

Chapter 24

Concluding Remarks: Applying *Med-Thinking* Proviso to Set a Research Agenda on Mediterranean Migrations



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24.1 What Are the Main Research Frameworks that Link the Different Contributions?

Quickly reviewing images on “Mediterranean migrations” in Google Analytics (November 2022) and even going through Google Scholar Analytics, we can infer several premises. First, negative aspects by far dominate the public representation and research narrative over the positive ones, ruled by the same rhetoric most governments have constructed: crisis and instability, Mediterranean “dis-ordered” migration. This may invite us to reflect on the extent to which a research agenda, which is too often conflict-driven, may fuel mainstream policies and hegemonic reactive governance narratives. This concurrency between the political, the media and the social negative agenda is denounced in most contributions (directly in by Ayoub’s contribution in the case of French’s Euro-Mediterranean policies), and there is a general claim for a more encouraging or at least independent Mediterranean migrations agenda from scholars, highly contaminated by political decisions.

The second premise we can infer from the Google Scholar screen is that current Mediterranean migrations research is still too state-centric, dominated by national concerns on border control, national identities, social sustainability, regional geo-political considerations related to insecurity, and ideological binomial views in pros and cons. The leading argument here highlights that the dangers of a hyper-crisis narrative can legitimise rapid, informal, and flexible policy instruments and legislative proposals that are often at odds with democratic principles and fundamental rights. The crisis narrative simply paints a scenario of exceptionalism in border regimes (as Ferrer/Gabrielli show in examining the evolution of Ceuta and

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Melilla), that can justify acting beyond the usual social and political norms. It can also legitimise the lack of regular channels or in practice, for instance, hotspots system (detention centres without regulation), jungle practices and an overall absence of a humanitarian approach. In fact, we learn from the different contributions that migration cannot be the main object of crisis but rather part of broader crises within politics, morality, the project of modernity and the Enlightenment vision of humanity progress. For example, the geographical European deterritorialization of “problems”, creating non-European emplacements in Turkey and Maghreb countries, is also a major trend visible in the first webpage of Google image search. This conveys a key message, particularly valuable for researchers: there is a lot to do to reverse this Google trend, with an algorithm dominated by politics and media.

The contributions in this co-edited book provide a range of insights that can help shape this alternative narrative in Google. Ultimately, what this volume shows is that any research on Mediterranean migrations necessarily becomes critical, (quasi)-activist, because any researcher is engaged against the dominant narrative wall. As has been noted, there is a need for a “variable focal length” in the study of Mediterranean migrations (Zapata-Barrero & Faustini, 2019). The various contributions in this volume certainly help to take a step forward in framing an independent research agenda. But we should also recognise that these contributions are in part also Google-dependent since they confirm that the link between the Mediterranean and Migration invites us necessarily to address border regimes and the relation between border, human (im)mobility, and society/politics, about asymmetries of power and inequalities between different cardinal points. The Mediterranean as a geographical contact area between Global North, Global East and Global South is the clear scenario that still polarizes us. It is to speak about viewing critically how states are shaping the current history of restrictions and lockdowns of (im)mobility and how this creates a “disquieting account” in Chambers’ terms (2008, 3). With new and constructed spaces of legality, the current Mediterranean scenario is more a geopolitical space for a chess game than a human and (inter)cultural area of mutual understanding.

However, even if there is awareness that the Mediterranean is a space of diversities (intentionally in plural), there is still no recognition that diversity can be a resource for transforming the current trans-Mediterranean relations. The different contributions of this volume take a critically distant position from this methodological nationalism that can be found on Google and embrace multi-scale thinking. This is an epistemological claim that knowledge production must be detached from the current domination of states and all their alliances. We also need to incorporate into the agenda more perspectives and visions from other scales (territorial and actors involved in migration dynamics and governance, Southern and Eastern visions of the Mediterranean, the view for departure rather than arrivals, etc). In the words of Musette/Maarmar, there are still too many black boxes that deserve to be explored and that call for data production, which is technically possible only in combination with political will. This “multiple voices framework” should address the epistemology of ignorance that shapes the migration agenda and should also demand that any

research finding needs to be strongly connected with the history of migrations and the colonial past. Decolonising current migration governance in the Mediterranean may be the most appropriate approach. This means incorporating what Foucault (1991) refers to as a “polyhedron of intelligibility”, and we can also add “heterochrony” and “heterotopia”, other Foucauldian notions. The first refers to the idea that there is always a variety of rationalities behind an event or a process that is being scrutinised. This involves the need to consider a mixture of causal factors. In Foucault’s own words, it is about understanding and considering the wider influences which contribute to what may appear at first glance to be ‘normal’ (Foucault, 1991; 77). This describes the need to examine the subject of inquiry in a multi-directional manner rather than solely from “one direction” (Khan, 2016; 67). This also invites Mediterranean migrations researchers to combine in an interdependent way the different levels of analysis, such as micro, meso and macro levels.

