Introduction

Xavier Andreu and Mónica Bolufer

European culture is full of stereotypes about southern Europeans' passionate and impulsive character, either as a strong rejection or a more or less veiled envy. These stereotypes provide a plot or a setting to countless literary, cinematographic or television comedy or drama fictions, inspire advertising campaigns and appear in debates about the policies of the European Union or the most severe problems that have challenged it from the 2008 financial crisis to the COVID-19 crisis. They also underlie the development of certain areas of study, such as the Mediterranean studies that have recently emerged in the American academic sphere. As Giovanna Fiume (2016) acutely pointed out, these are not exempt from a romanticised vision of the *Mare nostrum* inherited from the distinguished French historian Ferdinand Braudel. His classic *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (Braudel 1949) is an impressive piece of research that invented what Lucien Febvre called a "beautiful false topic". Following in the footsteps of Braudel, Mediterranean studies tend to over-generalise projecting, on the set of territories bathed by the Mediterranean Sea and in an almost immobile time, of extremely long duration (Braudel's famous *longue durée*), cultural features (such as the culture of honour or the extended family) that are documented only in specific geographic and temporal contexts.

The extended survival and significant extension of these clichés can be explained because they help to give meaning to reality by offering narrative and representation structures connecting with preconceptions so profoundly embedded that they are not always made explicit (Leerssen 2016). However, their broad scope and long duration do not mean that they are eternal. From a historical point of view, they have their origin, reasons, and evolution, which are always contingent and linked to precise political, cultural, and economic circumstances. Our volume builds on the legacy of several decades of research analysing the complex and conflictive symbolic construction of the European borders, precisely from those places that have been defined as peripheries at different times (Herzfeld 1987, Wolff 1994, Todorova 1997, Schneider 1998, Dolan 2000, Çirakman 2002, Moe 2002, Jakobson 2009). However, we adopt a different perspective, which aims to relate and compare the cases of Italy and Spain and to highlight the open nature of these processes and the plurality of conflicting opinions.

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The meanings attributed to the South derive from its place in a discourse articulated in terms of opposition. There is no South without a North, just as there is no North without a South (Fjågesund 2014, Leerssen 2019). These meanings need to be fixed through the articulation of their differences, in a continuous process irrevocably doomed to failure: geographical essences do not exist. The consistency and sharpness of contours induced by cartographic thought are just mirages. The symbolic borders of the North and the South are tremendously unstable. They are like a couple that changes position on the dance floor over and over again, rather than spaces to locate on a map.

The very idea of Europe, whose borders are equally blurred, historical, and unstable, was articulated on a North-South divide crossed by other axes of equal importance, such as the East-West one.[1] These conceptual pairs are mutually constituted and always involve power relations, as many specialists have highlighted. The debate between "ancients and moderns" was not only a temporary conflict but also a geopolitical one, as Roberto M. Dainotto (2007) has perceptively reminded us. The superiority of a civilised Mediterranean South over a cold and barbarous North was in jeopardy since the seventeenth century, as the power game in the continent began to shift towards northwestern areas. This new situation led some intellectuals of the Enlightenment to believe the flame of "modernity," which had been extinguished in a decadent Catholic South (Spain, Italy, Portugal) or in territories dominated by Ottoman power (Greece), was now sheltered in the North.

All these variables, in turn, intersected with and were an inherent part of the eighteenth-century debate on "national characters," as Ester García-Moscardó analyses in her chapter. In the encyclopaedic pastiche of travel accounts *Le Voyageur François* [The French Traveller] (1765–1795), Joseph de La Porte constantly used the European South to establish by contrast the features of a modernity that he ended up associating with the French. The text evidences the relevance of genres such as travel accounts (and more precisely, travel collections, a commercial synthesis product, adapted and plagiarised from previously published texts) in the simplification and popularisation of stereotypes about the European South, as well as in the dissemination of a "national thought" and the configuration of the clichés associated with the various national characters of the continent. In La Porte's work, climate and history, as well as certain anthropological features, become the main factors that justify a hierarchy among the various European peoples gradually turning into the *orientalization* of Mediterranean Europe. This is much more visible in his

1 On the symbolic borders of Europe, see the classics by Febvre (1999), Chabod (1995), and also Mikkeli (1998), Pagden (2002), Bolufer (2005), Dainotto (2007).

