



Mediterraneanist anthropology

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The Mediterranean is one of the most underrated areas in anthropological imagination. On the one hand, its shores have furnished the most complex formulations of the unfolding dynamics of society and culture in time. On the other hand, most Euro-American treatises of alternative social worlds fly over the Mediterranean en route to places taken to be more radically different. After a short view of the historiographical debate regarding the Mediterranean, this essay addresses some of the key the issues that occupied Mediterraneanist anthropology since the Second World War, and which have consequently framed wider debates in anthropology. First among them is the rise and fall of claims about the transnational cultural unity of Mediterranean (or any other geographical area): how such notions of cultural unity related to assumptions that Mediterranean societies were 'frozen in time', and what traits and modes of thoughts anthropologists claimed this cultural unity to include. A second set of questions deals with patron-client relations and their related patronage and clientelism, which at a certain moment came close to defining Mediterraneanist anthropology. The essay concludes by outlining the sort of theoretical complexity that Mediterraneanist anthropology has articulated. Acknowledging this complexity should urge us to reconsider anthropologists' aversion to the regional scales of analysis. It will also provide us with a recipe for scaling up our own tools to match the transnational complexity of the projects and processes that demand our scholarly attention.

Introduction

The communities of the Mediterranean possess both more similarities between different countries and more diversities within their national frontiers than the tenets of modern nationalism would have us believe (Pitt-Rivers 1963a: 9-10).

Is there one Mediterranean or are there many? Should we follow those among its travellers and [ethnographers](#) who claim that they have found cultural traits that unite the sea's shores into a 'cultural area', or should we instead limit our understanding of the sea's unity to geographical characteristics? How should we treat any similarities we might find across space and time? Should we consider them as proof of the sea's existence as an empirical entity? Or should we alternatively treat them as reasons to use the sea as a conceptual gadfly to our landlocked, unity-mirroring anthropological imaginations? More broadly, what makes regions 'exist' in any rigorous or interesting sense – commercial links, overarching political institutions, traversal social [relations](#), or cultural similarities? And how do we know that we've shown enough to establish the existence of any of these measures?

It is generally agreed that no area of sufficient coherence today in the zone of the Mediterranean could be profitably compared with contiguous areas that existed in the past or in other parts of the contemporary

world; that, in other words, other areas, in the past or elsewhere did have the sort of unity the Mediterranean lacks. Anthropologists had once searched for the cultural unity of the Mediterranean (Péristiany 1966; Pitt-Rivers 1963b), but then dismissed this search as a form of orientalism (Galt 1985; Herzfeld 1980; 1984; 1985b).^u The dismissal of Mediterraneanist anthropology severed the aggregate of ethnographies along the sea's shores from each other as well as from a coherent concept of the contemporary area as a whole. In this, the debate in anthropology aligned with similar judgements about the relationship between modernity and the Mediterranean in [history](#): when one began, the other ended. On the one hand, the contemporary Mediterranean was not supposed to show any cultural unity that would merit calling it a 'culture area'. On the other hand, the things that people took to mark any Mediterraneanness of people, things, and places also marked them as non-modern.

Historiographical debate

If European modernity includes a nationalist political order, then does the advent of such modernity entail the end of any Mediterranean non-national (imperial, cosmopolitan, or otherwise transnational) order? Is the Mediterranean pre-modern by definition? When we claim to study an object as vast and complex as an entire transnational maritime region - or at the very least to examine trends, similarities, and relationships within that region - we need to pay careful attention to the relationships that both our sources and we draw between that region's past and present. Modern social sciences have assumed that supra-local units of study follow concentric units of political, social, economic, or cultural order. This sociological imagination, otherwise known as methodological nationalism, actually fits comfortably within a wider set of seemingly homogeneous units, of which nations form only an intermediate scale: from [households](#) and villages to the globe. Seas in general, and the Mediterranean in particular, disturb this view of the world as a set of concentric social units of ever-widening, 'nested' scales (Brenner 2001).

