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The Mediterranean Seminar Review

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“The Mediterranean is back” (p.1). Thus begins the special issue curated diligently by Ben-Yehoyada, Cabot and Silverstein, an invaluable attempt to draw our attention to an area of inquiry that has evolved according to the pressing issues of the time and the intriguing aspects it offers today to contemporary anthropological exploration. The Mediterranean has definitely recaptured our interest, both as audiences, world citizens and academic minds, with news of transnational journeys, economic and cultural challenges, trope redefinitions, and contested values. The special issue offers nine insightful reflections on a wide range of topics. In addition to the introduction by the three editors, readers can enjoy articles by seven international scholars and an afterword by Michael Herzfeld, while travelling alongside familiar anthropologists of the Mediterranean like Pitt-Rivers, Peristiany, Campbell and Gilmore to remind us that this special issue is “part of a delicate oscillation and recalibration” (p. 154), as “anthropology... will be diminished by our failure to return to a space, and an idea, that has produced such enlightening and unsettling work” (p.154).

Starting with an astute study of the role of religious devotion, patriotic attachment and collective memories through the transnational voyages of the Virgin Mary statues between France and Algeria to the micro-historical study of an Italian Sephardic Jew, readers are reminded of the many entanglements that are personal and national at the same time, the multilayered aspects of personhood and histories, the juxtaposition of repatriation and cultural heritage, the confounding and confusing sense of belonging and/or exclusion. The third article explores the Mediterranean “following the thing” (p. 67), the olive tree, emblem of the Mediterranean world as “tenacious and vibrant co-producer of physical and spiritual life” (p. 68). The extra-virginity mentioned by the author cannot but lead to concepts like honor, also covered by the following article through the vulnerabilities of undocumented migrant women in Turkey, along with powerful anecdotes, highlights of legal platforms and victories as well as the clear difficulties of engaging with terms that need to be viewed from multiple perspectives, recognizing “where and how honour continues to matter” (p.101). Migration is at the core of the fifth and sixth articles, one tracing Andalusian return migration, focusing on tropes of Moorishness, honor-shame dynamics, allegations of fraud and corruption, and the role played by return migrants uniquely positioned to mingle old-fashioned values with modern political and work habits, and the other on multilingual communication and its power as witnessed during border crossing.

Michael Herzfeld concludes by applauding the healthy challenge the editors and contributors present as the Mediterranean has *per se* a complexity and mobility that demand moving away from a national or supranational identity. He purportedly also points to plural identities as well as plural linguistic situations, at least three major languages and the uniqueness of the Basque tongue (unfortunately, omitting Sicilian which is spoken by more than 4 million people). Quoting Naor Ben-Yehoyada (2014, 2017), Herzfeld reminds us, in fact, that the Mediterranean is “a vision of the ‘cousinage’ that unites people of opposing religions, ideologies, and social classes” (160), a wonderful patchwork of cultures which have been shaped by historical events, economic trades, religious intermingling, architectural, culinary, and linguistic re-inventions. And yet we continue to experience a bureaucratic rigidity that runs counter to the excellent contributions of this issue, articles aimed at a true remapping of the Mediterranean region.

This is a must read for all those interested in Mediterranean Studies but also in migration studies, anthropology, and the social sciences in general. The articles are not only very relevant but also quite cohesive. Scholars might also want to use individual contributions as assignments for upper-level courses in those concentrations. They will spur enriching reflections and discussions among those less familiar with the contemporary Mediterranean context and among those who are well versed with the powerful research of past years in order to reframe the themes and scopes of further scholarship.



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