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in the Mediterranean World



Special Issue

*The Mediterranean Matrix: Memory, Movement and  
Migration in Late Modernity*

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## CONTENTS

**The Mediterranean Matrix: Memory, Movement and Migration in Late Modernity**  
*Issue Editors:* Silvia Bermúdez & Roberto Strongman

<b>Introduction:</b> Mediterranean Manifesto: From <i>Mashrabiya</i> and the Doha Tower to Fortress Europe .....	<b>Silvia Bermúdez Roberto Strongman</b>	137
<b>Memory:</b> The Gothic Mediterranean: Haunting Migrations and Critical Melancholia .....	<b>Laura Sarnelli</b>	147
Enrico Pea and Giuseppe Ungaretti: Matrices of Italian Identity and Literature across the Mediterranean .....	<b>Nadine Makram Wassef</b>	167
<b>Migration:</b> Parisian Dystopias: The Mothers of Maghrebi Migration in Yamina Benguigui's <i>Mémoires d'immigrés</i> , Mehdi Charef's <i>Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed</i> and Leïla Sebbar's <i>Fatima ou les Algériennes au square</i> .....	<b>Brinda Mehta</b>	183
Blue is the Colour of Forgetting: Mediterranean Re-Orientations in Italian Cinema .....	<b>Pasquale Verdicchio</b>	201
<b>Movement:</b> Reframing Accountability in Spanish Immigration Cinema: Mediterranean Modernity and the Shortcomings of 'NGO-Films' .....	<b>Jorge Pérez</b>	215
The Muslim Mediterranean: Islam and the Contradictions of 'Europe' in Bosnia and Herzegovina .....	<b>Neda Atanasoski</b>	231
<b>Afterword:</b> Sea and City .....	<b>Iain Chambers</b>	249
Book Reviews .....		253
Notes for Contributors .....		260
Information for Advertisers .....		262
Contents of Previous Issue .....		264

## MEDITERRANEAN MANIFESTO: FROM *MASHRABIYA* AND THE DOHA TOWER TO FORTRESS EUROPE

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This introduction frames and contextualizes six essays mapping the Mediterranean experience in late modernity—from the early 18<sup>th</sup> century until the present—within the notion of ‘Matrix’. We understand the Mediterranean Basin as a shared but contested space where notions of frontier, (in)security, policing, and identity are pitted against the desire to move to find work, safer political grounds, better opportunities across borders. We envision the Mediterranean Matrix as a hermeneutic tool that simultaneously refers to the migration dynamics and narratives traversing the Mediterranean in late modernity; the securitization and militarization of such dynamics through ever changing European Union migratory policies; the re-articulation ‘Fortress Europe’; the cultural products that attest to the ebbs and flows of populations across the Mediterranean Basin; and how these products reflect on patterns of exclusion, inequality, and domination. While there are innumerable ways in which one might visualize the Matrix, in this volume we propose three mapping strategies to concretize its image: memory, movement, and migration.

**Keywords:** Matrix, European Union, Fortress Europe, Mediterranean Basin, Migration Dynamics, Memory, Movement.

As this Special Issue is getting ready to go to press in early June 2016, the ever evolving nature of the Mediterranean Matrix in regard to movement and migration continues to take center stage due to what global media is describing as Europe’s worst migration crisis since World War Two.<sup>1</sup> In the space of months, from summer 2015 to late March 2016, we have witnessed significant shifts in how Fortress Europe is responding. Thus, we have the example of Chancellor Angela Merkel moving from a policy of solidarity in September 2015, with her rolling the welcome mat and opening Germany’s borders to refugees and asylum seekers, to a strong German anti-migration stance after the New Year’s Eve assaults in Cologne by migrants—eerily reworking the narrative of the ‘Rape of Europe’. On 18<sup>th</sup> March 2016, the European Union and Turkey reached an agreement on how to address migration. The immediate German political context for supporting Turkey’s requests at this historical juncture cannot be overlooked. Germans appeared to be strongly rejecting what is considered as Merkel’s liberal refugee policy by supporting the new anti-migrant Alternative for Germany (AfD) party and the troubling expansion of the far right political movement PEGIDA, (Patriotische Europäer gegen die Islamisierung des Abendlandes). Furthermore; human rights organizations and the United Nations are concerned with Turkey’s many human rights violations and invoke the