There is a near consensus among [historians](#) that the Mediterranean they reconstruct from pre-modern times no longer exists, though some aspects of such pre-modern Mediterranean worlds - as well as the main preoccupation regarding the Mediterranean's unity and attempts to unify it - have made it to our times (Greene 2010). Historians debate the dating of the shift from a Mediterranean to a modern world, but their accounts contain such a shift. Perhaps the most famous shift is the 'Northern Invasion' of Atlantic European fleets into the Mediterranean and the development of national rivalry, which thus ended a bipolar Christian-[Muslim](#) world (Braudel 1972: 615-42). This Invasion, which Braudel dates to the turn of the seventeenth century, brought about the 'waning' of the early-modern Mediterranean with its binary religious divisions, sails, corsairs, and the slave trade (Tabak 2008). Molly Greene complicated this image of change from a bi-religious to a multi-national order by showing how nationality did not replace religion but joined it as a dimension of commercial and political [relations](#) (Greene 2002). This complex image postpones the end of the Mediterranean throughout the seventeenth century. Molly Greene's analysis of

the early modern Mediterranean, based on the balance between Ottoman and European powers, takes us to the end of the eighteenth century with Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 (Greene 2014). It thus challenges other attempts to define the Mediterranean as a 'colonial sea' - as a maritime region defined by the historical project of European [colonial](#) expansion - which would be squeezed between the late eighteenth century and the 1950s - modern and not contemporary at the same time (Borutta & Gekas 2012).⁶⁴ For other historians, the distinctiveness of Mediterranean history - the combination of relatively easy seaborne communications and a fragmented topography of agricultural microregions - lost its central role since the late nineteenth century with the advent of steam shipping and national economic consolidation projects (Horden & Purcell 2000: 3). When the industrial and economic dimensions of modernity are the focus of attention, the Mediterranean becomes northwestern Europe's pre-1800s periphery, which was abandoned with the Atlantic expansion and [colonization](#) (Pomeranz 2000: 24-5). In other words, the 'Northern Invasion' anticipated a northern abandonment: northwestern Europe's turning away from the Mediterranean to 'the New World'. Whether modernity stands for European transoceanic colonial expansion, nationalization, or nation-states' sea-shunning consolidation, it is said to have sealed the sea's fate (Pamuk & Williamson 2000: 4).

Historians date the Mediterranean's latest [death](#) to as late as the 1920s and 1940s, when cosmopolitan port cities - the most recent of its historiographical emblems - perished in the wake of nationalism, 'a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that [ethnic](#) boundaries should not cut across political ones' (Gellner 1983: 1). More generally, because historical accounts define the Mediterranean on the basis of historically delimited characteristics that are said to expire before modernity, applying any conception of the Mediterranean from the historiography of earlier periods to the present runs the risk of anachronism. It matters less whether the aspects or areas of the Mediterranean are believed to be immune to change (as Braudel would have it; 1972: 1239) or to incorporate coping strategies for instability and unpredictability, that is, incessant change (Horden & Purcell 2000: 13). Even for those scholars who study the Mediterranean in modern times, it is clear that modernity *came to* the Mediterranean (Abulafia 2003; Burke 2010). This sort of diffusionist thesis writ transnationally does not avoid the problematic ascription of modernity to some places and not to others. It rather transforms the question of who is modern to the question of who was so first.

Cultural unity

That historiographical definitions of the pre-modern Mediterranean would not stretch to the present should not surprise us. Anthropologists' rejection of a Mediterranean modernity, however, raises different questions about our disciplinary imaginary of transnational regions and how we claim to access them [ethnographically](#). How is it that a part of the world that is so famous for its maritime past has not enjoyed any anthropological attention to its brimming transnational present? Is there anything specifically

Mediterranean about everything that is happening over the last decade or so in the Mediterranean? When we study unauthorised migration to Europe, path-breaking trans-marine [infrastructures](#), or the Arab Spring and European reactions to it (just to mention the usual suspects), should we treat them as transnational events *tout court* without any regional specificity? More generally, what anthropological preoccupations made societies around the Mediterranean stand not for transnational or transregional processes but instead emblematised almost their ultra-local opposite?

The Mediterranean is one of those parts of the globe with which anthropologists have had the most productive, provocative, and at times bewildering engagement. As John Davis shows in his book – the most comprehensive account of Mediterraneanist anthropology to date – the Mediterranean ‘attracted anthropologists almost before any other region of the world’ (Davis 1977: 1). The list that Davis cites clarifies this ‘roll-call’: Maine’s *Ancient law* (1883), Fustel de Coulanges’s *La cité antique* (1864), Robertson Smith’s *Kinship & marriage in early Arabia* (1903), Frazer’s *The golden bough* (1925), Durkheim’s *De la division du travail social* (1893), as well as several works by Westermarck (e.g., 1899; 1911). Yet after this early phase of interest, the Mediterranean ceded this place.

