Dieser Text erscheint demnächst in: Kockel, U. Nick Craith, M. and Frykman, J. eds. *A Companion to the Anthropology of Europe*, Oxford (Blackwell)

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The Anthropology of Mediterranean Societies

Foreword: anthropology of Mediterranean societies and national ethnologies

To begin with, in dealing with the anthropology of Mediterranean societies we are referring to researches carried out mainly by scholars from Anglo-Saxon, French and to some extent Dutch academia associated with specific anthropological schools that some critics hold to be *hegemonic* (Llobera, 1986: p. 30 f; Bromberger, Durand, 2001: p. 737 ff.). Accordingly, our presentation will not include most of the so-called national ethnologies of Mediterranean countries, such as *tradizioni popolari*, *studi demologici* or *studi folklorici* in Italy and *laographia* in Greece. This partial omission is due essentially to the reason that, contrary to the anthropology of Mediterranean societies, these disciplines lack a comparative project and their researches are focused solely on their own national societies without taking into consideration other countries.

The discovery of Mediterranean societies as an anthropological subject

In comparison with other more distant and hard to reach geographical areas, anthropologists discovered Mediterranean societies as a subject of study, especially societies of continental Europe, fairly recently. This is not fortuitous, but can neither be traced back to negligible and superficial reasons, as some critics would have it (Moreno Navarro 1972; 163 seq. Gilmore, 1979: 38). Any claim that it was the mild climate, the pleasant company of easy-going, amusing and generous contacts or, worse still, the

proverbial fine dining that drove North-European anthropologists (British and Dutch especially, but also French) to choose the Mediterranean as the *locus amoenus* for their researches, would be tendentious. In fact, if this hypothesis were true, we would then need to wonder why these societies were not discovered any time sooner. But, as John Cole pointed up, the rationale behind this choice is far less banal and conceals political reasons (Cole, 1979: p.15 ff).

Aside from the groundbreaking and isolated research carried out by Charlotte Gower Chapman in the small Sicilian agro-town of Milocca end of the 1920s, but discovered only in the 1970s (Gower Chapman, 1971), the anthropology of Mediterranean societies, according to authoritative opinions, made its first appearance in 1954 with the publication of Julian Pitt-Rivers' monograph *The People of the Sierra* (Boissevain, 1979: 81). Along with this study of an Andalusian rural community, we also need to mention *Turkish Village* by Paul Stirling (Stirling, 1965) and *Honour, Family and Patronage* by John Campbell (Campbell, 1964) centred on the *Sarakatsani* community in Epirus (north-western Greece).

All of these field researches in the Mediterranean area were carried out in the late 1940s and in the 1950s, thus during a period of great transformations and upheavals in extra-European countries. In fact, colonial empires, i.e., those territories where anthropologists, especially British, French and Dutch ones, had carried out their researches, were disintegrating. India and Indonesia by then had attained independence, while many future *new nations* in Africa and Asia were slowly breaking away from colonial dominion and were on the brink of independence. It is a well-known fact that decolonization processes were marked by tensions and conflicts. This epoch was characterized by non-violent protests (as in India), nativist revolts (e.g. Mau Mau in Kenya) guerrilla warfare (e.g. Indonesia), and full-blown wars (e.g. French Indochina), all followed by the colonial powers' brutal repressions. In this world in turmoil, anthropological field research became increasingly problematic, if not impossible, also because anthropologists were no longer under the colonial order's umbrella, with whom most of them had in the least collaborated. Without this protection, finding a place to study the allegedly untouched traditions of *savage societies*, as they had been termed by

Bronislaw Malinowski and Alfred Reginald Radcliffe-Brown, was a nearly unthinkable endeavour in such an endemically unstable situation. Moreover, in countries that had attained independence, anthropologists were increasingly viewed with disfavour and were often considered *persona non grata* since they were suspected of being agents of the former colonial power.

In all likelihood, these specific political circumstances, i.e., the end of the colonial *pax britannica*, *nederlandica, gallica* etc. occurring precisely in the years just-mentioned, played a major role in the rise and development of the anthropology of Mediterranean societies. At first, however, researchers did not change their methodological paradigm. Indeed, we can trace several continuities between what we shall call colonial anthropology and the newborn anthropological research in the Mediterranean region. In the first place, Pitt-Rivers, Stirling and Campbell chose extremely peripheral and highly isolated locations for their field researches. Thus, there is a clear correspondence between field choices in colonial anthropology and in Mediterranean societies. Moreover, we cannot fail to notice a more or less overt equivalence between African, Asian and American *primitives* on the one hand and southern European *shepherds* and *peasants* on the other. In itself, this would be sufficient proof of the link between the earliest anthropologists of Mediterranean societies and the classic researches of colonial anthropology. Yet, there is also another interesting correspondence regarding the nearly identical use of monographs made by Pitt-Rivers, Stirling and Campbell, as well as other researchers who followed in these three authors' footsteps. In this first phase of studies on Mediterranean societies, the *monographic study* of a village, located in the most out-of-the-way area possible, was still seen as the sole legitimate standard for a serious anthropological research.