On the other hand, heterochrony is a way to indicate that an event is the result of evolution and it is part of an accumulation of different historical layers. To frame a Mediterranean migrations agenda, we need to zoom out historically, because the premise is always that there are many historical narratives behind a given reality. Finally, heterotopia is a notion that seeks to find room to break the usual binomial utopia/dystopia and designates the fact there are spaces that are simply different, literally “in other spaces”. Taking the Foucauldian power relation focus, this means looking at alternative spaces, separate from the mainstream. It describes certain cultural, institutional and discursive spaces that are somehow ‘other’: disturbing, intense, incompatible, contradictory or transforming; a world off-center with respect to normal or everyday spaces, one that possesses multiple, fragmented, or even incompatible meanings (Dehaene & De Caeter, 2008).

“Polyhedron of intelligibility”, heterochrony, and heterotopy, are then notions that can help us underline two main final arguments that frame the different contributions of this co-edited book. First, any Mediterranean migrations-related topic is always multi-faceted and we need to have a holistic view, as the historical dimension and accumulation of historical moments are key for its understanding. In Braudel philosophy of history’s terms, what we can learn from the different contributions is the need to place any topic within a *longue durée* history rather than within a short-term and event-driven (*événementiel*) understanding that governs most of today’s dominant vision. What we always see as a research pattern connecting all the contributions, and probably closely related to the previous dimension, is the importance of multi-scale approaches in conducting Mediterranean migrations research, which includes looking at “other spaces” instead of the mainstream spaces of research. This means that this volume manages to contribute to knowledge production from the local and regional perspective, reflecting South/North/East and West geographical perspectives, from receiving and departure countries, and even social actors’ views, and incorporating new spaces of exploration. Epistemologically speaking, all these different visions and positions produce different types of knowledge, because they contextualise different kinds of information related to the same topic.

This first reading invites us to a second and final argument: to take seriously the “multi-scale approach” in the study of migrations in the Mediterranean. This is the outcome of putting at work reflexivity in conducting research, and being aware that we should receive different answers to seminal questions such as what is happening, what are the current main patterns, how to understand drivers and mechanisms of Mediterranean migrations, how can we place a determinate topic or event within a longer temporal and spatial continuum, how can we draw future scenario of human (im)mobility in the Mediterranean. Given the negative narrative context, these chapters also offer some paths for optimism, for thinking Mediterranean migrations in positive terms. The different conclusions strive to provide some orientations on how processes of changes should be conducted, and strengthen the view that the Mediterranean needs to be considered as a regional area of co-production of knowledge.

These different contributions display then particular epistemological manifestations of *Med-thinking* (Zapata-Barrero, 2022), which include both taking seriously multiple-perspective and rejecting Euro-centrism, Western-centrism, and decolonising existing prejudgments around migration in the Mediterranean. The different chapters also invite us to frame migration research with a particular methodological regional lens. Applying this *Med-thinking* lens to guide the conclusions of this collective book involves then putting into practice at least four main pillars that interact: epistemic solipsism, holism, homeostatic and positive thinking on migration.

