Mediterranean Metaphors: Travel, Translation, and Oceanic Imaginaries in the 'New Mediterraneans' of the Arctic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Caribbean

[Forthcoming in *Water Worlds: Social and Cultural Geographies of the Ocean* (J. Anderson & K. Peters, eds.), Aldershot, UK: Ashgate, 2013]

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Oceans are 'known' in many different ways. As the chapters of this book reveal, scientists, sailors, surfers, passengers, and divers all have their own perspectives on the ocean as a fluvial, dynamic arena of human and non-human biota, of minerals and molecules, of affects and ideologies.

But what of the perspective from *beyond* the sea? Does that even need to be considered in this book? After all, this is a book that emphasizes *affect* and *experience* in a resolutely *material* sea. Do we need to provide a forum here for those who view the ocean simply as a surface in the middle – whether as a space to be crossed, or plundered, or ignored, or as a space that merely divides or connects?

I answer this with an emphatic 'yes.' For better or worse, our perceptions of the ocean are structured not just by the tactile *experiences* that we have with its liquid element but by the *stories* that we tell about the sea, including the simplified stories of functionality or the non-stories of absence. Narrated understandings, even if not derived from sensory experience, contribute to the ocean assemblage. Indeed, as the paradigmatic space of the sublime – where emotional understanding

exists on a plane removed from cognition – the ocean derives much of its power from the reproduction of its image, including by those who never come in contact with, or sail across, its waters. Like a map (Del Casino and Hannah 2006, Kitchin and Dodge 2007), an ocean is more-than-representational. It is continually reconstructed through our encounters, but as we engage the sea our experiences are performed and internalized through articulations with pre-existing imaginaries.

To be clear, this call for taking imagined oceans seriously should not be seen as an endorsement of a perspective wherein the ocean is reduced to a metaphor -- a signifier for cultural hybridity or global commerce or any of the other social processes that the ocean has been made to stand for in recent work in literary, cultural, and historical studies. Indeed, elsewhere I specifically reject this perspective (Steinberg 2012; see also Blum 2010). But images of the ocean *do* matter, not because they exist apart from, or after, our interaction with the material sea but because they contribute to that interaction and, thereby, to its social (and more-than-social) construction. To that end, this chapter focuses on one specific imagined ocean – the Mediterranean – and how its image has been applied to construct meanings and practices in other maritime regions.

The Mediterranean as an Ocean of Connection and Division

Oceans have long been seen in Western thought as barriers. In Macrobius' worldview the oceans were impassable. A world was believed to exist on the other side of the ocean, but it was inaccessible because it lay across the torrid zone. In the medieval world of the mappamundi, the ocean had even less potential as a surface

for connection; it was simply a limit, and no earthly space of note, certainly nothing that was mappable, was believed to exist on the other side (Cosgrove 2001, Edson 1997, Gillis 2004, Harley and Woodward 1987). In the modern era, the world typically has been characterized as a universe of continents, wherein the oceans that exist between these fundamental land masses serve simply to divide the terrestrial spaces that matter (Lewis and Wigen 1997). From this continental perspective, the ocean and its uses occur outside the space of society, subsequent to the constitution of state territories and in defiance of their terrestrial roots (Steinberg 2001).

Notwithstanding the predominance of this worldview, for at least a century it has been challenged by academic observers from geography and beyond. Early in the twentieth century, Ellen Churchill Semple (1911: 294) noted that the ocean on which 'man explores and colonizes and trades' is no less a space of society than the land on which 'he plants and builds and sleeps.' At mid-century, Richard Hartshone (1953: 386) addressed the continentalist perspective directly, stating that although '[oceans] do divide, they do not separate.' Since that time, scholarly communities have arisen to study a number of ocean basins (see Lewis and Wigen 1999), and although these communities vary with respect to disciplinary or interdisciplinary focus they all share a perspective in which the ocean is moved from the margin to the centre of the regional social formation.

