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Geography, pluriverse and ‘Southern Thought’: engaging with decoloniality from the Mediterranean

Abstract: *This paper analyses the notion of Mediterranean ‘Southern Thought’ discussed by Italian philosopher Franco Cassano (1943-2021), through the lenses of critical geographical and geopolitical scholarship, drawing upon the concept of ‘costal indentation’ as addressed by one of its main interpreters, anarchist geographer Elisée Reclus (1830-1905). Southern Thought is increasingly associated with decolonial and post-development approaches, especially with notions such as degrowth, and the ‘pluriverse’. It is first and foremost understood as an anti-dogmatic philosophy that opposes all fanaticisms and narrow (political, cultural or ethnic) chauvinisms, including the dogmas of development, market, speed and productivity coming from (neo)colonial ‘Norths’ to foster pluralism and mutual listening. Connecting and putting into dialogue different strands of scholarship in critical geopolitics and decoloniality, I first contend that Southern Thought can help enlarging geographical notions of plural Souths to avoid essentialising any single notion of ‘Global South’, or ‘Southern Theory’, which would imply the risk of reproducing new dogmatisms. Then, I argue that Southern Thought can engage productively with geography, and especially with scholarship in critical geopolitics addressing global crises such as the migrant and refugees one, in learning from these plural ‘Souths’ (including Southern Europe and the Mediterranean) to find alternative models to that of the nation-state based on territorial sovereignty and bound to territorial ‘traps’.*

Keywords: Pluriverse; Coastal Indentation; Mediterraneism; Anti-dogmatic Thought; Other Territorialities

This article addresses matters of pluriverse, ‘Southern Thought’ and Mediterranean decoloniality in connection with critical geographies and geopolitics, by discussing works of Italian philosopher Franco Cassano (1943-2021), eventually his notion of *Pensiero Meridiano* (hereafter Southern Thought) based on Mediterranean intellectual traditions. Hitherto substantially ignored by geographical scholarship with few exceptions (Giaccaria and Minca 2011), Southern Thought has

likewise received little attention outside Italy, with the exception of literature on translation studies (Ferme 2021; Bouchard 2008), and decolonial scholarship on degrowth and the pluriverse (Kallis, Varvarousis and Petridis 2022; Romano 2019), although the association between degrowth and Southern Thought is not always straightforward, as I discuss below.

Trained as a philosopher, Cassano was as a professor of sociology at the University of Bari and a leftist activist who served in the Italian Parliament for the Democratic Party from 2013 to 2018. He was well known as a popular writer, given that books such as *Pensiero Meridiano* had a great success in Italy, well beyond academic publics, and Cassano could work with the most renowned Italian publishing houses such as Laterza and Feltrinelli. In Italy, Cassano's name is variously associated to critical 'meridionalist' thought. He contributed to spread ideas that knowledge should be 'dialogue rather than dogma' (Frediani and Gallo 2011, 7), through the example of the Mediterranean, a sea whose history was characterised by a 'plurality of voices' that, for Cassano, renders impossible 'any *reductio ad unum*' (Frediani and Gallo 2011, 8) or arbitrary appropriation of its shared identities.¹

In this paper, I read for the first time Cassano's work through the lenses of alternative traditions in political geography, drawing on the principle known as *articulation littorale* (Lefort 1994) by early anarchist geographer Elisée Reclus (1830-1905), a notion that I translate here as 'coastal indentation'. Little-known in current scholarship, this 'old' geographical theory can be key, today, for connecting decolonial ideas of pluriversal Mediterranean with geographical research agendas. My argument is twofold. First, in connection with recent notions of 'pluriverse', Cassano's Southern Thought can be effective in enlarging, pluralizing and de-essentializing geographical notions of Souths/Global South (Sparke 2007), challenging Manichean divisions between a single North and a single South. This allows understanding the complex positions from which cultures and political ideas speak to each other, contributing to further elaborate on the 'pluriverse' as a world in which many worlds can fit (Carrillo Trueba 2006; De la Cadena and Blaser 2018; Escobar

¹ All quotes from texts in Italian and French have been translated by the author.

2018; Kothari et al. 2019). Thus, grounding geographical epistemologies and political praxes on plurality, listening and connectedness undermines all kinds of fundamentalism and chauvinism, responding to current scholarly claims for both decolonising geography (Esson et al. 2017; Jazeel 2019) and fostering ‘defiant scholarship’ understood as: ‘The pursuit of scholarly activity in the name of epistemic disobedience and epistemic justice’ (Daley and Murrey 2022, 166; Mignolo 2011).

Second, connecting different strands of scholarship and extending former geographical calls to reconsider a ‘Mediterranean alternative’ (Giaccaria and Minca 2011; Giaccaria and Paradiso 2012), I show the relevance of Southern Thought and decolonial pluriverse for critical geographies and geopolitics, and vice-versa. I especially contend that their conversation can produce alternative insights to think social and political spatial relations beyond the dominant model of the nation-state based on the principle of territorial sovereignty. This dominant model is classically questioned by geopolitical scholarship on the ‘territorial trap’ (Agnew 1994 and 2010), post-statist geographies (Ince and Barrera de la Torre, 2016), and more recent literature on bordering, political asylum and migration, often addressing cases in the Mediterranean or around the Mediterranean (Agamben 2000; Casaglia et al. 2020; Casas Cortes et al. 2015; Minca 2019). Below, I discuss how ideas that bounded territory is intrinsically linked to political sovereignty and state violence (Agnew 2021; Elden 2009 and 2013; Weima and Minca 2022) can be considered as part of what Cassano calls the double ‘fundamentalism of land and sea’ (Bouchard and Ferme 2012, xix), the former representing excluding territorial sovereignties, the latter representing utilitarian individualism and colonialism. Against that, coastal indentation and Southern Thought provide further tools to avoid territorial traps.

Critical literature on ‘Southern theory’ has already warned against the danger of creating new dogmatisms, conformisms and essentialisms pretending to unproblematically build any ‘pure’ theory ‘from the South’ which is completely unconnected with ‘Northern’ ideas. Also these latter should not be taken for granted as such, as it is well explained by authors dealing with South-South relations (Fiddian-Qasmiyeh and Daley, 2018). Some scholars also note how, even within

decolonial literatures, definitions of ‘Southern theory’ remain often limited to a geographical South of the World that broadly corresponds to what was formerly called the Third World (Ratele et al. 2021). This scholarship questions the ‘invention of the Global South’ (Ndlovu-Gatsheni and Tafira 2018, 127), stressing contradictions such as ‘the continued predominance of the English language’ (Murrey 2018, 67) in much of so-called ‘Southern theory’.

Furthermore, scholarship on peripheral spacetimes and borderlands suggests the complexity and plurality of widespread notions of rebel seas and oceans, such as Black Atlantic, Black Pacific and their irreducible hydras of social subversion (Featherstone 2021; Gilroy 1993; Linebaugh and Rediker 2000; Shilliam 2016), whose epistemological and political subversive potentialities resist any simplification or essentialisation. In this vein, authors such as Sharad Chari discuss how these spaces challenge terracentric certitudes about territorial sovereignty as well as fixed and simple belongings. Drawing upon Edouard Glissant’s notion of sea errantry understood as ‘a global call for intellectual marronage’ (Chari 2019, 193) referred to transoceanic spaces rather than to one sea or ocean, Chari addresses examples of the unpredictable agency of subaltern oceans in shaping terrestrial spaces and social relations (Chari 2021).