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narrative than in other accounts, more nuanced and attentive to details. In the discourse on European modernity, Mediterranean Europe became then one of the "internal Others" that made it possible to affirm and legitimise the recently established cultural and political dominance of the North.

Nuria Soriano analyses the eighteenth-century dispute over the New World from these coordinates and underlines the implicit political dimension in these debates. According to Cornelius de Pauw or the Abbé Raynal, to what extent should the Spanish and Portuguese empires be replaced in America by other more modern and efficient forms of imperial domination? (Iarocci 2006). The analysis of Pedro de Estala's *El Viajero Universal* [The Universal Traveller] (1797–1799), a free adaptation of the fragments dedicated to the American continent by La Porte, as well of other contemporary texts written by Spanish authors on this same question, reveals that the association of the North with modernity could be internalised and discussed at the same time. Estala accepted the climatic arguments to justify a commonplace in that debate: the differences between a prosperous and active North America and a stagnant South America with childish features. However, he reconsidered the responsibility attributed to Spain in the last issue. For him, on the contrary, those same arguments could be used to highlight even more the titanic civilising enterprise that the Spaniards had carried out in such a hostile territory, thus affirming the European modernity of Spain and its empire against those who denied it.

Both García-Moscardó and Soriano show how gender was one of the categories that allowed these discourses of power to be articulated. The relationship between the sexes became a clear indicator of the degree of civilisation of peoples in the Enlightenment narrative of progress (Moran 2005, Bolufer 2009, Sebastiani 2013). Self-control and the moderation of passions were conceptualised as unmistakable signs of modernity. The stability of a well-arranged family structure was a precondition and guarantee of the proper functioning of a political order that had to be based on subjects capable of governing themselves. Courteous relationships between the sexes, love and sexuality had to be aligned with the principles of female modesty and domesticity and male self-restraint (Patriarca 2005 and 2010, Babini, Beccalossi and Riall 2015, Bolufer 2016). In the eighteenth century, the eastern harem was in the European imaginary a symbol of disorderly passions and a metaphor for the inability of non-European peoples to host free representative institutions. In a not so extreme way, the idea that passions overruled reason in the domestic as well as in the political realm also applied to descriptions of alleged female confinement and excessive forms of gallantry in the European South (Bizzocchi 2014, Bolufer 2016). However, since the end of the eighteenth century, the hegemonic

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forms of French gallantry started to be questioned in defence, precisely, of the virtues of nations, considered the ultimate depositories of sovereignty.

In this regard, Mónica Bolufer's chapter analyses in a comparative way how some travellers and philosophers from northern Europe who visited Italy or Spain in the eighteenth century, in person or from their desks, judged the gallant relations between women and men, and particularly the bond between a married lady and a gallant known as *cicisbeo*, *chichisveo*, or *cortejo*. The chapter also looks at how local male and female authors responded to those views. The former, coming from Great Britain or France – and in some cases, Prussia–, tended to interpret these relationships as adultery, making them proof of the inability of the southerners to control their passions due to climate or religion. More insightful or empathetic, only a few understood the logic of a practice that had its specific reasons in aristocratic values and in the intense sociability of the century. The latter often hesitated between sharing the critiques of the northerners – which were, in turn, a critique of the very possibility of modernity in societies that were burdened by their past – and counteracting them. Some of them, in fact, defended the Italian and Spanish forms of gallantry as a morally respectable and more respectful alternative either to the separation of masculine and feminine spaces typical of Great Britain or the "frivolous" manners imposed by French hegemony. In any case, for Spanish and Italian intellectuals, morality was at stake and, with it, the capacity for the progress of their nations, both being questioned by many external observers. They all sought to locate their country and grant it a proper position on a reconfigured map of cultural and political hegemonies in Europe.

These and other debates remained central throughout the following century. The new nations forged in the nineteenth century were imagined through familiar metaphors that were key in liberal revolutionary processes (Hunt 1992, McClintock 1995, Blom, Hagemann and Hall 2000, Landes 2001, Banti 2005, Porciani 2006, Andreu 2011). The modernity and viability of these nations were made dependent on the respectability of their respective national characters. The honour and purity of their maidens were extended to that of the entire nation, as Alberto M. Banti shows in his chapter. The author underlines the relevance of inter-ethnic sexual violence in the narrative of romantic nationalism throughout the continent, as can be seen in some of the most famous contemporary novels, operas or paintings that put rape at the centre of their plots. Through these narratives, nations were imagined as kinship communities, showing the political dimension of the discourses on sexuality and the morality of European women. The link between national modernity and the respectability of men and especially women increased throughout the century (Mosse 1985, Malecková 1996).

