

EDITORIAL

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Editorial: “Mediterranean thinking” for mapping a Mediterranean migration research agenda

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Abstract

The Mediterranean is paradoxically, rarely considered a category of analysis in most Mediterranean migration research. If it were to be taken as a geographical, regional and geo-political area, it could provide migration studies a particular framework of comparison, a much needed structure for the dispersed research currently being carried out. After drawing the main contours of “Mediterranean thinking” in migration studies and defending a postcolonial account against Eurocentric views, I review the main theoretical frameworks for formulating such criticisms. Additionally, I propose how in the coming years we may be able to further develop this Med-Thinking in migration studies. A base from which a Mediterranean migration research agenda could be built with “multiple voices” contributing to Mediterranean regional building. Finally, I place this excursus as main background of the different contributions of this Special Issue.

Keywords: Migration, Mediterranean, Migration research agenda, Regionalism, Post-colonialism, Euro-centrism

“Edward Said once pointed out that we all move within the boundaries of imaginary geographies in which what is available is not truth as an absolute, a-historical measure of the world, but a constructed series of representations”, (Chambers, 2008, p. 10).

Background of this special issue: Mediterranean thinking in migration studies

The Mediterranean constitutes by itself a category of analysis. Paradoxically it is rarely considered as such in most Mediterranean migration (MedMig) research. If it were to be taken as a geographical, regional and geo-political area, it could first of all provide migration studies a particular framework of comparison, a much needed structure for the dispersed research currently being carried out. Articulating the Mediterranean as an approach can also facilitate, for most MedMig scholars, a sense of shared space for knowledge exchange and a common focus for Mediterranean migration development. What makes the Mediterranean “exceptional” is not only its distinctive location where three continents are connected combining Sea and Land, but also because it is a unique common space of relation which holds different mainstream traditions: Christian-Greco-Roman tradition grounding a territorially-based national and liberal tradition, and religious

culture-based tradition shaping many countries through Islam and Judaism and their multiple subdivisions. The Mediterranean's distinctive feature as cradle of civilization means that it is a geographic space that has produced civilizations as a product of its linking shores. Following Braudel's leading focus on seeking the distinctive features of the Mediterranean unity and uniqueness, its networking nature and the fact that it is an area of particular spatial human mobility, could be the starting premise for discussing a sense of belonging. It could even be viewed as a first building block for constructing a Mediterranean identity. The way we can then channel much of the MedMig theoretical and empirical studies, is to allow the findings to contribute to the Mediterranean regional building-process.

This is the background argument of the "Mediterranean thinking" (Med-Thinking) which I would like to place into migration studies and that all the contributions of the Special Issue share. I owe this approach from the seminal work of Cooke (1999) and the basic development done by Chambers (2008) in its inspiring book on Mediterranean Crossings. Med-Thinking can be a useful framework for comparative analysis, allowing for the shaping of a novel research approach in MedMig studies. A research approach which combines geographical environment, historical and cultural connections, as well as regional building processes and geopolitical relations. Placing the Mediterranean at the centre of migration research offers a vantage point that may help us develop a new way of viewing trans-Mediterranean place, mobility and settlement in migration studies. Moreover it is Sea/Land area combining fixity of place, contingency of events and fluidity of relations.. Cooke conceptualizes the Med-Thinking approach with an apparent Braudelian oxymoron saying it is a way of "homogenizing diversity" (Cooke, 1999, p. 292). Let me articulate this Mediterranean approach for migration research, as a background of this Special Issue.

As a conceptual field the Mediterranean encourages us to frame migration studies as a distinctive approach. In practice this means that we need to encourage scholars to channel their findings toward the development of a Mediterranean approach rather than leaving their outcomes in a conceptual limbo. It basically implies following at least two strands. First, from an intra-view perspective, to envision how migrants, and the narratives as well as the policies towards them can help shape the Mediterranean Region as a particular approach. Second, to better situate the research findings as a contribution shaping the distinctive features of this particular region from a global migration perspective.

The first way to articulate the Med-Thinking approach applied to migration studies is by identifying what seems to be fixed and unchanging, following Braudel's proposal to shape a *long durée* Mediterranean approach. Throughout history, the Mediterranean Sea has been configured by intertwined social, political and economic relations among and between countries of the region (Braudel, 2008). Even though most of the current narrative and policy trends go against this historical background, the historical lens can provide us some light to understand current practices and dynamics. It is a fact that historians were probably the first to develop Mediterranean Studies, and MedMig studies can learn from them. We can also take into account international relations and geo-politics and the view of the Mediterranean as a chess game. For a long time, this Mediterranean approach

has been a central focus for the study of population dispersion and settlement. It can be considered as the most diasporic region in the world (Gallant, 2016, p. 205). Trans-Mediterranean human mobility generates distinctive by-products that can be a matter of discussion such as diversity, diaspora, transnationalism, interculturalism and cosmopolitanism, among others categories. This could provide us with a powerful perspective to develop critical thinking, since the current scenario is a history of restrictions and blockage of mobility. This “disquieting account” in Chambers’ terms (2008, p. 3), about how European states and EU articulate Mediterranean borders and frontiers is the basis of how they also frame the Med-mover with a complex system of filters and channels. This puzzling centrifuge political arrangement stretches outward into extraterritorial space in North-Africa, creating quarantine sanctuary spaces of migrants through Camps and Hotspots. The current system, as we know with an abuse of economic and political conditionality and externalization of EU migration policies, seeks as an ultimate goal to prevent people from moving, from leaving their countries or the countries of transit before reaching European territory, rather than blocking mobility by itself at the Sea (Mediterranean) and Land (European) spaces. These being transit areas which are usually more visible by our media radar systems, impacting public opinion. It is really politics of immobility rather than mobility management and control, as Nimführ and Sesay’s (2019) contribution in this Special Issue try to systematize. With these remote-control policies, European States and the EU reassert their authority and hegemony (in Gramscians’ terms) in managing flows and configuring the same Mediterranean as a space of conflict and even of threat within a “clash of civilizations” rhetoric between irreconcilable cultures. This Euro-centric view generates the geopolitical environment for an “Europeanization” of the Mediterranean following the still present, but arrogant Roman imperialist devise “Mare Nostrum” (“Our Sea”). This policy framework fixes binaries categorizations of the Mediterranean which we need to problematize, such as the same division between North-receiving-we countries and South-sending-others countries. These policies also legitimize most of the xenophobic behaviour towards Med-movers in Europe.