Furthermore, the idea of considering the complexity of different positions to foster dialogues rather than to simply acknowledge ‘difference’ has been discussed by interdisciplinary scholarship about de-essentialising and de-bounding notions of alterity to avoid any standardised reproduction of the ‘Other’. This includes anthropological works by authors such as David Graeber, who warned about the dangers of ‘radical alterity’ as a possible projection of the observer’s own wishes to locate ‘purity’ in other, eventually indigenous cultures. For Graeber, the ‘ontological turn’ in anthropology should not become absolute relativism, which would create a new universalistic narration (Graeber 2015). Similarly, other anthropologists stress the need to keep differences in contextual and critical conversations (Bessire and Bond 2014).

From a geopolitical standpoint, authors such as Ian Klinke criticise the chronopolitics that are widely released by popular geopolitics, still relying on Western temporalities, by arguing that, ‘like

space, time does not exist meaningfully outside narrative' (Klinke 2013 676). This recalls Cassano's claims on the different temporalities of Southern Thought, challenging commonplaces which pretend that Souths are: 'A not-yet ... The fundamental theoretical move is therefore to upset the hierarchy implicit in this temporal gap through a radical subversion of perspectives' (Cassano 2012, xxxv). As I discuss below, Cassano's idea of Mediterranean *nostos*, the eternal coming back associated with circular time, can productively converse with scholarship questioning colonial ideas of universal and shared time (Rifkin 2017), while avoiding the essentialisation of the Other.

In my reading of Cassano's work, the newest aspect is a specific emphasis on the decolonial potentialities of Mediterranean histories, ideas and alternative geographical traditions in finding intellectual instruments to avoid recreating new dogmatisms and/or arbitrary (physical or theoretical) lines between Norths and Souths. While critical scholarship has already noted how Europe also contains complex margins and peripheries (Dainotto 2007), Southern Thought is an indispensable tool to avoid recreating new nationalisms and frontiers, highlighting the potentiality of hybrid (Mediterranean) sea/land spaces to ontologically and geopolitically challenge the powerfulness of states and continents.

Before continuing this discussion, it is worth clarifying what are the main difficulties in translating Cassano's Italian terminology for English-speaking readerships. Such clarifications should always be done as a key decolonial exercise in addressing texts that were not written in the dominant language of international scholarship (i.e. English) to avoid taking translations for granted, overlooking the need of critical reflections on linguistic difference. These were addressed by Norma Bouchard and Valerio Ferme, who realised the English translation of Cassano's essays on the Mediterranean (Cassano 2012). According to Ferme, pluriversalizing language is essential for pluriversalizing thinking: the need for transposing Cassano's ideas in the language in which the notions that he challenged are mainly expressed, such as the terminology of market, capitalism and neoliberalism, rendered all translators' decisions political rather than technical choices. Assuming Cassano's geopolitical coordinates such as 'North-West' and 'South-East' (Ferme 2021, 290), Southern Thought is meant to be a model for resisting 'Northern and Western

capitalism and its imperial desire to transform every subaltern culture into a hub for development' (Ferme 2021, 291). Therefore, the dilemma was on how to engage productively with the language that most expressed the Western concepts that the author criticised.

The translators' choice was to show their agency and visibility, eventually under the form of 'conspiring with the author' (Ferme 2021, 292) by being 'agents of subversion ... at the expenses of the target language system' (Ferme 2021, 293). To this end, they chose to render certain terms in different ways than their most obvious literary translation. For instance, they translated *Meridiano* as 'Southern' to partially repair the impossibility of finding an English term that equated the polysemy of *Meridiano* as related to *Mezzogiorno* (midday, but also south). In this vein, 'Southern Thought' results to be more understandable for Anglo-American readers in the context of a discourse affirming the plurality of the possible 'Souths'. The translators also decided to mobilise plural terms to translate Cassano's notions such as *misura* and *dismisura*, arguing that they are 'non univocal, but polyvalent' (Ferme 2021, 296). Generally translated as 'moderation' by Bouchard and Ferme (as I do in this paper as well), *misura* broadly indicates a dialectic equilibrium in which opposed arguments of a discussion do not exclude mutually, avoiding the delegitimization of the adversary.

Conversely, *dismisura* (lack of moderation) indicates all the dogmatisms and fundamentalisms that are expressed by the 'single thought' of whoever pretends to bring a universal truth, being unavailable to listen to other positions. For Ferme, assuming ideas of polysemy and words' plurality means applying to language the same anti-dogmatic approach of Cassano. That is, opposing 'those fundamentalisms related to language usage' (Ferme 2021, 296), which tend to crush linguistic variety. To remain faithful to Cassano's pluriversalism, Bouchard and Ferme tried to create 'an equipollent linguistic *pluriversum*' (Ferme 2021, 297). In this paper, I join their approach by additionally drawing upon a pluriverse of disciplines that includes geography and geopolitics, consistently with Cassano's idea of 'disciplinary *sconfinamento* or trespassing' (Bouchard and Ferme 2012, x) across the boundaries of human and social sciences.

Bouchard highlights how Cassano's Mediterranean: 'Is both a geographical entity [and] a metaphor for the Global South(s)', providing a heterogeneous list of plural Souths mentioned by Cassano, which accounts for the plurality of perspectives that Cassano considered in seeking dialogue with decolonial scholarship worldwide: 'The Caribbean of Edouard Glissant and the Asia of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Ranajit Guha, Gyan Prakash, Amartya Sen, and Dipesh Chakrabarty; the Latin America of Enrique Dussel, Walter Mignolo, Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Anibal Quijano; the Northern and the Sub-Saharan Africa of Mohammed Arkoun, Nelson Mandela, Wole Soyinka, Aminata Traoré, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi wa Thiong'o' (Bouchard 2008, 307). Thus, it can be said that, in relation to other authors addressing the plurality of Mediterranean voices (Matvejević 1999; Chambers 2008), Cassano went significantly further in engaging with international decolonial strands.

In the first part, I situate Southern Thought in the context of the critical geographical tradition of 'coastal indentation'. In the second part, I discuss current critical geopolitics criticising the principle of territorial sovereignty (Agnew 2021; Minca 2019) as related to the territorial 'fundamentalisms' denounced by Cassano. In the third part, I address key Southern Thought ideas on Mediterranean intellectual traditions as antidotes to 'totalitarian forms of belonging, such as ethnicity, culture, language, and especially place' (Bouchard and Ferme 2012, xiv), stressing their connections with decolonial scholarship on the pluriverse to further engage with concerns of critical geographies and geopolitics.

