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Mediterranean Spaces of Education

Educational Hybridizations between Policies, Languages and Mobilities

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ABSTRACT: *The Mediterranean region's educational landscape is intricately woven with a history rich in cultural exchanges, human migrations, diverse political influences, and conflicting tensions. In this article, we examine the complexities of education in the region. Rather than viewing the Mediterranean as a unified entity, we highlight contradictions and paradoxes that illuminate differences and inequalities stemming from colonial legacies, postcolonial struggles, diglossia, migration, and cultural pluralism within national education systems. Three thematic axes underpin our analysis. We briefly explore the colonial legacies in the evolution of modern Arab States and the Arabization of formal education. We then delve into the interplay of 'national' and 'secondary' languages within educational programs. This intricate mosaic bridges cultural references among students, albeit often amidst subtle conflicts over linguistic hegemony. Lastly, we examine the complex mobility of individuals, students, and educational discourse across the Mediterranean. The emergence of a 'culture of mobility' challenges traditional notions of belonging and disrupts static educational environments. In conclusion, the Mediterranean's educational spaces are characterised by diversity, complexity, and ongoing transformation.*

KEYWORDS: *Mediterranean, Educational policies, Language of instruction, Migration, Colonialism and post-colonialism*

Introduction

The fabric and the contours of the Mediterranean area of education are crossed and intermingled by a long history of cultural traffics, human mobilities, heterogeneous political influences and dividing conflicts. The Mediterranean region's educational landscape bears witness to a rich tapestry woven with the threads of cultural exchange, human movement, diverse political influences, and contradictory dynamics. This article, serving as an introductory discourse to the Special issue of *Scuola democratica* 1/2024 dedicated to educational spaces in the Mediterranean, aims not to essentialize the Mediterranean as a singular geographic, historical, or political entity. Instead, its focus lies in unveiling contradictions and paradoxes that shed light on difference and inequalities (Cassano, 2012), stemming from the legacies of imperialism, colonialism, post-colonialism, diglossia, triglossia, migration and cultural pluralism across the national education systems.

We focus on three relevant topics that can bolster the analysis of the intricate conception of the Mediterranean spaces of education. Firstly, we consider the question of education in the context of the evolution of modern Arab States. The Arabization of official culture and education has varied effects depending on timeframes, circumstances, incidental events, and resulting consequences.

These effects interact differently within specific contexts and are deeply intertwined with the legacies of colonialism, post-colonialism, and nation-building processes (Sirles, 1999; Amara, 2017). There are cultural and organizational contaminations and hybridizations that have historically moulded the formation and implementation of national education systems, in

reference both to the ties of colonial origins (above all in French-speaking countries such as Algeria, Tunisia and Morocco), and to the recent regulatory educational isomorphism among countries that are nonetheless different from each other due to the role that State has historically played in education (Soufiane, 2024).

Within the European Union, the Mediterranean countries – namely Greece, Italy, Spain, and Portugal (and France, contingent upon the shifting interpretation of ‘Southern Europe’) – are commonly perceived as adhering to a unified and monolithic educational model. This perception often characterises them as the cluster of ‘late-comers’ in the educational convergence process towards the reference standard model, a trajectory frequently associated with neoliberalism and New Public Management approaches (Dale, 2009; Ball, 2012). Conversely, countries situated along the southern shore of the Mediterranean are further packed in a narrative of homogeneity, wherein differences outweigh similarities and a continual call for educational reforms persists to facilitate economic development in North African and Near Eastern countries. Consequently, an implicit hierarchical view of education systems emerges, positioning Southern European countries as the least productive, efficient, and performative among their European counterparts (Landri, 2009; Giancola and Salmieri, 2022) and implies a greater necessity for modernization, convergence, reform, and innovation in education across the African and Near Eastern sides of the Mediterranean (World Bank, 2008). However, these notions fail to fully acknowledge the rich heterogeneity both between and within these countries. Furthermore, it inadvertently validates the existence of a singular European cultural reference ideal-type, the educational Nordic model (Antikainen, 2006; Fronès *et al.*, 2020), paradoxically aligned with the Anglo-Saxon or the so-called neoliberal gaze (Savage, 2017).

