Rethinking New Media and Mediterranean Publics

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The section "Rethinking New Media and Mediterranean Publics" is the third and final part of the special issue *Rethinking the Mediterranean: Extending the Anthropological Laboratory across Nested Mediterranean Zones*, with the previous two parts having been published in the *ZfE / JSCA*, Vol. 145 – 2020, 2. Its contributions take up and further elaborate on recent anthropological work on new media and (counter-)publics that has been developed in/on the Mediterranean and the MENA region as much as elsewhere (see for example Eickelman and Salvatore 2004; El-Ariss 2018; Gaonkar and Povinelli 2003; Ginsburg 2012; Hirschkind 2006; Hirschkind, de Abreu, and Caduff 2017; Jurkiewicz 2018; Meyer and Moors 2006; Morris 2012; Spadola 2013) and resituate these debates in specific Mediterranean settings. The starting point is the radical change in global media ecologies and this section acknowledges the centrality of the everyday media use and media production of our interlocutors and ourselves as anthropologists.

In our analyses of on-site media practices in the Mediterranean we follow Harjant Gill, who asks how "[is] our scholarship continuously shaped by the various media-scapes within which [it] circulate[s], and how does institutional power condition what is knowable in the form of ethnographic accounts?" (Gill 2017:63; see also Takaragawa et al. 2019:517). Assuming a multiplicity of relational publics (Warner 2002), we as editors also take into account that "anthropological ideas are increasingly being communicated dialogically across social media" (Benton and Bonilla 2017) and that ethnographic work not only speaks to scholarly debates but is embedded in larger conversations on public policy and enables the emergence of new outlets for public anthropology (Pink and Abram 2015). Moreover, the omnipresence of technical media in all fields of ethnographic research and the concomitant situated media practices open up new possibilities for distributing research across time, space, and groups of actors, and for forging new forms of collaboration (Schäuble 2018:16–18; see also cf. Ramella and Zillinger 2020). New digital devices and platforms for cooperation and data management, such as the Platform for Experimental Collaborative Ethnography, PECE (Fortun et al. 2020), reposition researchers and those researched differently – but come with new challenges in terms of access, resources, and standardised technologies. We therefore share the interest in "identifying what these media *do* in our anthropological encounters and how they may enact the possibility of another anthropology – more public, more collaborative, more political", as Ethiraj Gabriel Dattatreyan and Isaac

Marrero-Guillamón so aptly put it in their introduction to multimodal anthropology and the politics of invention (2019:221).

In scholarship on the Mediterranean the topic of 'mediation' has always loomed large, not least because 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*) – accounts for much of the dynamics and processes by which connections have been forged but also cut across space and time. We suggested therefore to apprehend 'the Mediterranean' not so much as a place, or an entanglement of spaces, but as a way of narrating, conceptualising, and experiencing temporality and locality in the ongoing struggle for spatial and temporal knottings that characterise a specific Mediterranean being in time and space (Holdermann et al. 2020:175–179). Here, the sea potentially connects as it divides, since especially at the southern shores the ecologically volatile and politically often repressive landscapes are delimited by the sea, which is increasingly turned into a fortified border. "*Au fin, il y a que la mer devant nous*" Moroccan Rif interlocutors told one of us during recent fieldwork (Laan and Zillinger 2021). However, as we have learned in extended walks at the *corniche* of Al-Hoceima, the ultimate significance of the sea is much more than a border space. While the beaches of the Mediterranean's southern shores have been turned into spaces of total control, monitored by digital surveillance systems financed by the European Union, they do not cease to be places in which horizons of another world open up and people imagine themselves into different presents and futures.[1] In his work *Rochers Carrés* (2008) – a photo installation about concrete blocks erected on beaches in Algeria to prevent people entering with the boats that will bring them to Europe – Kader Attia beautifully reappropriates these border zones for other poetics of Mediterranean life and migration that emerge from the resistance to the logics of colonialism and state governmentality (cf. Diawara 2014).[2]

Uneven processes of connecting and dividing have not only been central to Mediterranean scholarship, but also to the history of thought in media studies (Schüttpelz