On the one hand, its shores have served ever since as ethnographic breeding grounds for classic themes like hospitality (Candea & Da Col 2012; Herzfeld 1987b; Pitt-Rivers 2012; Shryock 2012), patronage (Gellner 1977; Gilsenan 1996; Silverman 1965; Weingrod 1968), and networks (Blok 1973; Boissevain 1974). On the other hand, the most ambitious treatises about the elementary forms of kinship stayed away from the Mediterranean (to mention two examples, Lévi-Strauss 1969; Sahlins 2013). Instead, they followed neater examples of what Germaine Tillion called ‘republics of brothers-in-law’ (1983). In this scheme, ‘republics of brothers’, which Tillion called modern nation-state political order, establish unity and solidarity within ‘the same national formation’ on the social [relations](#) of sameness, hence ‘brothers’. Anthropological examples from far afield set the logical alternative to this order – of sociality across difference and relationship across it, as among ‘brothers-in-law’ (for a recent version of this alternative, see Viveiros de Castro 2004). Not the Mediterranean. Here a ‘particular endogamy (that is, preferential marriage between the [children](#) of two brothers)’ and the ‘debasement of the female condition’ are widespread across religious and national borders (Tillion 1983: 16-8). Her argument focused on parallel cousin marriage and patriarchal family structure, but the relationship Tillion drew between the Mediterranean and anthropology’s geography of disciplinary interests holds more widely. This complexity ended up marginalising the Mediterranean’s role in anthropological scholarship (Herzfeld 1987a).

The Mediterranean as frozen in time

During the heyday of Mediterraneanist anthropology – roughly 1960s-1980s – the debate pitted against each other three general positions about the anthropological making of the Mediterranean. Some anthropologists followed Braudel in viewing entire swaths of the Mediterranean rim as ‘museums of Man’

(quoted in Horden & Purcell 2000: 463), which survived to the present because they were detached enough from their modernising surroundings. Social institutions like the *hamoula* in Palestine (Cohen 1965),^u patronage, honour, and family among the Sarakatsani in northwestern Greece (Campbell 1964), and the complex of norms, [values](#), and social structure in rural Andalusia (Pitt-Rivers 1971) were depicted as timeless emblems of an erstwhile social world (Davis 1977: 242). This approach implicitly claimed that some places around the Mediterranean froze in time.^u

This view of places out of time soon encountered its critique: absolute seclusion is historically impossible for long periods of time, definitely in this part of the world (Wolf 1982); the same people who declare pristine removal from [history](#) and human contact often live in complex relationship with those forms of contact exactly (Candea 2010; Driessen 2005); and their declarations often mesh with nationalist attempts to locate the nation's essence out of foreigners' reach, however the latter may be defined (Herzfeld 2005a). To claim the Mediterranean remoteness of such places amounts to adopting their residents' self-proclamations and the latter's echoes in nationalist discourse, but it could not serve as an anthropological perspective on the entire region.

If we rule out the possibility of defining the Mediterranean on the basis of seemingly emblematic entire contexts - of locating it in 'places out of time' - how may we define it? In what dimensions of social action and relations could we locate the ingredients of a regional unity, if we should locate such unity at all? A significant part of the Mediterraneanist debate revolved around this question. In the volume that initiated the debate, Pitt-Rivers combined the role of historical contact with the plea for a comparative analysis of circum-Mediterranean 'problems of social organization' under 'social change'.^u In his words, since 'there are few points on the Mediterranean coastline which have not long enjoyed contact of one sort or another with the opposite extreme', and since 'the greater part has been, in one century or another, subject to both Islam and Christianity', then 'such observations ... must lead us to question here the popular conception which assumes, at the same time, that peoples can be studied under the title of their national flag as geographical entities, and explained in terms of their history. The communities of the Mediterranean possess both more similarities between different countries and more diversities within their national frontiers than the tenets of modern nationalism would have us believe' (Pitt-Rivers 1963a: 9-10). This phrasing of the Mediterraneanist pursuit differs significantly from the 'time immemorial' approach.