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However, in the South, these discourses clashed with those that emphasised certain immorality intrinsic to the inhabitants of the Mediterranean shores – immorality that questioned the modernity of these nations (Patriarca 2010, Andreu 2016). Southern Europe fascinated nineteenth-century romantics: it was for them an exotic and picturesque territory situated on the edge of Western modernity (Pemble 1987, Calvo Serraller 1995, O'Connor 1998, Saglia 2000, Luzzi 2002, Brilli 2006, Saglia and Haywood 2018, Varela 2019). Hence, as Joep Leerssen points out, it was possible to consider the "Byronic hero," interpreted as a mixture of southern and eastern features, as characteristic of that Mediterranean. This hero remained in the European imaginary and influenced – and continues to influence – how the social sciences address the anthropological features of the Mediterranean countries. This new ideal of masculinity, whose *raison d'être* has much to do with the logic of romantic exoticism, was born from crossing an ethnotype (the temperament typical of a warm climate) and a sociotype (the outlaw that roams freely in lawless countries).

As Leerssen points out in his text, deep down, if the South was fascinating and exotic like other places on the planet, it was because it was supposedly rooted in the past. In other words, romanticism did not change the assessment of the position these territories occupied in the narrative of European progress but the critical assessment of this progress. The three gods of modernity – reason, work, and freedom – seemed to have abandoned southern regions, decimated by passion and religious fanaticism, by idle indolence and blind servility to authority. In this regard, the South was progressively associated with the quintessential "Other" of Western modernity in the European mindset: an Eastern world to which the Mediterranean Sea would not have functioned as an impassable barrier.

Historizing this entire process is essential. The conceptual opposition North versus South – as well as their links with the languages of the nation and gender – is always articulated in specific spatial and historical contexts and is endowed with equally variable meanings. One of the purposes of this collective work is to understand this historicity, renouncing excessively simplistic dichotomous explanations that cancel out the complexity and obscure the agency of those who participated in the process. For historians, it is essential to escape teleological accounts. The hegemonic rise of the identification between the European North and modern civilisation cannot be taken for granted. Likewise, it cannot be conceptualised as a zero-sum triumph of the North over a South that is only recognised in the drama as the scapegoat. This account, by the way, ends up reproducing an archetypal and gendered vision of North-South relations that assigns each of the protagonists, respectively, an active and a passive role.

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On the contrary, the essays collected in this volume recover a debate in which several voices took part, and in which the identification between North and modernity had not yet been decided. It is precisely for this reason that we have chosen a long-term chronology between the age of Enlightenment and a long nineteenth century that spans the first decades of the twentieth. This question allows us to perceive how, at the beginning of this period, the apriorism pairing the North with modernity competed with some views (many internal and some external) that not only underlined the historical importance of Italy and the Iberian Peninsula in the origins of European culture but also valued the processes of economic growth, social change and intellectual renewal experienced in those territories during the eighteenth century.

Furthermore, the hegemonic link established at the dawn of the late modern period between the North and modernity was discussed right from the beginning, and not only by southern authors. The opinions of the participants in the debate did not always coincide with the latitude from which they were writing. The "estrangement" of the South made it a space through which authors who wrote from there or elsewhere could imagine alternative forms in their critique of the dominant "modernity." Despite being suspiciously related to the eastern peoples, imperial Spain, the Portugal of the discoveries, classical Greece and Renaissance Italy could not fail to be considered fundamental parts of European history. For this reason, the Mediterranean South – in its historical and geographical proximity with its extra-European "Others" – became an in-between space and a liminal territory that contained untraveled routes or different ways, for example, of understanding freedom or the relationship between the sexes. Diego Saglia underlines in his text, for instance, the ambivalent character of southern Europe according to some authors of the Coppet group who contributed the most to establish a romantic stereotype decisively crossed by gender categories. In general, Madame de Staël, Jean-Charles-Léonard Simonde de Sismondi or Charles Victor de Bonstetten based their works on the same gendered stereotypes that they also questioned, laying the groundwork for future reinterpretations, reimaginings and criticism.

