

## CHAPTER 1

# Introduction: Locating the Mediterranean

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### Abstract

In recent years, the Mediterranean region has reasserted itself in the world: popular uprisings have unsettled long-standing political regimes, economic crises have generated precarity, and nationalist movements have reified some borders while condemning others. The circulation and stagnation of people, ideas, and objects provoked by these events draw attention to regional connections and separations that, in turn, challenge strict geopolitical renderings of Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. In considering this resurgence of interest in the Mediterranean, this introduction asks: what role does 'location' play in our conception of region and region-formations? What kinds of locations are generated in the contemporary Mediterranean? How do historical, legal, political, and social connections and separations shape the experience of being located somewhere in particular? Furthermore, the introduction explores how, by placing in dialogue

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diverse approaches and traditions, this collective volume works on two levels at once. First, each contribution posits its own Mediterranean ‘constellation’. Second, the collective volume presents a wider understanding of what historically inclined anthropologists might conceive of as a Mediterranean ‘constellation’. In doing this, the introduction proposes a theoretical apparatus through which we can understand cultural and historical values of region and region-making in and beyond the Mediterranean.

## Two (Mediterranean) Locations

In Alexandria, Egypt, tucked behind the Bibliotheca Alexandrina, across from the Greek school campus, and next to the old tram line, there is an Italian care home (Casa di Riposo, see [Image 1.1](#)). The home was built in 1928 to house over 200 elderly or disabled Italians and then expanded several years later when there was need for additional rooms. At the time, there were over 30,000 Italian residents in Alexandria (out of around 55,000 in all of Egypt). When inaugurated, the Italian architects, charity organisations, and diplomats dedicated the Casa di Riposo to Mussolini and named it after the then king, Vittorio Emanuele III. In 1946, after the collapse of the Fascist govern-



**Image 1.1:** Casa di Riposo Vittorio Emanuele III, Alexandria, Egypt.

Photo: Joseph John Viscomi.

ment and the declaration of the Italian Republic, Vittorio Emanuele III departed Italy for Egypt where he died one year later; his corpse remained buried behind the altar of St Catherine's Cathedral of Alexandria until it was repatriated in 2017. After the Second World War, an ageing community populated the care home as many of the younger Italian residents left Egypt. By the mid-1960s, over 40,000 Italians had departed, and the community continued to shrink as the walls around the old people's home grew. In 2013, inside the Casa's emptied halls, where around 20 elderly Italians lived (nearly one third have since passed away), a number of residents discussed past and present revolutionary futures. Outside, the sounds of demonstrators chanting '*yisqut yisqut hukm al-murshid*' (down, down with the rule of the [Muslim Brotherhood's] Supreme Guide) filled the street. Inside, with idyllic nostalgia, three residents debated the 'turn' (*svolta*) away from the 'cosmopolitan' Mediterranean worlds that, they claimed, had dissipated between 1948 and 1967. In this post-war 'turn' away from 'cosmopolitanism', Egyptian and Italian governments had strengthened political, economic, and military ties. After the 1952 coup d'état, the two governments negotiated relations in terms of a history of cultural and political exchange. Even following the 2016 death of Giulio Regeni, the Italian PhD student abducted and tortured by Egyptian security agents while conducting doctoral research in Egypt, these relations have been evoked and reinforced while material indexes of this past, such as the Italian care home, are emptied and resignified within Alexandria's urban landscape.

Some 200 kilometres south, in the heart of the capital, Cairo, boys and men play recreational football on a small artificial-grass pitch inside the courtyard of an old school building. Less than a kilometre from Cairo's iconic Tahrir Square and adjacent to Muhammad Mahmoud Street – famous for clashes between protesters and security forces in 2011 and 2012 – the shiny green football field was constructed by a thrifty entrepreneur, Mustafa, in 2017 (see [Image 1.2](#)).<sup>1</sup> The surrounding buildings are much older. The school was originally founded by French educators in 1909 but brought under state control after the 1956 Suez Crisis; the present building – combining European and Islamic architectural features to showcase the merging of two worlds – was built in the 1930s. Until the late 1960s, all teaching was carried out by French teachers, many of whom resided in dormitories in the school's upper floors. These days, the European pedagogues are



**Image 1.2:** Mustafa's football pitch, Cairo, Egypt.

Photo: Lena Malm.

long gone, although the school – run as a cooperative by the pupils' parents – is still known as a 'French school' (part of the teaching takes place in French). Over the last decades, the school complex has been expanded multiple times. In the 1980s, the world-famous Egyptian architect Hassan Fathy designed a nursery that featured Nubian-styled domes and materials ensuring natural year-around ventilation. A while later, a small kiosk was built that allows students to buy snacks and soft drinks during breaks. The football pitch constitutes the latest addition. Mustafa worked hard to finance it through informal credit circles (*gama'iyyat*) involving friends and family all over Egypt and as far away as Northern Europe. The grass comes from a factory in Osmaniye, south-eastern Turkey. It was constructed by a family-run company who holds the exclusive licence to import this high-quality but relatively cheap grass to Egypt. Mustafa rents the pitch from the school on a five-year-long contract. From 4pm until long after midnight, seven days a week, he in turn rents it out to coaches running football academies or groups of friends playing the game for fun. On any given night, one might see boys and men playing in match shirts representing clubs from every corner of the Mediterranean: Egypt's

al-Ahly and al-Zamalek; the Tunisian champions Taragi; Galatasaray and Beşiktaş from Istanbul; Real Madrid, Atletico Madrid, Barcelona, Marseille, Rome, Milan, and more.