Behind this Med-Thinking, there is also the premise that the current state of European Mediterranean control cannot be de-contextualized. It needs to be placed within a historical process. Here we welcome the postcolonial studies, as most of the colonized countries are now countries of emigration and the main producers of the largest diaspora of the world. Med-Thinking invites us to enter in the domain of uprooted geographies (Chambers, 2008). Postcolonialism is accounting for and combating the residual effects of colonialism and empires on culture, society and politics. It is by nature a critical process of raising awareness that there is still today a cultural legacy of colonialism in most of the policies governing Mediterranean migration relations. In incorporating this *longue durée* and historical dimension into MedMig research, postcolonialism may provide meaning to understand current politics and policies towards Med-movers. A key goal of postcolonial theorists is epistemological. It seeks to clear space for “multiple voices” (Chambers, 2008, chapter 1.), echoing Braudel focus on the Mediterranean as a category of analysis. It is a claim that we need to ‘decolonize’ the current European MedMig representations (Chambers, 2008, p.31). This lack of

umbilical historical connection with the colonial past has been one of the most successful empty narratives that we need to objectify by research. This postcolonial perspective is timidly developed by migration studies dealing with current trans-Med migrations (the same *Post-Colonial Studies* journal has very few articles dealing with MedMig topics). This can also be a useful approach to promote an epistemological reflection on how far categories that apparently objectify real facts, are just mere political ideological constructions reinforcing Mediterranean power relations. Conceptually, we need to uncover the system of categories and binaries placing our rear view mirrors to the colonial past of the Mediterranean. This view can help us analyse current issues of the migration research agenda from other angles and perspectives, listening more to what is often labelled as “the others” or “subalterns” in Gramscian terms (often used by post-colonial studies). For instance, the same Chambers (2008, p. 7) suggests to interpret today’s xenophobia concentrated in the European countries as a failure and unwillingness to work through a still largely unconscious European past in which colonialism and Empire were (and still are) distilled into national configurations of ‘identity’, ‘culture’, ‘modernity’ and ‘progress’. Following Said’s tradition of thought, Med-Thinking sees then colonialism not as a closed past chapter but rather as a contemporary presence moulding and modifying the horizon of MedMig possibilities.

Applying Med-Thinking to migration studies means having to pursue a polycentric view of MedMig research, by learning to widen our current often “biased or unilateral” perspectives. In part, this justifies the subtitle of this Special Issue: “variable focal length”. It is a epistemological cognitive denunciation on how far national narratives (and EU and European States policies) govern MedMig interpretations of current trans-Mediterranean dynamics and governance. For instance, after navigating through the politics of Mediterranean diasporas in the nineteenth Century (Isabella & Zanou, eds, 2016), the afterword written by Gallant draws this conclusion: “modern scholarship has placed so much emphasis on nationalism that it has distracted us from examining other possibilities for political change” (2016, p. 208). This is the epicentre of Med-Thinking: to problematize the Mediterranean centre and margin nexus in current research and policy narratives.. In practice, this can take the form of a claim for how migration studies are currently conducting research in the Mediterranean. Namely, that migration research does not always need to be conducted by a background concern on the impact (positive and negative) of migration to Europe, ignoring and leaving at the margins other views from the East and South. Med-Think can also be interpreted as a claim that MedMig research needs to break its dependence from the leading Euro-centric policy frameworks.

This epistemological concern about the way MedMig studies produces knowledge needs to be tackled seriously. This includes addressing questions on how migration studies are being developed by non-European and western scholars, and also to incorporate documentary analysis and data sources produced by non-European institutions and non-European civil society. This is in part the originality of the contribution done by Roman and Pastore (2020) in this Special Issue. They suggest taking civil societies, in sending and transit countries, as a remedy to avoid unilaterality and top-down policy perspectives. The development of Med-Thinking in migration studies is necessarily a criticism to the “political solipsism” (which takes the form of Euro-centrism and Western-centrism for instance) governing our policies and research. As an

