

Mediterranean thinking in migration studies: A methodological regionalism approach

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Abstract

The core reflection of this article is to explore the potential of using the Mediterranean as a category of analysis for migration studies, what epistemological and ontological effects this may have and how this could be done. To better capture this focus, I will speak about *Med-Thinking*. This Mediterranean scale of analysis invites us to follow methodological regionalism. In practice, this means that we need to encourage scholars to channel their findings towards the development of a Mediterranean approach. To develop an integrative and reflexive regional approach, I will first point out the background premises of such a normative effort and second, I will present the main analytical tools framing this Med-Thinking approach by articulating four main dimensions: epistemic solipsism, holism, homeostatic and positive thinking on migration. In the end, I will suggest some paths to promote the continued application of the Med-Thinking approach for the development of Mediterranean migration studies.

INTRODUCTION: FRAMING THE MED-THINKING APPROACH

The core reflection of this article is to explore the potentialities of using the Mediterranean as a category of analysis for migration studies, what epistemological and ontological effects this may have and how this could be done from a critical thinking perspective. To better capture this focus, I will speak about *Mediterranean thinking (Med-Thinking)*.¹

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This Mediterranean scale of analysis invites us to contribute to an emerging scale of analysis between the global and local migration research,² and shape the contours of methodological regionalism in migration studies. This is a direct appeal to conduct most of the Mediterranean migration research findings towards a region-making process, detaching what is distinctive from this region of the world. The background premise is that even today, if we can say there is an undergirding research on Mediterranean migration, from a Med-Thinking point of view, findings are disarticulated and lost in a conceptual limbo. This is because there is no Mediterranean portfolio that frames the outcomes within a regional approach. In seeking to point out a series of epistemological and methodological pitfalls in our current understanding of migration in the Mediterranean region, this article could be useful for a research community which is often faced with a fragmented Mediterranean migration research area. In practice this means that we need to encourage scholars to channel their research towards the development of a Mediterranean approach.

To develop an integrative and reflexive regional approach, the following sections will point out, first the background premises of such a normative effort and second it will present the main analytical tools framing this Med-Thinking approach by articulating four main dimensions: epistemic solipsism, holism, homeostatic and positive thinking on migration. In the end, I will suggest some paths to promote the continued application of the Med-Thinking approach for the development of Mediterranean migration studies.

BACKGROUND PREMISES: CONTEXTUAL AND ANALYTICAL BASIS OF MED-THINKING

So far, migration has been one of the biggest and most divisive political questions of the twenty-first century, and it seems likely to be a central part of our politics going forward, especially in the Mediterranean area where several continents and migration regimes meet. Population movements constitute the bedrock of Mediterranean history (Chambers & Curti, 2008; Pace & Roccu, 2020), but controlling it is a key feature of current Mediterranean history. Today, the Mediterranean is considered as the most diasporic region in the world (Gallant, 2016, 205), as the world's least peaceful region (Global Peace Index, 2018) and by far the world's deadliest zone (UNHCR and IOM latest reports). It is also a space where migration is governed by a multipolar geo-politics where the Mediterranean plays the role of a chess game with multiple key players and migrant pawns (Garelli et al., 2018; Gillespie & Volpi, 2019). Current EU politics is basically re-active by creating a hostile environment for Med-movers that are unable to meet regular human migration corridors (Fekete, 2018; Pécouc, 2020), while criminalizing those social servants working for migrant rescue (Paoletti, 2011; Stierl, 2016). The Mediterranean is definitively viewed as a border space full of filters and conditions basically dominated by a unipolar EU Thalassocracy (Abulafia, 2014) dominance of all the Mediterranean space by concentrating power in the EU and European states. This current history of restrictions and lockdowns of mobility creates a 'disquieting account' in Chambers' terms (2008, 3). This is because presentism and event-based concerns prevails with a crisis narrative that generates an atmosphere of uncertainties and insecurity (Kirtsoglou & Tsimouris, 2016; Wolff & Hadj-Abdou, 2019), which often fuels xenophobic and neo-nationalist discourses in contemporary Europe (Michael, 2021), racial Europeanization (Goldber, 2006) and religious and anti-European fundamentalisms outside the European Mediterranean territory (Adamson & Tsourapas, 2020; Natter, 2018; Thiollet, 2011; Tsourapas, 2018). It also invites us to link Mediterranean migration with postcolonial critical thinking (Mayblin & Turner, 2021), where it becomes clear that Europe is governed by race and religion drivers in its politics of containment (Garelli & Tazzioli, 2020).