The origins: costal indentation and the anarchist Mediterranean

The Mediterranean as a space of connectivity is especially addressed by works of Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell. In *Corrupting Sea* (2000), the two historians evoke the metaphor of Plato who considered the sea as 'corrupting' because it brought foreign people and practices allegedly threatening some Greek purity. They discuss how paradoxical are the difficulties that human scientists still have in taking distance from statist and continental readings that fail to account for a Mediterranean wholeness with few exceptions such as: 'Archaeologists of the Bronze Age and historians or archaeologists of Greece and Rome' (Horden and Purcell 2000, 15), or what they

consider as an unequalled classic of geo-history—Braudel’s *La Méditerranée*. Dating back to ‘Hesiod’s *Works and Days* at the end of the eighth century BC’ (Horden and Purcell 2020, 15), their idea of a Mediterranean ‘maritime connectivity’ explicitly questions bordering practices by drawing upon the tradition of ancient Mediterranean journeys taking the form of the ‘periplus’. Like Cassano, Horden and Purcell consider the Mediterranean as a sea of differences, whose specificity should not be understood as exceptionalism, to keep open the dialogue with other spaces. More recently, critical scholarship variously discussed how environmental features matter to geopolitical analyses. It is the case with works on wet and more-than wet ontologies, questioning terra-centric models in geopolitical approaches (Steinbeg 2022; Peters and Steinberg 2019) and with the ‘watershed model’ discussed by Paulina Ochoa Espejo (2020) discussing how water basins are geographical objects that provide forms of connectivity for human/natural geographical spaces.

Yet, after reading the aforementioned literature on borders and on Mediterranean worlds (including by Cassano), anybody who worked on the history of nineteenth century geography may be struck by an absence. For instance, although Cassano deeply engaged with geographical and geopolitical concepts and with classical thinkers on Mediterranean matters, from Albert Camus and Paul Valéry to Félix Guattari and Gilles Deleuze, he did not reference explicitly the idea of ‘coastal indentation’ that characterised works of geographers such as Carl Ritter, Alexander von Humboldt, Elisée Reclus and more broadly the French school of *Géographie humaine* (Lefort 1994; Ferretti 2014). While alternative geographical traditions are understandably little-known among scholars in other disciplines, I contend that the principle of coastal indentation as especially elaborated by Reclus predates and potentially nourishes some key features of Cassano’s ‘Southern Thought’ and of what has been called Mediterraneism (Romano 2019) by Onofrio Romano in the *Post-development Dictionary* dedicated to the notion of pluriverse, which other authors define Militant Mediterraneism (Giaccaria and Minca 2011).

Often confused with Eurocentrism as it is periodically evoked under various names in relation to some Europe’s historical ‘success’ (Diamond 1997; Cosandey 2007), coastal indentation needs to

be recast in the intellectual context of anarchist geographies (Ferretti 2014; Springer 2021), including one of the main inspirations of Cassano's Southern Thought, that is Albert Camus's 'Pensée du Midi' (Southern Thought as well). As demonstrated by Philippe Pelletier, Camus's works owed much to Reclus's ideas of the Mediterranean as a sea historically serving connections and mixing cultures rather than determining rigid distinctions among them. These ideas served Reclus's and Camus's criticisms of both colonialism and opposed nationalisms in the Algerian affair, that the two men expressed in the respective epochs – the late nineteenth century for Reclus, the heated time of the Algeria War (1954-1962) for Camus (Pelletier 2015).

In the nineteenth century, geographers such as Ritter and Reclus rediscovered works of ancient geographer Strabo, considering this latter's notion of coastal indentation as the model of a dynamic relation between history and geography, consistently with their own ideas of *Naturphilosophie*, that is, consubstantiality and mutual interdependence of what is conventionally called 'nature' and 'humankind' (Tang 2008; Nicolas-Obadia 1974). Strabo argued that the physical conformation of Europe allowed the cohabitation of different peoples with beneficial outcomes for 'peace' (Strabon 1969, 5, 26). Yet, Strabo's political aim as a Greek supporter of the Roman Empire was to endorse *Pax Romana*, and his analysis can be still charged with 'determinism' as it matched commonplaces of Roman culture associating the plains (*Ager*) with 'civilisation' and considering the mountains (*Saltus*) as the place of 'warriors'. Conversely, both Ritter and Reclus emphasized the mutual interplay of natural and historical circumstances rather than legitimating colonial ideas of Europe's alleged 'natural advantages'.

Reclus proposed his own reading of Strabo's principles. Unlike Saint-Simonist thinkers that were influential in his day such as Michel Chevalier, who defined the Mediterranean as the bridge between the 'East' and the 'West' (Chevalier 1832), Reclus did not recognize the categories of East and West that were used by European diplomacy (Said 1978). Instead, the anarchist geographer stressed the similarities of the different cultures that historically gravitated around the unifying basin of the Mediterranean Sea, using definitions such as 'East' and 'West' only in historical sense, related a pre-1492 map of Eurasia, and applying the adjective 'Eastern' only to

Indian and Chinese civilisations (Reclus 1894). While acknowledging the geopolitical advantages that coastal indentation could imply for Greek power in the Ancient Mediterranean, Reclus insisted on the idea that, facilitating early navigation, archipelagos and short straits favoured civilisational cross-breeding and mutual understanding (Deprest 2002).

Drawing upon works on ‘Fluvial Civilisations’ by his fellow anarchist geographer Léon Metchnikoff (1838-1888), Reclus argued that, if Greek philosophy became prominent, it was not due to any local ‘genius’, but to the frequency and quality of the contacts between Greece and the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean sea, where early African and Asian civilisations were located, in Egypt and Mesopotamia (Metchnikoff 1889). To connect Greek philosophy and the Mediterranean geographical setup in which it was developed, Reclus used a telling physiological metaphor. ‘Seeing the numerous islands of the Aegean Sea, the fringes of peninsulas that characterise it and the big peninsulas such as Peloponnese, Italy, and Spain, one spontaneously compares these with the brain circuits in which human thought is elaborated’ (Reclus 1876, 47). This metaphor is key to understand Reclus’s concept of coastal indentation as geographical ground for cultural cross-pollination.

Also, Reclus highlighted the geopolitical advantages that could be provided by terrains favouring at the same time trade routes and military defence. To this end, he made the example of Peloponnese, clarifying that these advantages were not ‘absolute’, but related to the techniques of certain historical periods. ‘Reunited with the Greek hinterland by a simple peduncle of land and defended at the entrance by a double transversal bastion of mountains, the island of Pelops had to become the homeland of independent peoples, at a time when the obstacles of the ground stopped the armies. The isthmus remained open for trade, but closed to invasions’ (Reclus 1876, 91). Significantly, Reclus defined the Peloponnese as both a ‘peninsula’ and an ‘island’. To his mind, the Mediterranean concentration of narrow straits and short isthmuses blurred rigid topological distinctions between these two geographical objects.

These notions anticipated ideas that were expressed one century later by two of Cassano's main references, namely Deleuze and Guattari, who equally stressed the impact that the Mediterranean system of islands and peninsulas had in the development of Greek thought and politics. 'It can be said that Greece has a fractal structure, given how close each point of the peninsula is to the sea and how extensive the coasts are. The Aegean peoples, the cities of Ancient Greece and especially Athens are not the earliest merchant cities; however, they are the first to be enough close, and at the same time enough far, from the archaic eastern empires to take advantage of them without following their model' (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 102). Cassano similarly argued that: 'There exists a structural homology between the geographic configuration of Greece (and in particular the relationship between land and sea) and its culture ... The sea divides, but at the same time offers an easier avenue of communication than the mountains' (Cassano 2012, 16-17). Deleuze's and Guattari's definition of geo-philosophy is clearly rooted in the ancient Mediterranean, allowing for a comparison between the networked structure of Mediterranean peripluses and the Deleuzian notion of 'rhizome', in which there is no centre or hierarchic structure (Deleuze and Guattari 1987).

