

## **51. The Mediterranean as a (De)Colonial Border Zone: Socio-Economic Disparities in the Context of Historical and Political Responsibilities (Workshop)**

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The Mediterranean can be seen as a prime example of global, historically conditioned asymmetries, inequalities and contradictions. In this transcontinental space, poverty and prosperity, tradition and modernity, equality and inequality coexist in a small area. Colonisation, de-colonisation and neo-colonialism in this geographical narrow space create fields of tension that continuously challenge the search for answers to historical and political causes and contemporary responsibilities. Although migration and mobility as well as economic and political interdependencies have shaped the Mediterranean region since antiquity, the effects of colonial pasts culminate in the current border regimes and reinforce asymmetries of southern and northern Mediterranean shores. Border fences and refugee boats become indicators of the need for a discussion on global wealth distribution, economic dependencies and global justice. While some see migration to Europe as an opportunity for a better life, others point out that the socio-economic and political causes can only be overcome south of the Mediterranean. The RG Mediterranean would like to discuss how social anthropology should position itself in the study of this border zone. How does it produce knowledge in a space where different normative as well as socio-economic foundations of human togetherness, (historical) responsibility for existing inequalities and different strategies of dealing with these problems collide so closely and conflictive? How does it deal with the political dimension of its research? What consequences do demands for the decolonisation of knowledge have for socio anthropological knowledge practices? Which models of decolonial, activist and participatory research do critically engage with this?

## **The Mediterranean as Analytical Borderlands of Contemporary Urban Transformations**

***Fadma Ait Mous, University Hassan II Casablanca***

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The area around the Mediterranean Sea is one of the most urbanised areas of the world. As elsewhere, urban forms are experiencing rapid transformations, in the wake of broader 'conjunctural change' evident in shifting political and economic settlements and increasingly harsh migration regimes. The speed of urban change and growing diversity of urban forms pose huge questions for social science researchers, and has significant impact upon urban policy-makers and urban dwellers. While there are numerous interconnections and resonances between urban life in this vicinity, the region is riven with separations and ruptures that affect how urban life shaped, lived and studied. Yet few studies place 'northern' and 'southern' Mediterranean cities in the same optic (Dines 2022). In this workshop, we share the early phases of a collaborative, inter-disciplinary research project (anthropology, sociology, and architecture) that brings together scholars north and south of the Mediterranean. More specifically, we examine the value of thinking comparatively about urban life around the Mediterranean, by examining empirical material from Casablanca and Marseille. We use this to interrogate the utility of Mediterranean spaces as 'analytic borderlands' (Sassen 2008), questioning binary analytical categories such as north/south and migrant/non-migrant, and challenging Euro-centric paradigms of much urban comparison.

## **The Humanitarianization of the Political and the Radicalization of the Humanitarian**

***Jasmine Iozzelli, University of Turin***

Since 2015, numerous SAR (Search and Rescue) NGOs have been present in the central Mediterranean, working with migrants crossing from North Africa to Europe.

Based on my own ethnographic research, conducted on board various SAR vessels between 2019 and 2022, I here set out to reflect on my own positioning: by adopting a crossed-eye perspective – that is to say, by simultaneously taking up the roles of both researcher and rescuer/activist – I was able to immerse myself in the setting of the ships and to gain an understanding – through participation – of the practices, rhetorics, and imaginaries deployed by activists and humanitarian workers in constructing their own subjectivity as rescue workers.

This privileged gaze allowed me to observe three types of tension: first, between state (or supra-state) institutions and non-governmental organizations; second, among the different organizations where I had the opportunity to do ethnography; third, within individual organizations, between structure and individual practices. These tensions bring to light the different types of sovereignty that compete with one another in maritime space, and consequently also on-board ship.