Like any antithetical categorization, the ocean region can either challenge or reproduce the fundamental assumptions of the dominant construction to which it is posed as an alternative. On the one hand, when one designates an ocean as the element that unites a region, fluidity and connections across space replace

embededness in static points and bounded territories as the fundamental nexus of society and space. 'Roots' are replaced by 'routes,' and this suggests a radical ontology of deterritorialization and reterritorialization (cf. Deleuze and Guattari 1987). On the other hand, by reaffirming the concept of the region as a unit of analysis – a unit that is stable in space and time and, therefore, potentially explanatory -- the ocean region perspective can inadvertently reproduce the static and essentialist spatial ontology that it attempts to subvert.[1]

Giaccaria and Minca (2011) advance this critique by identifying ocean basin-based regions as exemplarily postcolonial spaces that reproduce and naturalize ideals of unity in difference. On the one hand, the ocean in the middle of a maritime region links spaces and societies that are purported to be 'naturally' different. The different societies exist on opposite sides of a seemingly natural divide, a purportedly empty and separating ocean. On the other hand, because the ocean connects, even if it does not homogenize, the societies in an ocean region appear to exist in a permanent and natural universe of exchange and interaction that reproduces difference. Existing within an idealized arena of connectivity amidst difference, the various societies within an ocean region are linked together in an arena of mobility in which all entities – those with relatively more power and those with relatively less – are transformed even as they resist the 'other.'

While all ocean regions are, in this sense, prefiguratively postcolonial, arguably the paradigmatic case is the Mediterranean (Chambers 2008). In part, this

[1] For a broader discussion of how revisionist approaches to the region can inadvertently reproduce the ontologies that they seek to undermine, see Smith (1987) and Marston (2000). For expansions of this discussion that refer specifically to ocean-basin regions, see Giaccaria and Minca (2011) and Steinberg (2012).

is because of the Mediterranean's physical geography (relatively small and enclosed), in part it is because of its location at the intersection of Europe and one of its longest standing 'others' (the Arab 'orient'), and in part it is because of the long history in the humanities of treating the Mediterranean as a singularly unified, but also resolutely divided, region (Giaccaria and Minca 2011). For all these reasons,

> [amidst] a paradoxical interplay between different (and potentially conflictual) representations of this sea that alternate narratives of homogeneity and continuity with those of heterogeneity and discontinuity,…[the rhetoric of mediterraneanism sustains] the belief in the existence of *a geographical object called the Mediterranean*, where different forms of proximity (morphological, climatic, cultural, religious, etc.) justify a specific rhetorical apparatus through the production of a simplified field of inquiry, otherwise irreducible to a single image (Giccaria and Minca 2011: 348, emphasis in original).

The Mediterranean thus comes to be seen as something that, although permanently divided, is also permanent in its wholeness: 'The *mediteraneisme de la fracture* [is understood as]…something substantially immutable – a vision that resembles, in many ways, the cultural "containers" imagined and celebrated in Orientalist colonial rhetoric and Romantic literature' (Giaccaria and Minca 2011: 353).

In the remainder of their article, Giaccaria and Minca discuss ways in which one can harness the alterity that lies within the mediterraneanist discourse without inadvertently reproducing its orientalism. Even as they pursue this agenda, however, they fail to remark on how the ultimate power of mediterraneanism, like

all forms of orientalism, lies not simply in reproducing an ideal of stabilized difference but in the designation of this unity as a *category* that can then be integrated into systems of language and meaning that, in turn, are used to 'understand' (and thereby design futures for) other peoples (Mignolo 2003, 2005). Put another way, the power of mediterraneanism (the idea of there being a distinct Mediterranean region) flows not just from its purported ability to explain the (upper-case) Mediterranean as a naturalized arena of linked difference but from its functionality as a *category* wherein the presence of an inner sea (a lower-case mediterranean) is used to explain a generalized condition of difference amidst connection. In short, the power of the Mediterranean idea derives not just from its representation of a divided but unified ocean basin as 'something substantially immutable' but from the idea's existence as an 'immutable mobile' (Latour 1987), an idea that travels.

When an idea travels, however, it is never truly immutable. Although ideas gain their power through travel, travel invariably necessitates translation, and translation will always modify the power of an idea, even as it provides the means for realizing (or performing) that power (Clifford 1997). As is shown in this chapter, the mediterraneanist ideal of an inner sea that simultaneously essentializes both unity and difference has had specific histories as it has travelled to other regions. Below, I relate two stories of mediterraneanist travel and translation: first in the Gulf of Mexico/Caribbean, and then in the Arctic.

