Sea and city
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If, as Pedrag Matvejević rightly claims, the Mediterranean is a 'vast archive', then eventual understandings of this historical and cultural space are clearly entwined with the complex claims of the archive itself (Matvejević 1999). Implicit in Matvejević's assertion is the invitation not to leave this archive prisoner of a static definition, as though it were a crypt or a moribund museum. To follow Freud into the complex meanderings, blocks and repression of memory, to respond to Jacques Derrida's analysis of the archive as the site of a justice yet to come, while all the time grappling with the disciplinary drive for closure and conclusions, is clearly to propose tangential, even unauthorised, crossings of a contested critical space (Derrida 1997). In particular, if historiography is invariably considered to be the privileged source for understanding the archive then an engagement with its authority is inevitable. In this manner, the Mediterranean also proposes a space that exceeds its immediate geo-political confines as we come to test and tune the claims of a planetary modernity in its Mediterranean singularities.

What I wish to suggest here is that any engagement with the complex historical and cultural formation of the Mediterranean involves registering an emergent historiographical and political problematic. Contrary to the sequential and consequential representation of its chronology, we might be better advised to consider the depths and folds of time, the resonance and dissonance of its rhythms, that promote diverse modalities for remembering and assembling its complex inheritance. There are proximities of time and space that negate their seeming separation on a map or in a sequential history. These can exist in a resonance and a recall that does not necessarily obey a unique framing or logic. This is to uncover the critical role of unruly archives interrogating consolidated explanations secured in chronological causality. Insisting on the failure of history to ever fully conclude its analyses and establish its explanation once and for all, it perhaps becomes possible to consider the Mediterranean as the laboratory of another modernity. I feel that this is clearly the spirit in which the essays in this volume have been written.

To be provocative, we could borrow a series of lessons from the Caribbean where, through the insistence that the 'sea is history' (Derek Walcott), the whole discussion is literally taken off shore (Walcott 1992). Suspended and sustained in a marine environment which, after all, permitted the transport and translation of the world into a European dominion, are altogether more fluid archives in which histories, cultures and lives are suspended. Listening to histories sustained in maritime waters identities go adrift. If this provides a dramatic analogy for modern day migration, it also draws us into the deeper histories of the political economy of migrations and the marine traffic in goods, war and colonialism that have formed our present. Opposed to the national narration of time, secured in territorial stability and apparently rooted in the soil of an immutable identity, this introduces us to an altogether more extensive and unstable space. No longer a dumb accessory to what is established and pursued on land, the sea acquires an unsuspected critical vitality and centrality.

For indicating the maritime world is not merely to add islands, fisheries and sea journeys to the equation, it is also to query the territorial premises of understanding. Since the rise and triumph of European-styled nationalism in the nineteenth century in particular, it has tended to be customary to consider history in terms of national units and hence the modern history of the Mediterranean as an agglomeration of these isolated elements. Of course, there are

distinctions marked by geopolitical divisions, linguistic confines, particular historical and cultural formations, and the history we have inherited emphasises and endorses this particular narration of the immediate past and its impact on the present. Still, this manner of representing time and space is also an instance of negation. What exceeds or disturbs the telling tends to be repressed and marginalised. This nationalist framing of the Mediterranean space invariably emphases frontiers, borders, boundaries and documented citizenship, rather than the fluid materiality of a sea that can never be fully possessed. The friction between these two dimensions and their pressing historical intimacy, pointedly provoked by present-day migration, proposes an assembly of uneven and antagonistic powers.

Today, we could consider the Europeanised Mediterranean as a historical and ethical shipwreck. This is most cruelly and immediately the case in the loss of life at sea, but also in the extensive exposure of the supposed ideas of Europe when its limits and hypocrisies are shamed on the water and then rigidly endorsed in European cities. Here a colonial past – blocked, negated and refused – continues to ghost and configures the present. The old -isms and their hierarchical understandings of the world that flourished in nineteenth century Europe – nationalism, colonialism, racism – have not passed. They have accumulated to become naturalised in the present. The tonality, syntax and grammar has undoubtedly changed, but the continuities of their power ensure their largely unquestioned status in explaining the present. To consider the contemporary Mediterranean and the modern city through the critical undoing of this mode of narration is to engage with the promise and problematic of a postcolonial sea and city. It is to splice into the hegemonic accounting of time and space a further series of histories – subordinate, subaltern and repressed. These come from below to disturb and haunt the surfaces of the institutional representation of the city and the sea as objects of unilateral control and explanation. The archives that are sustained in both clearly overflow and disband that reductionism.