Within this current scenario, Med-thinking is an epistemological and ontological invitation to have a second-order reflection on the way migration research is producing and using knowledge. This article is a methodological exercise of positionality and reflexivity taking the Mediterranean as a category of analysis. These two epistemic attitudes activate self-awareness and critical thinking, and it even invites us to be questioned by the substantial ethical question of who benefits from research outcomes (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2019). These second-order

rationales are crucial to identify the key features of Med-Thinking. Reflexivity leads us towards a reflection on the scope of research not only in space (holistic thinking) but also in time (homeostatic thinking). Positionality also questions the self-systemic process that only legitimizes the knowledge that oneself produces for the benefits of oneself. This is better captured with what I call 'epistemic solipsism'. Positionality also invites us to have an axiological reflection about how we focus migration issues. It is a fact that the mainstream rationale frames Med-movers as a problem. Positive thinking is then much needed.

The main purpose of this article is also to conduct these rationales towards the normative dimension of Mediterranean migration research. In fact, this normativity of the Mediterranean as a dynamic region fabric probably belongs to the most well-known 'romantic yearnings' of the present/past of this geographical space. The 'imaginary' of peace, stability, prosperity and common values of free mobility of people/goods/information is of great importance, since it constitutes the utopian skyline of most governance instruments being deployed since the beginning of the 1995 Mediterranean Partnership Framework process (the so-called Barcelona process), the first EU initiative of region-making.³ Yet, this is only an ideal scenario, as this is not 'imaginary', yearnings are not happening within any European state nor within the European Union itself, which is full of migration-related cleavages.

The fact is that in this twenty-seventh anniversary, the failure diagnosis prevails because it has not managed to shape a positive view of Med-mobility, as it is always placed in the basket of security. This EU Mediterranean partnership was initially (and ideally) a multilateral affair that shifted to a much more bilateral one, where most relations are dominated by conditionality or the so-called more-for-more rhetoric or an incentive-based approach that began to be applied during the second decade of the twenty-first century.⁴

Taking this regional making as the normative horizon of Med-Thinking, allow me in the next section to further attempt to draw this Mediterranean methodological regionalism, before entering to the different dimensions that fashion the Med-Thinking approach. At the end, I will emphasize how far postcolonialism clusters most of the dimensions shaping the Med-Thinking approach and suggest some application paths so as to promote the continued normative development of Mediterranean migration studies.

MED-THINKING AS A METHODOLOGICAL REGIONAL LENS

Med-Thinking is beforehand an invitation to frame migration research with a particular methodological regional lens. Regional building theories are often based on a number of shared markers and a set of assumptions under which a 'region' makes sense and is thus given a shared meaning (Pace, 2006; 27). The premise is that a region is not a natural entity, but rather a political and social construct. There are broadly speaking two different ways of explaining the making of regions. Materialist theories emphasize the resource basis such as commonly shared characteristics, like geography, language, religion, economic ties and institutions. Ideationist scholars, on the other hand, have argued that although material factors matter, regions are above all 'imagined communities'. This means that regions are socially constructed entities, created by common narratives and shared spaces that may contribute to creating a sense of belonging. Med-Thinking combines both. Sympathizing with most of Pace's focus on regional identity building, the fact is that material factors become intelligible only in light of ideational factors (Pace, 2006; 10).

The spatial dimension is then key for Med-Thinking. Region-making is the sum of relations, connections, embodiments, narratives and practices, involving a large series of different scales of actors (Jones & Paasi, 2013). This relational view usually links politics, territory and power (Martin, 2009; Paasi & Metzger, 2017). It sketches different networks that belong to different state jurisdictions and even political regimes and religious/nationalist ideologies. Regions are envisaged as complicated constellations of materiality, agency, social relations and power. This 'relational thinking' is discussed by multiple geographers (Jones & Paasi, 2013; Varro & Legendijk, 2012) and suggests that the Med-region should not be seen as a bounded nested territory but as a net space of nodal places

with given narratives, practices and perceptions. Geographers often use region-making in descriptive terms in general as a set of spatial relations, but less on the added value of this region-making in normative terms, which consist of building a space of shared value making and even identity making.

This methodological regionalism grounds the basic dimensions shaping Med-Thinking. Let me start with epistemic solipsism.