The monograph approach based on studies on a single and generally marginal rural community, thus one that could be regarded as a virtuous example of an authenticity still untouched by modernity's influence, was soon criticized. This approach remained prevalent up to the 1980s, notwithstanding due exceptions such as the pioneering *multisided* research by Caroline White (White, 1980) who studied two neighbouring but historically different townships in the Fucino basin in Abruzzi (south-central Italy). This

more or less explicit connection with the methodology developed by colonial anthropology and its field research was pointed out by Jeremy Boissevain in particular. Boissevain questioned whether persisting to study Mediterranean societies and European societies in general by means of monographic researches could still be suitable, since these were based on the assumption that the communities examined by anthropologists would be actually isolated, thus as truly autonomous as they appeared to be (Boissevain, 1975; Boissevain, 1979: p. 81 ff). Boissevain's criticism, which exposes the *tribalization* of Mediterranean societies (and of European societies in general, too), presents two fundamental arguments. In the first place, the choice of field investigation sites located in areas known for their socioeconomic marginality highlights how anthropologists at the time would seek out societies in the Mediterranean area, especially the European one, that were as akin as possible to the segmentary ones of the *primitives* that had been studied overseas during the colonial epoch. Secondly, any monograph research centred nearly exclusively on the social life occurring within a purported community microcosm tends to overlook the historical dimension's significance, thus also to underestimate phenomena such as the State's presence and its incorporating role, the more or less enforced processes of bureaucratization and national integration, the urbanization dynamics and finally, the power relationships and class conflicts between those within the *little community* and those outside (Boissevain, 1975: p. 11). Accordingly, the condition of subservience, thus the structural asymmetries in relation to the hegemonic outer world, is hardly examined. How to surpass the *tribalistic* and intrinsically ahistorical viewpoint inherent to village monographs, a crucial goal for the anthropology of Mediterranean societies, was exactly the most noteworthy contribution of the volume *Beyond the Community: Social Process in Europe*, edited by Jeremy Boissevain and John Friedl (Boissevain & Friedl, 1975).

Actually, from the mid-1970s up to the great crisis of the anthropology of Mediterranean societies in the second half of the 1980s, monographs were still present, but their nature underwent a significant change, since they became less generalistic and impressionistic. There was no longer that eagerness to describe and interpret the entire social life of a *little community* as if withdrawn into itself. The subjects and the questions involved, as the titles of the publications indicate, became increasingly specific and targeted. Moreover, history as a long-term process and not as a historicist

vision, i.e., a pedantic event-based sequence, began to emerge in the narration's background. Amongst the various studies, those by Anton Blok, *The Mafia of a Sicilian Village: 1860-1960* (Blok, 1974), Jane and Peter Schneider, *Culture and Political Economy in Western Sicily* (Schneider, Schneider, 1976), David Gilmore, *People in the Plain* (Gilmore, 1980) and Caroline White, *Patron and Partisans* (White, 1980), notwithstanding their different theoretic approaches, are probably the most representative of this initial shift, not least because their new methodological approach was explicitly thematised in the introductions.

Finally, we need to add that essays such as those by John Davis (1977) and David Gilmore (1982) began to appear in print during this highly fruitful phase of the anthropology of Mediterranean societies. Thanks to a professedly more to-the-point approach, thus greeted with keen interest for comparisons, these essays went beyond both the narrow scope of single monograph studies and the apparently comparative, yet ultimately rather fragmentary character of some miscellany texts on specific themes such as honour and patronage (Peristiany, 1965; Gellner & Waterbury, 1977), which we shall examine in the next chapters. In fact, Davis' main concern seems to be this disregard, viz. unwillingness, towards comparison, as he underscores right from the introduction of his book:

> *"the reader may think he is in a luxuriant field, but gradually sees there is no controversy; he may think he is in the company of scientists, but find they do not compare their results. It is a constant theme of this book that mediterraneanists have failed in their plain duty to be comparative and to produce even the most tentative proposition concerning concomitant variations, and so it need not to be elaborated here: one example will suffice"* (Davis, 1977:5).

Admittedly, though Davis' appeal did not go unheeded, it would be followed only by some and moreover much later (Giordano, 1992). Christian Bromberger also pointed up these misgivings about comparisons in his closing remarks to the volume of the conference proceedings in Aix-en-Provence in 2001. Bromberger, going back to Davis' remarks, confirmed that they were still pertinent and could very well apply to this new miscellany work (Bromberger, Durand, 2001: p. 740). Maybe be ought to wonder whether other regional anthropologies, such as those of societies in Southeast Europe or Southeast Asia, are just as unheeding of comparisons.

The anthropology of Mediterranean societies: major themes

The anthropology of Mediterranean societies is characterized by a remarkable variety of themes, as the previously mentioned studies by Davis and Gilmore also show (Davis, 1977; Gilmore, 1982). However, we can identify some topics that were particularly debated in the past and which, beyond the circumscribed Mediterranean area, have lost none of their relevance. Under this aspect, we shall consider three main themes:

A) honour, status and gender relationships,
B) patronage and political practices,
C) history and the past in the present.

