

A Matrix for Mediterranean (Area) Studies – Towards an Interdisciplinary Approach in the Post-“Arab Spring” Context

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Abstract

The multipolar, dynamic and heterogeneous Mediterranean area is an object of analysis in different disciplines. The French historian Fernand Braudel developed one of the most comprehensive scientific approaches, defining the Mediterranean as a space of unity and coherence, with a long-term continuity (*longue durée*). Studies in political science, especially in international relations (IR), have been limited to debates between schools of thought, explaining global challenges, or using local case studies for theoretical testing. Work in area studies has been reduced to (comparative) analysis of local specificities. The fundamental changes within the societies of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean provoked by the uprisings since the end of 2010 call for new scientific approaches in Mediterranean Studies. By combining IR and area studies, and by simultaneously analysing large-scale developments (macro) and smaller, local, sub-regional developments (micro), we can not only explore the interdisciplinary dynamics in social sciences, but also place the Mediterranean area within the international system, and deepen our knowledge about its specificities at the same time.

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Introduction

The study of the Mediterranean area includes numerous different disciplines, depending on the concrete research issue and angle of exploration. Political science, sociology, anthropology, economics, geography, Islamic studies, cultural, literary and linguistic studies are amongst the most common disciplines contributing to the interdisciplinary comprehensive area studies' approach. From the perspective of political scientists, the Mediterranean area has again become particularly relevant since the Arab uprisings. The fact that neither international relations (IR) experts nor area studies scientists were able to predict the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East plunged at least parts of the concerned scientific community into a certain credibility crisis, and demands a critical reappraisal of existing theories, approaches and methods. Besides the Arab uprisings, the recent protest movements in other Mediterranean countries (e.g. Spain, Greece, Turkey) bring the Mediterranean area back on to the scientific agenda, too. These developments raised, amongst others, the question of whether we can speak of transnational phenomena, but also whether these socio-economic crises (e.g. unemployment, rising food and living expenses) are economically interlinked.

But already before 2011, and seen from a European perspective, the Southern Mediterranean region had become geographically closer and more relevant to Europe: following the adoption of the different Schengen Agreements in the 1990s, and the different enlargement rounds of the EU, the Southern borders of the EU now run into Southern Italy, Spain or Greece. Therefore, the Mediterranean neighbourhood had and continues to have a political, social, economic and geo-strategic meaning for both Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries; this is particularly important with regard to broader inter-regional and transnational perspectives, trade



relations and socio-economic dimensions, energy politics, demographic and human developments, regional conflicts or cultural aspects.

At the same time, the global and interdisciplinary scientific knowledge about the political, economic, social and cultural backgrounds of the Mediterranean area often still does not correspond to the intensive level of the existing political, economic and socio-cultural ties between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries are largely interdependent. The close linkages between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean become for instance increasingly visible in the case of migration and integration issues. About 20 million individuals living in Europe have their background in migration from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries; they contribute to the human interwoven pattern of the Mediterranean area. In the context of different EU policies (such as the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)) Europe tried and still does offer economic and financial perspectives. However, political and intercultural dialogues with the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries often remained difficult, due, amongst other things, to persisting regional conflicts and security matters, and different perceptions of good governance, rule of law or political freedoms. From the perspective of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, the presence of Mediterranean Studies in the respective scientific landscapes does not correspond to the existing intensive relations with Europe and other parts of the Mediterranean area. On the contrary, in most of the Arab countries, Mediterranean Studies are less present than in Southern European countries, and are sometimes even considered with resentment.

The main objective of this article is to critically reconsider the current state of the art of Mediterranean Studies, against the background of the new political context and landscape in different Arab countries, and to suggest some research tracks for the further development of Mediterranean area studies. Hence I argue that in contrast to classical Middle East studies - that also failed to predict the “Arab Spring” (Gause 2011) and focused for along time on authoritarian stability - Mediterranean studies’ approach has the



advantage of considering Europe (EU and EU member states), North Africa and the Middle East, as well as Israel, Turkey and the Balkans. In a wider sense, Mediterranean Studies even include the impact of the developments in the Southern and Eastern geographical neighbourhood of the North African and Middle Eastern countries, meaning Sub-Saharan Africa and the Gulf countries. Numerous challenges emanating from the Mediterranean area (such as migration, energy, climate change, demography, transnational radicalism) have a transnational and regional character. They demand regional and interregional analyses and answers, too. Area studies like Middle East studies, North African studies or European studies address subparts of the Mediterranean, but they do not observe and analyse the Mediterranean region as a whole. There have been few attempts to work on the entire region. Some Euro-Mediterranean networks work on a 'policy oriented' basis and are not equipped to systematically carry out fundamental large-scale research on the area. Smaller research projects exist here and there. The Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l'Homme (MMSH) is one of the rare examples of a multi-disciplinary research institute working on the entire region. In international relations (IR), numerous studies on North Africa and the Middle East exist, but few scholars do work on the Mediterranean area. The traditional divide between IR scholars and area studies scholars and their reciprocal stereotypes continues to exist. While IR scholars consider area studies experts as too bound to their regions, area studies researchers often prefer to work with comparative analysis and consider IR experts as theoreticians far removed from the realities of local societies.

Contradicting this traditional divide, I argue that the political analysis of a complex and heterogeneous region such as the Mediterranean area demands, however, the consultation of both IR and area studies' theoretical and empirical approaches. This contribution seeks to develop some preliminary thoughts for a future Mediterranean matrix model that could eventually contribute to the process of explaining and decoding the contemporary Mediterranean system. Therefore, in what follows, the article first provides a critical overview of the state of the art of Mediterranean Studies, before developing some reflections on a potential conceptual model (matrix) or



approach for the analysis of the Mediterranean area. The third part of the article suggests some ideas for relevant future research fields of Mediterranean Studies that could be used to test the matrix approach, while the last part debates different research methods of Mediterranean Studies.