European Convention on Human Rights to argue that it explicitly prohibits the collective expulsion of foreigners. While Turkey is the nation that has welcomed the most Syrian refugees—2.7 million as we finalize this Introduction—the implications of this nation becoming a *de facto* warehouse for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers have yet to be fully evaluated and assessed. All in all, the many negotiations that took place within the European Union and in Turkey underscore the anxiety and desperation with which the EU has been approaching the situation. As it is to become apparent when introducing the section ‘Migration’, the meetings and discussions to reach the agreement are but a reiteration of failed processes of securitization by the European Union (see page 142).

Chancellor Merkel’s actions have come to symbolize the contradictory and confusing manner with which the European Union seeks to address migratory movements that have their roots not only in the political, social, cultural, religious, and economic instability experienced in the Maghreb, Africa, the Middle East, Libya, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq, but also in the colonial and post-colonial transactions and processes established principally by Europe and the United States with and within these geopolitical regions. The constant shifting political positions mirror and appear to respond to the migratory routes developed throughout the Mediterranean since the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, delineating a trajectory moving from the Western Mediterranean and the Strait of Gibraltar to the Eastern Mediterranean and the corners of Lebanon, the Middle East, Syria, the Greek Islands, Turkey, and the Balkans to reach Northern European nations such as Germany and Austria. The privileging of the Eastern Mediterranean route has placed Turkey at the center of how Fortress Europe seeks to deal with migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers. A phrase used at different times in history, ‘Fortress Europe’ is generally employed to describe the fortification of Europe to prevent entry from the outside. While during WWII, Fortress Europe was a notion favoured by Hitler (Seaton 1981), the term has been in use within debates about European immigration, coming into pointed focus when looking at the hazardous crossings taken by would-be migrants trying to reach the EU’s Southern frontiers.

It is within these social and historical premises that we have seen a revitalization of the so-called ‘immigration problem’ in Europe and along the Mediterranean shores. The ever changing policies to protect ‘Fortress Europe’ along with the constantly changing classificatory nomenclatures—illegals, *sans papiers*, without papers, economic migrants—to statements and actions by high ranking European political figures, render visible one of the many cracks in the armour of Fortress Europe where, as Didier Bigo and Elspeth Guild argue, ‘... liberalism is replacing the welfare state by a kind of social panopticon of surveillance and coercion towards the people who do not hold regular jobs and who are migrants’ (2005: 1). All of these strategies also signal both the unraveling and the reification of discourses on ‘Mediterraneanism’ according to which the Maghreb and Africa are chronically in need of help from the highly developed and richer European nations of the Northern Mediterranean shores (Horden and Purcell 2000: 20). This reification comes with a price, compromising, it appears, the cohesion the European Union.

The majority of the essays collected in this volume originated at a conference hosted on 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> May 2014 at the University of California, Santa Barbara, located at the shores of the Pacific Ocean.<sup>2</sup> The conference took place almost a year prior to one of the most devastating series of shipwrecks in the Mediterranean, which took the lives of 1,200 African and Middle Eastern migrants in the course of seven days on April, 2015. The unfolding of these tragic events enacted a profound redefinition of the idea of the Matrix as guiding principle for our