A) *Honour, status and gender relationships*

It is widely known that in anthropology the theme of honour in Mediterranean societies was proposed by two authors in particular: John G. Peristiany (Peristiany, 1965; Peristiany, Pitt-Rivers, 1992) and Julian Pitt-Rivers (Pitt-Rivers, 1968; Pitt-Rivers 1977; Peristiany, Pitt-Rivers, 1992). However, before and contemporary with these two anthropologists Mediterranean honour had been a very popular subject amongst leading literary and cinematography figures, and, due to some aspects linked to criminal law, jurisprudence and criminology experts, too. We need to add, though, that all of the above have to do with works of art or strictly juridical, thus normative reasonings, whose concern does not involve discovering ways to delineate and identify the various facets of honour.

With reference to Mediterranean societies, Pitt-Rivers was the first one to attempt a structured and thorough characterization that would encompass the various dimensions of honour.

Paraphrasing Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Nouvelle Héloïse*, Pitt-Rivers begins by distinguishing between two key aspects of honour, the *inner* one and the *outer* one:

- Honour can be understood as a feeling or, more precisely, as a specific state of consciousness. This consists of a conviction that there is nothing one should reproach oneself and that consequently one can and indeed has a *right to pride* (Pitt-Rivers 1968, p 503; 1977, p 1). This point of view considers the so to speak individual aspect only, since the sole judge of one's own honour is the individual, thus oneself.

- The second aspect refers to concrete behaviour as a manifestation of the state of mind mentioned above. This state, therefore, is exclusively relevant if courses of action are regarded in relation to their reception and their appraisal by the society to which the actor belongs. Consequently, honour is strictly linked to what may be broadly defined as *public opinion*. Pitt-Rivers emphasizes, therefore, that *honour felt becomes honour claimed and honour claimed becomes honour paid* (Pitt-Rivers, 1977: p. 2). Thus, personal expectation is not enough; to be guaranteed, honour requires a social status validation from a collectivity (Pitt-Rivers, 1977: p. 21). Peristiany holds the same opinion when he highlights that honour is dependent on specific *social evaluations* (Peristiany, 1965: p. 11).

Based on the foregoing rather general observations, researchers have analyzed the various expressions of honour in Mediterranean societies. Accordingly, the focus was on exploring the single ascribed and acquired qualities as well as the visible and assessable ones that attribute honour to individuals and groups, since honour in the Mediterranean area is not based exclusively on personal status. The qualities that bestow honour, thus ensuring the collectivity's recognition, also define reputation and rung on the social ladder.

Yet, the most authoritative experts confirm nearly in unison that the above qualities are not the same for all and that a gender divide is crucial: the prerequisite qualities for men are different from those for women. There is a male honour and a female honour, thus there is also a rather marked and just as strict division of social roles. Male honour is essentially dependent on its visible will and the ability to shield one's own and one's family's reputation from possible attacks from potential rivals (Pitt-Rivers, 1977: p. 22). Qualities that have been attested and verified by public opinion, such as nearly heroic courage and valour (Pitt-Rivers, 1977: p. 22; Kaser, 1992), composure, presence of

mind, readiness to fight, feeling of pride (Campbell, 1976: p. 269) as well as generosity, hospitality and even mildness of character and patience, are essential to be acknowledged as a true *uomo d'onore*.

Female qualities are mainly related to modesty, which most authors believe to be the cornerstone of women's honour. Consequently, female honour is strictly linked to sexual behaviour. Therefore, pre-marital virginity and absolute fidelity to one's spouse are the imperative hallmarks of purity (Friedmann, 1974: p. 291), together with modesty, shyness, self-restraint and obedience.

According to some authors however, this difference between the two roles does not imply an actual social disparity between genders, since the *status of the powerful* is counterbalanced by the *virtue of the weak* (Lisón-Tolosana, 1966: p. 108 ff).

Moreover, male and female honour are not two separate, individual phenomena, but must be considered jointly since honour is also a collective issue. This led Pitt-Rivers to state that between the two genders there is a moral division of labour guaranteeing the honour of the entire family (nuclear or extended) and in some cases of the entire kinship group (Pitt-Rivers, 1977: p. 78).

The concept of *honour and shame societies* is based precisely on the above-mentioned division of roles and corresponding social practices in accordance with gender. This label was expressly created and used to characterize Mediterranean societies' specificity, and, despite criticisms of an anthropological nature that we shall discuss further on, is still in use to some extent in social sciences' parlance.

One of the most outstanding features of the purported *honour and shame societies* in the Mediterranean area, besides the ones previously mentioned, was their *agonistic* character by which groups would vie fiercely for honour, thus triggering an unremitting competition for recognition, respect and ultimately for reputation and social status. Yet, in this case as well we can observe a tendency to substantiate the egalitarian and harmonious nature of *honour and shame societies*. In fact, the agonism linked to honour

was ultimately regarded as a social strategy *to remain equal* and not as a set of practices aimed at reaffirming the disparity between individuals and groups.

Credit for calling into question the theoretical framework based on the notion of *honour and shame societies* goes to Michael Herzfeld in particular. This author criticizes anthropologists, especially those of Anglo-Saxon origin, for their ethnocentric viewpoint tainted by both heterophile and heterophobic stereotypes about the concept of honour and honour-related ones (Herzfeld, 1984: p.440; Herzfeld, 1987a: p. 9).