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1 In the ongoing research project "Big Data Lives. Anthropological Perspectives on Tech-Imaginaries and Human Transformations" (2019–2023) Michaela Schäuble and her team research how individuals' and societies' imagined futures are channeled through and inextricably linked to the use of technology. The sub-projects focus on surveillance *and* dataveillance – the tracking of online data for unstated pre-set purposes – including the examination of "Virtual Borders" comprised of surveillance cameras, sensors, radar systems, and Integrated Fixed Towers (sub-project by Darcy Alexandra) as well as sensor enabled, wearable technology in digitised healthcare systems (sub-project by Sophie Wagner) https://www.anthro.unibe.ch/forschung/einzelne_forschungsprojekte/big_data_lives_anthropological_perspectives_on_tech_imaginaries_and_human_transformations/index_ger.html [last accessed: 10 September 2021]. In the ongoing research project "Digital Publics and Social Transformation in the Maghreb" of the Collaborative Research Center 1187 *Media of Cooperation*, Simon Holdermann (2016–2020), Nina ter Laan (since 2020), and Martin Zillinger (since 2016) explore situated media practices and design interventions in cooperation with socio-informaticians in the High Atlas and the Rif Mountains of Morocco. https://www.mediacoop.uni-siegen.de/en/projects/b04/ [last accessed: 10 September 2021].
2 See http://kaderattia.de/rochers-carres/ [last accessed: 11 September 2021].

et al. 2021). By departing from a broad notion of mediation (Bender and Zillinger 2015a; see also Meyer 2020) processes and practices come into view that "entail the technological but are not reducible to it" (Hirschkind, de Abreu, and Caduff 2017:S3). This understanding might be useful in overcoming a deterministic bias not only in media studies but also in anthropological media research. It was this bias that paved the way for Peregrine Horden and Nicolas Purcell (2000) to prematurely announce the end of the Mediterranean in the twentieth century (but see Horden and Purcell 2020). In their seminal work *The Corrupting Sea*, Horden and Purcell had argued that, in the history of the Mediterranean, the circulation of signs, persons, and things has been a situated activity connecting localities and socialities. In the course of the last century, however, they saw these interrelated microecologies radically reconfigured. As the authors noted, technologies and new regimes of mobility restructuring the circulation of knowledge, goods, and people have always catalysed change. But according to their assessment of the more recent history of the Mediterranean, the involvement of new technologies and communication networks had disintegrated Mediterranean landscapes to a considerable extent. This conceptualisation of media as overcoming time and space has been increasingly criticised over the last twenty years. Research that located media in/as situated practices (cf. Bender and Zillinger 2015b) suggests that through increased communication and digital media practices spaces are not erased but restructured, distances not undone but reconfigured, and connections not inherent to the working of the digital, but an achievement of the actors themselves (cf. Latour 2005). To be sure, the increasing acceleration of communication through social media – be it through messaging services such as WhatsApp, Signal, Telegram, FaceTime, or other digital applications – intensifies multiversal connectivities of individuals and collectives. However, access to resources and infrastructures varies significantly in Mediterranean settings as elsewhere, while expanding control mechanisms and surveillance technologies have multiplied the means to exercise control over what kind of connectivity can – or should – be pursued by whom.

For too long, classical media theory as much as classical Mediterranean scholarship have de-politicised their subject matters. While the former urbanised the 'global village' in a teleological, modernist discourse (Bergermann 2021), the latter 'ruralised' a European periphery in a timeless present (Green, this volume) – both thus dehistoricising the epistemic and social formations they claimed to describe. As Charles Hirschkind, Maria José A. de Abreu, and Carlo Caduff have recently emphasised, one has therefore to be wary of reproducing these modernist differentiations by recasting political and economic inequalities as digital divides, and to thus subscribe to a techno-liberal imaginary of new media bearing "the promise of universal political enfranchisement in the form of 'access,' the term by which projects of democratic inclusion are being reimagined and reengineered" (2017:S4). In a similar vein, Elizabeth Chin reminds us that new media and media technologies are commodities that operate within the system of capital and extractive capitalist logics (Chin 2016, 2017).