1. State of the Art

The Mediterranean area has been explored as an object of analysis in various disciplines. The idea to establish the Mediterranean area as an analytical category goes back to the French historian Fernand Braudel (1902-1985). His human history of the Mediterranean and concept of *longue durée* remains a *reference oeuvre* (Braudel 1949, 1990). Since then, there have only been a few attempts to update his approach in order to develop a contemporary analytical framework for this multi-layered area. Braudel's approach was taken up again, a few decades later, by the British historians Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell when they analysed the 3,000-year history of the entire Mediterranean area and, with *The Corrupting Sea* (Horden, Purcell 2000), defended the thesis that one needs to research the micro-environments of the Mediterranean in order to be able to understand the general trends of the region, its culture and its history. Other historians focused on the analysis of the history of diplomatic relations (Brown 2001) or the detailed retracing of the cultural and human history of the Mediterranean area (Carpentier, Lebrun 2001, Abulafia 2011).

Only since the 1990s have we been able to speak of 'Mediterranean Studies' as a category of area studies, alongside, for instance, Asian studies, European studies or Middle Eastern studies. However, the case of Mediterranean Studies remains specific because the region is geographically located at the intersection of various world regions. Different area studies thus overlap, these being mainly European studies, Turkish studies, Middle Eastern studies/Near Eastern studies and North African studies. It was in the context of the revival of area studies (Schäbler 2007), and of regionalism in international relations at the turn of the twenty-first century that the Mediterranean area also



made a certain comeback as a scientific and political issue. Within the French- and English-speaking scientific communities, the notions of ‘Middle East and North Africa’ (MENA) or ‘Maghreb-Machrek’, ‘*Afrique du Nord/Proche-Orient*’ remain predominant. The Mediterranean, on the other hand, is perceived and defined as a fragmented and diverse space. Sub-regions, such as Europe, North Africa, the Near East or the ‘oriental’ and ‘occidental Mediterranean’ continue to be put into the foreground (Fawcett 2005, Halliday 2005). In Arab scientific literature the notion of the Mediterranean (Al Bahr Al Abyad al Muttawasit, the Middle White Sea) only plays a minor role, compared to the amount of Southern European scientific literature on the Mediterranean.

Mediterranean Studies consider the Mediterranean area as an autonomous, standalone region, which is, however, in constant interconnection with other world regions. Unlike Middle Eastern studies, the Mediterranean approach permits researchers to work in a more comprehensive manner on regional and trans-regional problems such as migration, energy, security or cultural identity matters. The advantage of Mediterranean Studies is also that they not only include the study of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, but also consider the European dimension and the interregional relationship between Europe and the Arab-Islamic worlds as well. With regard to the recent developments in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean in the context of the Arab upheavals and protest movements, and the impact of the economic crisis in the entire Mediterranean area, the necessity of developing and combining different scientific approaches and disciplines, in order to better understand the complexity of the Mediterranean region, has increased.

Depending on different schools of thought, the definition of the Mediterranean region varies greatly (Schäfer 2012). In the political and social sciences, constructivists such as Lars Cederman, Alexander Wendt or Emanuel Adler consider the Mediterranean as a virtual space – a space where values and common interests are defined by interaction (Cederman 2001, Wendt 1999, Adler 1997, 1998, Adler et al. 2006). Social constructivism analyses the impact of identities on the relations between states. Identities are the product of interaction and they are not primordial or essential. In contrast



to the neo-realist school, constructivists think that international institutions can change identities and the interests of states. The constructivist approach also allows for the simultaneous analysis of governmental and non-governmental agents, as well as the processes of interaction between them and the consequences or impact of these interactions on identities and interests. This is to say that, with a constructivist understanding of area studies, Mediterranean Studies can help to analyse interactions, identities and common interests between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean states, and between societies and individuals.

The neo-realist school defines the Mediterranean area above all as a security area where the role of the state stays central (Ortega 2003, Masala 2005). This means that states create regimes and regional institutions in order to maximise their security, their power and their interests. Terrorist attacks or the rise of radical *salafism* have generated new security concerns about radical movements of political Islam in North Africa and the Middle East and related spill-over to Europe. Much has been written on the security dimension and on the Western responses to these security challenges. Within these works, the focus is often on the security relations in the Mediterranean, or on the relationship between Muslims and the State in the Post-9/11 West (Bleich 2009). However, the growing interconnectedness between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean needs to be addressed more intensively from other scientific angles. Mediterranean research needs to go further, leave aside out-dated antagonistic images, and investigate beyond the analysis of transnational Islamist ideology's success within Europe and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean societies (Allievi, Nielson 2003).

According to the neo-liberal school, it is the extension of free trade in the Mediterranean that is considered to be the magic bullet for the numerous problems and challenges in this region (Attina 2003, Baldwin 1993). Institutionalists defend the idea of strengthening regional organisations such as the Arab League or the Arab Maghreb Union (Philippart 2003), or creating new institutions. This approach corresponds to the tradition of Europe projecting its own institutionalism to other parts of the world, in this case to the Mediterranean area. From the perspective of international political



economists, the aspects of natural resources (oil, gas) and their impact on conflicts and governance are put in the foreground (Bromley 1994, Cameron/Rhein 2005, Nonneman 2005). In sum, and here I can cite only a few examples, studies in political science on the Mediterranean area, and in particular in international relations, have either been limited to specific thematic approaches or to selective angles of IR schools of thought.

