

Ports as locus of the Mediterranean imaginary

Jean-Claude Izzo and Vincenzo Consolo

by

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I dedicate this thesis to you, dear father. You showed me with your constant love, that whatever I do with persistence and commitment will open the doors to my destiny. The long nights I spent awake, reading and researching reminded me of the long nights you spent awake working, permitting me to study and build my future. Your sacrifices are always accompanied by a constant smile that continuously gives me courage in difficult moments.

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Abstract

The Mediterranean harbour is a place of meeting, of encounters between civilizations, of clashes, wars, destructions, peace; a place where culture comes to live, where art is expressed in various ways and where authors and thinkers have found inspiration in every corner. The harbour imposes a number of thresholds to the person approaching it. This threshold could have different forms which could be emotional, geographical, spiritual or cultural. Authors such as Jean-Claude Izzo and Vincenzo Consolo lived and experienced the Mediterranean harbour in all its aspects and expressions; their powerful experience resulted in the formation of important images referred to as 'imaginary'. The Mediterranean imaginary is the vision of various authors who have been able to translate facts and create figures and images that represent a collective, but at the same time singular imagination. The harbour is an important part of the Mediterranean geographical structure and thus it has been the main point of study for many examining the region. Factors such as language have transformed and suited the needs of the harbour, being a cultural melting pot.

1 Introduction

The Mediterranean is represented by chaos, especially in the harbour cities that are witness to the myriad of cultures which meet each and every day to discuss and interact in the harbour. It is imperative to state that chaos, as the very basis of a Mediterranean discourse has been fed through the different voices formed in the region. These same voices, images and interpretations have found a suitable home in the Mediterranean harbours, places where literature and culture managed to flourish and where the so-called 'margins', both geographical and social, found centrality. The harbour has acquired significance in the discourse on the Mediterranean and thus on how literature and cultural expedients and the various authors and artists recall the harbour as an anchorage point for their deep thoughts about the region.¹

Nowadays, the unification of the Mediterranean seems a 'utopia', since the Mediterranean is politically perceived as a region full of borders and security plans. One may easily mention the various strategic moves put forward by the European Union to safeguard the northern Mediterranean countries from migration from North African shores. By applying and reinforcing these security plans, the Mediterranean has become ever increasingly a region of borders. It is also important not to idealize the Mediterranean past as a unified past, because the

¹ Georges Duby *Gli ideali del Mediterraneo, storia, filosofia e letteratura nella cultura europea* (Mesogea, 2000) pp.80-104

region was always characterized by conflict and chaos. Despite the chaos that was always part of the Mediterranean, being a region of clashing civilizations, it managed to produce a mosaic of various cultures that is visible to the eye of the philosopher or the artist. The artist and the philosopher manage to project their thoughts and ambitions for the region; therefore they are able to see harmony in a region that seems so incoherent. The aim of my thesis is to understand why the harbour is crucial in the construction of the Mediterranean imaginary. Both open space and border, the port, as in the case of Alexandria or Istanbul, has for a long time been a center for trade, commerce and interaction. Therefore, it is imperative to focus on the study of the harbour and harbour cities to be able to give substance to a study about the Mediterranean as a complex of imaginaries.

The boundaries in the study about the Mediterranean have a special place; in fact a boundary that may be either geographical or political has the ability to project and create very courageous individuals that manage to transgress and go over their limits when facing the 'other'. In the Mediterranean we perceive that the actual reason for transgressing and overcoming a limit is the need of conforming or confronting the 'other', sometimes a powerful 'other' able to change and shift ideas, able to transpose or impose cultural traits. Yet, the Mediterranean in its multicultural environment has been able to maintain certain traits that have shaped what it is today. Through movement of people in the region, the Mediterranean has been able to produce a number of great innovations, such as the movement of the Dorians who moved from the south all along the

Greek peninsula, and also the 'sea people' that came from Asia and, being hungry and thirsty, destroyed whatever they found. The same destruction and movement resulted in the creation of three important factors for the Mediterranean: the creation of currency, the alphabet, and marine navigation as we know it today. The various movements also contributed to the formation of the person as a free being with the ability to move freely. Therefore, movement and the overcoming of boundaries in the Mediterranean have contributed greatly to the formation of civilization itself.²

A board, today found in the museum of Damascus, with an alphabet very similar to the Latin one written on it, was very useful as it was very simple in its structure. This confirms a high level of democracy, as civilization meant that each individual had the possibility of knowing and understanding what his leaders understood. We get to understand that in the Mediterranean each person can practice his freedom by travelling out at sea and engage in trading. All this was made possible by the same interactions and conflicts raised in the region.

Conflicts though are not the only factor that promoted the interaction and the formation of interesting cultural and literature in the Mediterranean, as we know it today. Art and culture have been means by which the various conflicts and interactions took life and expressed the deep feelings that inhabited the soul

² Georges Duby *Gli ideali del Mediterraneo, storia, filosofia e letteratura nella cultura europea* (Mesogea, 2000) pp. 80-104

of the artist. Karl Popper³ states that the cultural mixture alone is not sufficient to put the grounds for a civilization and he gives the example of Pisistratus, a Greek tyrant that ordered to collect and copy all the works of Homer. This made it possible to have a book fair a century later and thus spread the knowledge of Homer. Karl Popper wants to tell us that art and culture have deeply influence the formation of a general outset of the region and that the formation of the general public is not something that comes naturally, but is rather encouraged. The Greeks in this sense were directly fed the works of Homer by the diffusion of the works themselves. On the other hand, the majority of Greeks already knew how to read and write, further enabling the diffusion of knowledge. Art and architecture are two important factors that have determined the survival of empires and cultures through time. When artists such as Van Gogh were exposed to the Mediterranean, they expressed art in a different way and when Van Gogh came in contact with the Mediterranean region, the French Riviera and Provence in particular, he discovered a new way of conceiving art. In a letter that Van Gogh wrote to his sister in 1888, he explained that the impact the Mediterranean had on him had changed the way he expressed art itself. He told her that the colours are now brighter, being directly inspired by the nature and passions of the region. The Mediterranean inspired Van Gogh to use a different kind of colour palette. If the art expressed by Van Gogh that is inspired by the Mediterranean is directly

³ Georges Duby *Gli ideali del Mediterraneo, storia, filosofia e letteratura nella cultura europea* (Mesogea, 2000) pp. 80-104

represented and interpreted by the spectator, the region manages to be transposed through the action of art itself.⁴

The way in which the thesis is structured aims to focus on the various images created by poets, popular music and art. Each chapter provides evidence that the harbour has been the centre of attention for the many authors and thinkers who wrote, discussed and painted the Mediterranean. The thesis aims to prove that certain phenomena such as language and religion have contributed to a knit of imaginaries, the layout of certain events such as the *ex-voto* in the Mediterranean and the use of *Sabir* or *Lingua Franca Mediterranea*, which shows how the harbour managed to be the center of events that shaped the cultural heritage of the Mediterranean. The language and religious movement mentioned have left their mark on the Mediterranean countries, especially the harbour cities, which were the first cities encountered.

The choice of the harbour cities as the representation and the loci of a Mediterranean imaginary vision is by no means a casual one. In fact, the harbour for many centuries has been the anchorage point not only in the physical sense but also emotionally and philosophically for many authors and thinkers, two of which are Jean-Claude Izzo and Vincenzo Consolo, extensively mentioned in the dissertation. These two authors are relevant for the purpose of this study as they manage to create a vision of the Mediterranean, based on their personal experience and influenced by

⁴ Georges Duby *Gli ideali del Mediterraneo, storia, filosofia e letteratura nella cultura europea* (Mesogea, 2000) pp.43-55

the harbour from which they are looking at the region and observing the Mediterranean. Popular culture ‘texts’ such as movies and music based on the interaction between the person and the Mediterranean region have an important role in the study, as they represent the first encounter with the harbour. It is a known fact that in the postmodern era where technological means have a broader and deeper reach, popular culture has become the first harbour in which many find anchorage. Therefore it would be difficult to mention literature works that have shaped the Mediterranean without mentioning the popular texts that have constructed images about the region that intertwine and form a complete and powerful image. The relevance of each factor is well defined in this study, delving deep in not only popular culture but also in language and various historical events that have transformed the Mediterranean, providing examples of how factors such as geographical elements, spirituality, devotion and passion have transformed the way in which we perceive a region.

1.1 The Harbour as Threshold

The first chapter focuses on the harbour as a threshold between stability and instability, between wealth and poverty, between mobility and immobility. The various elements that constitute the harbour always convey a sense of ‘in between’ to the person approaching. The very fact that the harbour seems to be a place of insecurity gives the artists and authors a more stimulating environment to

write about their feelings and to contrast them with the ever-changing and chaotic environment of the harbour. The way in which the natural landscape manages to influence the poetic and artistic expression is of great relevance to the study of the Mediterranean region, especially with regards to the study of the harbour. Poets such as Saba and Montale wrote about the way in which nature felt as a personified figure, able to give hope and change the way poets look at the world. They also wrote about nature in the Mediterranean as being an important feature shaping the way in which history and culture developed.

The sailor as a representation of a Mediterranean traveller is often found in literature especially with regards to the notion of the harbour as an image of the Mediterranean culture. Many authors such as Jean-Claude Izzo and Vincenzo Consolo wrote about the figure of the sailor in relation to the sea and everyday life in Mediterranean harbours. The novels *Il Sorriso dell'Ignoto Marinaio* by Vincenzo Consolo and *Les Marins Perdus* by Jean-Claude Izzo are written in two different geographical areas of the Mediterranean and reflect two different periods, but they are tied by an expression of a Mediterranean imaginary and somehow recall common features and aspects of the harbour. Both novels manage to transpose their authors' personal encounter with the Mediterranean, therefore recalling their own country of birth. The novels are somewhat personal to the authors; Consolo recalls Sicily while Izzo often refers to Marseille. The fact that the novels are projecting two different areas and two different points of view on

the Mediterranean proves that by gathering different experiences related to the region, a rich imaginary is created.

The harbour is a door, an entryway to a new world, and borders. Security and expectations are all part of the experience of the threshold when entering a country, especially in the Mediterranean, where thresholds are constantly present and signify a new and exciting experience that leads to a new interpretation of a Mediterranean imaginary. The way in which the harbour acts as an entryway suggests that what lies beyond the harbour is sometimes a mystery to the traveller. Literature greatly contributes to the formation of ideas, especially in regard to the formation of thoughts such as the idea of a Mediterranean imaginary, but there is another element of fundamental importance to the formation of ideas on a generic line, which is popular culture. High-culture, referring to elements such as art, literature, philosophy and scholarly writings, creates a common understanding between an educated public. Popular culture refers to the section of culture that has a common understanding between the public. High-culture and popular culture have the power to transform what is mostly regarded as pertaining to high society; literature is constantly being reinterpreted and transformed by popular culture to be able to reach a greater audience.

1.2 The Port as a Cultural Lighthouse

The importance of natural landscape which determines the success or failure of a harbour, also determines a number of historical events. In this sense, the Mediterranean is a region that has been naturally set up with a number of very important harbours that consequently formed a particular history. The image of the harbour could be compared to the image of the lighthouse, which is part of the harbour itself but at the same is a distinct entity that in some cases had a role which went beyond its initial role of guidance and assumed almost a function of spiritual assistance.⁵ The symbol of the lighthouse is also tied to knowledge and therefore the lighthouse has the ability to give knowledge to the lost traveller at sea, it is able to show the way even in uncertainties. The lighthouses in the Mediterranean had the ability to change through ages and maintain a high historical and cultural meaning; their function is a matter of fact to give direction to the traveller, but in certain cases it has been used to demarcate a border or as a symbol of power.

The Mediterranean Sea has witnessed different exchanges, based on belief, need and sometimes even based solely on the search of self. Among these modes of exchange and these pretexts of voyage in the Mediterranean, we find the *ex-voto* and the movement of relics. Both types of exchange in the region have in common at the basis religion that instilled in the traveller a deep wish to follow a

⁵ Predrag Matvejevic *Breviario Mediterraneo* (Garzanti: 2010)

spiritual path. These exchanges resulted in an increasing cultural exchange. The *ex-voto*⁶ shows a number of things. One of these things is that the very existence of *ex-voto* proves a deep connection with the geographical aspect in the Mediterranean and therefore proving that the region is a dangerous one. In this sense, people in the Mediterranean have shown their gratitude to God or the Virgin Mary in the form of *ex-voto* after a difficult voyage at sea. On the other hand, the *ex-voto* shows how popular culture mingles with the spiritual experience and the way in which a person expresses gratitude to the divine. The *ex-voto* paintings have a special way of being identified. The saint or in most cases Virgin Mary, is usually set in a cloud or unattached from the sea in a tempest. Another element that shows if a painting is or is not part of an *ex-voto* collection, is the acronyms found in the bottom of every painting V.F.G.A (*votum facit et gratiam accepit*). The use of Latin demonstrates the vicinity to Christianity, whilst the words meaning that ‘I made a vow and I received grace’ prove the tie between the tragedies at sea and the grace given by God. The difficult Mediterranean geographical predisposition, discussed by Fernand Braudel⁷ has developed an abundance of devotion that transformed to shrines and objects of adoration and gratitude. These same shrines, objects and materials that were most of the time exchanged and taken from one place to another, have deeply enriched the Mediterranean with cultural objects and the same shrines are nowadays part of a collective cultural heritage.