epistemological position this political solipsism holds that knowledge and evidences of anything outside one's own vantage point is unsure, unstable and can even, in its radical form, threaten the survival of our vantage point. For Med-Thinking, Euro-centrism is an epistemological aggression and a channel of legitimation of current MedMig policies that have difficulties passing the evidence-based approach contextual-dependent and ideology-laden (Baldwin-Edwards, Blitz, & Crawley, 2018). Even if we may adhere to the importance of placing human rights and democracy, gender equality, diversity recognition and interculturalism as Mediterranean fixed values, liberal nationalism, religious and cultural narratives tend to create a fluidity of interpretations on these values. This is particularly the case when these values play the role of guiding practices shaping Mediterranean region. This fluidity of interpretations of core values may create a space of dispute and misinterpretations we need to address within the Med-Thinking perspective of migration studies. These views are often not seeking to replace current core categories, but rather they propose new ways of analysing these same categories from other angles. Ideally, in migration studies we really need to work on what constitutes Mediterranean values of living together, of sharing the same space, of belonging to the Mediterranean. What does "Mediterranean identity" mean for the Mediterranean people? This centripetal view of the Mediterranean can be itself a resource for development and it also belongs to the Med-Thinking. This resource-based view of MedMig remains unexplored. This approach has even been obscured by categories and structures imposed by European discourses that push towards a centrifugal view of the Mediterranean as source of conflict and fragmentation. To go beyond this political solipsism also involves the incorporation of the national methodology criticism that is still clustering most migration studies within Med-Thinking. In fact, postcolonial studies' first criticisms are towards fixed national identities that drive the orthodoxy of Euro-centrism. As this is already taking place in migration studies, we need to apply the "local turn" (Caponio, Scholten, & Zapata-Barrero, 2018) to Med-Thinking. This implies to change state-centric hegemonic views and incorporate local perspectives and human security needs in the region (Roman, Pastore, Ponzio, Harrami, & Lahmidani, 2017).

To summarize, for all these potential under-researched MedMig routes, Med-Thinking necessarily invites us to move our focus towards a much more kaleidoscopic view. Namely, to accept the premise that there is a multiplicity of centres and margins, depending on which vantage point we conduct research. This also entails that we probably need to reassess the current MedMig agenda, which is overly focused on a European view of crisis and instability in the region. This can allow us to interpret the so called EuroMed policy as being nothing more than a Europeanization of the Mediterranean and a historical continuation of the hegemonic imperial and colonial legacy expression that this Sea is "Ours" (Mare Nostrum). EU's attempts to regulate the Mediterranean space around Euromed policies also needs to be rethought in terms of how, in the background, they interpret trans-Mediterranean human mobility not only as a matter of sociodemographic security, but also more implicitly what subtly follows as a clash of civilizations between Islam and European irreconcilable values. Med-Thinking in migration studies invites us then to review what has been done in Euro-Med migration policies. Chambers (2008, p. 20) reminds us in his Mediterranean crossings' essay that legislating against migrants reveals a war against the political

articulation of difference. Most EU Mediterranean policy since then has, accordingly, been focussed on achieving the necessary conditions for long term political and economic stability in this “bitterly contested and fractured geopolitical space” (Giaccaria & Minca, 2011, p. 352).

To dig further into this particular Mediterranean approach, we then need to follow a particular ontological vision. The Mediterranean needs to be thought about as an imaginary political, social, economic and cultural interconnected space with a postcolonial legacy. From this perspective, the Med-Thinking in migration studies becomes beforehand an epistemological project, a process of theorizing the Mediterranean as a postcolonial trans-mobility sea. Incorporating postcolonial studies even becomes a requirement for mapping a MedMig research agenda. Echoing Chambers (2008, p. 26) this means to articulate an answer to basic questions in migration studies that explodes the empty, homogeneous continuum of current historical knowledge and include what has been occluded, marginalized, culturally repressed and physically eradicated from Europe. The postcolonial view is always a critical interrogation (Chambers, 2008, p. 28). As a political theoretical project, it is concerned with the decolonisation of representation, of the west view of the Mediterranean, of taking the Mediterranean as a continual interweaving of cultural roots and historical routes.

Chambers even speaks about the “epistemological violence” of liberal thought, deposited in the implicit knot of race and civilisation (Chambers, 2008, p. 28). These are the epistemological proviso before properly elaborating a sense of belonging of the Mediterranean. From this perspective, there is a real concern about how trans-Mediterranean human mobility is interpreted under a neo-colonial subtle approach. The post 9–11, 2001 debates on the relationship between Islam and Europe have, in many ways, revitalised (and legitimised) an image of the Mediterranean as the theatre of real and imagined clashes of civilisations; an image that has resurfaced with a certain degree of regularity in times of crisis over the past centuries (Giaccaria & Minca, 2011, p. 352). Contemporary representations of the Mediterranean space embrace, accordingly, a vast array of processes and manifestations: from the relationship between the Muslim world and democracy, to questions of gender and human rights, to images of economic backwardness and institutional corruption, to the demographic explosion and the impact of illegal migration between the two shores. The young population on the South bank and its scarcity in the North will probably continue to dot the demographic profile of both shores of the Mediterranean as well. As Cooke states “suspicious of closures, Med-Thinking mobilizes these concrete and abstract oppositions to rethink them in an open-ended and dialogical manner” (Cooke, 1999, p. 299). In such a view, the Mediterranean is then both a geographical area, a geopolitical space and a regional place of network of reflections. It sees human mobility as channel connecting different centres. This process entails juxtapositions and “criss-crossing of binaries such as land and water, fixity and fluidity, nationals and foreign, settled and nomadic, ancient and modern, colonizer and colonized, nationalism and globalization” (Cooke, 1999, p. 299). Pace (2006) reminds us that we can think of the Mediterranean as a ‘region’ (comprised of sub-regions) or rather as an ‘interface’ between other regions and then without having itself this interpretative status. This regional argument of the Mediterranean can also be an empirical analytical tool to revitalise MedMig thinking. As Cooke (1999)