Next to the aforementioned approaches, the concept of regionalism allows for the explanation of the contemporary world system (Ian Clark 2001) and can help us understand regional community building in the Mediterranean area (Volpi 2004). Regionalism can accentuate and explore different forms: the economic dimension (the Mediterranean area as a trade region), the security dimension (the Mediterranean as a security community) or cultural or religious dimensions (e.g. the Mediterranean as the cradle of civilisation and of the three monotheistic religions). The intensification of regionalism is often interpreted as a reaction directed against globalisation processes, but regionalism can also be understood as an inherent aspect of globalisation. Here, regionalism is understood in the sense of the construction of a relatively autonomous political, economic and cultural space, by underlining its particularities or specificities, and by following a certain regional institutionalism (Fawcett, Hurrell 1995). This approach can include the development of a feeling of belonging to common civilisations ('Mediterranean civilisations') or the construction of a certain political autonomy in contrast to other national, international or supranational political frameworks. The Mediterranean area is real in its geographic existence and its socio-economic challenges, and it is virtual in the sense of a reinvention of images, traditions, cultural practices, identities and values or shared cultural belongings. The normative and exclusive interpretation of the underlying common cultural and historical aspects of the Mediterranean region, and the reference to a single and unique Mediterranean civilisation, somehow presumed to be superior to other civilisations, can lead to a certain exaggerated *Mediterraneanism* though. Regionalism, in this context, can also simply mean the phenomenon of a new constellation of countries that are looking to facilitate their trade relations (e.g. UE, Euro-Mediterranean Partnership or Agadir Group).



In a post-bipolar or multipolar system different (world) regions gain more autonomy; this is also true for the Mediterranean region. At the same time, the degree of interrelationships and globalisation is constantly growing, and the Mediterranean area as a region becomes more and more interdependent with other entities in the world system. This leads to a situation where, on the one hand, since the beginning of the twenty-first century, we observe a retreat to bilateralism between Europe (EU and EU Member States) and singular Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries as an answer to growing heterogeneities and complexity. While on the other hand, there is a growing need to develop new regional institutions and frameworks, or to strengthen and reform the existing ones. This evolution became visible for instance with the launching of the multilateral intergovernmental project of the “Union for the Mediterranean (UfM)” in 2008, with the objective to push forward the institutional regional integration of the Mediterranean area. This is to say that regionalism can be one central track for explaining the heterogeneous and complex character of the Mediterranean area, but it is certainly not sufficient.

The Mediterranean region needs to be approached in a pluri-disciplinary way (Sant Cassia, Schäfer 2005). Here, the interdisciplinary and comparative works of the Maison Méditerranéenne des Sciences de l’Homme (MMSH), founded in 1997 by Robert Ilbert and colleagues, in Aix-en-Provence, were certainly ground-breaking. Numerous studies and research projects have gathered political scientists, anthropologists, sociologists, archaeologists, historians, linguists, etc., working on the Mediterranean area from different perspectives (e.g. Fabre, Ilbert 2000; Albera, Bromberger, Blok 2001). For instance, the Institut Européen de la Méditerranée (IEMed) in Barcelona combines studies of international relations with approaches through history, cultural studies or sociology (Mediterranean Yearbook), while the British journal *Mediterranean Politics* focuses on international relations in the Mediterranean. The broader German political science community only discovered the Mediterranean region at the time of the diplomatic disagreement between the German government and the French President Nicolas Sarkozy about the project of the “Mediterranean Union” in 2007/2008. Different Islamic studies’ and Middle East area studies’ research institutes deal with selected themes or



sub-regions related to the Mediterranean area, but they do not address the Mediterranean area as such in a comprehensive and interdisciplinary way.

The former centre-periphery paradigm is not valid anymore for area studies. Instead, we observe the emergence of new hegemonic structures. The Asian Pacific area especially is growing in importance and power, but so also are 'new' global players like the BRICS states Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa. Scenarios of the future world system are becoming more diverse. Some authors propose a comprehensive multilateralism or world federalism (Galtung, Scott 2008), while others insist on the shift from the former triad model US-EU-Japan to China-India-US (Dadush, Stancil 2010). Due to global economic transformation, the centre of gravity of world (production) will move towards Asia. However, the future place of the Mediterranean area within this constantly developing world system remains unclear, pointing to the necessity of conducting Mediterranean area studies.

With regard to the cultural dimension of the Mediterranean area, one can find numerous studies on the 'clash of civilisations' (Huntington 1993) and its critics, or about the misleading dichotomies of modernity-tradition, Orient-Occident or Islam and the West (Lewis 1994). Only a few authors have seriously tried to overcome these dichotomies and to develop alternative views of the relations between the European and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean societies that are meeting and melting in the Mediterranean area (e.g. Arkoun 2005).

Much has been written on the relationship between economic reform politics, governance, and democratisation politics in the Mediterranean area (e.g. Kienle 2009, Bicci 2009). Recently, there have been a few attempts to develop broader views or scenarios on the long-term future of the region (Alm eras, Jolly 2009, Ayadi 2013), predicting that major challenges in the Mediterranean region will be the geopolitical power relations, as well as human, agricultural, environmental, energy and financial challenges, and last but not least political Islam.

The impact of the Arab uprisings on area studies has been important in so far as the number of international research projects and publications on the



developments in North Africa and the Middle East has rapidly and largely increased. After a first wave of “revolutionary” enthusiasm, a wave of disenchantment followed, and a relapse into old explanatory schemes. However, as the uprisings and transformation processes are still going on, including backlashes, counter revolutions and civil wars, as well as new constitutions, citizenship affirmation and new freedoms, most of the analysis insists on the future heterogenisation, the fragmentation of the region, and the uncertainty of future developments. It might be true that the fundamental impact of these historic events can only be analysed for their entire meaning in a mid- or long-term retrospective. However, what is missing so far is a critical revision of existing approaches, and a new comprehensive analytical framework, based on international relations theories and regional expertise, that allows for the simultaneous analysis of contemporary transnational influences and the larger developments in the region and an understanding of the intricacies of smaller sub-regional units. This is a gap that Mediterranean Studies can fill out.

