Mediterranean Mediations

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From the perspective of the global north, the Mediterranean is definitely back on the agenda in a range of disciplines, and not only in anthropology (Ben-Yehoyada 2017:10). The Mediterranean has also been in the news rather a lot, perhaps not coincidentally: the ongoing emergency concerning refugees and other kinds of spontaneous migration along with related geopolitical tensions have been the main topics, though there have also been climate-related, environmental and fiscal issues that regularly draw attention to the region. The place has the feel of there being a *there* there again, after a period during which the Mediterranean languished in a corner of anthropology that debated what kinds of ethnocentricities were being imposed on the place by researchers who were accused of not been quite reflexive enough (e.g. Herzfeld 1984, Pina-Cabral 1989, Knudsen 1992, Mitchell 2002).

This was a moral condemnation as much as it was an intellectual one: attempts to identify an historical continuity and enduring cultural coherence about an entity called Mediterranean not only appeared to homogenise the diversity that existed there, but more importantly, it appeared to locate the place outside of time, or at least, outside of modern time. And this kind of critique was not only being directed at Mediterranean scholars: the same overall self-critique and self-reflection was being directed against ethnographies covering many other parts of the world, perhaps most particularly south Asia with the emergence of subaltern studies (Bhabha 1994, Chakrabarty 2000, di Leonardo 1991, McClintock 1994, Stoler 1999, Taylor 1994). The key criticism here was that the hierarchical relation between one part of the world and other parts (North and South, West and East, coloniser and colonised, developed and developing, rich and poor, etc) were simply being reproduced in ethnographic descriptions of other areas rather than being critically assessed, even though their authors believed they were conducting objective scholarly studies. In these critiques, the view from nowhere turned out to be a view from somewhere in particular.

Yet the Mediterranean has always had an uneasy location within anthropology, even before those self-critiques had gathered steam: unlike its sister disciplines of ethnology and folklore, anthropology was, initially at least, developed explicitly to study 'other cultures and societies,' meaning peoples who were either from outside of Europe (Wolff and Cipolloni 2007, Wolf 1982) and/or outside of modernity (Fa-

bian 1983). The very act of choosing an ethnographic field site and a social or cultural group to study in that site carried at least the implication that the place and the people matched one or both of those criteria. The degree to which the Mediterranean was included in that scope at all was always present as a question that had to be answered in one way or another by those who chose somewhere in the region as their field site. And the issue in the Mediterranean was not that it was regarded as having too little history, but instead that it had altogether too much history: ever since the eighteenth century, it was the location that Western classicists and philosophers alike had located as being the birthplace of Western civilisation, the place that gave rise to the hierarchies that were now being imposed on the rest of the world (Weber 2014, Wolff 1994). In that sense, the place was the opposite of being timeless, in that it carried one of the deepest and longest recorded histories in the world. Yet in another sense it was also timeless, in that the Mediterranean stood for an abstraction, the *idea* of Western civilization that was developed in the eighteenth century by Enlightenment philosophers and others.

The implication of all this was an account of the Mediterranean which suggested that the region generated all the groundwork for modernity to arise, and then somewhere else actually created modernity. This left the question of how ethnography of the contemporary Mediterranean should be carried out in something of a quandary. Ben-Yehoyada argues that "the Mediterranean is defined on the basis of historically delimited characteristics that are said to expire before modernity" (Ben-Yehoyada 2017:9). From that vantage point, it is not surprising to find a series of heated debates concerning whether certain characteristic behaviours, rituals, practices or attitudes that have been recorded or associated with one or more parts of the Mediterranean are evidence of the persistence of whatever came before modernity in the region, or evidence of something that could be called timeless, or perhaps more complexly, something that has to do with constant change without changing (unlike modernity, in which there is constant change which results in change). In anthropology, these questions have as much to do with the history of the discipline and its location in the world as they have to do with whatever has been going on socially and culturally in the Mediterranean region, as such.