The Travelling Mediterranean 1: The Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean

If mediterraneanism achieves its power by constructing the idea of the inner sea as a space that facilitates both fractures (or difference) and crossings (or unity), then at first glace it appears as if only the first of these is present in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. From the perspective of the United States, the Gulf of Mexico consists of a series of fragmented coastal destinations: a peninsular Florida coast of pristine beaches and recreational fishing, a Texas/Louisiana coast of off-shore oil drilling and shrimping communities, and, in the middle, a Mississippi/Alabama/Florida panhandle coast of shipyards, naval bases, and casinos. Further to the east (and south), the Caribbean is understood as a series of island isolates, what Epeli Hau'ofa (1993) calls 'islands in a sea' in contrast with the integrated South Pacific 'sea of islands' that he extols.

While each of these Gulf/Caribbean images is certainly maritime, none of them suggests an underlying historical, or ongoing, space of maritime unity – a mediterranean space of crossings. Mexico, which might logically be perceived as lying on the 'other' side of the region (the equivalent of North Africa and the Levant, in the Mediterranean context), is instead seen as an extension of the arid western United States, not a space that is joined to the United States through maritime connectivity. This geographic erasure in U.S. thought, in which the southern maritime frontier is subsumed by the western land frontier, is reproduced in the Hollywood Western, where Mexico is almost universally depicted as an extension of the southwestern U.S. desert, not the land that lies across from the Gulf coast of the southeastern U.S. The resulting conception of the Gulf region as a series of local destinations, as opposed to being an integrated maritime space unified by a body of

water, is so pervasive that when Mississippi state legislator Steve Holland proposed renaming the Gulf of Mexico the Gulf of America in an effort to spoof his anti-immigration colleagues the joke was lost on the national media (Wilkinson 2012).[2]

However, this construction of the Gulf/Caribbean as an ocean without routes of connection is relatively new; it is no more 'natural' or static than the prevalent conception of the Mediterranean as a sea that joins connectivity with difference. During the first decades of the twentieth century, when the United States was asserting its regional ambition in the wake of the Spanish-American War and the newly opened Panama Canal, the U.S. perspective on the region was much more mediterraneanist. Indeed, analogies to the Mediterranean were explicitly deployed to signify the region's potential as an arena in which the United States could expand its frontiers through maritime connectivity to different, but accessible, places. For instance, at the turn of the twentieth century, when the American naturalist and travel writer Frederick Ober (1904) published *Our West Indian Neighbors,* he subtitled the book '*The Islands of the Caribbean Sea, "America's Mediterranean", their Picturesque Practices, Fascinating History and Attractions for the Traveler, Nature Lover, Settler, and Pleasure Seeker.*' 1920s tourism promotion material for Key West, Florida (at Florida's southern tip) and the Florida East Coast Railway (which ran trains to Key West) similarly identified the Caribbean not as the *end* of America but as its continuation.[3] Key West itself was promoted as the 'Gateway to Cuba, West

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[2] The gaps in the U.S. imagination of the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean as a maritime region are explored further by Steinberg (2011) and Silva Gruesz (2006).
[3] This trope of ocean basins expanding the U.S. frontier was reproduced later in the century in the Pacific, although not typically with direct reference to the Mediterranean (Connery 1994).

Indies, Panama Canal, Central America, and South America,' while on promotional maps from this era railroad lines merged seamlessly into ferry routes, and ocean shallows and reefs were coloured so that one had to concentrate to ascertain where land ended and water began. Most suggestively, Key West was labelled 'America's Gibraltar,' a geographic appellation that, even more than that of the Mediterranean as a whole, resonates with dual connotations of connection and difference. [4]

Today, not only have these Mediterranean signifiers disappeared, but even the less specific mediterraneanist images of the Gulf/Caribbean as an inner sea of connection amidst difference are absent. On Key West, major tourist icons such as the 'Southernmost Point' monument (marking the southernmost point of the continental United States) and the 'Mile 0' marker (signifying the terminus of U.S. Highway 1, which runs the length of the country's east coast) suggests that there is nothing to connect to beyond Florida's shores. Indeed, in some senses the contemporary U.S. perspective on the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean resembles that of a mappamundi: The ocean appears simply as a limit, an end beyond which there is no known civilization (or even potential for civilization). Nothing, or certainly nothing of interest, exists beyond the coastal zone. In today's de-mediterraneanized Gulf/Caribbean it is impossible to conceive of the ocean as the central binding element of a diverse region constituted by the various societies