collective work. While the notion of migration and movement were central to our work from the start, our conversations of just how the Mediterranean could be mapped as a network remained productively nebulous, even at times nostalgic. In retrospect, we acknowledge having succumbed to the seductive pleasure of conceiving the Matrix through the mythical Mediterranean unity and harmony inspired by Al-Andalus. This somewhat romanticized approach to the Mediterranean Matrix functioned as a musical counterpoint and balm to the polemics surrounding the struggles of Maghrebi and Sub-Saharan populations in France, Spain and Italy, which dominated our deliberations. Listening to live performances of the Andalusian pieces *Msaddir: Qurrat ‘Ayni* (‘I am Delighted by the Gazelle’) and *Mkhlās: Ya Saqī w-Asqī Habībī* (‘O Cupbearer, Pour out a drink for my Beloved’) prompted a collective remembering of the Mediterranean Matrix through the paradigmatic architectural feature of Muslim Spain and the Maghreb, the *celosía*, *lattice-work*, *transenne*, *mashrabiya* or *shanasheel*, مشربية or شاشيل. Over the course of re-writing, editing and assembling the volume, our concept of the Matrix has shifted from the *mashrabiya* as the respectfully ornamented partition between private and public, knowledge and secrecy, and self and other to the barbed wires and chain link fences of fortress Europe—those of the North African Spanish enclaves of Ceuta and Melilla being the most visible examples of this nefarious version of the Matrix. From slippages into romantic visions of lovers’ songs chanted across heavily aestheticized wooden balcony screens, to the injustices of exclusion and the terror of incarceration behind iron bars in an unwelcoming foreign land, we return to the notion of the Matrix as a Mediterranean reality, beyond good and evil, defining both the most noble and inhuman aspects of human culture, as well as the everyday lives for the peoples who claim the contours of this sea as their home. Thus, in the process of assembling this volume, we as editors have journeyed through our own Mediterranean crossing, as the waves of news developments rerouted our original course and brought us close, but not quite exactly, to our original destination.

As a visual and concrete referent to the potentialities of our Mediterranean Matrix, we invite our readers to consider the steel *shanasheel* structure that comprises the Doha Tower in Qatar. This building with 46 floors above ground, 3 floors below ground and a total gross floor area of approximately 110,000m is one of the architectural marvels of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The Doha Tower has no central core, allowing more internal space available to its occupants. The design is unique: it is the first skyscraper with internal reinforced concrete dia-grid columns; these form an ‘X’ shape grid which harmonizes with the eye-catching cylindrical façade. (see figure 1).

In a formidable adaptation of the *Mashrabiya*, the traditional wooden screens are now made of steel and are used to shade the building from the high temperatures of the desert and to protect it from airborne sand residue. This reformulation of the *Mashrabiya*, prophetically points towards the enabling qualities of the Matrix this Special Issue proposes: a mapping of the maritime confluences of the European, Asian and African landmasses. The fact that the Doha Tower is in the Persian Gulf expands our intellectual apparatus by forcing a theorization of the Mediterranean as a social condition and a historical experiment beyond its traditional geographical referent.

The legal, political, military, and economic ramifications of these narratives clash with the brutal circumstances endured by those venturing in such perilous crossings—the migrant newcomers, exile seekers aiming to reach Fortress Europe (Geddes 2008; Talani 2010). It is in light of the particular historical circumstances described above that this Special Issue