For these researchers, the discussion of Mediterranean honour ultimately proves to be a fatal trap because they project onto the 'alien' reality by which they are confronted their own fear of and their longing for an archaic world, which constantly appears to them as an ambivalent allegory. Thus, Mediterranean societies are made 'archaic' both artificially and arbitrarily.

The reader gets the impression that these societies are a relic of past epochs, admittedly characterized by violent and bloodthirsty barbarism, along with a primitive purity, and finally by an earthy simplicity of ways of life and social relationships. What emerges, therefore, is that the 'archaization' of Mediterranean societies by Anglo-Saxon anthropologists simultaneously and always implies an 'exoticization' of these cultures (Herzfeld, 1980, 339 ff); Herzfeld, 1987a: p. 64). One can hardly challenge the fact that the patent penchant of North American and North-European researchers for the theme of honour evokes an 'alien', hence an 'exotic' image of Mediterranean societies. The entire Mediterranean region is thereby presented as an appendix of the 'wilderness' in both its positive and negative form. Besides, the Euro-Mediterranean space is staged as being nearly unrelated to Europe. According to Herzfeld, the most serious consequence of the 'archaization' and 'exoticization' of Mediterranean countries is the artificial separation of Euro-Mediterranean societies from other European cultures, so that 'Mediterranean Studies' ends up regarding the region as an accumulation of autonomous, yet socio-culturally homogeneous *primitive societies*.

To support his thesis, Herzfeld adds that while the national ethnologies of this region do not entirely deny *honour and shame*, they neither regard it as a central element in the study of Mediterranean values. This is in pleasant contrast to the reports of travellers and researchers from Northern Europe and the United States, because local folklorists strive to resist this explicit or implicit 'exoticization' (Herzfeld, 1987a: p. 64). Though recognizing their parochial approach (Herzfeld, 1987a: p. 13), yet in this case Herzfeld is rather lenient with the various versions of Mediterranean folklore studies since we cannot fail to notice that nearly all of them provided welcome material for the construction and development of nationalist, separatist, populist and localist ideologies precisely via the 'archaization' and 'exoticization' of their own lower strata, particularly the rural ones. In doing so, there was a clear will to create a far too idyllic image of the Mediterranean's peasant world.

Aside from Herzfeld's contentions, there are further criticisms regarding the anthropology of honour in Mediterranean societies. In the first place, we need to highlight the implicit communitarian vision by which, notwithstanding the previously mentioned *agonism*, the single actors have a strong sense of solidarity and reciprocity. Still, the term *agone* in itself, i.e. contest, as used by anthropologists of Mediterranean societies, brings to mind loyal competitions, if not between socially equal persons, at least between people with a similar social status. This construction of the subject-matter downplays both the importance of social disparity and of the conflicts and tensions between individuals and groups, while emphasizing the social harmony of the communities examined. As Jacob Black-Michaud proposed, in several cases the term *feuding societies,* in which the struggles for recognition, thus honour contentions, are much more violent, would be more suitable (Black-Michaud, 1975).

The point that appears to be particularly questionable – and this is true also of Herzfeld's suggestion to replace the notion of honour with other terms such as *hospitality* (Herzfeld, 1987b: 75 ff) – is the tendency to believe that coercive systems of norms and values mirroring specific forms of morality underpin the idea of honour and its social practices. We feel quite sceptical about this rather idealistic and perhaps somewhat naïve vision.

Given these criticisms, should we then believe that everything that has been researched and published by anthropology on the subject of *honour and shame societies* in the Mediterranean area ought to be regarded as outmoded, unreliable and unrealistic, thus scientifically irrelevant and not fit to be used? This would definitely be too drastic, considering that in recent years other social sciences, such as sociology and social history, have reintroduced the theme of *honour and shame societies* drawing on and reinterpreting those anthropologists' highly criticised results and analyses. Nowadays however, the interest in honour goes beyond the limited space of Mediterranean societies and extends to other social configurations, such as specific societies in the Near and Middle East (Husseini, 2009) and the Indian subcontinent, as well as immigration societies in North-Central Europe especially. Obviously, this rediscovery is also strictly linked to the rising number of *honour killing* cases and of the far less frequent but not less shocking *blood revenge* in this area of the Old Continent (Wikan, 2008).

Most likely Unni Wikan is right when she questions the current validity of the term *honour and shame societies*. This is due mainly to the ambiguity of the term *shame*, which may convey both the idea of *disgrace* as in impudence, indignity and infamy, and of *decency* as in modesty, propriety and purity. It would probably be more suitable to speak simply of *honour* and *dishonour*. Under this aspect, we should mention the terminological question, i.e., honour's semantic differences from one society to another in the Mediterranean area. Without going into much detail, there seems to be a far more marked variety of concepts in the Arab and Turkish world (we need only refer to the difference between the notions of *namus* and *sheref*) than in Greece, Spain and Italy, though all these various representations with dissimilar connotations always involve reputation, prestige, esteem, standing, saving face and good name.