[4] The Key West historical promotional materials referred to in this paragraph are available for viewing at the Flagler Station Over-Sea Railway Historeum in Key West (http://www.flaglerstation.net).

along its shores. Instead, the ocean is reduced to constituting the outer boundary of a series of coastal and island destinations.[5]

The Travelling Mediterranean 2: The Arctic[6]

In the 1920s, just as the Mediterranean metaphor was being deployed in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico to justify U.S. commercial (and military) expansion, a similar trope was being applied in the Arctic. A key proponent of this effort was the Canadian-American anthropologist Vilhjalmur Stefansson. In such books as *The Friendly Arctic* (1921) and *The Northward Course of Empire* (1922b), Stefansson argued that the Arctic, far from being a frozen wasteland, was a 'Polar Mediterranean.' Like the Mediterranean, he wrote, the Arctic featured a relatively navigable central space that united diverse coastal peoples in commerce and productive interaction. With the advent of new transportation technologies (especially the airplane) that would further ease navigation across its inner sea, the Arctic was likely to emerge as a new centre of civilization. As Stefansson wrote in *National Geographic Magazine*:

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[5] Further reflections on the ways in which residents and tourists in Key West construct and deny connections with lands and waters to the south (as well as with the mainland U.S. to the north) can be found in Steinberg (2007) and Steinberg and Chapman (2009).

[6] Interviews discussed in this section were conducted in 2010 as part of a U.S. National Science Foundation-funded project on Territorial Imaginaries and Arctic Sovereignty Claims. The interviews cited here were conducted by myself, Mauro Caraccioli, and Jeremy Tasch (Anchorage); myself, Mauro Caraccioli, Jeremy Tasch, and Elizabeth Nyman (Washington); and Hannes Gerhardt (Nuuk and Oslo). I am grateful to each of these colleagues for their assistance in gathering and sharing interview data.

> A map giving one view of the northern half of the northern world shows that the so-called Arctic Ocean is really a Mediterranean sea like those which separate Europe from Africa or North America from South America. Because of its smallness, we would do well to go back to an Elizabethan custom and call it not the Arctic Ocean but the Polar Sea or Polar Mediterranean. The map shows that most of the land in the world is in the Northern Hemisphere, that the Polar Sea is like a hub from which the continents radiate like the spokes of a wheel. The white patch shows that the part of the Polar Sea never yet navigated by ships is small when compared to the surrounding land masses (Stefansson 1922a: 205).

Although the Mediterranean analogy has faded from public imagination in the Caribbean and the Gulf of Mexico, it has recently undergone a resurgence in the Arctic. Regional boosters are seeking new tropes to assist them in realizing the opportunities that they believe will come from climate change and the demise of Cold War tensions, and they have seized upon the Mediterranean as an appropriate, if climatically incongruous, analogue.

The prevalence of mediterraneanist discourse in the Arctic became apparent to my research team in 2010, when we were in Alaska conducting interviews on Arctic geopolitics. Driving to an interview on our first day in Anchorage we turned on Alaska Public Radio and heard a promotional advertisement announcing that the topic for that week's Talk of Alaska radio show was to be: 'Is the Arctic the new Mediterranean?' As it turned out, the programme featured an interview with author Charles Emmerson (who had recently published *The Future History of the Arctic*

(2010)). The programme began with the host, Steve Heimel, giving the following introduction:

> The climate is warming…and what this does is it opens up the Arctic Ocean. The question is: What now? Does the Arctic at some point become the Mediterranean? Does the Arctic Ocean become the centre of civilization, with a warming climate, and how many years from now does what happen? Everybody's looking at this. Anybody in the policy area, whether it's science, whether it's mineral exploration, whether it's international law. The implications of an opening Arctic are staggering and different from the kinds of dreams that the polar explorers once had, but not all that different.