A good example of solipsism is the credo that “there is no civilization outside of White-Christian European tradition”. Epistemic solipsism shows us how knowledge production is related to (national) self-interest and legitimates fixing binary categorisations and monolithic constructs of the Mediterranean, which we need to problematise. Holism pictures an organic system view of the Mediterranean and establishes that we cannot understand the whole by knowing the components in isolation from each other. This involves that the knowledge we may produce also needs to be framed within a given relational space, and that migrations-related topics cannot be analysed out of a contextual reference framework. Taking again Foucault’s (2008) reflections on space, holistic thinking considers space as “emplacements” rather than “localizations”. Emplacements are sites that can only be thought of if they are in relation to other sites. Emplacements are context-based locations. Applied to Mediterranean migrations concerns, this also involves including as many aspects as we can from the given topic, ethical, political, economic, legal, sociological, psychological, anthropological, etc. Holistic thinking requires both interdisciplinarity and intersectionality and most of the contributions of this co-edited volume meet this *Med-Thinking* proviso. As a third pillar, the concept of homeostasis is a way to leave aside presentism and event-based concerns and place migration issues within a *long durée* continuum. There is a widespread tendency in migration studies to focus research on social, political, economic, cultural changes, leaving aside and even disparaging what remains after a process of transformations. This is probably because most background research assumes that migration and the diversity that follows is one of the key drivers of change today. Within this mental

framework, most of these contributions enrich what *Med-Thinking* claims to be a Copernic turn in Mediterranean migrations research (Zapata-Barrero, 2022; 6), inviting the researcher to focus on continuities over changes. In Weberian terms, to have more of a historical than sociological approach in conducting research. Of course, most of these contributions reject the trend of researching Mediterranean migrations in good or bad, in pros and cons terms. The different chapters invite us to carefully avoid falling within a dialectical approach that links directly research with ideologies. The research frameworks in Mediterranean migrations studies are much more complex and related to different forms of articulating the consequences and impact of migrations. It is not the same to assess migration in positive terms from the country of reception than from the vantage point of the departure country; it is not the same to build a research design from the position of the migrant than from a particular state's interests. Finally, most contributions display what we may call "hybrid research", in the sense that they necessarily combine descriptive and explanatory arguments with normative claims, at different grades and intensity. In other words, it is very difficult to disentangle the "is" from the "ought to be" in Mediterranean migrations research.

24.2 What Are the Main Lines of Research That Intersect in the Different Contributions?

Adopting a qualitative conceptual strategy allows us to identify the main keywords in this volume that make up the research map of Mediterranean migrations. These chapters also show how concepts shape representations and perspectives, and how we classify them as a tool of analysis into political (power relations), social (inequalities), cultural and ideological strands. Considering the above preliminary frameworks and focusing on the rationale of each chapter, we can deduce at least seven main avenues for future research on migrations in the Mediterranean. These avenues are not ranked and we will start with the most general and then narrow the focus.

1. ***Need to review traditional theories and explore new ones, according to new trends and practices, considering Med-thinking lens:*** What becomes clear is that most theories that shed light on Mediterranean migrations patterns have been constructed without *Med-Thinking* provisos, always from the point of view of countries of reception, in terms of gains/benefits, political solipsism and Eurocentrism. Many chapters address the tension there is between traditional theories and new migration dynamics in Mediterranean migrations that challenge the functioning of traditional theories. For instance, Awad's contribution discusses how the EU and Egypt share a neoclassical conceptual understanding of Egyptian migration, grafted by the network theory, in its criminal shape. Since the 1970s, Egypt sought to promote labour migration so as to release pressures on its labour market and to bring it valued remittances. However, in order to help meet the EU's aim of stopping migration, it has now given up promoting its labour

migration to Europe in return for development cooperation. Awad claims that the EU-Egypt agreed conceptual framework and derived policies achieved their objectives, on the surface, but in reality failed to meet the two parties' real concerns. Awad then argues that the EU-Egypt conceptual framework should go beyond the neoclassical theory and the arguments advanced by approaches such as the dual labour market and world systems theories, and devise corresponding policies and actions. Djelti and Zapata-Barrero's contribution explicitly discusses the traditional migration and development debate incorporating new recent discussions coming from business and migration studies connecting migration, transnationalism, and entrepreneurship. They suggest incorporating migrant's capacities and social/cultural capital to the mutual benefits of countries or the development of their countries of origin. This need to review the dominant and traditional migration-development nexus incorporating different angles of exploration is also claimed by Rodríguez-Peña's contribution, stating that its focus is often shortsighted or primarily on developing countries. This is also the main path articulated by İçduygu/Altıok's contribution. In analysing the irregular migration in Eastern Mediterranean, in particular the case of Afghans and Syrians, they argue that linking the concept of weak statehood with the root causes of migration helps us to better understand the dynamics and mechanism of mixed flows, mainly including irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees. This may also explain also new questions such as why and how people move through particular routes over time, trying to understand the particular geography of the Eastern Mediterranean. The need to theorize "black box" situations enhancing evidence-based research deficits and avoiding blind-shooting policies is also addressed by Musette/Maamar's exploration of irregular migrations from North Africa to Europe. They even propose a global view (directly related to a holistic view in *Med-Thinking* terms) considering all the actors and new data methods to measure the process of irregular maritime migration into several steps, from having a global stock of irregular migrants to how to measure statistics of the sea routes from the countries of departure rather than arrival and even to how to have information of missing migrants (disappeared or drowned). Again, from the perspective of the countries of departure and from the point of view of new emigration policy configurations, Bousetta et al. also identify new migratory dynamics that request a revision of diaspora theories informing policies in Morocco.

