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Rethinking the Mediterranean: Extending the Anthropological Laboratory Across Nested Mediterranean Zones

Simon Holdermann, Christoph Lange, Michaela Schäuble, Martin Zillinger

Rethinking the Mediterranean

From antiquity to today, the Mediterranean has been conceptualised as a site of economic and socio-political promise, corruption, and failure. Likewise, anthropological scholarship has conceived the Mediterranean as an area full of tensions and challenges, simultaneously romanticising and continuously deconstructing it. Yet, according to Peregrine Horden, in response to a series of recent proclamations of the Mediterranean's "return" (Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot, and Silverstein 2020), it "has never gone away" (Horden, this volume). In light of contemporary migratory movements and multiple aggravating crises, the Mediterranean Sea is no longer described only as a zone of conflicting and competing social formations but as "one of the world's highest walls" (Pina-Cabral 2013:249), which has increasingly turned a border zone into a site of "carnage" (Albahari 2016). Yet, despite the ongoing devastating economic and political dynamics and the brutal failure of migration policies, the heritage industry and commodification of "Mediterranean identity" are in full swing (Herzfeld 2014). At times it seems as if the Mediterranean envisioned by scholars, artists, and intellectuals from North-Western Europe, whose travelogues and visual documentations have exercised the imagination of European publics since the nineteenth century (see Kramer 1977), has exceeded the discursive realms. Continuously re-created as social-ecological 'niches' by the transnational tourist industry, regional identity politics, and local nostalgia, Mediterranean landscapes lend themselves as economic and social reserves (Hauschild 2008) for individuals and various social formations in late modernity. Awaiting exciting discovery (Sant Cassia 2000) by tourists, pilgrims, and returning migrants, these reserves, however, continue to be haunted by catastrophes – environmental (earthquakes, floods, and droughts), political (failing states, corruption, and criminal networks), humanitarian (migration, war, and state violence), and medical (invasive species, COVID-19) – that seem to mirror an increasingly fragmented globalisation and testify to their own temporality.

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Contributors to this special issue trace and rethink classical *topoi* of Mediterranean scholarship and ask how the Mediterranean is located and mapped differently by different actors along and beyond maritime shores. The focus is a praxeological one: by whom and how is the making and remaking of different 'Mediterraneans' not just constantly pursued but always embedded in, or informed and constricted by, overlapping "regulating regimes" (Green 2019)?

To better understand how these various regimes operate simultaneously on and across transnational, national, regional, and local levels we propose to work with the perspective of a 'nested Mediterranean', in which overlapping zones of different scale form and dissolve at an uneven pace, and lend themselves to different forms of belonging in an increasingly capricious environment. In order to critically rethink borders, connections, and disconnections, we pay close attention to dynamics of involution, which remain crucial for a Mediterranean that "has the capacity to call forth alternative scenarios and imaginings of relatedness offering anthropologists an opportunity to conceive (dis)connections, relations, and separations in new ways, but without glorifying the region as an idealized space of cosmopolitan interconnection" (Brković 2020:4). The notion of a 'nested Mediterranean' allows us to zoom in on the multifaceted and graduated interconnectivities – at the same time fractal and recursive – that unfold and undo Mediterranean relations and references at different scales. A 'nested Mediterranean' thus accounts for situated complexities, as documented not only in the ethnographic archive but also in, and for, Mediterranean scholarship, that include contradictory discourses and dynamics,[1] and are recalibrated in situ;[2] it collapses binary distinctions and the clear-cut distribution of social, political, and discursive power.[3] For us, it works as a stepping stone to regain a take on the complexities documented in the ethnographic archive as well as on the polyphony in the history of Mediterranean scholarship alike. Speaking of zones benefits from their "uncertain status, unclear delineation [and] unsettling atmosphere", as described by Bruno Latour and Peter Weibel for their critical zonology (2020:13). We do not intend to "hijack" (Gaillardet 2020:123) the research programme of Critical Zones Observatories, rather we invoke their work to get beyond worn-out tropes of "area", "region", "landscape", or "topography" to characterise and describe the Mediterranean (see Wagner 2001).

While the Mediterranean is an especially interesting space in which to create site-specific, multidisciplinary observatories for zooming in on the "thin biofilm beneath and above the planet's surface … where atmosphere and geology have been modified by life" (Schaffer 2020:157), here we are interested in reassessing and opening up the history of anthropological research for future ethnographic work. Thinking about nested

1 See Bakić-Hayden's gradation of Orients in what she calls a "nesting orientalism" (1995).

2 See Gal's nested publics that recalibrate the inside–outside (or private–public) distinction at every iteration, or scale (2002).

3 See El Shakry's "nested colonialisms" to account for Egypt's own colonising aspirations that destabilise classificatory differentiations in coloniser and colonised (2007).

Mediterranean zones helps us to gain perspective on this interrelated conglomeration of settings located at the fracture line of three continental plates and characterised by contact and interaction of various kinds, depths and scales in a more-than-human-history. Without foregrounding the form or extension of these zones, we are interested in how they relate to one another within a dynamics of change whose nature demands we draw the Braudelian time spans of the *longue, medium*, and *short durée* together.

Mediterranean Involuted Zones

In their seminal work *The Corrupting Sea* (2000), historians Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell describe the relation between geography and history as crucial to grasping topics and themes that continuously re-emerge in Mediterranean scholarship. At the centre of their history of the Mediterranean are microecologies, a "deliberately loose concept" (Horden and Purcell 2020:10) to account for the topographical fragmentation that results from the dynamic tectonics of three lithospheric plates, but also for the significant climatic variability across Mediterranean settings, in which droughts, floods, and extreme temperatures alternate on a small scale. Faced with the "ineluctable triple imperative" to diversify, store, and redistribute (ibid.:178), life in these microecologies has been interlinked across karstified landscapes and, in its "redistributive engagement" (ibid.), connected by the median space of the sea – the Medi-terranean as it is called in English and the Romanic languages, but also in Arabic (*al-baḥr al-mutawassiṭ*) or Hebrew (*yam ha-tikhon*).