All European cities are ex-colonial cities: London, Paris, Bruxelles, Rome, Berlin, Madrid, Lisbon, Bordeaux, Bristol, Stockholm, Naples, Marseilles… . They are also open archives, sites of contested memories where both daily life and deeper cultural configurations are caught in the complex interfacing of a colonial past and a postcolonial present. This means that urban spaces (and associated powers) are irreducible to a single identity or unique manner of belong and narrating. This re-opens and radically extends Henri Lefebvre's famous call for the 'right to city' (Lefebvre 2009). Crossed by multiple histories and cultures, the coordinates of class, race, gender and patriarchy are the sites of proliferating intersections that complicate and thicken the urban script. The languages of the city, both linguistically and culturally, multiply. If previous powers persist (above all, in the continuation of the colonial framing of urban spaces and the criminalised profiling and construction of ghettos and *banlieues*), new ones emerge. They are unequal, often unrecognised, frequently indirect. They may leave more of a trace in artistic practices, in sound, in writing, than in a narrowly defined political sphere. They remain subordinate to other powers and premises, they are subaltern. Even if anonymous, such forces nevertheless exist, persist and resist. The city is a historical reality, is a process; it changes, and the accumulation of traces can rarely be eradicated. Its tempo is never single, nor is its history autochthonous or homogeneous. So, the contemporary city is not simply a possible home or haven for migrants. As a mutable social structure and apparatus, subject to multiple pressures, practices and perspectives, it, too, promotes the migratory spaces of translation and transformation.

Such a reconfiguration of European urban space via the ongoing cultural composition of the postcolonial city, whose cultures are daily involved in de-colonialising the precedents

and premises of the city they inhabit, promote holes in time. The colonial past returns to the present. The city is unpacked. It can, of course, be re-assembled in multiple ways, although the choices are never neutral and the powers exercised never equal. Caught on the contested cusp between different memories, cultures and histories, the city is transferred into another, unsuspected, space. There it becomes the political and historical palimpsest of what are ultimately planetary antagonisms. It is precisely here, far more than in the abstract polity and legislation enacted by the patriarchal powers of the nation state, that the complex historical heritage of the European colonisation of the planet, is everyday negotiated, contested, modified, transformed. It is here in the city, as Jacques Derrida has effectively argued, that the social and historical justice of an emerging and truly eccentric modernity is sought (Derrida 2000).

All of this serves to suggest that the Mediterranean, until recently consigned to the edge of Europe and Occidental modernity, acquires a new centrality, becoming a key laboratory of modernity. Not only do the dramatic events of revolution, war and 'illegal' migration bring this home. Altogether more sedimented and marginalised histories also return through the rents produced by contemporary events. What exists, resists and persists in a soundscape as much as in a contemporary political struggle criss-crosses the modern Mediterranean, disseminating perspectives that do not simply reflect and respect the framework imposed by its northern shore. That shore, too, is also traversed, contaminated and creolised by the cultures and histories of the Mediterranean's other shores taking up residence in its cities. Much of what Europe externalised in fashioning itself as 'modern', returns to reveal its unsuspected contribution to the making of that modernity. What was externalised as negative and external, reduced to the colonised 'other' against which Europe measured its 'progress', turn out to be internal and integral. Without listing agricultural and scientifici contributions from the Arab world, Islam, too, both is and was a European religion (at least since the 8th century, a longer presence than Christianity in Scandinavia and the eastern Baltic). Mediterranean musicalities also tell us another tale in which Europe is unable to separate itself from an altogether more extensive geography of sound. Reopening this complex archive, recognising via the sea and the city the interleaving of multiple 'contact zones', the Mediterranean insists as a critical matrix that proposes its particular agenda of modernity and another Mediterranean. The revaluation is not restricted to the Mediterranean. Europe and the Occidental framing of the world – both its past colonial appropriation and its present neoliberal management – are here exposed, challenged, potentially undone, rendered vulnerable to their unexamined cultural formation and the historical processes of creolising change and hybridisation: precisely what they continually seek to disperse and repress.

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