2. ***Need to follow a Mediterranean reading of Methodological nationalism's critical approach and adopt a multi-scale approach:*** Most contributions take a critical path toward states as the only legitimate actors of knowledge production. This epistemological positionalism takes different forms of expression. From the already mentioned Musette/Maamar's claim for exploring different evidences that are missed by states' dominance of data to Aubarell Solduga's contribution overviewing the Local and Regional Networks and their effects in the Euromed cooperation. These current research trends challenge the limits of the multilevel governance and the absence of Southern Mediterranean engagement. Fakhoury/Aitken's Lebanese case study also addresses these issues wondering how notions

of national identity and otherness materialise, interlace, and collide in the Mediterranean. They exemplify Lebanon's political regime as a system that contributes to building the figure of the refugee as a disrupter to Lebanon's national identity. Finally, even if it is not the central focus, Boubakri's contributions deal with the issue of how the fact that Southern countries are becoming countries of migration may affect hierarchical political structures and division of competencies, contributing to a much more decentralised political regime such as Tunisia.

3. ***The determining place of the historical argument in the research of Mediterranean migrations:*** The historical argument plays a leading role in this volume. Hatleskog Tjønn/Gabrielsen Jumbert's analysis of Italy-Libya relations over time agrees on the fundamental importance of history in understanding current South/North migration agreements and policies. The Mediterranean is a landscape of past and current treaties and geo-political agreements that must be considered to understand whatever North-South relationship today. History also sheds light to why it is difficult to reduce the asymmetrical power relations in the Mediterranean. This argument appears also in Ayoub's contribution. History shapes the negative media and public opinion agenda and often explains their interlinks with political debates. The historical argument also shapes the focus of Rodríguez-Peña analysis on the continuities and discontinuities of Spanish social transformation through migration. It also frames the whole analysis of Marseille conducted by Gastaut. In this case, history helps to understand how the image of the city is constructed in its relationship to otherness. Gastaut also argues that the imaginary of the welcoming city results from a narrative created by historians, along with political and cultural elites. The fact that we must historically situate today's migrations within a postcolonial framework also has a critical dimension of vindication. There are also some meta-historical insights invitations, since there is also a selective list of historical moments that may influence and change current (im)mobility patterns. For instance, Boubakri's contribution constructs its argument considering the Arab spring but also the Post-covid period. We can also take some other turning point dates such as the global financial crisis of 2008, the 2015 refugee mass migration arrival, and Ukraine's refugees more recently. All of them probably make up what we may call the "collective memory" of Mediterranean migration studies.

4. ***Exploring the impacts of more than a decade of externalization of EU policies and geo-political conditionality strategies:*** Another research track is directly related to the impacts of externalizations of EU policies and conditionality in the Mediterranean countries of the South. These are linked to this double EU morality of requesting more border control and human rights infringements with democratization and development narratives that frame both research and politics in Mediterranean migrations today. Here again, there is a claim for narrative theory-revision. For instance, Faustini's contribution directly criticises this EU Janus face narrative and even adventures that the contrary is happening: conditionality and EU external migration policies have a negative impact on democratization processes in Morocco, and even contribute to a certain "democratic ralentism". These concerns are also shared by the research framework of

Demirbas/Miliou-Theocharaki's case study analysing the EU-Turkey Deal. Their contribution highlights how political solipsism is not only a narrative-building denunciation but have also practical consequences. This is not only a matter of tightening border regimes and new laws of deterrence, but how Eurocentrism perpetuates precarity when it grounds externalisation and selection of migrants. Within this same research avenue, we can place Panebianco/Cannata's contribution on (im)mobility partnerships. The democratic argument here continues to play a vital role but under a different complementary angle. They highlight how European Neighbourhood Policies (ENP), focusing on the case of Mobility Partnerships (MPs) in the Southern neighbourhood, are in fact trade-offs between cooperation with authoritarian governments to ensure stability and democracy promotion. This can be better framed, they argue, under a stability-democracy dilemma, contending that the EU is unable to promote democracy in the Southern neighbourhood via 'more mobility'.