According to the two French authors: 'Philosophy is a geo-philosophy, just as history, according to Braudel, is a geo-history. Why was philosophy born in Greece at that particular moment? It is the same question that Braudel asks about capitalism ... Geography is not limited to provide a matter and variable places to history; it is not only physical or human, it is always mental, like landscape. [It allows following] the escape lines that cross the Greek world through the Mediterranean' (Deleuze and Guattari 1996, 111). The direct and indirect influences of Reclus's geography on the 'geo-history' that was elaborated by *Annales* historians such as Lucien Febvre and Fernand Braudel have been addressed by geographical scholarship (Ferretti 2015). However, to fully grasp the political value of such relations between land, sea and philosophy for Southern Thought, one needs to come back again to Reclus, despite his works were not directly referenced by Deleuze—which raises matters that there is no space to address in this paper.

For Reclus, Greek philosophy did not represent a marker of European centrality, as he rather associated it to ideas of internationalism and cosmopolitanism. The anarchist geographer argued

that coastal indentation had made Greek people: ‘A people of sailors, of “amphibians” as Strabo said, always attracted by journeys ... The true Greece, that of arts, of sciences and of republican autonomies, would very soon exceed her cradle’ (Reclus 1876, 56). Reclus compared this history of migrations to the diasporic trajectories of progressive ideas inspired by Greek philosophy, which only germinated: ‘Much later. One can say that it was in exile that Greece redacted the testament of her centuries, and her teaching for future people’ (Reclus 1902). According to Reclus, the true continuation of Greek philosophy was represented by anarchism and internationalist socialism. ‘The principle of the great human fraternity was never proclaimed more clearly, strongly and eloquently than by Greek thinkers: ... The Hellenes affirmed most highly the principle of what two thousand years after them was called “The International”. Democritus was a “citizen of the world” and Socrates ... relatedly declared that his homeland was “the whole earth”’ (Reclus 1902). At Reclus’s time, the rediscovery of Greek thought and ancient Mediterranean myths was widespread among anarchist intellectuals and artists (Ferretti 2019), also because the ancient Mediterranean provided models of secularism and pre-Christian ethics challenging the dogmas of monotheistic religions, a theme that one can likewise find in Cassano’s (and Camus’s) Southern Thought, as I discuss below.

In dealing with Greek intellectual heritages, Reclus was well aware (as also Camus and Cassano would be) of the contradictions that historically existed in the corresponding societies of the ‘classical’ period, often practicing slavery and various levels of social exclusions. Yet, he considered progressive ideas coming from Mediterranean traditions as key inspirations to challenge oppression. It was to Mediterranean cases that the anarchist geographer applied some of his most significant anticolonial commentaries, referred both to ‘internal’ colonialism in Europe and to European ‘external’ colonialism overseas. The first case is exemplified by his commentaries on Greece’s struggles for gaining independence from the Turkish Empire in the nineteenth century, that were inserted in the wider movement of European progressives supporting the anticolonial struggles of Eastern Europe’s ‘nationalities’ against the Empires of Moscow, Wien and Constantinople. Consistently with his ideas that striving for ‘national’ causes could be the occasion to enhance class consciousness, Reclus regretted that the new Greek state had become: ‘A

centralized monarchy [instead] of constituting a federal republic, that would have been fitter to her genius' (Reclus 1876, 77-78). For the anarchist geographer, coastal indentation was closely associated with federalism and municipal autonomies.

As for overseas colonialism, Reclus famously pioneered anticolonial critiques of French rule in Algeria arguing that the 'indigenous' had 'the right to throw us out' (Ferretti 2013). Starting from the Mediterranean, he further generalized that principle. 'This hatred of the slave who revolts against us is right, and proves at least that there is still hope of emancipation. It is natural that the Hindus, Egyptians, Kaffirs and Irishmen hate Englishmen; it is natural that Arabians execrate Europeans. That's justice!' (Reclus 1899). Then, a conceptual understanding of the Mediterranean as a geographical object first serving connections and cosmopolitanism is consistent with the fact that Reclus did not only refuse colonialism, but also narrow nationalisms and chauvinisms, even when associated with anticolonial movements (Pelletier 2015), anticipating Cassano's ideas on the need to 'moderate' opposed fundamentalisms.

After Reclus, a rich geo-historical and geographical scholarship has broadly applied the principle that the Mediterranean played an attractive role, contrasting the very idea of the unity of the (conventionally defined) continents surrounding it. According to the aforementioned Braudel: 'As far as it strongly permeates Southern Europe, the Mediterranean significantly contributed, for its part, to oppose the unity of Europe itself. It attracts the continent and breaks it to its own advantage' (Braudel 2002, 189). More recently, Franco Farinelli has defined a 'Mediterranean' as: 'A unique system of circulation where land and sea routes merge to the point that they become undistinguishable' (Farinelli, 2003, 99). Thus, a long geographical tradition works on the notion that the Mediterranean is both a place, a concept and a relational system, which allows understanding the potentiality of Southern Thought for critical geopolitics and vice versa.

One can now better understand Cassano's definition of Mediterranean ethics as 'multiplicity of standpoints' (Cassano and Fogu 2010, 2), implying that there is an 'element of infidelity that exists in all sea ports, the cities from which one leaves' (Cassano and Fogu 2010, 3), which instils the

germs of doubt and difference in all political and religious dogmas. In this vein, Southern Thought challenges Hegelian dialectics in which the Other needs to remain external and subordinated in relation to the Self and argues of acknowledging difference. Crucially, Cassano contends that: ‘Cultures should not remain close in themselves, they should dialogue to target a universal; but it should be a universal to which all give their contribution, a multi-handed universal’ (Cassano and Fogu 2010, 5). Among the fundamentalisms to reject, Cassano mentions ‘the fundamentalism of Capital’, whose refusal cannot be grounded in other fundamentalisms, ‘including that of progress so dear to Marx’s Manifesto’ (Cassano and Fogu 2010, 5). After the attacks of 9/11, Cassano lamented that the global geopolitical scenarios were seriously deteriorating by the relaunch of ‘the spiral of opposed fundamentalisms’ (Cassano and Fogu 2010, 7), eventually the antagonism of what Cassano called respectively Jihad and McWorld.

This critique of the West is useful to explain how far Southern Thought is from classical Eurocentred and imperial views of the Mediterranean that were mobilised by French and Italian colonialisms rediscovering the Roman Empire (Gambi 1994), and still ground ethnocentric understandings of Ancient Greece’s legacy as an only white and European model, which was contradicted by historical scholarship (Bernal 1987). Cassano explained that his ‘Mediterranean’ is both a place and an ethics of connectedness that can be empathetically applied to a number of different situations. That is: ‘A place in which the North and the West meet the East and the South of the world, and a model for understanding how multiple faiths, cultures and economies can coexist peacefully’ (Cassano 2001, 1). For Cassano, Southern Thought is a way for learning how to avoid ‘epistemological violence’ (Cassano 2001, 6).

Thus, there is a Mediterranean: ‘Wherever people respect others ... wherever they sit down for the pleasure of telling stories ... It could be Rio or Tokyo, San Francisco or Athens: the Mediterranean is wherever one strives to bridge the distance between lands’ (Cassano 2001, 10). It is exactly from Cassano’s commitment to understand the Mediterranean in its original sense of *koiné* and geographical object bridging rather than separating people, that one can start rediscovering the geographical roots of Southern Thought. In this vein, the Mediterranean exactly serves to de-

essentialise ideas of North and South as Cassano considered it as a ‘pluriverse’ that challenges (rather than confirming) European centralities, as I discuss in the next two sections.

