

Maurizio Isabella & Konstantina Zanou (eds.), *Mediterranean Diasporas: Politics and Ideas in the Long 19th Century* (London, New Delhi, New York, Sydney: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016)

This book consists of ten case studies of politics and ideas in the Mediterranean region. They are innovative and thought-provoking, particularly because they reveal that, due to long-distance cultural exchanges, the region was more diversified than previous research has suggested. For the most part, these contributions are biographical explorations of prominent characters, intellectuals and political activists. Broadly speaking, all of them exhibit the influence of Western liberalism, the ideology that helped to shape political systems and political discourse throughout Europe and North America in the course of the long nineteenth century.

This new book focuses upon intellectual networks and the circulation of ideas. All the individuals who are examined in these new studies share a diasporic background, as they spent at least part of their life separated from their principal cultural *milieux*. That experience clearly influenced their political outlooks, as a number of contributions in this volume reveal. In other words, these are surveys of a cultural transfer, even over long distances, within and outside of the region. Given the title of the book, one might have expected a more comprehensive regional survey, with more detailed elaboration of political thought in the Middle East and North-Africa. However, a 200-page collection of essays is really too small to be able provide such a wide survey and the editors' decision to concentrate on European areas between the Balkans and Iberian Peninsula is sensible.

Until the end of the medieval period, the Mediterranean Sea was Europe's main highway for cultural and material exchanges. Following the opening of the Atlantic route and the rise of the European powers on the Atlantic seaboard, the Mediterranean lost its central role. Historiography has generally intimated that these changes turned Mediterranean populations into receivers, rather than sources, of innovation in the modern age, including political and cultural innovation, and not least the liberal ideology. As this new book exemplifies, that interpretation oversimplifies the role of southern European intellectuals, as they undoubtedly contributed to the development of the liberal movements of the Continent.

Liberalism is one of the most difficult ideologies to define, particularly if we also examine it from a North-American perspective, where its content has been expanded considerably. It goes without saying that all liberal thought takes the individual to be an essential unit of society. What varies, however, is how inclusive liberals consider their ideology to be and, in particular, to what extent they regard the less cultivated/educated, as well as members of the lower social strata, to be capable of becoming full-fledged citizens. In this volume, the term "liberalism" is on the whole used in an inclusive way, socially and culturally. Moreover, the authors generally posit a close relationships between liberalism and nationalism, comparing the self-determination of the individual, on the one hand, to the independence of (imagined) nations on the other. But a detailed scrutiny, and deconstruction, of the

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symbiosis between liberalism and nationalism is not what one would expect to find in a collection of essays like this one.

Finally, as in most examinations of intellectuals and political activists, these are studies of male characters. That reflects the gender system of the nineteenth century. The authors might have examined the absence of female characters, but, again, the compact size of the collection allows little room for the many relevant discussions that might have found a place in a larger work.

All in all, this publication is significant and substantial. By focusing on the dynamic and multiple interactions between different cultural regions, this book enhances our understanding of political culture in a trans-Mediterranean mode.

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