Mediterranean traits

Ultimately, social comparison gave way to cultural unity (Silverman 2001: 45-50). Some anthropologists argued that habits of thought and action continued from the past while the contexts of action changed. There was no road to take or wall to pass that would take us into veritable Mediterranean worlds. Mediterraneanity resided in traits, not in places; 'a bundle of sociocultural traits' that served as emblems of

the Mediterranean: “atomistic” community life; rigid sexual segregation; a tendency toward reliance on the smallest possible kinship units (nuclear families and shallow lineages); strong emphasis on shifting, ego-centered, noncorporate coalitions’ (Gilmore 1982: 178-9). Other such traits included ‘an intense parochialism or *campanilismo*’, inter-village rivalries, communities’ local cults of patron saints who are identified with the territorial unit, ‘a general gregariousness and interdependence of daily life characteristic of small, densely populated neighborhoods’, and ‘a widespread belief in the evil eye’ (Gilmore 1982: 179).

Beyond a mere consideration of ‘continuity and change’, the discussion of ‘Mediterranean modes of thought’ contained a double move: it revealed similarities between circum-Mediterranean societies and it distinguished them from other places, most clearly Northern and Western Europe (and less so with other of the region’s ‘corners’). The axis for this charting was the above list of traits, which at times apparently contradicted each other (e.g., ‘tendency toward reliance on the smallest possible kinship units’ vs. ‘strong emphasis on shifting, ego-centered noncorporate coalitions’), and nonetheless provided sufficient anthropological material to sustain a heated debate about the cultural unity of the Mediterranean in modern times.

Modes of thought

Most of all, social anthropologists found the strongest sense of similarity in ‘the continuity and persistence of Mediterranean modes of thought’ (Péristiany 1966), specifically the ‘honour-and-shame syndrome’ or ‘the flamboyant virility complexes of Mediterranean males’ (Gilmore 1987: 16). As an analytical category in anthropology, honour was fixed at the regional scale: above the various national-language or dialectical names and the local instances of its observation, and below the universal scale of abstraction – of prestige, a category claimed to contain no socio-cultural specificity (‘There is of course no society, anywhere, without prestige’; Davis 1977: 89). As such, they were later critiqued (Herzfeld 1980): why should we gloss *onore*, *nif*, and *egoismos* as the English honour? The honour and shame complex was defined as a behaviour of ‘competing to remain equal’ (Bailey 1971: 19); as an ‘emphasis ... on the virginity and the chastity of women’ (Schneider 1971: 2); and as ‘a system of stratification [that] describes the distribution of wealth in a social idiom’ (Davis 1977: 98), to cite only key examples. The first of these definitions makes honour an [egalitarian](#) struggle up a hill of material or other forms of stratification: the poor and the rich can both be honourable; better yet, in some situations, the poor can emerge as more honourable than the rich (Bourdieu 1966; Herzfeld 1985a). The second definition explains regional prevalence of an attitude by a recurrence of a structural feature of its political economy: ‘a highly competitive relationship between agricultural and pastoral economies’ and ‘the absence of effective state institutions’ (Schneider 1971: 2-3). The third definition claims the opposite: it reduces a form of behaviour to the social standing that it is claimed to mark.

The second and third approaches share an important feature: they locate their object of study - honour - in the relationship between an attitude and a social structure. If every form of society has prestige, then in those societies in which honour is emphasised, the patriarchal pursuit of the maintenance and enlargement of patrimony links certain emblems (patrimony, female chastity, and virginity) into the joint object of entire sets of those societies' members. Whether the emblems of honour marked social stratification or the integrity of patrimony, the social conditions for such marking were observable in the ethnographic present and its (equally observable) historically-dependent context.