5. ***The rural-urban nexus is still a framework explaining human (im)mobility in the twenty-first century:*** The traditional rural-urban geographical and socio-demographic divide has diverse functioning in understanding current new patterns of Mediterranean migrations (im)mobilities. For example, in her Tunisian case study, Sobczak-Szelc reminds us that the internal rural-urban framework explains most initial human mobility patterns today in Tunisia. Her particular focus on how hydropower production causes changes in both the social and natural environments and how this shapes what she identifies as a benefit-sharing system incorporating, however, new functioning of this traditional rural-urban nexus. If this is a traditional frame, according to European human mobility tradition, the reasons are quite current, since climate change and environmental constraints, together with socio-economic factors, influence today the rural-urban (im)mobility. The fact is that agriculture faces environmental constraints that were probably not so pressing factors in previous historical periods. This agricultural perspective is also present in Papadopoulos/Fratsea's chapter on Greece, but rather differently. For them, there is a change of direction and urban-rural (im)mobility is also becoming a current trend in need of deep analysis. We can even say following their rationale, that a rural-rural (im)mobility from Southern rural environment to a Northern rural environment is in need of more research. As they argue, agriculture still holds an important position in the Mediterranean economy and society, while rural localities maintain productive functions and amenities that attract international migration. This means that Mediterranean migrations to rural areas have emerged as a major research field in the study of migrant labor in non-urban, peripheral, agricultural, or remote regions. Summarising this research track: rural and urban frameworks cannot be considered in their traditional simpler form, but display a multiplicity of spatial angles, and cannot be disconnected from environmental change of humanity today.
6. ***There is a need to focus on particularly vulnerable migratory profiles in the Mediterranean:*** Particular profiles, such as women and youths, are also addressed and invite us to pay more attention to their vulnerabilities. Ismaili Idrissi/Touhtou's chapter on mobilities among marginalised youths in Morocco

focuses on how this particular profile of migrant constructs their lives incorporating the will to migrate as a socialization process. This migration culture is reproduced by institutional agents in Morocco and then a certain link exists between mobility culture, structural reproduction and youths' agency. Following a similar rationale, Paynter's contribution to gendered asylum in the Black Mediterranean also illustrates the need to work on particular profiles. In this case, intersectionality also plays a relevant role in fixing her focus: sex trafficking is the outcome of border-gendered and racialised policies.

7. ***The need to re-interpret the Mediterranean in light of migrations:*** Most contributions invite us to explore new ways of interpreting the Mediterranean as a space of interconnection through human mobilities. Geha, for instance, argues that the diaspora frames the Mediterranean as a symbolic and activist space of relations. This new space of interpretation also frames the contribution of Fakhoury/Aitken, who suggests handling the Mediterranean through alternative spaces of hospitality incorporating the activity of civic and humanitarian actors, refuting the conception of a closed, excluding citizenship and linked to sectarianism. The Mediterranean as a heterotopic space where exclusion and inclusion co-constitute each other is also addressed. This new way of interpreting the Mediterranean space drives also Buhr/Desille/Fonseca's contribution. In this case, the focus points towards trans-Mediterranean digital space of communication, where time and space become unidimensional realities. These contributors state that ICTs have proved crucial for the maintenance of long-distance familial arrangements, for the mobilization of migrants' social networks, and for managing remittances, but also for shaping migration decisions and the choice of destinations. Migrants' digital practices and the ways they portray the places they use - by posting, commenting, sharing, and leaving online reviews - add up to an ICT-supported imaginary of the city fed by residents, migrants, and other visitors alike.

A scientific disclaimer terminates these conclusions. The fragmentation of knowledge, without its accumulation, hinders the construction of theory and the scientific development of any study. In fact, this volume has attempted to take a step forward in the improvement of research on Mediterranean migrations by bringing together in a single book the new trends in the research agenda on Mediterranean migrations. Of course, they are not exhaustive, but merely indicative, and much remains to be done to develop *Med-Thinking* in migration studies.

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