Looked at that way, the three articles by Elisabetta Costa, Simon Holdermann and Michaela Schäuble in this special issue have taken a fascinating step sideways in addressing this dilemma. Each one takes a well-known Mediterranean trope – honour and shame, hospitality and funerary laments – and combines it with some form of contemporary media: Facebook for Costa, online reviews and Google Earth for Holdermann, and film and photography for Schäuble. Each one insists that these familiar Mediterranean tropes are an important part of understanding what is going on ethnographically in their field sites – Turkey, Morocco and southern Italy – suggesting that such tropes do indeed have a remarkable persistence in these places; yet these modern, and perhaps one might also say post-modern, techniques for communication,

performance and mediation are also equally important and equally present.[1] They co-exist, and something will be missed if one or the other is neglected. The sideways move here addresses that key dilemma of Mediterranean studies by shifting the debate away from the issue of whether or not, empirically speaking, there is such a cultural and/or social entity that could be called Mediterranean which can be salvaged from the reflexive battering it received in the 1980s and 1990s; instead, it looks at how people in some places located in the geographical Mediterranean are engaging with their contemporary world. The concern has shifted towards today: today as a day that is full of history and traces of the past, but that is also full of what is happening now, full of many things that may or may not persist into future todays, but that are significant here, now.

It is in this sense that these three authors have a deep interest in, and appreciation for, what earlier scholars of the Mediterranean have learned from their many years of study about the practices, beliefs, structures, aesthetics and relations of people who live in the Mediterranean region. They have drawn on some of that scholarship and repurposed it so as to try and understand what is happening today; the aim is not to establish what is, or is not, a trace of the past – let alone an attempt to establish what is, or is not, Mediterranean in some kind of timeless sense. The question of what remains of the past is not the issue for these authors; rather, it is how to learn from that earlier scholarship in order to make sense of what is going on for people today.

Here, I am borrowing from Derrida's commentary on the idea of 'today' in his essay on where Europe is headed (Derrida 1991, 1992). Derrida points out that the word 'today' (in English as well as in French) carries the implication of a heading: to (the) day. The idea of heading somewhere, towards something, is embedded in the word. In my reading, it is this that these three essays are attempting to capture: not whether there 'is' a Mediterranean or not; not whether there is timeless continuity between the ancient past and the contemporary moment; not even whether what is happening is modern or something other than modern; but instead, how focusing on these three tropes – honour and shame, hospitality, and laments – help to understand some people and places today, which also helps to understand where they may or may not be headed.

This is undoubtedly a less all-encompassing goal than the one of the 1950s to 1970s, which attempted to identify the Mediterranean as a distinctive cultural area; and it also lacks the hostility of the critiques of the 1980s and 1990s, which threatened to undermine the value of all the careful scholarship that had been done in the region in the past. What it provides instead is an openness: one that is open both to learning from that earlier scholarship, and learning from the self-critiques that came after it, and

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1 The reference to postmodern here concerns the reflexive and conscious use of tropes such as 'Mediterranean' in order to achieve certain intended effects; this is in contrast to referring to the Mediterranean as an ontological reality, something that simply is (Herzfeld 2014).

combining that with today, which always leaves open what might happen next. And that is hopeful.

Elisabetta Costa's article concerns how experiences of shame amongst young people, particularly young men, in Mardin in eastern Turkey have changed as a result of the currently ubiquitous use of Facebook. Facebook, Costa argues, creates more visibility, both of men and women, and thus the risks of shame and loss of honour are increased. During the discussion, Costa raises a couple of other familiar Mediterranean tropes: she mentions young people's ongoing troubled relationship with the concept of modernity, and she noted orientalist tropes as well. Yet Costa does not focus on these issues analytically, in the same way as she does not provide a critical analysis of the gender relations described in the piece. Instead, she focuses squarely on the way Facebook has intervened in these young people's lives today. The article demonstrates how Facebook is a spatially located and locating technology: the fact that the space of the internet could be anywhere does not make it any less located in how people use it. These young people embedded Facebook into their in-person emplaced lives, to such a degree that it was quite difficult to see any division between them.