⁶ Joseph Muscat *Il-Kwadri ex-voto Martittimi Maltin* (Pubblikazzjonijiet Indipendenza, 2003)

⁷ Fernand Braudel *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (Fontana press:1986)

1.3 The Mediterranean Imaginary of Izzo and Consolo Inspired by the Port

The Mediterranean for Jean-Claude Izzo and Vincenzo Consolo revolves around the idea of a harbour that gives inspiration because it is in essence a border where ideas meet and sometimes find concretization. The Mediterranean harbour for centuries has been a meeting place for people and cultures, thus creating a region full of interactions on different levels. The imaginary for both authors has been shaped by both cultural elements and by the literary elements that find a special place in the mindset of the author. Culture as a popular expression of the concept of the Mediterranean has developed in different ways, one of which is the projection of the harbour and the Mediterranean itself through media and advertising. Various elements such as the touristic publicity or the actual reportage about the harbour and the Mediterranean have widened the horizon and the imaginary of the region. In advertisements, the Mediterranean has been idealized in some ways and tends to ignore controversial issues such as 'migration'; advertising also tends to generalize about the Mediterranean and so mentions elements such as the peaceful and relaxing way of life in the region. Advertisement obviously has its own share in the building of an 'imaginary' of the region, but it may also create confusion as to what one can expect of the region. On the other hand, the reportage about the Mediterranean harbour and the region itself focuses more on everyday life in the Mediterranean and common interactions such as encounters with fishermen. Nevertheless, when mentioning

the Mediterranean even the reportage at times makes assumptions that try to unite the Mediterranean into an ideal space and it sometimes aims to give an exotic feel to the region. Yet there are a number of informative films that have gathered important material about the Mediterranean, such as the French production *Méditerranée Notre Mer à Tous*, produced by Yan Arthus-Bertrand for France 2.⁸ The difference between the usual promotional or advertising video clips and the documentary film produced for France 2 was that in the latter the focus points were an expression of the beauty of the whole, whereas in the former, beauty usually lies in the common features that for marketing purposes aim to synthesize the image of the Mediterranean for a better understating and a more clear approach to the region.

The harbour and other various words associated to the concept of the harbour have been used in many different spaces and areas of study to signify many different things other than its original meaning, and this makes us realize that the harbour itself may hold various metaphorical meanings. We have seen the way in which the harbour served as a first spiritual refuge or as an initial salvation point, but it is also interesting to note how the harbour is conceptually seen today, in an era where globalization has shortened distances and brought down barriers. Nowadays, the harbour is also used as a point of reference in the various technological terms especially in relation to the internet, where the 'port' or

⁸ Yan Arthus-Bertrand *Méditerranée notre mer à tous* (France 2, 2014)
www.yannarthusbertrand.org/en/films-tv/--mediterranee-notre-mer-a-tous (accessed February, 2014)

‘portal’ refers to a point of entry and thus we perceive the main purpose of the harbour as being the first point of entry as is in the context of information technology. The concept of core and periphery has deeply changed in the world of Internet and technology, as the concept of core and periphery almost disappeared. Similarly, the Mediterranean’s core and periphery have always been in a way different from what is considered to be the norm. Geographically, the core could be seen as the central area, the place where things happen, whereas in the Mediterranean, the periphery acquires almost the function of the core. The harbour is the geographical periphery; nevertheless, it acquires the function of the core. The islands for example are usually centres, whereas in the Mediterranean they are crossroads rather than real centres of power. In normal circumstances the relation between core and periphery is something that denotes not only the geographical location of a place but it usually also refers to economical, social and cultural advancement. Therefore, in the Mediterranean region the concept of geographical centre and economical and social centres are different from their usual intended meaning.

The Mediterranean imaginary has developed in such a way that it purposely distorted the concepts such as the standard core and periphery or the usual relationship between men and nature or between men and the various borders. In the Mediterranean imaginary, which as we have mentioned is being fed by various authors and popular discourse, has the ability to remain imprinted in our own thoughts and thus has the ability to reinterpret the region itself; we find

that the usual conceptions change because they suit not only the region but the author that is writing about the region. The way in which the various authors and artists who describe the Mediterranean are faced with the ongoing challenges presented by the region shows how in essence each and every author has their own personal approach to the region. Their works are essentially a personal project which lead to the enrichment of the region's imaginary. The differences between each and every author makes the 'imaginary' and the accounts about the Mediterranean much more interesting and personalized.

Consolo⁹ and Izzo¹⁰ have different ways of perceiving the region and although they both aim to create an 'imaginary' that may recall similar features, it is undeniable that there are substantial differences in their approach. Consolo on the one hand focuses a lot on the image of Ulysses as a figure that represents him in his voyage in search of the self. Ulysses for Consolo is a figure that manages to preserve a meaning even in the modern era, a figure that is able to travel through time all the while reinventing the Mediterranean. Izzo as well feels that the figure of Ulysses is imperative to the study of the Mediterranean, but he mostly focuses on the impact of the present experience of the region on the conception of a Mediterranean 'imaginary' rather than focusing on the past as a representation of the present situation.

⁹ Vincenzo Consolo *Il Sorriso dell'Ignoto Marinaio* (Oscar Mondadori: 2012)

¹⁰ Jean-Claude Izzo *Marinai Perduti* (Tascabili e/o: 2010)

1.4 Conclusion

The Mediterranean has been seen as a region full of inconsistencies, contradictions and conflicts, based mainly on the divergent ideas and cultures residing in the same area. The Mediterranean imaginary does not exclude the conflicts that are present in the region and does not aim to unify the region, and in doing so it aims to give voice to the region. For the various authors and thinkers that are mentioned in the thesis, the Mediterranean has transmitted an emotion or has been able to create the right environment to express ideas and form thoughts. The relevance of each and every author within the framework of this thesis shows that without analyzing the single expression about the region, through the various works, one cannot form an imaginary of the Mediterranean region. The various concepts of borders, thresholds, conflicts and cultural clashes manage to mingle with each other in everyday life in the Mediterranean - greater ideas and fundamental questions find resonance and meaning in simple everyday interaction between a common sailor and a woman at a bar. The Mediterranean in essence is the voyage between the search for deep roots and the analysis of the clashes that result from this search for roots. The study of the Mediterranean is the constant evaluation of boundaries and the search for the 'self' through a wholly subjective analysis of the 'other'. The imaginary plays a fundamental role in bringing near the 'roots' and the 'present', and the 'self' and the 'other'.

2 The Harbour as Threshold

The Mediterranean harbour for many authors and thinkers is a starting point as well as a dying point of the so called 'Mediterranean culture'. In fact many sustain that the 'Mediterranean culture' takes place and transforms itself in its harbours. This concept does not have to confuse us in assuming that a 'Mediterranean culture' in its wholesomeness really does exist. There are elements and features that seem to tie us; that the sea so generously brought ashore. On the other hand the same sea has been keeping things well defined and separate. The harbour as the first encounter with land has always maintained an important role in the formation of ideas and collective imagination. The harbour is not selective in who can or cannot approach it and so the formation of this collective imagination is a vast one. It is also important to state that the harbour in itself is a place of contradictions, a place where everything and nothing meet. The contrasting elements and the contradictions that reside in Mediterranean ports are of inspiration to the various authors and thinkers who study the Mediterranean. In this sense they have contributed in the formation of this Mediterranean imagination. Literature is an important factor that contributes to a formation of a collective imagination; it would be otherwise difficult to analyze the Mediterranean without the help of literature, as the formation of a collective imagination was always fed through literature and cultural expedients.

The Mediterranean region, as we shall see, is an area that is somehow constructed; a person in France may not be aware of what a person in Morocco or in Turkey is doing. The concept of a constructed Mediterranean may be tied to the anthropological study conducted by Benedict Anderson¹¹ where he states that the 'nation' is a constructed concept and may serve as a political and somehow economic pretext. The sea is navigated by both tragic boat people and luxurious cruise liners, and these contradictions seem to be legitimized in the Mediterranean region. To give two recent examples we can observe on a political sphere, the European Union's decision to form a Task Force for the Mediterranean (TFM) whose aims are to enhance the security of its shores and to drastically reduce deaths at sea. The TFM is a recent initiative that follows a number of proposals at a political level that have the Mediterranean security at heart.¹² This idea was triggered by a particular event that saw the death of 500 migrants off Lampedusa. It clearly poses a question whether the Mediterranean is a safe place or not, and whether it remains in this sense appealing to touristic and economic investment. The TFM probably reinforces the idea that the Mediterranean is a problematic region and thus requires ongoing 'security'. To reconnect to the main idea, the TFM reinforces the notion that the Mediterranean is a constructed idea where access from one shore to another is denied and where one shore is treated as a security threat whereas the other shore is treated as an area to be protected or an

¹¹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined communities* (Verso, 1996)

¹² Brussels, 4.12.2013 COM (2013) 869 *Communication from the commission to the European Parliament and the council on the work of the Task Force Mediterranean*

area that is unreachable. The contradictions keep on adding up when we see the way the Mediterranean is portrayed for economic and touristic purposes. One example is the 'Mediterranean port association' that helps the promotion of cruising in the Mediterranean region providing assistance to tourists who would like to travel in the region. In this context the Mediterranean is used in a positive way in relation to the touristic appeal it may have. The construction of a Mediterranean idea is by no means restricted to an economical or a political discourse; it has deeper roots and meanings that have formed through a history of relations between countries and of formations of literary expedients. For Franco Cassano¹³, the Mediterranean is a region that in essence is made of differences, it would be otherwise difficult to justify the clashes that have characterized the Mediterranean history, if it was not for the fact that we are all aware that it is a region made up of dissimilarities. On the other hand it is due to these dissimilarities that the Mediterranean is an appealing region both for authors and for travelers alike.

¹³ Franco Cassano, Danilo Zolo *L'alternativa mediterranea* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007)

2.1 Natural Landscape and the Development of Literature

Nature and literature are two elements that intertwine and thus create a collective imagination around the concept of the Mediterranean harbour. In fact, the dialectic between natural landscape and poetic expression was always a matter of great relevance as nature constantly managed to aid the development of poetic expression. The natural landscape helps the formation of existential thoughts, such as life, death and the existence of men - thoughts that are always reinterpreted and reinvented through literature. This relation between men and nature was always important in configuring spaces and determining them according to a common understanding.¹⁴ In the poem of Giacomo Leopardi *Dialogo della Natura e di un Islandese*, Nature is personified, and although the indifference and coldness of nature is palpable, we sense that the poet is being aided by nature in forming his ideas about life itself. Through time and especially through globalization, the world is being interpreted in terms of geographical maps and technology is subsequently narrowing our concept of space and enlarging our concept of life. In the new modern dimension, where the concept of space has acquired an abstract meaning, literature leaves the possibility of dialectic relationship between men and nature, thus enabling men to perceive the places they inhabit as a significant part of their self-construction process. This concept takes us to the perception created around the Mediterranean region and especially the way people look at

¹⁴ Massimo Lollini *Il Mediterraneo della contingenza metafisica di montale all'apertura etica di Saba* (Presses Universitaires Paris Ouest: 2009) pp.358-372

figures such as the sea, the ports and the shores. In Giambattista Vico's¹⁵ poetic geography we understand that the representation of geography through poetic expression is something that dates back in time, through a cosmic representation of senses and feelings. In this regard, Montale and Saba both express in a relatively modern tone the deep representation of the Mediterranean through a mixture of contrasting feelings and ideas. The image of the harbor and any other images in the Mediterranean are deeply felt and analyzed, through the eyes of the poets that live in the region. Montale uses the dialectic of memory to explain his relationship with the Mediterranean, a region locked in its golden age that lives through the memory of poets and authors. He refers to the Mediterranean as '*Antico*' emphasizing the fact that it is an old region. The word '*Antico*' does not merely refer to oldness, but to oldness combined with prestige. The memory characterizes the Mediterranean for Montale, the image of the sea for instance is an archaic image that notwithstanding holds a modern and yet spiritual meaning as it expresses a sense of purification. The sea with its movement brings ashore all the useless and unwanted elements. On the other hand the sea may be seen as a fatherly figure that becomes severe in its actions and makes the poet feel insignificant and intimidated. Montale's aim was to overcome the threshold between artistic expression and natural landscape through a dialogue with the Mediterranean Sea. This aim was not fulfilled. Montale tried hard to express artistically what the Mediterranean Sea meant but ended his poem humbly putting himself at a lower stage in comparison to the greatness of the Sea. Montale fills

¹⁵Massimo Lollini *Il Mediterraneo della contingenza metafisica di montale all'apertura etica di Saba* (Presses Universitaires Paris Ouest: 2009)

his poetry with a mixture of humility and paradoxes; two elements that keep on repeating themselves in the poetry concerning the Mediterranean.

Furthermore, in Umberto Saba's 'Mediterraneo'¹⁶ we encounter the same contrasts and paradoxes used by Montale to develop the figure of the Mediterranean Sea. Saba uses the microcosm of Trieste to explain a larger macrocosm: The Mediterranean. This technique renders his work more personal and gives it a deeper meaning. Saba and Montale both rely on the memory to express a feeling of deep ties with the element of the sea and the life of the Mediterranean harbour. Saba's Mediterranean resides in his microcosm, personal encounters and experiences form his ideas about the region; a region he perceives as being full of fascinating contradictions.

‘Ebbri canti si levano e bestemmie
nell'Osteria suburbana. Qui pure
-penso- è Mediterraneo. E il mio pensiero
all'azzurro s'inebbria di quel nome.’¹⁷

‘Drunken songs and curses rise up
in the suburban tavern. Here, too,
I think, is the Mediterranean. And my mind is
drunk with the azure of that name.’¹⁸

¹⁶ Umberto Saba, translated by George Hochfield: *Song book the selected poems of Umberto Saba* www.worldpublicofletters.com/excerpts/songbook_excerpt.pdf (accessed, July 2014)

¹⁷ Massimo Lollini *Il Mediterraneo della contingenza metafisica di montale all'apertura etica di Saba* (Presses Universitaires Paris Ouest: 2009) pp.358-372

Saba mingles his personal classicist formation expressed in the 'all'azzurro' with the poorest part of the Mediterranean harbour 'l'osteria'. Both factors are intertwining, and so, the Mediterranean for Saba is the combination of both the richness of classicist thoughts that formed in the Mediterranean as well as the meager elements that formed in its ports; yet they embellish and enrich the concept of the Mediterranean. Saba is searching for his personal identity through the search for a definition to the Mediterranean. In his art he attempts to portray the very heart of the Mediterranean which is found in his abyss of culture and knowledge with the everyday simple life of the harbours.