This median space is crucial for dynamics and processes of 'extraversion', through which people along the shores and inland forge connections, be it via networks of exchange (Horden, this volume), flight and migration (Perl, this volume; see also Friese 2015, 2017), or coerced colonisation (Hauschild, this volume). But the sea provides only one form of connectivity, since what has been called the Mediterranean "hinterland" may be of equal importance for the "distinct regimes of risk" (Horden and Purcell 2020:10) that determine modes of (re-)production in unstable environments. For the two historians, "slopes of connectivity" of graduated extra- and introversion form a crucial feature of both rural and urban Mediterranean spaces. These slopes establish a large zone of "net-introversion", and their "fading away" marks the fringes of a Mediterranean world. Judith Scheele (this volume) traces this perspective to the Sahara as the "other face of the Mediterranean" (Braudel 1972), which is characterised not so much by net-introversion as net-extraversion. She thus provides a complementary, comparative perspective, from outside the Mediterranean, on the "flux and reflux" (Gellner 1981) of connectivity, domination, and resistance that accounts for situated "Mediterraneanisation" (Morris 2003) within.

Extraversion has been described as a fundamental strategy in African societies to reach out to an external social and ecological environment for resources (Bayart 1993). Translating this concept to Mediterranean societies, the forging of connectivity promises not only to increase but also to endanger the delicate balance of resources, among

them the "ultimate resource" of a predominantly underpopulated Mediterranean: the people (Horden and Purcell 2000:377–383). In Mediterranean history "abundant population is one of the greatest blessings which a city or a region can enjoy" (ibid.:379). Up to today abundance and scarcity of people have alternated on small scales at the northern as much as at the southern shores. Across these social topographies wealth in people remains crucial. According to Horden and Purcell, this is not mainly a matter of the mere pursuit of large aggregates *per se*, but also of the functioning of social institutions for which control over people and human labour moving in and out of Mediterranean microecologies is critical. Wealth in people implies the skilful management of scale, the knowledge of whom to include, and how to relate. In other words, it concerns wealth in knowledge (cf. Guyer and Belinga 1995 for African societies) about shaping, controlling, and fighting processes of extra- and introversion as central features of 'Mediterreanisation'.

A word of caution is appropriate here, however. The concern with continuity in Mediterraneanist anthropology, with its focus on historical perpetuity, geographical connectivity, and the endurance of cultural forms (Appadurai 2013), has long overlooked the accelerative discontinuities and disintegrating normativities of social orders. The use of the concept of involution (Horden and Purcell 2020:12) to further describe the rhythms of Mediterranean lifeworlds is double-edged in this regard. Coined by Alexander Goldenweiser to describe patterns that continuously intensify and develop by becoming internally ever more diversified (1968[1936]), "involution" captures complexities well, and denotes a pattern that works back on itself, combining continuity and change. But it may also conceal temporalities of change and discontinuities crucial for what we propose to call Mediterranean temporal zones.

Mediterranean Temporal Zones

We suggest apprehending 'the Mediterranean' not just as a place or an entanglement of places but as a particular way of narrating, conceptualising, and experiencing temporality. This means that the various contributions in this special issue consider how time plays a critical role in expressions of sovereignty in the Mediterranean, especially in view of an opening up of (uncertain) futures, (re)visions of modernity, and particular, situated practices of future-making in opposed settings.

Most contributions in this issue attest to the desire for "otherwise" Mediterranean futures (Povinelli 2016): be it through mimetic transformations and the sacralisation of space (Zillinger); in the face of a racialising border regime at the fringes of Europe and North Africa (Perl); or as a response to the hyper-nationalist recrafting of Egypt's future by the current military regime in the aftermath of the uprising of 25 January 2011 (Lange); through ritualised reactions to crises in Southern Italy (Schäuble); in the form of modernisation projects on a Greek island (Kalantzis); with the formation of new dissenting subjecthoods in Turkish society (Bayraktar); and/or digital technologies

that create new conditions both for change (Holdermann) and social interactions on a more personal level (Costa).

As editors, we respond to this desire by framing futurity in/of the Mediterranean through connections across time and geographical scales and situate them in collective and individual (dis)continuities. Rather than applying 'future' as an analytic, we focus on the individual and collective temporal agency that might entail planning, speculation, and imagination, but also particular anxieties, aspirations, and hopes.

We are thus not arguing for temporal recognition or for the Mediterranean to be seen as equally 'modern' vis-à-vis the (rest of the) Global North in the sense of Fabian's famous dictum of coevalness (2002[1983]), nor do we situate our analyses in a developmental frame. Rather, we attempt to combine particular kinds of spatial and temporal knottings and establish a specific Mediterranean being-in-time that does justice to ongoing and anticipated socio-political, economic, and ecological problems.