EPISTEMIC SOLIPSISM IN MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION STUDIES: EURO-CENTRISM IS OUR TARGET

Solipsism is a view that the world is 'my world' in the sense that nothing exists independently of how I interpret the world. For me it is the epistemological foundation of Western-centrism, Eurocentrism and even 'white' supremacy that leads the current EU Thalassocracy. It is very close to methodological individualism (Heath, 2020), but applied to the politics of knowledge of the EU and European states. A good example of solipsism is the credo that 'there is no civilization outside of White Euro-America' (Hicks, 2020; 45). Epistemic solipsism shows us how knowledge production is related to self-interest. The Med-Thinking approach develops its first dimension as a radical criticism to the epistemic solipsism governing our views about Mediterranean migration and the geo-migration politics that follows.

As an epistemological position, solipsism is driven by power relations and holds that knowledge of migrants outside one's own vantage point is unsure, unstable and can even, in its radical form, threaten our own worldviews. For Med-Thinking, solipsism is an epistemological aggression and a channel of legitimization of current hostile Mediterranean migration policies that have difficulties passing the evidence-based approach, contextual dependent and ideology laden (Baldwin-Edwards et al., 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, cultural and even racial narratives tend to create a fluidity of interpretations of these values. Solipsism even has an ethical sense of selfishness, which takes the form of egocentrism. By targeting solipsism, we can identify assumptions that nurture our own vantage point, legitimating one's own position but rejecting the others as 'less credible' and even 'dangerous' for our 'western standards'.

Med-Thinking is an outcome of the critique of methodological nationalism applied at the regional/Mediterranean level. It is an answer to the current diagnosis of how certain Mediterranean migration research is performed: state-centred, dominated by narratives/practices/perceptions of crisis and security, dominated by top-down approaches, presentism, event-driven, highly Euro-centric and White/Christian supremacist. This Euro-centric view generates the geopolitical environment for an 'Europeanization' of the Mediterranean (the current Thalassocracy) fixing binary categorizations and monolithic constructs of the Mediterranean, which we need to problematize. Here, we can reflect on the diagnosis done by Arendt in the Preface to the first edition (1950) of *The Origin of Totalitarianism*, when she stated that: 'the subterranean stream of Western history has finally come to the surface and usurped the dignity of our tradition. This is the reality in which we live' (1976; ix).

Against this epistemic solipsism, Med-Thinking seeks to pursue a bottom-up polycentric view of Mediterranean migration research by learning to widen our current often 'biased or unilateral' perspectives, providing a 'variable focal length' (see Zapata-Barrero & Faustini, 2019). It is an epistemological cognitive denunciation on how far national narratives (and EU and European States policies) govern interpretations of the current trans-Mediterranean population dynamics and governance. It is important to capture the chronopolitics (Hicks, 2020) behind this Eurocentrism in order to shape the Med-Thinking approach.

This also entails that we probably need to reassess the current Mediterranean migration research 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 roman imperial and colonial 'Mare Nostrum' legacy. Along these lines, Chambers

(2008, 20) reminds us that legislating against migrants reveals a war against the political articulation of difference. Most EU Mediterranean policies since then have, accordingly, been focused on achieving the necessary conditions for long-term political and economic stability in this 'bitterly contested and fractured geopolitical space' (Giaccaria & Minca, 2011, 352).

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 silenced, occluded, marginalized, culturally repressed and physically eradicated from a solipsist Europe, as most postcolonial thought denounces (Chambers & Curti, 1996; Pace & Roccu, 2020). As a political theoretical project, Med-Thinking is concerned with the decolonization of the West representation 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 civilization (Chambers, 2008, 28).

HOLISTIC THINKING: THE CONCEPT AND ITS APPLICATION FOR GUIDING MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION STUDIES

'Holism' is a concept that has become an umbrella term that is used to encompass anything that is non-reductionist or dualist, monolithic construct. Holism is sometimes spelled as 'wholism', to accentuate its semantic connections to the 'whole' (Shoroff, 2011, 244–5). It pictures an organic system view, if we cannot understand the whole by knowing the components in isolation from each other. In sociology, Durkheim developed a concept of holism which he set as opposite to the notion that a society was nothing more than a simple collection of individuals. Ecology is the leading and most important approach to holism, as it tries to include biological, chemical, physical and economic views in a given area. The complexity grows with the area, so that it is necessary to reduce the characteristic of the view in other ways, for example to specific time duration. Epistemologically holism can prevent solipsism since it invites the researcher to look at the plurality of angles and narratives of a given topic.

Holistic thinkers believe that events or social dynamics are products of external forces and situations. This involves that the knowledge we may produce needs to also be framed within a given relational space, and that migration-related topics cannot be analysed out of a contextual reference framework. Taking Foucault (2004) reflections on space, holistic thinking considers space as 'emplacements' rather than 'localizations'. Emplacements are sites that can only be thought of if they are in relation to other sites. Emplacements are context-based locations.

