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Workshop 14
From the Politics of Culture to Cultural Policies: Mediterranean Perspectives

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Workshop Abstract

This workshop will explore the mobilisation of cultural identity and difference – the rhetoric as well as the practice – in the Euro-Mediterranean area, with a special emphasis on the societies of the 'Middle East' and 'North Africa. Globalisation has generated the resurgence of the particular, as various communities develop strategies of negotiation and competition to cope with, counter, resist or even sometimes co-opt homogenising forces. These include rationales – and programmes – that range from cultural resistance and invented traditions, heritage preservation and revitalisation to the processing and packaging of cultural expression for the cultural industries. This new 'culturalism' is rapidly diversifying in the 21st century as groups at different levels instrumentalise cultural difference in ever more complex ways, for a politics of group recognition.

Yet, because empirical study of these interactions is still in its infancy, their dynamics are inadequately understood; they are often reduced to stereotypes and simplified generalisations. The purpose of the workshop, therefore, is to:

I.   inventory forms and tropes of culturalist discourse in the Euro-Mediterranean area;

II.   contribute to deeper analysis of the behaviours and changes they produce – or which are produced to repress or exclude them;

III.   deliver a more robust understanding of today's cultural dynamics as well as lessons for policy-making.

The issues to be discussed during the workshop should therefore focus on the 'cultural' discourses and strategies deployed by 'imagined communities' at different levels – from the activism of minorities and local groups to the 'cultural policies' of nation states. Hence papers and case studies should address questions such as the following:

- What kinds of discourses are these?
- What kinds of strategies are developing out of these discourses?
- What are the stances and processes that on the contrary work to suppress or sideline them?
- What are some of the perverse and disturbing outcomes?

Workshop Description

Today, the word 'culture' is on everybody's lips as individuals and communities everywhere mobilise a self-conscious defence and/or affirmation of their own 'culture,' proclaimed as an inalienable 'right,' conceived as a value in itself, and justified as an inherited 'tradition.' In doing so, they are actually repeating the history by which German Romantic Nationalism, two centuries ago, first brought into being the culture concept as we use it today. Under similar threat today from a dominant source of 'civilisation', the values of different ways of life have risen to consciousness to become the rallying cry of diverse claims to a space in the planetary culture. Before, culture was just lived. Now it has become a self-conscious collective project. Every struggle for life becomes the struggle of a way of life.

This wave of cultural self-consciousness is one of the most noteworthy phenomena of late 20_{th} century history. It has put the mobilisation of cultural identity and difference squarely on the public policy agenda – to the point that the 2004 Human Development Report, devoted to the issue of *Cultural Liberty in Today's Diverse World,* offers policy-makers 'concrete ideas on what in means in practice to build and manage the politics of identity and culture in a manner

consistent with the bedrock principles of human development.' It has naturalised the cultural dimension into the palette of the policy options of collective institutions, ranging from nation states to local authorities and cultural communities of various kinds. But there is scant analysis of the ways in which the rhetoric of cultural identity is being constructed and articulated, of the coherence of policy stances and of the fit or lack of fit between rhetoric and actual practice. While this particular gap exists throughout the world, some observers suggest that it is particularly large in the societies of the 'Middle East' and 'North Africa.'

Although cultural identity has long been the handmaiden of national affirmation, it has now become a more deeply, diversely and widely shared aspiration in the *zeitgeist*, as people everywhere seek to assert their cultural distinctiveness as full-fledged members of an emerging world cultural system. The latter, though, is highly incomplete, shot through with economic and political indeterminacy. There is neither providence nor government, nor an Invisible Hand of the market, harmonizing the actions of self-interested agents. On the contrary, multinational corporations and rapid international capital flows escape all control.

Locally, the world order is experienced as uncertainty and incoherence. Even as their own traditions and relations are impacted by powerful and changeable outside forces, local peoples can find no economic or political proportion between efforts and returns. They turn to their 'culture,' which offers at once some resistance to the domination of the global system and some structure to its entropy. Globalisation has thus generated the resurgence of the particular, as communities develop strategies of negotiation and competition to cope with, counter, resist or even sometimes facilitate homogenising forces. These include rationales – as well as projects and programmes – ranging from cultural resistance and invented traditions, heritage preservation and revitalisation to the processing and packaging of cultural expression for the cultural industries, under the umbrella (in countries such as France) of the slogan of 'cultural diversity.' Papers should document and analyse these rationales, projects and programmes, whether on the national, sub-national, local (municipal) or cultural community level.