Mediterranean Zones of (Alternative) Belonging

Recent works revisiting the Mediterranean have outlined a space of alternative affiliations or zones of belonging at different temporal and spatial scales (see e.g. Candea 2010; Ben-Yehoyada 2017). As such, actors in the Eastern Mediterranean may attempt to link a region directly to classical antiquity – for example as the cradle of European civilisation to avoid any connection with the unpredictability and bloodshed commonly associated with the Balkans (Schäuble 2014) – or, if not concretely referring to a specific geo-historical lineage, to imagine a European alternative beyond binary classifications into 'Western' or 'Oriental' hemispheres. In a recent text, Brković introduced the notion of the "postsocialist Mediterranean" to disentangle the ambiguities of the combined political and economic effects of clientelism across various scales (Brković 2020:2). On the 'other' side of the Mediterranean, complementary forms of 'Mediterraneanisation' are gaining momentum as in the case of Amazigh nationalist and activist movements creating alternative Mediterranean belongings and counter-alliances in their attempt to oppose what they call "Arabo-Islamic-Imperialism" (Crawford and Silverstein 2004:47; see also Jay 2015); or Catalan Separatists conjuring local Mediterranean histories and futures to counter a Spanish national embrace and inscribe themselves into a Euro-Mediterranean project of regional cooperation (Llobera 2004).[4]

4 For an analysis of the "cultural polemic of Mediterraneanism" in an Israeli context, see Yaacov Shavit, who argues that the claim that Israel belongs to "the Mediterranean world" has its roots in a 1930s Zionist concept in which the Mediterranean "supplied a certain model of aesthetic values which was 'European' in character, yet not 'Western' in nature" (1988:111). Being Mediterranean provided an alternative, a "third option" (ibid.:112) beyond 'Aryan' or 'Semitic', 'western' or 'oriental', he claims. Noting a revival of this notion in the late 1980s he proposes that the Mediterranean still offers an attractive alternative self-ascription.

Creating zones of belonging thus comes in different guises. Charles Hirschkind recently proposed going beyond tropes of invented traditions or romanticising Mediterraneanism. He describes the political cartography of *Andalucismo* as offering a remapping of possibilities across political – and scholarly – chorographies that differentiate Europe from the Middle East, the Iberian Peninsula from the Maghreb, and Christendom from Islam. By recognising the multiple historical entwinements across the sea, alternative futures are projected into social, political, and economic relations that did and continue to exist between North Africa and Europe – into a Mediterranean space that opens up alternative horizons of thought and life (see Hirschkind 2021). We share the sense that, across fluid Mediterranean zones, different histories lend themselves to being inhabited, conveying a sense of diverging and alternative belongings, forms of living otherwise that exceed those of nation-states, ethnicities, or religions. Following Hirschkind in acknowledging a "recalcitrance of the past" (ibid.:158), we take these histories as part and parcel of the multiplying complexities that form the "realm of excess" (Shryock and da Col 2017:xxix) scholars of various political positionings have located in Mediterranean lifeworlds. Inscribed differently in different articulations of the past, ways of life unfold across scales and social topographies, and may bring forth this element of "grace" (Pitt-Rivers 2017[1992]) that exceeds the bequeathed realities of Mediterranean worlds. But note that these histories and territories often remain haunted, by experiences of domination and resistance, ecological catastrophes, and environmental pollution that can be found as much in southern Spain as in northern Morocco, in Tunisia as in Southern Italy.

At the same time, the Mediterranean continues to serve as a paradigmatic model for geo-political and geo-cultural notions. On a political level, this has gained momentum and visibility with the foundation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) in 2008, an extension of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (Euromed) set up more than twenty-five years ago and known as the Barcelona Process. As an intergovernmental institution modelled after the European Union, the UfM promotes dialogue and cooperation. Invoking the principles of shared ownership, shared decision-making, and shared responsibility between the two shores of the Mediterranean, the UfM ultimately seems to aim at strengthening the security–development nexus. Another aspect of the UfM is the establishment of the Euromed Heritage Programme, which promotes the identification and preservation of cultural heritages of Mediterranean states (see Helly 2018; Lichtenberger, Haller, and Meerpohl 2015). The Euromed partnership particularly highlights inter-regional cooperation, including free trade and shared judicial areas, and business development initiatives (including digital economies), and takes specific ecological issues and climate change coping strategies into consideration (among others, the depollution of the Mediterranean, development of alternative energy sources such as the Mediterranean solar plan, and protection of Mediterranean biodiversity). Recently, accelerating climatic change has been redefining the terms of Mediterranean cooperation and collaborative enterprises at an unprecedented pace and scale and demands a new ecological and epistemological understanding of the Mediterranean as a Critical Zone.

The Mediterranean Critical Zone

By extending the notion of the Mediterranean-as-laboratory (Albera 1999) or field of study (Albera and Blok 2001), we propose rethinking the Mediterranean in line with Latour, Weibel, and others as Critical Zone (Latour and Weibel 2020). According to these authors, this concept describes the "thin, porous and permeable layer where life has modified the cycles of matter … [and] whose reactivity and fragility have become the central topics of multidisciplinary research around the disputed concept of the Anthropocene" (Arènes, Latour, and Gaillardet 2018:121). Critical Zones, then, are the "patchy, heterogeneous, discontinuous" (Latour 2020:14) battleground of radical transformation where human impact and climate change have cascading ecological and socio-political effects on Mediterranean landscapes.[5] Thus, the Mediterranean Critical Zone with its capricious, unstable, and catastrophe-prone environments and histories focuses on the entwinements of ecological, societal, and economic collapse: the culmination of violent conflicts, forced migration, famines and impoverishment of entire regions intensified by eco-extractivism, marine gas field mining, extensive fishing, and an exploitative agricultural and tourist industry, water and air pollution, droughts, desertification, and the toxification of vast areas. These call indeed for a "new radical politics" (Moore 2015:24) that challenges capitalism and (neo-)imperial politics of extractivism and exploitation as key catalysts and systematic aberrations. What have long been described as Mediterranean "anomalies" and features of "anti-markets" (Braudel 1985[1979]) – patronage, clientelism, and elite secrecy with its insider trading and monopolies, intimidation, and brute force – turn out to be at the centre of this "sophisticated art" without which "capitalism is unthinkable [and] where it takes up residence and prospers" (ibid.:24). Exploring Mediterranean economies therefore sheds light on the foundations of a globalised destructive capitalism that increasingly endangers the persistence of an ecologically viable earth. But it may also uncover the rock on which Marcel Mauss (2016[1925]) founded his hope for peaceful coexistence: the continuous importance of rhythms of work, performed in common or individually, of accumulated and redistributed wealth, and of mutual respect and generosity vis-à-vis crude forms of economic and political exploitation and violence that can be translated into transregional environmental activism as Bayraktar argues (this volume).