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The care home in Alexandria and the football pitch in central Cairo are both well demarcated spaces located squarely within Egypt's political borders. At the same time, the qualities of their *located-ness* stem from a multitude of relations that well exceed the confines of the post-1952 Egyptian nation state. Bringing together elderly Italians, Italian, French, Islamic, and Nubian architectures, imperial nostalgia, French curricula, Turkish artificial grass, and match shirts of football clubs in Spain, Tunisia, Italy, and Turkey, the two sites are not delimited by national political boundaries; they extend back in time to moments when borders had different meanings and outwards in space to seemingly detached locations. In other words, the two locations only become meaningful within a complex meshwork of historical, material, and discursive links. They are constituted by multiple connections and separations, through time and across space.

Building on a long history of intellectual engagement in the Mediterranean region, *Locating the Mediterranean* brings together ethnographic examinations of projects and processes that make locations and render them meaningful. The book's overarching aims are to highlight the centrality of located-ness in people's lives and to reinvigorate anthropological debates about the interplay between location and region-making. Our intervention is first and foremost empirical and ethnographic. From different theoretical and topographical angles, the volume's eight contributions illustrate how historical, legal, religious, economic, political, and social connections and separations shape the experience of being located 'somewhere in particular' in the geographical space commonly known as the Mediterranean region. This anthropological attention to the local allows us to see the region – and region-making, more general – anew. The volume's chapters demonstrate how qualitatively distinct threads conjoin (or dissolve) to give locations value, usefulness, and political charge.

## Locating Location in Anthropology

When 'the local' arose as a key concern for anthropologists in the 1980s and 1990s, it did so in opposition to other units of analysis that ostensibly did not do the job. In an era combining a devastating crisis of representation (Clifford and Marcus 1986) with expanding interests in globalisation (Hannerz 1989), transnationalism (Hannerz 1996), cultural flows (Appadurai 1996), and multisitedness (Marcus 1995), the disciplinary habit to premise comparative analyses on fieldwork in and on presumably coherent 'culture areas', 'societies', or 'nations' inhering in discrete geographical spaces appeared more and more suspect (Clifford 1988; Gupta and Fergusson 1997a, 1997b; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002, 2003). Efforts to overcome the discipline's looming crisis proceeded along multiple paths. Whereas some anthropologists turned ethnographic attention to projects and processes of scale-making that render global, regional, and local cultures comprehensible in the first place (Gupta and Ferguson 1997b; Mazzarella 2004; Tsing 2000; Wilk 1995), others advocated a re-envisioning of 'the local' as an analytical category. One early blueprint was Anthony Cohen's work on rural Britain (1982, 1986, 1987), in which an 'anthropology of locality' ultimately aimed at deconstructing the purportedly hegemonic and homogenising industrial nation-state by highlighting symbolic construction and reproduction of idiosyncratic 'local' communities (see also Knight 1994).<sup>2</sup> Arjun Appadurai's proposal to reconceive anthropology in line with a new globalised, mediatised, postcolonial, and postnational world order is another case in point (1990, 1996). Appadurai understood locality as an always fragile 'phenomenological quality' or 'structure of feeling' produced in 'disjunctures' between deterritorialised 'scapes' through dialectical work between the materiality of local spaces and meaning-making local subjects.<sup>3</sup> His approach inspired numerous studies of the interplay between, on the one hand, belonging, memory, and agency and, on the other, the making of 'local' spaces in the midst of global flows (e.g. Ghannam 2002; Korff 2003; Lovell 1998).

Until today, anthropological examinations of locality have taken primary interest in local subjects leading local lives in local communities. Through a shift of conceptual emphasis from *locality* to *location*, the present volume departs from previous preoccupations with identity and belonging and inverts central optics of ethnography.

In *Locating the Mediterranean*, we begin by examining questions of *where* spaces are *located*. Each ethnographic chapter aims to arrive at a characterisation of how particular locations are articulated and realised through intersecting processes of (dis)entanglement and by socio-historical actors. Only thereafter do we consider how the particularities of this located-ness shape lives, experiences, and identities. This adjustment of analytical stress should be read neither as a retreat to a primordial and untouched local field site nor as a reliance on a fixed spatiality. Relationality is inherent to the locations that we consider, some connecting to distant elsewheres and others mired in the complexity of microspatial particularity. More precisely, the volume attends to the constitution of what anthropologist Sarah Green calls ‘relative locations’ (Green 2005, 13–14; 2013a; 2013b; 2019) – i.e. the way in which a location’s quality of being ‘somewhere in particular’ results from connections and separations to other locations (see also Gupta and Ferguson 1997a).<sup>4</sup> When making sense of such processes of relative positioning, it is generative to delineate how different *spatial logics* intersect (or do not) to make a location what it is. The individual chapters illustrate how legal codes, bureaucratic organisations, urban planning, migration, trade networks, infrastructure, narrations of historical events, and political borders divide up, connect, and separate space, how distinct logics overlap, and how locations – always relative, multiple, and contingent – are carved out at their interstices. Sometimes the spatial logics are shown to be additive and cumulative, at other times they are dissonant and tension-inducing (see Green 2005, 128–48).