Within nations, the accent has begun to shift from policies with a nationalist and homogenising cast to the acceptance and even active promotion of cultural differences, as societies are faced with the challenge of articulating and mediating a sense of separate as well as shared space for different cultural communities. Contemporary migratory flows are

accompanied by claims to the retention of cultural distinctiveness, putting the 'melting pot' model to rest for the foreseeable future. They have also polarised the policy debate. On the one hand the classic liberal position, which posits the primacy of the individual and her/his identity over collective belonging and restricts the affirmation of the latter to the private sphere. On the other, the communitarian approach which sees individual identity as the product of community. There is likely to be continuous, even mounting tension between the two positions. While an increasing number of individuals are opting for the right and the responsibility to choose the markers and roles they use to construct their identities, the claims of equality will have to be reconciled with the claims of difference. The challenge of including diversity within the national public sphere can also help question the 'national' culture itself and develop new understandings about its increasingly inter-ethnic and interracial composition. Papers bearing on this particular issue in cultural and intercultural relations would therefore be welcome as well.

The task of finding ways to allow non-conflictual cultural distinctions to flourish is already being pursued in many places, with immigrants themselves providing much of the adaptive effort required. In some cases, the task has been made almost superfluous by the ongoing process of hybridisation. Nevertheless, enabling all the groups that henceforth constitute the national community to assume ownership of its composite cultural identity remains a major challenge for policy-makers. This is not simply a matter of combating intolerance and exclusion, but also of giving dignity, voice and recognition in the public sphere to different cultural groups while constructing – negotiating – a sense of national community. Europe's increasingly diverse cities are already functioning as intercultural 'laboratories', both at the general policy level and in terms of new urban strategies in on the ground conviviality, education, arts and design practice, etc. Papers should therefore analyse the contemporary resilience of identity claims in such settings and the ways in which they have been positively accommodated, or not accommodated.

Across the world, processes of cultural invention are also under way. People are constructing cultural pasts that serve as powerful political symbols. They did this historically in the service of national liberation and nation-building; they are doing it subsequently in the affirmation of group difference, both national and sub-national. In the rhetoric of postcolonial nationalism (and sometimes separatism) and the struggles of indigenous Fourth World peoples, now minorities in their own homelands, visions of culture have been created and evoked. The

ancestral ways of life being evoked rhetorically may bear little relation to those documented historically, recorded ethnographically, and reconstructed archaeologically--yet their symbolic power and political force are undeniable. This has long been both an epistemological and axiological issue for those us who have committed ourselves to the cause of culture in the collective memory. Ultimately we have had to conclude that it really does not matter whether the pasts being recreated and invoked are mythical or 'real.' Political symbols radically condense and simplify 'reality,' and are to some extent devoid of content: that is how and why they work.

Perhaps it matters only whether such political ideologies are used for just causes, whether they are instruments of liberation or of oppression. But in our contemporary world, culturalist ideologies are being used both to recapture rights and to deny them. Hence the question is less simple than that. The culturalist spectrum also contains movements for cultural domination – political parties, militias, violent groups, international networks, even some states – that believe in their own cultural superiority, which they attempt to impose on others, both within and outside their community. Some are violently coercive; others use softer pressures of various kinds. Papers that analyse such phenomena and the ways in which policy-makers have confronted them, whether successfully or unsuccessfully, would also be welcome. A case in point is the 1991 military reaction in Algeria of the electoral victory of the Islamic Salvation Front and its unhappy sequel.