Combining the 'anthropological laboratory' of ethnographic research with critical zonology will provide a "close description of the complex dynamics of those highly heterogeneous regions" (Arènes, Latour, and Gaillardet 2018:121) that have been at the centre of Mediterranean research in the past. Together with research in the environmental humanities and the earth sciences, it enables innovative collaborative future

5 A Critical Zone perspective resonates very much with Anna Tsing and colleagues' latest concept of the "Patchy Anthropocene", which focuses on "patches [as] sites for knowing intersectional inequalities among humans … [that] show us landscape structure, that is, morphological patterns in which humans and nonhumans are arranged" (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019:S188).

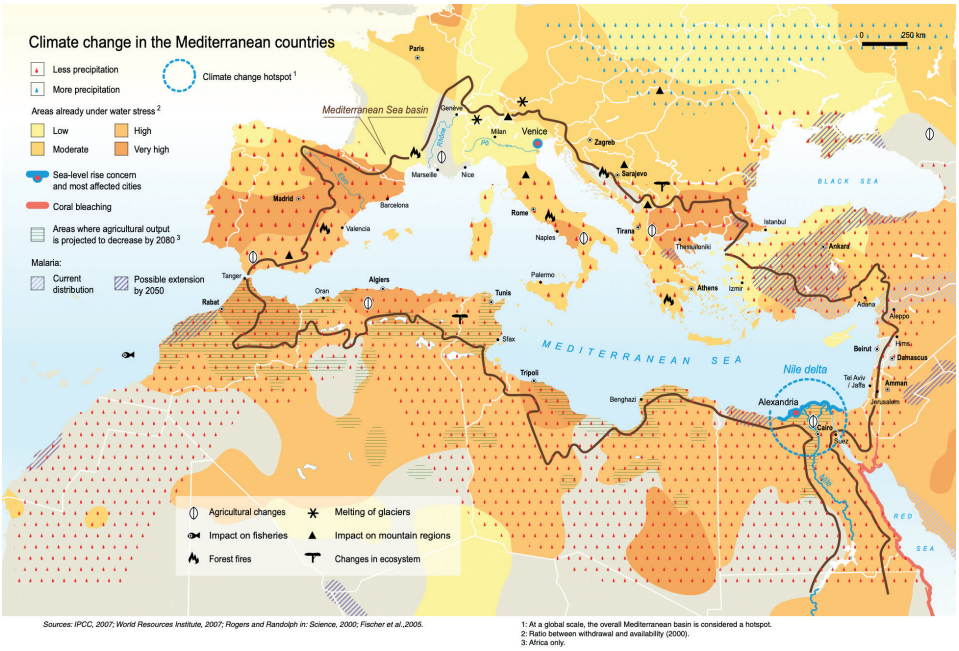

Figure 1 *Climate Change in the Mediterranean Countries*: *Global Hotspot and Multiple Stresses* (©MED-SEC Report & Zoï Environment Network; Cheterian 2009:11–12)

research on current and impending climatic, ecological, and socio-political challenges in the Mediterranean and poses crucial questions for a global climatic and civilisational history of humankind.

Recent findings suggest that climate change will aggravate floods, droughts, and the overall scarcity of ecological resources in the Mediterranean, "amplifying the potential for sociopolitical and economic disruption" (Cook et al. 2016:2071). Research in the Eastern Mediterranean of Turkey and the Levant not only confirms "the exceptional nature" of a drought that has been ravaging the region for more than three decades now, but also estimates it to be "the driest ... period in the region since the twelfth century" (ibid.). While reports show how, locally, the current drought is adding to "Syria's misery" (Cooke 2014), or is even threatening to exhaust Istanbul's water supply "in months" (DTE 2021), the dire overall situation in the (Eastern) Mediterranean is further reinforcing a strong North *versus* South/East divide along ecological and climatic trajectories (Cramer et al. 2018; UNEP/MAP and Plan Bleu 2020). Moreover, a UN Environment Programme report on Environmental Food Crisis predicts that by 2080 cereal output in vast rural areas along the Mediterranean's southern shores will have decreased by more than 50 per cent (Nellemann et al. 2009). Not only will the progressive (and probably already unstoppable) aridisation and desertification of entire regions put current forms of rural spaces and their niche-like interconnections under severe

pressure, but also the accelerating warming of the sea itself and the massive impact this has on sea level, salinisation dynamics, and the rapid displacement of marine life forms will change the face of the wider Mediterranean region's status as a 'waterworld' (see Adloff et al. 2015; Hastrup and Rubow 2014; and figure 1). The consequences of current ecological and climate change intensify and impact already ongoing political and economic crises alongside migratory movements on a massive scale and will have foreseeable devastating effects for the near future.

The fact that national politics, the livelihoods of millions, and potential future water scarcity are intimately entangled with and will further fuel regional conflicts becomes most apparent when looking at transboundary river basins, such as the Nile in the context of the Grand Ethiopian Renaissance Dam mega-project (Barnes 2017), or the Jordan River and its role as an essential freshwater reservoir in the Israel–Palestine conflict (Brooks, Trottier, and Giordano 2020). New findings by climate archaeologists present the potential collapse of Mediterranean microecologies against the backdrop of the so-called Late Bronze Age Crisis (Gogou, Izdebski, and Holmgren 2016; Lionello 2012; Weiss 2016). This historic mega-drought "was a complex but single event where political struggle, socio-economic decline, climatically-induced food-shortage, famines and flows of migrants definitely intermingled" (Kaniewski et al. 2013). Rethinking the Mediterranean as a Critical Zone of climate change, anthropogenic ecological crises, and humanitarian societal collapse reveals crucial spatial and temporal connectivities and thus underlines the interconnectedness between regional areas and the scales of human practice that for a long time were conceived separately and in isolation.