2. A New Interdisciplinary Conceptual Matrix or Approach for Mediterranean Studies

The Mediterranean system consists of different subsystems; it is a group of different spheres that work together, a complex web of life. Hereby, I understand “matrix” as an interlocking web of principles, sub-systems, institutions, agents, practices and processes that shape the system at all levels. This matrix links international relations (IR) and area studies, and contributes to the further establishment of Mediterranean Studies as an analytical category. Under Mediterranean Studies, I understand a specific field of research at the crossroads of different disciplines. Mediterranean Studies provide a case for changing conceptual models through which we assess the general phenomena of an area which contains transnational links. By using elements of IR, area studies and further disciplines as a tool kit, the objective here is to develop a coherent and appropriate analysis framework for capturing the Mediterranean area.



The matrix model includes the analysis of three dimensions: politics, economy and culture/society. It allows us to revisit the Mediterranean as a political, economic and cultural space. The matrix puts a strong emphasis on the linking of the political and the social, in the sense of a political sociology approach to IR. This process of rethinking the Mediterranean is based on the principle of inclusiveness, and instead of using dualism or dichotomies (such as modernity/tradition, European/Arab world, North/South, East/West, Orient/Occident, centre/periphery), it can be understood as taking an integrative approach in the sense of *Ganzheitlichkeit*, decoding the region as such and from within. As distinct from Braudel, the emphasis here is not put on a supposed coherence and unity of the Mediterranean area, but rather on the heterogeneity, diversity and interconnectedness of multiple interests, identities, cultures and references in a given historic space. Thus, the analysis of the region as an entity underlines the need for a strong pluralism of meanings, as well as for the exploration of divergences and conflicts, and it includes a strong multi-layered investigation. The comprehensive analytical framework is based on international relations theories and regional expertise. It allows for both the analysis of greater developments in the region (macro-level) and a close-up of the specificities of smaller local or sub-regional hubs or units (micro-level). This kind of matrix also permits us to better understand the interdisciplinary dynamics in the field of social sciences. The matrix can be tested in different thematic fields, such as the analysis of the political dimension of Euro-Mediterranean relations, mobility and migration issues, or questions related to the domains of energy and environment. Hereby, IR theory enables the explanation of worldwide tendencies, global challenges, interrelationships and contexts, while area studies can better explain regional and local intricacies and backgrounds. By combining both, we can place the Mediterranean region within the world system and deepen the knowledge about its specificities at the same time.

A further objective of the Mediterranean matrix is exploring its particularities and similarities compared to other world regions. Why is the Mediterranean an area or region? What and who makes the Mediterranean a region? Is it a space of unity and coherence in a long-term continuity, as Braudel says, or should



we rather break with the idea of unity? According to different schools of thought and disciplines, the definition and the reading of the Mediterranean area strongly varies. The notion of the “Mediterranean” is contested, too, especially by those who exclusively reduce it to failed intergovernmental political initiatives (such as the “Union for the Mediterranean”) or to European initiatives without sufficient involvement of Arab actors and civil societies. It even provokes resentment amongst some Arab scientists, societal groups and political deciders, and it is true that most of the Arab countries or governments do not often refer to their region as the Mediterranean region, but rather the “Arab regional system”. According to this kind of rather (neo)realistic-oriented IR interpretation of the “Arab regional system”, Israel is considered to be the main source of threat. While in the “Mediterranean system”, as it was understood during the 1990s and in the subliminal comprehension of the UfM, the main threat would be seen as internal instability and lack of democracy.

On the contrary, according to the interdisciplinary matrix approach, the “Arab regional system” would be understood as one Mediterranean sub-system next to others (a North African sub-system including Berber and other identities, a Middle Eastern sub-system including Israel for instance), which is in constant interconnection or overlapping with other systems; the objective is not to define the potential threat but rather to understand the Mediterranean system “from within”, as well as the different layers of references and identities of inclusion and exclusion, and their interactions. The idea is, in a first phase, to deconstruct and revisit existing definitions and readings of the Mediterranean area and, in a second phase, to define new vertices for the research process. One path to do so is to reinterpret Braudel’s approach, given the fact that he is one of the central historians who worked extensively on the Mediterranean area. As one of the founders of the “Les Annales” group of historians in France after the Second World War, his perspective on the Mediterranean area is of course a “French” and a “European” one, but at the same time, his works offer various useful findings and assumptions that can serve as analytical fundamentals, such as the use of three different time levels, the understanding of the Mediterranean area as a nexus (conjunctive structure or pattern), and the development of a panoramic



matrix for the Mediterranean. According to post-colonial studies, we must critically consider these readings through post-colonial glasses.

Therefore the question is: How can we adapt Braudel's ideas to post-modernity and develop new comprehensive analytical concepts for the Mediterranean area in the twenty-first century? I argue that the Mediterranean area represents a common and specific "pool", a fount or a source of multiple and diverse ideas, offering a long and deep tradition of theories. This specific "pool" developed over the centuries on the ground of shared history, marked by conflicts, interaction and cooperation. By interlinking theories from IR, area studies, political science, history, political sociology and some abstract elements of science and mathematics (e.g. the concept of the matrix), we can develop new conceptual models. In mathematics, a matrix is a constellation of elements or objects that one can use in order to solve linear algebraic equations. A Mediterranean matrix allows the solution of the insoluble fractions of the Mediterranean region, by thinking in terms of three or multi-dimensional models, uncovering the multiple layers of this space. The matrix enables both single-spot close-up and multi-spot close-ups and the analysis of simultaneous landscapes. The micro and the macro level are both observed, as well as their relationship to each other. This approach designs general overviews and maps, putting the Mediterranean in relation with other world regions and the global context, and explains cooperation schemes and fragmentation processes. The mapping includes geographical, political, socio-cultural, and mobility as well as mental maps. The deconstruction and reconstruction of the Mediterranean area are part of this scientific process.