Xavier Andreu's text connects particularly with the reflections of Leerssen and Saglia. He analyses how the figure of the romantic bandit, of Schillerian roots and Byronic inspiration, was particularly associated with the Mediterranean South in the European romantic imaginary. This identification – generally rejected by southern countries – implied accepting the backwardness and lack of modernity of these territories, but also the survival in them of some admirable peculiarities lost definitively in "modern" Europe. This ideal could be mobilised to defend a revolutionary liberal subject that was mixed with the protean hero of romanticism. Both Spanish and Italian radicalism

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appropriated these figures to articulate an ideal of national masculinity that fused elements of the citizen-soldier of civic humanism with others coming from the new romantic sensibility.

Other southern intellectuals, on the contrary, reacted vehemently to such associations. The similarities that many travellers identified between the sexual and love manners of eastern peoples and those of the passionate inhabitants of the Mediterranean coasts became a weighty matter of public interest for many southern authors. In her chapter, Maria Pia Casalena addresses Italian reactions to some influential authors, such as Sismondi, who had taken for granted in their works the moral corruption of the Italian peninsula after the Spanish domination in early modern times. Far from accepting these judgments without further ado, various Italian authors defended the moral superiority of Southern Catholic women against the Protestant North in their historical-biographical repertoires of great women, published in the first decades of the nineteenth century. This moral superiority, a mirror for the "new Italian woman," guaranteed a specific modernity for Italian civilisation.

Florencia Peyrou analyses, in her essay on Spanish democratic radicalism in the central decades of the nineteenth century, how this political culture conceptualised the virtue of men and women and the morality that should govern relations between them as a necessary condition to ensure the survival of the political community. Peyrou points out to what extent this question was a central element of the political project of radicalism and how it influenced ideals of femininity and masculinity that partially challenged the liberal hegemonic ideas about the complementarity of the sexes and the public-private divide. By defending the virtue of their men and women, these radical authors also implicitly defended a specific modernity for the Spanish nation, which required the triumph of its political project.

Thus, those who wrote from the shores of the Mediterranean were not merely passive recipients of northern imaginaries questioning their anchorage in the modern world. Many of them discussed in their accounts such a link and articulated alternative ways of understanding modernity or the place of their nations. Others, in turn, strategically appropriated and took advantage of that same conceptual framework, which established a relationship of superiority between North and South, for their own political or cultural projects, applying it to their territories. Coro Rubio analyses, from this perspective, the case of the Basque Country. The Basques were part of a Spain that European romanticism frequently exoticised and orientalised. However, they were idealised as a people because they retained features bringing them closer to Northern European values, as seen in travel guides published in Spain and the rest of the continent

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throughout the nineteenth century. Once again, a gender dimension crossed this interpretation. Basque men and women could have qualities distancing them from the common denominator of the Spaniards and were used by certain intellectuals from these territories to articulate a particular identity that was defined mainly in contrast to the south of the peninsula.

Images and stereotypes about the internal south also played a fundamental role in Italy (Schneider 1998, Dickie 1999, Moe 2002, De Francesco 2012). As Antonino de Francesco points out in his chapter, the image of a backward and lawless *Mezzogiorno*, fanaticist and superstitious, was decisive for post-Unitarian Italy's political and social dynamics. De Francesco highlights the extent to which these imaginaries about the south of the peninsula were present in the Italian public sphere of that period and how the most critical Left used them, precisely, to explain the political paralysis of the entire country. In 1893, the last government of Francesco Crispi and, at the end of the century, the new sociological and anthropological discourses promoted this interpretation. They read Italy from a new scientifically based moral cartography representing the inhabitants of the South as a homogeneous ethnic reality incapable, unlike the North, of joining the modern world. In this regard, as all the authors of the volume emphasise in their essays, both categories, North and South, were always disputed territories – also for those who reflected on them from the southernmost countries of the continent. How they did it would depend a lot on the position taken in each historical context within that dialogue, as the different chapters in this volume also demonstrate. It was not the same to participate in it as a man than as a woman, as a Catholic than a Protestant, as an inhabitant of a prosperous region than an eminently poor one. Nor was it the same to do it from the political assumptions of enlightened reformism or absolutism, advanced liberalism or moderatism. These religious, political, or social categories conditioned the possible responses and wove complicities that crossed national borders and could even blur the centrality of the South-North axis.