Thinking along nested Mediterranean zones goes beyond the (dis)connectivities of Horden and Purcell's fragmented microregions that simultaneously connect and disconnect, inspire and frighten human and more-than-human dwellers alike. Thus, the Mediterranean is to be rethought as a zone of intersecting material, political, and ecological realities, in which the multiplicities of earth's and hence humanity's crises, challenges, and responsibilities are dramatically unfolding locally around global struggles for food, water, and safe dwellings (Perl, Hauschild, this volume). Herein, the Mediterranean acts as a scientific and political cultural resource and imaginary that possesses both bridging and disjoining powers as well as stabilising and undermining potentialities in coping with these ecological threats and socio-political transformations (Bayraktar, Kalantzis, this volume). In this perspective, the question of whether there is a valid claim for an anthropological idea of the Mediterranean or not becomes irrelevant, because the urgent need for action – not just by our research partners and interlocutors but ourselves as anthropologists – creates an "ecological imperative" and responsibility from which there is no turning away.[6] Moreover, future anthropological

6 For more details on the notion of an "Ecological Imperative", see the SNSF Sinergia project "Mediating the Ecological Imperative", 2021-2024 (Schneemann, Schäuble et al. 2021) at https://ecological-imperative.ch/ and compare the work on profound dynamics of environmental change within the col-

enquiries that address the "new political and economic opportunities and risks … climate change offer[s] to a range of actors" (Barnes et al. 2013:543) will not only enrich the study of climate change itself but also contribute to rethinking the Mediterranean along ecological scales and connectivities.

Together, these imminent ecological crises and the mobilisation of a shared geo-cultural past and future evoke Mediterranean lifeworlds facing socio-political challenges of the utmost urgency, which implicitly feature in the various contributions of this volume but are also a pressing and significant call for a new generation of anthropologists concerned and engaged with a Mediterranean of nested critical zones.

Comparison in Mediterranean Critical Analyses

In addition to these bleak environmental perspectives, it is in light of the intensification of socio-economic struggles and the implementation of austerity schemes (see Narotzky 2019, 2020) as well as the failure of Europe's migration and refugee policies (see de Genova 2017) that the Mediterranean has once again taken centre stage in political debate and discourse. This has coincided with the resurgence of the Mediterranean as a topic in socio-cultural anthropology and a critical reassessment of "Mediterranean anthropology" (Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot, and Silverstein 2020). A look at the discipline's past debates recalls that many attempts to delimit or establish the Mediterranean as an area of anthropological research have turned out to be problematic and frequently essentialist. For Ben-Yehoyada and others it is the comparative design in particular that has fuelled essentialising anthropological engagements (see Albera, Blok, and Bromberger 2001), as comparison holds the possibility of producing and reifying 'the Mediterranean' in the first place (Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot, and Silverstein 2020:6).

By conceptualising the Mediterranean as a nested temporal and spatial conglomeration of diverse scaling effects and a Critical Zone, we intend to escape the long-standing pitfalls of essentialism and constructivism. Foregrounding at once highly local and highly global spatial and temporal dynamics that shape a nested Mediterranean, we take comparative research to be indispensable. Insofar as categorisations are concerned, it is inherent to any anthropological endeavour that comparative anthropology comes with its own problems (see Jones 2017) and therefore cannot do without the complementary reflexive perspective of an anthropology of comparison (see Zillinger 2017). Such an anthropology of comparison needs to go beyond mere navel-gazing, not least because comparison is pursued by the actors themselves. Comparison's pitfalls should therefore not lead us astray to explain away the "anthropological puzzle" (see Luhrmann 2017) at the heart of any research through which anthropologists try to understand something unfamiliar, and at times radically different. Comparison

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laborative research centre CRC 228 "Future Rural Africa" (since 2018): https://www.crc228.de [last accessed: April 25, 2021].

is part and parcel of the "radical toolkit" and allows anthropologists to "continually produce new data, unexpected insights, and alternative understandings of the social" (Shryock 2020b:415; see Candea 2018). Comparison in this respect does not serve to (mis-)construct the Mediterranean, as Ben-Yehoyada et al. worry, but to work out the various situated and interrelated forms of (dis)connection. By comparison, their 'patchiness' (Tsing, Mathews, and Bubandt 2019) is localised and then selectively brought back into larger/comprehensive (temporal, spatial, ideational, material, symbolic, epistemological) contexts. Acknowledging the difficulties that come with it, Dionigi Albera proposes a "controlled comparison" as a methodological tool in Mediterranean research that also helps "to determine whether certain models can be defined at an intermediate scale, between the microecologies and the whole Mediterranean region" (this volume).

Ethnographic research has always been a localising practice (Welz 1998, 2002). Turning participant observation into a method, it proceeds "from tools to theory" (Gigerenzer 1991). Fieldwork 'in the Mediterranean', as elsewhere, follows connections and movements; inherently 'multi-sited', it requires a spatial starting point, either as bounded construct (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) or as "arbitrary location" (Candea 2007). To be sure, the localised insights and situated ramifications elaborated during fieldwork are ill-suited to being 'part of a whole' or to stand *pars pro toto*. But they emerge from the dynamic interplay of the ecological circumstances, social configurations, and political conditions they describe. The critical potential of anthropological analysis is ultimately about "making relations explicit", as Marilyn Strathern (2020:16) recently noted. As a sharp lens that focuses on varying degrees, scales, and contradictory simultaneities of similarities and dissimilarities, the comparative method remains indispensable. It offers decisive support for arriving at careful descriptions (which resonate with shared realities and belongings on the ground) by mapping (dis)connections through different nested zones.