Patrons and clients, mediators, power brokers

Our Mediterranean has by now changed significantly from the Braudelian 'museum of man': it is neither patches of a world out of [history](#) nor a set of behavioural relics from a pre-modern past. What if the social situations that anthropologists observed stemmed from people's reactions to the changes modernization had wrought on societies around the Mediterranean - a part of the process, not what preceded it? For such an approach to maintain a specifically Mediterraneanist dimension, the regional unity should reside in a shared historical context. This was definitely the case for the various national semi-peripheries that hosted many anthropologists during the 1960s and 1970s: provincial capitals, agricultural centres and, more generally, social settings that echoed the Mediterranean's own role in anthropologists' imaginary map of world cultures - somewhere in the middle between the modern 'We' and those radically-different 'They'. The kinds of patriarchal actors under consideration did share several historical and political economic conditions, which made them all accessible and interesting subjects of anthropologists' work, roughly during the Cold War (Schneider 2012). Yet would such a regionally shared historical moment suffice for constructing the Mediterranean as an anthropological object? Should our definition of the Mediterranean be made of elementary units that are unique to the area? Or should the region's definition emerge only through the specific combination of otherwise universal anthropological elements?

Before we delve into the debate about it, we may construct a composite image of the kind of social [relations](#) that captivated anthropologists in those years, and which made patron-client relations a famous Mediterraneanist theme. Patrons and clients were often people from different social strata, who forged an enduring relationship of mutual, albeit diagonal, obligation; in some cases one side attempted to forge such a relationship and failed to do so or to attain the wished-for outcomes from it (Silverman 1968; Weingrod 1968). The relationship often received justification and shape from idioms of fosterage, baptising, Godparenthood, and the like - with the patron serving as co-parent of the client's [child](#) (Campbell 1964; Parkes 2004). On the basis of such a relationship, clients expected to receive access to resources that patrons controlled and patrons expected to receive their clients' allegiance in matters ranging from political support to armed conflicts (Palumbo 2004). In terms of circulation and distribution of resources, patronage facilitated redistribution through the construction of a social relation that was supposed to

sustain it. This is not to say that patronage is antithetical to relations of employment or fraternal reciprocity. On the contrary, this social relation could be used by both sides in an attempt to frame as redistributive relations of exchange or reciprocity (or its violent opposite: Gilson 1996; Schneider & Schneider 2005). This reframing capacity served people located at the nodes of post-war redistributive administrations: the entwined threads of party apparatuses, national development and reconstruction funds, and government offices (Boissevain & Friedl 1975; Pitkin 1967). The same persons who appear here in their role as patrons play the roles of mediators or power brokers in other perspectives on the same political scenes during the same period (Schneider & Schneider 1976).

Scholars have discussed these issues in varying degrees of explicitness regarding issues like local patriotism (*campanilismo*), [tribalism](#), patronage/clientelism, and 'amoral familism'. Patronage occupied a particularly distinct place in these debates. It foregrounded the social structure of political action in such settings, which scholars contrasted with their image of European modernity. Here again the question of modernity surfaced: was patronage an ancient obstacle in the modernising spread of state institutions and national hegemony? Or was patronage a reaction to these trends - which subject groups or their leaders might have experienced as external infringement on their local autonomies? Here, the opposition between Mediterranean and modern/European/'our' politics was explicitly phrased at the outset:

The kind of patronage which does concern us is a form of *power*. In part, it intrigues us because we disapprove of it. Why? It offends both our [egalitarianism](#) and our universalism. Patrons and clients are generally unequal. Patronage relations are highly specific. They fail to illustrate the principle that like cases should be treated alike (Gellner 1977: 1, original emphasis).

Gellner's preface does not exhaust the varying approaches to patronage in the volume that it opens. Some scholars focused on dyadic patron-client relations as instrumental 'lop-sided friendship' between peasants and their patrons (Pitt-Rivers 1971: 140; Campbell 1964; Wolf 1966). Others treated patronage structurally as a gap-filling mediation between communal and national scales of politics (Silverman 1965). Finally, some works explained actual patron-client relations through their conditioning by 'a self-perpetuating system of belief and action grounded in the society's value system' (Boissevain 1966: 30). These different anthropological takes on social action and relations more generally materialised in disputes regarding every axis of the analysis. Some authors emphasised 'personalized, affective, and reciprocal relationship' (Lemarchand & Legg 1972: 151), while others stressed the workings of power in party politics in 'developing areas' (Weingrod 1968). Students of national political systems used patronage as an analytical concept to understand *clientele* systems as extended forms of relations in states' political cultures (Powell 1970), while others compellingly argued that a 'local ideological-normative model cannot be used to analyse itself' (Gilson 1977: 168). If some focused on clients' point of view to explain patronage as a strategy for securing protection and subsistence (Campbell 1964), others cautioned that clients' compliance with their relations to patrons should not be confused with patrons' legitimacy, which would

otherwise be smuggled into our definition of what is structurally clients' forced compliance with their exploitation (Scott 1977; Silverman 1970).