In any case, as early as the nineteenth century, at a time characterised by the affirmation of national sovereignty and the construction of modern national public spheres, the discourse about modernity built on the North-South axis would condition how those nations were being imagined while questioning their Europeanness. "Modernity," or its absence, was an unavoidable concern for the architects of the nations of the European South: a concern running through national narratives articulated from these continental areas (Liakos 2013). Isabel Burdiel's text particularly illustrates how the axes of tradition and modernity, nation and region, North and South, and class and gender intersect in each specific context concerning various political and national projects.

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Burdiel analyses the case of the great Spanish novelist and feminist Emilia Pardo Bazán and the meanings conveyed in her unsuccessful attempts to be recognised as a "national writer." In the discussion about the place that she should occupy in the Spanish canon or in the debate she held with Manuel Murguía on the differences that separated her from the other great Galician writer of the time, Rosalía de Castro, what was ultimately discussed were questions of great importance such as the national meanings of Spanish cultural diversity and the role of women in the public sphere, the nation, and national regeneration projects. Pardo Bazán actively participated in all those projects with a class and "anti-sentimental" proposal that closely questioned any "essential" or "natural" understanding of identities.

Ferran Archilés analyses, in turn, the mirror images of orientalisms, imperial desires and national self-assertion that affected Spain in the last decades of the nineteenth century. The Spanish Africanist imperialism articulated in those decades responded to the implicit denial of Spanish modernity within a debate on the degeneration of the Latin *races*. This *fin-de-siècle* Spanish imperialism was founded on a civilising discourse homologous to that of other European imperialisms. However, it put into play a series of discourses that entered originally into dialogue with those orientalising the Spanish people and interpreting it from the parameters of the South. Intellectuals such as Joaquín Costa or anthropologists like Luis de Hoyos or Telesforo de Aranzadi defended a certain racial kinship between Spain and Morocco that gave the former primacy in the civilising mission over the latter. This issue did not prevent the development in Spain of a particular orientalism, whose gender variable was equally essential.

Thus the texts collected in this volume reveal how discourses on nation and modernity, gender and other categories were mixed in the construction of national imaginaries on and from the European South. They also show the variety of cultural devices through which these nations were imagined. The chapters cover a vast repertoire of cultural materials, many of them widely disseminated across the social spectrum: factual and fictional travel stories, philosophical stories, moral treatises, satires and criticisms of customs, biographies and autobiographical writings, political, scientific, or historiographical texts, novels, operas, dramas, and other kinds of literary or artistic materials (in particular historical paintings).

All these resources – and the national imaginaries and narratives they allowed to project and articulate – were decisive in constructing Mediterranean nations that started from extraordinarily different conditions. Again, historical uniqueness and context are determining factors. Spain and Italy, which ended up becoming paradigmatic examples of great European civilisations in

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decline, had to deal with accounts that cast doubt on their full attachment to the present. They did it, however, also from different places. Spain had lost its hegemonic position on the continent since the seventeenth century, but it remained an imperial power throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Although it experienced a remarkable decline, particularly from the first decades of the nineteenth century, after the independence of most of the American colonies, it could still culturally mobilise a relatively recent great past. Also, its construction as a modern nation started from a not questioned political unity and a new founding myth – the victory over the Napoleonic troops at the beginning of the nineteenth century – on which its restoration to the modern world could be planned (Álvarez Junco 2001, Burdiel 2010). On the contrary, the greatness of Italy was more distant in time. The nation, as such, existed for most of the nineteenth century more as an ideal than a reality (Banti 2000, Banti and Ginsborg 2007, Riall 2009, Patriarca and Riall 2012). More peremptory was the reflection on the causes of its division and decline, as well as the urgency of reversing so many centuries that were perceived as lethargic. Because of this, the setbacks suffered in the unifying enterprise of the *Risorgimento* were also felt more bitterly. Once unity was achieved, and new and long-standing problems had to be faced, all those shadows were projected towards the Italian south itself.

Despite these differences, Spanish and Italian men and women of letters, or those writing from other countries related in the European imagination to a Catholic South, a warm climate and suspiciously oriental features, such as Portugal, had to face the same challenge: the one represented by those discourses questioning their full membership in modern Europe. This volume explores how they dealt with it, especially highlighting the gender dimension of their responses.

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