describes, the Mediterranean is both a process and a place, where the link between the land and the sea is by itself its defining characteristic. She adds: "A form of aquacentric inquiry, Med-Thinking distinguishes between the materiality of earth and sea, juxtaposing the fixed and the fluid, as well as the near and the far in time and space. In the process, it challenges the assumptions and categories associated to traditional area studies. Whereas land-based scholarship can content itself with consideration of territory only, aquacentrism must include both seas and shores if it is to have meaning" (Cooke, 1999, p. 294). Incorporating Med-Thinking in migration studies also invites us to make an effort to identify current binaries, such as we-us-Europeans and them-others-Southern Africans-Middle-Easterners, and reconstruct categories going beyond them. This way of epistemological thinking warrants that the 'us' and 'them' applied at the Mediterranean space is a real *idola* (roughly speaking human cognitive fixations that prevents a more open-minded knowledge, in Bacon's terms) for developing MedMig studies. Med-Thinking problematizes not only binaries but also closures. This approach undermines conventional wisdom about centers and their margins, as well as about the indivisibility of identity, language, culture, and place, complicating the mapping of individual and national identities onto specific, stable terrains (Cooke, 1999, p. 298).

This is why the best way to reconceptualise the Mediterranean is to view it as a dynamic space with huge network of nodes and connections, as a space of mobility and flows (Zapata-Barrero, 2017). The Mediterranean as a transit hub and a hub of cities for strengthening regional building processes. The Med-hub will see the Med-movers not as a burden, and even as-weapons in a geopolitical political logic, but as resources for communication an external Mediterranean relations. To once again recapitulate Cooke's seminal inquiries, they invite us to take the Mediterranean as a cyberspace. A port designates a place where information goes in and out of the computer. This virtual port is like a real harbour and city in the Mediterranean, interconnected by trans-Mediterranean human mobility. Interchangeability is also a key-word for defining the Med-Thinking in migration studies. A view of the Mediterranean as a cyberspace is also a way to combine simultaneity and juxtaposition, to connect the near and the far. This Med-Net thinking also invites us to change our ways of knowing and producing knowledge, forcing what Cooke (1999, p. 296) calls a "deterritorialized consciousness of place". This de-spatialization of interaction erodes, then, the traditional symmetry of State, place and identity. For instance, diaspora and transnational studies developed in MedMig research points towards this direction. This way of thinking the Mediterranean suggests to us then the need to reconceptualize the Mediterranean as both a physical geographical and a historical place.

Finally, we probably also need to consider that through these building blocks of Med-Thinking there are some fluid connections. The Mediterranean constitutes both a bio-region and a spatial system that we need to feature through migration research. Seen from migration studies, the Mediterranean invites us to think in an unstable set of relations, an uprooted geography is necessary to reveal a discriminatory mapping. From this perspective, the Med-Hub needs to be seen as a transnational, super-diverse, and multilingual arena that links widely separated peoples and cultures. A shared space of potential external contact of cities that are not necessarily European and where the intercultural paradigm could become one of the Mediterranean core identities and main

channels for encouraging Mediterranean regional building. Trans-Mediterranean human mobilities belong to its same history and it is consubstantial to Med-Thinking. The Mediterranean shapes current human mobilities by this interlink between water and land, but the mobility of people also shapes the current Mediterranean as a geopolitical space. Today the Mediterranean as an uprooted space is under the monopoly of states, who decide its circulation and forms of mobility. Med-Movers are seen as weapons in a clash of strategic interests of controlling the Mediterranean spaces and resources.

The way we articulate the three main uses of the Mediterranean also shape Med-Thinking in migration studies. As a *geographical category*, the Mediterranean is a “Thalassa/aquatic territory” with distinctive multiple and mixed mobilities that can have origin in the Mediterranean or not. This geographical perspective includes both historical and cultural legacies. The Mediterranean can be a stage of a long migratory trajectory for some South Sahara Africans and Asian migrants that use the sea as a transit zone for crossing to Europe. This geographical dimension also considers intra-regional migration since most African international migrants remain in other South Mediterranean countries instead of crossing the sea, as it is the case of Morocco, who is now beginning to conceptualize itself as a country of immigration with many “francophone” black Africans. The Med-Thinking applied at migration studies is also a *regional category* of analysis framing current research and the dynamics and governance of migration. This means that, as such, migration policies and patterns shape the Mediterranean region-building. From this perspective, Mediterranean studies is a way to analyze the process of building a regional identity, considering the Mediterranean by itself as an agent in global multiple regional relations. This regional building process is particular since it is a unique place where three continents meet, each one with their own regional particularities. No other such basin exists in the world. This unique location needs to drive Mediterranean migration studies. Finally, it is also a *geo-political category* with differentiated government interests and a multi-actor space of peace, stability and conflict. This last view is probably the opposite direction of the second one. The regional categorization of the Mediterranean has a centripetal force, meanwhile the geo-political categorization has a much more centrifugal force. The regional view sees Med-movers as resources, the geopolitical vision shapes the Med-Mover as weapons of particular strategies. If the second view considers the Mediterranean as a potential Unity, in Braudel terms, sharing its distinctive features as a region, this last dimension has a multiple regional and state view of the Mediterranean, with complex relation of interests. Here we see the Mediterranean as a realm of real-politics. It is probably this MedMig geopolitical dimension which prevails today over the second regional view. The tension between these three understandings of the Mediterranean must also be included within the MedMig research agenda.