In this special issue we assemble a set of ethnographic approximations of how local temporalities, scales, and affiliations play out in the contemporary arena. In order to interrogate these zones of belonging, entangled political ecologies, and different scales of (dis)connectivity, the contributors revisit classical Mediterranean *topoi* across the special issue and a following thematic section of the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* under the headings of *Connectivity*, *Rurality*, and *Media/Publics*. This three-fold conceptual framing is grounded in a collection of ethnographic encounters and deliberations in (historical) anthropology.

Scope and Focus

Connectivity

The first section of this special issue, *Connectivity*, addresses conceptual and epistemological matters with regards to the scope, prospects, and limits of 'the Mediterranean' from a praxeological perspective. Exploring the materialities and socialities of changing (dis)connectivities in particular, the section tackles the predicaments and politics of place-making that permeate anthropology and ethnography of and in the Mediterranean. We share the aim of going beyond the "familiar choreography … [of] literature review and remedial therapy" that Judith Scheele and Andrew Shryock (2019:11–12) recently suggested for Middle East Anthropology – and which is all too familiar when looking at the Mediterranean. Furthermore, also the Mediterranean as an anthropological region seems "[t]oo historical, literate, complex, and self-confident to be turned into ordinary anthropological subject matter" (ibid.:10).

The section's framework is critically examined by Peregrine Horden, who reflects on the legacy of the historical ecology unfolded for *The Corrupting Sea* and explores alternative global histories in the Mediterranean. Holding on to the significance of microregions' connectivity to capture the way they cohere, both internally and with one another, often at great distance, he proposes a mesoglobal addition to connectivity in order to reinstate the capacity of local settings to "knit together microregions". The mesoglobal constitutes "a 'circulatory regime', [which] has the capacity to shape whole societies [and] encompasses not just the movement of people and goods but information, ideas, practices, even gods; and it is not any kind of mobility but 'a double movement of going forth and coming back' (Markovits, Pouchepadass, and Subrahmanyam 2006:2–3)" (Horden, this volume).

Connectivity not only knits together microregions but also foregrounds a continuity of temporal scales unique to the Mediterranean – our map "Continuous Connectivity" (see figure 2) merges the archaeological project of mapping ancient shipwrecks in the Mediterranean by Matthew Harpster (for a detailed discussion see Horden, this volume) with the materiality of "potentially all-round, low-friction communication" (ibid.) equally idealised and problematised in contemporary global shipping and container transport routes (https://www.shipmap.org/ [last accessed: April 25, 2021]).

Judith Scheele's contribution sets out by contrasting the circum-Mediterranean region as a "zone of net introversion" (Horden and Purcell 2000) with the Sahara as an area of "net extroversion" (McDougall 2012). Through her historical and ethnographic perspective, Scheele problematises the relationship between town and hinterland, as it has been established in Mediterranean research (cf. Horden and Purcell 2020, ch. 5), by employing the notions of "aspirational urbanity" and "wilful rurality". This underlines the relational quality of scalar properties and emphasises the difficulty of discerning in a general (abstract) manner what counts as urban or rural. In this respect, it is significant that in the Sahara almost all permanent settlements have urban qualities

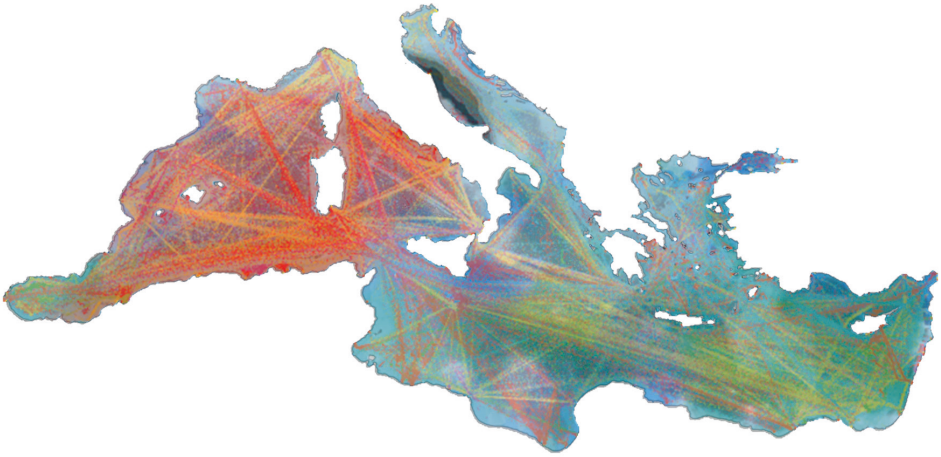

Figure 2 *Continuous Connectivity* (Map overlay of ©Matthew Harpster's Ancient Shipwrecks and ©Kilin's Shipmap of Contemporary Maritime Transport)

due to the sheer size and extent of the desert region. As a "region of cities", the Sahara "turns even the tiniest settlement into a trading post: whatever Timbuktu might really have been, it was not a village" (Scheele, this volume). This does not, however, settle the matter, in the sense that the analytical distinction between towns and villages can now be dropped altogether. Instead, Scheele further complicates the blurred lines between urban/rural by convincingly highlighting how the distinction matters for people on the ground – for social practice and representation. In fact, "rurality and urbanity, town and village are always also (and perhaps primarily) archetypes, moral judgements, and projects" (ibid.). Hence, both in the Mediterranean and across the Sahara connectivity is always also seen as a threat to moral integrity. Scheele proposes a skilful extension to the approach put forward by Horden and Purcell: "Microecologies are always also projects, and hence entail human judgement, evaluation, domination and aspirations, as much as 'hard ecological facts' on the ground" (Scheele, this volume). Although Scheele's concern is primarily with the question of connectivity, the rural locale and the focus of her discussion already introduce the connections to the next section of the issue.