Land/sea versus frontiers and ‘territories’: towards Mediterranean critical geopolitics

The first concern that pushed Cassano to write *Pensiero Meridiano* had quite recognizable geopolitical features, that he identified with geographical notions. Namely, it was time for ‘the South’ to restart speaking ‘in the first person’ as in the last centuries another hegemonic civilisation had spoken in its place, that is: ‘The civilization of the world’s North-West, in whose eyes the South is, at best, synonymous with a backward society and a perverse mix of misery, repression, and superstitions. According to this perspective, the South’s only possibility for redemption is to become North, to erase, as quickly as possible, its difference’ (Cassano 2012, xxvii). Matching decolonial scholarship on ‘double modernity’ which discusses how the second wave of colonisation (led by British, French and Dutch empires) from the seventeenth century has inaugurated the domination of Northern Atlantic (Lander 1993), Cassano criticises Huntington’s notion of the *Clash of Civilisations* for breaking again the Mediterranean, which becomes there: ‘One of the cleavage lines that divide and set civilisations against each other’ (Cassano 2012, xxix). For Cassano, alternative models had not only to question the idea of the Mediterranean as a frontier, but also the notion of frontier itself.

According to Romano, Cassano’s Mediterranean is exactly characterised by its role of ‘mediator’ between lands, that the sea separates and connects at the same time. ‘A particular complicity between land and sea is staged here... Land becomes a general metaphor of identity and rootedness. The sea ... becomes a metaphor of emancipation, liberty, escaping from the Self and opening to the Other’ (Romano 2019, 238). While arguing that land without sea may be the place of ‘despotism’, Cassano defines ‘frontier’ as an ambivalent word, implying division but also connection and in-betweenness, given that each frontier implies a contact. ‘The word “frontier” derives from the Latin *frons, frontis*, “front/forehead”. Frontiers are the places where countries and the human beings who inhabit them meet and stay in front of each other. This being in front of each other can mean many things: first of all, looking at the other, learning about him’ (Cassano

2012, 41). Said more plainly: ‘Frontiers unify just as they divide. ... Each perimeter has enormous power: by dividing the space in two, it sets the fundamental rule, it brings together points in space precisely because it divides them’ (Cassano, 2012, 43). There, Cassano criticises traditional geopolitical conceptions that consider every limit as a (potentially militarised) boundary, and anticipates geopolitical scholarship that discusses how, although they are ‘also geographical and ecological facts’, borders remain ‘a point of contact’ (Ochoa Espejo 2020, 16).

Cassano argues that frontiers favour contact even when this occurs clandestinely, like when they are crossed by smugglers and other clandestine travellers, or when the armed people who preside these frontiers exert their privilege of being able to speak to the ‘enemy’. ‘Peace begins when people can go back to *touching each other* at the borders, when *con-tiguity* and *con-tact* are possible. *Con-fine* in fact also means contact, points in common’ (Cassano 2012, 44). Cassano’s arguments partially predated an established literature in alter-geopolitics and geographies of peace (Koopman 2011; McConnell, Megoran and Williams 2014) contesting militarised borders and nationalist sovereignties. For Cassano: ‘Those who build their own national state force others to wish for and fight to build it: it is a true process of dissemination of frontiers. After having exterminated or driven out the others, everyone will have his/her own “state”, the small house whose door is shut on one’s neighbour’ (Cassano 2012, 45). While Cassano lamented that the old internationalist dream of abolishing borders still seems something utopian, his critique to sovereignty speaks exactly to current scholarship interested in migration routes across the Mediterranean and elsewhere (Casas Cortes et al. 2015).

It is the case with Claudio Minca’s idea of a geography that commits to make ‘a revolution of the spatial categories that we have used so far to think and to describe our planet’ (Minca 2019, 10). Minca eventually studied routes of migrants and refugees across the Mediterranean and the Balkans, as well as the barriers, walls and camps that participate in the materialisation of excluding boundaries on these routes. Such obstacles overtly clash with Reclus’s, Camus’s and Cassano’s principles of Mediterranean as synonymous with contact, circulation and exchange. Minca argues that the two global crises of climate and of refugees both expose the limits of contemporary politics

based on nation-states that are provided with linear and continuous boundaries, as well as claims for sovereignty understood as exclusive control of their territories. For Minca, all the responses that have been hitherto provided to these crises failed, exactly because they ‘were produced within the logics of the models that have determined these crises’ (Minca 2019, 11), that is the territory-based nation-state. Therefore, it would be impossible to find a solution without questioning the very principle of linear boundary and territorial sovereignty.

These authors analyse camps as one of the demonstrations that nation-states cannot avoid the ‘state of exception’ that is perennially exposed in ‘exclusionary landscapes’ (Weima and Minca 2022, 263) resulting from the application of ‘sovereign power’ which grounds the ‘inherent violence of encampment’ (Weima and Minca 2019, 271). One can say that this violence is part of the original vice of organising political geographies on sovereign states, that is on territory understood etymologically as ‘terror’—the portion of space in which the violence of political power is exclusively applied. There is a classical literature on the historical formation of territory and on the need for geographers to overtake analyses that are limited to territorialised political formations (Agnew 2010; Elden 2009 and 2013). Recently, John Agnew has discussed how the notion of territory, usually seen ‘in close connection with state sovereignty’, proves to be: ‘More contingent in its significance for political life than much orthodox political practice and most political theory have imagined’ (Agnew 2021, 1). For Agnew, recent cases such as the difficulties around the Brexit process show how, in an interconnected world, the idea of ‘pure’ and all-powerful national sovereignty is simple illusion (Agnew 2020).

Yet, current political affairs are dealt with on the grounds that ‘all terrestrial space is territorialized’ following ‘the spatial ontology of classical geopolitics (e.g. land and sea powers) and its reiteration by writers such as Carl Schmitt’ (Agnew 2021, 2). Today states claim: ‘Absolute control or sovereignty over a population within carefully determined external borders’ (Agnew 2021, 3). The exercise of this power stands at the core of reactionary politics in which the principle of sovereignty is increasingly associated with racism and xenophobia to the profit of so-called populist parties fostering essentialisation of national and ethnic differences (Antonsich 2021), to which the

COVID-19 pandemic offered new pretexts in their bid for closing borders and filtering people (Casaglia et al. 2020). Yet, for Minca, neither the ‘security paradigm’ nor the ‘humanitarian’ one question the notion of bounded national state: what we need is new spatial ontologies which allow thinking the political organization of space in different ways (Minca 2019). As I discuss below, Southern Thought provides insights for this ‘geographical revolution’ that geographers should not neglect.

Thinking spaces of plural Souths

The circularity of ‘return’ as an alternative to linear times and boundaries

The capacity of bridging rather than confining peoples and spaces that Cassano considers to be intrinsic to Mediterranean traditions led Greek philosophers to create the notion of *dissoi logoi*, that is the coexistence of ‘contradictory discourses’ in which interlocutors should avoid the arrogance of considering their own arguments as superior to those of the others, as well as the pretention of destroying the others’ positions. For Cassano, the capacity of including and listening to the Other is associated with: ‘Clashing gods, with the abundance of unexpected outcomes that originates in every act; the ability to handle major conflicts among equally justified perspectives’ (Cassano 2012, 20). This means the rejection of universalisms which, in their pretention to impose unique models, only end to divide people, hence Cassano’s idea of *misura*, or moderation.