The objective is not developing a (new) theory of Mediterranean Studies, but rather drafting a new comprehensive approach addressing the complexity of the Mediterranean area while investigating its common and diverging elements. Mediterranean Studies also need to provide new methodological tools for implementing and operationalizing interdisciplinary fundamental research on the Mediterranean region. Mediterranean Studies are an emerging field of research, and contemporary theoretical reflections, theories and scientific approaches are still missing. Mediterranean area studies are not yet



well established and there is reluctance from all sides: from IR scholars as well as from area studies scholars themselves. The latter often only consider North Africa and the Middle East as stand-alone areas, but not the Mediterranean area. I argue that a Mediterranean area studies' approach can provide regional expertise on a transnational background, by bringing theories and methods from different disciplines together and combining them in a new and appropriate way.

The Mediterranean matrix explores contemporary political, economic, social and cultural developments and trends in the Mediterranean area, by using a three- or multi-dimensional perspective (political, economic, socio-cultural dimensions): The political dimension of the analysis model includes the broader foreign and security relations setting in the region as well as political transformation processes. The economic dimension covers economic relations, for instance in domains like energy politics or environmental politics. The social and cultural dimension implies wider trans- and intercultural relations, political cultures and societal transformation processes (for instance in domains like mobility and migration).

In a post-“Arab Spring” context, we still do not know what will be the fundamental mid- and long-term impacts of these events on the political systems and societies concerned, as well as on the entire Mediterranean area, and on the relations between the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries and Europe. But what we do know is that conventional theories and scientific approaches were neither able to predict nor to explain the sudden acceleration of transformation processes. The Arab uprisings, the shifts in the geopolitical context, as well as the social protest movements, and economic and political crisis in Spain, Greece or Turkey (even if for different reasons and with different forms) have catapulted the Mediterranean area back onto the political and scientific agenda. Existing political multilateral cooperation frameworks (such as the UfM) are increasingly contested. Therefore numerous new fields of research open up. With regard to these recent developments in the Mediterranean area, provoked by the Arab uprisings and their consequences, Mediterranean Studies need to renew themselves in terms of concepts, and to redefine research areas and appropriate methods, too.



3. Future Research Fields for Mediterranean Studies

The preliminary matrix model described above could be further developed, enriched and tested through empirical work (case studies). Three research fields seem of particular scientific and political relevance for Mediterranean Studies in the current post-“Arab Spring” context: the study of the political dimension of the Mediterranean concept in relation to the on-going transformation processes; the study of mobility and migration; and the field of socio-economic politics/political economy (here we choose the example of energy and environmental politics). Case studies can provide a more appropriate mode to understand the current developments in the particular region of the Mediterranean area, and enable us, in a second step, to develop theoretical reflections that could implicitly underlie the conceptual model. The objective is not to find empirical evidence for any kind of cultural unity or homogeneity of the Mediterranean area, but rather to search for findings illustrating the growing political, economic and human interconnectedness between the different regions and sub-regions around the Mediterranean Sea (especially between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries and societies, but also between the Eastern and the Western Mediterranean).

3.1. Political Transformation Processes - Foreign and Security Relations

This dimension includes the analysis of political transition, transformation and democratisation processes, as well as foreign and security relations between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries. The Mediterranean is an area in motion, a space where local, regional and trans-regional dynamics constantly meet and interact. It is not only one of the poles in a multipolar world, but it is a multipolar world itself, too. The Mediterranean area also has some of the most positive connotations of any sea or geographical space in the world, and it often awakens positive associations such as Punic and Greek heroes like Hannibal or Odysseus, the trading culture of the Phoenicians, the cosmopolitanism of Alexandria, or the adventures and



ideas of Averroes and Ibn Khaldoun. The Mediterranean is, however, along with its cultural diversity and historical depth, also an area of power, conflicts and governance struggles. Therefore, Mediterranean Studies need to explore more intensively the following questions: Whose Mediterranean are we speaking of? Who has the right to interpret this complex region that is a part of Europe, Africa and Asia all at the same time? Against the background of changes provoked by the recent uprisings and revolts, how can we differently and better explore Euro-Mediterranean political and security relations in an updated way? How can we analyse the specificities of transformation and democratisation processes in a specific environment such as the Mediterranean, and the similarities with other world regions?

Mediterranean Studies need to look for the essence of political and social change in an extremely heterogeneous area. The exploration of the political dimension of the Mediterranean area permits us to deepen the reflections on the conceptual model of the matrix and feed it with elements of the meanings of post-modernity, post-colonialism, constructivism, transition and transformation processes, authoritarianism, reform policies, or foreign policy, global, transnational, regional and local governance in the Southern Mediterranean, interethnic conflicts, conflict resolution or regional integration. This analysis of political and social change is closely linked to the economic liberalisation policies in the region and their political and social impact.

The disappointing results of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (EMP), or Barcelona Process, the stagnation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) (Balfour 2010, Emerson 2008, Emerson, Noutcheva 2005, Gillespie 2008) and the growing fragmentation in the Mediterranean space explain the return to bilateral and sub-regional relations. However, despite the political stagnation of the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), the political Mediterranean remains a room in motion. We can observe that independently of the existing political institutions and structures, Euro-Mediterranean cooperation continues to develop on other levels, in other fora, policy frameworks, networks and through transnational mobility from below. Regional challenges, such as regional conflicts, migration, energy supplies, climate change or nuclear armaments, demand regional political answers and solutions. The political and institutional future of the Mediterranean is closely



linked to the question of greater active participation of civil society in democratisation processes (Mohsen-Finan, Schäfer 2014).