On the contrary, both historical accounts of education and contemporary analyses underscore the remarkable diversity of educational models and realities prevalent in each country of North Africa and the Near East. Moreover, since the early Sixties of the last century, nations along the southern Mediterranean coast have made significant advancements in ensuring more equitable access to formal education. Currently, the majority of countries in this region exhibit near-complete enrolment in primary education, alongside secondary and tertiary education rates comparable to those observed in countries along the northern Mediterranean coast. Additionally, gender disparities in secondary and tertiary education have considerably diminished across many of these countries. Consequently, the region now hosts one of the world’s largest young educated populations in proportion to its overall population (Boudihaj and Sahli, 2022). As this demographic progresses through the education system, it catalyses unprecedented demand for additional learning opportunities and heightens expectations for democratic access to education, a boosting dynamic that appears increasingly innovative compared to prevailing educational contexts in the old Europe.

Our second topic, the interweaving of ‘national’ and ‘secondary’ languages and envisaged in the teaching programs stems out as a kaleidoscopic mosaic that brings the cultural references of students closer together rather than disconnected,

via a contamination preserving divergences, although the linguistic (and the religious) question is too often enacted in hostile conflicts for cultural hegemonies (Ennaji, 2018; Benadusi *et al.*, 2017). This interweaving complex mosaic has its idiosyncrasies, but also its opportunities for openness and enrichment provided that it is exploited as a resource in the migratory paths of students, in the context of social inclusion and cultural pluralism. This is a challenge that even the educational systems of the countries situated along the northern shores of the Mediterranean had encountered in the early stages of State-national education enlargements, as they grappled with the task of standardizing internal linguistic variations. Subsequently, during the implementation phase, these education systems had to navigate the complexities arising from the ever-growing influx of migration (Laurenti, 2024; Baby-Collin and Russo, 2024).

Finally, a key topic regards the complex mobility of persons, students and even educational discourses across the Mediterranean. Our focus is not on identifying a specific Mediterranean aspect of the migratory phenomenon, but rather on acknowledging the multitude and diversity of migratory flows, their associated mobility, and the resulting territorial constructs. Advancements in transportation and communication have liberated migrants from the confines of uprooting, allowing them to establish sustainable connections with their original spaces while settling in destination countries. Although violently contrasted by the policies of rejection and confinement implemented by European governments, these novel modes of continuous mobility afford migrants the opportunity to circulate among different locales – be it their workplace, region of origin, or transient spaces – engaging in activities of varying significance, sometimes equivalent to those prompting their displacement. Within this perpetual movement emerges a genuine «culture of mobility», characterised by a distinct set of values, behaviours, and tools tailored to the mobility needs of these new actors (Clifford, 1997), signifying a notable shift in the temporal and spatial dynamics of migration. On one hand, the emergence of «transnational communities » (Adamson, 2012), i.e., groups maintaining cohesive social functioning across spatial distances, underscores the notion of seamless mobility. On the other hand, mobility may clash with the educational environment, where the static nature of classrooms, daily routines and entrenched habits ask students to be confined in a fixed location, impacting their sense of belonging.

1. Legacies

The concern of Europe's colonial powers with schools was an early one. It dates to the early establishments of colonial institutions at the beginning of the Nineteenth century, in Algeria, which became an integral part of French territory (Reynaud Paligot, 2021), as well as in the Levant, where Christian missions proliferated throughout the century. In the Arab and multi-confessional territories of the Ottoman Empire, they benefited from the secularisation objective proclaimed by the authorities, following the administrative *Tanzimat* (reorganizations) aimed at strengthening the State. The centralization efforts, reinforced during the reign of Sultan Abdulhamid II (1876-1909) with a decidedly Islamic perspective, did not put an end to this. Foreign missions (French, British, American, Russian) certainly acted as intermediaries of the powers they represented, but they were also vectors of modernization, and the religious and moral teachings they offered persisted even as an imperial educational system began to develop from the Eighties of the Nineteenth century, with secular aspects serving the Muslim State (Davison, 1961; Somel, 2001; Fortna, 2002). Elsewhere in the Ottoman empire, as highlighted in Chantal Verdeil's excellent synthesis of the history of education in the Arab and Muslim world, the emergence of engineering schools founded by Mehmet Ali in Egypt, or the creation of the Sadiki College in Tunis, accompanied this movement (Verdeil, 2017). These secularist tendencies took place within the common framework of religious education (*kuttab*, *madrassa*, or *m'sid* in the Maghreb) in the Islamic world, focused on the learning of Arabic, reading and memorization of the Quran. Around the Mediterranean, this persisted almost everywhere during the colonial period until the Fifties of the last century, while education in general became a means of assertion for colonial States, regardless of the regimes (colonial rule in Algeria; protectorates in Egypt, Tunisia, and Morocco; League of Nations mandates in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine).