Moderation exactly means that opposed discourses can coexist without renouncing to the strengths of the respective positions. This inspires Cassano’s claims against all forms of ‘single thought’, eventually the dogmas of capitalist markets, which erase the differences and the plurality of the Souths to embrace the univocal logic of Northern-driven development. The idea that the proximity of land and sea can counterbalance the ‘lack of moderation’ of every ‘single thought’ precisely recalls Reclus’s arguments on costal indentation. As noted above, Mediterranean regions such as Southern Greece, where ‘no land is further than 60 kilometres from the sea’ (Cassano 2012, 17), were historically exposed to all kinds of cultural cross-pollination, which favoured at the same time openness to contacts and the possibility of defending local and municipal autonomies.

As a practical example inspired by Deleuze and Guattari's works, Cassano mentions the favourable and cosmopolite environment that philosophers coming from different places found quite everywhere in Ancient Greece. 'Philosophers were foreigners who were honoured for their knowledge and found partnership, friendship, and exchange of opinions. This is what Greece is about, even more than philosophy' (Cassano 2012, 20). Valuing contrasting ideas and welcoming foreign people appear thus early steps to oppose closed boundaries and preconceived intolerance.

Plurality and moderation also relate to the aforementioned idea of 'clashing gods', that is the secularity of Greek and Mediterranean cultures whose approach to the sacred belongs rather to mythology than to theology. There, personified divine entities did not express any principle of absolute power or almighty divinity but rather what French poet Paul Valéry defined 'the calm of the gods' (Valéry 2007, 132) in his famous *Cimetière marin*. On this point, works of the aforementioned Camus first inspired Cassano's idea of Mediterranean secularism. Active in the central decades of the twentieth century as a nonconformist activist, non-aligned with the big ideologies dominating its time, being these Stalinism, Nazi-Fascism or Liberal Democracy, Camus elaborated his *Pensée du Midi* playing on the polysemy of the world *Midi*, the equivalent of *Mezzogiorno*. As noted above, these terms mean both 'South' and 'Midday': the thought of midday is therefore the 'luminous' perspective as opposed to the 'Midnight' thought, that of the death, in the ongoing 'struggle between darkness and light' (Cassano 2012, 141).

For Camus, to the 'philosophy of darkness' that was represented by fundamentalisms, totalitarianisms and unique truths (including religions), a Southern, or Mediterranean thought represented a civilisation that is peculiar, but does not pretend to be superior to the others. According to Camus, the act that is associated with light and life is revolt, as he discussed in his famous *L'homme révolté* (The Rebellious Man). Crucially, for Camus, the notions of 'revolt' and 'moderation' are not incompatible, because moderation: 'Is not wisdom or balance, but something deeply set in passion and contradiction' (Cassano, 2012, 75). Camus understood moderation as the 'permanence of Greece', a Socratic 'knowing that we do not know', acknowledging human limits

(Camus 1951). Conflicts are permanent: moderation means recognising their existence and addressing rather than eluding them.

Significantly, Cassano and Camus (and formerly Reclus) unanimously highlight the proximity and mutual interdependence of ‘humankind’ and ‘nature’ as a key point of Greek philosophy, an ‘equilibrium of becomings’ (Camus 1951, 310) that also counterbalances political authoritarianism. On this regard, these authors criticise Hegelian notions of rationality as human domination over nature, exactly for the lack of ‘moderation’ characterising imposed models of modernity in which the ‘spirit’ is divorced from ‘nature’. Camus famously declared that: ‘Like the Greeks, I believe in Nature’ (Cassano 2012, 72). This inspires Cassano’s remarks on the need of valuing ‘beauty’ against the ethics of commodification, stressing the need for defending natural and social environments as a key point of Southern Thought agendas.

Furthermore, Cassano restated Camus’s refusal of any finalistic philosophy of history, arguing that the fundamentalism of religions and big ideologies is grounded on the domination of history over nature, while Southern Thought does not believe in a recipe for ‘salvation’, being it redemption or revolution. For Cassano: ‘The canon that Christianity and Marxism have in common [is] both optimistic with regard to the final end of history but pessimistic toward humanity [while] Camus declares himself pessimistic toward history and optimistic toward humankind’ (Cassano, 2012, 64). Discussing works of another thinker akin to anarchism, Simone Weil, about the need of seeking roots, Camus contended that ‘tradition’ does not equate with conservatism or restoration, but just meant rediscovering (idealised) Mediterranean traditions of freedom.

Recalling again Reclus’s idea of costal indentation, Cassano argued that the Mediterranean challenges fundamentalism by being a relational space, in which each political unit is jealous of its autonomy but extraneous to narrow nationalisms or chauvinism. Cassano observed that one of the numerous Greek names for sea was *pontos*, that is: ‘Arm of the sea, bridge that unites yet maintains the distance from the Other who remains separate, on another shore’ (Cassano 2012, 18). As it is shown by the posterity of this word, at the etymological origins of the Latin *pons*

(bridge), *pontos* embeds the notion of travel in its specific Mediterranean association with ‘return’, the *nostos* of Ulysses in the Homeric myth. According to Cassano, the association between journey and return describes a Southern model of balance between rootedness and cosmopolitanism, providing an alternative to both the philosophies of Nietzsche and Heidegger, based on Central Europe and sedentarism, and of Deleuze and Guattari eulogizing ‘nomadic’ populations.

Again, this balance equates to ‘moderation’, as the return implies a focus on what is humanly feasible in opposition to great modernist utopias, that Cassano identified with the centuries in which the Atlantic overtook the Mediterranean becoming the basis for some of the evils of modernity such as indigenous and Black genocides. Remembering that Greek narrations of gods, and of ‘heroes’ such as Ulysses, included their human flaws and weaknesses, Cassano quoted Emmanuel Lévinas, opposing Ulysses’ return to the biblical model of Abraham, ‘symbol of the movement without return’ (Cassano 2012, 35) that characterises big ideologies and metanarratives transcending the human dimension. In this bid for rediscovering more human, and humane, dimensions for life, Southern Thought proposes the ethic of ‘slowness’ as opposed to the ‘turbo-capitalistic’ model of the *Homo Currens*, which represents an idea of competition in which the only ethics is that of the strongest in the market.

Slowness, pluralism, moderation and *nostos* are the theoretical contributions of Cassano’s South to counter all fundamentalisms, including those of commodification and of territorial sovereignty, responsible for the exclusions that are operated around walls, boundaries and camps. Thus, to think a geopolitics that overtakes frontiers, one needs to come back to Mediterranean geo-philosophies that can build cultures of welcoming and bridging, recognising specificities and differences without denying pluralistic dialogues. In the next section, I further discuss how Southern Thought is inserted in global problematics on decoloniality and ‘pluriverse’, that should be also addressed geographically in theory and praxis.