*Locating the Mediterranean* understands locations as constituted by a multiplicity of connections and separations. This approach to the local necessitates empirical examinations of processes, logics, and events that ostensibly unfold *elsewhere*, across the Mediterranean region and at times far beyond it. For example, Douzina-Bakalaki (Chapter 4) draws attention to the expansion outwards from a spectacular Greek bridge said to link ‘nowhere much to nowhere at all’ towards an imaginary Europe based on *longue durée* historical narratives that situate Greece at the nexus between East and West. Soto Bermant (Chapter 3) and Elbek (Chapter 2) both demonstrate how grand projects of ‘European’ geopolitics are accentuated and collapse into the remote border locations of Melilla and Lampedusa, respectively. In both cases, remoteness is a measure of distance from and

centrality within broader geographical imaginaries. The spatial logics that Lähteenaho (Chapter 7) examines draw on French imperial and national legal codes but take shape and form materially in the location of Beirut's last remaining public beach. This is one of several chapters in which urban landscapes demonstrate the important and complex palimpsest processes converging on and defining locations. In other cases, the ethnography draws upon past movements to understand ethnographic locations. Bullen (Chapter 5) and Su (Chapter 8) begin on specific streets and neighbourhoods to understand how mobility cultivates relational meaning for social actors living within specific material conditions in Marseille and Istanbul. Mobility, then, is more than individual movement through space; it spans and forms life-worlds as well as regions. Russo (Chapter 6) and Green (Chapter 9), finally, illustrate how institutional transformations in colonial and postcolonial settings have resignified the values of religious icons in Tunisia and animal lives across the sea. These cases show how institutions generate meaning in locations but also elaborate wider regional configurations.

All of these inquiries are rooted in the position afforded by specific locations. By starting from the question of *where* and with an interrogation of what it means to be *here* and not *there*, they spotlight connections, separations, and spatial logics of inclusion and exclusion refracted from a particular *somewhere*. As we shall return to below, this ethnographic insistence on standing still in a world that twists and turns gives us a unique vantage point from which to locate the Mediterranean anew. By zooming in on the constitution of specific Mediterranean locations, we are inevitably also zooming out in order to re-envision region-making in and beyond the sea. Before returning to these locations and the regions that they spawn, however, we shall consider the approaches and traditions that have developed in and around the anthropology in/of the Mediterranean.

### Which Mediterranean?

Fernand Braudel's *La Méditerranée et le Monde Méditerranéen à l'Époque de Philippe II* (1949) challenged scholars to see how distinct historical processes shaped landscapes in and around the sea. His approach highlighted ecological, social, and political processes that together constituted the Mediterranean worlds of the 16th century. To do this, Braudel directed his analysis away from the events that punc-

tuated historical narratives. His layered approach instead sought to articulate the totality of the region through three distinct, yet interconnected temporalities: event history, social or economic histories, and the *longue durée* of geohistorical time. This temporal division of labour has been interpreted unsurprisingly as hierarchically determined, especially given the analytical space he devotes to the *longue durée*. Importantly, Braudel's multidimensional approach also undermined the political borders that have conventionally framed historical analyses (Trevor Roper 1972, 467).

Braudel initially wrote of the 16th-century Mediterranean from the confines of prison in Mainz during the Second World War, where his own experience of historical time was shaped as much by his experience of the war as it was by more protracted processes ('slower temporalities') such as the 'colonial sea' of the French empire in North Africa (Borutta and Gekas 2012; Braudel 2009, 181). Howard Caygill argues that '[t]ime for the detainees was a burden, not only because of the dreary routines of the prison regime but also because of the sense of being detached from crucial historical events and helpless to intervene in them' (2004, 152). Braudel's specific *location* in space and time fostered his thinking through the complex manner by which political histories impose themselves upon the so-called slower temporalities. One might suggest that his was an attempt to locate the present within (or to dislocate it from) a more complex historical trajectory of the violence of the Second World War (Braudel 2009, 182). The threefold temporality at the heart of Braudel's intellectual project, therefore, located his experience – as well as those that constituted the 16th-century worlds about which he wrote – through a set of (temporal) relations.<sup>5</sup> In a similar multidimensional fashion, the present volume aims to articulate location by paying attention to the complex overlapping, incorporation, and obfuscation of distinct social and historical processes.

After the publication of Braudel's *La Méditerranée* (1949), the Mediterranean (and especially its Southern European shores) emerged as a site of increasing anthropological importance. Ethnographers in the region employed categorical containers that situated, in some way, the ethnographic present upon a backdrop of timeless sharedness often buttressed by allusions to Braudel's *longue durée*. These containers – honour and shame (Campbell 1964; Gilmore 1987; Peristiany 1966; Schneider 1971), amoral familism (Banfield 1958), patron–client networks (Boissevain 1966; Brown 1977; Gellner and Waterbury 1977;

Gilmore 1982) – depicted societies connected through deep-rooted structures that in turn determined conditions of possibility for a kind of society – peasantry – located in a grey zone between ‘civilised’ Europe and the ‘primitive’ South. In line with Braudel’s dissatisfaction with a nation-centred (and political event-oriented) historiography, anthropologists such as Julian Pitt-Rivers posited the Mediterranean as a regional framework that could challenge privileged national cultures (1963, 1977). Indeed, it was Pitt-Rivers’s Mediterranean, which cut across political boundaries of nation states and framed the region as a ‘zone’, that John Davis, in *People of the Mediterranean* (1977), suggested offers ‘distinctive opportunities to be *comparative and historical*’ (10, our emphasis).