Some countries, such as Egypt, and to a lesser extent Lebanon and Palestine, have even contributed to the dissemination of education elsewhere in the Arab world, hosting young students or providing their teachers in other countries in the region, such as in the Arabian Peninsula, laying the groundwork for future inter-Arab cooperation (Honvault and Al-Rashoud, 2019). A broad debate took place in Egypt where during the first half of the Twentieth century the relationship between technical education and economic development fed the expectations

of industrial growth (Labib and Turiano, 2024). Throughout the Maghreb, primary school, *kuttab* and *m'sid*, constituted a wide network of learning centres – nearly 2,000 in Algeria at the dawn of the French presence – outside any formal organisation, where reading and memorization of the Quran played a major role (Kateb, 2004). But these structures were often disqualified and suspected by the colonial authorities for what they conveyed of potential opposition to their project, due to the strongly religious Arabic-language training. Deprived of resources, placed under control, and sometimes closed, these schools became rare during most of the period of foreign sovereignty (Baiza, 2018; Tan, 2018; Suleiman, 2019).

Nevertheless, the education of native youth was a major issue for the colonising States, who were keen to train an elite that would support the agricultural, industrial, and administrative implementation of colonisation. Particular attention was paid to children of notables (Knibiehler, 1994), especially boys, while most school-age natives were kept away from many forms of education (Brunot, 1934a; 1934b). Girls, often overlooked in educational projects, benefited from women's initiatives and private structures, unequally supported financially by the colonial administration (Rogers, 2013). The schooling of these pupils was the subject of numerous political debates on the aims of education to be built for the local populations, producing specific decrees, *dair*, and orders, like so many adaptations and breaches of common law, to create structures and teaching that educate without emancipating (Kadri, 2007). The care of these indigenous children, often considered uneducable for racist reasons, habitually took place within a parallel, separate school framework, where classes, curricula and diploma were distinct from the educational system offered to the children of settlers (Benhlal, 2005; Mussard, 2024). For the latter, on the other hand, schooling was a matter of course, organised in the same structures as in mainland France. In support of a discourse extolling the 'grandeur' of the civilising mission, the measures proposed, and the forms invented, gave rise to a great multiplicity of schooling situations, all of which had in common the fact that only a minority of indigenous children were catered for. Schooling in colonised territories was thus marked not only by separation (Kateb, 2004), but also by major urban-rural inequalities (Bennoune, 2002). In the latter, the distancing of the European and colonial presence has greatly reduced school equipment and discouraged metropolitan teachers, often unattracted by an isolated and difficult daily life. As a result, school attendance was low in primary school, even lower in secondary and virtually non-existent in higher education. Families and elected representatives denounced this educational discrimination, but the gap between European and native youth remained wide (Mussard, 2023). The budget allocated to the schooling of native pupils was much lower than that of the children of settlers, many due to the local administration's reluctance to allocate adequate resources. Parents, initially reluctant to entrust their children to French schools, gradually accepted and even demanded them (Colonna, 1975), committed to the academic value of a system where language and diplomas gave access to employment. Nevertheless, keen to pass on their culture and religion, they often sent their children to school both in the colonial one and in the traditional structures.

The nationalist movements that emerged in the Thirties and Forties of the last century across the entire Mediterranean Arab region did not typically originate from traditional educational institutions, but rather more often from secular institutions established by the States, or from Christian institutions. In Algeria, after the Second World War, educational policies changed direction in a more favourable context to access rights for colonised populations. The creation of the French Union and the granting of citizenship to its populations in theory, fostered a new consideration for this part of the youth that has been left aside and discriminated against. Programs to build schools and open classrooms, and the introduction into school curricula of the history of native populations (Leon, 1991) have significantly opened schools to the indigenous public but have not succeeded to bridge the gap that had existed for many decades.

Alternative forms of teaching, either apart from or in competition with the institution, developed, especially at the end of the forties in Algeria, bearing teachings marked by the cultural imprint that colonial power had often distanced (Courreya, 2020). As the colonial State weakened, the transmission of knowledge in the vernacular language and religion embodied the desire for a different kind of sovereignty. In Algeria, the war of independence crystallised school competition, sharply contrasting French public structures, often destroyed, and abandoned by families at the request of the FLN (*Front de Libération Nationale*) (Mussard, 2021), with Koranic schools, more numerous despite increased military control. The so-called *ecoles de circonstances* opened by the French army in the Algerian countryside are a singular example of what colonisation was able to produce in terms of schooling (Hadj-Ahmed, 2022). The colonial educational experience thus leaves traces in the teaching provided, testifying to the strength and complexity of a transmission that articulates history and memory (De Cock, 2018).