Different political and institutional concepts for future cooperation in the Mediterranean area have continued to be debated since 2008. The UfM was considered as an occasion to reformulate the EMP, and as a more flexible instrument for implementing concrete and visible projects, and for testing the ‘reinforced cooperation’ of the EU’s common foreign policy in the Mediterranean. However, the UfM and its institutional framework lack credibility and legitimisation. Scenarios included the creation of a new institutional organisation (e.g. the initial Sarkozy proposal of a “Mediterranean Union” copying the model of the “European Union”), the reinforcement of sub-regional frameworks such as the 5+5 Dialogue or ‘alternative integration’ (Bechev, Nicolaidis 2008). The long-term scenario of a “(Euro-)Mediterranean Community” points to a constructivist direction. This community would be based on the rule of law, protection of individual liberties, free movement of people and the idea of belonging to a common space, along with the political and individual will to live together. However, at this stage in time, the majority of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean societies and political regimes are struggling with existential and socio-economic problems and are not accessible or responsive for this kind of future-oriented vision. Thus, the different existing frameworks and instruments of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, such as the UfM, the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), sub-regional groups and bilateral relations continue to exist in parallel and partially overlap. The articulation between these different structures constantly develops, without generating any real coherence, effective synergies or a common overarching structure. The orientation of the UfM on concrete projects (‘Union of projects’) was conceived to promote regional integration and confidence building, especially in the Maghreb, but this orientation is mainly focused on economic and infrastructural dimensions. Finally the UfM only introduced some minor institutional reforms, but political dialogue and sensible issues were neglected in favour of economic objectives. Since the Arab uprisings starting in 2010/2011, there has been no major European or



other political design for the political future of the Mediterranean area, and the UfM continues to exist on a small scale as if nothing has happened.

With regard to the analysis of the political dimension, constructivism can provide some useful elements for further developing Mediterranean Studies’ conceptual approaches. Indeed, the Mediterranean can no longer be defined through its fixed borders, but rather needs to be defined through common interests and solidarity, a sort of virtual union, based on a non-Eurocentric approach of decentralising integration from Brussels to the Mediterranean area. Faced with the changes provoked by the “Arab Spring” and the rise of transnational networks of different natures in this area, “fortress Europe” responds above all by following a neo-realistic and security-politics oriented perception of the Mediterranean. While a constructivist concept of the Mediterranean area permits us to rethink this area as a space of increasingly overlapping circles of interests and values and as a space where, for instance, migrants moving between the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean and Europe are transmitters of transnational identities and mobility, and thus contribute to transformation processes on both sides of the Mediterranean.

The Mediterranean matrix can be useful for a systematic remapping of the political Mediterranean. This remapping consists of a broad overview including political, geographical, and mental maps of: international, inter-regional and regional cooperation frameworks; regional and interethnic conflicts; contemporary political systems, institutions, social movements; reform policies of current regimes; the role of external agents (e.g. EU, US, UN); contested or controversial ideologies and ideas (e.g. neo-liberalism, political Islam, post-colonialism). This broad overview mapping can then be complemented by an additional empirical layer, focusing more in depth on the concrete transformation process since 2010/2011 within a given society in the Mediterranean area.

3.2. Transmediterranean Mobility and Migration

Another important layer of Mediterranean studies concerns the mobility and migration field. Here, the works of the Migration Policy Centre, formerly



the CARIM network, are abundant and central (e.g. Migration Reports 2005, 2006-2007, 2008-2009, 2013). Migration flows and migration policies influence each other reciprocally and have an impact on the perceptions and the structuring of the area. For instance the Maghreb used to be an area of free circulation in former times. Due to the restrictive migration policies of the different Maghreb countries, the tradition of exchange with the countries of Sub-Saharan Africa has been interrupted. The majority of the existing migration literature insists on the problems emanating from irregular migration and immigration, the widely criticised restrictive EU immigration policy, the repressive character of the migration policies of the Maghreb countries, copying EU migration policy and intending to control and to discourage migration (e.g. de Wenden 2010, Bensaad 2009). Also, classical migration studies focus on the push and pull factors of migration, on country case studies, or on the changing characteristics of migration movements (such as feminisation of migration, unaccompanied minors etc.).

In the field of mobility and migration, the ambiguity of the Mediterranean concept as such becomes visible. On the one hand the Mediterranean area is often considered in European political discourses as one region, one area, one geographical space with common cultural elements; on the other hand, the EU draws a clear and inhumane borderline in the middle of this space, protecting itself against unwanted migration from the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean neighbourhood. Therefore, Mediterranean Studies need to explore more intensively the socio-economic and socio-cultural aspects of the relations between Europe and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean, in terms of migration and mobility politics. The Mediterranean area represents a bridge region between Europe, the Maghreb, the Machrek and Sub-Saharan Africa. We can increasingly observe different forms, logics and strategies of migrant networks within this area, and the increasing role of migrants as agents of change. European as well as Southern and Eastern Mediterranean migration and integration policies each respond to the migration flows in their own ways; coherent and harmonized cooperation in this field remains an exception.



The Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries are close to the Southern European countries; migration and mobility between these two sides of the Mediterranean has a long history. Since the 1990s, the North African states have also become countries of immigration and of transit. Migrants from the Sub-Sahara come to the Maghreb countries either to work and stay there or in order to wait for a possibility to migrate further. The spatial factor plays a central role in the formation of post-colonial identities. In addition, the long-term objective of a Free Trade Zone in the Euro-Mediterranean area (one of the key objectives of the EMP/UfM) can only be implemented if there is not only free circulation of capital and products, but free movement of people and services, too, and if the existing barriers between the EU and the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean become more permeable.

Mediterranean Studies need to develop more comprehensive concepts and analysis, looking for greater synergies and complementarities between the different political domains and frameworks (Portes, deWind 2007). Mediterranean migration studies allow an exploration of the interconnectedness of concepts, factors and movements in the Mediterranean area, and their relationship to transnational, international relations, regional conflicts, migration politics and integration politics in the Euro-Mediterranean context. In a wider sense, this includes the study of the relation between borders, conflicts and migration narratives, too. The Mediterranean matrix could help us to better understand the inter-relationship between growing mobility, changing routes of migration, and the development of social movements and civil society networks between the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean and Europe. Against the background of transnational mobility, migrating ideas and values lead to growing interdependencies between the North and South of the Mediterranean. What impact do these growing human interdependencies have on the political systems and international relations in the Mediterranean area? Mediterranean Studies need to consider more systematically the growing role of individuals (e.g. migrants) in international relations by integrating a sociological approach into the conceptual approach. Finally, a Mediterranean matrix designs the Mediterranean area as a future space of inclusiveness.



3.3. The Research Fields of Energy and the Environment

With regard to the subjects of energy and the environment in the Mediterranean area, different studies analyse the environmental dimension of Euro-Mediterranean cooperation (Costa 2010), energy corridors in the Mediterranean (Escribano 2010) or specific bilateral energy relations (e.g. EU-Algeria, Witton 2010). While most of the publications related to energy and the environment have a technical engineering, natural science, geographical or economic background, Mediterranean Studies allow us for instance to investigate the long-term social, socio-political and cultural impacts of energy policies and major energy projects in the Southern and Mediterranean region, as well as the relation between governance and energy in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean.

The growing importance of energy politics in the Mediterranean area concerns the international relations in the Mediterranean area, by affecting existing regional cooperation and bilateral and multilateral political agreements. However, so far there has not been, for instance, a systematic comparative analysis of the EU “Energy Foreign Policy” and energy politics of the EU Member States and those of the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean States. The growing importance also concerns the long-term societal consequences of current energy policies, especially for North African societies. The implications of climate change touch the Mediterranean Sea and its bordering countries. Natural resources like oil and gas become technically more accessible, but at the same time, energy consumption increases and the end of oil reserves comes closer. The routes for maritime trade are changing worldwide, leading to a change of the geopolitical meaning and position of the Mediterranean Sea in global trade. The countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea will need to agree more intensively upon the politics of resources, energy and climate.

With regard to European energy security, different Arab Mediterranean states, especially Algeria and Libya (in addition to the Gulf states) play a central role, being major energy suppliers for Europe. The wealth of natural



resources in these countries is related to the debate on climate protection and energy security. The EU's economic relations with these countries are close. Private European companies are increasingly active in the energy- and climate-relevant sectors in the Mediterranean area. At the same time, within the framework of world climate negotiations, tensions and divergences between the Northern and Southern countries of the Mediterranean persist, for instance about the conditions of the post-Kyoto-Protocol period after 2020. Therefore, numerous issues remain to be explored by Mediterranean Studies: How can we define common Mediterranean interests in energy and environmental matters? How can Mediterranean states accompany their energy and climate policies with a viable social policy? As well as various private and public initiatives in the renewable energy sector, especially since the establishment of the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008, one can observe that simultaneously, (civil) nuclear energy continues to be pushed forward by certain actors in the region. However regional cooperation in this domain is lagging far behind and no in-depth reflection is being conducted on the long-term consequences of the actual energy policy for the societies concerned and the future security relations in the Mediterranean area.

Current energy politics in the Mediterranean area trigger socio-economic processes, too. However there is no systematic analysis of the short-, medium- and long-term impacts of the implementation of large energy projects and programmes (e.g. the Mediterranean Solar Plan) on the societies in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean. Mediterranean Studies, including different disciplines, can provide energy scenarios for the Mediterranean area, covering consumer behaviour and wasteful or efficient habits in energy usage, as well as an analysis of the relationship between societal and cultural habits of the consumer in developing societies, and environmental and climate change as a global and regional Mediterranean challenge. How can energy policy be implemented in accordance with sustainable development policies and in an appropriate manner given the respective environments in the Mediterranean? What could a win-win scenario in energy matters for the Northern and Southern Mediterranean look like? What happens when European energy policy and Southern and Eastern Mediterranean governance meets? I argue that only a differentiated combination of bilateral and regional



cooperation on governmental and non-governmental levels will permit the implementation of greater renewable energy projects with a sustainable character in the Mediterranean region, and that the Mediterranean Studies matrix could contribute to the scientific analysis for this kind of comprehensive approach.

3.4. Analysing Transversal Dynamics

The Mediterranean Studies matrix analyses different transversal or horizontal dynamics that concern or are inherent to different thematic research fields in the Mediterranean area. These dynamics exist simultaneously or time-shifted and can be analysed with specific case studies. The comparison of the results contributes to the formulation of general conclusions on tendencies in the Mediterranean area, in comparison to other world regions. One example for such a transversal dynamic is the acceleration and/or deceleration of Mediterranean societies (e.g. diverse life rhythms, notions of time), diverging or converging in relation to different factors. Acceleration and the change of temporal structures (Rosa 2013) does concern all societies living around the Mediterranean Sea, and is an inherent part of globalisation processes; modern global societies move in a motionless, frozen acceleration spiral. In the Mediterranean context it is interesting to analyse the liberating and empowering impacts of acceleration, as well as the negative impacts, and to explore the Mediterranean experience of time and history, which is changing both for individuals and collectively. The phenomenon of acceleration/deceleration concerns the political transformation processes (e.g. the accelerating role of information spread by social media in the Arab uprisings in 2011), as well as mobility and migration (e.g. travelling in modern times becomes easier and faster) or energy and the environment, in the sense that mobile modern accelerated societies consume more and more energy and have negative impacts on the environment (climate change).