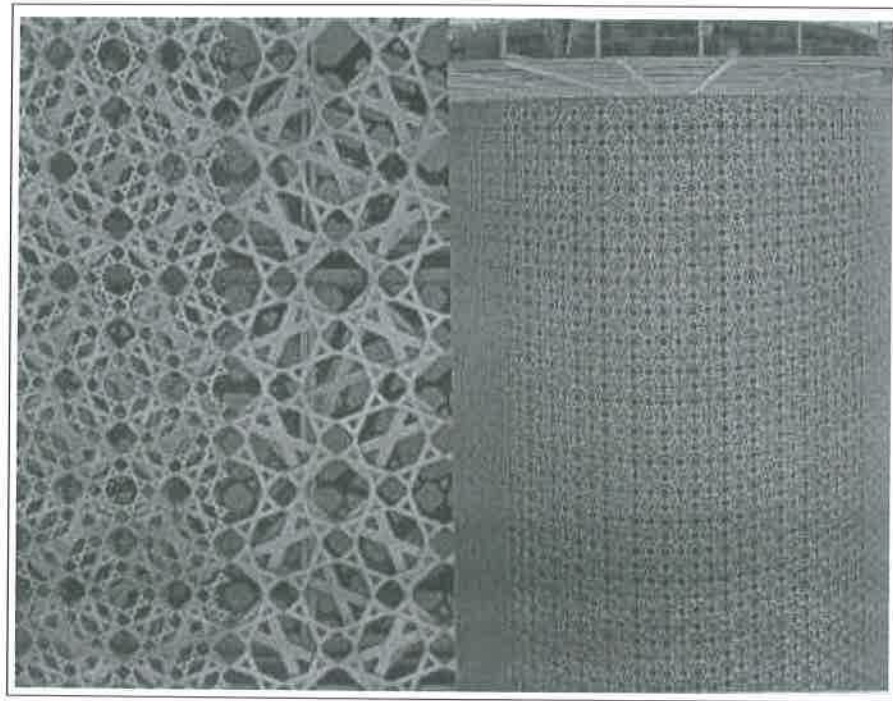


Figure 1. Image through fair use.

redefines the Mediterranean as a 'matrix of human movement', moving away from the narrower idea of 'a space of exchange'. In fact, recent scholarship in political theory supports this notion of a 'matrix of human movement'. In fact, in his *The Figure of the Migrant* (2015), Thomas Nail calls attention to the fact that 'the migrant has been predominantly understood from the perspective of *stasis*' and thus mistakenly understood '*as a failed citizen*' (2, emphasis in the original). The time has come to reconsider 'the migrant first and foremost according to its own defining feature: by its *movement*' (2, emphasis in the original).

The foregrounding of current flows of human migration, particularly from Africa, the Middle East, Syria, Afghanistan, and Iraq to Fortress Europe, is exemplified paradigmatically in the images of the thousands of drowned Africans, Syrians and many others seeking to reach any of the Mediterranean shores. This visual referent conveys the pivotal significance of the human experience as the nexus of the Mediterranean Matrix. Evoking and redeploying the theme of 'killing an Arab' from Albert Camus' (2011) novel *L'étranger*, we consider her death to be more than just an accident: it is an event simultaneously deliberate and needless.

The 'Matrix', with its 'M', also functions as an abbreviated near-anagram for the name of the sea. Even the signifier itself reflects a questioning of centers and origins that is at the core of what Sharon Kinoshita considers 'less a way of defining or delimiting a geographical space . . . than a heuristic device for remapping traditional disciplinary divides' (2009: 602). Through the idea of the 'Matrix' we seek to make visible the myriad patterns that constitute the psychological configurations, cultural productions, political arrangements and social organizations that are embedded and at work when discussing the Mediterranean. We take the 19<sup>th</sup> century as a point of departure since this is the era when the 'Mediterranean', as concept and construct, 'linguistically entered the European lexicon' (Chambers 2008: 12). We contend

that the complexities that arise after the Enlightenment result in such significant differences from the preceding periods that said complexities require a particular historical framework to unravel. Mediterranean modernities—characterized by the rise of republicanism, the consolidation of the nation-state, the subsequent formation of supra-national global entities and the advent of rapid transportation technologies that bridged its opposing coastlines—require the special theoretical apparatus presented in this Special Issue.