In the mid-Twentieth century, in all the independent or soon-to-be-independent Mediterranean Arab countries, the need for education was immense among a large, young population that had largely been deprived of it, and the colonial legacy played a major role in the invention of a new educational framework (Kateb, 2014). The language of instruction, the general operating frameworks and the retention or recall of certain staff were all elements of continuity in the making of a new school where cooperation was implemented (McDougall, 2004; Henry *et al.*, 2012). At the same time, education was becoming the key challenge in asserting national sovereignty. It became standardised in projects aimed at mass education, giving new prominence to Arabic. However, not all previous school structures disappeared, and missionary institutions adapted to the new nationalist policies. While exceptions remained, such as in Ba'athist Syria, the retention of foreign languages of instruction and the establishment of cooperation systems that supported it were strong elements of continuity within the new systems. Meanwhile, Muslim education has increasingly been taken over by the States – including in Syria, but especially in Egypt, where Al-Azhar University, which served as a genuine soft power for Muslim countries as a whole, structured the maintenance of religious education in the country. Educational landscapes have diversified, and the school institution has emerged as «a hybrid place where a culture or cultures, knowledge, and behaviours are developed drawing from different sources» (Verdeil, 2017, 27).

The successes of neoliberalism, from the Seventies to the present day, has accompanied the failure of Arab states to cope with the demographic explosion in education as well as the international demand, which in 2000 still called for universal primary education and gender parity at the World Education Forum in Dakar (Matasci *et al.*, 2020). Their disengagement, while not universal and admitting nuances, has allowed for the strengthening of existing private institutions

here (Lebanon) or their sometimes-unbridled expansion there (Egypt, Morocco). The redevelopment of Muslim religious schools is part of this movement and illustrates the increasing Islamization of societies, driven both by criticism of authoritarianism and by the neoliberal policies the regimes draw on to maintain themselves, which unfold to varying degrees depending on the countries. However, the phenomenon does not question secularisation: it accompanies and draws inspiration from it in its methods (Pierret, 2011).

2. Languages

Everywhere, the question of languages taught and of languages of instruction is posed with new acuity, linked to that of access to quality higher education and

ultimately to employment, which both opens prospects for studying abroad, particularly in Europe and the Americas. The school becomes a «cradle of acculturation in relation to the linguistic, cultural and religious, family and social environment » (Pellegrini, 2023: 14),

which, like elsewhere, unlocks a universe of possibilities, not without creating uncertainties and identity anxieties (Roushdy, 2023; Spera, 2023). This process also holds true in the countries of the northern Mediterranean, where schools have to accommodate children from migrations originating from the southern shores (Fiorucci and Catarci, 2016). These

migrations may have historical ties to colonial legacies or may be more recent, prompted by conflicts in Syria or the lack of economic opportunities (Baby-Collin and Russo, 2024). Historical, cultural, and political contexts have shaped language policies in the Arab region of the Mediterranean, highlighting the tensions between linguistic diversity and the promotion of a unified national identity (Starrett, 1998; Rugh, 2002; Mazawi, 1999, 2010; Segalla, 2010). As we know, official language-in-education serves as a cornerstone in shaping identity and fostering national cohesion within societies worldwide, particularly in the diverse and culturally rich regions of North Africa and the Near East. In these areas, where histories are deeply intertwined with linguistic diversity, the significance of language goes beyond mere communication; it becomes a symbol of cultural heritage, political identity, and social cohesion in the building of the nation-State. The historical roots of linguistic diversity in North Africa and the Near East are deep and multifaceted. Each nation-building history among the south Mediterranean landscape has faced a plethora of languages and dialects, each reflecting centuries of cultural exchange and historical development.

Arabic, as the language of Islam, has played a central role in shaping the linguistic dominance of the region, while Berber, Kurdish, Hebrew, and other indigenous languages represent the rich tapestry of ethnic and cultural identities within these territories. The colonial era left an indelible mark on the linguistic dynamics of the region. European powers, notably France and Britain, imposed their languages through colonial education systems and administrative structures.

This legacy of linguistic hegemony has had profound implications for identity formation and national cohesion, creating tensions between indigenous languages and the languages of former colonial powers (Zeghal, 2010; Moatassim, 1992; Errihani, 2023; Soufiane, 2024).