Personally, I believe that nowadays we ought to revise those previously mentioned concepts of honour steeped in romanticism and resume a more *transactional* approach, as suggested by Bailey (Bailey, 1971: p. 19 ff). Honour in general, thus also honour in the Mediterranean societies, is not merely a moral code comprising values, norms,

representations and a set of practices, but rather a cultural idiom and a combination of social strategies found in several public arenas. Thus, honour in its various expressions in terms of representations and social practices alike is a phenomenon set up to highlight social differences (class and gender especially), and maintain, increase or restore status and reputation in order to define (better yet, redefine) the social identifications and auto-comprehensions of individuals and groups (Brubaker, Cooper 2000: p. 1 ff). Therefore, as my experience as expert witness in criminal court cases confirms, an agent acts in accordance with the social logic of honour not so much because he feels duty-bound by a culturally-defined moral obligation, but rather because he fears being sanctioned and stigmatized by his *significant others*.

With specific reference to the Mediterranean but also elsewhere, the person who reacts to an alleged or actual offence to his honour (even in a criminally indictable way), does so because he fears the annihilation of his social status and personal reputation, including the good name of his primary group (family and relatives) with the reference community. This loss of status and good repute often implies negative economic consequences, too. Honour and its social practices are not so much a nearly genetically-set cultural legacy, as much as a system of concrete strategies intentionally put to use in everyday life. Thus, honour in this specific case stops being a static entity that the actor cannot escape and becomes a pliant and flexible phenomenon. It proves to be a cultural knowledge, and consequently an adequate action know-how. Therefore, honour is a social resource for individuals who will both put it to use to assess their own social situation and activate it in specific constellations in order to achieve what is regarded as an opportune goal. To conclude, in line with Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu we can state that the actors abide by a given rule to the extent that their interest in acting accordingly exceeds their interest in not conforming to said rule (Weber, 1956; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1996: p. 147). If on the one hand interests and rules are not universal and ought to be regarded, in a sense, as cultural products, on the other hand actors are not trapped in their social and cultural habitus, which must be regarded as a socially acquired disposition and not as a strictly binding behaviour dictated by a coercive morality.

B) Patronage and political practices

In anthropology, the debate concerning the forms of patronage cannot be properly pinpointed without mentioning what was and still is the most renowned, though probably the most criticized study (Pizzorno, 1966; Silverman, 1968; Davis, 1970; Schneider & Schneider, 1976; Pitkin, 1985; Herzfeld, 1987a) on the political culture of Mediterranean societies and Euro-Mediterranean ones in particular. Clearly, we are alluding to the book written by American political scientist Edward C. Banfield, *The Moral Basis of a Backward Society* (Banfield, 1958). Banfield had carried out a field research in the small community of Montegrano in Basilicata (Southern Italy) and, by applying a typically anachronistic stance borrowed from North American political studies, believed he observed a lack of *civic culture* in this town on the margins of Italian society.

His key argument, taken up even recently by two rather ideologically apart authors such as Francis Fukuyama (Fukuyama, 1995) and Robert Putnam (Putnam, 1993), was that there was no awareness of the *common good* in this Southern Italian society and that in the public sphere its inhabitants were only pursuing the interests of their own family group. Their attitude was summarized as an *amoral familism,* which highlighted a condition of moral, social and economic backwardness. Clearly, this vision was so blatantly ethnocentric that we need not comment further. Banfield's fundamental error lay not so much in this vision distorted by ethnocentrism, as much as in reducing Montegrano into an *atomistic* society consisting solely of family units with the possible addition of nearest kin members. According to Banfield, beyond this quasi-segmentary sociability there was only a structural desert. On his quest for an unlikely American-style civil society, this author had practically disregarded the social complexity based on highly personalized relationships within the community and beyond the family and closest relatives. Wide of the mark, he had focused exclusively on his search for formal and permanent organizations (such as voluntary associations, co-operatives, trade unions etc.) and had utterly overlooked the less apparent, yet also more informal, changeable and flexible existence of *quasi-groups* and *networks*.

Anthropological researches on Mediterranean societies have tried to remedy this serious theoretical and empirical deficit and have provided ample evidence that the single family units extend their social relationships beyond the limited range of their own members, including closest relatives and in-laws. Therefore, Mediterranean societies cannot be likened to fictitious and improbable atomistic societies (Galt, 1973: p. 325 ff; Gilmore, 1975: p. 311 ff).

The family's role is definitely central, yet its interests, as Italian anthropologist Carlo Tullio-Altan highlighted, are managed by its own members through skilful strategies that may often be in contrast with the proper administration of the state or to the detriment of the common good (Tullio-Altan, 1986: p. 24 ff). But, in order to effectively guarantee advantages for the family, the single members need to extend their network of social relationships by joining extrafamilial coalitions of various types and dimensions. By means of the asymmetrical and often vertical relationships of symbolic kinship, such as godparenthood for example, and the rather symmetrical and horizontal ones of friendship, the anthropologists of Mediterranean societies (Pitt-Rivers, 1977: p. 54; Gilmore, 1980: p. 161 ff; Piselli, 1981: p. 49 ff) were able to observe two principal forms of extending cooperation relationships beyond the inner circle of parents, relatives and in-laws. Neighbourhood ties, instead, would seem to be less important and at times rather trouble-ridden (Davis, 1973: p. 68; Du Boulay, 1979: p. 216 ff).