Emmerson, in turn, followed up by discussing the predictions of one of those 'polar explorers':

> Vilhjalmur Stefansson…wrote this wonderful book called *The Northward Course of Empire*, and his idea was that thousands of years ago the centres of civilization had all been in very hot places, very temperate places – Cairo, Baghdad, then in Rome and later slightly cooler places such as London and Paris and then New York – his vision was that that line is going to continue and the centre of civilization 20 or 30 years from now is going to be Winnipeg or Anchorage (transcribed from Alaska Public Radio Network 2010).

Apparently, the image of an Arctic Mediterranean resonated with Alaskans, because it was brought up, without our prompting, in two subsequent interviews.

First, an official from Alaska's Department of Natural Resources specifically referenced the radio programme:

> Last Tuesday there was a public radio programme produced here by the Alaska Public Radio Network called Talk of Alaska and last week was 'Is the Arctic the New Mediterranean?'…I didn't make it – I can't listen to it during the day – but I thought that the tag was sort of funny. I'd never thought of the Arctic as a new Mediterranean, but there's probably no [fewer] people living around the Arctic [now] than lived around the Mediterranean in Roman times.

In another interview, an elected official, when informed that we were a team of geographers funded by the U.S. National Science Foundation, remarked:

> The first geography teacher I ever had suggested that civilizations come about because of interaction and accessibility, and, you know, that's why classic geography says, 'Look at rivers, ports, how does that all happen?'....[With climate change,] I'd be fascinated to kind of take the classical geographic thinking and say, 'Okay, what will be the ties that will endure, that will ultimately change this?' And I don't know what they are; there's a lot of potential right now and there are some things that [will] work and things that won't work, but now, you take a look at the vision of the Arctic, where the unified Arctic is kind of a Mediterranean play and so forth….And that is the question that I'd ask if I had a National Science Foundation grant to look at cooperation in the Arctic. Because in the end, all

> the meetings we do, they're fun meetings, but what endures is what people are going to do with Arctic regular commerce.

In making this statement, the elected official was unknowingly (or, perhaps, knowingly) referencing a mediterraneanist, liberal view of the ocean held since Aristotle, who encouraged civilizations and cities to adopt a maritime orientation in the belief that cultural and commercial movement across the maritime surface of exchange would lead to peace and prosperity (Gottman 1973).

Although not directly referencing the Mediterranean, then Soviet Premier Mikhail Gorbachev similarly drew on the mediterraneanist concept of the cosmopolitan *emporion* when he noted, in 1987, 'The Arctic is not only the Arctic Ocean but also…the place where the Eurasian, North American, and Asia pacific regions meet, where the frontiers come close to one another and the interests of states…cross' (Gorbachev 1987). Likewise, then U.S. Vice Presidential candidate Sarah Palin famously proclaimed, 'We have that very narrow maritime border between the United States…and Russia….They're very, very important to us and they are our next door neighbor….You can actually see Russia from land here in Alaska, from an island in Alaska….I'm giving you that perspective of how small our world is and how important it is that we work with our allies, to keep good relation[s] with all of these countries, especially Russia' (ABC News 2009).

As in the actual Mediterranean, however, the mediterraneanist ideal of unity amidst exchange in the Arctic is paired with one of antagonistic difference. Resurrecting the dream of Vilhjalmur Stefansson, military affairs journalist Barry Zellen (2008) wrote in Toronto's *Globe and Mail* that the only factor that had so far

prevented the Arctic from emerging as a site of interaction and investment was its climate. Now, with climate change, he argued, the potential for the Arctic to emerge as a 'new Mediterranean' will likely be realized. However, Zellen went on to write that the 'Age of the Arctic' that will emerge is as likely to be one of hostile interaction among antagonists as one of peaceful commerce. Giving a nod to Sir Halford Mackinder, Zellen concluded by warning that a proactive military strategy is warranted because 'the long isolated "Lenaland" along the Arctic basin will transform into a highly productive and strategically important "Rimland," transforming the Arctic into tomorrow's equivalent of the Mediterranean, a true strategic, economic and military crossroads of the world.' In a similar vein, former U.S. Coast Guard officer Scott Borgerson (2008) has likened the melting Arctic to the Mediterranean as a parallel zone of contestation. Borgerson argues that the Mediterranean has avoided outright conflict because antagonistic nations on opposite sides of its connecting waters have recognized each other's coastal rights and the rule of law, and he argues for reaching a similar consensus in the Arctic before it is too late.