In the post-colonial era, language emerged as a powerful marker of national and cultural identity. Arabic became synonymous with notions of Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism, serving as a unifying force in the struggle for independence and self-determination (Suleiman, 2004). Standard Arabic, known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), is primarily used in formal education, government institutions, and media in most countries of North Africa and the Middle East. At the same time French still holds a significant position in the Moroccan and Tunisian educational system, particularly in secondary and higher education. It is commonly taught as a second language and is widely used in business, administration, and higher education. English is increasingly becoming important altogether. It is taught as a foreign language in schools, and there is growing emphasis on English language instruction, particularly in urban areas and private schools (Kirkpatrick and Barnawi, 2017).

The use of French and English as languages of education in countries south of the Mediterranean has been a subject of considerable debate and contention (Daghigh *et al.*, 2022). While French-language education often reflects historical ties to France and Francophone cultural identities, English-language education is associated with aspirations for internationalisation, modernisation, and economic competitiveness. However, the use of these colonial languages engenders tensions related to linguistic nationalism, cultural authenticity, and social inclusion. For example, despite efforts to promote Arabic as the language of national identity and resistance during the struggle for independence, French continued to hold sway in education even after Algeria's independence. Post-independence Algeria embarked on a journey to reclaim Arabic as the language of instruction and national identity so that language-in-education policies are enshrined in the

national constitution, which recognizes Arabic as the official language (Daoudi, 2018; Rouabah, 2022). Arabic serves as the primary language of instruction in schools, reflecting Algeria's Arab-Islamic identity and post-independence aspirations for Arabization (Grandguillaume, 2004). However, French continues to play a significant role in education, particularly in higher education, scientific research, and technical fields (Benrabah, 2013). The less widespread use of English in education reflects considerations, including access to international knowledge, academic resources, and economic opportunities (Millani, 2000).

In Morocco, where Abdelkarim Ben Jelloun established a blueprint for education reform in 1958, by unifying the traditional and modern education systems, prompting a plan to Arabize all teaching subjects, generalising literacy

and train nationals to replace foreign teachers, French was maintained as the language of instruction of Maths and Science in both primary and secondary levels. Only by 1989, Arabization of all subjects across all grades in both primary and secondary public education was accomplished (R'boul, 2022; Errihani, 2023). However, French remained the medium of instruction for scientific subjects in technical and professional secondary schools, technical institutes and universities (Boutieri, 2016). To this day, French schools – which are informally referred to as *la mission* whether they are actually related to the *Mission Laïque Française* or not – still have a major presence in Morocco. In these schools, French is the language of instruction, and Arabic is only taught as a second language if at all (Ennaji, 2005).

A significant sociolinguistic development revolves around the discourse on the linguistic and cultural diversity within the region, particularly pertaining to the acknowledgment and institutionalisation of the Amazigh language, also referred to as Tamazight or the Berber language (Alalou, 2023). This discourse gained momentum during the Eighties and the Nineties, reaching a milestone with the official recognition of the Amazigh language in Morocco in 2011. The term Tamazight is commonly used to denote the various dialects of the Berber language

primarily spoken in Morocco and Algeria, while the term Amazigh functions as an adjective describing the people and their cultural practices. Consequently, references to the Amazigh language, culture, and customs encompass what has traditionally been known as the Berber language, culture, and customs, irrespective of their historical roots. Moreover, the term Imazighen serves as the plural form of Amazigh and designates the Berber people (see Soulaïmani, 2016).

Subsequently, in 2016, the Algerian parliament enacted a series of reforms that included the official recognition of Tamazight as a language alongside Arabic (Chtatou, 2019). In Tunisia and Libya, the Amazigh movement is still in its nascent

stages, albeit Amazigh communities in these countries are advocating for their linguistic and cultural rights. Consequently, the integration of Tamazight into educational curricula varies from one country to another. For instance, the formal introduction of Tamazight instruction was implemented in selected Moroccan public schools. These long-awaited developments underscore the gradual acknowledgment and embrace of the Amazigh linguistic and cultural heritage by Morocco and Algeria (Chaker and Ferkal, 2012). However, tensions persist between Arabic, French, and Tamazight, highlighting deeper societal divisions within Algeria,

which stem from historical disparities, regional differences, and competing linguistic identities (Maddy-Weitzman, 2012). Additionally, many North Africans have raised concerns regarding the status of other languages commonly used in everyday communication, such as Darija (also known as Darja and Derja), which serves as the lingua franca for most North Africans. Consequently, the evolving sociolinguistic landscape reflects the region's troubled transition toward a more inclusive sociocultural and multilingual framework (Alalou, 2023).

