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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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# ‘Knitting Together the Unconjoined’: Mediterranean Connectivity Revisited

Peregrine Horden

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**Abstract.** The ancient geographer Strabo imaged Rome’s conquest of a Mediterranean-wide empire as a ‘knitting together’ of ‘unconjoined’ regions – unconjoined because of a lack of harbours or other natural deficiencies. This article takes the image seriously as a point of entry into the vexed topic of connectivity, in the Mediterranean and elsewhere. In current global history, connectivity has been found everywhere but is seldom precisely defined. The article proposes a return to the type of definition offered in P. Horden and N. Purcell’s *The Corrupting Sea* (2000), a definition according to which connectivity is inseparable from microregional ecology. After reviewing the intellectual origins and ramifications of that definition, the article critically surveys alternative terminologies that have emerged since 2000, and finds them mostly unhelpful as guides to the nature of Mediterranean contacts and communications. It next examines recent work on recovering and mapping Roman movements of people and goods as a modern version of Strabo, and as suggestive of the directions the subject may profitably take in future. Finally, it offers two examples showing, respectively, the complexities of connectivity within the Mediterranean region (coral fishing) and the differences in pattern and chronology between connectivity around the sea and connectivity across Asia (bubonic plague).

*[Connectivity; communications; Rome; Mediterranean; fishing; plague]*

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# Connectivity and its Discontents: The Sahara – Second Face of the Mediterranean?

**Judith Scheele**

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**Abstract:** This paper argues that the Sahara can be approached as a region following Horden and Purcell's (2000) suggestions for the Mediterranean. Or at least, that this is true in economic and ecological terms. Internally, however, Saharan connectivity tends to be expressed in terms of genealogies, kinship and alliance, which implies moral evaluation of a kind that Horden and Purcell's model is less able to capture. This becomes especially apparent with regard to the classification of Saharan settlements. From an ecological point of view, it might be meaningless to describe them as either towns or villages. From a moral point of view and in terms of self-definition, however, their classification matters greatly, in practical as much as representational terms. Moral aspirations emerge as an integral part of human ecologies.

*[rurality, urbanity, moral ecologies, oasis economies, Algeria, Chad]*

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# Hamid's Travelogue. Mimetic Transformations and Spiritual Connectivities Across Mediterranean Topographies of Grace

**Martin Zillinger**

University of Cologne

**Abstract.** In their seminal work that helped to re-invent Mediterranean anthropology some 20 years ago, Horden and Purcell argue that the religious landscape reflects both, the fragmented topography of Mediterranean micro-regions and the means by which the fragmentation is overcome. In order to explore how space and time concern the divine along and across Mediterranean shores, this paper examines how social and spiritual borders are crossed in religious practice and how graduated socialities are generated, shaped and negotiated. It argues that connectivities, lateral and vertical, are forged or undone by turning borders into thresholds and vice-versa. Drawing from both, the history of Mediterranean anthropology of religion and ethnographic material from transnational mobile members of trance networks, the paper sketches an anthropology of blessing across nested fields of exteriority and alterity, found within and without the social niches of Mediterranean lifeworlds.

*[blessing, liminality, spirit-possession, trance-mediums, Facebook, shrines and sanctuaries in the Mediterranean, mobility, migration]*

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# The Production of Illicit Lives: Racial Governmentality and Colonial Legacies Across the Strait of Gibraltar

Gerhild Perl

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**Abstract:** For centuries, the Strait of Gibraltar has been a crossroads between Africa and Europe. Since the 1980s, however, it has increasingly become a “zone of illegality” (Hannoum 2020) where racial governmentality produces illicit lives and creates an apartheid-like hierarchy of humanity. By exploring how colonial legacies and EU policies play out in the Strait of Gibraltar, I show how categories of difference are made and remade across time and space. Through a genealogical and ethnographic approach, I study the historically produced particularities that make racialised “Others” emerge and explore how human differences are created in terms of race, gender, and class. Migrants are historical actors that shape and are shaped by the social fabric of a border region. I thus argue that categories of difference are not fixed entities, but instead they are simultaneously reworked, reinforced, contested, and subverted.

*[al-hogra, border regime, colonial history, global apartheid, Morocco, race, Spain, whiteness]*

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# Mediterranean Ruralities: Towards a Comparative Approach

Dionigi Albera

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**Abstract:** In this article, I discuss several options for apprehending the rurality of the Mediterranean world. The place, if any, of the 'rural' is related to the geographical basis of the construction of the Mediterranean as a scholarly category. A broad conception of the Mediterranean world that treats it as a region encompassing large parts of the hinterland must take the rural dimension into account. This is demonstrated through a discussion of two historiographical masterpieces dealing with Mediterranean history from the perspective of the *longue durée* – Braudel's *Mediterranean* and Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea* – which are among the best representatives of this broad conception of the Mediterranean region. However, although Braudel devoted many pages to the rural world, he sometimes offers a distorted view of rurality, thus ending up affirming the traditional view of the centrality of the Mediterranean town, influenced by an urbano-centric vision of the region and a solid environmental determinism. In criticizing these biases, Horden and Purcell announce their programmatic intention of ruralizing Mediterranean history, though they finish by revoking the category of the rural itself, alongside that of the urban. They propose instead a view of the Mediterranean world as characterized by the endless vibrancy of the variegated realm of microecologies, with their infinite and minuscule manifestations of connectivity. Their comparative approach implies a passage from the lowest common denominator of microecologies to the whole region, without intermediate levels.