In his paper, Martin Zillinger draws on the history of Mediterranean anthropology of religion and ethnographic material from his research among transnationally mobile members of Moroccan trance networks. He sketches an anthropology of blessing across nested fields of exteriority and alterity within and without the social niches of Mediterranean lifeworlds. Sharing Horden and Purcell's insight that sacred spaces have long provided the cognitive foundation on which mobility and connectivity rest (Horden and Purcell 2000:458), he follows an actor-centred approach by focusing on the ritual organisation of (dis)connectivities between North Africa and Europe. Through a re-

reading of Stefan Czarnowski's work on the rhythm of space, Zillinger traces practices of extra- and introversion across graduated socialities that are generated, shaped, and negotiated in ritual spaces. Ritual forms of mimetic becoming blend self and other but always come with ritual forms of decoupling. Both help to de- and recentre persons, spirits, and sacred places on the move, reshaping spatial and social cognition across the fragmented microecologies of religious practice. In the handling of liminality, wealth of relations (see above) recurs as the skilful management of scale, when individual crises, spiritual belonging, and social connectivity are ritually scaled up and down. The paper argues that connectivities, lateral and vertical, are thus forged or undone by turning borders into thresholds and vice versa. Scale becomes, as it were, an achievement of the actors themselves (Latour 2005), reminding readers that in Mediterranean scholarship differentiating micro-, meso-, and macro-scales may occlude as much as it reveals.

In her contribution, Gerhild Perl responds to Horden's exhortation to examine "Mediterranean connectivities" by analysing the Strait of Gibraltar as a "zone of illegality" and how the "fabrication of race, class, and gender plays out in the micro-region" (Perl, this volume). Thereby she brings together a conceptual call with the most urgent current socio-political developments in European migration and refugee policies. With her focus on "racial governmentality" and "colonial legacies" the attention shifts to EU border regimes and how Mediterranean (dis)connectivities establish exclusionary regimes of "racialized differences" (ibid.). Herein, Perl's ethnographic analysis of the illegalisation and criminalisation of Moroccan and sub-Saharan migrant bodies connects the discussion, on the one hand, regionally to Scheele's paper and thereby extends it through the pivotal aspect of moral and ethical border-making. On the other hand, her contribution also links to the recently invoked concept of the Black Mediterranean and so-called Afroeuropeaness "as a privileged analytical site to make sense of the power relations as well as of the ongoing resignification processes reproducing Afro-European subjectivities" (Grimaldi 2019:426; see also Proglio et al. 2021) and expands to historical research focusing on the Mediterranean as a "Colonial Sea" (Borutta and Gekas 2012).

Rurality

The second section of this special issue proposes a re-examination of *Rurality*, which has been both one of the most defining and contested concepts in 'classic' Mediterranean studies.[7] The 'rural' has perhaps never lost the taste of the backward, and continues to be perceived as lacking future orientation. Framed as a topographic space that needs to

7 In his widely received critique, Pina-Cabral pointed out the "ruralist emphasis of social anthropology" of the 1950s (1989:405). In fact, after analysing early Oxford ethnographies of Mediterranean societies, Carbonell concludes that the "most significant limitation" of these studies "does not lie in [their] way of dealing with the aforementioned honour/shame complex, but in *its fixation for the rural world*" (2010:19, emphasis added).

be 'developed' it becomes the target of a variety of interventions – economic, political, cultural, and, of course, ecological. In a different vein, and by attending to some surprisingly unruly rural sites of future-making, this section aims to foreground the conceptual and explanatory possibilities of the rural for a Mediterranean anthropology of global (dis)connectivities and translocal entanglements.

Scheele's reflections on the Sahara in the first section connect to Dionigi Albera's call for a "controlled comparison" to organise structural resemblances with regard to rural–urban relations in the mountains of the circum-Mediterranean, hence rethinking another set of well-established key Mediterranean *topoi*. Albera reminds us that Fernand Braudel in the first edition of *The Mediterranean* refers to the multitude of Mediterranean seas, islands, and coastlines and conjures up their "poetry more than half-rural" (Braudel 1972:17). Drawing on decades of ethnographic fieldwork and historical research, Albera, in his attempt to apprehend the (poetry of) rurality of the Mediterranean world, identifies and establishes a scalar middleground: he proposes to go beyond both Braudelian "ecological types" as well as Horden and Purcell's "microecologies plus connectivity", by highlighting the spatial dimension and intermediate scales of both.

To this end, Albera suggests re-examining the Mediterranean conceptual tool box and pragmatically applying its "useful" bits. In doing so, he aims not only to determine an intermediate scale of Mediterranean formations, between the microecologies and the whole Mediterranean region, but also to trace fine-grained relations in a landscape of fuzzy urban and rural patches. Applied to his own ethnography on mountain microecologies and their interactions with the external world, this implies organising "the structural resemblances by defining polythetic sets for both the mountains and the plains" (Albera, this volume). Starting from there, an intermediate level enables the consideration of various configurations that remain undetected in Horden and Purcell's historical ecology of microregions. Thus, overall this is a "comparative trajectory that, starting from ecology, aims to uncover society" (ibid.).