Tunisia's language-in-education policies have undergone evolution in response to shifting socio-political dynamics and educational needs since the 'Arab Spring' marked a pivotal

moment, catalysing widespread social and political change and ushering in a new era of reform. Among the various areas of transformation, language policy emerged as a crucial domain for reshaping national identity, cultural diversity, and educational practices (Daoud, 2001). Following independence from French colonial rule in 1956, Tunisia embarked on a process of Arabization, prioritising Arabic as the language of national identity and education. However, the legacy of French colonisation left enduring influences on Tunisian society, including the continued presence of French in various domains, such as education, administration, and commerce. The coexistence of Arabic and French languages reflected Tunisia's dual heritage and cultural connections to both the Arab world and the Francophone community. In the aftermath of the 'Arab Spring', the post-revolution government reaffirmed Arabic as the official language of teaching, emphasising its importance as a symbol of national identity and cultural heritage. Efforts were made to strengthen Arabic language education, develop Arabic-language resources, and promote the use of Arabic in public discourse and administration. While stressing the primacy of Arabic, Tunisia also sought to preserve the role of French as a secondary language of communication, particularly in sectors such as higher education, business, and diplomacy. Bilingual schools, language immersion programs, and language exchange initiatives were established to provide students with opportunities for cross-cultural learning and linguistic development. However, despite legislative changes and policy pronouncements, the effective implementation of language reforms remains a challenge due to resource constraints, institutional inertia, and resistance to change (Daoud, 1991). Moreover, language issues in Tunisia are still politicised, reflecting harsh debates over identity, nationalism, and cultural belonging. Tensions between proponents of Arabization and defenders of linguistic diversity constantly hinder consensus-building and policy implementation, threatening social cohesion and democratic governance (Helal, 2023).

Fluctuation over time has been a factor in some of the southern Mediterranean countries as it is the case for Libya where now Arabic serves as the official language and primary language of instruction, but English has also played a significant role, particularly in higher education, scientific research, and international communication (Schnelzer, 2016). During periods of political alignment with English-speaking countries or efforts to modernise education, there have been initiatives to promote English language learning and proficiency. However, these efforts have sometimes faced challenges due to competing linguistic priorities and tensions between Arabic and English (Baldinetti, 2018).

Egypt has also emphasised English language education in its educational system, via curriculum reforms, teacher training programs, and the establishment of English language institutes (Ibrahim, 2010). Additionally, English language proficiency has become increasingly important as a distinctive status (Haeri, 1997) leading to growing demand for English language education and certification. Perhaps the most intricate case concerns Lebanon, a country long known for its multi-lingual/cultural makeup, with Arabic, French, and English all playing significant roles in education (Akl, 2007). The importation of French, and later its imposition as a medium of instruction during the French mandate (1921-1943), led to inequitable education in favour of the Catholic and Maronite communities (Ghaith and Shabaan, 1996). Later on, the promotion of Arabic as an official language and subsequently as a medium of instruction in the era of independence after 1943 was dissociated from an effective implementation of educational reform which did not seem to have sufficiently considered the socioeconomic and educational incentives of knowing foreign languages. No serious attempts were made to simplify Arabic and institute it as an official medium of instruction. In addition, a 1969 decree stated that Arabic, in principle, should be the language of instruction at the primary level, but re-introduced English and French as instructional languages at the intermediate and secondary levels (Zakharia, 2010). Consequently, differently from other Arab countries following independence, the established policies were hasty and did not result from careful planning (Smock and Smock, 1975). French

and English were deeply rooted in the Lebanese educational system and remained dominant as instructional languages as many private schools continued to use French and English in teaching mathematics and science even at primary schools (Bacha and Bahous, 2011). The difficulties involved in utilising classical Arabic as an instructional language were acknowledged by the Arabic Language Society (ALS) which called for the simplification of Arabic grammar, morphology, and syntax as well as for the promotion of classical Arabic in educational centres and mass media (Smock and Smock, 1975). However, there were no serious attempts to reform and manipulate Arabic in order to facilitate its use in order to serve the educational and ideological tendencies of the Lebanese community. It should also be noted that despite the spread of French and English as instructional languages, the strength of both languages remains limited to the context of education and are not widely used in extra-educational functions (Ghaith and Shabaan, 1996). Recent changes and reforms in Lebanon's educational landscape indicate a major shift away from using the national language, Arabic, as a medium of instruction in favour of other foreign languages, namely English, French, and German, making these foreign languages usable as instructional languages in all education cycles, including the pre-primary and primary levels (BouJaoude and Ghaith, 2006; Akl, 2021).