Framework of this special issue: the need for mapping a MedMig research agenda

In the last few years, the Mediterranean gained more and more relevance in migration studies and, currently, it is a regional focal point where several types of large-scale human displacement converge. According to the Global Peace Index 2018, it remains the world’s least peaceful region. UNHCR and OIM last reports also warns it is by far the

world's deadliest zone. Urbanizations processes are also the result of migration and the impact on climate change is also becoming a common concern, as an emerging driver of trans-Med Migration, as the fieldwork on Tunisia carried out by Karolina Sobczak-Szelc and Naima Fekih (2020) show in this Special Issue. This is a global and regional challenge with major effects on origin/transit/destination countries, border/integration/diversity policies, and geopolitical strategies. Indeed, if we review the recent European MedMig policy agenda the keywords identified would probably be ungovernability, unmanageability, instability, uncertainty, unpredictability, complexity. Further, MedMig governance could be identified as one of the major political cleavages between Member States, creating sub-alliances as Visegrád Group, which links four central European States (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia). We may also include lack of evidence-based narratives and policies on current migration dynamics and governance systems often denounced from international forums to major scholarly debates. There is also a shared view among MedMig scholars that the research agenda tends to be too Eurocentric and probably misses the Med-Thinking we have tried to roughly conceptualise in the previous section. In the same measure, it also omits, to a certain extent, the criticism of the state-centric and economical liberal (and imperial) way of thinking of the Mediterranean that most scholars from the South condemn.

We must also consider the centrality of migration and trans-Mediterranean human mobility for shaping Mediterranean (inter)-states relations, and how they conform their geo-political strategies. Seeing globally, the Mediterranean is a geographical area where many different political regimes and ideologies coexist, making it even more difficult to find a common ground of understanding, as it was the main philosophy of the Barcelona process in 1995. There is a shared view that this first framework of Mediterranean cooperation has had several challenges related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict framing the recent history of the Mediterranean. Another relevant, and most recent, challenge is the Syrian conflict and the refugee conundrum that is shaping the region today, together with the lack of Libyan interlocutor as a condition for whatever relation. This means that to conduct a MedMig research is to enter in an area driven by political and social tensions, where contingencies often lead the migration dynamics and processes. However, current research also warns us that instability does not necessarily magnify the migration dynamics known in periods of stability, even when its validity is assumed.

For migration studies, the importance of combining the geographical, regional and geopolitical approach (namely the Med-Thinking in migration studies we have sketched out in the first section) is key to understanding multiple human mobilities and current control policies at the East, Centre and West of the Mediterranean. The need for mapping a research agenda is also justified as a way to review the current EuroMed and the partnership framework shaping current policies. Mainly since 1995 and revisited with the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008 and after the so called Arab spring in 2011 (Geddes & Hadj-Abdou, 2018) and the neighbourhood policies framework, conceived after the 2004 enlargement of the European Union with 10 new member countries (Schumacher, Marchetti, & Demmelhuber, 2018). In fact, we have gone from an idealistic multilateral to a pragmatic bilateral policy focus. We can also do a critical diagnosis on how States have tried to shape Mediterranean Region through their EuroMed Partnership approach as a history of failure. This can justify the need to construct a Med-Hub giving cities the opportunity to interrelate and be active in the process of regional building.

There is even a paradox that, despite the great importance of trans-Med human mobility, there are no strong debates tackling the research agenda. Academic, social and political demands should be better substantiated by covering all the geographical areas through a complete focus on the MedMig, promoting multi-sited and comparative research, multi-level analysis, and intersectional studies. Comparative Mediterranean studies are scarce. In spite of an existing burgeoning literature, this field is still dispersed and unarticulated in a patchwork of studies and disciplines, without being clustered by a Mediterranean approach. In fact, these concerns are in line with The Valletta Declaration's (Ministerial meeting, 2017) requests to overcome the fragmentation of knowledge and data, and to find instruments to reduce the gap between research insights and knowledge, public opinion and policies. This approach is also in line with the UN Global Compact for Migration (December, 2018) by underlining as one of the first objectives the importance of research and communication platforms.

A MedMig research map can help to draw the first guidelines for Med-Thinking in migration studies, as a first step to increase an understanding of the migration dynamics and its mixed nature, the migration drivers and their interdependence. While also maximising its benefits to the Med-Thinking and coping policy mechanisms at origin, transit and destination (Jolly, 2014). This is a good opportunity to reassess the centrality of the Mediterranean for the development of migration studies, for its variety of topics and perspectives.

We must also highlight in this brief theoretical positioning that most of the MedMig research agenda has a critical insight that may help develop the Mediterranean approach. There are several theoretical frameworks used for formulating such criticisms. Most of them combine descriptive and explanatory arguments with normative claims, at different grades and intensity. For instance, the contribution of Bauböck (2019) in this Special Issue maps three different normative claims (he speaks about trilemma) that call for different policy responses. By applying this Med-Thinking approach we can briefly overview the most relevant frameworks allowing us to identify current main concerns and how we can go further in the coming years for developing this Med-Thinking in migration studies.

Above all, there is the obvious need to strength the policy, social and research agenda nexus. The fact that a link exist is beyond doubt. However, how this interface takes place is much less evident. A research agenda cannot be an uncritical reproduction of newspaper headlines and/or political practices. The dominance of political ideologies and State decisions over social and research distinctive agenda can be a matter of concern. Research must find ways to shed light on how certain political decisions lack evidence, and these contribute to create "virtual" policy narratives that seek to legitimize their decisions towards a "disoriented" public opinion. The responsibility of conducting a MedMig research agenda along Med-Thinking lines must then seek to provide a regulative and evaluative framework for critical assessment, separating what is fake, from what is "real reality". We need more deep analysis on how the security policy rhetoric is constructed. Most scholars insist that the European States obsession to hinder this trans-Med human mobility is necessarily counter-productive, since their policies do not manage to reduce conflict. A more resource-based pro-active narrative that ensures the best conditions for this trans-Med human mobility would certainly contribute to prevent the development of a much-needed Mediterranean regional identity able of being a reference within the global migration agenda.