### Memory

All of the contributors to this collection address the matter of memory as a discursive tool attempting to trace an intelligible trajectory out the seemingly disjointed, illogical and unjust series of events that have characterized the history of the Mediterranean. In so doing they exemplify Stuart Hall's thesis in 'The Questions of Cultural Identity', where he writes: 'If we feel we have a unified identity from birth to death, it is only because we construct a comforting story or "narrative of the self" about ourselves' (1995: 598). Our Mediterranean Matrix is such an attempt at identitarian and regional construction: the knitting and stitching of anecdotal events into a pattern that makes the repetition and variations of such occurrences visible as a discernible pattern in the quilt-like fabric of history. This re-membling is best illustrated within the mythical history of the Mediterranean by Penelope and by Antigone: Penelope weaves her own matrix of remembrance while Odysseus is absent; Antigone's commitment to recover the body of her brother Polynices for proper burial attests to the ethics of personal responsibility within the social sphere. In this sense, the writers of this volume, and especially the three included in this section, utilize news articles as well as filmic and literary texts to weave a tapestry that renders lucid the difficult movements of people and cultures across the sea during the period of late modernity, and point to the power of the pen to as a way to move from passive lamentation to fecund documentation.

'**The Gothic Mediterranean: Haunting Migrations and Critical Melancholia**' by Laura Sarnelli (University of Naples) investigates the reconfigurations of the contemporary Mediterranean—marked by global forms of violence and vulnerability, and experiences of loss, both personal and collective, historical and cultural. Melancholy provides a theoretical framework that revalues the transformative power of the melancholic process as a critical tool for healing and an ethical response to loss. The melancholic attitude toward loss, namely, the refusal to let go of lost objects or past grief, takes on the form of political commitment and resistance against normative mourning; namely, against those strategies of amnesia which are meant to preserve the hegemonic social and political order without accounting for the issue of ethical responsibility. Reclaiming the body of the past by taking care of it means to revalue a crucial understanding of the present where the myth of Antigone proves central to this investigation.

This section closes with a remembrance of the role played by early twentieth-century Alexandria in the articulation of Italian literature. In '**Enrico Pea and Giuseppe Ungaretti Matrices of Italian Identity and Literature Across the Mediterranean**' Nadine Makram Wassef (Ain Shams University) takes a lead from Michael Haag's *Alexandria: City of Memory* (2004) to focus on the friendship and literary production developed by these two Italian writers within the matrix of cultural relationships particular to the Mediterranean city of Alexandria—emblem of cosmopolitanism and home and refuge to many European novelists and poets in the first three decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Migration

Fleeing warfare and/or political persecution, economic hardship, and poverty, thousands of peoples—those whom Frantz Fanon referred to as *Les damnés de la terre* (1963)—have embarked in treacherous journeys across the Mediterranean Sea in the past few years. The war in Syria since 2011 appears to be one of the main reasons for the increase in numbers. While these migrants' objective has been to reach European territories in the northern shores of the Mediterranean, thousands have perished transforming this sea in-between lands and continents into a graveyard. The depiction of these movements of migration and transnational flows as 'invasions', has become the norm when discussing immigration in the age of globalization since, as Andrew Coleman argues, the 'familiar language of borders and threats' is used to describe how those 'inside' fear the migrating hordes of those 'outside' (2005: 294). Coleman is correct in stressing how migratory flows are construed within a discourse of fear since anxiety and dread appeared to be the driving forces behind one of the many bloc-wide immigration policies adopted by the European Parliament since 2005. A telling one, because of its brutal criminalization of migrant newcomers, was the policy adopted on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2008 in Strasbourg (France) that, among other measures, authorized the jailing of undocumented workers for as long as 18 months pending deportation. Though the procedure was decried by the United Nations and human rights organizations as excessive and inhuman, Spain, Italy, Greece, and Malta gladly accepted the funds established by the EU to deter the further arrival of migrants from the Maghreb and Africa to the European Union between 2008 and 2010. Anxiety and fear were also at work in June 2015 when Hungary announced the construction of a fence along the southern border with Serbia (175 kilometers/110 miles) to supposedly stop the march of refugees and migrants from, by and large, Syria, Afghanistan and Iraq. As argued at the beginning of this Introduction, anxiety and fear are at also at the European Union's desire to reach an agreement with Turkey in 2016 to do what Spain, Italy, Greece, and Malta were already paid to do between 2008 and 2010.

