

The Liquid Europe of the *Cahiers du Sud*

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In interwar Europe a critique of Orientalism and of the opposition between the Orient and the West was developed by some intellectual positions that might well be considered as examples of postcolonial and postsecular attitudes, in spite of sometimes including elements of traditionalism, especially towards women.

One of the most interesting cases is the journal *Cahiers du Sud*, published in Marseilles for more than 40 years since 1926. Contributors included Gabriel Audisio, Joë Bousquet, René Nelli, and Simone Weil, as well as Marguerite Yourcenar, Paul Eluard, Walter Benjamin, André Masson and Paul Valéry. On the basis of the heritage of Provençal culture and the independence from French culture, the journal affirmed its determination to break out of national boundaries and project the idea of regional autonomy on a continental scale. In *Cahiers*, the term 'Europe' was often used interchangeably with 'West', but not in the sense of an opposition with the East. The opposition of East and West was defined as 'superficial', while Europe was seen as 'miserable' and hurtling toward ruin, threatened as she was by the colonies she had subjugated in accordance with her principles of reactionary authority and racial superiority. The magazine expressed an extended notion of Mediterranean culture, a meeting place between various cultures as opposed to a restricted viewpoint inspired by the 'Latin spirit' or the 'Greek miracle'.

In particular, Gabriel Audisio wrote of unifying a new world around the Mediterranean sea, which would link southern Europe and North Africa. Audisio dreamed of a people with many different faces, who spoke many languages understandable to all who were citizens of this 'liquid continent'. Against the expansionist aims of fascist and nazi viewpoints, and against all forms of racism, he declared his mistrust for 'Mediterranean humanism' and railed against the claim, encapsulated by the Mussolinian slogan 'mare nostrum', of reducing the Mediterranean to Rome. He also took up a stance against the policy of the Italian government in Ethiopia.

The *Cahiers* included a plurality of intellectual positions, sometimes Eurocentric and often male-centric, but they also presented, for instance in the writings by Simone Weil and Thérèse Aubray, new visions of love and a renewed interest in spiritual life. Simone Weil took a strong position against Roman Catholic fundamentalism and its spiritual totalitarianism, which had repressed the spiritual freedom of the Cathars. For her and for the *Cahiers*, under the fascist Vichy regime, language and poetry were the foundation of the relationship between cultures, while secular rights and freedom of expression were the condition for saving Europe from totalitarianism.