Behind these statements there is an obvious epistemological concern regarding the way knowledge is produced, how Mediterranean dynamics and policies are interrelated, and as several works have pointed out, how far political decisions and policies towards Med-movers determine their risks and safety in their migratory process. As Fargues, among others, insists: “stopping migration and eradicating deaths at sea may therefore be partly conflicting objectives. Shutting the shorter and less dangerous routes can open longer and more dangerous routes, thus increasing the likelihood of dying at sea” (Fargues, 2017, p. 1).

This theoretical framework also provides other complementary research paths. The sustained premise is the gap between narratives of control and current migration dynamics. Control policy narratives can be formulated even with few real migration dynamics. These policy assumptions drive most of the recent research, which takes the inquiry plan of disentangling assumptions and taken for granted arguments seriously (see for instance Geddes, 2014; McMahon & Sigona, 2018). This theoretical framework evidencing the tension there is between politics/policies and migration patterns is one of the mainstream rationale clustering the MedMig research agenda today.

Surveying quickly Google Scholar analytics (September 2019) on “Mediterranean Migration” in the last five years, we can infer several premises, which may also justify the need to overview a MedMig research agenda along Med-Thinking. First, negative aspects by far dominate the research narrative over the positive ones, governed 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, that is always conflict-driven, may reinforce mainstream policies and hegemonic political solipsist narratives. I think it will be much wiser, if we want to take the Med-Thinking approach seriously, to begin to draw a MedMig resource-based approach as well as to start thinking how to articulate a regional approach based on the advantages of trans-Mediterranean Mobility. The Mediterranean as a source of creativity and innovation, as a source of development thought trans-Med human mobility needs to be assessed. This could probably be done by first identifying the Mediterranean drivers that may fix Mediterranean exceptionality such as interculturalism, transnationalism, diaspora and cosmopolitan Mediterranean values and principles. We can go on along this research path incorporating the need to conceptualise “Med-identity” and “Medi-zenship”, with a deep reflection of what Mediterranean belonging may involve in terms of understanding the Mediterranean as a geographical transnational area instead of adhering to a unique national flag.

The second premise we can infer is that research is still too state-centric, dominated by national concerns on border control, regional geo-political considerations related to insecurity and instability, and cosmopolitan universal values related to democracy and human rights. There are some actors, at the sub-level, that are still absent in the research agenda: Mediterranean regions and cities are practically neglected in the current MedMig research agenda. Most research that use cities include them as case studies, but without seriously reflecting on their key role in shaping Mediterranean migration studies and their contributions to the development of Med-Thinking. The EU-Mediterranean policies have basically been centred on EU-State relations through EU multi-level governance neighbourhood policy programmes (Delcour & Soleri Lecha, 2017). Cities are potentially more flexible to foster contact and construct this “bio-

Med-cyberspace” I was suggesting in the previous section. They are politically and socially much closer to people, more pragmatic in the diagnosis processes and problem-solving actions as it has been emphasized in one of the last Handbooks dealing with cities of migration (Caponio et al., 2018). Furthermore, it is easier to connect the city of Oran or Tel Aviv and the city of Roma or Barcelona, with Tunis and El Cairo, rather than Italy, Israel, Egypt, Tunis and Algeria. This city-based approach for the promotion of a Med-Thinking in migration studies is now contextually justified: on the Northern Mediterranean shore, cities are becoming new agents and interlocutors within the EU in relation to human mobility challenges, integration policies and diversity management. On the Southern shore, it has been broadly accepted that the so-called 2011 Arab Revolutions have been above all an urban phenomenon and an action taking place in the cities public spaces (squares and streets becoming symbols of the revolutions). Therefore, the city focus as a way to strengthen Med-Thinking is needed to improve articulation within MedMig studies.

In the current MedMig research agenda, the Mediterranean is sometimes presented as one of the most significant extra-European regions, with a long history of colonial engagement from States that are now members of the EU (Collyer, 2016). The framework of security and stability nexus is also dominant (Roccu & Voltolini, 2018), together with the area of externalization of EU policies since the seminal work of Boswell (2003) among others (see also Aubarell, Zapata-Barrero, & Aragall, 2009; Lavenex & Schimmelfennig, 2009). The leading argument within this research avenue highlights that the dangers of a hyper-crisis narrative can legitimize rapid, informal and flexible policy instruments and legislative proposals that are often at odds with democratic principles and fundamental rights. It can also justify the lack of regular channels (Ansems de Vries, Carrera, & Guild, 2016) or even, and in practice, for instance, hot-spots system (detention centres without regulation), Jungle Calais and an overall absence of humanitarian approach.

Another current area of research that may contribute to the development of a Med-Thinking in migration studies points to the question of how the so-called 2015 migration/refugee crisis has been interpreted. The ‘crisis’ was, in large part, policy-driven and sustained by the failure of the EU to propose humane responses to deal with this unprecedented, but also foreseeable movement of people (Crawley, Duvell, Jones, McMahon, & Sigona, 2016; Sigona, 2018). Scholars also share that there is a need to go beyond the current conceptual landscape of Fortress Europe (Wolff & Hadj-Abdou, 2018), however a strongly articulated counter-narrative capable of gaining centrality in the debates has not yet been developed. We need more normative Med-Thinking that goes beyond the identification (and denunciation) of tensions and paradoxes, contradictions of the liberal national European State (Geddes, 2014) and go straight on to encapsulate the power asymmetries and imbalances between EU and South Mediterranean countries within the postcolonial Med-Thinking, a dimension that needs further exploration within the current MedMig research agenda.