The complex racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, religious, and cultural processes that migration entails are posited in the receiving countries as questioning sovereignty, and national identity. In fact, as Stephen Castles argues, the conventional notion in regard to migration is to believe that '... if we can only work out and tackle the so-called "root causes" of international migration, we can drastically reduce it. This also carries the unspoken [ ] message that international migration (especially from South to North) is a bad thing that ought to be stopped' (2009: 2). While all the essays in this Special Issue offer reflections on these kinds of misgivings and the question of migration, exile and diasporic subjectivity, the two included in this section directly speak to the processes of migration and the experience of those seeking the crossing of the straits before, during, and after their perilous journeys. The 'after' refers simultaneously to those who complete the treacherous journey and arrive to Europe and those who take in a ghostly 'afterlife' after perishing in the Mediterranean Sea.

In 'Parisian Dystopias: The Mothers of Maghrebi Migration in Yamina Benguigui's *Mémoires d'immigrés*, Mehdi Charef's *Le thé au harem d'Archi Ahmed* and Leïla Sebbar's *Fatima ou les algériennes au square*', Brinda Mehta (Mills College) explores the ways in which the three women authors mentioned in the title focus on the life-stories of first-generation Algerian women within the shaky colonial and post-colonial bonds between France and Algeria as a result of 132 years of French colonization. Particular attention is paid to the historical context—the family reunification process legislated by the government of President Valéry

Giscard D'Estaing—by which the mothers of Maghrebi migration came to France to join their husbands in the 1960s and 1970s. The authors' insistence in underscoring the crucial role played by these mothers leads Mehta to argue that within immigrant cartographies of resilience these stories lay the groundwork for Algerian feminist historiographies articulated from the Parisian periphery.

'Blue is the Colour of Forgetting: Mediterranean Re-Orientations in Italian Cinema' by Pasquale Verdicchio (University of California, San Diego) considers how the Mediterranean has come to be used in contemporary Italian film to suggest a renewed sense of approximation. The sea as mirror, while preserving the cultural and traditional specificity of its surrounding lands, reflects on how Italy's south has historically been considered as a gateway to the Orient. Contemporary Italian filmmakers have taken this proximity as the starting point for considering the Mediterranean as something more than a protective moat at the southern edge of Europe. However, Italy's failure to acknowledge its history of alterity within Europe, and more generally its history of emigration, has placed the current immigration debates within a skewed context often reminiscent of the rhetoric of the ancient Crusades. Verdicchio argues that Italy is in fact faced with having to renegotiate its position within Europe and—in view of its own internal divisions between the North and South—must now reconsider its self-image and recalibrate its vision of citizenship and nationhood.

### Movement

The *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED online) defines 'movement' as a noun that refers to: 'a) the action or process of moving; changing of position or posture; passage from place to place, or from one situation to another. Also: an instance or kind of this; a particular act or manner of moving' (www.oed.com accessed 26<sup>th</sup> June 2015). All three connotations; i) action/process of moving; ii) changing of position; and iii) passage, are embedded in current discussions about 'movement(s)' from the Mediterranean shores, cities, and places of the Maghreb, Africa, the Middle East, Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria, to the shores of the European Union where now nations in central Europe such as Germany and, Austria, among other destination nations have become 'Mediterranean'. For one, the 'changing of position' aspect of movement is much at work when discussing destinations. Thus, while France—and other European nations such as The Netherlands, Belgium, or Denmark—began receiving migrant laborers since the 1960s and the 1970s, countries such as Spain and Italy began that process later switching 'roles from net exporters to net importers of migrants' (Dancygier 2010: 261). The passage from one place to another happens through four principal routes by land and sea that, according to the historical events and political situations of the moment, both in the nations of origin or the intended destinations, see fluctuations in regard to which of the routes becomes more centrally used. Thus we have the Western Mediterranean route, the West Africa route, the Central Mediterranean route, and the East Mediterranean route. As this Special Issue goes to press, the protection of Fortress Europe is much at work in the closing of the East Mediterranean passage going northward through the Balkan and Visegrad nations—Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Slovakia—into Germany and Austria. As the two essays included in this section explain, cultural productions depicting and assessing migration pay attention to the ways in which the European Union asserts its rights to protect its territorial sovereignty. This had led to what we understand as the militarization of the Mediterranean. But the exertion of power and the techniques used to control the flow of migrant newcomers within Mediterranean