The comparative project at the heart of that nascent ethnographic interest (Boissevain 1979) rested on troubling premises. For Davis, history was a matrix upon which comparison within the contemporary Mediterranean was made possible. It was a unifying backdrop, yet the ethnographic observations facilitated by these historical connections were atomistic and disjointed. He claimed that peoples ‘of’ the Mediterranean ‘have been trading and talking, conquering and converting, marrying and migrating for six or seven thousand years’, and then he posed the question ‘is it unreasonable to assume that some anthropological meaning can be given to the term “Mediterranean”?’ (1977, 13). Davis’s Mediterranean was constituted by means of these interactions, historical and social in their substance. Comparison as a mechanism for realising this complexity thus functioned teleologically on the basis of that substructure. Davis’s historical Mediterranean is flat and atemporal, and, in consequence, his anthropological one is atomistic and fragmented.<sup>6</sup> He reduced the multidimensionality of Braudel’s Mediterranean and installed in its place a trajectory wherein the past presupposes the present, perpetuating the myth of a cultural area at once written out of time and yet determined by it.<sup>7</sup>

Furthermore, just as Braudel was deeply embedded within the colonial sea when he conceived of his project, and later Nazi-occupied France and the Algerian War in its writing and initial reception (Borutta and Gekas 2012; Dobie 2014), these post-Second World War ethnographic iterations of the Mediterranean interplayed with a world that had become strategically central to burgeoning American imperialism and NATO’s Cold War geopolitics. The comparative study of peoples ‘of’ the Mediterranean located the region uncomfort-

ably between democracy and the need for democratisation (Schneider 2012; Silverman 2001). While its historical determination predisposed its contemporary importance as a region, the way in which the sea was studied systematically obscured dynamism and connectivity across space and time.

Whether we speak of Pitt-Rivers's 'metaphysical', transcendent Mediterranean (1963, 1977) or Davis's 'atomistic' one (1977), as Dionigi Albera has observed (2006, 113), both models were founded upon comparative frameworks that divide the ethnographic present and the historical past in arbitrary ways. Both scholars also employed the language of 'cultural area' despite their outspoken opposition to the idea (Albera and Blok 2001, 18). In this sense, they left little room for the layered and multiple experiences of immigrant arrivals, embodied geopolitics, marketplaces, bridges and transportation networks, urban landscapes, and human and non-human border-crossings. In short, the foundational texts of Mediterranean anthropology paid scant attention to the actual connections and separations that constitute Mediterranean *locations*, thus taking for granted the 'Mediterranean' as a regional framework by functioning on the premise that the Mediterranean itself is already *there*.

Not long after Davis's *People of the Mediterranean* was published, Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978) inverted the frames through which scholars wrote about Others. This found its Mediterranean expression in Michael Herzfeld's classic critique of the 'horns' of the Mediterraneanist dilemma, which all but silenced discussion of regional sharedness (see Herzfeld 1980, 1984). The epistemological shift to perceive of taken-for-granted analytical categories as constructed (Pina-Cabral 1989) made it possible to think of the Mediterranean as a contested category in itself – a move that continues to inform postcolonial and cultural studies of/in the region (see, for example, Dobie 2014; elhariry and Talbayev 2018; Proglío et al 2020; Smythe 2018; Yashin 2014). As a result, the Mediterranean became a historically contingent category rather than one generated in comparison.<sup>8</sup> Later, and turning the ethnographic concept in on itself, 'Mediterraneanism' came to be interpreted as part of a politicised cultural repertoire by means of which sociocultural hierarchies could be reconfigured (Herzfeld 2005).

During the 1990s, attention turned towards the more complex relations between past and present *in* and *around* the Mediterranean, without much pretence to regional generalisation or comparison

(on different sides of this moment, see Behar 1991; Leontidou 1990; Sutton 2000). With scholars aware of Herzfeld's critique of regional comparisons, and at the height of the age of ethnographic relativism (accounted for above), interplay across and between sites specifically located in a Mediterranean configuration remained below the surface, at least until the late 1990s and early 2000s when attempts were made in Aix-en-Provence to revive the regional debate and justify the viability of a Mediterranean anthropology (Albera 2006; Albera, Blok, and Bromberger 2001; Bromberger 2006, 2007; Sacchi and Viazzo 2013). Reflecting on earlier controversies, Sydel Silverman noted a colleague's reflection on 'the possibility that the very concept of a "Mediterranean anthropology" is no longer useful'. In response, she argued that indeed migration, nationalisms, the reconfiguration of state and society, and globalisation are all 'processes ... *still worked out in localities*' (2001, 53, emphasis ours). To what extent does Silverman's insight pave the way for an anthropology that embraces abstracted regional frameworks *and* specific locations? That is the point to which this volume turns.

## Mediterranean Locations, Mediterranean Constellations

*Locating the Mediterranean* is guided by an attempt to rethink regional constellations by taking locations, always relative and constituted by particular connections, separations, and spatial logics, as our starting points. Constellations enter the analysis in two ways and on two different scales. First, they do so in the individual chapters, which offer insights into particular locations, the connections and separations that bring them into being, and their often independently emergent constellations. Second, they do so through the collective and accumulative project of *Locating the Mediterranean's* eight following chapters, which constitutes a Mediterranean constellation in its own right. We contend that our approach unveils powerful hierarchies that give particular form to a particular region. The locations with which we began – the Italian care home in Alexandria and the football pitch in Cairo – together conjure a range of connections and separations that give each location, and the region, meaning and value. Therefore, we take into account Silverman's 2001 observation that processes of all scales by necessity are worked out in localities, but we do so by engaging with more recent reassessments of the analytical value of regional

frameworks (e.g. Ben-Yehoyada 2017; Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot, and Silverstein 2020). In framing this volume, we ask: how do we move from micro interactions and dynamics worked out in specific locations, and characterised by particular cultural and historical worlds, into broader processes that are not always visibly (or materially) connected? How can we elaborate such an approach without sacrificing one perspective for the other (that is, without insisting on innate comparability or incommensurable difference)? And, importantly, how do these multi-directional processes locate places, and regions, within particular sets of relations through space and time?