2.2 Instability vs. Stability in the Mediterranean Harbour

In Saba and Montale's works, the fascinating inconsistencies in the Mediterranean seem to find a suitable place in the ports and in the minds of each and every author and thinker who encounters it. The notion of stability and instability finds its apex in the port. The sea is the synonym of instability, especially in the Mediterranean, being depicted as dangerous and unpredictable. As in the recounts of the Odyssey, the sea, and the Mediterranean as a whole, is a synonym of instability and thus prone to natural catastrophes. The Homeric recounts of Ulysses' journey explore the Mediterranean that was previously an unknown place. Although the places mentioned by Homer are fictitious, they now

¹⁸ Umberto Saba, translated by George Hochfield: *Song book the selected poems of Umberto Saba* www.worldrepublicofletters.com/excerpts/songbook_excerpt.pdf (accessed, July 2014)

have a general consensus over the definition of the actual places. As time went by historians and authors went on confirming what Homer had depicted in his *Odyssey* - a Mediterranean that constantly poses a challenge, danger and fascination at the same time. Fernand Braudel in his '*Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip the II*'¹⁹ sustains the view of a difficult Mediterranean, of a succession of events that have helped the success of the Mediterranean for a period of time. Its instability and complication have not aided the area in maintaining its '*golden age*'. This discourse was reinvented by Horden and Purcell in '*The Corrupting Sea*'²⁰ where the Mediterranean meets geographically, historically and anthropologically. In '*The Corrupting Sea*' the view of Fernand Braudel is expanded into what the Mediterranean meant geographically and historically, therefore Horden and Purcell explain that the inconsistencies and natural features in the Mediterranean really contributed to bring the '*golden age*' to an end, but they were the same features that brought on the rich culture around the Mediterranean countries in the first place. Where literature is concerned, the inconsistencies and natural features served as an inspiration to various authors who went on forming the collective imagination around the Mediterranean. Therefore, it could be argued that the geographical complexity of the region is in fact the tying point to the 'Mediterranean' itself that resides in the unconscious and that otherwise would have died with its economical shift towards other areas of interest. The problematic identity and the challenging

¹⁹ Fernand Braudel *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (Fontana press: 1986)

²⁰ Peregring Horden, Nicholas Purcell *The Corrupting sea, a study of the Mediterranean history* (Blackwell publishing: 2011)

natural environment brought by an ongoing sense of curiosity and attraction towards the Mediterranean region.

The port is the first encounter with stability after a journey that is characterized by instability, at the surprise of the inexperienced traveler. However, the port does not always convey immovability. The port gives a sense of limbo to the traveller that has just arrived. It is a safe place on the one hand but on the other hand due to its vicinity to the sea, it is as unpredictable as the sea itself. The sailor is a frequent traveler who knows and embraces the sea. He chose or has been forced to love the sea, to accept the sea as his second home. The sailor is in fact the figure that can help us understand the fascination around the Mediterranean and its ports. It is not an unknown factor that sailors and their voyages have captured the attention of many authors that tried extensively to understand the affinity sailors have to the sea.

The sailor²¹ is a man defined by his relation with the sea and is a recurrent figure in a number of literature works all over Europe and the rest of the world. The sailor is the incarnation of the concept of human marginality, he lives in the margin of life and he embraces the marginality of the harbour with the different aspects of the port. The thresholds present in the port are represented by the sailor; a figure that lives between the sea and land, between betrayal and pure love, between truth and lie. Like the portrayal of Odysseus, the concept of a sailor has

²¹ Nora Moll *Marinai Ignoti, perduti (e nascosti). Il Mediterraneo di Vincenzo Consolo, Jean-Claude Izzo e Waciny Larej* (Roma: Bulzoni 2008) pp.94-95

infidelic properties. He carnally betrays his loved one, but he is psychologically anchored to one woman for his whole life; a woman who is always present in various thoughts but at the same time she is always physically distant. As we will see in various works, the sailor is in constant search of knowledge - the very same knowledge that brought him to love and embrace the sea. The knowledge that is conveyed through the action of travelling itself is another question that would require a deep analysis, but for the sake of our study the fact that knowledge is transmitted through the depth of the sea is enough to make a connection with the purpose by which the sailor travels. The sailor fluctuates between sea and land, between danger and security, between knowledge and inexperience. The thresholds are constantly overcome by the curious and free spirited sailor that embarks in this voyage to the discovery of his inner-self. The literary voyage of the sailor in the Mediterranean takes a circular route while it goes deep in ancient history and ties it to modern ideas. Since the sailor is not a new character but a recurring one in literature and culture it has the ability to transform and create ideas giving new life to the Mediterranean harbours. While the seamen are the link between the high literature and the popular culture, the sailor does not have a specific theme in literature but the archetype of 'the sailor' has a deep resonance in many literary themes. As Nora Moll states in one of her studies about the image of the sailor, she puts forward a list of common themes associated with the image of the sailor:

‘Tra i complessi tematici, a cui in parte ho già accennato, si annoverano l’avventura, il viaggio, l’eros, l’adulterio, il ritorno, il superamento di limiti (interiori) e di sfide (esterne), la libertà, la vita come “navigatio” e come intrigo conflittuale di esperienze.’²²

‘Amongst the complex themes, which I partly already mentioned, we find adventure, travel, Eros, adultery, the return, the overcoming of limits (interior) and challenges (exterior), freedom, life as “navigatio” and as a conflictual intrigue (or scheme) of experiences.’

2.3 The Prototypical Sailor

The interesting fact about the study conducted by Nora Moll is that the sailor in her vision is not merely a figure tied to a specific social class, but as we can see the themes listed are themes that can be tied also to the figure of Ulysses. It is difficult to say that Ulysses or the image of the sailor own a predestined set of themes, and in fact they do not necessarily do so. Ulysses is a character that comprehends certain themes, but these change and shift in accordance to space, time and circumstances. What does not change is the thresholds that are always present in the life of a sailor, the limits that are constantly there to be overcome and the external challenges that need to be confronted. The harbour conveys a

²² Nora Moll *Marinai Ignoti, perduti (e nascosti). Il Mediterraneo di Vincenzo Consolo, Jean-Claude Izzo e Waciny Larej* (Roma: Bulzoni 2008) pp.94-95

number of thresholds; as we have seen these are embodied in the figure of the mariner.

Jean Claude Izzo in his *Les Marins Perdus*²³ wrote about the discomfort of sailors having to be forced to stay on land and their relationship with the harbor, a passing place that has a special meaning. The harbor is in fact a special place for the mariner, as it is the only place where they can have human contact beyond that of the crew. The mariner in Jean Claude Izzo does not feel that he belongs to any nation or country. He belongs to the sea; a sea that managed to give meaning to his life but at the same time managed to destroy it. Jean Claude Izzo uses strong images of the port to describe the tie the sailor has to the harbour itself, he uses sexual and erotic images and ties them to legends and popular culture expedients. The story is interesting because of the way Jean Claude Izzo reverses the way sailors live. In fact he recreates a story where the sailor is trapped in the harbour and so he is forced to view the sea from land and not the other way round as he usually does. The psychological discomfort that Jean Claude Izzo creates portrays the Mediterranean archetypes and the life in the ports from a reverse point of view. Everyday life in the harbour is analyzed through a succession of tragedies that on one hand recall the classicist view of the Mediterranean, and on the other hand, due to references to everyday life elements, may be easily connected to the modern conception of the Mediterranean port. The links created by Jean Claude Izzo are made on purpose to create an ongoing bond between the classic Homeric

²³ Jean-Claude Izzo *Marinai Perduti* (Tascabili e/o: 2010) pp.238

Mediterranean and the modern Mediterranean. In fact, Diamantis -the main character of the novel- is portrayed as a modern Ulysses trying to cope with ongoing temptations and with the constant drive for knowledge. The Odyssey is for Diamantis a point of anchorage. He reads the Odyssey while attempting to define himself:

‘In effetti l’*Odissea* non ha mai smesso di essere raccontata, da una taverna all’altra, di bar in bar:... e Ulisse è sempre fra noi. La sua eterna giovinezza è nelle storie che continuiamo a raccontarci anche oggi se abbiamo ancora un avvenire nel Mediterraneo è di sicuro lì. [...] I porti del Mediterraneo... sono delle strade.’²⁴

‘Yes... In fact, the Odyssey has constantly been retold, in every tavern or bar... And Odysseus is still alive among us. Eternally young, in the stories we tell, even now. If we have a future in the Mediterranean, that’s where it lies.” [...] “The Mediterranean means... routes. Sea routes and land routes. All joined together. Connecting cities. Large and small. Cities holding each other by the hand.’

In this quote we see the continuous threshold between space and time being overcome, that serves to keep alive the Mediterranean itself. It is clear that the classic Homeric recount is always reinterpreted and reinvented. The Odyssey is not the only point of reflection for Diamantis. In fact the protagonist is seen as a

²⁴ Jean-Claude Izzo *Marinai Perduti* (Tascabili e/o: 2010) pp.238

deep character that reflects on the various incidents in his life and it could be argued that *Diamantis* is the expression of Jean Claude Izzo's thoughts. The sailors in Jean Claude Izzo's novel chose to be Mediterranean; naval commerce exists beyond the enclosed sea, but these men chose to sail with inadequate ships in a region where geographical beauty and historical richness meet. The port for Izzo, has multiple meanings and he defines the Mediterranean harbours as differing from other harbours, because of the way they are accessed. Izzo uses the image of the harbour as a representation of love:

‘Vedi, e' il modo in cui puo essere avvicinato a determinare la natura di un porto. A determinarlo veramente [...] Il Mediterraneo e' un mare di prossimita'.’²⁵

‘You see, it's the way it can be approached that determines the nature of a port. Really determines it. [...] The Mediterranean, a sea of closeness.’

This passage shows the influence of thought, Izzo inherited from Matvejevic. In fact the approach used to describe the harbour and to depict the nature is very similar to the one used by Matvejevic in his '*Breviario Mediterraneo*'.²⁶ We perceive that the harbour is substantially a vehicle of devotion, love, passion and Eros, though we may also observe the threshold between the love and passion found in the port and the insecurity and natural brutality that the sea may convey. In this novel, the port is transformed in a secure

²⁵ Jean-Claude Izzo *Marinai Perduti* (Tascabili e/o: 2010) pp122

²⁶ Predrag Matvejevic *Breviario Mediterraneo* (Garzanti:2010)

place whilst the sea is a synonym of tragedy. At the same time the port is seen as a filthy and corrupt place.

While for Izzo the past is used as a background to tie with the present and moreover to show a link with the future, Consolo uses a different technique. He goes deep in one focal historical point to highlight certain Mediterranean features and problematic issues. Consolo uses the period of time where Sicily was undergoing various political changes. He describes the revolution and the Italian unification, and portrays real events and characters tied to Sicilian history. In Vincenzo Consolo, the image of the sailor is used as a metaphor through the work of Antonello *'il Sorriso dell'Ignoto Marinaio'*.²⁷ The title itself gives us a hint of the tie between art and everyday life. The voices that intertwine and form the discourse around the Mediterranean are hard to distinguish as they have formed the discourse itself to a point where a voice or an echo is part of another. The work of Consolo²⁸ goes through a particular historical period in Sicily to describe present situations and ongoing paradoxes in the Mediterranean region. It is difficult to resume and give a name and specific allocation to the works on the Mediterranean as the multiple faces and voices have consequently formed a variety of literature and artistic works. The beauty behind works on the Mediterranean is that archetypes such as the concept of a 'sailor' or the 'harbour' are revisited and reinterpreted, thus acquiring a deeper meaning and at the same time enriching the meaning of 'the Mediterranean' itself.

²⁷ Vincenzo Consolo *Il sorriso dell'Ignoto Marinaio* (Oscar Mondadori:2012)

²⁸ Vincenzo Consolo *Il sorriso dell'Ignoto Marinaio* (Oscar Mondadori:2012)

Consolo focuses on the microcosm of Sicily and he portrays a fluctuation between sea and land. He locates Sicily in an ideal sphere where the thresholds are nonexistent: 'La Sicilia! La Sicilia! Pareva qualcosa di vaporoso laggiu' nell'azzurro tra mare e cielo, me era l'isola santa!'²⁹ 'Sicily! Sicily! It seemed something vaporous down there in the blue between sea and sky, but it was the holy island!'

Sicily is placed in an ideal sphere where beautiful natural elements coexist with famine, degradation and war. The imagery created around the island of Sicily may be comparable to the imagery around the Mediterranean region. As for the harbour it is described by Consolo as a place of contradictions, comparable to the ones found in the whole Mediterranean. The detail given to the life in the port is extremely in depth and the type of sentences used expresses the frenetic lifestyle of the port itself:

'Il *San Cristoforo* entrava dentro il porto mentre ne uscivano le barche, caicchi e gozzi, coi pescatori ai rami alle corde vele reti lampe sego stoppa feccia, trafficanti con voce urale e con richiami, dentro la barca, tra barca e barca, tra barca e la banchina, affollata di vecchi, di donne e di bambini, urlanti parimenti e agitati [...].'³⁰

²⁹ Vincenzo Consolo *Il sorriso dell'ignoto Marinaio* (Oscar Mondadori:2012) pp:56

³⁰ Vincenzo Consolo *Il sorriso dell'ignoto Marinaio* (Oscar Mondadori:2012) pp:29

‘The San Cristoforo sailed into the harbour whilst the boats, caiques and other fishing boats, sailed out with the fishermen holding the ropes sails nets tallow oakum lee, traffickers beckoning with an ural voice, inside the boat, from one boat to another, from one boat to the quay, crowded with the elderly, women and children, screaming equally and agitated’ [...]

The tension around the port is well transmitted in the explanation given by Consolo, there seems to be a point of nothingness and a point of departure at the same time. We perceive that there is plenty of life in the port but at the same time confusion reigns, therefore we could argue that people in ports are not really conscious of life and that they are letting things turn. Nevertheless, the port is the starting point of life that develops either in the sea or inland. Both by Consolo and in Izzo we are made aware of the importance of life at the 'starting point', therefore the port in the works of both authors acquires the title of a 'threshold' between life and death, consciousness and unconsciousness, love and hatred, nature and artifice, aridity and fertility. In the microcosm described by Consolo, the Sicilian nature and its contradictions seem to recall the ones in the rest of the region. For example, the painting *'Ignoto Marinaio'* is described as a contradictory painting. In fact, the sailor is seen as an ironic figure that smiles notwithstanding the tragedies he has encountered. The *'Ignoto Marinaio'* has seen the culture and history of the Mediterranean unveil, he has therefore a strange smile that

expresses the deep knowledge acquired through his experience and a deep look that convey all the suffering he has come upon. In the novel by Consolo, the painting serves as a point of reference and in fact, the '*Ignoto Marinio*' resembles another important character in the novel; Internodato. Both figures share the ironic and poignant smile and the profound look. Internodato is seen as a typical Sicilian revolutionary who embraces the sea but at the same time is not psychologically unattached to the situations that happened on land. He is part of the revolution and integral part of the Sicilian history.