Holdermann's article on ultra-running tourism in the High Atlas Mountains in Morocco draws on the Mediterranean trope of hospitality, and looks at how that concept is being restructured through social media evaluations of the businesses that provide services for the ultra-runners. Here, there is a clear element of the owners of the tourist businesses explicitly drawing on the idea of hospitality as a tradition in the Mediterranean region to promote their services. The hospitality is a conscious performance, one that customers pay for, even though there is a strong claim to an underlying authenticity of the sentiment. Although the article does briefly discuss the literature which critiques the concept of hospitality, the focus of the article is this engagement between businesses that provide services to tourists in Morocco and the way customer evaluations of the services on social media has a dramatic effect on the level of success of these businesses. Holdermann calls this 'digital hospitality' – which, for the most part, is the process of ensuring that the customers send positive reports and avoiding any customers from sending negative reports online. The article also points out that calculating the ultramarathon trail route requires good use of GPS and Google Earth technology, combined with local knowledge that allows the route to be calculated. Holdermann notes that customers are increasingly requesting ever more detail and ever more data about their ultra-runs, fed by the technologies that make it possible to know the answers to such questions.

This provides intriguing information about three things: first, that these new technologies are altering how people experience the process of moving through physical space; second, that the techniques and technologies which are used to calculate location are global ones, not ones based on anything Mediterranean, as such, although they are combined with local knowledge on the ground; and third, as noted for Costa's article, that there is no big distinction between the physical experience and the digital one here: at least in terms of ultra-running, they are combined. In that sense, experi-

ence of the Mediterranean as a physical, geographical and geological place is being mediated through GPS and other technologies that locate things in ways that are not related to this place in particular.

Finally, Schäuble's article, which focuses on Italian anthropologist Ernesto de Martino's 1950s photographic and film studies of laments in southern Italy, draws out most clearly the interplay of performance, authenticity and the idea of today in the recording and reporting of familiar Mediterranean tropes. Most of the performances filmed and recorded by de Martino's team were staged: carried out by people who were paid to do it, in the same way as they were paid to perform laments by the families of people who had died. Schäuble draws on her own lengthy ethnographic work from the same region as studied by de Martino and his team to reinterpret de Martino's analysis.

Schäuble notes that de Martino's intent was "to verify that contemporary forms of mourning did not just resemble ancient funerary laments but were actual relics thereof". She discusses de Martino's concept of 'dehistoricisation,' which referred to those moments in time during which people fall out of time – a sensibility that occurs during traumatic events such as the death of a loved one. De Martino suggests that these ancient traditions of the lament amplify that sense of falling out of time. Schäuble argues instead that the women are drawing on these very old traditions to reinterpret them for themselves: "these gestures are there to be performed, individually reappropriated, and revived in situations of crisis to the present day." Here, Schäuble is not disagreeing with de Martino; rather, she is shifting her focus to 'to-day,' whereas de Martino and others were more concerned with finding the past, or even timelessness, in the present. Schäuble is also concerned with women's agency: the people performing the laments are not simply enacting a ritual that they have learned to perform; they are drawing on these techniques to interpret and make something meaningful out of what has happened: a death in the family. In that sense, Schäuble is suggesting that these remarkably persistent performances, ones that de Martino traced even back to classical times, are hugely useful to people who draw on them as a kind of a canvas upon which to paint their own picture.

So, what does all this say about the Mediterranean? It shifts the question sideways. In a sense, it both does and does not matter that the laments go back hundreds or even thousands of years. It matters because it is possible to see that certain ways of mediating a situation, an event, have been passed on repeatedly, which has proven that there have been many todays before this day, during which these performances were important and powerful, and that part of what makes them powerful today is the understanding that the performance goes back a long way. But it does not provide a full understanding of today, as such, as that is always heading somewhere, it is always on the way to somewhere else; the answer to that question can only be understood through ethnographically exploring it. The implication is that the meaning of Mediterranean is within the person, within current relations and within the mediated moment; it is not contained within the gestures, tropes, sensibilities or laments themselves.

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