Probably though, with his study *Friends of Friends*, which drew inspiration from the concept of *network* developed by the Manchester School, Jeremy Boissevain revealed the significance of extrafamilial personalized coalitions in Mediterranean societies, thus indirectly confirming the flimsiness of Banfield's analysis.

Anthropological researches on the crucial role of patronage relationships and coalitions in Mediterranean societies' political and bureaucratic fabric stem precisely from this debate and the subsequent study of personalized and barely formalized forms of social organization. Relationships between patrons and clients on which all these networks are based were defined as personalized, asymmetrical and vertical dyadic links rooted in the reciprocal exchange of qualitatively unbalanced favours (Foster, 1963: p. 1280 ff;

Mühlmann & Llaryora, 1968: p. 3 ff). The asymmetry was determined by the fact that the client was more dependent on the patron than vice versa, while the verticality was due to the palpable social gap between patron and client, i.e., the latter belonged to a lower social class. Therefore, the relationship between patron and client was characterized by a clear social disparity between the two contracting parties.

With good reason, anthropologists of Mediterranean societies were revealing that, aside from few exceptions (White, 1980), patronage coalitions permeated in particular the political systems of the societies studied (Signorelli, 1983). Consequently, personalized patron/client relationships were typical between *political entrepreneurs* and electors, wherein the latter would provide their vote in exchange for a previous or subsequent counter-favour from the former to their own exclusive advantage. The term *political entrepreneurs* included both aspirants to a political position and *brokers*, i.e., middlemen who mobilized the single client for the candidates using door-to-door strategies. In Sicily, for example, prominent members of the Mafia networks would take on the role of *broker*.

Yet, the situation described by most anthropologists was typical of the so-called *clientele system of the notables*. This was a local elite that would disappear from the political scene during the 1960-1970 decade. Thus it was an outmoded and declining form of patronage. In place of the old notables, full-time professional politicians emerged especially in Euro-Mediterranean countries (Italy, Spain and Greece) and what political scientists call *party clientelism* or *mass clientelism* set in (Weingrod, 1968: p. 377 ff; Belloni, Caciagli, Mattina, 1979: p. 253 ff; D'Amico, 1993: p. 211 ff.). This brought on a substantial change in patronage policies, which moreover has seldom been studied by the anthropology of Mediterranean societies. In fact, the professional politician in his role of party official or his *broker* no longer aimed at obtaining the single client's vote, but rather at controlling entire blocks of votes (Blok, 1974: p. 222). From then on, the role played by the old notables was taken on by the managers of so-called secondary associations, viz. trade unions, co-operatives, youth, professional and sports associations etc.. The management can include both professional politicians who control these electoral *clusters* directly as well as socially influential persons who,

though not directly involved in politics, can tender the electoral potential at their disposal. Contrary to the old clientele system of the notables, the current forms of patronage policies are based mainly on the systematic capture and control of votes obtained by exploiting civil society institutions. However, the personalization of social relationships is essential also in this case.

The main as well as the most pertinent criticism to anthropological researches on patronage in Mediterranean societies is that they produced, perhaps unintentionally, a *deficit theory*. Patronage strategies and policies have been regarded as a *systemic deficiency* or, worse still, as a *sociocultural pathology*. Thus, patronage has been held responsible for weakening the State, for subverting the political system based on democracy, for hindering the construction of a civil society, for corrupting the bureaucratic organization and, in Marxist terms, for undermining class solidarity. In brief, either directly or indirectly through this perspective developed in northern Europe or North America, patronage has been held to be the origin of all political and administrative malfunctions in the public sphere of Mediterranean societies and in particular of southern European ones. At first glance, these interpretations appear to be unexceptionable and may seem likely. However, they provide cursory explanations that reveal an ethnocentric vision oblivious to the social rationale of the actors involved and to the historical context in which the various forms of modern patronage emerged and took root.

Perhaps we ought to reverse the perspective and wonder whether the State's fundamental and repeated failure to monopolize the use of physical force, thus also to guarantee peacemaking within its territory, may have engendered what we may call a *clientelistic reaction*. From this viewpoint, it was the weakness of the State's political and administrative institutions that favoured the rise and development of patronage rather than the other way around. However, national States in the Mediterranean area that rose in high hopes from the ashes of centuries-old misgovernment regimes, greedy foreign rulers and rapacious colonial dominations lacked the ability, in turn, to be acknowledged as legitimate by their own citizens due precisely to their permanent institutional shortcomings. Given these circumstances, the emergence of societies

guided by the principle that the only reliable form of trust is a personalized one, i.e., the only one that can counter the activities of a State that neither protects nor respects its citizens, is not surprising. These are not out-and-out *low trust societies* as Francis Fukuyama thinks (Fukuyama, 1995), but rather *public distrust societies* in which patronage becomes a rational strategy to neutralize or influence to one's own advantage the State's activity that most times is regarded as unfair and detrimental.