Our approach is inspired in part by Nicholas Purcell and Peregrine Horden's path-breaking *The Corrupting Sea* (2000), with its strong focus on connectivity within and between the Mediterranean's many microregions. In developing a more complex study of the mechanisms of connection from micro-level processes to regional phenomena, from the ancient to the contemporary periods, Purcell and Horden have inspired a new wave of Mediterranean studies and a thorough rehashing of older conversations and debates (on the sea and its global histories, Abulafia 2011; on region-making, Ben-Yehoyada 2014; on postcolonial Mediterranean literary studies, Chambers 2008; on Mediterranean ports, Driessen 2005; on the Mediterranean city, Leontidou 2004, 2015, 2019; on critical theory and literary studies, elhariry and Talbayev 2018; on rethinking the broad field of Mediterranean studies, Harris 2005; Horden and Kinoshita 2014; on legal regimes in the 19th century, Marglin 2014; Sant Cassia and Schäfer 2005; on the Mediterranean viewed from its southern shores, Tucker 2019). These new works conjure a sea that circumvents homogeneity through its microregional complexity, one that is interconnected by transport and infrastructure, sociocultural perceptions, shared dependencies, and asymmetrical political forms of exchange. *The Corrupting Sea's* Mediterranean is not a region on the basis of its being the same everywhere, nor of shared historical processes manifesting in a generalisable present. Instead, its intellectual underpinnings aim to attend to the 'polybian problem' of 'making sense of more than one place at a time' (Purcell 2006). In doing so, processes of connection become ever more important in understanding region.

The resurgence in scholarly interest in the Mediterranean as a field of connections has also been spurred by a recent evocation of relations that connect space and time across the sea. The Mediterranean

has emerged as a site of negotiation for the century's most pressing concerns: the Barcelona Process in 1995 paved the way for Sarkozy's 2007 Union pour la Méditerranée; the 2011 revolutions and uprisings in the Middle East and North Africa stimulated popular revolts against global capitalism and austerity measures from Spain's *indignados* to Athens's Syntagma Square to Occupy Wall Street; the creation of 'Fortress Europe' and the Operation Mare Nostrum (OMN) sought to block migrant and refugee arrivals and externalise EU boundaries since the early 2000s; and the surge of right-wing nationalism following the 2008 economic recession and the migrant 'crisis' has recast the sea's northern shores within a discourse of civilisational conflict (Albahari 2015; Andersson 2014; Ben-Yehoyada 2015; Cabot 2014; Elliot 2021; Heller and Pezzani 2017; Knight 2015, 2021; Soto Bermant 2017). Scholarship in the region has also raised questions about how decolonisation after the Second World War has connected and separated places and peoples across borders through the lens of these abovementioned events and processes (Ballinger 2020; Malia Hom 2020; Lorcin and Shepard 2016; Viscomi 2019, 2020).<sup>9</sup>

A subsection of this outpouring of scholarly engagement explicitly addresses the constitution of the Mediterranean as a region. Naor Ben-Yehoyada's *The Mediterranean Incarnate* (2017), for example, examines sociopolitical geographies in the Mediterranean by arguing that scale-making processes of region formation are at play both in grand political projects, such as Sarkozy's Union, and in micro-level cultural, material and historical encounters, such as those between Sicilian and Tunisian fishermen.<sup>10</sup> We find Ben-Yehoyada's intervention a much-welcomed challenge to previous decades' epistemological hesitancy. Indeed, if it is true that 'the Mediterranean is back', as Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot, and Silverstein argue, then a revitalised field of Mediterranean studies must take seriously how processes of 'connection, movement, and relatedness' engender 'socio-cultural and ecological realities' that span, constitute and even exceed the region (2020, 1, 6).

The processes explored by scholars in this new 'wave' of Mediterranean studies are rich in connections. Yet, in an incisive critique of Purcell and Horden's approach to connectivity, Gadi Algazi asks: '[i]s connectivity the sum total of enabling natural conditions and techniques, of economic structures, cultural perceptions, and configurations of power that predispose agents to engage in exchange, or the end result of all of these forces?' (2006, 242; a similar critique has been levied by

Fentress and Fentress 2001). In other words, the stress on connectivity does not tell us much about constitutive processes. Does an emphasis on connectivity suggest a new form of ‘total history’ (a way of putting everything together into a whole image) or is it generative (emerging from existing, but not necessarily connected processes)? Is connectivity an analytic predisposition or is it an empirical result? These questions are left unanswered. A similar critique might be made about *The Mediterranean Incarnate*. Ben-Yehoyada’s Mediterranean is a region that connects, forms, and extends but which rarely dissolves, deforms, or breaks apart. For him and other scholars who follow travel, trade, transport links, shared vocabularies and infrastructure, the spotlight will always be on tying, knitting, and knotting rather than on dead ends, loose threads, and unfinished connections. In this framing, the ways in which the Mediterranean is contemporaneously an epitome of connectivity and mobility *and* one of the most deadly and heavily policed border risk sliding out of view.

