteraria*" ('An interliterary network'), we can argue that the mobility of writers across cultural and literary boundaries enhances their interconnectedness, hybridizing their literary and cultural production. The Algerian novelist, translator and filmmaker Assia Djebar would probably agree, defining herself as a "writer of the passage" between languages (Djebar 2004: 32). In that passage between identities and languages, and in the "poetics of intercultural translation" that it animates (Sinopoli, "Migrazione/ letteratura"), lies both the promise and the challenge of intercultural writing.

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Abstract

After the collapse of the Berlin Wall in 1989, one of the central sites of the Cold War confrontation, the Mediterranean Basin, has become again a fertile crossroads for the interplay of Eastern (including Eastern European) and Western, Northern and Southern (including African) literary traditions and for the pursuit of transnational agendas. This article contrasts pre-1989 literary works – which described the Mediterranean as the focal point of nationalistic and political superpower conflicts, tied directly to the lingering Cold War divisions – against post-1989 literary phenomena and works that bridge the former ideological divide, promoting transnational messages and concerns. The examples in this article are taken especially from the eastern and southern flanks of the Mediterranean basin, emphasizing their role in creating new literary hybrids and pluralizing national cultures. The first part of the article argues for a transcultural literary history of the Mediterranean area that explores not only north-south, but also east-west relationships, recovering an entire geocultural area (the Eastern Mediterranean) that has not been treated as often in Mediterranean studies. The author argues for a comprehensive multicultural approach to the region that questions both all absorbing global vision and the polarizations that oppose northern and southern, eastern and western paradigms. The following two sections, focused on Mediterranean relationships before and after 1989, similarly explore the conflicts and convergences that have continually restructured our understanding of the Mediterranean world, emphasizing "interference" and "translation" between local and global, national and transnational. The author proposes a type of regional multicultural history that, by comparing and interfacing cultures within a larger region such as the Mediterranean, can help us move beyond our polarized pre- and post-1989 worldviews.

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