As often happens, the debate about patronage waned without conclusion. Yet the attention to national party politics and [bureaucracies](#), as well as to the inter-classist role that client-patron chains played in articulating peripheral social settings to national centres (Gribaudo 1980; Schneider & Schneider 1976), already diminished patronage's role as a Mediterraneanist emblem. Unlike the honour and shame theme, which persisted as a culturalist emblem of Mediterranean unity, patronage turned from a delineator of 'non-modern' places and peoples into a geographically unbound dimension of socio-political action (Gilmore 1982: 194). Perhaps because of that, anthropologists' search for the Mediterranean continued elsewhere, and the analytical questions that had once gripped social anthropology of patronage remained unanswered (Piliavsky 2014; Waterbury 1977).

This issue repeated itself in other aspects of Mediterraneanist anthropology. One of the leading figures in the development of practice theory and in importing its nascent conceptions from anthropology to sociology was Pierre Bourdieu, whose early work on Kabylia contributed to two of the pivotal volumes in Mediterraneanist debate (Bourdieu 1963; 1966; and, see Scheele 2008). Yet once culture turned from code (or [values](#), or norms) to logics of practice or a practical sense, it stopped being fixable either as modern or as Mediterranean. In other words, Mediterraneanist anthropology disowned the theoretical advances it had begotten, because the latter replaced the object of dispute with tools of analysis that were no longer useful in declaring whether people, places, or relations were Mediterranean or modern. The same could be argued also for the development of network theory, especially through its expansion on both sides of the Mediterranean, and always in pursuit of methodological ways to analyse social relations in 'complex societies' (Blok 1973; Boissevain & Mitchell 1973; Geertz, Geertz & Rosen 1979). Here too, the higher the theoretical purchase and applicability of the concept, the shorter its life among Mediterraneanists.

Aftermath of the patron-client debate

The resulting image of the Mediterranean that emerged from the heyday of anthropological interest was based on cultural similarities across the region, most of all 'honour and shame', for which Mediterraneanist anthropology is remembered to this day (Bromberger 2006; Sant Cassia & Schäfer 2005). For the few studies that did focus on cross-Mediterranean connections and comparison, it was connections between 'cultures', rather than the cultural conditions of connection: similarities between discrete entities rather than graded resemblances in practices across time and space (Davis 1977). With the exception of Jane Schneider's classic 'Of vigilance and virgins' (1971), anthropologists circularly concluded that connections and proximity both generated and were based on cultural unity (Galt 1985). British social anthropologists 'turned cultural' not once they had encountered their transatlantic colleagues, but when they found '[values](#)' and 'modes of thought' - like honour and shame conceived as the cultural traits shared by individuals -

more fitting than underlying structures for the craft of regional comparison (Schneider 2012).

This 'cultural shift' towards unity and its flattening effects were gradual. The advocates of the cultural unity approach abandoned the view of the Mediterranean as a breathing, negotiable zone, in which people acknowledge their similarities as they make and break political [relations](#) among themselves and together against others. Their opponents denounced this reification altogether, rather than search for the underlying structural processes that made the Mediterranean into a transnational constellation and the idioms that inform political relations in such a constellation. In other words, the 'culture area' argument constructed transnational regions like the Mediterranean not on the basis of the dynamics that their diversities permit, but on the common denominator the observers drew, and then fixed that denominator as the essential character of the area.

Moreover, the debate among Mediterraneanists ended up reaffirming notions of inherent difference between the West and the Rest. If the Mediterraneanist debate entertained similarities between some parts of the three continents of Asia, Africa, and Europe, the dismissal of such similarities fixed Europe as *culturally incomparable* with its Mediterranean neighbours. By preferring Europe and its post-war nation-states as spatial categories over the Mediterranean, anthropologists opted for a [scientific](#) imagination made of discrete spatio-political entities, not structural relationships. This choice reiterated the reifying fallacies wrought on [tribes](#), then on nations, only now on national and supra-national scales. As a result, the Mediterranean has become a favourite case in historiography of past maritime worlds of cultural contact and exchange (Abulafia 2011; Armitage 2009; Subrahmanyam 1998; Wigen 2006), as well as a frequent example in critiques of orientalism (Herzfeld 2005b).

