

Grey zones all around us.

Lecture at FORUM, Naples, 29/5/86.

You have invited me to your meeting about "France and Southern Italy", because you expect that I shall contribute some distant, "transcendent" considerations to your Mediterranean reflexions. In fact: I am neither French nor Italian, but still I shall disappoint you. My cultural baggage is made up mostly of German, Anglo-saxon and Brazilian odds and ends, and I am Jewish. Which implies that Mediterranean thoughts and values permeate me. Omnia mea mecum porto, and the Mediterranean is mare meum. I cannot speak about it, nor about any of the axes which cross it, without being deeply committed. But I can speak, in a committed way, about the grey zones between the Mediterranean and other lands which I harbor. In the hope that this may contribute to our discussions.

By "Mediterranean" I mean that lake which occupies the central position in the maps of Antiquity, although I confess that those maps have become geographically useless. Earth has become a ball which circles a secondary star, so that the name "Mediterranean" is no longer valid. But I shall sustain that those maps are still of some value as tables for cultural orientation. With this reservation, however: other similar maps have been discovered, (for instance the Indian, the Chinese and the Mexican one), and they overlap. It is not possible to simply include them within the Mediterranean map, by labelling them "hinc sunt leones". We have to take them into account, and the result are grey zones between them. Tragic zones of battle, but also zones for something new to emerge from them. I shall propose three of those zones to your consideration.

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Let us go then, let us leave this clear and well articulated bay of Naples, and let us advance into the murmuring forests beyond the Rhine, and into the fogs which cover them. Of course: those forests have by now become economic assets, those murmurs have by now been electromagnetized, and those fogs, by now acid, are being analyzed by chemists. But be not deceived by this. The merchants, the legion and the monks which have crossed the limes so often did not succeed in dispelling those fogs, nor have those who have travelled in the opposite direction, all those conquerors, humanists and philosophers of Enlightenment. On the contrary: the more light is brought in, and the more light sought after, the more those fogs condense, and the more they assume ever more fantastic, diabolic forms. We should not interpret this grand spectacle as the struggle between the Sons of Light and the Sons of Darkness, however. Because the German fogs, when illuminated by the Mediterranean light, acquire splendor, and that light, when reflected by those fogs, shines in kaleidoscopic profusion.

What we are watching is the struggle between clear and distinct shapes, (ideas), and nebulous, opaque stuff, (mystery). The struggle between classical and romantic existence. Now of course: there are sometimes fogs over the Mediterranean, and even over Germany the sun shines on some days. But nowhere else is this dialectics between classicism and romanticism as violent, and as fertile, as it is in this dialogue between the Mediterranean and the Germans. Not even in the

apparently more dramatic dialogues between the Mediterranean and its Western, Slavonic or Islamic regions. What is so special about this relationship between the Mediterranean and the German culture? To answer this question, we have to consider the structure of Mediterranean culture.

It is a precarious synthesis between Jewish, Greek and Latin elements, known as "Christianity", and one can see how precarious it is, if one goes back to the division of the Roman Empire. This division is fundamental, and the oecumenical efforts to overcome it, (like summit meetings between Reagan and Gorbachov those present representatives of the two halves), must fail, unless they take into account the diverging destinies of the two halves. The Eastern, Hellenized half has centered upon the shores of the Mediterranean, upon Constantinople, for all of the Middle ages, and it has shifted toward Moscow, (the "Third Rome"), only with Modern age, when it was perfectly articulated. But the Western, Latin half has been transferred to Germany, under the name of "Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation", at a moment when Christianity was still fragile and plastic. Thus the German element has become part and parcel of it.

The tragedy, (in the strict sense of that term), is precisely the fact that the German element cannot be assimilated by Mediterranean culture. In the face of the relative wealth of Jewish, Greek and Latin cultures, and the relative poverty of Germanic culture at that time, this is surprising. There must be something to "German mentality", which makes it impossible for people to be at the same time German and Christian, (Roman). What that something is may be seen more clearly, if one considers Charles the Fifth, and not Charlemagne, the founder of the Empire. The Reformation was an effort to adapt Christianity to the Germans. To achieve this it accentuated the Jewish elements in Christianity, which gave rise to the murderous antisemitism of later ages. But it did not succeed in its effort, because the Germans were incapable of integrating the Mediterranean values of Christianity, even in their reformed version. Thus Charles the Fifth had to transfer his Empire, (in which the sun never set), to Spain, (and it moved to America later).

