EDITORIAL EDITORIAL

The Mediterranean: an open continuum of encounters and fault lines

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Twenty-five years after the Barcelona process, has the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership delivered on its promises? Scholarly consensus prevails that the EU's attempt to create a Euro-Mediterranean partnership has had mixed results [1]. In the light of complex geopolitical, historical and cultural dimensions, states and societies have diverged rather than converged around the EU's proposed norms and policies in areas such as governance, security and migration management [2]. The EU's attempt to diffuse scripts and narratives of democracy and democratization has been criticized for branding a "one size fits all approach" [3]. Turning points such as the 9/11 watershed, the so-called Arab Spring and the 2015 "refugee challenge" have moreover contributed to the proliferation of policies and partnerships that have securitized conceptions and imaginings of the "Mediterranean" [4]. With the outbreak of the so-called Arab Spring, the EU adopted an initially enthusiastic rhetoric in 2011/2012, hinting that governance could evolve into a shared and deliberative project across both shores of the Mediterranean. Yet this rhetoric would soon fade away. As the Middle East has been grappling with collapsing social contracts and ill-defined trajectories of state-building, the EU has reverted to its longstanding focus on security and stability.

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In this setting, the issue of migration management has evolved into a particularly polarizing and divisive matter at the heart of Mediterranean spaces. Securitized borderzones, erected razor-wire fences, suspended sea rescue operations and remote control measures have shattered the Mediterranean vision of "the two shores" that authors such as Jacques

Berque have once imagined. Scholars have increasingly used phrases and expressions such as “refuge beyond reach” [5], “governing migration through death”[6] and “open arms behind barred doors” [7] to describe the various ways mobility and refugee displacement have been regulated in Mediterranean land- and seascapes. Within this climate, as Judith Tucker writes, the Mediterranean has emerged as “ a problematic space […] —a political, economic, cultural, and psychological barrier, a place of danger, inhumanity, and death” [8].

Against this backdrop, scholars, policymakers and practitioners have long debated what approaches could reconfigure entrenched asymmetries of power, “desecuritize” migration deals and partnerships, and bridge understandings and conceptions of governance and democracy [9].

The Barcelona Process: twenty-five years later

A quarter century after the adoption of the 1995 Barcelona process (also called the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership), this special issue of IDEES takes both an alternative and alternate view of the Mediterranean from both the southern and northern shores as a dynamic space in which socio-political power, norms, and borders are constantly questioned, reconfigured and readapted along an open continuum of entanglements, encounters and fractures. In so doing, it attempts to answer the following questions:

- How can the Euro-Mediterranean partnership become more attuned and responsive to shifting dynamics and realities?
- Policy approaches of regionalization and homogenization have so far failed to capture the extremely fluid temporalities and spatialities of the Mediterranean. Still what partnerships could envision this region as a “shared space of connection and intertwined communities of land and sea” [10] while safeguarding its complexity?

To gain an insight into such questions, we take stock of three levels of analysis: first, forms, dynamics, and trajectories of contentious politics, second, plural conceptions of governance and citizenship, and third, the politics of mobility, migration and borderlands in the Mediterranean. We analyze intersectional entanglements as well as divided spatialities and fault lines. We also account for recent socio-political dynamics that are remaking the “Mediterranean” quarter a century after the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

1. Contentious politics and protests: In the last years, we have seen an overwhelming spread of “protest waves” on both shores of the Mediterranean. Examples range from the so-called Arab Spring, the 15 M Movement, migrant protests in Southern Europe to the renewed 2019 wave of contention in Lebanon, Algeria and Iraq. What forms and trajectories has contentious politics taken across both shores of the Mediterranean? How are older and more recent protest waves related insofar as their tactical repertoires, grievances and framings are concerned? and what insights do they convey insofar as reevaluating the Euro-Mediterranean partnership is at stake?

2. Conceptions and configurations of governance: Democracy promotion has been a key albeit contentious pillar of the Barcelona process. In the last decades, the EU's regional model of "democracy promotion" has encountered much criticism. Scholars and practitioners have argued that conceptions of democracy differ across spaces and contexts, and that the standardized model of liberal democracy has failed to capture both formal and informal imaginings, narratives, and scriptings of democracy in various local settings. Reacting to the so-called Arab Spring that has ushered in a series of turbulent upheavals, the EU revamped its Neighborhood Policy in 2015, announcing that it would adopt a more pragmatic perspective towards democracy promotion, privileging stability and resiliency of people and societies [11]. Still, scholars have asked whether the EU's shift to "principled pragmatism" may –instead of dealing with the roots of dispossession and vulnerability – obscure accountability over the latter. In this part, we take stock of bottom-up forms of governance in the Mediterranean. We account for how everyday politics as well as gender and youth politics reconceptualize governance and government, and seek to break ties with prevalent forms of rule that obfuscate the myriad political projects that citizens craft in their daily lives. Questions that authors raise are manifold: How do these alternative conceptions of politics and governance interact with state apparatuses and accumulated policy legacies? And how can a regional Mediterranean policy approach account for varied, evolving and localized modes of governance that defy categories of democracy versus full authoritarianism?

3. The politics of borders, migration, sanctuary and refuge: As underscored, hegemonic conceptions of national security, border regulations and remote-control measures have characterized Mediterranean responses to mobility and refugee displacement. Here we take an incisive look at security-driven migration partnerships and strategies of refugee governance from a distance. We also show how they have obscured refugee and host societies' perspectives and histories across both shores of the Mediterranean. We moreover bring in a fresh perspective on the politics of migrant and refugee narratives and its importance in offering an alternative script of sanctuary and mobility.

Contributions adopt a three-fold theory-driven, thematic and case study perspective. While highlighting the plurality of trajectories and cautioning against a perspective that glosses over spatial, geopolitical, and temporal complexities that have distinguished the Mediterranean both as a space and an assemblage of lived realities, they all integrate key insights as to whether and if so how a renewed Euro-Mediterranean Parternship, based on common histories and legacies, may see the light.

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