As editors of this special issue we agree with these authors' critical assumptions that "a stable referent for the entity called 'new media'" (Hirschkind, de Abreu, and Caduff 2017:S4) misleads more than it helps to understand how today's lifeworlds are socio-technically restructured (cf. Behrend and Zillinger 2015; Thielmann and Schüttpelz 2013; see also Gitelman 2006) and how a multiplicity of (networked) publics emerges (Marres 2012; Morris 2012; Varnelis 2008). Instead of invoking a concept of "new media" that need to be appropriated by those living at the periphery of Europe's tech-nologised modernity, we are interested in the "new" that signifies the desire for "other-wise" Mediterranean futures, as we argued with Elizabeth Povinelli in the overall intro-duction to this issue (Holdermann et al. 2020:178). As the "new" becomes part of the today, or rather of what Sarah Green describes as the ongoing movement towards today (Green, this volume), it thus becomes part and parcel of post/colonial Mediterranean settings that are characterised by "the ambiguous struggling through and with colonial pasts in making different futures" that are enacted in the present (Verran 2001:38). In the making of different futures, media practices thereby become important elements in shaping publics on site, across the sea, and beyond the confines of the nation-state.

This section's three contributions, together with Green's epilogue, "Mediterranean Mediations", look at how different media technologies and mediated practices are em-ployed at different locations across the Mediterranean and respectively respond to or alter classic Mediterranean *topoi*. Particularly, the events of the so-called 'Arab Spring' along the Mediterranean's southern shores in 2011 have raised questions about the dynamised relationship between media technology, political participation, and pro-cesses of transformation. Digital media technologies have been used as means to forge resistance and to question existing social orders and institutional arrangements. In this process, new forms of publics and publicness are emerging, raising aspirations and anxieties about the scale and scope of media practices and challenging previous assumptions and conceptualisations of the public sphere (Eickelman and Anderson 2003; Gerbaudo 2012; Westmoreland 2016; Zillinger 2017).

The three contributions assembled in this section present three seemingly disparate cases that nevertheless share an aspiration to "ethnographically informed, historically grounded, and context-sensitive analyses of the ways in which people use and make sense of media technologies" to shape social and moral worlds and incorporate new publics (Askew and Wilk 2002:3). By stressing the human agency that grants media meaning, all three cases demonstrate media as modes of cooperation, circulation, and translation, and relate to wider social transformations in the Mediterranean. They also explore to various extents how contemporary media forms and communities of practice are embedded in systems of social and economic inequality (including gender inequal-ities). This said, the section explores social processes of mediation and variously "emerg-ing forms of public life" that go along with the use of media (Hirschkind, de Abreu, and Caduff 2017:S3). These mediated practices – now incrementally digital – not only constitute an intriguing starting point for ethnographic enquiries, but also challenge (or highlight) long-standing social orders.

Case studies of media practices across the Mediterranean

Multimodal media technologies were already employed in Ancient Greece, where naturalistic representations of anatomy, garments, gestures, and emotions in black and red figure-technique vase paintings not only provided insights into everyday Athenian life and communicated concepts of citizenship, but also complemented literary texts and inscriptions, and were part of sacrificial practice (Robertson 1992). Herein, our understanding of media practices connects well with the critical rethinking of classical *topoi* of a Braudelian Mediterranean trajectory as foregrounded by Horden and Purcell's Mediterranean connectivities of historical exchange and communication. Hence, the three contributions traverse physical and historical spaces by trailing across (mountainous) digital and archival landscapes to better understand emergent, changing, or persisting media practices and how these produce visibility and transform publics through and across different infrastructures and scales.

We entirely share the conviction, put forward by the editors of *Remapping Mediterranean Anthropology*, that the "older cultural categories of Mediterraneanist anthropology (e.g. honour, hospitality, patronage, and popular religiosity) continue to provide analytical purchase on – and an emic vocabulary for making sense of – processes of displacement, economic precarity, and political instability, as well as forms of solidarity, mutual assistance, and political mobilization" (Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot, and Silverstein 2020:3). By focusing ethnographically on social media and digital technologies, which often seem to stand synonymously or account for profound transformative consequences, the authors of this section encounter these "older cultural categories", highlighting their ongoing analytical and emic importance as well as the scandalous continuity they actually produce – even in situations of supposed radical change (cf. Scheele and Shryock 2019).