Of course: "German mentality" is an abstraction, because there is nobody who may claim to have it. And so is "The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation", which is much more the name of an ideology than of a real political or cultural unit. Still: those abstract concepts may be observed within concrete contexts. They manifest themselves in the conscious or unconscious effort of every German to identify himself: he must choose between being Mediterranean, (Western), and being German, an impossible choice to make. And they manifest themselves within all those contributions which Germany made to human culture: within music, within poetry, within the plastic arts, and, most clearly, within the philosophical writings. There, those abstract concepts may be termed "German idealism". Now this is such an un-Mediterranean, un-Jewish, un-Greek, un-Latin attitude that many have tried to compare it to Indian rather than to Western thinking.

Now this internal, tragic rupture which characterizes the German mind has infected everything within the Latin half of the Mediterranean culture. To

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give the two examples which concern our subject: In Italy it resulted in the fateful division between the Ghibellines and the Guelfs, which is still effective. And in France it manifests itself at present as "existentialism" and "rationalism", which are nothing but modern names given to a permanent division. We can understand nothing about the internal and external problems of the Western half of the Mediterranean, if we do not take into account this German element which renders everything so dramatic and doubtful.

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Let us now leave the foggy North of the Mediterranean, and travel to its Wild West. We shall have to follow the doubtful steps of the Vikings, through Iceland, Greenland and New Found Land, and when we step from the plane, we shall find ourselves in God's Own Country. Platon's experience must have been similar to our's, when he left ship at Syracuse: we find ourselves in Megale Hellas. But the utopia we have reached is even more intoxicating: we have reached New Jerusalem and Rome resurrected as well. Of course: everything one may say about this colossus is a banality, which explains that curious mixture of disdain and envy which characterizes many European intellectuals where America is concerned. To avoid that banality, let us concentrate on one single aspect: the Capitol in Washington.

It is the Roman Campidoglio resurrected. But the Campidoglio, (originally an Etruscan sanctuary), was a temple dedicated to Iuppiter Optimus Maximus, and a steep path separated it from the forum. The Capitol is a temple, (it houses a statue of Liberty), and a forum, (it houses Congress), at the same time. The sacred and the public space have been united. But not like in Moscow, that other Rome, where the public space has been subordinated to the sacred space, and has become "orthodox". On the contrary: here in Washington it is the public space which sanctifies human commitment. Now I take this as a point of departure because it is so very Jewish.

For Judaism, it is not the private experience which counts, (not one's consciousness or one's faith), but what counts is the way one behaves with regard to other people. It is the public acts which count, and not the thoughts and feelings. Jesus has expressed it in saying: By their fruits you shall judge them. This sanctification of politics has been achieved in Washington through the mediation of Calvinism. The private motives, articulated through all those lobbies, all those checks and balances, are lifted there to the public level, and they become sacred. And the spirit which sacralizes all those profane acts is called pragmatism.

At first sight, it looks as if the Greek element of the Mediterranean, the tendency toward theory, had been abandoned. This is not so. Pragmatism, in its insistence upon results, despises articles of faith, it despises dogma, and in this it is opposed to Moscow. But as for theories, it not only uses them, but it improves them continuously by submitting them to the tests of trial and error. It is a sign of how much all of us have become americanized by now, that we no longer try to prove theories, but to falsify them. Thus

pragmatism is faithful to the Greek heritage just as much as it is Jewish. And the Capitol in Washington is a symptom of a successful synthesis of Latin, Greek and Jewish elements, it is the Mediterranean on a large scale.

But this is precisely what is its danger. We know, for instance from architecture, how dangerous it is to pass from a model to the big building. The Mediterranean model of America is of human order of magnitude: its islands can be crossed by foot, its valleys may be overlooked from a hill top. There, anthropos metron panton, and it is precisely this human size which forms the structure of Mediterranean values. The American second edition of the Mediterranean is enormous, and enormity is synonymous with barbarism. This colossality exercees an attraction over all those cultures which are un-Mediterranean, which are barbarian as the Greeks defined them. The Capitol in Washington is surrounded by a crowd of people coming from all the horizons of humanity, and it is not important whether they have been attracted by force, (like the African crowd), or whether by other motives. This crowd is to be assimilated to the Mediterranean model, and Washington must become the center of a Mediterranean world. As if Rome had in fact become the center of Orbis terrarum, and as if "catholic" had meant in fact "for everybody". If that should not succeed, America itself will be barbarized, it will shift away from the Mediterranean toward the Pacific and Mexico, and Little Italy will be devoured by China Town and Porto Rico.