Mediterranean and pluriversal Souths

A point of Cassano's critique to the 'West' that called some attention of scholarship on post-development and degrowth was his lambasting of those: 'Fanatical, calloused (and well-paid) modernizers who travel the world preaching development as the mandatory form of salvation' (Cassano 2001, 2) both in the South of Italy and in other Souths. Such critiques to the very idea of 'development' were connected with international scholarship in anti/post-development that flourished since the 1990s (Sachs 1992; Escobar 1995 and 2018), including by geographers (Power 2003 and 2019; Simon 2007 and 2019; Sidaway 2007). Later, these critiques were inherited by the burgeoning fields of decoloniality (Mignolo and Escobar 2010) and degrowth (Demaria, Kallis and Bakker 2019). Authors in these strands have recently engaged with Cassano's Southern Thought associating it with degrowth, as it criticises capitalist-driven development not only for fostering social injustice and coloniality, but also for causing environmental devastation. They note how both Cassano and degrowth theorist Serge Latouche took some inspiration from Camus's concept of 'happy poverty' (Kallis, Varvarousis and Petridis 2022, 3).

It is worth noting that, in a recent *Political Geography* forum, several authors in the field of political ecology have discussed contrasts and convergences between degrowth and tendencies such as 'eco-modernism' and 'eco-socialism' (Robbins 2020; Gómez-Baggethun 2020), concepts that are criticised by degrowth scholars for being too focused on scientific and technological 'progress' (Bliss and Kallis 2019). Conversely, scholars supporting 'eco-socialism' criticise degrowth stressing the risks of adopting Malthusian ideas on 'limits' and neglecting broader perspectives on socialist futures (Huber 2021). Degrowth scholars instead contend that, stressing how economy cannot continue to 'grow' indefinitely, they do not contradict socialist perspectives, also quoting anarcho-feminist contributions by Emma Goldman and decolonial matters (Hickel 2021; Kallis 2021), while other authors refuse simplistic dichotomies between degrowth and eco-socialism (Lawhon, Henderson and McCreary 2021). Although it would be impossible to fully address these complex debates here, it can be argued that Southern Thought can provide some hints to the conversation.

While Cassano's work is explicitly evoked as a reference by several degrowth authors, his main book did not explicitly address degrowth theories, although Cassano hosted contributions by Latouche in other works such as *L'alternativa mediterranea* (Cassano and Zolo 2007). However, Southern Thought can be considered as closer to degrowth than to any 'modernistic' idea of socialism or ecology, at least in its 'negative' parts as a critique of economic logics. For sure, Southern Thought can be hardly considered as 'elitist' or Malthusian. I would contend that its contribution to this debate lies in its stressing ethical and methodological principles to find voluntaristic rather than deterministic and technocratic solutions to the dilemma between 'limits' and 'modernity'. In the spirit of Southern Thought, the debate between degrowth and eco-socialism should imply mutual cross-pollination rather than fight, taking as main target the realisation of a society that is both more just as for sharing (scarce or abundant) material goods, and a place where people can live happier, freed by what Cassano called '*Monsieur le Capital*' (Cassano 2012, 4).

First published in 1996, *Pensiero Meridiano* had a significant success in Italy among both scholars and wider publics. It was only some years later that Cassano started to address more explicitly his work's potential in terms of dialogues with decolonial scholarship, through the new foreword 'Meridians and Parallels', included in the Italian editions since 2005 and in the 2012 English one. There, Cassano engaged directly with scholarship on post-development and decoloniality, explaining on which key points it was worth developing further linkages between his works and these strands. 'Drawing me to the South, even before and even more than the fact of living there, was a constant attention to the "weak" points of every "strong" discourse, the choice to maintain the world free and open, the will to defend its multiplicity against the wish of the victors to enclose it in their uni-verse' (Cassano 2012, xxxix). The alternative was what Cassano called *pluriversum* and which is now well-known in international scholarship under the name of pluriverse. It is not coincidence that Cassano first referenced works of Boaventura de Sousa Santos, an author expressing wishes for a complex and plural 'epistemology of the South' which breaks the 'hierarchy implicit in th[e] temporal gap' pretending that all the Souths should be backward, and 'not-yet North' (Cassano 2012, xxxv). Equally referencing postcolonial and decolonial authors such as Dipesh Chakrabarty and Walter Mignolo, Cassano emphasized this latter's idea of 'border

thinking’ as a powerful way to understand ‘colonial difference, the discontinuity of power and epistemology between the Northern core of the planet and ... its peripheries’ (Cassano 2012, xxxvi). Thus, it is in expressing the need that the Souths fight back against epistemicides, proposing their own epistemologies, that the decolonial characteristics of Southern Thought first appear, which is in no case disembodied theory but, as most of the authors quoted above argue, a concept rooted in material practices and activism.

For Cassano, these connections are explicitly geographical, being based on notions of place. Playing with the polysemy of the verb *riguardare*, similar to the English term ‘regard’, meaning potentially ‘looking at’ as well as ‘having regard for’, Cassano argued that one should regard places and take care of them. This first means: ‘Re-examining the geographical map, to expand our vision beyond national borders, to discover new connections, proximities, and distances’ (Cassano 2012, xxxvi). Chiming with both radical and humanistic geographical scholarship (Buttimer and Seamon 1980; Springer 2021), these geographies of care call to rethink one’s cognitive and affective relations with these places. Cassano claimed that no ‘development’ can be legitimated if it is: ‘Based on the contempt for and auctioning of places, starting with the industrial rapes of modernity all the way to the postmodern ones of tourism’ (Cassano 2012, xxxvi). Again, this was neither nostalgia of good bygone times, neither mere cultural relativism, but awareness that geography matters in the sense that no idea of ‘development’ can prescind from fair dialogues between the specificities of each place. That is, no innovation can be prescribed or imposed from above, a key point of all the broad field of decoloniality and post-development studies (Escobar 2018 and 2020).

In this vein, there is no point for opposing the Northern dogmas of development by embracing new dogmas or fixed/essentialized views of the South. For Cassano, the model of the *Homo Currens* is not a problem in itself, but in its ‘absolutization’ (Cassano 2012, xli) and identification with progress, understood as the perennial ‘state of exception’ of urgency. In ‘a society dominated by the fundamentalism of speed [...] democracy constitutes an unbearable waste of time’ (Cassano 2012, xli). To foster moderation and a human dimension for life, Cassano claimed for rediscovering the peculiar geographies of the Mediterranean, whose centrality was broken by the

domination of continents. This way: ‘The old continent redeems itself of its Eurocentrism and discovers that its own finitude is not an obstacle but a resource, a path to the future’ (Cassano 2012, xlvii).

After mentioning maps, Cassano criticized those cartographic representations in which the Mediterranean sea: ‘Is pushed to the margins by the centrality of continents and appears only at their borders: the South of Europe, the North of Africa, and the West of Asia Minor. In the view of atlases it almost always occupies only the role of border and backdrop, a blue frontier that separates one land from the others’ (Cassano 2012, xlv). For Cassano, the sea should instead favour connections that are ‘capable of moving *beyond the epoch of nation-states* that many call “early” or “first modernity”’ (Cassano 2012, xlv, my emphasis). As a model stopping ‘the fundamentalism of the continents’ (Cassano 2012, xlix), Southern Thought can suggest alternatives to nation states based on territorial sovereignty.