Conclusion: Theory from the Mediterranean?

The Mediterranean is triply absent as an anthropological subject nowadays. First, it is rarely considered as an adequate scale of analysis (as are most, if not all, other candidate-regions: Ho 2006; Matory 2005). Second, it serves as a theoretical [morality](#) tale for what kinds of generalizations we should not pursue. Third, the category of the region is absent even from the analyses of processes and situations that are taken to be Mediterranean by other disciplines and wider treatments. In the absence of a vibrant Mediterraneanist anthropology, [ethnography](#) in the region blooms. After all, unauthorised migration, conflicts of various types and scope, transnational [infrastructural](#) projects (like pipelines and highways) and other events and scenes known to raise anthropologists' interest abound (for key examples, see Ballinger 2003; Cabot 2014; Cole 1997; Feldman 2011; Green 2005; Rogozen-Soltar 2012; Silverstein 2004). Nevertheless, we rarely examine these situations in relation to each other and to the wider transnational constellation. Can we find a way to use the social-[historical](#) complexity that the current state of affairs across the Mediterranean offers for a wider anthropological lesson? Do we need to sacrifice the area's specificity - however we choose to define it - on the altar of such a broader lesson, or is there a way to

harness such a specificity, perhaps even to harness its specificity theoretically?

A possible answer to these questions comes out of a consideration in an earlier section – the Mediterranean seems to have fared best in anthropological literature not through radical alternatives to anthropologists' perceptions of the way of life in their own societies (Fortes & Evans-Pritchard 1940; Malinowski 1927; Mauss 1923), but through baffling variations and permutations of them. This anthropological view of the Mediterranean as a repository not of radical alternatives to modern/Euro-American sociocultural settings but as a much closer cognate is perhaps most lucidly reflected in the conceptual relationship between anthropologies of [gifting](#) and of hospitality (Candea & Da Col 2012: S1-2; Pitt-Rivers 2011; 2012). Anthropologies of both hospitality and gifting have focused on turn-taking acts. Yet work on hospitality includes another key element: the notion of the mastery of the spatial realm, adding questions of sovereignty to those of reciprocity (Shryock 2012: S24). The skeletal gifting scene includes two persons and things that they ritually pass to each other. The relationship between gifting as an institution and reciprocity as a principle is one of the most famous issues in anthropology (Algazi, Groebner & Jussen 2003; Bailey 1971; Godelier 1999; Laidlaw 2000; Lambek 2011; Munn 1986; Parry 1986). Yet this theoretical thread privileges the role that gifts themselves serve in constituting the identity, fame, price, reputation, prestige, or otherwise social worth of the gifting parties. In contrast to this, the skeletal hospitality setup includes two persons and things that pass between them, at least those things that the host gives to the guest (food, famously), but they also include all persons coming under the host's authority as well as the space into which the guest enters. Through these added elements in the ritual staging of social [relations](#), the hosts' reputation comes to depend not only on what he or she gives, but also on how intact they manage to maintain the spaces they claim to control.

This double preoccupation is illustrated in the different emphases that Pitt-Rivers and Herzfeld stress. Pitt-Rivers focuses on 'the law of hospitality', which he defines as 'the problem of how to deal with strangers' (1977: 94). Herzfeld focuses not on the relationship of [household](#)-stranger but on the homology among the levels of the wider set of collective identities, from the village to the nation (1987b: 76). As hosts and guests demand, enact, and recount scenes of hospitality, they move along this set of concentric identities, in a way that permits 'moral englobing of political asymmetry' (1987b: 86). Hospitality conjoins reciprocity and power, morality and politics, generosity and sovereignty (Dresch 1998; 2012; Herzfeld 1987b; Pitt-Rivers 2011; 2012; Shryock 2008). Where hosting is a key ritualised scene for claiming the moral high ground and staging political relations, people's careers as leaders rise and fall through the stagecraft of hospitality, and is definitely so narrated (Shryock 2004). As a result, gifting is still an anthropological classic emblem of reciprocity *tout court*, presenting it as a pure aspect of social life, while hospitality – exactly because it combines spatio-political issues with those of reciprocity – has had a rockier path in anthropology and is also a theoretical matter of a double, not sole thread. It should not surprise us at this point that Mauss discusses societies far afield, while Pitt-Rivers concentrates on societies from around the

Mediterranean.