To avoid this drifting away, America tries to maintain its contact with its Mediterranean origin, and this contact takes the form of turism, fast food or war ships. This is resented by those who stayed there and did not move to America for one reason or another as "imperialism". And this resentment again provokes in America a reaction called "isolationism". In meetings ^{like} as ours, which discuss the Mediterranean, one must contemplate the probable result of this convergence of anti-imperialism and isolationism. It is the barbarisation of America, and sooner or later of the Mediterranean as well. Now of course: barbarism may be a good thing, and a growing number of people seem to be committed to it. But it is our duty, as intellectuals, to have this alternative clearly in mind: either American imperialism, or barbarism, and tertium non datur.

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The grey zone I now ask you to visit is covered for you, (but I hope not for me), by contradictory myths like "samba", "tropical paradise" and "Brasilia" on the one hand, "favãã", "international debt" and "massacre of Indians" on the other. Those myths allow you to hold opinions, but not to enter into a meaningful dialogue with Brazilian intellectuals, which is a grave danger. I shall submit to you the hypothesis according to which the future of the Mediterranean is at stake in Brazil more than anywhere else, and if that hypothesis were true, a responsible dialogue with Brazilians would indeed be urgent. To sustain my hypothesis, I shall try to consider Brazilian society from the point of view of the Mediterranean heritage which it carries.

In the course of the 15th and 16th centuries Portugal, up to then and after that again a rather marginal place, exploded toward Africa, Asia, and

toward that greater half of South America which is called "Brazil" at present. That explosion is less mysterious than it looks if one links it to the Spanish inquisition. The persecuted Jews and Maranos fled to Portugal and to Holland, where they formed a considerable part of the population. And both those countries exploded. Although documentation is spotty, it may well be that most of the adventurers which were left stranded on the shores of recently discovered Brazil were of Jewish origin. We should imagine those adventurers more like astronauts abandoned in space than like Spanish conquistadores. Now these people were Mediterranean, because they professed Christianity, they spoke a Latin language, and they were informed by Renaissance values. In the course of the following four centuries, layers of various origins deposited around those nuclei and crystallized into Brazilian society and culture. Those layers, (Amerindians, Africans, Southern and Eastern Europeans, Arabs, Japanese, Chinese and others), adapted the Portuguese language, and thus, as if spontaneously, Mediterranean culture. The Portuguese language was called by a Romantic poet "última flor de Lácio, inculta e bela", (the last flower of Latium, uncultured and beautiful), and the accent should be put upon "última", both in the sense of "latest", and in the sense of "blooming on the most exposed of the Mediterranean branches".

There was an ideology, during the 19th century, which saw Brazil as a synthesis of "three sad races", namely the Portuguese, the Indians and the Negroes. This is no longer valid. Because there is a far more important element present, which cannot be synthesized with the rest, namely the Japanese and Chinese. From the point of view of East Asia, Brazil, that enormous country which does not succeed in feeding its sparse population, looks like a natural place to accommodate the overflow of Far Eastern population. And East Asian culture looks down upon all other people with the same disdainful paternalism which used to characterize Mediterranean culture. Thus we are witnessing, in Brazil, an almost conscious and disciplined take-over by East Asia, with Japan as its spearhead.

You will object, of course, that this confrontation between the Mediterranean and the Far East goes on everywhere, (even here in Naples), and that it is in fact what characterizes the immediate future. But consider: in California and in Japan, which are the centers of that confrontation, pragmatized and technicalized Christianity faces miniaturized and informatized confucianism in what may be called "open competition". But the canjís which cover the walls of S.Paulo, the Japanese students which occupy the first places in Brazilian universities, and the ease with which Brazilian industry becomes computerized through Japanese methods, is a different phenomenon altogether. Should the Far Eastern cultures succeed in absorbing Brazilian culture, and should they permit an easy passage from Industrial to Information society in Brazil, nothing will stop this process to advance and to reach eventually the Mediterranean proper.

Again, as in the case of barbarisation: there can be no objection to confucian, buddhist and taoist cultures absorbing the Jewish, the Greek and the Latin ones, if this should result in a more meaningful life, and to speak of a

"Yellow peril" is certainly a sign of unreflected chauvinism. Still: in a meeting of minds like ours, this is a subject which must be discussed, if we are to acquire a deeper view of the Mediterranean problem. And Brazilian thinkers might contribute decisively to this sort of discussion.

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I have tried to present to you three grey zones which surround the Mediterranean, and where, very possibly, the future of this culture of ours is being decided. There are other zones of the same kind all around us, and I need not point them out: you can see them with your naked eyes here from Naples. The three zones I have chosen are a part of my own identity, and they influence my commitment. Therefore you should mistrust my way of speaking about them: I am being subjective. My purpose is not to convince you, but to exchange views with you. Now that is a typically Mediterranean purpose: try and find some light through dialogue, and project that light into greyness. Should the Mediterranean abdicate from this purpose, and should it recoil upon itself, it will no longer be worth discussing.