3. Mobilities

Today, the Mediterranean basin is a major migration area (Wihtol de Wenden, 2018): in 2019, the Mediterranean countries, which account for just under 7% of the world's population, hosted 15% of the 271 million international migrants, the majority of whom settle on the northern shores (60%), secondarily in the Middle East (around 20%) and more marginally in the countries on the southern shores (less than 5%). This migratory system is fuelled by a North-South divide, entrenched in an economic differential: a third of migrants from southern Mediterranean countries currently reside in France and more than half in Europe. Since the first decade of the new century, Europeans have felt that they are experiencing a 'migration crisis' in the face of an upsurge in flows, and a «Euro-Mediterranean migration regime» (Schmoll *et al.*, 2015) is being established, based on stricter conditions for entry into Europe and more precarious migratory itineraries, which extend beyond the confines of the Mediterranean region. The historical trajectory of migration within the Mediterranean spans a considerable duration, although contemporary movements are part of a broader global acceleration in international migration initiated during the mid-Nineteenth century, coinciding with industrialization and advancements in transportation infrastructure. The Mediterranean's extensive coastline stretching over 20,000 kilometres has historically fostered connectivity, facilitated by coastal shipping routes and islands serving as crucial waypoints and staging areas (Purcell and Horden, 2000). This geographical setting facilitates the linkage of territories, often fragmented into micro-regions. Primarily, the abundance of mountainous terrain along the Mediterranean shores hinders overland transportation, thereby accentuating the importance of maritime routes and port facilities for facilitating interactions. Moreover, alongside natural barriers, the region's geopolitical complexities contribute to its variable geometric configuration, oscillating between division and cohesion. Nonetheless, since the Nineteenth century, a prevailing notion has emerged, characterising the Mediterranean as a distinct and self-contained region, not only in terms of climate and topography but also in its political, economic, and cultural dimensions. This conceptualization envisions a sense of shared destiny among the peoples inhabiting its periphery (Ruel, 1991). Intellectuals and writers have played a pivotal role in shaping this collective imagination, often referred to as the «Mediterranean dream» (Temime, 2002). Fernand Braudel (1985), the eminent historian, famously considered the Mediterranean as «a thousand things at once», highlighting its role as a dynamic «space of movement» characterised by the continuous flux of people, goods, and ideas over extended periods. Indeed, a myriad of popular migration movements, spanning diverse origins and motivations, have

profoundly influenced and reshaped Mediterranean societies over centuries. The persistent dynamics of migration and transnational connections underscore the significant role of migration in shaping the Mediterranean's historical trajectory, contributing to what can be described as the ongoing «making of the Mediterranean» (Baby-Collin *et al.*, 2021). Consequently, the Mediterranean region stands as an invaluable cultural crossroad, «one of the best historical observatories of the movement of people, things, knowledge and ideas at different times» (Calafat and Grenet, 2023: 23).

Throughout history, the countries bordering the Mediterranean have been both places of departure and arrival. As a geographical crossroads, Italy has been at the heart of Mediterranean migratory movements since Antiquity, through the political and religious models it has known, and the trade routes it has crossed. From the Nineteenth century onwards, Italy became the main country of emigration. During the century spanning from the 1860s to the 1960s, approximately 26 million Italians migrated, with a portion relocating to France, which emerged as the primary destination for immigration in Europe (Corti and Sanfilippo, 2009). A network of Italian schools abroad was set up (Tassello and Vedovelli, 1996) in order to preserve the *Italianness* of migrants, an objective declared by the State at the end of the Nineteenth century and even more so by the Fascist regime (Mourlane *et al.*, 2022; Laurenti, 2024). Italy, like other southern European countries, underwent a shift from emigration in the Seventies to immigration, which intensified in the Nineties of the last century. The number of foreigners rose from six hundred and twenty-five thousand in 1991 to five million in 2018. In Spain, foreigners accounted for 1% of the total population in 1980, rising to over 12% in 2010. In Greece, the post-dictatorship period since 1974 witnessed significant return migration alongside a substantial influx of immigrants, catalysed by the collapse of communist regimes in the Balkans. Turkey, Lebanon and the Maghreb region are currently serving as both receiving and transit nations for migrants are also now receiving or transit countries (Baby-Collin *et al.*, 2021).