shores produces and reproduces colonial/imperial paradigms that clash with the never-ending struggle for decolonization taking place in the Maghreb, Africa, the Middle East, and even Bosnia and Herzegovina.

**‘Reframing Accountability in Spanish Immigration Cinema: Mediterranean Modernity and the Shortcomings of “NGO-Films”**’ by Jorge Pérez (University of Kansas), centers in the analysis of three Spanish immigration films that narrate the journeys of undocumented African migrants seeking to reach the coasts of Europe: *Querida Bamako* [Beloved Bamako] (Omer Oke and Txarli Llorente 2007), *14 Kilómetros* [14 Kilometers] (Gerardo Olivares 2007), and *Retorno a Hansala* [Return to Hansala] (Chus Gutiérrez 2008). All three use the genre formula of the road movie to address the experiences of mobile subjectivities and the redefinition of borders and identities—national, gender, class, and so on—linked to migration. Unlike the typical Spanish immigration film, which focuses on the struggle of immigrants to integrate in the host society, these road movies go back to show us the previous steps: the causes of the displacement and the arduous journey—deadly in many cases—to reach their desired European destination. This contribution shows how these films activate the meaning of the Mediterranean as a ‘Matrix’, and how they ultimately fall short in their ethical mission, despite their impulse to alleviate social anxieties and to undermine stereotypes about immigration.

In **‘The Muslim Mediterranean: Islam and the Contradictions of “Europe” in Bosnia and Herzegovina**’ Neda Atanasoski (University of California, Santa Cruz) utilizes the Mediterranean Matrix as an analytic tool to think Bosnia-Herzegovina’s geopolitical formation within the European Union outside the tendency in security studies to inscribe their complex war inside the paradigms of Islamist terror. Atanasoski first addresses this rewriting to then critique the dominant conception of Muslims as inherently un-European by paying attention to an alternate imaginary emerging out of the Bosnian Spring (2014). Within this imaginary Bosnia-Herzegovina reorients itself towards the Arab world by coming to an understanding of terror as the capitalist transition and dispossession derived from the processes of ‘Europeanization’.

As we conclude this Introduction, we find ourselves ironically saddened by the fulfillment of our predictions regarding the wide and movable geographical reach of the Mediterranean Matrix our issue proposes. At this current moment, media reports continue to focus on the sexual attacks by male migrants towards German women in Cologne. Women’s rights and the granting of asylum to migrants are presented as either/or situations and the overall picture of the ‘Rape of Europe’ dominates political and economic discourses in newspapers, television and electronic and independent media. We always knew that the waves of the Mediterranean were powerful enough to cross the Alps, but we never imagined they would retort to the most negative and stereotypical ways of addressing the serious problems and difficulties of the migratory processes currently taking place across the Mediterranean. For these reasons we invite you to consider each one of the contributions that follow as an appeal to combat such ways. Moreover, we call your attention to the last sentences to the Afterword to this issue where Ian Chambers utilizes our conceptualization of the Matrix to end this collection—a perilous journey of sorts—on a hopeful note: The matrix is reduplicative and it is therefore able to generate—engender, in the biological sense of the Matrix as ‘Mater’ and ‘Matriz’—another Matrix. These reproductive qualities of the Matrix imply the possibility of a positive transformation in which the totality can shed the illusion of separateness and fragmentation and exists in full awareness of itself. We see this newer Matrix emerging as being one in

which in the connections of ferry lines and plane routes supersede the nodes of cities, ports, and nations. This volume works towards the emergence of this New Mediterranean, one that overcomes its present duality and curtsies to its Mare Nostrum ancestor in Antiquity to provide an altogether new postmodern paradigm, which is both our duty to forge and interpret.