Epistemologically it can be contrasted to monism and atomism, namely and respectively, the credo that there is just one truth and principle of a given event, and the credo that there is just one indivisible component as a unit of analysis, the individual, the nation, the religion. In common usage, this all-encompassing concept emphasizes the interconnectedness of its components within a systemic approach. This also involves including as many aspects as we can from the given topic, we are analysing ethical, political, economic, legal, sociological, psychological, anthropological, etc. Holistic thinking requires both interdisciplinarity and intersectionality. This combines mainstream patterns, although it is also open to explore other ways of understanding a given fact, trying to go beyond mainstream narratives. In this case, holistic thinking often falls within critical thinking because looking at a topic from different angles also allows for weighing up arguments and drawing conclusions. Applied to Med-Thinking, holism assumes a multiscale approach for generating understanding, from the individual to collective associations, institutions, cities, sub-regions, etc. The new UN Global Compact on migration (2018) is a perfect example of holistic thinking. It combines a global approach of migration and a view of the different types of relationships between many elements in a complex system. As a methodological approach, a good analogy could be a puzzle. A puzzle can be overwhelming if you just have a bunch of jumbled pieces and try to put them together without guidance (Terry, 2016). The Mediterranean region-making is one of the needed frames of reference required for holistic thinking.

Going from concept to applications, holism has also been one approach proposed at the EU Parliament on 23 March 2016 to deal precisely with Mediterranean migration affairs: 'on the situation in the Mediterranean and the need for a holistic EU approach to migration' (2015). In spite of being endorsed by the majority of the EU Parliament, this approach has had little policy continuity and less traction by researchers. It is a fact that the concept appears five times in the document and in a descriptive form, without any serious conceptual definition. It seems to mean 'broad approach' that tries to go beyond short-termism, but it incorporates some key analytical understandings of holism as a system where different kinds of policies interconnect. As the preliminary document grounding this EU proposal, the S&D research paper released in December 2015 stated that holism was 'one that embodies the principle of solidarity, thus enabling Member States to share responsibility fairly and to maintain a focus on human rights' (Socialists & Democrats, 2015, 4). This holistic initiative includes solidarity and the fair-sharing of responsibility, border management and visa policy, developing safe and lawful routes for asylum seekers and refugees into the EU, developing a strategy for cooperating with third countries, developing adequate legal economic migration, examining the use of funding in the area of migration and implementing the Common European Asylum System. Connecting all these actions within a holistic umbrella expresses the wish to encapsulate, within a single box concept, all aspects of the Mediterranean migration system, together and in conjunction with one another as the most effective way to handle migration. The message was clear: that concrete Mediterranean migration policies cannot be done in isolation from each other and that a systemic view was necessary. This would also involve more coordination from agencies and offices in charge of Mediterranean migration and development aid. Among the several measures, we can summarize that in the short term this involves a humanitarian response to Mediterranean migration and in a medium term, greater investment and enforcement against smuggling and trafficking networks, and to look at alternative forms of admission so that people no longer resort to smugglers. The debate turned around very different and probably dispersed and often contradictory claims taking the shape of policy priorities. This illustrates that holism has then had some application, even if we may discuss if this holistic approach passes the filter of solipsism, so important for the Med-Thinking approach.

EXPLORING THE CONCEPT OF HOMEOSTASIS AND CONSIDERING ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION STUDIES

There is a widespread tendency in migration studies to focus research on social, political, economic, cultural changes, leaving aside and even discrediting what remains after a process of change and have a more permanent temporality. This is probably due to the fact that most background research assumes that migration and the diversity that follows is one of the key drivers of change today. These initial assumed premises blur most of the current research focus and are probably one of the key rationales why short-termism prevails over long-term focus in Mediterranean migration. This event-driven prevalence over more *longue durée* shows that there is often a lack of a genuine philosophy of history in most Mediterranean migration research. This philosophy of history may invite us to zoom in on the time frame of what is being researched to place a given topic within an historical process. Within this background, Med-Thinking is claiming for some sort of Copernic turn, inviting the researcher to focus on continuities over changes. In philosophical terms, we can state for a more Parmenidean reading over a more Heraclitan reading of Mediterranean migration research. The Parmenides approach fixes the focus of what remains over change, while the Heraclitan approach points towards what changes over what remains. The stasis of Parmenides is then contrasted to the flux of Heraclitus. This is the basis of homeostatic thinking. It is much more related to the Braudelian's effort to approach the Mediterranean looking at *longue durée* events in contrast to those that only have a short-term life and are event-driven, with little impact on future developments.