Does an overemphasis on connectivity create gaps and biases in our knowledge of the material conditions of social life in the region? We argue that it does. In this volume, therefore, we are less concerned with connectivity per se and more focused on how *locations* are calibrated by *constellations* of money, materiality, movement, and stories that cross or do not cross the Mediterranean in space and through time. By constellation, and in accordance with Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot, and Silverstein (2020, 7), we refer to a specific, yet inevitably transforming arrangement of meanings and values that render a location legible or internally coherent. While partly a result of contingent spatial and temporal relations, a constellation is also constituted by separation. Locations are also constituted by deliberate processes of region *un*-making, by excluding other locations from a given constellation, or by being distinguished and situated within power-laden hierarchies. While attentive to the processes that Ben-Yehoyada calls ‘region formation’, our approach thus also highlights practices that intentionally work to *dissolve* region, to foster separation, and to generate remoteness.<sup>11</sup>

## Stepping into the Mediterranean

By examining constellations that incorporate connections and separations across space and time, the individual chapters and *Locating*

*the Mediterranean* as a whole demonstrate how Mediterranean locations affect and shape daily lives, practices, opportunities, and social and political conditions. Drawing on research in Lampedusa, Melilla, Nafpaktos/Lepanto, Marseille, Tunis, Beirut, Istanbul, and Mediterranean-wide networks of animal mobility, each chapter creates diverse kinds of distinctions between places and times and demonstrates how locations are actualised.

The first two chapters work through remote or isolated locations to understand such spatiotemporal constellations. In [Chapter 2](#), Elbek shows how Lampedusans depict their island's isolation in historical time and in the ethnographic present. In doing this, they understand their own isolation as pulled in multiple directions contemporaneously. Soto Bermant explores Spain's and the European Union's remote borders in Melilla in [Chapter 3](#), illustrating the enclave's role as distanced gatekeeper for Europe's centres of geopolitical power. The constellation that renders Melilla meaningful as a location is most clearly one where drastic separations and performative connections work in tandem.

The following two chapters use infrastructure – bridges and roads – to unravel temporal processes wrapped up in locations. In [Chapter 4](#), Douzina-Bakalaki examines how commemorative practices around the Battle of Lepanto situate Nafpaktos's changing locations vis-à-vis Europe and the Mediterranean. The constellation under scrutiny in the chapter combines history and geopolitics to locate Nafpaktos as a contemporary incarnation of Lepanto. Bullen ([Chapter 5](#)) looks at the social networks that intersect on one street in Marseille to understand the location of lives and practices in relation to French and Algerian shores. Her interlocutors are contemporaneously located along a busy urban road and in a Mediterranean region criss-crossed by history, travel, and postcolonial debates.

Chapters [6](#) and [7](#) concentrate more explicitly on constellations informed by colonial and postcolonial locations. Russo ([Chapter 6](#)) explores the rituals around the celebration of the Virgin Mary of Trapani in Tunisia to understand how its use has manifested La Goulette's religious diversity at different historical conjunctures. Through the cult that surrounds Notre Dame de Trapani, La Goulette is at the crossroad of spatial and temporal trajectories that define the city as a distinctly cosmopolitanism location. Lähteenaho ([Chapter 7](#)), then, shows how public spaces in Beirut are located through colonial and postcolonial

legal and bureaucratic regimes. Here, the location of the city's coastline is shown to be both relative and contested, an always-shifting sum of political struggles in the present and spatial logics of bygone eras that haunt the present.

The last two chapters turn to questions of mobility, each from radically different perspectives. In [Chapter 8](#), Su looks at how location, in relation to notions of belonging, creates possibilities for migrants in Istanbul to subvert social and political borders. It spotlights how the notion of *gurbet* (exile) is both an experience and a location, which fundamentally shapes ideas about masculinity. Green explores in [Chapter 9](#) the classificatory logics of locating animals in the Mediterranean region, in terms of both science and their actual travels, whose movements frequently evade political bordering regimes. Here, we see how the Mediterranean takes shape at the intersection of a multiplicity of spatial logics that only partly contain the region's unruly fauna.

By taking the unique vantage point in concrete locations, each chapter approaches Mediterranean constellations from a specific position, somewhere in particular. This ethnographic insistence on watching the world's complexity from an 'arbitrary' location (Candea 2007, 2010; see also Douzina-Bakalaki, [Chapter 4](#)) provides an analytical fix-point from which to 'cut the network' (Strathern 1996) and partially unravel the 'knotted' temporal and spatial threads (Viscomi 2020) that compose the constellation under consideration.<sup>12</sup> In keeping this dual perspective – on the one hand, specific locations; on the other hand, the Mediterranean as a regional constellation (especially visible in Green's contribution, [Chapter 9](#)) – we are able to explore located understandings of the Mediterranean, while still maintaining and, indeed, insisting that locations fluctuate and overlap in their meanings and values. We also demonstrate how multiple locations materialise and coexist in the same space, emphasising the centrality of certain locations while marginalising others. Bullen ([Chapter 5](#)) and Russo ([Chapter 7](#)), for instance, demonstrate how particular neighbourhoods and streets, in their material landscapes, evoke local and regional values that endow them with specific yet multiple meanings.