Gorbachev, Palin, Zellen, and Borgerson all deploy the physical imagery of an inland sea to construct the Arctic as a region, like the Mediterranean, that combines unity with division in Giaccaria and Minca's (2011: 348) 'paradoxical interplay…that alternate[s] narratives of homogeneity and continuity with those of heterogeneity and discontinuity.' However, the flexibility of the mediterranean image – in which the fluidity of the sea both erases and magnifies difference – and the intensity of the 'paradoxical interplay' that results allows individuals to use the image to support

very different political diagnoses. For Gorbachev and Palin, the paradoxical qualities of the mediterranean Arctic are used to highlight its potential as a space of peace wherein differences may be overcome through commerce and exchange. For Zellen and Borgerson, these same qualities are used to highlight its potential as a space of conflict wherein encounters between naturally separated nations are likely to breed distrust and acrimony.

This theme of the Arctic as a Mediterranean-like meeting place where the West brushes up against its 'others' was echoed in an interview that we conducted with a U.S. State Department official who effectively combined the Zellen/Borgerson position (as a divided space, the Arctic is a natural space of discord) with the Gorbachev/Palin position (that maritime space of division is also a space of connection, and thus it provides an environment in which this discord may be overcome):

> A difficulty for the Russians is learning how to be part of the community. The old Soviet ways of doing things still seems to be ingrained in them….I think part of it is the Russian mindset, and getting past that….In some ways, it's like [the Russians] have to learn to play nice with others, and the Arctic may be the place to do that.

For this official, the fluid centre of the Arctic, like the Mediterranean, creates divisions (in particular, it makes it possible for proximate neighbours to have different social skills in the international community) but it also creates the connections that could lead to transcendence of those divisions. Interaction between these disparate neighbours is seen as potentially productive and

increasingly likely due to connections brought about by an inland sea. However, such connections are also recognized as inevitably fraught with tension due to superorganic cultural differences that result from the geographic division mediated by that same intervening ocean.[7]

Still others have used comparisons with the Mediterranean to argue for heightened national presence in the Arctic region. For instance, an official from the Government of Greenland likened the Arctic to the Mediterranean not as a zone of interaction but as a region whose borders ended at some point 'inland.' Thus, he argued that just as non-Mediterranean countries with non-territorial interests in the region should have, at most, observer status in Mediterranean governance issues, non-Arctic countries should have little power in governing the Arctic.[8] In similar fashion, in 2010 the Standing Committee on National Defence in Canada's House of Commons issued a report on 'Canada's Arctic Sovereignty' (Government of Canada 2010) that began with a discussion of Stefansson's predictions about the future centrality of the Arctic and then went on to note that in the context of climate change and the end of the Cold War Canada must assert its Arctic sovereignty to

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[7] Bravo (2009) discusses more generally how Russia is constructed as an 'other' in the literature on policy responses to climate change in the Arctic region.

[8] Interestingly, a non-Arctic member of the European Union's delegation to the Standing Committee of Parliamentarians of the Arctic Region constructed a parallel between the Arctic and the Mediterranean to make just the opposite case, arguing *for* the inclusion of non-Arctic countries in Arctic decision making: 'The EU is partly Arctic in a way and I mean, you can also compare it to the Mediterranean policy of the EU. I mean, not all EU member states are Mediterranean countries obviously. Maybe it is more obvious that the EU should have an interest in the Mediterranean region, but I mean you could also use the same argument and say that all the European states are Mediterranean states.'

foster national development in its portion of Stefansson's rapidly emergent Polar Mediterranean.

Conclusion

As a response to the continentalism that pervades our understanding of the world, numerous scholars and commentators have proposed that we conceive of a world of mediterranean regions. These regions' oceanic centres allow us to highlight such phenomena as intensified economic exchange (e.g. Dirlik's (1998) 'Pacific Rim'), transnational diasporas (e.g. Gilroy's (1993) 'Black Atlantic'), or a 'planetarity' in which individuals are both local and global (e.g. Craciun's (2009) circumpolar Arctic). In all of these visions, the character of the ocean at the centre of the region as a space that simultaneously facilitates movement and divides plays a crucial role in establishing norms of connectivity amidst difference. As Giaccaria and Minca (2011) and Chambers (2008) note, this narrative has a long history in the Mediterranean and, as I have argued here, the mobility and transferability of these ideas of mediterraneaness have facilitated the Western understanding of the ocean region as a postcolonial space.