The article suggests that, in constructing a history of Mediterranean ruralities, it is important to build a comparative perspective going beyond both Braudel's determinism and Horden and Purcell's indifference to space. In this perspective, microecologies should be organized into a sort of 'Linnaean system' through a process of separation that takes into account intermediate scales in space and time. From this point of view, ecological types, as portrayed by Braudel, may offer a suitable starting point for a comparative analysis of the various contours of rurality in Mediterranean history. Braudelian ecological types could be a preliminary tool for organizing the analysis of difference, thus building a comparative perspective that takes into account a number of socio-cultural variables that are absent from Horden and Purcell's perspective. Drawing on material from anthropological and historical research I have carried out in the Alps, I propose some pathways towards a comparative perspective of this sort.

*[rurality, comparison, determinism, ecological type, microecology, Mediterranean, Alps]*

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# Performing Resistance: Horon Dance and Chanted Poetry in Turkey's Transregional Environmental Activism

Sevi Bayraktar

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**Abstract:** This article examines how folk dance is deployed as an innovative tool of urban and rural contemporary protests in Turkey. It specifically focuses on *horon*, a popular folk dance genre across the country and a cultural heritage of minority communities in the eastern Black Sea region. I investigate how environmental activists transregionally circulate this dance during their coordinated protests in the city of Istanbul and the Rize province in the Black Sea region against a massive infrastructural project called the Green Road in the summer of 2015. The project has become a symbol of the state's forced developmentalism, violent histories of ethnic and religious minorities and capitalist dispossession, against which multiple iterations of *horon* seek to create solidarity, social mobilization and political participation. Ethnographic and choreographic methods guide this study to explore the dance as a complex space of physical and social interactions. Its varying aesthetics, contested meanings, and forms of reproduction and circulation provide a lens through which to discuss how protesters negotiate their identities both in *horon* circles and protests. The improvisational quality of *horon* helps merge dance, music and chanted poetry together into political action and enables urban and rural protesters to find flexible ways of resistance across the Black Sea.

*[folk dance, environmental activism, cultural heritage, performativity, Black Sea, Turkish studies]*

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# How to Win Elections in the Eastern Delta of Egypt: Towards the Idea of a Strategic Tribalism

**Christoph Lange**

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**Abstract:** In order to examine the entangled notions of rural hinterlands and practices of future- and place-making, this article focuses on an episode from my fieldwork in Egypt's Eastern Nile Delta in 2015/16, when I accompanied Tahawi Bedouins on their successful campaign during Egypt's parliamentary elections in 2015. The aim is to shed light on the strategic use of tribal solidarity and patronage networks to mobilize supporters and voters. However, the same tribal networks and resources were also used to invoke and perform the necessary tribal unity when faced with a rural non-Tahawi population. The article develops two ideas, *strategic tribalism* and *maḍyafa* (guest house) *ecology*, to show the election campaign as an example of future- and place-making in a rural setting, whereas the specific constraints, possibilities and meanings embedded in the rural as a resource and a reserve unfold very differently, always reaching beyond romantic notions of the rural as remote.

[*Egypt, Arab Bedouin, strategic tribalism, maḍyafa ecology, parliamentary elections, rural-urban nexus, connectivity, ethnography*]

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# Modernity as Cure and Poison: Photo-Ethnography and Ambiguous Stillness in Therasia, Greece

**Konstantinos Kalantzis**

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**Abstract.** As Therasiotes – residents of Therasia, a sparsely populated island sitting to the west of the globally iconic tourist destination of Santorini – engage with their landscape, they are haunted by a sense of stillness, which contrasts with Santorini’s reverberating modernity. By combining text with photographic imagery, this essay explores how Therasiotes experience quietness and its perceived antithesis, modernity, as well as the ways in which both are entangled in conflicting dynamics of pleasure and aversion, a condition invoking Derrida’s discussion of Plato’s *pharmakon*, with its inherent vacillation between the categories of cure and poison. The article examines peoples’ material practices and modes of looking in order to understand how they experience time and place and how they rework the island’s position in national and global hierarchies of value. It also proposes a peripatetic narrative structure that mirrors my own physical movements on the island in pursuit of photos and thus explores the ethnographic role of photography as a narrative strategy, an object of study and a research method.

*[modernity, ethnography, photography, tourism, material culture, landscape]*

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## Epilogue – Mediterranean Survivals

**Thomas Hauschild**

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### I. Mediterranean Anthropology – A German Experience

*1960-1982 Mediterranean Countryman and Neo-Marxism*

The regional focal points of social and cultural anthropological fieldwork are subject to changing material, political or social forces and cultural trends. During the mid and late 1970s, the small discipline of *Völkerkunde* (ethnology) at the University of Hamburg was already taught on the basis of contemporary international social and cultural anthropology. It was in Hamburg that I started to pursue my studies, in 1973. We German anthropologists at that time were in an exceptional situation.

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