Another currently relevant transversal dynamic concerns uncertainties and disorder, their impact and interaction, in the Mediterranean area in times of economic and financial crises. A further transversal dynamic is the growing



role of individuals in international politics, which can be investigated by integrating a sociological approach into the conceptual model. Having, for instance, a closer look at this transversal dynamic of the growing role of individuals, one can observe that individuals (of domestic or transnational civil societies) can be influential actors in international politics. These societal actors are characterised by specific normative perspectives and interests, and they define their idealistic and/or material interests independently from politics; by reason of competition with other societal actors, they try to realise their interests by influencing political decision-makers (Auth 2008: 110). With regard to the Mediterranean context, the matrix model looks for concrete examples of individuals that played a significant or exemplary role in the above-mentioned fields of political transformation, migration and mobility, and energy and the environment. The study of these different transversal dynamics complements the study of thematic research fields, and thus permits a more holistic and comprehensive analysis.

4. Research Methods of Mediterranean Studies

Given the fact that Mediterranean Studies are a combination of different scientific disciplines such as political science, sociology, anthropology, economics, geography..., the variety of research methods is to that effect very broad. The first sketch for a conceptual matrix model for the Mediterranean area, which was described above and which needs further elaboration, proposes to refer to a combination of different methods, including the methods of international relations studies, comparative politics, area studies, political sociology and elements from mathematics. The process of revisiting methods allows us at the same time to explore and make use of the interdisciplinary dynamics in the field of social sciences. The matrix approach combines macro-analysis (wider Mediterranean area, global trends) with micro-analysis (local case studies). The matrix also relies on various findings in Braudel's work, including the use of three time levels and the drafting of panoramic matrix pictures (which corresponds in this context to the macro level). The matrix is based on the conviction that a mixed-method approach, combining



qualitative methods (such as expert interviews, qualitative interviews, participant observation, field research, case studies, comparison based on configurations and variables, literature and document analysis) with quantitative and rather descriptive methods (statistics, data collection) (Pickel et al. 2009) permit us to deepen the understanding of a specific area in a transnational context. The particular strengths of area studies are their empirical-analytical nature and the underlying field research. Depending on the concrete research question of course, further methods – for instance of migration studies, democratisation indices, or demographic statistical data – need to be integrated into the patchwork methodological framework. The objective is to bear in mind the comprehensive Mediterranean area and context, while analysing a specific research object in a given place and in a given time period.

Therefore, it is, for instance, particularly important, in terms of methodology, to consider recent developments in terms of the digital humanities. The role of digital media and social networks as producers of information and knowledge, as well as their role in recent political protest movements, leads us to a situation where an explosion of new sources, images, and mechanisms of information communication, and multiplication of actors is occurring. How can Mediterranean Studies systematically study these new messages, means, tools and actors in a Trans-Mediterranean context? The digital humanities raise numerous new questions such as: How can we archive and cite information from social networks? How can we determine whether these sources are trustworthy or not? Knowledge is produced differently, and it circulates differently. What impact do these new communication mechanisms and practices have on the political participation of citizens in the Mediterranean area? What roles do online communities and eParticipation play? How can Mediterranean Studies methodologically make use of these communication tools? Integrating communication studies' methods into the matrix will permit us to better capture these new phenomena on the one hand, but so will participant observation of online communities or action-oriented research (e.g. research cooperation with internet bloggers or activists).



A strong point, however, of the matrix model is comparison, meaning in time (see Braudel’s *longue durée*) and in space (between world regions, sub-regions, countries, local sites). Comparative research incorporates the constant dialogue between evidence/data and theory in order to conduct comprehensive research by taking into consideration emerging variables and concepts.

5. Conclusion

Mediterranean Studies are still an emerging field of area studies. Due to the recent uprisings and developments in the Southern and Eastern Mediterranean countries, the study of the Mediterranean as an area has become more relevant again, and the interest of the international scientific community in North Africa, the Middle East, Southern Europe and Turkey has experienced a certain revival. Even though we have seen very different factors, forms and outcomes of the uprisings in the individual countries, there have been Transmediterranean spill-over effects in terms of social protest movements, solidarities, migration movements or economic interlinkages. Given these rapidly changing contexts due to the “Arab Spring”, we must reconsider the political, economic, and socio-cultural conditions and frameworks under which contemporary area studies, and especially Mediterranean Studies, exist and develop.

Existing political frameworks (such as the Union for the Mediterranean or the European Neighbourhood Policy) have widely been criticised, and little accepted or appropriated by Southern and Eastern Mediterranean governments and civil societies. At the same time, there exists an increasing need for new scientific approaches and analysis frameworks, as well as for an intensified rethinking process about the scientific methods that are applied. The above-described draft for a matrix of analysis for the Mediterranean refers to reinterpreting Fernand Braudel’s comprehensive approach, and adapting it to the realities and challenges of the twenty-first century. This Mediterranean matrix could serve as an instrument for empirical research on the



Mediterranean area, by combining social sciences with other disciplines (history, ecology, geography, anthropology, Islamic studies, mathematics, natural science etc.), in order to develop a systematic and coherent analysis framework, contrasting with the heterogeneity of the Mediterranean region.



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