With this reversed perspective, patronage becomes a fitting and rational strategy employed to remedy the State's failure or shortcomings. It can no longer be regarded as a set of social practices, nor as a hallmark of sociocultural backwardness or stagnation, nor as the expression of a parasitic attitude, nor, worse still, as the sign of a mentality that lacks public spirit. As Alessandro Pizzorno aptly points up, one cannot expect people to believe in the State's legitimacy, to comply with the proper governance of its institutions, to have a positive attitude towards politics, to organize themselves in civil society organizations and thus to forgo patronage practices, when it stands to reason that it would be pointless (Pizzorno, 1976: p. 243). This is neither fatalism nor exotic immobilism, nor organizational inefficiency, but simply a rational choice within the context of a permanent *failing statehood* in which the State's lawfulness falls short of the requisite legitimacy, i.e., the citizen's recognition and thus their trust.

Clearly we have to avoid viewing the patronage system and its specific practices -which disconcert anthropologists since willingly or not they have been brought up to believe in the universality of the values of enlightenment, *civitas* and citizenship- as a nearly exclusive peculiarity characterizing practically all Mediterranean societies. This would truly mean exotizing patronage and disregarding that to varying degrees it can be found in virtually all societies including western-world ones that too often are hastily extolled as the most civilized, thus free from such crude practices.

Indeed, thanks to a broader anthropological outlook we can aim at a fresh assessment of researches on patronage in Mediterranean societies. Under this aspect, anthropological researches on political practices in this part of the world have been very useful since they stimulated research in other sociocultural contexts. The Fall of the Berlin Wall and

the discovery of Eastern Europe's postsocialist societies by social sciences and anthropology provided that so to speak paradigmatic evidence that the patronage practices and networks first observed in the Mediterranean region and analyzed with an anthropological approach showed unmistakable similarities with analogous action strategies and forms of social organization clearly visible in the various post-socialist scenarios. Moreover, the diffusion of these social facts showed on the hand that the Mediterranean could not be reduced to a *culture area*, and on the other that there were other social configurations in which a corresponding personalization of social relationships was crucial in a *failing statehood* context (Georgiev, 2008; Giordano, 2002; Giordano, 2007). This provided an opportunity to observe, in line with researches on Mediterranean societies, that the activity of the state (pre-socialist, socialist and often also post-socialist) was considered inadequate, detrimental or even unfair and practically lacking any legitimacy by most citizens. Therefore, given this situation of deep-seated, yet justified mistrust in public institutions, patronage was a possible and legitimate strategy (along with others, such as corruption) to neutralize a State that often treated its own citizens like subjects.

C) History and the past in the present

Aside from the initial monographs on villages in which the historical dimension is virtually non-existent, quite soon the anthropology of Mediterranean societies had to face the fact that this ahistorical perspective was rather naïve and above all inadequate in terms of theoretical and empirical approach since it led not only to an exotizing vision of the societies in question but also to an extremely reductive one. The absence of history significantly hindered an adequate understanding of the present giving rise in particular to interpretations warped by serious oversimplifications with the consequent construction of stereotypes. As previously mentioned however, we can observe that Carmelo Lisón Tolosana (Lisón-Tolosana, 1966), Anton Blok (Blok, 1974) and later John Davis in particular (Davis, 1977: p. 239 ff; David, 1982: p. 291 ff) along with other authors (Schneider & Schneider, 1976; Gilmore, 1980), would highlight the shortcomings of a purely synchronic perspective and would stress the importance of a diachronic analysis, thus on the significance of past history to explain the present of

Mediterranean societies. Therefore, the need to introduce history in anthropology was felt soon. Under this aspect, probably the most revealing study is Caroline White's, in which she aimed to show how two neighbouring towns in south-central Italy, which at the time of the research were also economically similar, developed two different if not indeed opposite *political cultures* due precisely to two parallel but fundamentally different histories (White, 1980). Through her field research the author had noticed a predominance of vertical and asymmetrical patronage relationships in *Trasacco* while in *Lugo de' Marsi* socially equal individuals interacted within more horizontal and symmetrical cooperative structures. According to the author, the different pasts of these two communities needed to be taken into account in order to explain this apparently baffling circumstance. This historically-determined difference lay mainly in the fact that for centuries the land distribution had been more unequal in the former community than in the latter. Thus for centuries the inhabitants of *Trasacco* had been more vulnerable and dependent on feudal lords and agrarian capitalists than those of *Lugo,* therefore the former were more inclined to accept patronage relationships than the latter.

As this further example shows, these researchers' concept of history, though no longer event-based and albeit taking into account long-term conjunctures, is still strongly biased by the principle of causality. Consequently, the relationship between past and present is explained in a rather mechanical and decontextualised way. In fact, there is an attempt to determine past and present *facts, circumstances and objective processes* and simply correlate them via a direct or nearly automatic cause and effect relationship.