2.4 The Harbour as a Metaphorical Door

Consolo and Izzo with their accounts of sailors and the life in Mediterranean harbours brought us to the interpretation of the harbour as a metaphorical door. As in the seminal work of Predrag Matvejevic '*Breviario Mediterraneo*',³¹ the harbour is tied to the concept of a metaphorical door. In Latin both 'porto' and 'porta' have the same root and etymological derivation. A harbour in fact is a metaphorical and physical entryway to a country. In the Roman period, the god Portunos was the deity of the harbour who facilitated the marine commerce and the life in the port in general. The various deities related to the sea in the Roman

³¹ Predrag Matvejevic *Il Mediterraneo e l'Europa, lezioni al college de France e altri saggi* (Garzanti elefanti:2008)

and Greek traditions are an indication of a deep relation between the figure of the harbour and the physical and geographical figure of the door or entryway.

The door may have many different shapes and may divide different spaces but it always signifies a threshold from one point to another. In literature the harbour signifies a metaphorical door between fantasy and reality, history and fiction, love and hatred, war and peace, safety and danger. The image of the door is concretized through the various border controls, visas and migration issues and in this regard the entryway becomes a question of membership. A piece of paper in this case determines the access through that doorway, but from a cultural and identity point of view the Mediterranean threshold is overcome through the encounter with history and fiction. Thierry Fabre in his contribution to the book series *'Rappresentare il Mediterraneo'*;³² in relation to the Mediterranean identity he states; "...Non si situa forse proprio nel punto di incrocio tra la storia vera e i testi letterari che danno origine all'immaginario Mediterraneo?"³³ Isn't perhaps situated exactly at the meeting point between the real stories and the literature texts that give birth to the Mediterranean imagination?' Fabre is conscious of the fact that the discourse about the Mediterranean limits itself to a constructed imaginary, the poet or artist in general that enters this metaphorical door is expected to conceive the Mediterranean imaginary; blending reality with fiction. The door is not always a static figure but is sometimes blurred and does not

³² Jean Claude Izzo, Thierry Fabre *Rappresentare il Mediterraneo, lo sguardo francese* (Mesogea: 2000)

³³ *Ibid* (Mesogea: 2000) pp.25

clearly divide and distinguish. The Mediterranean itself is a region of unclear lines - the formation of a port and of a nation itself is sometimes not that clear. In Matvejevic's *'Il Mediterraneo e l'Europa'*³⁴ literature blends with facts and culture so does the geography around the Mediterranean region:

‘Tra terra e mare, in molti luoghi vi sono dei limiti: un inizio o una fine, l'immagine o l'idea che li uniscono o li separano. Numerosi sono i tratti in cui la terra e il mare s'incontrano senza irregolarità né rotture, al punto che non si può determinare dove comincia uno o finisce l'altro. Queste relazioni multiple e reversibili, danno forma alla costa.’³⁵

‘Between land and sea, there are limits in many places: a start or a finish, the image or the idea that joins or separates them. The places where sea meets land without any irregularities or breaks are numerous, to the extent that it's not possible to determine where one starts or the other finishes. These multiple and reversible links that give shape to the coast.’

The coast in this sense is made up of a set of relations between figures and forms that meet without touching each other, the door is not always present; it sometimes disappears to give room to imagination and the formation of literature.

³⁴ Predrag Matvejevic *Il Mediterraneo e l'Europa, Lezioni al College de France e Altri Saggi* (Garzanti elefanti: 2008)

³⁵ *Ibid* (Garzanti: 2008) pp.53

The concept of literature allows the analysis of culture and the way it is envisioned and spread through Mediterranean harbours.

The fluctuations of varied thoughts that have shaped the Mediterranean imagery through its harbours have no ties with everyday life, if not by the transmission of culture and the means of popular culture that served as a point of anchorage and sometimes as a point of departure for the formation of a deeply rooted but also enriching and contested collective imagination.

3 The Port as a Cultural Lighthouse

The harbour for many centuries has been an anchorage point and a safe place for sailors and travellers that navigate the Mediterranean. We perceive the safety of the harbour as something that is sometimes naturally part of its very makeup, as on such occasions where we encounter natural harbours. In other cases, to suit their needs, people have built around the shores and transformed part of the land into an artificial harbour which is able to welcome the foreigner and trade and at the same time to defend if needed the inland. Fernand Braudel³⁶ in his *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* discussed the importance of the Mediterranean shores for the traveller in an age when people were already able to explore the outer sea, but yet found it reassuring to travel in a sea where the shore was always in sight.

The Mediterranean Sea has always instilled a sense of uncertainty in the traveller, because of its natural instability. Nevertheless, the fact that the shores and ports are always in the vicinity, the Mediterranean traveller is reassured that he can seek refuge whenever needed. The fascinating thing is that the ports in the age delineated by Fernand Braudel were not only a means of safety but most of all of communication - a type of economic and cultural communication that went beyond

³⁶ Fernand Braudel *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (Fontana press:1986)

the simple purpose of the port itself. The same simple modes of communications that Braudel describes may seem irrelevant when studying the Mediterranean history in its entirety, but we get to understand that they are actually the building blocks of the Mediterranean itself:

‘This is more than the picturesque sideshow of a highly coloured history. It is the underlying reality. We are too inclined to pay attention only to the vital communications; they may be interrupted or restored; all is not necessarily lost or saved.’³⁷

The primordial modes of communication, the essential trade and the mixture of language and culture all have contributed to the creation of what we now sometimes romantically call the Mediterranean. The truth lies in the fact that the harbour has always been prone to receiving and giving back; it has been a passing place of objects, customs and of words. We surely cannot deny the fact that trade has shifted not only by moving from different areas of interest but it also shifted into different forms changing the harbour’s initial function. This basic form of communication has contributed highly to the formation of a Mediterranean imaginary and a mixture of cultures that have left a deep resonance in language, literature and cultural expression as a whole.

³⁷ Fernand Braudel *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (Fontana press: 1986) pp.108

The risk and insecurity delivered by the sea have contributed to the formation of various symbols that from their end contribute to the formation of an imaginary concerning the Mediterranean harbour. Amidst the uncertainties and hazards at sea, the light of the lighthouse that shows the surest path and warns the person travelling of the possible dangers, reassures the traveller while leading the way. The symbol of the lighthouse is tied to the representation of light and thus knowledge. Finding light in the middle of the sea gives the traveller the necessary means to have greater awareness of what is approaching. The geographical position and the architecture of the lighthouse are all an indication of their meaning beyond their primary objective. During the Roman period for example, the lighthouse was primarily an important source of safekeeping,³⁸ but at the same time it represented a high expression of architectural and engineering knowledge. One example is the ancient roman lighthouse in Messina. Studies show that the architecture used was very functional, but at the same time it portrayed Neptune, thus mingling popular beliefs and superstitions. On the other hand, it was also a powerful way of delineating borders between Sicily and the Italian peninsula. Today the lighthouse in Messina has been replaced by fort San Remo and the architecture of the lighthouse has changed to a more functional one. Another powerful example is the ancient lighthouse in Alexandria, built on the island of Pharos where it stood alone as if wanting to replace the harbour itself. In Alexandria it is Poseidon who guards the harbour, and the myth blends with the social and geographical importance of the lighthouse. Originally, the lighthouse in Alexandria was simply a landmark, but

³⁸ Turismo La Coruna, Roman Lighthouses in the Mediterranean (2009)
www.torredeherculesacoruna.com/index.php?s=79&l=en (accessed September, 2014)

eventually during the Roman Empire, it developed into a functional lighthouse. In the case of the old lighthouse built during the Roman period at the far eastern end of Spain, its dimension and position reflect the way Romans saw the world and how they believed Spain marked the far end of the world. What these lighthouses had in common was the fact that they were not just there to aid and support the traveller in his voyage but to define a border and to give spiritual assistance to the lost passenger.

The symbol of the lighthouse is somehow deeply tied to a spiritual experience. In Messina where Neptune guarded the sea, and in many other places and different eras, the lighthouse was positioned in such way that it attracted a spiritual resonance and the light that emanated from the lighthouse may be compared to a spiritual guide. Matvejevic in his *Breviario Mediterraneo*³⁹ compares lighthouses to sanctuaries and the lighthouse guardian to a spiritual hermit. He also adds that the crews responsible for the running of the lighthouse resemble a group of monks, rather than sailors: 'Gli equipaggi dei fari, cioè personale che somiglia piuttosto ai monaci dei conventi di un tempo che non ai marinai'.⁴⁰ 'The crews of the lighthouses, that is staff that resembles more the convent's monks of yore rather than the sailors'. The comparison is by no means striking, considering the mystical importance of the lighthouse. The lighthouse and its crew are seen and respected by the traveller, as they are their first encounter with land, safety and refuge. The link with spirituality is something that comes

³⁹ Predrag Matvejevic *Breviario Mediterraneo* (Garzanti:2010) pp.55-56

⁴⁰ Predrag Matvejevic *Breviario Mediterraneo* (Garzanti:2010) pp.56

naturally. The lighthouse crew for example is in some cases part of the *ex-voto* paintings found in the monasteries and convents. This illustrates the deep connection with the spiritual aspect. The question sometimes is to determine whether the harbour and the lighthouse need to be two distinct features in the same space or whether they are part of the same geographical, social and cultural space. The answer may vary according to the way one perceives it. The lighthouse is the first encounter with land, but it is almost a feeling that precedes the real encounter with land, whilst the harbour is the first physical contact with land. The two elements may be taken into account separately, but for the purpose of this study they need to be taken in conjunction.

The cultural value of both these elements goes beyond their physical value. In fact, both the lighthouse and the harbour share a common proximity to the sea, and receive cultural and social contributions from every traveller. The lighthouse and the harbour do not distinguish between different types of travellers -they accept everyone and their main gift for this act of pure love is the enrichment of culture, customs, language and food. The different elements intertwine and create a beautiful atmosphere that mixes sounds and tastes from various countries. This is not always distinguishable and it may not in all cases recreate the same atmosphere in more than one country. What is sure is that the elements present in the harbours are of great relevance to what is portrayed on a higher artistic and cultural level. In this regard the harbour acts as a lighthouse for the country and sometimes for the region too, this time not to alarm the traveller but to guide him spiritually and

artistically. The harbour was and still is a meeting place, where artists and thinkers stop and reflect. What comes out of these reflections sets deep roots in the cultural knit of the harbour and expands and grows until all the roots intertwine and create such a beautifully varied cultural atmosphere. Although the process may seem an easy and flowing one, we must not forget that the mixture of cultures and the setting up of such a variegated cultural atmosphere was not always flowing and peaceful.

3.1 Religious Cultural Mobility

The way the Mediterranean is geographically set up, contributed to an expansion of religious pilgrimages that intertwined with marine commerce and cultural richness. The image of the lighthouse and the harbour instil a sense of spiritual refuge, and the large number of harbours and lighthouses in the Mediterranean contribute to the mysticism of the region. Religious pilgrimage throughout the Mediterranean is something that belongs to an older era and that could have possibly started very early in the Greek empire, where Gods were adored and ports and lighthouses had deep ties with different deities. As Christianity started spreading in the Mediterranean, the Greek and Roman gods were joined by saints and shrines for adoration.⁴¹ The coexistence of both pagan and monotheistic religious expressions confirmed a cultural motif related to

⁴¹ Peregring Horden, Nicholas Purcell *The Corrupting sea, a study of the Mediterranean history* (Blackwell publishing:2011)

divinity that has been a constant throughout Mediterranean history. In the Middle Ages the phenomena of the religious pilgrimage and the movement of saints' relics gave to the Mediterranean voyage a different dimension. As noted in Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea*, this age of pilgrimage and movement for religious purposes was brought about by a new discovery of sea routes in the Mediterranean and a different conception of religion as a commodity. 'Through the translation of his remains the saint himself, like the images of pre-Christian deities before him, in a very intense expression of the link between religion and redistribution, became a commodity'.⁴² The redistribution of relics brought a new type of secular economy that involved bargaining and bartering. The movement of relics not only created a new wave of economic activity around the Mediterranean but also a movement of tales and accounts that pictured saints and voyages at sea, 'Tales which echo real webs of communication, such as that of the arrival of St. Restitua from Carthage to Ischia'.⁴³ The stories seem to recall older stories from Greek culture, but are adapted to a newer setting.

The parallelism between good and bad, projected on the perilous voyage in the Mediterranean, was always part of the account of a voyage itself, as we can also recall in the various episodes of Ulysses' journey. We are thus able to see that in the voyages of pilgrims, the relationship between good and bad is often projected onto the hard and extreme weather conditions in the Mediterranean.

⁴² *Ibid* pp.443

⁴³ *Ibid* pp.443

Religious travellers had their own way of reading the map of the Mediterranean, interpreting every danger and threat through religious imagery.

From a cultural point of view, the accounts and echoes of religious travellers shaped the Mediterranean Sea itself and gave new life to the ports they anchored in. Apart from the movement of relics, another testimony of the great communication and cultural heritage -as we have previously mentioned- is the *ex-voto* in the Mediterranean shores which gives witness to the cultural interaction and customs based on faith. In many instances the objects collected for the *ex-voto* have been taken up over time and placed in marine museums where cultural interaction and exchange takes place. One example could be the *ex-voto* in Marseille,⁴⁴ where nowadays the objects collected are part of a collective cultural memory. In France, during the late seventies and the early eighties we have seen a great rediscovery of the *ex-voto* heritage that led to a deep cultural resonance in the area. The discovery of the *ex-voto* brought by a new inquiry of religious and harbour customs that were probably ignored previously. The paintings and objects dedicated to the saints and most of the time to the Virgin Mary represented the everyday life of sailors and travellers, the dangers at sea and most of all the miracles encountered during the arduous voyages. In the various exhibitions about *ex-voto* in France the concept of a Mediterranean *ex-voto* emerged and we are aware that at the time when the *ex-voto* was practiced in the majority of cases the

⁴⁴ Jacques Bouillon 'Ex-voto du terroir marseillais' *Revue d'histoire modern et contemporaine* (1954) pp.342-344

voyage routes were solemnly around the Mediterranean and the fact that marine exhibitions concerning the *ex-voto* claim a Mediterranean heritage calls for a collective cultural experience. It is difficult though to distinguish between a personal encounter with the harbour and a Mediterranean experience; one may intertwine with the other. In this case, the Mediterranean reference is imposed and not implied, and one might therefore wonder if there are elements that are common in the region and thus justify the use of the word Mediterranean. In the case of the *ex-voto*, it has been noted that certain elements are common to the whole region.