Processes of objectification are also rife, as a group's culture is imagined to consist of the heritage, both tangible and intangible (including 'traditional' song and dance, customs, etc.). Periodically performing or exhibiting these fetishized objects and processes, which serve metonymically to represent the whole of a 'culture' elites and policy-makers ritually affirm that this ancestral cultural heritage lives on. Discourses of cultural identity thus suffer from the conceptual diseases of essentialism and reification of abstractions into entities and causal agents. A cognate issue is the degree of terminological confusion in this semantic field. It is not just that the term 'culture' has totally escaped academic control and to become a protean buzzword. Many, scholars included, oscillate constantly between two different levels when referring to this 'thing' called culture. Sometimes they mean the works and practices of intellectual and especially artistic activity and the heritage from the past, in other words what ministries of culture are responsible for. Simultaneously, they refer to the particular way of life of a people or a group. This hampers serious understanding and is linked to anthropologist

Adam Kuper's observation that complex notions such as culture inhibit an analysis of the relationships among the variables they pack together because they tend to be represented as a single system, though one shot through with arguments and inconsistencies, instead of being deconstructed and disaggregated.

This new 'culturalism' is rapidly diversifying in the 21st century as cultural difference is instrumentalised in ever more complex ways by the politics of group recognition. Yet, because empirical study of these interactions is still in its infancy, their dynamics are inadequately understood; they are often reduced to stereotypes and generalisations that do not deepen our understanding.

The purpose of the workshop, therefore, is to:

I.   inventory forms and tropes of culturalist discourse in the Euro-Mediterranean area;
II.   contribute to deeper analysis of the behaviours and changes they produce – or which are produced to repress or exclude them;
III. deliver a more robust understanding of today's cultural dynamics as well as lessons for policy-making.

Papers should therefore be based on empirical study of topics such as the following and could include case studies of specific process that illustrate them. What 'cultural' discourses are deployed by 'imagined communities' at different levels – from the activism of minorities and local groups to the 'cultural policies' of nation states? What kinds of strategies are developing out of these discourses? What are the stances and processes that on the contrary work to suppress or sideline them? What are the perverse and disturbing outcomes? What are the policy implications of these findings?

Directors' Individual Paper Abstracts

Yudhishthir Raj Isar

The Mobilization of Cultural Identity and Difference: Some Conceptual Perspectives

This paper frames several lines of debate and further inquiry derived from contemporary manifestations of culturalism (seen here as the conscious mobilization of cultural differences in the service of a larger national or transnational politics) and from issues arising in the Euro-Mediterranean area as they have been addressed or alluded to in the abstracts submitted by workshop participants. It does so in both an eclectic spirit and a somewhat generic manner, with the help of examples from other regions, the intention being to help draw out commonalities and differences in ways that might facilitate productive debate. The paper first discusses some of the ways in which the range of interests these topics reflect has emerged from the international organization institutional matrix and discourse that have marked the author's professional and intellectual itinerary. It then explores the following themes as presented in the academic literature: i) the dynamics of the self-conscious, collective cultural identity project in the context of symbolic boundaries and locality; the logic of identity formation as it has unfolded in the nationalist matrix, which is taken to be a template for the articulation of various kinds of group identity; iii) the construction of cultural pasts by different groups - citing the examples of Greece and the contemporary Pacific; iv) the articulation of shared and separate cultural space for newly arrived cultural groups in today's culturally diverse Europe and v) conceptual problems arising from the construction of trans-national European cultural identity.

Abdellah Labdaoui

Identités changeantes ou changements identitaires ? Les bases d'un pluralisme au Maroc

The identity claims formulate today in Morocco, the need for one or more ruptures with the past. The ones are a movement of reforms defining a relationship controlled between change and continuity, and others carry the radical hope of restoration of idealized ages. The lines which follow try to raise how the identities change by stressing the importance of the factors which contribute to this change. Is it a change of identities or are they identities whose stating undergoes some variations and show changes thus? The answer to this question imposes an observation of the identity phenomenon at the same time in the light of given historical heritage and regional dynamics. It will be seen that the identity change is in last analysis an accumulation of identity segments which constitute as many resources for an

individual. This one will mobilize of them one or the others according to a logic of situation. The continuation will be devoted to the identities witch are changing under the combined pressure of internal and external factors, without excluding the strategic repositioning. The case amazigh will come to illustrate this step and it will be the occasion to stress that the reformulation of the identity memberships return to a certain extent to redefine the positions of authorities of different social components within the national community. Is such a change in identity a chance for political pluralism?