In its definitional format, the concept of homeostasis comes from biology and physiology. Digging into this origin may help us clarify its use in shaping Med-Thinking. The term derives from Greek roots meaning 'similar' (*homeo*, not to be confused by *homo*:the same) and 'a state of stability'. In biology it also designates 'the ability

to maintain a stable internal state that persists despite changes in the word outside' (Lanese, 2019). Broadly speaking, it designates a state of equilibrium (balance between opposing pressures), as in an organism or cell, maintained by self-regulating processes (Miller-Keane Encyclopedia, 2003). In fact, self-regulation is seen as a homeostatic mechanism in a given body or system. There is also an ontological dimension of the concept. For instance, Rodolfo (2000) referred to 'homeostasis' as 'to any process that living things use to actively maintain fairly stable conditions necessary for survival'. This ontological background may have many applications in social sciences. It can even be related to 'resilience', since homeostatic systems may have primarily evolved to help organisms maintain optimal function in different stressing environments and shocking situations (Biggs et al., 2016). A homeostatic society maintains its stability despite competing political, economic and cultural factors (Rodolfo, 2000). Some scientists theorize that homeostasis primarily provides a 'quiet background' for cells, tissues and organs to communicate with each other. This 'quiet background' is often linked to equilibrium and balance. The word element-stasis implies static but also fixed or an unmoving state. In socio-psychological terms it may refer to how a person under conflicting stresses and motivations can maintain a stable psychological condition. Taken historically, it is much more related to continuity rather than changes, but adds that this continuity helps us to understand the present.

The application into the social sciences may be multifaceted. We may use homeostasis as a framework to understand how people and patterns maintain stability/routines despite disruptions. As a perspective for social science research, homeostasis can help underline how important it is to box fixed points in a changing environment, since these fixities in a process of change may help to give meaning to these changes and even help to draw different scenarios. If the focus is on what is stable, fixed in a given dynamic system, we may, for instance, have the seeds of identity building, a Mediterranean identity, based on historical continuities and fixities.

Med-Thinking is then characterized by powerful homeostatic tendencies. If we take a multi-layered view of history, following Braudel philosophy, the temporality of events is dominated by different historical strands that may overlap in the present. This involves that we can critically explore past structural events that have been silenced by politics and ideology, as it is often underlined by postcolonial thinkers. In this case, the making of silence, of 'political historical amnesia', is incorporated into the Med-Thinking agenda.

This homeostatic perspective is being used by some demographers (Wilson & Airey, 1999) and economists (Damasio & Damasio, 2016) looking at functional variables that may help to understand and explain fluctuations and regime transitions. I contend that if Mediterranean migration is looking at objectifiable drivers that may help us to understand and explain complex patterns of human mobility, diversity and governance, we need a framework of thought that tries to capture homeostatic regimes beyond variations, uncertainties and indomitable factors. This can be a valuable approach that can help give light to the normative dimension of Med-Thinking as well. This also implies that beyond variation Med-Thinking seeks to encode temporally long-term variations. One well-known and often quoted homeostatic thinking is the famous 'invisible hand' that guides the market capitalist economy (Damasio & Damasio, 2016; 129). Invisible and often escaping conscious rationality factors that give us light to understand current patterns and probably may help us to find ways of taming changes and variations, uncertainties that often paralyzes our understanding. This dimension captures one traditional meaning of homeostasis calling attention to a non-conscious form of physiological control which operates automatically without awareness or deliberation on the part of the organism.

Applying a homeostatic approach to Mediterranean migration provides us with a temporal context. Beyond communication channels, human mobility and translocal relations, what increasingly connects the past and the present can be clustered by colonialism. 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 today there is still a cultural legacy of colonialism in most of the policies governing Mediterranean migration relations. Power and violence are not something of the past, but still remain under

subtle security narratives legitimating control policies and building a hostile Mediterranean environment. As Hicks has recently highlighted in his preface: 'violence is not some past act, to be judged by the supposed standards of the past, but an ongoing event' (2020; xiv). In connecting the past and present, the homeostatic approach can help us to bring to surface what has been buried into a political amnesia.