It is interesting to note the areas of interest and the social groups to whom the *ex-voto* applies. This may give a clearer idea of the criteria and the cultural sphere that surrounded the practice of the *ex-voto*. In the majority of cases the *ex-voto* represented the medium bourgeoisie and the lower classes, the setting mostly represented small nuclear families. In most of the *ex-voto* paintings, one can see that the terrestrial elements intertwine with celestial elements ‘Dans sa structure, un *ex-voto* présente deux espaces, celeste et terrestre’.⁴⁵ The anthropological and cultural importance of the *ex-voto* emerges through the various figures that appear especially in the paintings dedicated to the saints and the Virgin Mary. These figures have a particular placement in these paintings that reveals a deep connection with the cult of miracles and devotion.

In Malta, as in France, the *ex-voto* was a widespread custom that left a great cultural heritage. The paintings and objects donated to the *ex-voto*, especially

⁴⁵ Jacques Bouillon ‘Ex-voto du terroir marseillais’ *Revue d’histoire modern et contemporaine* (1954) pp.342-344

in connection to the sea, reveal a number of historical events and geographical catastrophes that are tied with the Mediterranean region. The fact that the sea is unpredictable makes the practice of the *ex-voto* much more relevant in an era where the only means of transportation in the Mediterranean was by ways of sea. In the Maltese language there is a saying '*il-bahar żaqqu ratba u rasu iebsa*' which literally translates to 'the sea has a soft stomach but it is hard headed'. This saying is very significant as it shows the profound awareness of the Maltese community of the dangers at sea. The sea is unpredictable and therefore only through divine intercession can the traveller find peace and courage to overcome any dangerous situation. The different types of paintings that were donated portray different types of vessels and so indicate a precise period in history. At the Notre Dame de la Garde in Marseille, one finds a number of models of different vessels from various historical periods. We also encounter very recent models of boats. This confirms that in a way the *ex-voto* is still present nowadays. Even in Malta, the practice of the *ex-voto* is still relatively present, although one may notice that the advance in technology and the new forms of transport through the Mediterranean aided the voyage itself and therefore diminished the threats and deaths at sea. The types of vessels used in the paintings also shows the different modes of economic trading voyages in the Mediterranean. For example, in Malta during the nineteenth century, a great number of merchants were travelling across the Mediterranean. This resulted in a number of *ex-voto* paintings that pictured merchants' vessels and one could be made aware of their provenance. Various details in the *ex-voto*

paintings show many important aspects of the Mediterranean history as a whole and of the connectivity in the region that went on building through time.

One interesting fact common to almost all the *ex-voto* paintings is the acronyms V.F.G.A (*votum facit et gratiam accepit*) and sometimes P.G.R (*Per Grazia Ricevuta*) that categorizes certain paintings into the *ex-voto* sphere. The acronyms literally mean that we made a vow and we received grace and P.G.R stands for the grace received. The acronyms are in Latin, for a long period of time which was the official language of Christianity. These acronyms, which may have indicated the tie of high literature -through the knowledge of Latin- and popular culture -through the concept of the *ex-voto*, usually associated to a medium to lower class- demonstrate that the use of language may tie the various social classes. Although everyone understood the acronyms, it doesn't mean that Latin was fully understood amongst sailors and merchants of the sea. Language was a barrier to merchants, traders and seamen most of the time. The Mediterranean has a variety of languages coexist in the region; Semitic languages at its south and Romance languages at its north. The lines of intersection and influence of languages are not at all clear and the geography of the Mediterranean region forced its people to move and shift from one place to another for commerce or for other reasons which brought by a deep need for modes of communication.

3.2 The *Lingua Franca Mediterranea* as a Mode of Communication

The communication barrier between people in the Mediterranean coupled with the profound need for interaction brought by a deep need of a common language or at least common signals which would be understood by everyone. In the case of the *ex-voto*, language or at least a reference made to a certain language, gives the possibility for people from different countries to understand the underlying message. In the Mediterranean harbours where interaction between people from different lands was the order of the day, the need for common signals and language was always deeply felt. Languages in the Mediterranean region contain linguistic elements that throughout history have been absorbed from other languages. In the Mediterranean region especially during the fifteenth century, the great need for communication resulted in the creation of a so-called *Lingua franca*, a spoken language that allowed people to communicate more freely within Mediterranean ports. One such language was known as ‘Sabir’, with words mainly from Italian and Spanish, but also words from Arabic and Greek. The interesting fact about Sabir was that the amount of words coming from different languages around the Mediterranean was an indication of the type of commerce that was taking place at the time. Therefore, if at a given moment in time the amount of words from the Italian language was higher than that from the Spanish language, it meant that commerce originating and involving from Italy predominated. As Eva Martinez Diaz explains in her study about the *Lingua franca Mediterranea*:

‘They created a new language from a mixture whose lexical and morphological base – the base of pidgin – is the Romance component, exactly the language of the most powerful group in these relations and which varies according to historical period.’⁴⁶

During the 16th Century, for example, the *Lingua franca Mediterranea* acquired more Spanish vocabulary, due to certain historical events that shifted maritime commerce. This was also an indication of certain political events that shaped Mediterranean history. When a country invaded or colonialized another, as happened in Algeria after the French colonization, linguistic repercussions were observed. This mostly affected everyday language communication, especially with the simpler and more functional mixture of words and phrases from different languages in ports and the areas around them rather than at a political level. In Mediterranean ports, the need among sea people and traders to communicate led to the creation of a variety like *Sabir*.

Sabir comes from the Spanish word *saber* (to know), although, it is mostly noticeable that Italian formed it in its prevalence.⁴⁷ *Sabir* is known to be a pidgin language. A pidgin is a language used between two or more groups of people that

⁴⁶ Eva Martinez Diaz 'An approach to the lingua franca of the Mediterranean' *Quaderns de la Mediteranea, universidad de Barcelona* pp: 224

⁴⁷ Riccardi Contini, 'Lingua franca in the Mediterranean by John Wansbrough' *Quaderni di Studi Arabi, Literary Innovation in Modern Arabic Literature. Schools and Journals. Vol. 18* (2000) (pp. 245-247)

speak a different language but need to have a business relation, and so, need to find a common language or mode of communication. The word 'pidgin' is said to come from the Chinese pronunciation of the word 'business'. The *Lingua franca Mediterranea* was a language that started forming in the Mediterranean throughout the 15th century and continued to shape and change itself depending on where the political and commercial hub lay; *Sabir*, specifically as an offshoot of the *lingua franca mediterranea*, formed after the 17th century. The first time that reference was made to *sabir* was in 1852, in the newspaper '*L'Algérien*' in an article entitled '*la langue sabir*'. Apart from a few references made to the language, it is quite rare to find *sabir* in writing because it was mostly used for colloquial purposes, but in some cases it may be found in marine records. When it was actually written down, the *lingua franca mediterranea* used the Latin alphabet, and the sentence structure and grammar were very straightforward. In *Sabir* the verb was always in the infinitive, as, for example, in '*Quand moi gagner draham, moi achetir moukère*'⁴⁸, that means 'when I will have enough money, I will buy a wife'. The use of the infinitive indicated a less complex grammar that made it more functional to the user, as it was a secondary language mostly used for commerce.

Although *Sabir* was in most cases referred to as a variety of the *lingua franca mediterranea*, we perceive that in the popular culture sphere the word *Sabir* is mostly used to refer to the common and functional language used in Mediterranean harbours for communication. It is deceiving in fact, because the

⁴⁸ Guido Cifoletti 'Aggiornamenti sulla lingua franca Mediterranea' *Universita di Udine* pp: 146

lingua franca mediterranea, is the appropriate reference that needs to be made when talking in general about the language used in harbours around the Mediterranean. On the other hand, if we want to refer to *Sabir* we are reducing the *lingua franca mediterranea* to a definite period of time and almost a defined territory association. Nevertheless, both *Sabir* and *lingua franca mediterranea* are two different words that express almost the same thing, it is thus important to establish the minimal difference between the two terms. In arguing that the *lingua franca mediterranea* refers to a more general language used in the Mediterranean harbours during the Middle Ages and that went on changing and forming and changing-assuming different forms according to the harbour and place where it was spoken- we are looking at the language in a broader way. It is undeniable though that *Sabir* as a reference to a specific language that formed in Algeria during the 17th century, is most of the time more appropriate to address specific arguments, especially when it comes to popular culture expedients. Popular culture and literature have expressed their interest in the language through expressions such as poems and songs recalling *Sabir* as a language that managed to mingle more words of different derivation into single cultural spaces. Nowadays, *Sabir* is no longer used; in fact we notice that English and Chinese are developing into new pidgin languages, understood almost by everyone, especially when it comes to trade and business.

In the Mediterranean we have encountered the rediscovery of *Sabir* in culture as a language that has a deep cultural value for Mediterranean countries as

a whole. One of the examples of the presence of *Sabir* in cultural expedients is the famous play by Molière *Le bourgeois gentilhomme*⁴⁹ that was represented for the first time in 1667 at the court of Louis XIV. The story was a satiric expression of the life at court, Molière was well aware of the life at court and he wanted to show that there was no difference between royals and normal people, especially with regards to emotions. Molière associates the *Sabir* to the foreign Turks that by means of *Sabir* they managed to communicate:

‘Se ti sabir,
Ti respondir;
Se non sabir,
Tazir, tazir.’⁵⁰

The use of *Sabir* for Molière indicated a common language understood both by French and Turks in this case. The fact that Molière used *Sabir*, it meant that gradually the resonance of *Sabir* could reach out to a different audience, than it's main purpose. In this case the meeting place as the harbour was not present but we may perceive that the mixture of cultures and the need for communication led to the use of *Sabir* as the common language.

⁴⁹ Molière, *le bourgeoise gentilhomme* www.writingshome.com/ebook_files/131.pdf

⁵⁰ Molière, *le bourgeoise gentilhomme* www.writingshome.com/ebook_files/131.pdf pp.143

Coming to the present day, it is difficult to say that *Sabir* or the *lingua franca mediterranea* own a particular important space in the cultural sphere or in the language per se. We are mostly sure that in the Mediterranean harbours *Sabir* has no relevance anymore, nevertheless, we find the use of *Sabir* in popular culture. One example is the artist Stefano Saletti,⁵¹ who in his songs uses *Sabir*. Its use was obviously intentional. Saletti looked at the new uprisings in the North African countries and he could recall the same feelings, faces and atmosphere that southern European countries went through thirty years prior. With this in mind, he decided to use a language that had common elements to all Mediterranean languages, and so he chose *Sabir*. His albums are inspired by the notion of music and culture as a tie to the whole Mediterranean, being conscious on the other hand of the numerous contradictions and differences in the Mediterranean region. The CD Saletti and the *Piccola banda ikona* explain what *Sabir* is and why they chose this language to communicate a common message through the music:

‘Once upon a time there was a tongue shared by the peoples of the Mediterranean. This was Sabir, a lingua franca which sailors, pirates, fishermen, merchants, ship-owners used in the ports to communicate with each other. From Genoa to Tangiers, from Salonika to Istanbul, from Marseilles to Algiers, from Valencia to Palermo, until the early decades of the twentieth century this kind of sea-faring “Esperanto” developed little by little availing of terms from Spanish, Italian,

⁵¹ Stefano Saletti www.stefanosaletti.it/schede/ikonaeng.htm (accessed July, 2014)

French and Arabic. We like this language. We like to mix sounds and words. We play Sabir. We sing Sabir.’⁵²

The importance of *Sabir* for Saletti shows that the harbour’s cultural value has been transmitted through time. Does the use of *Sabir* by Saletti indicate a recreation of a language that was used in the harbour as a functional and common means of communication or does it have the pretext to artificially recreate a common language? It is difficult to understand the importance and relevance an old pidgin language used for a specific purpose might hold today. Nevertheless, the use of this specific language in the music of Saletti reveals a profound search for common cultural traits in the Mediterranean region, that in this case aim to opt for cultural and educational approach to unite a region that is fractured in its own basis. Saletti refers to *Sabir* as resembling *Esperanto*; a failed attempt to linguistically unite a region that cannot be united. Although we may find the same concept in *Esperanto* and *Sabir*, we are aware that they differ in the way they came to be. *Esperanto* was artificially constructed, whereas, *Sabir* was born and evolved in an almost natural way by a need that went beyond the actual artifice. This is probably the reason why *Sabir* and the *lingua franca mediterranea* lasted for a long period of time, while *Esperanto* was at its birth a failed attempt to create a language for a determined sector in society. It is a fact that the main difference between the two languages is that one aimed to create a broader understanding based on a functional everyday life need, whereas the other aimed to create a

⁵² Stefano Saletti www.stefanosaletti.it/schede/ikonaeng.htm (accessed July, 2014)

language understood by few.

In Saletti's and Molière's works, we perceive the Mediterranean harbour as a point of intersection of cultures and ways of living that left a spill-over of cultural traits in the abovementioned artistic works and in many other works by various authors around the Mediterranean region. It is important to notice that the harbour in the expression of the *ex-voto*, *Sabir*, *lingua franca mediterranea* and various literal and artistic expressions, served almost as a lighthouse, where culture was projected and created, and recreated and changed to fit the ever changing needs of the Mediterranean differing cultures. In Jean-Claude Izzo's *Les Marins Perdus*, the language used in the harbour is not mentioned often, although he refers to language as a barrier that finds its purpose in the basic everyday needs. Jean-Claude Izzo mentions an important point on language in *Les Marins Perdus* as he delves in the way the word 'Mediterranean' is seen in different languages across the region:

'Il Mediterraneo è di genere neutro nelle lingue slave e latine. È in maschile in italiano. Femminile in francese. Maschile e femminile in spagnolo, dipende. Ha due nomi maschili in arabo. E il greco, nelle sue molteplici definizioni, gli concede tutti i generi.'⁵³

'The Mediterranean is neutral in the Slavonic languages, and in Latin. It's masculine in Italian. Feminine in French. Sometimes masculine, sometimes feminine in Spanish. It has two masculine names in Arabic.

⁵³ Jean-Claude Izzo *Marinai Perduti* (Tascabili e/o: 2010) pp.237

And Greek has many names for it, in different genders.’