Two problems emerge, however, when one looks at the world as a series of mediterraneans. The first, which has barely been touched on in this chapter but which should be evident from the other chapters in this book, is that, to quote Hester Blum (2010, 670), 'the sea is not a metaphor.' So long as one views the ocean in the abstract as a central space – even as a central space that performs a complex mix of functions that serve to both unite and divide – one runs the risk of forgetting

that the sea is constructed not just through how we *think* about it but through how we *experience* it, as a material space that is encountered by our embodied practices as well as the practices of the ocean's other (human and non-human) constitutive elements. Any perspective on an ocean region that focuses on terrestrial societies that are simply 'linked by' or 'divided by' (or 'linked *and* divided by') a central sea are necessarily incomplete.

The second, related problem is that once the ocean in the centre is reduced to a metaphor then the ocean region similarly can become a metaphor, and, as scholars of metaphor caution, the application of a metaphor, particularly to a space, is never innocent (Brown 2000, Smith and Katz 1993). In each of the examples from the Caribbean, the Gulf of Mexico, and the Arctic, the application of the 'Mediterranean' (a specific place) to a 'mediterranean' (a region characterized by a central sea) is partial. Those who apply signifiers of mediterraneanism desire some aspects of the Mediterranean idea to travel (e.g. the idea of 'civilization' spreading to 'opposite' shores) while disabling others (e.g. the potential for migration in the reverse direction). As just one example, interviews conducted in Key West revealed that tourists and residents there had contradictory attitudes toward a hypothetical bridge to Cuba: They supported the benefits that a bridge would bring for tourist mobility and the southward diffusion of cultural norms (in this case, specifically, tolerance of homosexuality) while fearing that a bridge would facilitate an influx of Cuban migrants (Steinberg 2007, Steinberg and Chapman 2009).

Just as the Mediterranean Sea is more than an imagined surface, the Mediterranean region is more than a trope for understanding (or performing)

postcolonial dynamics of connection amidst division. Metaphorical references to the Mediterranean do indeed have these affective resonances, in part because of the properties attributed to the ocean in the Western imagination and in part because of the specific Western history of thinking both about and with the Mediterranean. But the application of mediterraneanism as a category – its travel as a purportedly immutable mobile – inevitably involves translation, and this translation occurs in specific historic contexts. The very fact that Mediterranean references in the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean have faded into obscurity while they are on the rise in the Arctic suggests that, despite its appeal to historic constancy and 'natural' physical geography, the mediterraneanization of a region is dependent as much on the ambitions of those who would deploy the trope as on the actual dynamics of connectivity and difference that are present in the region. In particular, as a concept that justifies sustained interaction among nations that are deemed to be at different levels of civilizational development, mediterraneanization and the fetishization of the ocean as a space that connects while preserving heterogeneity appears most prominently in times and spaces of imperial expansion. Many imperialist ideologies join the idealization of natural difference between societies with the belief that integration of one society into the other is possible, and inland seas are well positioned to aid in the pairing of these seemingly contradictory narratives.

The ocean in the centre of the Mediterranean 'water world' thus cannot be reduced to a surface, whether a surface of division, a surface of connection, or – as in the case of the postcolonial Mediterranean sea – a surface of division amidst connection. It is all of these, and the image of it as all of these is regularly applied to

construct and interpret a universe of mediterranean 'water worlds.' But this application of the image occurs amidst actual practices by which connection and division are produced, both in and around the water. The representation of the inner sea as postcolonial space is *one* component of a wet ontology, but to fully understand the 'water worlds' that constitute our planet this imagery must be joined with the historically and geographically specific material practices – of humans and others – that constitute marine space.

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Citation on deposit: Steinberg, P. (2014). Mediterranean Metaphors: Travel, Translation and Oceanic Imaginaries in the 'New Mediterraneans' of the Arctic Ocean, the Gulf of Mexico and the Caribbean. In J. Anderson, & K. Peters (Eds.), Water Worlds: Human Geographies of the Ocean (23 - 37). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315547619
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