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Carl Rommel & Joseph John Viscomi

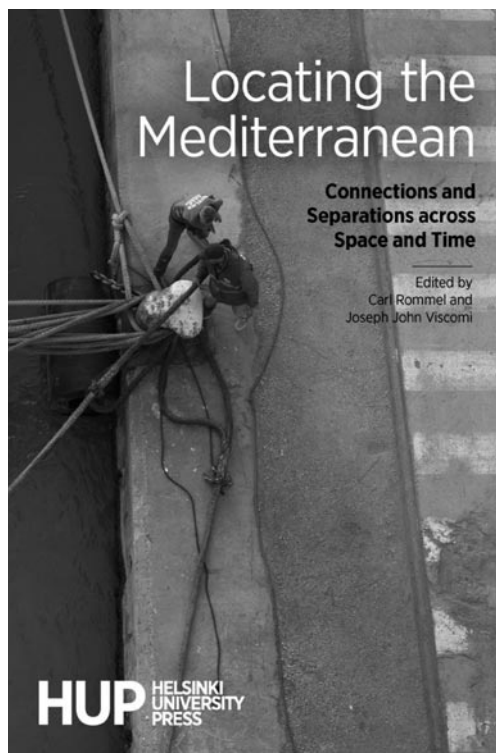
Locating the Mediterranean

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Palestinian writer Fawaz Turki has written in one of his autobiographical books that the Mediterranean «has had a way of storing and responding to our memories». ¹ For Turki, a refugee who fled with his family in 1948 from Haifa to a refugee camp in Beirut, the Mediterranean Sea was the constant in his early life, its waves something that made him feel at home. The Mediterranean formed a location full of meanings for him that were anything but flat and atemporal. Such complexities of Mediterranean location(s) are at the forefront of this volume edited by Carl Rommel and Joseph John Viscomi. There should be no doubt about the relevance of research on the Mediterranean location, given the attention that has been devoted to the region over the past decades. The aim of the volume, however, is not to look at the role of the Mediterranean Sea, and how it functions as a separating and connecting frontier, but to explore «how Mediterranean locations affect and shape daily lives, practices, opportunities, and social and political conditions». It aims to do this without falling into essentializing and pre-determined understandings of what the Mediterranean is. Rather, it considers how the Mediterranean emerges as a locating, spatio-temporally fluctuating constellation of relations, connections, and separations, whose meanings are never fixed.

The edited volume comprises an introduction, an epilogue, and eight ethnographically based chapters, each of which focuses on a specific Mediterranean location, and on the spatial logics



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and meanings of their Mediterranean-ness. In some chapters, the Mediterranean becomes a defining feature of their locatedness, whereas in others it remains in the background of the analytical inquiry, while still influencing how that specific (cross-)location gathers its meanings. As is always the case with edited volumes, some chapters are more engaging than others, but as a collection the book manages to exemplify the multiplicity and multidimensionality of Mediterranean constellations, and the complexity of the spatiotemporal (dis)connections that are embodied in the locations it explores.

What contributes to the volume's success in demonstrating the complexity and multidimensionality of Mediterranean location is the attention to the historicity of place- and location-

making that is part of every chapter. This approach further helps in avoiding the pitfalls named as shortcomings of previous regional studies of the Mediterranean, such as dichotomous thinking. The historicity of these spaces is present in the chapters in its organic form, meaning that places and locations are inherently accumulations of the past, «simultaneity of stories so far» as geographer Doreen Massey² has famously put it. This becomes evident in how public space is construed in Beirut through colonial cadastral maps (chapter 7 by Samuli Lähteenaho), in how the remoteness of Melilla has been produced over time by changing Spanish geopolitics (chapter 3 by Laia Soto Bermant), and in how the Virgin Mary of Trapani ended up in Tunisia due to histories of migration (chapter 6 by Carmelo Russo). Historicity is not, however, only organic but also a matter of intentional remembering and forgetting, of drawing connections to some events and logics of space-making and disconnecting from others. This is most evident in Phaedra Douzina-Bakalaki's chapter on how the battle of Lepanto has been reproduced in present-day Nafpaktos in Western Greece but is present across the volume as the chapters examine how power-relations are always immanent in how things and people are located. Temporal connections and power interrelate, for example, in defining what locating regimes are used and how, and who is thought to belong to a certain location and on what grounds.

On a slightly more critical note, as an anthropologist working closely with human geographers, I would have hoped for a bit more engagement with geographical literature, given that «location» is a geographical concept par excellence. Anthropologists do, of course, have their own tradition in studying location(s). As Matei Candea notes in the volume's epilogue, location is, in fact, central to how anthropologists work. Still, while reading the chapters, I found myself think-

ing time and again that «this is exactly what this or that geographer has talked about» and hoping the authors had looked beyond the (often vague) disciplinary boundary between human geography and anthropology in their readings. This is, however, not really a flaw on the authors' part, as we all have to make choices in what we read and which theories we draw from. The chapters do manage to portray the multivocal, multidimensional, and multirelational location of the Mediterranean without excessive engagement with geographical literature, but I maintain that some discussions would have been enriched by connecting them to the work of geographers that now go unacknowledged. There is, however, no denying the ethnographical richness of the volume, and a reader does end up with a broad understanding of what it can mean to be located in the Mediterranean at this point of history.

1 Fawaz Turki, *Exile's Return. The Making of a Palestinian-American* (New York: The Free Press, 1994), 108.

2 Doreen Massey, *For Space* (London: Sage, 2005), 24.