Whatever the era, migration can have several objectives: simple survival, the quest for a better world, a desire for discovery and travel, a thirst for knowledge or wealth, a political project of domination, conquest, proselytism, colonisation or subjugation, involving economic, political, cultural, ethnic or religious motives. The status of people who migrate is always determined by the conditions of their mobility and residence. There are obvious differences between a merchant, a slave, a student, a tourist, a migrant with a work permit or an illegal immigrant. It is also crucial to underline the links maintained by transnational dynamics (Basch *et al.*, 1994) and that migration contributes to the circulation of practices, lifestyles, representations and symbolic objects across borders. Whatever their status, migrants act as mediators between the cultures of origin and those of the host societies. These contacts take the form of exchanges, influences, acculturation or transfers, to varying degrees and in different ways, depending on many factors. As a result, Mediterranean cosmopolitanism is often highlighted (Grenet and Smyrnelis, 2016). However, and whatever the territory, the period or the origin of the population, foreigners are frequently perceived as a political and social threat, and with mass migration in the Nineteenth and Twentieth centuries, xenophobic discourse has become more virulent, sometimes accompanied by violence (Dornel, 2004). In particular, the threat of 'invasion' and of an attack on national identity was raised, while the supposed link between immigration and insecurity became a favourite refrain of populist discourse with a growing audience (Chopin, 2019). Education became a major challenge often seen as a privileged place for the integration or assimilation of immigrants, but also as a space where egalitarian civic values designed to outlaw all forms of discrimination could take root, a privileged context for «building bridges» (UNESCO, 2019).

Conclusions

The varied colonial legacies across the Mediterranean region have contributed to the divergence of educational traditions and systems, as well as distinct relationships with metropole countries, and with the power blocs existing in the area, including the US and the EU. Schooling in the Mediterranean is thus imbued with the traces of multiple exchanges driven by the necessity of education in modern societies, in dynamics that extend beyond mere colonial domination. Colonialism, post-colonialism and Arabization have left their mark on educational landscapes and organisations in terms of operational models, without managing to put an end to the inequalities generated by both the neoliberal order. It is widely acknowledged that despite the considerable diversity of circumstances, the educational domains within the Mediterranean region are influenced by three overarching phenomena. These phenomena, while manifesting differently and with varying degrees of significance, impact the ideological foundations, the challenges confronting, and the potential advancements within the educational sphere.

First, the issue of the official language in education continues to be crucial to the policies and ideologies that shape and maintain an imagined national identity. This is in motion in the southern area of the Mediterranean, where conflicts for cultural hegemony still arise between Arabic as the main official language, French (or English) as possible educational distinguishing factor for the elites, English as the global language and local idioms that are increasingly taking on the role of political claims for ethnic minorities. On the opposite coast, State education must grapple with the inclusion of minors of foreign origin as well as the rising populism and revanchism fuelled by right-wing movements. In this latter case the Mediterranean Sea, which for centuries has acted as the main vehicle of communication between the basin's north and south, east and west, is now traversed by an invisible but no less effective deadly wall, infused by the Schengen spirit which strives to keep the frontiers of fortress Europe intact and the boat people at bay. When this wall cannot stop migration, the young generations are subjected to linguistic segregation in the European schools at their arrival or, at best, the suppression of their linguistic roots. The linguistic pluralism poses both opportunities and challenges for national cohesion. On the one hand, linguistic diversity may enrich the cultural fabric of these States, providing a platform for intercultural dialogue and exchange. On the other hand, it also presents obstacles to political integration and social cohesion, as competing linguistic identities struggle for recognition and representation within the national arena.

Secondly, many historical developments of the education systems located in the South of Mediterranean are stories of success, «not least as a way of 'writing back' to an international community that has tended to see educational development in the region almost exclusively in deficit terms» (Sultana, 2009: 11). Neoliberal narratives currently emphasise a gap in the quality of education across North Africa and the Middle East compared to Europe suggesting this is evidenced by the high rates of youth unemployment. However, these narratives widely disseminated by international organisations avoid considering the substantial brain drain that fuels migration to Europe.

A third commonality rests upon the space of the Mediterranean itself, as a polythematic teaching subject, usually dispersed, and fragmented in the syllabi of several disciplines in compulsory schooling (Ben Khalifa, 2024). This axis of reflection has not been analysed much so far, if not marginally, neither by the pedagogical literature, nor by the historical-sociological perspective; yet it represents a very crucial issue for understanding towards which models of representation of the 'Mediterranean' curricula and educational programs are evolving. The different ways in which each teaching discipline addresses its own themes help to forge a particular vision of the flexible and open concept of the 'Mediterranean' among students and in their daily lives. Indeed, it is in this overlapping of geographical, historical, linguistic, cultural, and architectural references that the match between contamination and difference, cooperation and conflict, otherness and homogenization, inclusion and discrimination is played out. Reflections on this issue can only lead the social sciences to address the otherwise unforeseeable

links between the disciplinary subjects covering the Mediterranean area and the creation of a critical, participatory, and democratic view of civic education.

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