Jean-Claude Izzo wants to prove that the word ‘Mediterranean’ in language is a sufficient proof of how people around the shores view the region. The gender of the word Mediterranean does in fact show that the languages in the region have developed their own way of understanding and perceiving the region. Language as we have seen has deep ties to how popular culture and ideas have evolved and developed. *Sabir* in its essence has proved that although the region has a myriad of contradictions and differing cultures, the harbour and everyday needs managed to combine the different languages into one. At the same time it is undeniable that the differences in the Mediterranean region make the region itself not only vast but also wonderful and enticing to the traveller and the artist. Literature and culture have formed and mingled together, yet each maintained its distinct features at the the Mediterranean harbours; the place of various particular encounters. Jean-Claude Izzo, Salletti and Molière all managed to create a powerful work of art that has deep ties to the culture created and recreated over time in the Mediterranean harbours. *Sabir* and the *ex-voto* are only two examples of how harbours throughout the Mediterranean have been a point of anchorage but also a locus of Mediterranean cultural development. Harbours have been able to unite, divide and create such a diverse and yet common culture.

4 The Mediterranean Imaginary of Jean-Claude Izzo and Vincenzo Consolo Inspired by the Port

The Mediterranean as a discourse has been interpreted and reinterpreted, and idealized and mystified by a myriad of authors, thinkers and artists. In this modern era where globalization of thought is the norm, the Mediterranean discourse is by far a difficult expression that finds obstacles in the concretization of its own thought. Nevertheless, today the Mediterranean is still capable of producing new artists and new expressions by which the discourse gets richer and deeper. The Mediterranean, as its name suggests, is a sea that is in between two lands, and as Franco Cassano⁵⁴ states, has never had the ambition to limit itself to only one of its shores. The Mediterranean was for a period of time consecutively and simultaneously Arab, Roman and/or Greek; it was everything and nothing at the same time. The Mediterranean never aspired to have a specific identity, and its strength lies in its conflicting identity; it embraces multiple languages and cultures in one sea. Franco Cassano in his *L'alternativa mediterranea* states that borders are always ahead of centres, 'Il confine è sempre più avanti di ogni centro'⁵⁵, and this concept is very relevant when we think about the significance of the harbour, as a place at the border of the country and yet the centre of every interaction. Cassano goes on explaining how the centre celebrates identity, whereas the border is always facing contradiction, war and suffering. The border cannot deny the suffering by which the conflicting and inhomogeneous Mediterranean identity has

⁵⁴ Franco Cassano, Danilo Zolo *L'alternativa mediterranea* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007)

⁵⁵ Franco Cassano, Danilo Zolo *L'alternativa mediterranea* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007) pp.80

been built upon. The border is the true expression of the Mediterranean and it is undeniable here that the most important interactions and historical events in the region have taken place.

The border is an important concept in the study of the Mediterranean itself, and as already mentioned, the majority of intersection and cultural exchanges have taken place in the harbours, which are the borders of a country yet the centre of every interaction. For the concept of a 'Mediterranean identity' to arise, the harbour has been a pivotal place economic and religious interactions which consequently left an undeniable cultural baggage whose strong presence allowed the Mediterranean shores to benefit from an enriching cultural *mélange*. Being a sea of proximity, the Mediterranean has always been prone to receive the 'other' with all its cultural baggage, and therefore the concept of fusion and amalgamation of different aspects of every country has always contributed to the region's culture. Accounts about the Mediterranean and those set in it have always put at their centre the concept of 'differences' and the 'other' in contraposition to the conflicts found in the harbours and in its centres. Nevertheless, without expecting the ends to meet to a degree of totality, the Mediterranean has been able to create places where ends do not merely meet but coexist. The coexistence of different races, cultures and languages has been the founding stone of the region. As Cassano states, an identity that claims to be pure is an identity that is destined to fail because it is in the essence of a culture that it repels the 'other', and therefore sees the answer to every problem in the elimination of the 'other'. The

Mediterranean, on the other hand has embraced ‘the other’ or on occasion, ‘other’ has forcedly penetrated the Mediterranean, giving birth to a region of different cultures based on a coexistence which is sometimes peaceful but often hard. The Mediterranean nowadays has overcome the complex of Orientalism and moved forward from a vision of an exotic south or border; ‘non è più una frontiera o una barriera tra il nord e il sud, o tra l’est e l’ovest, ma è piuttosto un luogo di incontri e correnti...di transiti continui’.⁵⁶ ‘it is not a border or barrier between North and South, or East and West anymore, but it is rather a place of encounters and trends of continuous transits’. The Mediterranean has become a region of transit and a meeting place.

Upon travelling across the Mediterranean, an important thing which makes itself evident is the imaginary that keeps on building through the interaction between authors and thinkers, especially through their works that focus on the importance of stating a discourse about the Mediterranean.

4.1 The Mediterranean Imaginary in Izzo and Consolo

‘Il Mediterraneo non è una semplice realtà geografica, ma un territorio simbolico, un luogo sovraccarico di rappresentazioni.’⁵⁷

⁵⁶ Franco Cassano, Danilo Zolo *L’alternativa mediterranea* (Milano: Feltrinelli, 2007) pp.92

⁵⁷ Jean-Claude Izzo, Thierry Fabre *Rappresentare il Mediterraneo, Lo sguardo francese* (Mesogea: 2000) pp.7

‘The Mediterranean is not a simple geographical reality, but a symbolic territory, a place overloaded with representations.’

The Mediterranean is a region full of symbolism and representations which would not exist if it were not supported by the literature and culture that has formed on and around its shores. The Mediterranean as a region of imaginaries built on the integration of different voices and stories has produced a number of authors and thinkers that left a cultural and artistic patrimony to the discourse about the Mediterranean. We have already seen how the harbour transmits a sense of insecurity and plays a role of threshold which is testified through the works of Izzo and Consolo. Both authors have not only shown the importance of the harbour but have also contributed arduously to the formation of a Mediterranean imaginary. The word imaginary, comprehends a number of images, figures and forms that are created by the observers to define something -not solemnly by the mere reflection of facts and historical events, but by a personal evaluation- that sometimes goes beyond reality. In this sense, it is undeniable that the Mediterranean has gathered a number of observers who have been able to translate facts and create figures and images that represent a collective in a singular imagination. Consolo and Izzo have transformed their personal encounter with the Mediterranean into a powerful imaginary.

Jean-Claude Izzo was born and raised in Marseille in a family of Italian immigrants. His background and geographical position highly influenced his

writing. Both Izzo and Consolo shared a deep love for their country of origin especially for the microcosm surrounding them. Vincenzo Consolo wrote about his beloved Sicily, while Izzo always mentions Marseille. Both authors transpose the love for the microcosm into a broader vision of the Mediterranean as a whole. Jean Claude Izzo's Mediterranean is based on a passionate encounter with the region and states that his Mediterranean differs from the one found at travel agencies, where beauty and pleasure are easily found.

‘Cio che avevo scoperto non era il Mediterraneo preconfezionato che ci vendono i mercanti di viaggi e di sogni facili. Che era proprio un piacere possibile quello che questo mare offriva.’⁵⁸

‘I had discovered a Mediterranean beyond the pre-packaged one usually sold and publicised by Merchants, as an easy dream. The Mediterranean offered an achievable pleasure.’

The Mediterranean hides its beauty only to reveal it to anyone who wants to see it. The Mediterranean for Izzo is a mixture of tragedy and pleasure, and one element cannot exist without the other. This image of beauty and happiness shared with tragedy and war is a recurring one in the study of the Mediterranean. Consolo's writing is based on the concept of suffering. He pictures human grief and misery as an integral part of the Mediterranean

⁵⁸ Jean-Claude Izzo, Thierry Fabre Rappresentare il Mediterraneo, Lo sguardo francese (Mesogea: 2000) pp.17

imaginary and he feels that poetry and literature have the responsibility to transmit the human condition. Izzo in his writings not only shows that the Mediterranean imaginary is made up of tragedy, suffering and war but also shows that there is hope in the discourse about the Mediterranean itself. For Izzo, the Mediterranean is part of his future, part of his destiny, embodied in the geography of the region and in the tales and accounts that inhabit every corner of the region. Through his beloved Marseille, Izzo manages to look at the Mediterranean and thus find himself.

The word 'imaginary' in the academic sphere is tied to a concept used for the definition of spaces, a definition that goes beyond the way things seem externally, a definition that puts much more faith in how an author, thinker or artist expresses and describes the space. In the case of the Mediterranean, since the region is not an officially recognized political entity, identity is based on interpretation more than anywhere else and the concept of an imaginary proves that there are paths that still lead to thought about the Mediterranean. With this in mind, one cannot deny the fact that in the political or social sphere, the concept of Mediterranean is still being mentioned; however, one could argue that the Mediterranean that is being mentioned in a political and social sphere is somehow a constructed 'Mediterranean'. The Mediterranean's relevance nowadays is found in the hearth of the author and artist that from Tangiers or from Marseille is able to write about a sea that has thought him to be mobile, to travel not only physically but mentally and emotionally from one shore to another. Jean-Claude Izzo's troubled identity gives us a hint of the way in which the Mediterranean is

perceived as a region and the way in which the personal 'imaginary' for Izzo was formed. Izzo himself was from a family of mixed origins and was raised in a constant state of travel. Izzo found his Mediterranean identity in the imaginary other authors had created but also found his roots in the very absence of more organic roots. Every story and every country may be part of his own identity, and so, the Mediterranean has the ability to preserve in the depths of its sea the stories and feelings collected from every shore and give a curious traveller the opportunity to retrieve these treasures and make them his own.

The historical approach to the Mediterranean has been based on a comparison between south and north, between the Mediterranean and Europe, and it usually focused much more on the contrasting elements than on its conjunctions and similarities. Braudel⁵⁹ saw the Mediterranean as a static and unchanging region. Today, modern thought has led to a new perception of the Mediterranean, focusing rather on the points of conjunction than on the differences and contrasting elements, yet accepting the fact that the Mediterranean is diverse in its essence. In a paper by Miriam Cooke about the Mediterranean entitled *Mediterranean thinking: from Netizen to Metizen*⁶⁰, she delves into the importance of the juxtaposition between the liquidity of the sea and the immobility of the land in the rethinking process of the Mediterranean. In the Mediterranean imaginary, the sea serves as a mirror and as a fluid that is able to connect and remain well-defined. It is able to give a sense of time that is very different from the one on

⁵⁹ Fernand Braudel *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean world in the age of Philip II* (Fontana press: 1986)

⁶⁰ Miriam Cooke 'Mediterranean thinking: From Netizen to Medizen' *Geographical review*, vol 89 pp.290-300

land. As we perceive in Jean-Claude Izzo, time is something that is completely lost at the border between sea and land and especially in contact with the sea. Sailors in *Les Marins Perdus*⁶¹ realize the concept of time only when they live in the harbor and in other words, the sea has been able to preserve the sailor's spirit in the illusion that time on land was as static as it was at sea. In the study about the Mediterranean region, the sea plays a fundamental role that must not be underestimated. Jean-Claude Izzo and Vincenzo Consolo both refer extensively to the figure of the sea when addressing the Mediterranean imaginary. When pondering on the Mediterranean, Izzo always places himself facing the sea, embracing the liquidity of this region, whereas in his stories, Consolo always uses the sea as the main mode of transportation and giving it a mystical attribute.

The Mediterranean has a different meaning for the two authors, because it is perceived from two different places and two different conceptions of the Mediterranean arise. In much of Consolo's writing, the Mediterranean is seen through the image of Odysseus which is an image that holds a special meaning for Consolo and to which he feels deeply tied. For Consolo, *The Odyssey* is a story that has no specific ending and this is done on purpose because it is directly tied to the future. The door to the future was kept open with the specific purpose of letting the figure of Odysseus trespass time. The importance of Ulysses in Consolo's discourse extends to a deep and personal search for identity and it is identity itself and the search for knowledge that led Ulysses to embark on a

⁶¹ Jean-Claude Izzo *Marinai Perduti* (Tascabili e/o: 2010)

voyage around the Mediterranean region and afterwards to return to Ithaca. Like Izzo, Consolo finds the essence of a Mediterranean imaginary in the act of travelling and sometimes wandering from coast to coast, from harbour to harbour, somehow like a modern Ulysses that aims to find himself and find knowledge through the act of travelling and meandering. Many authors that have focused their attention on the figure of Ulysses have focused on Ulysses' return to Ithaca in particular and the search for a Mediterranean identity through this return. Consolo, however, mainly uses the metaphor of travel and wandering, and he manages to tie them to the question of a Mediterranean imaginary that is being built upon the various images that the author is faced with through his voyage. For Consolo the voyage and the constant search for knowledge are the founding stones of a Mediterranean imaginary. This urge to push further and thus reach a greater level of knowledge has driven the Mediterranean people to practice violence, and therefore Consolo believes that violence tied to the expression of a deep search for knowledge is what has constituted the Mediterranean region. In *L'Olivo e L'Olivastro*⁶², Vincenzo Consolo uses Ulysses' voyage as a metaphor of his own voyage and his personal relation with Sicily; being his homeland it holds a special place for Consolo especially in his writings. Constant change in the modern concept of a Mediterranean has left a deep impact on the Mediterranean imaginary. The wandering Ulysses returns to a changed and metamorphosed Ithaca, which is a recurring image in the Mediterranean. Consolo finds his home

⁶² Norma Bouchard, Massimo Lollini, ed, *Reading and Writing the Mediterranean, Essays by Vincenzo Consolo* (University of Toronto Press, 2006)

island 'Sicily' deeply changed by industrialization and although it may have maintained features that recall the past, it has changed greatly. Images of the harbour and of the Mediterranean itself have deeply changed. Change may be positive, negative or may hold a nostalgic tone, although change is always a positive factor that contributes to the formation of an 'imaginary'. The way Ulysses and authors such as Consolo and Izzo have wandered and fought their battles in the Mediterranean has contributed to the change that we now perceive in the region. Through the voyage of Ulysses, Consolo gives testimony of the Mediterranean violence and change to the rest of the world. For Consolo the imaginary created around the Mediterranean is a mixture of his own reality such as a modern Sicily devastated by industrialization and modernization, and the recurring image of Ulysses. In *Il Sorriso dell'Ignoto Marinaio*, Consolo focuses on the microcosm of Sicily as a metaphor of the larger Mediterranean. His imaginary is characterized by the concept of conflict - a conflict that keeps on repeating itself in the Mediterranean and is somehow tied to a general conception of the Mediterranean. The harbour acquires an important space in the novel, being the hub of the whole story. The violence mentioned in the novel is a projection of violence in view of an attempt at unifying two different spheres, in this case the unification of Italy, but in a broader sense the possible unification of a Mediterranean. The attempt is not only a failure but results in a continuous war to establish a dominant culture rather than a possible mélange of cultures that manage to keep their personal identities.