The shift from micro-level specificity to broader regional constellations is imbued with historical and cultural tensions that, although always beginning somewhere, often finish nowhere in particular. In embracing such an approach, *Locating the Mediterranean* aims to avoid several dichotomous interpretations that have long dominated

conversations about the Mediterranean. One such binary delineates proponents of the *reality* of the Mediterranean (as grounds for comparison) from those insisting on its constructed-ness (as a cultural tool to be employed, strategically or otherwise; see Herzfeld 1984, 2005). As the empirical material incorporated in this volume demonstrates, the Mediterranean *has* an undeniable material presence in infrastructure (Elbek, [Chapter 2](#)), cadastral archives (Lähteenaho, [Chapter 7](#)), border regimes (Soto Bermant, [Chapter 3](#)), and the regulatory frameworks of the World Organisation for Animal Health (Green, [Chapter 9](#)). Our aim, however, is to work towards its articulation *between* conceptual fields *and* material realities. To do so, we do not presuppose (or impose) the Mediterranean as a concept across the chapters. The Mediterranean might well be an ‘imagined’ or polysemic space (*al-bahr al-abyad al-mutawassat* [the white middle sea], *al-bahr al-malih* [the salt sea], *bahr al-rum* [the Roman sea], or localised nomenclature such as *bahr tanja* [the sea of Tangier], to draw from the recent work on the Mediterranean through Arab eyes; Matar 2019), yet there is, concurrently, one that is a material reality (for example, the political economic conditions described by Tabak 2008 and 2010). Moreover, we see the sea – in its conceptualisation *and* its empirical realities – as a product of locations cultivated to a significant degree by (European) imperial projects and projections (Borutta and Gekas 2012; Fogu 2018, 2020; Lorcin and Shepard 2016; Silverstein 2002). Like Proglío et al (2020), Proglío (2018) and Grimaldi (2019) show in their articulation of the Black Mediterranean, regional configurations demarcate lived and remembered paths across space and through time that interconnect migrants’ experiences and yet distinguish them from other experiences within a political contested Mediterranean (see also di Maio 2012).

Asymmetries of power between the northern and southern shores constitute another persistent and troubling binary. No doubt, Mediterranean studies has habitually adopted a distinctly northern perspective and European gaze. As literary scholar Roberto Dainotto notes, ‘Any Italian might write about the Mediterranean ... without bothering with citing Abdelkebir Khatibi, Albert Memmi, or Taieb Belghazi. For a Turkish or Algerian author, it is instead impossible (or suicidal) not to confront the “Mediterranean” canonised in European literature’ (2003, 7). Recent efforts to remedy this asymmetry have typically highlighted how the Mediterranean has been understood, created,

and mapped by people populating its southern (and eastern) – that is, Arab, Muslim, and African – shores (Ardizzoni and Ferme 2015; Kahlaoui 2018; Tucker 2019; Wick 2014). While we recognise that this is a praiseworthy and vital move, we also identify a risk of becoming trapped in the loathed binary division that one wants to challenge. Singling out the north–south divide as *the* fundamental principle that has to be broken down by necessity emphasises certain differences (i.e. religious and linguistic) while flattening other, ‘internal’ nuances<sup>13</sup>: how similar are Mediterranean experiences in ‘northern’ countries such as Greece and Spain? In Lebanon and Morocco? In cities such as Naples and Palermo? Or, as we began, in Alexandria and Cairo? Due to its insistence on examining relative locations, the chapters in *Locating the Mediterranean* aim to sidestep this impasse. Our minute analyses of the connections and separations that locate actors and processes somewhere in particular demonstrate that north-vs-south is but one of many logics determining where Mediterranean locations are located.<sup>14</sup> Sometimes (e.g. Soto Bermant, [Chapter 3](#); Douzina-Bakalaki, [Chapter 4](#); Su, [Chapter 8](#)) what is West and what is Rest *is* key for the experiences of located-ness under scrutiny; in other instances (e.g. Elbek, [Chapter 2](#); Bullen, [Chapter 5](#); Russo, [Chapter 6](#); Lähteenaho, [Chapter 7](#); Green, [Chapter 9](#)) other logics – infrastructural, religious, legal, scientific – play more decisive roles. Rather than assuming that the division between a European/Christian North and an African/Muslim South constitutes the region’s hegemonic divide, then, the volume allows localised encounters to determine what is pertinent and what is not.

‘Mediterranean modernity’ constitutes another long-standing field of contestation. To what extent is it possible to imagine and live modern Mediterranean lives, given the region’s associations with a golden, pre-modern age and the fact that it was conceptualised as an antidote to north-western Europe as the epitome of modernity? Is the notion of Mediterranean modernity a contradiction in terms, leaving contemporary Mediterranean subjects forever nostalgic for a lost past? How could a modern version of the sea be discursively and materially re-erected (Ben-Yehoyada 2014, 2017; Chambers 2008; elhariry and Talbayev 2018; Goldwyn and Silverman 2016; Tucker 2019; Yashin 2014)? Once again, we do not question the relevance of these questions but ask what they potentially obfuscate when taken as the premise for ethnographic research (see Russo’s engagement with nostalgia,

Chapter 6). As much as the region has been historically constructed as modern Europe's internal other, we note that this is a positioned and partial perspective. For many people, the Mediterranean instead represents an accessible vision of modernity (Elliot 2021; Schielke 2015) or a path to it (Douzina-Bakalaki, Chapter 4). In the wake of the 2008 economic crisis, cross-Mediterranean identities and solidarities might be more likely to conjure a shared sense of precarity and marginalisation than would nostalgia for a pre-modern past (Elbek, Chapter 2). Our focus on locations gestures to a different set of questions and a different kind of region. Examining connections and separations, our Mediterranean transpires in material and discursive constellations that might or might not encompass the question of modernity and the nostalgia elicited by it. This circumventing manoeuvre does not imply that we propose a wholly synchronic Mediterranean detached from historical time.<sup>15</sup> By contrast, one of the volume's primary interests is to expose how spaces and times get folded or knotted into one another (for example, Douzina-Bakalaki's and Russo's contributions, Chapters 4 and 6). And, yet, whether or not modernity, or the lack thereof, is implicated in these Mediterranean constellations must be an empirical question. It should not be one posed at the outset.