Homeostatic thinking applied to Mediterranean migration studies can also be a useful approach to promote an epistemological reflection of how far categories that apparently objectify real facts are just mere political ideological constructions reinforcing current Mediterranean power relations (Thalassocracy). 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 postcolonial studies). For instance, the same Chambers (2008, 7) suggests interpreting today's xenophobia concentrated in 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'. In his stimulating work, Gilroy (2005; 2) argues that 'political conflicts which characterize multicultural societies can take a very different aspect if they are understood to exist firmly in a context supplied by imperial and colonial history'. Let us say, following this application, that the accumulated effects of discriminatory acts in the past may have led to a contemporary environment that is itself discriminatory. Following Said's tradition of thought, Med-Thinking sees colonialism not as a closed past chapter but rather as a contemporary presence moulding and modifying the horizon of Mediterranean migration possibilities.

POSITIVE THINKING IN MEDITERRANEAN MIGRATION RESEARCH

The word migration is usually seen as a 'dirty word'. Positive thinking is the practice of focusing on the good in any given situation. It is an emotional attitude that expects results that will benefit you. At the core of this notion, there is then an initial solipsism that we need to dispel. Considering the normative horizon of Med-Thinking, it is very difficult to contribute to region-making through negative inputs. For centuries, migration has fostered global trade links, shaped nations and societies, fuelled human endeavours and enabled skills and cultures to be shared across the globe. As world leaders recognized in the UN Global Compact on Migration in December 2018, migration 'is a source of prosperity, innovation and sustainable development in our globalized world'.

The tricky question is whether migration can be explored in good or bad, in pros and cons terms. Applying most of the dimensions of Med-Thinking we have already introduced, we tend to assess that these questions are not worth asking, since these binomial reference frameworks may have many answers depending on which vantage point we formulate it. If we focus on the potential answers rather than the formulation of the question, in general, it always tends to be answered in Eurocentric terms. Good and bad for whom? European states? Countries of origin? Africa/Balkans? Morocco/Lebanon? The migrant and his/her family? These questions invite us to think ethically as well (Zapata-Barrero & Yalaz, 2020). So the best way to properly target this question, and then to confirm the adequacy of this positive thought for shaping the Med-Thinking approach, is to keep the holistic and homeostatic approaches alive, as well as the epistemic solipsism proviso when answering.

Apart from its intrinsic dualist nature, I also had initial doubts if this dimension needed to be included given its instrumentalist nature. The fact is that we can jump from pros to cons very easily. To enter into this debate's path, we need to carefully think as to avoid falling within a dialectical approach. This means to refrain from following the rationale that if there is a group of people that think migration is bad in terms of crime, for instance, the positive side would be that migration provides security, which is also false. The relation is much more complex and related to different forms of articulating the consequences and impact of migration. It is not the same to assess migration in positive terms from the country of reception than from the vantage point of the sending country; it is not the same to build a research design from the position of the migrant than from a particular state's interests. What is also a common trend is that this query of positive thinking on migration is always focused within a consequentialist

angle. The question of whether migration is good or bad touches on a lot more than just economics. There are social, cultural and moral arguments used to debate for and against migration, as well as human security concerns raised by letting people move back and forth (Zapata-Barrero & Gabrielli, 2017). The list of pros is quite long and dispersed: increased economic output, potential transnational entrepreneurs, increased economic demand and growth, a possible solution for an ageing population, more flexible labour market, solving a skills shortage, filling undesirable job vacancies, cosmopolitan creative and innovative society. The mainstream rationale is to link the positive side with cultural, economic, social development arguments, innovation and creativity. In this case, the negative view of migration is formulated in normative terms of cohesion erosion, social conflict and economic instability and even ontological national survival.

Often this debate inevitably includes discussions about stereotypes, prejudices and myths of migration. These negative misperceptions contaminate the public narrative and even affect practices and perceptions. The counter positive argument here takes the shape of providing evidence-based arguments countervailing these myths. For instance, providing evidence that migrants do not steal and increase criminality, do not collapse public services or occupy jobs that nationals may need. The focus on diversity advantages is already an open debate. This approach is usually used as a direct attack against the view of diversity as a direct source of conflict and disadvantages, as a 'diversity dividend' of private/social economic benefits (Syrett & Sepulveda, 2011). In seeking to realize the diversity dividend, city public promoters have for instance pursued a number of different strategies, from the branding of cities as vibrant, multicultural/cosmopolitan locations to attract investors, tourists, events and high skilled workers (Musterd & Murie, 2010; Rath, 2007), to the promotion of, for example, ethnic businesses (Ram & Jones, 2008), diaspora trading networks (Kitching et al., 2009; Kuznetsov & Sabel, 2006), ethnic quarters and festivals (Shaw, 2007). This literature often links diversity-advantages production with intercultural policies (Zapata-Barrero, 2019, Ch. 8). If we look at the Intercultural Cities Program of the Council of Europe, it incorporated a competitive call for cities in March 2015 to select the best practical initiatives on diversity advantage challenges. The way they define diversity advantage is broad, but it fits the strand we are shaping for Med-Thinking. 'Recognizing that diversity is not a threat – it can bring competitive benefits for businesses, organizations and communities if managed competently and in the spirit of inclusion', 'Embracing diversity is not a gimmick for the branding of a business, organization or city but a philosophy of governance, management and decision making' (Council of Europe, 2015; 3). The diversity-advantage approach of interculturalism (Wood & Landry, 2008) certainly emerges assuming the economic development hypothesis leading the debate. We are always searching for stories about the inspiring deeds of immigrants. For instance, giving visibility to artists with migrant origin, writers or even well-known football players with a migrant and working-class origin. Histories of successful migrants' entrepreneurs could also belong to this Med-thinking approach to migration studies.