In her contribution on the importance of the *Horon* dance for rural ecological grassroots movements in Turkey, Sevi Bayraktar also investigates a set of rural–urban connectivities. With her focus on rural environmentalists' networks in the mountainous Black Sea region of Turkey, she simultaneously expands Albera's line of thought and explores ethnographically how these movements organise and perform resistance and protests. Bayraktar illustrates that "folk dance and poetry are constitutive to the link between urban and rural grassroots movements, and at the same time are central to the formation of new political identities and dissenting subjecthoods in Turkish society" (Bayraktar, this volume). Practising *Horon* dance leads to the circulation of bodies between western cities and the Black Sea highlands, thus enabling "an embodied space linking the urban and the rural grassroots struggles"; as artistic interventions they provide an opportunity for anthropology to open up "a new horizon to dissenting movements engaging with the question of resilience beyond binary constructions of the rural and the urban" (ibid.).

Christoph Lange follows in his contribution Horden and Purcell's ecological approach of "Mediterranean Connectivity" to develop what he calls the *maḍyafa ecology* of Gizeret Saʿoud and the *strategic tribalism* of the Tahawi Bedouin in the Eastern Nile Delta of Egypt. Both conceptualisations are drawn from his ethnographic fieldwork in Egypt, and aim at problematising the binary rural–urban nexus. Lange delves ethnographically into the 2015 parliamentary elections in Egypt and demonstrates how the Tahawi election campaign could be seen as *strategic tribalism* and thus as a particular form of rural future-making, which in turn employs "a strategic renunciation of connectivity that has always brought together rural hinterlands, villages and cities" (Lange, this volume).

In his essay "Modernity as Cure and Poison", in which he combines textual and visual modes of analysis and description, Konstantinos Kalantzis focuses on how quietude and its perceived antithesis, modernity, are entangled in conflicting temporal dynamics. In analysing locals' experiences of (failed or halted) modernity on the sparsely populated and marginalised islet of Therasia – a place that is located vis-à-vis the iconic tourist destination of Santorini – he detects a change in people's modes of dwelling and relating to both land and sea. Through the romanticisation of rurality, techniques of subsistence are turned into touristic assets that fuel a vision of futurity among many Therasiotes who at the same time reject their perceived dependency on EU subsidies, state-funded services, the tourism industry, and 'development' in general. Traditional structures of architecture (cave houses), artisanry, and farming gain momentum as a form of (imagined) uniqueness or even superiority in comparison to Santorini, which is perceived as more modern, developed, and successful yet more corrupt and volatile. For Therasiotes to imagine or reinvent their islet as a premodern, more 'authentic' version of Santorini for the future means partaking in the modern.

Meanwhile, recent developments increasingly bring to light the capriciousness of the rural. Either through short-term, exponentially rising infection rates due to a pandemic or through medium- to long-term radical changes in human–environment relations as a result of climate change, it becomes evident how quickly supposedly remote and isolated regions can turn into centres.

Media/Publics

In the upcoming issue of the *Zeitschrift für Ethnologie*, a special section will expand and elaborate the debate on connectivity and rurality by zooming in on mediation and new forms of publicness that emerge and change with specific media in the Mediterranean as elsewhere. The Medi-terranean is an interesting zone for both media studies and media anthropology to rethink mediation as a feature of human and more-than-human interaction. Drawing from a broader debate between these disciplines in Germany (cf. Bender and Zillinger 2015; Thielmann and Schüttpelz 2013) we argue that mediation in the Mediterranean comes to the fore horizontally (across space), vertically (across time), and diagonally (across various media), and (re)produces the Mediterranean social

(Latour 2005). We argue that through increased communication and new forms of digital media practices, spaces are not erased but restructured, distances not undone but reconfigured, and connections not imposed but forged, if with increasing acceleration. In *The Corrupting Sea*, Horden and Purcell argue that, in the history of the Mediterranean, the circulation of signs, persons, and things had been a situated activity connecting localities and socialities. They see these established networks of microecologies as having been radically reconfigured during the twentieth century in the face of new media and the rapid expansion of infrastructures. Mobility and the circulation of knowledge, goods, and people have always catalysed change, but the involvement of new technologies and communication networks has disintegrated Mediterranean landscapes to a considerable extent. Following this argument of *The Corrupting Sea*, the last, upcoming section of *Rethinking the Mediterranean* will zoom in on mediation as a process that circulates, relates, and reorders signs (or discursive practices), persons (or social practices), and things (or material practices) by different means, including digital media (cf. Schüttpelz 2006; Zillinger 2014).

Conclusion

Thinking and writing about the Mediterranean necessarily entails unpacking now-classical perspectives and studies that have been both formative for the discipline of anthropology and also heavily debated and criticised beyond disciplinary boundaries. As William Harris put it, the Mediterranean has a tendency to be "somehow peculiarly vulnerable to misuse" (2005:38). It seems that more than for any other ostensible geographical entity or regional focus, anthropology *in* or *of* (Horden and Purcell 2000:2) the Mediterranean requires the formulation of a thorough disclaimer, or an almost ritualised rectification, with which authors respond to their urge to publicly renounce the idea of 'culture areas', vulgar comparisons, and the attachment to culturalising universalisms. This has been poignantly summarised in a recent afterword by Andrew Shryock, to which he adds the contemporary Mediterranean anthropological mantra: "we know this is/was the tradition; we know it is now considered old-fashioned, even Orientalist; we are embarrassed, sometimes scandalized, by the implications; yet we also know that there is much unfinished business in this tradition, whether we like it or not" (Shryock 2020a:149). There have been a multitude of recent political, economic, and socio-cultural developments that call for the urgent renewal of intensive engagement with both geographical regions and transnational connections that constitute Mediterranean zones. The latest research to advance our understanding of life and death in the Anthropocene carves out the Mediterranean as a Critical Zone that calls for further work in order to shed a light on the past, present, and future of convivialities within and without this peculiar intermediate space. In this sense, the unfinished business remains unfinished, and its resurgence continues.

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