We hope that *Locating the Mediterranean* opens the path for an anthropology both *in* and *of* the Mediterranean (see Horden and Purcell 2000), and that it does so without relying on comparison as the primary methodological approach. We recognise that comparison always creeps into a collected volume; yet, taking that insight with 'a pinch of salt', as anthropologist Matei Candea has suggested, the volume seeks to foreground empirical connections or processes that *lead to* comparison rather than begin with conceptual prefigurations (for more on this, see Candea 2018, and the [Epilogue](#) in this volume). As outlined above, anthropologists committed to the region's viability have, since Herzfeld's scathing critique, been at pains to justify why the comparative project is worthwhile. Arguably, doubts about the regional framework's very possibility have, over the last decades, troubled Mediterraneanist anthropologists more than any other regionally assembled community of scholars. While there has been no dearth of groundbreaking anthropological work in various parts of the Mediterranean region, scholars have been hesitant both to label themselves 'Mediterraneanists' and to address broader questions about region formation. For reasons that would require another book to disentangle, it has been

much less problematic for anthropologists working in Egypt or Tunisia to place themselves with bodies of scholarship labelled as ‘Middle Eastern’ or ‘North African’. Could ethnographic research premised on locations and the connections and separations that sustain them provide a way out of this impasse? We are convinced that it could, but only if the question of *what* the Mediterranean *is* is substituted by that of *where* the sea *is located*. The volume ultimately proposes that ‘Mediterranean’ – and, arguably, any other regional label – can function as a generative framework for analysis if it is studied as malleable, transforming and performative *constellations* fostered in specific *locations*. As each contribution to this volume illustrates, the study of locations – relative, connected, separated, overlapping – makes visible constellations that constitute actually existing Mediterraneans. In this sense, *Locating the Mediterranean* is accumulative. The ethnographic chapters that we now turn to do not provide Mediterranean ‘examples’ but rather offer windows into expansive Mediterranean worlds.

## Notes

- 1 Mustafa is a pseudonym.
- 2 This is the same moment in which ‘nation’ and ‘nationalism’ underwent intellectual scrutiny, best epitomised in Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (1983) and Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds.), *The Invention of Tradition* (1983).
- 3 This stems in part from a long-standing critique within cultural studies, such as Raymond Williams’s reading of the concentration on urban locations as delimiting historical and cultural understandings of modernity in *The Country and the City* (1975).
- 4 Although our project involves a certain degree of what theorist Henri Lefebvre calls ‘spatialization’ – or ‘the production of space’ – we seek to go beyond that analytical framework to understand how various spaces might be used to constitute specific locations in relation to others. For us, then, location is a more central and palpable concept, in contrast to an abstracted understanding of socio-spatial production. See Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space* (1991) for a full elaboration of his ideas.
- 5 Caygill importantly points to Braudel’s critique of Bergson by noting that Braudel ‘compares the history of events to a film trailer’, in which, however ‘gripping they may be, these trailers never tell us the whole film, all of the story (*histoire*)’ (2004, 157n22).
- 6 Purcell and Horden make a similar observation (2000, 467). They also importantly note that anthropologists in this period almost entirely neglected to give serious consideration to one key historically informed ethnographic work: Evans-Pritchard’s *The Sanusi of Cyrenaica* (1949).

- 7 See also Purcell and Horden's discussion on *Cristo si è fermato a Eboli* (2000, 463).
- 8 There are, of course, importance resonances with later works that challenged the assumed concreteness of geographical specificity; see e.g., Lewis and Wigen's *The Myth of Continents* (1997). Perhaps nowhere better is this encapsulated than in Jane Schneider's edited volume *Italy's 'Southern Question': Orientalism in One Country* (1998).
- 9 Similar insights on regional connectivity have formed the basis of a thorough reassessment of the cultural, political, and religious categories that shaped early modern and long-19th-century contexts of slavery, piracy, nationalism, and the circulation of political ideas; see Greene 2002; Hershenson 2018; Isabella and Zanou 2015; White 2017; Zanou 2018.
- 10 For further anthropological discussions on the production of scales and scalability, see e.g., Mazzarella 2004; Tsing 2000, 2012; Wilk 1995.
- 11 By emphasising this duality between connection and separation, we are not interested in describing the existence of or relation between points of a network, as is the dominant analytical approach in actor network theory; see Latour 2005. Rather, we aim to consider how these two processes (connection and separation) can give shape to constellations that emanate from and at the same time constitute particular locations.
- 12 As Matei Candea has argued (2007), this is an approach that both builds on and deviates from multisited methodologies that 'follow' the movement of things, concepts, or people across geographical space.
- 13 For an example of how this debate figures in Italian thinking, see Cassano (1996).
- 14 Importantly, we do acknowledge that this volume is missing a sufficient discussion of Adriatic and Balkan worlds. On this, see the interesting collective project 'Decolonize Hellas/Decolonize the Balkans' ([decolonizehellas.org/en](http://decolonizehellas.org/en)) and Ballinger (1999).
- 15 We are not arguing for a Mediterranean coequality à la Fabian (2014 [1983]) but rather a multiplicity of time. See Bevernage (2016).

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