We started this discussion with the Mediterraneanist interest of anthropology's early generations, yet the Mediterranean has also served in complicating anthropological theories beyond the theme of hospitality, when scholars performed a sort of theoretical doubling of mono-thread theories developed elsewhere. If Mauss's gift met its Mediterraneanist counterpart in Pitt-Rivers's hospitality (and grace), then the same could arguably be said for Lévi-Strauss's 'savage mind', which Bourdieu's *habitus* began to complicate between Algeria and southern France (Bourdieu 1966; 1972; 1979); Goody's work on the family and marriage in southern Europe (1983); De Martino's historical anthropology of [magic](#) and religion (2005; 2015); as well as Campbell's and Herzfeld's formulations of Evans-Pritchard's segmentation strand of segmentation theory (Campbell 1964; Herzfeld 1985a; 2005a). If the Mediterranean has actually inspired welcome theoretical complexity (of kinship, magic, perception, political structure), then perhaps both the scale of analysis it offers and current events in and around it could also benefit from our analytical attention on similar terms?

An anthropological approach to the current affairs around the Mediterranean can achieve both goals: show how we can reconstruct the ethnographic relevance of regional scale of action and examine current affairs in the Mediterranean using the tools of analysis that Mediterraneanist anthropology has honed over the years. In contemporary accounts of the Mediterranean, the two most frequent features are [tourism](#) and unauthorised migration. Authors discuss both under the theme of locals' xenophobia, which faces north and south respectively (Abulafia 2003; Boissevain & Selwyn 2004; Feldman 2013). Yet accusations of xenophobia fit within both threads of the anthropology of hospitality we've examined: it is one prescribed solution to 'the problem of how to deal with strangers' as well as a moral judgement of those who pursue it (through either commission or omission). Anthropologists of hospitality in close quarters have shown how hosts try to prove their honour by showing the integrity of their domestic spaces and their mastery over 'the threshold of welcome or trespass' (Shryock 2012: S24). Anyone following the international news cycle over the past four years will have noticed that the same splitting of the world into the moral and the political has been unfolding on a much vaster scale, in European management of unauthorised migration in the Mediterranean. The transnational dynamics of hospitality provide us with an outline for a historical anthropology of how the scales of action, responsibility, and sovereignty shift both upwards and downwards. Here, European states promote their own national pride and are members of a union that holds universalist pretensions as a beacon of universal hospitality. These states' governments both try to collaborate with each other (as members in that union) and exchange accusations of xenophobia, bad hospitality, and irresponsible management of their domestic realms. Such an analysis may provide us with the Mediterranean neither as the unchanging structure of cultural unity nor as a time-bound historical object, but rather as the ever-changing constellation that emerges from the various political projects and moral proclamations that clash and combine with each other. If we revisit the fruits of the region's past

anthropology, if we expand its scope, first to construct and then to address processes on a transnational scale, then we may regain both a Mediterraneanist anthropology and an anthropological Mediterranean.

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[1] The term 'orientalism' comes from the title of Edward Said's book, in which he critiqued the set of fictional representations of 'The East', which reduced it to stark figures of 'Oriental peoples' and 'places' (Said 1978). Herzfeld explicitly adapted it as 'practical Mediterraneanism' (Herzfeld 2005b; see also De Donno 2010).

[2] Edmund Burke III remains one of the only historians to insist on extending the Mediterranean into modernity. Yet, his opposition to culturalist explanations notwithstanding, the unity of the modern Mediterranean that he proclaims requires significant historical leaps and ends up reiterating old claims about some sort or another of the region's backwardness (2012: 920).

[3] In Rosenfeld's terms, 'a patrilineal descent group or patrilineage, related families or extended families being organised in a lineage of the segmentary type' (Rosenfeld 1974: 243).

[4] See Carlo Levi's (1947) account of his obligatory sojourn in a couple of villages in Lucania in 1930s fascist Italy for a most poetic rendition of this point.

[5] This formulation survived not within the culturalist direction that the Mediterranean unity debate took, but rather in the works of scholars like Jane Schneider (Schneider 1971; 1990) and Jack Goody (Goody 1983).