For doing that, the Mediterranean should be thought as a pluriverse, that is: ‘A world in which it is possible for multiple cultures ... to live together copying, overlapping, affecting and altering each other [considering] multiplicity as a value in itself’ (Romano 2019, 238). Discussing ‘Mediterraneism’, Romano matches the famous definition of pluriverse by the Zapatistas, that is a world ‘of many worlds’. For Cassano: ‘The Mediterranean is an irreducible pluriverse that does not allow itself to be reduced to a single verse. Its value rests precisely in this irreducible multiplicity of voices, none able to smother the others’ (Cassano 2012, xlvi). Against this backdrop, Cassano touched one of the key points of Minca’s ‘geographies of revolution’, that is migration, a phenomenon whose containment has been a classical obsession of modernity, as discussed by respected geographical scholarship (Cresswell 2006; Tazzioli 2020).

Cassano noted that, in today migrations, it is no longer bellicose populations who cross the Mediterranean, but poor people who arrive: ‘Hidden in the belly of ships, a clandestine escaping from old masters, but perhaps already in the vise of new ones. In a land where many others have arrived, there is no monolithic and pure “we” to defend from the snare of the Other’ (Cassano

2012, xlvi). Cassano opposed those: ‘Hysterical newspapers and frightened governments [that] see in these arrivals only a problem of public safety, forgetting history and their own migrations. We, instead, know that every arrival not only reminds us of the excesses and the fundamentalism of the North-West, but brings with it someone who helps us fight them’ (Cassano 2012, 123). This implies the need for ‘the demilitarization of cultures’ (Cassano 2012, xlvi), which means acknowledging that the ceaseless mobility of genes and cultures renders ridiculous any possible focus on a ‘pure’ identity, and that a new culture of welcoming is urgently needed.

Cassano pleaded for constructing new relations between Europe and its Souths, through: ‘An extended plurality of voices, the demise of the *vallum*, and the construction of bridges This multiplicity of loci of intersection is further grounds for a possible broadened fraternity’ (Cassano 2012, xlix). While ideas of universal fraternity recall Reclus’s language, Cassano overtly criticised notions of classical geopolitics drawing upon works such as Schmitt’s *Land and Sea* as a conception that exactly means militarising cultures, grounded on the prevalence of terrestrial models, projected on the sea. That is: “‘Earthly” nostalgia ... a faithfulness to the land that turns into ... a closure to the other that always runs the risk of transforming the *hospes* into *hostis*’ (Cassano 2012, li). Against that, the ideas of sea and journey (eventually moderated by the *nostos*), imply elements of unfaithfulness to the land of origin, of individual autonomy, dissidence, defeatism and desertion that according to anarchist geographers such as Reclus have to build international sisterhoods and brotherhoods beyond frontiers, armies and states (Springer 2021).

Finally, if pluriversal Mediterraneism engages with geography by constructing models of plurality and circulation beyond territorial geopolitics, it opens wider decolonial discussions by acknowledging the need for questioning linear progress and learning from other Souths, including the so-called Global South. This means a posture of listening and translation that: ‘Is not about going on a sightseeing tour inside the culture of the other but about taking it seriously and learning something from it’ (Cassano 2012, l). Southern Thought joins a broader subaltern, postcolonial and decolonial literature where, in addition to the authors mentioned above, Cassano especially engages with cases going from: ‘Edouard Glissant’s Antilles to the India that has spawned the

research of Homi K. Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak' (Cassano 2012, xlix), to Latin American scholarship of: 'Enrique Dussel and Anibal Quijano, who help us read the obscure side of modernity', to: 'The African South's ... great voices, from Nelson Mandela to Wole Soyinka, from Chinua Achebe to Ngugi wa Thiong'o or Aminata Traore' (Cassano 2012, liii). Pluralistic and manifold, rather motley than mixed (Rivera Cusicanqui 2020), these Souths speak about: 'The problem of justice, not the quest for power; a concept of life that does not seek to dominate nature and other cultures, but to live in harmony with both' (Cassano 2012, liv).

Paralleling ideas by radical movements such as the Zapatistas in Chiapas or Democratic Confederalism in Northern Syria, which implicitly recall themes of geographers such as Reclus in their refuse to seize power or to reconstitute new nation-states with their excluding territorialities (Zibechi 2012; Knapp, Flach and Ayboga 2016), Southern Thought suggests once more that geographies of revolution are not intended to 'storm the palace', but rather to conscientize and empower people.

Conclusion

Connecting and putting into dialogue different strands of scholarship on decoloniality, post-development, pluriverse and critical geopolitics, this paper has shown the potentialities that 'Southern Thought' from the Mediterranean offers to critical geographical scholarship for building models of tolerance, listening, slowness and situated cosmopolitanism. Questioning the dogmas of a fast and productive 'North' by considering that Souths' 'pathologies' are not the lack of modernity, but exactly the perverse effects of modernity, Southern Thought matches classical post-development points, while importantly claiming to avoid any essentialisation of the 'South' or 'Southern Theory' to keep open pluriversal conversations outside any new dogmatism or academic conformism.

While evoking Greek and Mediterranean cultural heritages, Cassano was often told that his standpoint remained European, to which he usually responded: 'Without a doubt!' (Cassano 2012, 123), being based in Europe and deeply immersed in studies of European cultures. Yet, what

Southern Thought aims at is exactly to know and relativise one's standpoint to engage in constructive dialogues. In his discussion on the metaphoric representations of the four cardinal points, or 'Cardinal knowledge' (Cassano 2012, 174), Cassano argued that North, South, East and West should never be essentialised, as they should serve as possible directions in the quest for dialogue. Thus, Greece is not a value in itself but an inspiration for plural ways of thinking relational spaces. Eventually: 'The West should stop looking with facile and haughty horror to the barbarism of fundamentalism, nationalism, and criminal economies, and try instead to fight them by controlling its own fundamentalism, the one tied to the economy ... to finally abandon ethnocentrism' (Cassano 2012, 50). Relativizing one's standpoint means giving up epistemic violence, denouncing epistemicides (Sousa Santos 2016) and being available to learn from the Other, namely from the other numerous Souths.

As this paper has shown, Southern Thought can also engage productively with critical scholarship in geography and geopolitics, by sharing new models of autonomy, welcoming and freedom of movement that are alternative to narrow ideas of territoriality defined by notions of state sovereignty. This also suggests that critical geopolitics should be available to learn from several 'Souths' and from the diverse territorial setups that are variously suggested by Latin American notions of multi-territoriality and territories in resistance (Ferretti 2022; Haesbaert and Mason-Deese 2020; Halvorsen, Fernandes and Torres 2019), as well as by similar experiences occurring in all the possible Souths, as suggested by the pluriverse *Dictionary* (Kothari et al. 2019).

Likewise, the aforementioned debates on political ecology can find some inspiration from taking the logical consequences of the arguments developed in this paper. That is, what Southern Thought can reinforce is the key idea that the problem is not neoliberalism or 'turbo-capitalism', but the very capitalistic order, and its corresponding political institutions. Drawing from models that are not based on states and bounded territories, one can subvert the 'fundamentalism of land and sea' that is still expressed by nation-states to enhance some of the federalist forms of organising space that are being proposed in geography since the time of anarchist geographers Reclus and Kropotkin

(Springer 2021; Ferretti 2014): open, networked, decentred, voluntaristic but cognizant of material features such as land/sea hybridity.

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