Taking the peculiar characteristics of the different organizations and 'life on board' as my starting point, I attempt to tease out the tensions between the humanitarianization of the political and the radicalization of the humanitarian, and between – on the one hand – bureaucratization, control, neo-liberal logics and – on the other – militant and spontaneous forms of political solidarity in support of the autonomy of migration.

Finally, I explore possible routes to making anthropological reflection practical, and anthropological practice political, offering a new gaze on the decolonialization of humanitarian work at sea.

### **Ethnography For and About the Persistence of Self-Managed Movement Initiatives: Reflections Between Greece and Spain**

*Xenia Valeth, Universidad de Sevilla*

*Carmina Cera Márquez*

In the northern Mediterranean countries, especially Spain and Greece, the economic and political crisis that started in 2008 prompted the creation of multiple self-organised neighborhood initiatives that, based on a mutual aid system, provided support to those most affected by austerity measures. They promoted a transformative idea of solidarity, enacting on a micropolitical level a horizontal and autonomous conviviality in no need of institutional intervention.

While in Spain few of the projects created in the aftermaths of the Indignados-Movement have survived until now, a significant number of their Greek counterparts continue to be active. Our current research, carried out together by a young anthropologist and an experienced activist of the Spanish self-management movement, aims to analyse the strategies through which self-organised infrastructures in Athens ensure their persistence despite conflicts with the local administration. The knowledge resulting from our fieldwork is meant to inform not only academic publications but also formats of practical interest to social movements in Spain. In this communication we would like to discuss the possibilities of transnational anthropological-activist research between Greece and Spain, considering the similarities and difficulties of their political cultures.

## **A Decolonial Reading of immigration Across the Mediterranean**

***Zayer Baazaoui, St. Paul's School, Concord, New Hampshire***

In 2017, CNN released striking images and a video showing a sale of slaves in Libya. The last decades have seen many tragedies linked to illegal immigration in the Mediterranean. Thousands of people lost their lives while trying to reach Europe. After this scandal of the slave trade, I published an article in the *Huff Post Arabi* in which I address the immigration machine and argue that there are also other forms of slavery. I conclude the essay by saying that slavery is to be conceived as one of several forms of the everyday enslavement of people including forced migration. Starting from this point, in this paper I want to investigate the way fiction (novels) goes beyond the clichés that surround this phenomenon to study this issue. Using a comparative approach, I will examine these pictures of the slavery trade while connecting them to the novel *Eldorado* of French writer Laurent Gaudé. The novel narrates the story of an Italian captain who takes the opposite path to discover North Africa and the mass immigration's reasons. I argue that this comparison offers a new decolonial reading of this topic but also shows the complexity of life and existence of these immigrants.

## **The Securitization of Mobilities and the Criminalization of Migration**

***Ahmed Jemaa, Central European University, Vienna***

My research sheds light on the bordering practices of the EU border regime in post-2011 Tunisia and its entanglement with the broader power relations between the two shores of the Mediterranean. Following an ethnographic approach of 'looking at the border from the other side' (Khosravi 2019), I am studying the Schengen visa regime from the perspective of applicants; 'youth on the move' in Tunisia, and their subjective experiences of (im)mobility. In the context of the so-called 'democratic transition' in Tunisia, the process of EU border externalization is accentuated under the labels of 'cooperation' and 'Euro-Mediterranean partnership'. In fact, the emphasis in public and academic debates on the 'border spectacle' (De Genova 2017) of the undocumented sea crossing from the Maghreb to Europe known as "Harga", functioned to legitimize the securitization of mobilities and the criminalization of migration, by implicitly casting 'youth on the move' as potential migrants or "Harragas". As a result, this rendered the struggles of 'regular' (im)mobilities invisibilized. Alternatively, my paper explores the multiple borders of the Schengen visa regime to unveil the border struggles and subjects they generate. Yet equally, to reveal the broader power relations of the border embedded in the processes of neocolonial accumulation by dispossession and human capital extraction that are either ignored or neglected in approaching migration in the Mediterranean.