The socio-technical restructuring of everyday life in southeast Turkey that Elisabetta Costa presents in her article "Please 'Like' Me: Reconfiguring Reputation and Shame in Southeast Turkey" touches intricately on questions of honour and shame, arguably the most foundational and also most controversial theme in Mediterraneanist anthropology. Her findings, however, suggest that just because critical discussions on certain topics seem 'untimely' in the disciplinary canon, it does not necessarily mean that these topics have become irrelevant ethnographically or that they have vanished as concepts and sets of practices on the ground. Hence, instead of simply dusting off an old pair of opposites to explain social cohesion in an essentialising way, Costa chooses a decidedly media-praxeological perspective on "honour" and "shame", grounded in meticulous ethnographic accounts. The diffusion of information and communication technologies necessitates recalibrating the demarcation between varying forms of private and public, which also has involuntary consequences for value judgements of what might count as shameful or honourable – and thus affects domains "such as politics, love and friendships" (Costa, this volume). Costa shows how studying social media practices allows critical reflection on the role that digital technologies play in reshaping long-standing

aspects of Arab, Kurdish, and Turkish public life. In fact, "reputation" and "shame" – as emotional experiences that form social practices which are increasingly entangled in digital media – have become an incremental part of individual projects of "scalable sociality" at the blurry borderline between online and offline.

Not unlike Costa, Simon Holdermann reopens another classic theme of Mediterranean anthropology in light of the dissemination of information and communication technologies. Here it is hospitality that Holdermann approaches through the digital media practices involved in contemporary Moroccan mountain tourism and in doing so he arrives at what he calls "Digital Hospitality: Trail Running and Technology in the Moroccan High Atlas". With an ethnographic focus on an ultramarathon sports event, Holdermann analyses how the combination of both media and data practices is challenging and restructuring the interactions and possible relationships between guests and hosts. The ultramarathon can thereby be understood as an "achievement of the organizers' scaling work, which in turn feeds into and interacts with the scalar characteristics of hospitality itself" (Holdermann, this volume). Combining ethnographic accounts of recent technological developments on the ground with 'classic Mediterranean topoi' presents a promising claim for the ongoing relevance that these long-debated themes might still entail as conceptual tools for analysis.

In "Performing and Re-enacting Southern Italian Lament", Michaela Schäuble focuses on the intersection between temporal agency and social structures in individual and collective practices of mourning. Drawing on the ethnographic multi-sensorial example of funerary lament and ritual weeping, Schäuble puts the analytic concept of cultural continuity in the Mediterranean to the test. In her article, she identifies a repertory of ecstatic gestures that are transferred through various media (ranging from pottery, reliefs, and sketches to photographs, sound and film recordings), corporeal means of expression (i.e. sonorous singing and wailing, tearing of the hair, waving of white handkerchiefs), as well as artistic approaches and modes such as re-enactment, performance, and montage. Referring mainly to examples from Southern Italy and applying Aby Warburg's concept of the "migration of images" (*Bilderwanderung*), she concludes that through (re-)enacting the "basic grammar", lamenters reappropriate, revive, and rehistorcise the codified catalogue of ecstatic gestures and expressions. Hence, contemporary forms of mourning are not (just) relics of ancient patterns and thus examples of pan-Mediterranean continuity but devices that can be mobilised as coping mechanisms in critical situations, even when performed in staged settings or on command.

Despite the long-held assumption that modern communication media have transformed the spatial and temporal constitution of social life (Thompson 1995), based on ethnographic fieldwork the three contributions show that interaction with/through media might not necessitate the sharing of a common locale (which they nonetheless also often do anyway), but they are still linked to specific shared social contexts and questions of access and agency. While the ethnographies of Costa and Holdermann highlight that digital media come with controversies about the scope and scale of the

practices they enable and, ultimately, transform, Schäuble shows how embodied movements of mortuary lament when (methodologically) entwined with photographic and cinematic media techniques become archival repositories visualising social and cultural continuities without solidifying them. "Doing media" (Eichner and Prommer 2017), then, situates Mediterranean life and research in the ebbs and flows of Mediterranean connectivities and ruptures and we propose that it will continue to shape anthropological research on Mediterranean transformations for some time to come – rendering, as it were, the anthropology of Mediterranean societies a "looking glass" (Herzfeld 1987) for the ebbs and flows of our discipline's public and scholarly concerns.

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