To round off this rather fruitful way of conceiving history's role, we need to highlight the importance of an *interpretative turning-point* in the analysis of Mediterranean societies, until now seldom employed, which could better thematise, from an hermeneutical viewpoint, the meaning given by the actors themselves to their past in the present. Therefore, the aim is not only to determine *objective events*, but mainly to observe how they are perceived by those who are touched by these events. When Paul Ricoeur talks about the *efficiency* of history, he is referring specifically to that close connection between the *interpreting present* and the *interpreted past* (Ricoeur, 1985: vol. 3, p. 320). In order to move beyond a too positivistic notion of history we must be

prepared to examine the *spaces of experience* as well as the *horizons of expectation* of a given society as they are constructed and perceived by its members (Koselleck, 1979: p. 349 ff). Therefore, as Jean Pouillon upholds, history is composed of all the versions that the members of a present-day collectivity regard as having actually occurred (Pouillon, 1975). Accordingly, all the various revisions of a social aggregation's collective memory merge with the official or established version of the past. Thus, history means above all reviewing past events, including also their manipulation and misrepresentation. To exemplify the above we can mention the bandit Salvatore Giuliano in Sicily. Current official history states that he was an outlaw in conflict with the State. According to the memory of Montelepre's inhabitants, his native town, to this day Giuliano is still a hero worthy of commemorations and celebrations. For the inhabitants of Piana degli Albanesi, instead, he remains a bloodthirsty murderer because he led the Portella della Ginestra massacre in which peasants of this town were killed. If we were to analyze the historical interpretations from a political viewpoint we would find further contrasting versions regarding this figure (Giordano, 1992: p. 440 ff.).

The intention of the latter somewhat abstract paragraph is to highlight the significance of moving beyond the dimension of history as a universal *objective truth,* especially in the context of anthropological studies on the Mediterranean area where societies or segments thereof have often been and to some extent still are violently antagonistic. Concurrently, reconstructing the plurality of history and its *efficiency* in the present by means of interpretative analyses is essential.

Conclusions: the Mediterranean space - from *culture area* to *historical region*?

Perhaps the most incisive and probably also the most legitimate criticism is the one that held the anthropology of Mediterranean societies responsible for pigeonholing these societies into a flat, uniform and thus homogeneous *culture area* (Llobera, 1986: p. 33). There has been an effort to substantiate the existence of artificial sociocultural constants, invariably present in the entire Mediterranean space, mainly through the theme of honour and, to a lesser extent, the one of patronage (Gilmore, 1987; Bromberger, Durand, 2001: p. 742). Given these observations, it may seem that

anthropologists of Mediterranean societies have put forward only simplistic and reductionist stereotypes. So, should we forgo this type of anthropology? In point of fact, I don't think so.

In the first place, we need to stress that the idea of dividing the Mediterranean space into separate and probably more homogenous zones, as Llobera and Pina-Cabral once suggested, seems hardly productive (Llobera, 1987: p. 101 ff; Pina-Cabral, 1989: 399 ff). Maybe this course of action could actually enhance the comparative approach, but this division would also imply a downscale and would be tantamount to creating a series of just as artificial and not less stereotyped *culture areas*.

Instead, building on the notion of *historical region* (Giordano, 2001: p. 4918 ff) and considering the Mediterranean space in these terms would be fruitful. The Mediterranean space cannot be described so much as a *clearly-defined unit* (Braudel, 1985: p. 10) as much as a mosaic of societies and cultures that are very different from each other yet that for millennia have had to coexist with each other among ongoing contacts and clashes. Despite countless conflicts and constant tensions, they influenced each other and mingled with the aid of the sea as well. This brings these societies to define themselves and define others through a recurrent complementary relationship with their neighbours. Consequently, identifications and auto-comprehensions are the outcome of a permanent, long-term, mirror effect (Bromberger, Durand, 2001: p. 746; Brubaker, Cooper: 2000: p. 1 ff).

However, any attempt to map out clear-cut, unchangeable and thus static borders would be specious because the Mediterranean space in terms of *historical region* does not coincide with the limited geographical area. In fact, contacts with other neighbouring societies and their influence were not sporadic. As such, considering this *historical region* as a discrete and closed entity would be a misconception (Davis, 1977: p. 11). Besides this so to speak *Mediterranean core* that includes coastal peninsulas and the islands, there are a variety of very fluid transitory zones with shifting borders (Braudel, 1982: vol. 1, p. 21, p. 155 ff). Therefore, we can speak of *interpenetrations* between the Mediterranean space and the other more or less neighbouring historical regions.

This *historical region* notion would prevent anthropology from underestimating the importance of the single *spaces of experience*, rooted in the past but active in the present, which, despite shared reference points, should never be considered identical. As Bromberger and Durand keenly comment, it is not so much the similarities as much as the historically-shaped differences that determine a system in the Mediterranean space (Bromberger, Durand, 2001: p. 743). This perspective would allow the anthropology of Mediterranean societies to avoid the tendency to seek impossible uniformities and to insist instead on the *cognate differences*, or better yet, paraphrasing Ludwig Wittgenstein, on the *family resemblances* between societies (Wittgenstein, 1958: par. 66-67; Albera, Blok, 2001: p. 22 ff.; Bromberger, Durand, 2001: p. 743).

This way of conceiving the Mediterranean space also allows to forgo the idea of uniqueness specific to this part of the world and begin to observe, interpret and compare the *family resemblances* with those of other *historical regions* (such as Eastern Europe, the Middle East, the Caucasus etc.) where the social representations of honour or patronage practices, for example, play a major role in several social fields of these societies.

Finally, the idea of the Mediterranean space as an *historical region* spanning three continents allows us to highlight the fluidity of Europe's borders. Another strong point is that it will bring into question certain increasingly widespread Eurocentric visions concerning both the external boundaries of the Old Continent and its internal demarcations.

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