## Notes

1. Contemporary migrations are not a new process since it is estimated that during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century forty-five million Europeans fled poverty and hunger by seeking better opportunities in the Americas (Bermúdez 2007: 239, note 1). For Thomas Nail, ‘the twenty-first century will be the century of the migrant’ as demonstrated by data from the *World Migration Report 2010* and the 2015 ‘Migrant Health’ report by the World Health Organization documenting more regional and international migrants at the turn of the century than ever before in recorded history (1, see note 1). For more on movement and flow see, among others, Deleuze and Guattari (2008), Merriman (2012), and Cresswell (2012). For ‘dealing with the worst refugee crisis the international community has seen since the end of the Second World War’ see Bajekal; see also Safdar (2016).
2. We take this opportunity to thank the support of the College of Letters and Science, the Office of the Associate Vice Chancellor for Diversity, Equity, and Academic Policy, the Department of French and Italian, the Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, The Comparative Literature Program, the Department of Spanish and Portuguese, The Center for Portuguese Studies, The Orfalea Center for Global and International Studies, the Latin American and Iberian Studies Program, the Department of Black Studies, and the Department of Music for making this event possible. We also thank our colleague Juan Pablo Lupi (University of California-Santa Barbara) for his insights, Jean-Paul Baldacchino for his guidance, and Iain Chambers for supporting the Mediterranean Matrix with his lucid Afterword.

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## THE GOTHIC MEDITERRANEAN: HAUNTING MIGRATIONS AND CRITICAL MELANCHOLIA

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This article proposes to examine the contemporary Mediterranean as a melancholic cultural formation and a transnational fluid space where histories intertwine and territories overlap. Drawing on examples ranging from theory, literature, visual culture and cinema, the article will explore some poetic and aesthetic representations of contemporary migrations across the Mediterranean, where the body of the migrant is portrayed through Gothic tropes, such as watery graves, dead bodies, zombies, and melancholy ghosts, as figures of resistance and survival. From this analysis, a new theoretical configuration emerges: a 'Gothic Mediterranean' as an expression of 'critical melancholia', a haunting countercultural space of memory which re-articulates the past in such a way as to rethink the present.

### What's in a Name?

We have lingered in the chambers of the sea  
By sea-girls wreathed with seaweed red and brown  
Till human voices wake us, and we drown.  
T.S. Eliot, *The love song of J.A. Prufrock*

The Mediterranean is a vast archive, an immense grave.  
P. Matvejević, (1999)

Submerged in Mediterranean waters is a bright heritage within which the idea of the human was conceived: the cradle of Western civilization, the land of gods and myths, a vast amphitheatre of encounters, voyages, shipwrecks, and seductions. Indeed, the Mediterranean has traditionally been represented in terms of a twofold vision: the sunny portrayals of classical antiquity, and the dark views of Gothic architecture, ancestral territories and sublime nature (Scotti 2007: 53–54). For several centuries, these views have given shape to the literary and symbolic dreams and fears of a cultural gaze arriving from the North of industrialized Europe, for which the Mediterranean south represented its primordial origins (Chambers 2008: 33). As a means of human acculturation through the knowledge of a glorious past, the voyage across the Mediterranean is culturally loaded: it is monumental and archeological, according to the model of the *Grand Tour*, and it is mythological, as it is associated with Odysseus' archetypal journey. The perception of the Mediterranean is invariably troubled by the weight of its history; as an arena of crusades and trade in earlier times, and later of cruises and tourism,