At a more practical level, there is a set of debates highlighting that the incoherencies and lack of coordination among actors may affect consequences between policies, legislations and practices (Carrera, Radescu, & Reslow, 2015). The existence of a huge array of programmes, many involving the same ministerial actors from partner countries, must be interpreted not as a sign of strength but of weakness according to Collyer

(2016). The lack of a clear central focus of this approach may, however, also help to explain the range of unintended consequences of migration control in the Mediterranean region. The legal panorama appears fragmented, with a lack of solidarity. The Mediterranean South, as well as the other actors involved, are undertaking a 'pass the ball' approach without a regional solution (Miltner, 2015).

At the meso level, we also find some research areas focusing on global governance and multi-actor framework that represents the Mediterranean. What is emerging is a 'patchwork' of actors, priorities, and instruments. Global governance is discussed in several non-binding international fora: UN High-Level Dialogue on Migration and Development, the Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM), the Global Forum on Migration and Development (GFMD). This multi-actor research approach raises questions of coherency, competition, and cooperation among them (Carrera et al., 2015) and the role of EU appears controversial and characterized by several critics due to its predominantly Euro-hegemonic focus and the developed securitarian approach.

There is also the substantial question of establishing frameworks of cooperation between democratic and nondemocratic regimes. The political situation of Libya, the attitude of its coast guard as well as the reported violation of human rights in the country prompt many to insist that EU member states cannot work with Libya (Barslund & Ludolph, 2017). But then why does this democratic argument not work with other countries that may reinforce instability in the region, and worse, use migrants-as-weapons in a geo-political chess game.

The policy framework on the conditionality practices as an instrument coming from real-politics and applied to migration negotiations between EU/South states is increasingly catching researchers' attention. This "more-for-more" logic that represents the conditionality approach and drives external relations is always an invitation to critical thinking. Third countries are obliged to accept EU policy transfer of its readmission and return/border controls and surveillance policies in exchange for external cooperation and development funding as well as a few legal opportunities for mobility (Carrera et al., 2015). This is probably the most flagrant example of the entrance of geopolitics into MedMig policies, but there is still no certainty that instead of creating a centripetal force it strengthens a centrifugal force, reinforcing again fragmentation over union in the Mediterranean.

The need to build a counter-narrative against the orthodox one, of changing perspectives and approaches, and of speaking more on human security and migration ethics (Zapata-Barrero & Gabrielli, 2017) are topics included in the research agenda. Further, the shifting of the mobility paradigm as an insecurity/threat with one exploiting the potential of mobility to foster economic growth, human capital and political reform is also on the research roadmap (Ayadi & El Mahdi, 2013). This resource-based approach of trans-MedMig can then gain centrality against the conflict-based and crisis-based we encounter today. It can certainly help develop the Med-Thinking in migration studies which we are claiming.

Along these lines, to think of the conditions for this new resource-based paradigm it must pass necessarily through the democratic conditionality and the 'more-for-more' dominating policy approach. This is in fact the main rationale of Faustini Torres' (2020) contribution in this Special Issue, focusing on the interlink between migration control

and democracy promotion. The more a country democratically reforms, the more economic support and market opportunities they will receive (Fargues & Fandrich, 2012). There are several shortcomings to this logic, which have been clearly stated by A. K. Jonasson (2015), among others. While constantly appealing to democracy and human rights in rhetoric, the EU has long prioritized security and stability, which has led to a lack of credibility. In this context the EU must not ignore the influence of the Gulf countries' investments in the region, as a vital new agent that has come into play (Coates Ulrichsen, 2013). It has become increasingly clear that the meaning of the so-called "common value" democracy is far from obvious. And finally, the EU's main tool to promote democracy is conditionality, awarding benefits when partners meet pre-set criteria, but granting limited lee-way for partners to hammer out their own approach to democracy.

Co-Development policies and root cause logic already have a certain tradition in migration research. The background premise is that co-development policy should not be seen as a means for reducing the number of migrants. Instead, political discussions and approaches to migration should recognize the interlinked nature of human mobility and development (Manrique Gil, Barna, Hakkala, Rey, & Claros, 2014), with transnational diaspora policies as an emerging policy from origin countries (Zapata-Barrero & Rezaei, 2019). For instance, there are other patterns that contribute to co-development and are not categorised as such. I am thinking about remittances send by diaspora, which play an important role. For instance, the amount of remittances usually far exceeds the official development aid's in Morocco (Bauer, 2016, p. 55; Ponsot, Terry, Vásquez, & de Vasconcelos, 2017). Finally, we also find normative-lead arguments as the clash between Law and Politics with Rights and Obligations despite the presence of fundamental rights and principles such as the right of asylum, and non-refoulement (Dublin system), countries such as Italy are violating them systematically. This in light of the assumed false premise that a stronger border control is necessary in order to respect 'legality' (Locchi, 2014).

As a final remark, and as a way to leave my reasoning wide open, an effort to map a research agenda for developing Med-Thinking in migration studies can definitively help us review the relationships between European and Mediterranean states. Together with other political and cultural actors bordering on the Mediterranean, starting with Arab peoples (Benguerna & Mangone, 2016), Arab civil society, and a full array of political, cultural, economic and social actors who work on migration and mobility, can help map this research agenda. Rather than being simply silenced or ignored by the dominance of postcolonial Med-Thinking.