CONCLUDING REMARKS FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION. POTENTIALITIES OF THE APPLICATION OF THE MED-THINKING APPROACH

This article is an invitation to explore the analytical, methodological and normative possibilities afforded by a Mediterranean approach for migration studies. First, it briefly presents the background premises on the historical, social and geopolitical dimensions that make the Mediterranean region uniquely positioned to develop critical thinking on a predominantly (North and West) unilateral European approach to knowledge production, cautioning at the same time against the trappings of idealized, utopian or 'romantic yearnings' about the Mediterranean. Second, and more importantly, the article lays out the methodological and epistemological dimensions of a Mediterranean approach: against Euro-centrism ('epistemic solipsism'), holistic and multiscale or better, multi-layered approach; focusing on positive thinking understood as an analytical choice to purposively avoid 'crises', 'threat' and 'security' laden framings of migration; favouring continuity over or within change (homeostasis).

The fact that the Mediterranean can and should be used as a category of analysis to enhance Mediterranean migration studies is then beyond doubt. What maybe is less obvious and probably needs further discussion is the guiding normative chart of this article: how far can Med-Thinking contribute normatively to Mediterranean region-making.

First of all, we may initially argue that there are probably many ways of Mediterranean region-making which are not necessarily related to migration, but to interchange commodities, knowledge and culture, economic and social circulation within all the shores of the Mediterranean. This is true. But we cannot leave aside from this list that human mobility is one of the most powerful resources for Mediterranean region-making today. This path is clearly under-researched. Med-Thinking can help to carry this on, since their various dimensions have potential to strengthen the necessary epistemological and ontological views for shaping a normative approach. One further reflection may request the role of postcolonial thinking within this Med-Thinking normative approach, since, as we have seen, it clusters almost all the four dimensions of Med-thinking. Obviously, postcolonialism provides strong arguments against epistemic solipsism and enhances the potentialities of holistic, homeostatic and positive thinking. Shaping Med-Thinking, postcolonialism can help to frame an alternative approach to Mediterranean migration research and can be at the foundation for innovative thinking in Mediterranean migration studies. Med-Thinking could be interpreted as a regional application of postcolonialism applied to migration studies.

Given this conceptual background, the current Mediterranean system of filters and blockage of population mobility can be interpreted as different ways of putting a stitch in the wheel of region-making. Mobility as a factor of region-making is not new. In fact, it is at the core of the constructivist approach of identity building followed by European citizenship (Favell & Recchi, 2009). Focusing on transnational relations, there are so many themes related to mobility and migration altogether: transnational relations of migrants, trans-local relations through cities, civil society actors networking in the Mediterranean to save lives, but also civil society relations through different intercultural programmes, such as those promoted by the Anna Lindh Foundation,⁵ whose mission is to deploy the cultural pillar of the Barcelona Process.

The normative dimension that brings us Med-Thinking may have many understandings and policy applications. The easiest way to begin is to look at identifying the key features of Mediterranean migration that may help to understand the specificities of this geographical area in a global context. For instance, we can identify key dimensions of this particular region, such as the migrants and associated moving population (such as refugees) and the long array of institutional, collective and individual practices around them, transnational dimensions that may take not only individual but also multiscale dimensions (translocalism, transregionalism, etc.), migrant transnational entrepreneurship, the presence of unaccompanied children, migrants with an irregular status, but also the colonial legacy still present for understanding European policies towards Mediterranean migration. Not only issues related to cities and NGO networks, corridors but also shared views and concerns, and even cosmopolitan values related to an intercultural Mediterranean, may also help to regionalize topics instead of viewing it within a territorial vacuum. We can even go on to the still under-researched issues of Mediterranean citizenship without falling to the 'Mediterraneanism', namely looking at a 'Mediterranean race' mostly used by Mussolini's fascism. Here citizenship studies may help us to see if a regional understanding of citizenship is possible. This seems to follow a communitarian view of a region, rather than the current liberal one governed by Mediterranean unipolar geo-migration politics.