Izzo on the other hand wrote about the Mediterranean imaginary from the point of view of sailors, who construct a Mediterranean imaginary based on the concept of a difficult intercultural relationship and a strange bond with the Mediterranean harbour. In *Les Marins Perdus*, the microcosm of Marseille managed to represent the macrocosm of the Mediterranean, and the figures of the sailors represents a modern Ulysses, with the aim of bringing about a Mediterranean imaginary that mingled old and traditional conceptions of the region with new and modern ideas. Jean Claude Izzo's sailors had different ways of perceiving the Mediterranean, but they had a similar way of seeing and identifying the 'sea'. Izzo's protagonist, much like Consolo's protagonist, develops an interesting habit of collecting old Mediterranean maps. For the sailor, the collection of maps represents in a certain way the concretization of a Mediterranean and the unification of the geographical conception of the region. The act of collecting may be considered as an attempt at identifying something that is common, something that is part of a collective memory.

The works of Consolo and Izzo are the literal expressions of a Mediterranean imaginary, based on their personal encounter with the region and on their individual research on the subject. The way in which literal texts shape our conception and ideas with their powerful imagery proves that the personal encounter becomes a collective encounter in the translation of facts that each author performs in his writings. However, what is most fascinating is the meeting of ideas brought about through writing which also share elements with popular

culture. In essence, popular culture manages to reach a higher audience but it often takes inspiration directly from literature and its various expressions. In the sphere of popular culture one may see that the concept of advertising and of mixing various means of communication to reach a specific goal come into action. Popular culture comprises various levels of cultural and artistic expression, and is therefore well placed to reach a larger audience and to imprint in the audience various powerful images related to the subject chosen. In this case, the Mediterranean has collected a large amount of popular culture expressions that managed to create a knit of ideas and interpretations that succeed in intertwining and creating ideas through the use of old traditions and seminal literal texts.

4.2 The Mediterranean Imaginary in Popular Culture

The way in which the Mediterranean has been projected in the sphere of popular culture owes a lot to the dichotomy between sea and land, between a fixed object and a fluid matter. The fascination around the two contrasting elements managed to create an even more fascinating expression of popular culture, thus an idea about the region that is based on the way in which Mediterranean people view the sea and view the stable and immobile element of land. Moreover, the Mediterranean popular culture focuses a lot on the element of the harbour, a place where the two elements of water and land manage to intertwine, meet, discuss ideas and at times fight over who dominates. The conflict between the two elements, projected in the geographical distribution of the region, has deep

resonance in the emotional encounter with the region. Thus, the authors, artists and travellers are emotionally part of this dichotomy that is consequently reflected in their artistic expressions.

To talk about the Mediterranean nowadays is to reinvent the idea behind the region in an innovative and appealing way. Culture and literature are new means by which we re-conceptualize the region. The Mediterranean has been compared to the Internet, because it is a place where near and far are not too well defined, where space is something fluid and where information and culture are transmitted through a network of connections. In her study, Miriam Cooke⁶³ notes how even the terminology used on the Internet derives from marine terminology. One example could be the 'port' or 'portal'. In relation to the web, it is defined as a place of entry and usually signifies the first place that people see when entering the web. Although virtually, the concept of harbour remains the first and most relevant encounter a person makes when approaching a country or 'page' on the internet. Although air transportation has gained a great deal of importance, shipping networks used for merchandise are common and still very much in use. The parallelism between the Mediterranean and the Internet opens a new way of conceptualizing the Mediterranean as a physical and cybernetic space. Miriam Cooke explains how the Mediterranean itself, just like the Internet, changes the traditional concept of core and periphery:

⁶³ Miriam Cooke 'Mediterranean thinking: From Netizen to Medizen' *Geographical review*, vol 89 pp.290-300

‘The islands that are geographically centered in the Mediterranean are rarely centers of power; rather, they are crossroads, sometimes sleepy but sometimes also dangerous places of mixing, where power is most visibly contested and where difficult choices must be made.’⁶⁴

The way in which the Mediterranean is seen geographically most of the time does not appear to be consistent with the actual function and thought of the place. As in the case of the islands in the Mediterranean, their main function lies in the fact that they are crossroads rather than real centres. Usually, the geographical centre of a country is the actual political, social and economic centre, however, in the Mediterranean, the centre is where ideas are formed, and this usually lies in the harbours and in the cities located in close proximity to the sea. The centre and marginality of a place according to Cooke depends on the position of the viewer. Therefore, the explained and conceptualized Mediterranean may have different centres and borders depending on who is writing about it. The function of popular culture is to somehow give a view on where the centre is and where the margins lie.

When discussing the Mediterranean in advertisements and in the media in general, there is a tendency to start from the past, from a presumed Mediterranean origin that seems to tie the whole region. In this assumption, there is no truth but just a commercial way of proposing the historical elements that

⁶⁴ *Ibid* pp.296

unite the region, therefore making it appealing at a touristic level. The audience at times does not have a precise idea of the differing elements and cultures residing in the region. To make it more appealing and coherent, especially in advertising, culture seems to be portrayed as a feature that holds similar elements that recur throughout the region. Even tastes and sometimes sounds seem to be homogenized throughout the region. The French documentary film entitled *Méditerranée Notre Mer à Tous* produced by Yan Arthus-Bertrand for France 2, aims to give an overview of the Mediterranean by focusing not just on the common features, but most of all on the fascination of the differences. The documentary film traces how the Mediterranean has transformed and shifted over time and it aims to show the deep cultural heritage it left in Europe. Rather than an advertisement or promotional video, this is an educational movie that rotates around the Mediterranean to explain each and every place while delineating its features and importance. The interesting fact about the movie is that it is filmed from above, giving almost an overview of the region, and that it talks about a Mediterranean future that ultimately lies in a supposed common past. When advertising a harbour in the Mediterranean, most of the short clips focus on the multiculturalism of the harbour and the projection of the place within a broader Mediterranean vision.

A particular advertising video, promoting Tangier⁶⁵ as a harbour city that looks onto the Mediterranean but remains predominantly African, focuses on the emotions that it can deliver and on the particular features that can attract the tourist such as traditional food and music. In everyday life, certain music and traditional food would have probably disappeared, but in the projection of a place that needs to attract the tourist, the sensational aspect prevails and the tradition needs to be prioritized. In all the movies concerning advertisement of the Mediterranean harbours, what prevails is the conception of the harbours as crossroads, as places where cultures meet, and obviously leave deep cultural heritage. The movement of people in these short clips is shown as a movement that has brought richness and cultural heritage to the country, ignoring the ongoing debates about migration. These clips tend to ignore the ongoing problems in the Mediterranean and this is obviously done to increase tourism and project a nicer image of the region, succeeding in having a positive impact on the mind of the viewer.

Another peculiarity that is noticeable both in the clips about the Mediterranean harbours and in many movies and stories is a concept of time which is very different from reality. In short clips, such as the one portraying Tangiers or the one promoting Valletta, it is noticeable that time slows down. In the transposition of the novel *Les Marins Perdus* into a movie⁶⁶, the concept of

⁶⁵ Fabounab, *Tangiers, port of Africa and the Mediterranean* (uploaded May, 2010) www.youtube.com/watch?v=E_IJ3zmxC6g (accessed July, 2014)

⁶⁶ *Les Marins Perdus*, Claire Devers (2003)

time is a fundamental element, because it drastically slows down. The first scene opens up with the overview of the *Aldebaran*, the ship on which the story unfolds. This scene is a very long scene that gives the viewer a hint of approaching trouble, from sea to land. It achieves this in a very calm and slow way. Throughout the movie the sense of time being slower than usual is something that finds its apex in the last minutes of the movie when all the tragedies unfold. The way in which the Mediterranean is described in short clips and in this movie shows a common perception of the Mediterranean people as a people who enjoy life at a slower rhythm, although in certain cases it might be true that this assumption lacks accuracy. Although it is undeniable that the juxtaposition between land and sea which we especially perceive in the harbour gives a sense of time as a rather fictitious concept, one may recall the *Odyssey*, where the voyage in the Mediterranean took an unusually long time. *The Odyssey* in fact bases on the fact that time almost seemed to have stopped and in fact, the time span that Odysseus spent travelling at sea does not match with the actual time that was passing on land in Ithaca. On the other hand we perceive that time is passing by rather slowly for Penelope who patiently raised her son and safeguarded Ithaca while waiting Odysseus.

What the concept of time in the Mediterranean proves is that the various images that one finds both in writing and in new popular culture are constantly fed to our conception of the region and through time these various concepts form an imaginary. In many cases, when we look at popular culture we find elements that

we can reconnect to literature. This proves that the means by which an imaginary is constructed is based on different elements but usually one may find recurring elements both in popular culture and literature. In the concept of time we also find a common way of seeing life itself. Time in the Mediterranean seems to be stuck therefore we may argue that literature and popular culture have contributed to the formation of our ideas about life *per se*, whilst obviously not denying that everyday life was of constant inspiration to literature and culture. The way in which both popular culture and everyday life intersect, connect and find common points is something of fundamental importance in the study of the Mediterranean imaginary, as it gives different points of view and visions of the subject and therefore creates an imaginary that manages in a subtle way to unite what seems so distant. Jean-Claude Izzo, Vincenzo Consolo and many other authors, as well as different ‘texts’ of popular culture, create an ethos about the Mediterranean that aims to join what appears separate. The fact that nowadays the Mediterranean is still present in popular culture, as in the case of the previously mentioned film shown by France 2, proves that discourse about the region and the Mediterranean imaginary are still alive and they have a presence in the mind of the receiver.

The imaginary of the Mediterranean harbour is also constructed by the way it is advertised. A short, recent video⁶⁷ advertising the Maltese harbour repeatedly used the word ‘Mediterranean’ to highlight the connection between

⁶⁷ Valletta Waterfront, *Valletta Cruise Port Malta- the door to the Mediterranean*, (uploaded February, 2012) www.youtube.com/watch?v=FMThbEG95WA (accessed May, 2014)

Europe and Africa. The way in which the harbour is projected in the French movie shows a deep connection to the historical and cultural heritage of the country but it also aims to show how historically and culturally varied the country is. The advertisement's aim was to create a sense of uniqueness whilst focusing on the broader vision of the Mediterranean as a whole. On the one hand it focuses on the fact that Malta is part of the European Union, therefore boasting high standards of security and maritime services, and on the other hand it promotes the various historical influences on Malta and its Grand Harbour and portrays it as the gateway both to the northern and to the southern shore. Being an island in the Mediterranean gave Malta the possibility to create its uniqueness, but also to affiliate itself to both Europe and Africa. In this sense, the sea serves as a unifying factor but at the same time it was always able to maintain the individuality of each place. The discourse about the Mediterranean is rendered possible thanks to the various factors that inhabit the region - factors that may differ from one shore to another, thus making the region a more interesting one to study.

4.3 Conclusion

The discourse about the Mediterranean has always revolved around the projection of different images that supposedly recall a common feeling and common grounds. The Mediterranean is a region that is in essence a combination of a myriad of cultures; this factor is very relevant in the discourse on the region

as the attempt to unite the region in one cultural sphere is somehow a failed attempt. It is relevant to mention that in the production of literature and culture, these different expressions especially concerning the Mediterranean have produced a knit of sensations and feelings that are now mostly recognized as being 'Mediterranean'. The harbour in this case has always been the locus of the Mediterranean imaginary because sea and land meet in the harbour, and therefore many cultures meet and interact in the harbours.

Harbours are places that live an 'in between' life but that still manage to mingle the differences in a subtle way that feels almost normal and natural. The harbour has inspired many authors as it has built a sense of awaiting and hope in the person. The Mediterranean port seems to suggest that everything is possible, and that imageries and ideas can unfold in the same harbour.

5 Conclusion

The Mediterranean city is a place where two myths come together: the myth of the city and the myth of the Mediterranean. Both myths have developed independently because both managed to create symbols and connotations that have been able to survive till today. The myth of the city in relation to the myth of the Mediterranean has been for a long time regarded independently and therefore it created a succession of elements that was able to reside in the same place but was in essence two different elements.⁶⁸

From antiquity, the 'city' has been seen as a symbol of social order - as a place where reason and civilization reign in contrast with the ignorance of the outskirts. The concept of a 'city' that is able to unify ideals and control society by maintaining high levels of education and increasing cultural standards has developed a division between the rural areas and the city itself. In conjunction with the harbour, the concept of a civilized 'city' mingles with the idea of a cultural mixture that is able to absorb what the sea has to offer.

In the Mediterranean port cities, the cultural emancipation and the centre of trade and business in a way managed to intermingle with the idea of 'squalor', most of the time being associated to the harbour. Nevertheless, in the

⁶⁸ Georges Duby *Gli ideali del Mediterraneo* (Mesogea 2000) pp.83-100

Mediterranean harbour cities, the idea of cultural richness and emancipation was a concept that found concretization in the idealization of the 'city' itself by its inhabitants. The 'city' as much as the Mediterranean itself found deep resonance with the growth of literature. In the case of the 'city', various treaties and literature expedients that promoted it as a centre of cultural richness and architectural rigor helped the 'city' itself to find a place in the mind of the person approaching it. The obvious consequence of this new formation of cities as a symbol of rigor and proliferation was that a great number of people migrated from the rural areas to the cities. The myth of the harbour cities as being the centre of business and a locus of culture went on cultivating with the accounts about these cities written by various authors. They managed to give life to a succession of images that are now imprints of harbour cities throughout the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean appears unified in anthropological⁶⁹ discourse in which assumptions are made about the way 'Mediterraneanism' is constituted and the 'Mediterranean way of life'. A group of cultural anthropologists aimed to view the Mediterranean as a whole for the purpose of identifying elements that managed to tie the region and gave meaning to the unification itself. On the one hand they managed to give international relevance to studies about the region because they constructed what they regarded as common Mediterranean attributes. On the other hand they were constructing a discourse that said more about their own vision than about a region that is varied in its essence. In a way they also

⁶⁹ Georges Duby *Gli ideali del Mediterraneo* (Mesogea 2000) pp.83-100

rendered the region ‘exotic’. The way in which anthropology managed to create an idea about the Mediterranean is interesting even though a person living in the region might argue that the picture given is incorrect. In this sense the imaginary of the Mediterranean projected by literature does not aspire to give a detailed account of life in the region but rather to actually transmit the feelings and passions that the region has. In this sense, literature was able to transform a passion and a detailed account of one’s own perspective about the region into an imaginary that is in its turn able to remain imprinted in the person’s conception of the Mediterranean. Literature and art in the Mediterranean had the ability to prove that there are common feelings in the region but they are distinguishable in their very essence and the harbour with its strategic position was able to give inspiration to the artist that approached it. The creation of an imaginary about the Mediterranean goes beyond the very need of knowing and apprehending facts that may be or may not be common to the whole region. In this sense, the artistic expedients and the literal world managed to relate to the reader and the spectator in a very special way by creating powerful images that construct society.