How the different articles contribute to Med-Thinking in migration studies: overview of origin, rationale and structure of this special issue

The contributions included in this Special Issue have been selected from the 15th IMISCOE Annual Conference in Barcelona (2018), which covered the theme "Europe, migrations and the Mediterranean: human mobilities and intercultural challenges". This was the opportunity to reaffirm the centrality of the Mediterranean as an essential regional area in migration studies. It includes the inaugural lecture held by Rainer Bauböck (2019) on the political ethics of migration in the Mediterranean, and the winners of the Rinus Penninx Best Paper Award: Sarah Nimführ and Buba Sesay (2019), as well as a selection

of works that participate in plenary sessions and panels, and those which we consider that are also contributing to Med-Thinking.

A scattershot approach can keep you from focusing on important questions and pull you in a number of different directions. This Special Issue offers us some main areas that highlight patterns in the current research agenda. Such work may fill the type of Med-Thinking which we are requesting from MedMig scholars. The initial ambition was to provide a picture of the new trends in MedMig research. For this reason, we included multidimensional approaches, touching several disciplines and combining micro, meso and macro level studies. Moreover, the combination of a wide and narrow lens of analysis also offers a variety of perspectives. Therefore, the selection of articles covers different dimensions that goes from the types of human (im)-mobility in the Mediterranean to the policies and relations among states that arise within this context, underlining what makes it an exceptional regional area. The Special Issue also covers the normative ethical dimension with Baubock's (2019) contribution. The general idea is to focus on what is structural about MedMig studies without forgetting the contingency and unexpected, and the intersection between these two dimensions. Finally, our goal with this Special Issue is to understand the 'now' but with an eye on 'tomorrow', that is, to provide insights that give us clues for analysing the present but also for anticipating future MedMig research developments. Then this Special Issue clusters at least five main dimensions: Research that tries to combine macro, meso and micro levels of analysis, it tends to be multidisciplinary, combine different logics of human mobility and immobility; the leading methodology is qualitative, privileging direct contact with the environment; and finally, there are always a multiplicity of actors ensuring MedMig governance that may also explain the complexity of this research area.

The initial idea is to show the multidimensional nature of the MedMig research, but also to delineate potential paths towards Med-Thinking agenda, going from a wide to narrow angle lens, in coherence to the subtitle photographic picture. The starting point will go from macro, to meso and micro levels of analysis. It also leads a way to move from the normative and narrative analysis, to the analysis of policies and policymaking processes (and the consequences they have for migration dynamics and Mediterranean 'movers').

The Special Issue opens with the normative-laden contribution of **Rainer Bauböck** (2019; "Mare nostrum: the political ethics of migration in the Mediterranean"). The paper argues that freedom of movement, global distributive justice and democratic self-government form a trilemma that makes pursuing all three goals through migration policies difficult. It also argues that there are distinct normative grounds for refugee protection, admission of economic migrants and reciprocity-based free movement. Refugees have claims to protection of their fundamental human rights. Economic migrants should be admitted if there is a triple benefit for the receiving country, the country of origin and for themselves. Free movement is based on agreements between states to promote international mobility for their own citizens. These three normative claims call for different policy responses.

Then we move with the contribution of **Emanuela Roman** and **Ferruccio Pastore** (2020; "Framing migration in the southern Mediterranean: how do civil society actors evaluate EU migration policies? The case of Tunisia") centred on the external dimension of EU

migration policies. It states that in spite of routine rhetorical references to its cooperative and partnership-based nature, the EU external migration policy-making remains essentially unilateral and top-down. Civil societies of sending and transit countries, in particular, tend to be excluded. This may represent a strategic resource for the EU to promote a more participatory governance of migration, which may lead to more balanced, effective and mutually beneficial migration policies in the Mediterranean region.

The third contribution written by **Luisa Faustini Torres** (2020; "Another nexus? Exploring narratives on the linkage between EU external migration policies and the democratization of the Southern Mediterranean neighbourhood") focuses on the interlink between migration control and democracy promotion. Stating the limitations of the current migration-security and migration-development paradigms. Her contribution aims to explore the interlink between control policies and democratization of Southern Mediterranean countries. Following a Narrative Policy Analysis approach, she draws on longitudinal and interpretative content analysis of EU official documents covering the period between 1995 and 2018, in which she disentangles the logic and impacts of the externalization of EU migration policies towards its Southern Mediterranean neighbourhood.

Then comes the original contribution by **Sarah Nimführ** and **Buba Sesay** (2019; "Lost in limbo? Navigating (im)mobilities and practices of appropriation of" non-deportable refugees in the Mediterranean area") focused on non-deportable rejected asylum seekers' forced to have a "live in a limbo" and then on the issue of forced immobility. This article is an opportunity to show from a micro-analytical perspective, how non-deportable refugees navigate the system governing their social and physical (im)mobilities. Practices of resistance and conciliation are illustrated.

Margit Fauser's contribution (2020; "Emigrant citizenship, privileged local belonging and the option to return: Germans on the Turkish coast") states that while political and economic crises are at the roots of many movements across the Mediterranean, the question is whether these are also leading to the "displacement" of the privileged. In addressing this question, the article links privileged lifestyle migration to a perspective on mobile citizenship.

Finally, the Special Issue closes with the main findings of an original research conducted by **Karolina Sobczak-Szelc** and **Naima Fekih** (2020; "Migration as one of several adaptation strategies for environmental limitations in Tunisia: evidence from El Faouar") focusing on a water scarcity environment and entering in a climate change framework debate. The article navigates on how some Southern inhabitants living in an oasis must cope with unforeseen crop destruction limiting their daily expenses by selling livestock or, in years of drought, migrating to look for additional sources of income. They also show how migration has become part of a wider process of socio-economic transformation in which people leave in order to cope with or adapt to environmental changes.

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