Human mobility remains a key feature of Mediterranean region-making. I follow the perspective of considering mobility essential in the making of societies (Cresswell, 2006; Urry, 2007). In a similar vein, trans-Med human mobility connecting Mediterranean cities could be considered another factor building the Med-region (Zapata-Barrero, 2020b). I am very sympathetic to the particular debate of the Mediterranean scale of governance, putting city networks at the core (Kramsch, 2004), transnational urbanism (Smith, 2005) and trans-local spatial geographies (Brickell & Datta, 2011) applied at city levels (Christou, 2011) or simply translocality (Greiner & Sakdapolrak, 2013), which I understand both as physical and virtual. It is not only a way to focus on the link between space/people, space/governance and then an invitation to rethink the role of space and

territory in migration governance, but also to stress the new Med-spatial geographies. Here we can also place the debate that focuses on translocalism as a driver for new values making, and the promotion of a new sense of belonging based on diverse city attachments (Smith & Eade, 2008), and even to frame this debate within cosmopolitanism (Smith, 1999).

As Cooke asserts and from which we get inspired, Med-Thinking can be summarized as an approach that seeks to homogenize diversity (Cooke, 1999, 292). Within this folder we can place a list of factors that may help region-making: reiterated relations, routines, patterns, fixities and how these factors interact in a comprehensive way to shape regional ecological system. We can take the geographical or the international relations description which points more on the geopolitical dimension of this geographical area (Collyer, 2016).

What I have tried to defend here is a path for building a normative approach (Med-Thinking) capable of contributing to the development of Mediterranean migration studies. This debate is much needed since it will allow us to place on to the Mediterranean migration research agenda the importance of ontological and epistemological questions in the process of building knowledge, insisting that the variety of legitimate approaches and views is probably what makes the Mediterranean unique.

As a last resort, Med-Thinking may contribute to be more sensitive to the concepts that shape Mediterranean migration studies and make visible their inner hierarchies and power differentials within the Mediterranean region. This conceptual thinking (Zapata-Barrero et al., 2022) applied to Med-Thinking would probably help us to decentralize Mediterranean migration knowledge production and governance. To raise awareness of how far the EU and the power of its states shape an imperialist Thalassocracy governing the Mediterranean, and to place into the agenda other Mediterranean fixities such as cities, which are older than states in the Mediterranean (Leontidou, 2019), it can also invite us to carve a much more polyhedric approach and look at other sources of information and other theoretical frameworks that may contribute to build knowledge around Mediterranean migration. The list of potential research avenues applying the Med-thinking approach in migration studies is then vast and promising.

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DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

In references I have placed all DOI for articles and mentioned and given all retrieved from website when it is free access.

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ENDNOTES

1. This approach was first articulated in the editorial of a special issue I edited for *Comparative Migration Studies* (Zapata-Barrero, 2020a), and then further developed in a *EuroMedMig Working-Paper* (Zapata-Barrero, 2020b). It is inspired by the seminal work of Cooke (1999) and the basic development done by Chambers (2008) in its stimulating book on *Mediterranean Crossings*.
2. Some initial works are devoting increasing attention in multi-scale settings, and the regional arrangements is receiving prominent interest; however, it is still an under-research scale of analysis in migration governance. See some seminal works in Bisong (2021), Geddes et al. (2019), Lavenex and Piper (2021) and Rother and Piper (2015).
3. In November 1995, following a European Council decision, a Euro-Mediterranean Conference of Foreign Affairs Ministers was held in the Spanish city of Barcelona. It marked the launch of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EuroMed), also known as the Barcelona Process for short, after the name of the city in which the decision was taken. It was the EU's first

- comprehensive policy for the region. There is a huge literature on Euromed policy and the EuroMed partnership initiative. I just quote two that seems to be better offer an introductory descriptive overview: Gillespie (2013) and Jünemann (2004).
4. Concretely it was first emphasized in May 2011 in a joint communication on 'a new response to a changing Neighborhood' European Commission and High representative Joint communication, a new response to a changing Neighborhood, Brussels, 25/05/2011, COM(2011) 303.
5. <http://www.annalindhfoundation.org/>

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