5.1 The ‘imaginary’ of the Mediterranean

One important definition of the ‘imaginary’ is given by Castoriadis in his *The Imaginary Institution of Society*⁷⁰ in which he states that the human being cannot exist without the collective and that the collective is formed by different

⁷⁰ Kostantino Kavoulakas *Cornelius Castoriadis on social imaginary and truth*(University of Crete, September 2000) pp.202-213

elements. One of the elements that is of great importance in the formation of the collective is the symbol. The symbol or the collection of symbols is formed from reality and from an imaginary. In the composition of the imaginary, whatever stems from reality and whatever stems from fiction remains in essence a question which is not resolved or which probably does not intend to be resolved. Therefore, the imaginary explained by Castoriadis gives a social meaning to certain questions that are fundamental in the complexity of reality. For example, the symbol of God was created for various reasons but its creation *per se* does not distinguish between elements that are true in its essence and elements that are imagined. The example given by Castoriadis on the symbol of God leads us to the conception of the Mediterranean region as a region formed in its imaginary by reality and myth which intertwine and are not distinguishable. The Mediterranean created by the various authors and artists mentioned reinforces the imaginary that has at its basis the aim of giving a picture of the region which is not far from reality but on the other hand which is not that structured. Therefore we can argue that the difference between an anthropologist's approach to the region and an artist's approach is based on the difference in their point of focus. This statement one does not deny the importance of the anthropologist's approach to the region where in fact social structure appears and thus one can easily understand the way by which society is formed. To further the study and understand it in its complexity one cannot deny the importance of literature and culture in the creation of an imaginary. Castoriadis⁷¹ states that society shares a number of undeniable truths that are

⁷¹ Kostantino Kavoulakas *Cornelius Castoriadis on social imaginary and truth* (University of

accepted by everyone. By analyzing the imaginary one manages to go beyond these undeniable truths and thus manages to extend the life of the imaginary itself. Therefore, if the Mediterranean exists, it is because it managed to create a number of myths and symbols able to renew themselves. The importance of the imaginary for the region itself is based on the fruits that it gives. The Mediterranean that is being mentioned in the various books and poems is supported by the emotions and passions of each and every author. If the author is not moved by passion for the region it would be difficult to create an imaginary. The Mediterranean region is still present in our mind thanks to the imaginary created by the various authors and thinkers.

The choice of the harbour as the locus of a Mediterranean imaginary comes almost naturally as the harbours facing the Mediterranean Sea have a great impact on culture in the Mediterranean and the threshold between sea and land is on the one hand the very basis of the Mediterranean life. The harbour and the city as two separate and yet same elements intertwine and are able to create rich and variegated cultures, yet they were also the first spectators of conflicts and wars. From this point of view, it is undeniable that the harbour in the Mediterranean holds a special place for the author and may be seen by many authors and thinkers as a place of inspiration where ideas concretize and where the emotions, thoughts and ideas brought by the voyage at sea are still very present in the memory.

Through the image of the harbour we come across the image of the sailor who to many authors has been a point of reflection for the discourse on the Mediterranean and has helped the connection between the real, almost “filthy” life of the harbor, and the ideas and concepts that form in the city. The various authors that integrated the image of the sailor to the idea of the harbour in the Mediterranean were able to reinforce the Mediterranean imaginary by joining different images and by giving them life and purpose in a way that goes beyond the truth. The sailor in Jean-Claude Izzo’s imaginary has a deep and developed curiosity and a great knowledge of *The Odyssey*. While it is not be a surprise that a sailor has a passion for literature, the point that Jean-Claude Izzo makes is that Homer’s Mediterranean has definitely changed, yet it is still alive in the heart of the ones that live the region in all its essence. Therefore, the sailor who is an everyday image and thus is able to relate to a greater audience acquires almost different attributes that do not match reality, but that are in essence part of a shared Mediterranean imaginary.

The way in which authors and thinkers contribute to the formation of the Mediterranean has been the principal focus of this dissertation. The pattern created by art and literature all over the Mediterranean highlights the differences in the region but it also portrays the similarities that are able to give birth to a unified Mediterranean. As discussed throughout, the process of finding similarities and the formation of an imaginary that is able to constitute the

Mediterranean was not a smooth one. The Mediterranean does not in fact appear as a place that has a lot of common features. Even though politically and sometimes socially it has been portrayed as a unified region, the unifying factors are few. Literature does not aim to give a picture of the Mediterranean as one but aims rather to give various personal and interpersonal interpretations of the region to form an imaginary able to be transported and reinterpreted in different circumstances. It is important to understand that the word 'imaginary' does not aim to conduct a political or social inquiry about the region and that the word in itself actually aims to understand the underlying concept of the Mediterranean. It does not aim to state facts about the region but rather to give an account that is able to connect the historical roots of the region to personal experience.

5.2 The Mediterranean 'Imaginary' Beyond the Harbour

Although the harbour was my main focus in identifying the Mediterranean imaginary, it is definitely not the only point in the Mediterranean that could be taken into account when studying its imaginary. Other aspects of the Mediterranean could be of great relevance when expanding the various images of the region. One important aspect in all the literature expedients taken into account was the relationship of every author with their nation and their complex identity. Therefore, in relation to the study conducted, it would be of great interest to expand the notion of 'nationhood' and the formation of various and complex

identities created in the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean nowadays is seen as a region where 'nationhood' and identity are created through a complex of knits and relations. The latest 'citizenship' programs in all of the northern Mediterranean countries show how the borders and the concept of 'nationhood' are deeply changing, most probably opening to further possibilities that range from cultural enrichment to economic advance. When thinking about the Mediterranean Jean-Claude Izzo emphasized the fact that he felt that part of himself resided in every harbour and his 'identity' was not limited to one place. He makes us realize that the Mediterranean existed before the creation of 'nations' and so, each Mediterranean person feels like he can relate to more than one country and more than one culture. The harbour has been the first impact with a deep association to the region, and the person approaching a Mediterranean harbour automatically abandons his roots and is able to relate to what the harbour has to offer. In this sense we have seen how the harbour was vital to the creation of a powerful imaginary. The question of identity and complex relations in the Mediterranean would be a next step in analysing the complexity of the region. The Mediterranean harbour teaches us that all Mediterranean people are prone to the 'other' and are open to various cultures, including the exposure to a number of languages and the creation of a *lingua franca* to facilitate communication. Therefore, with this exposure promoted by the harbour, the Mediterranean created various identities that sometimes are not distinguishable.

Jean-Claude Izzo felt he could relate to almost every country in the Mediterranean and that part of him resided in every harbour. Nevertheless, he always saw Marseille as a point of reference and as an anchorage point where his thoughts concretized. Contrarily, the difficult relation of Vincenzo Consolo with the Italian peninsula makes the issue of complex identities particularly relevant. For a number of years, Consolo worked in northern Italy where he felt like a stranger in his own country. However, with the difference of environment and in a way, a dissimilarity of culture, he was able to contemplate the meaning of the Mediterranean and his native 'country', Sicily. The question of a possible or rather an impossible identity in the Mediterranean does not enrich or denigrate the concept of an 'imaginary' but rather enables the person studying the region to understand certain dynamics and the way in which authors and thinkers approach the region. It is rather difficult to paint a clear picture of the Mediterranean through understanding the complexity of 'identity', though it would be of great interest to find the way in which each and every Mediterranean person manages to relate to the concept of identity, which is an integral part of his or her social accomplishment. Society instils a deep sense of fulfilment and accomplishment in a person who is able to fully relate to their country of origin, and as Amin Maalouf states in *In the Name of Identity*,⁷² identity is something that most of the time may lead to war between countries, and so it is undeniable that it plays a fundamental role in the way we view things.

⁷² Maalouf Amin, *In the name of Identity: violence and the need to belong* (Penguin books, 2000)

Amin Maalouf is an author of mixed origins. He is Lebanese but has lived most of his life in France and when asked which of the two countries is his 'real' country, he found it difficult to answer as he states that both countries are part of his identity. Thus identity for Amin Maalouf is something very personal. A person living in France for a number of years has the ability to enrich his previous identity, therefore acquires an added identity to the previous one. The same person cannot deny the previous identity, yet he cannot deny that the present identity plays an important role in his personal formation. The Mediterranean as a region has always promoted the mixture of cultures and the voyage itself, therefore contributing to the formation of complex and variegated identities. Nowadays, we manage to relate both to a Greek and Roman descent, therefore geographically and historically the Mediterranean has been united in ideas and concepts that are now far from each other but yet undeniable.

The same geography and architectural heritage left by the Greeks and Romans is still visible in most of the Mediterranean cities and harbours. This is evident in the lighthouses that were for most of the time a symbol of greatness and architectural splendour, and we encountered a succession of ideas and cultures that mingled with the necessity of the lighthouse. Therefore the lighthouse that was on the one hand a powerful expression of artistic and cultural splendour, managed to create ideas and thoughts that stemmed from the actual need of 'light' and guidance. All these elements intertwine in the Mediterranean, rendering the

concept of identity somewhat a complex one. Each person has an identity as explained by Tarek Abdul Razek in his study about the *Mediterranean identity*:

‘Each one of us is the depositary of a dual legacy: the first is vertical, coming from our ancestors, the traditions of our people and religious communities; the other is horizontal and derives from our era and contemporaries. Vertical identity is connected to memory and the past; it is limited to a given territory within a given area. It usually corresponds to national identity, the outcome of cultural policy choices. Instead, horizontal identity extends towards the future, though it remains open to the contemporary, reaching beyond national borders, within a social context, in a postmodern approach. Thus, horizontal identity is a project, a project for the future and not merely a legacy of the past.’⁷³

In relation to the Mediterranean, the horizontal and vertical identity may be tied to the deep varied history that the Mediterranean holds. If Mediterranean history is based on the interaction between people and cultures, then each and everyone’s identity cannot just be based on the value of the nation as it is now. The horizontal identity that leaves a door open to the future is in this sense very important and gives substance to the discourse of a Mediterranean imaginary,

⁷³ Abdul Razek ‘Common Mediterranean identity’ *The Euro-Mediterranean student research multi-conference EMUNI RES* (2009) pp.1-8

being the main contributor to the future of the Mediterranean. The imaginary that is the bringing together of both the vertical and horizontal identities manages to give hope to future discourse about the region. The imaginary does not deny the complexity of a possible Mediterranean identity, but merely shows a past where ideas flourished and have now become an integral part of our own identity. It also proves that the future of a region is not solely made up of geographical, political and social features but is also made of different elements that manage to intertwine forming a knit of images able to reside in the mind of every reader, artist and philosopher.

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A search for a common identity is surely not the path to be taken in understanding the relations in the Mediterranean because a common identity usually instituted by the idea of a nation instills in the person a set of common goals and ideals. In the case of the Mediterranean, the various conflicts and wars show that there is no common identity tying the region. Therefore, it is quite difficult to analyze a common identity and it should not be the purpose of a study itself. It is interesting, however, to delve in the way authors and thinkers that contributed to the formation of an imaginary in the Mediterranean deal with their personal identity, whether it is problematic for a great number of authors or whether authors find that their identity is not limited to their 'national identity'. All these factors could be of great interest to the person studying the region in the sense that if each author writing about the Mediterranean finds the impulse to write about the region, then he must feel a sense of association to the region,

irrespective of his roots or his identity, or the historical elements that he finds residing in all the Mediterranean. This 'affiliation' has an element of identity that I find interesting in the discourse about the Mediterranean. Jean-Claude Izzo in his *Les Marins Perdus* states that every person travelling in the Mediterranean needs to have a personal reason for it, and this personal reason resides mostly in the search for an identity. One of the characters in Jean-Claude Izzo's *Les Marins Perdus* was in constant search of an identity; a personal one that could tie him psychologically and emotionally to a harbour or to a land. The Mediterranean, as a region, was the place where he could comment, argue and question his own identity. Whether the search actually resulted in finding his identity is not the actual point of the novel but the focal point is that the constant search for an 'affiliation' and an anchorage point brought out a rich imaginary that is able to be transported through time.

The Mediterranean imaginary constructed by the various authors and thinkers created a vision of various concepts such as the sailor, the metaphor of the harbour, and the thresholds that hold both a geographical and metaphorical meaning. The imaginary of the region is meant to go beyond the initial socio-political meanings that the media tries to portray. The Mediterranean for anthropologists, authors, politicians and the Mediterranean people themselves has in essence a different meaning for each person, and therefore by analyzing the narration and images about the region, it is possible to understand the relationship between each component of the Mediterranean society to society itself.

The aim of analyzing the imaginary in the Mediterranean through the help of the harbour as a conceptual and geographical area was to focus on the way in which literature and culture through the help of metaphors and the personal encounter with the region, manages to leave an imprint on the imaginary of the region. The region is not only a place where these figures meet, intertwine and are reinvented but it is also a place where politics should be discussed considering the deep historical and geographical ties as well as a place where issues such as 'migration' should be viewed with the history of the region in mind. The importance of the Mediterranean does not lie in the accomplishment of a common identity but in realizing that each and every complex identity that resides in and writes about the Mediterranean can contribute to the formation of the 'imaginary' to which everyone can relate - images and figures with which each Mediterranean person, with their diverse identities, can identify. The imaginary is the result of images, narratives and depictions that from a personal meaning and manage to acquire a deeper and more global meaning. The Mediterranean people would not feel that these common ideas and values are in any way limiting their freedom or restricting their identity, but on the contrary, feel that it is enriching to their personalized and contradictory identity.

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