

Poetics of Infrastructure: (Re)Imagining The “Modern” Mediterranean

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Abstract

The aim of this article is to inquire into global imaginings of the possibilities for the future of the Mediterranean region, i.e. its current and future reconceptualization through political economy of connectivity through the Maritime Silk Road (MRS) as part of the OBOR.¹ OBOR promises to mediate exchange over distance and bring different people and objects into interaction through its infrastructure. The question is whether OBOR will replace the present politics of domination by the diplomacy of communication, interaction, negotiation, and conversation, where dialogue of civilizations is based on tolerance, recognition, respect, mutual reference, and mutual learning. The article argues that the reconceptualization of the Mediterranean from its current, stereotyped image of the ancient past towards a modern paradigm largely depends on contrasted geopolitical dynamics of this region.

Keywords: Maritime Silk Road, infrastructure, modern Mediterranean, hegemony, imaginative geographies

Introduction / Uvod

The aim of this article is to inquire into global imaginings of the possibilities for the future of the Mediterranean region, i.e. its current and future reconceptualization via political economy of connectivity through the Maritime Silk Road (MRS) as the part of OBOR.² My argument is that the reconceptualization of the Mediterranean from its current stereotyped image rooted in the ancient past towards a modern paradigm largely depends on contrasted geopolitical dynamics of this region.

Today, imagination plays an increasingly significant role in globalization and in influencing the way people imagine themselves in the world. Imagination also plays a key role in the discourse of power since empowerment implies a capacity to perceive one's real interests and connect them reliably to an imagined future. As Rorty (1991: 13) argues, 'Imagination is the key to power...it determines the direction of desires.'

It was imagination that sparked/ignited the beginning of Greek civilisation through its mythologies, from which its philosophy and consequently history emerged. For Greeks, it was almost impossible to make a categorical differentiation

¹ OBOR - One Belt One Road

² Ibid.

between mythology and history, as mythology was explaining the natural order and justifying the socio-political order (Davutoğlu, 2016).

Balancing between desire and possibility, i.e. what Walter Benjamin would term collective fantasy of society is China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) mega project, a sort of modern-day Silk Road that is considered to be one of the most ambitious projects in the world (Benjamin, 1989). As part of the OBOR, the 17+1 initiative's objective is to enhance cooperation between the Mediterranean countries and China in trade and investments, transport connectivity, finance, agriculture, science and technology, health, education and culture.³ OBOR is a geohistorical movement of almost unimaginable scope, a movement that can radically transform the 21st century geopolitical landscape of Eurasia.

During the last decade, investments in rail and maritime infrastructure in South-East Europe, the presence of the Chinese Navy along the sea route from the East China Sea to the Eastern Mediterranean, and Chinese state-ownership of China's shipping lines, ports, and infrastructure construction companies are changing political geography of this region (Grgić, 2019).

For example, through the recently established Sino-Greek comprehensive strategic partnership for new historical stage with China's infrastructure investment boost, Greece has been re-imagining its more promising future, as shifting its position from marginalized periphery of EU to the center of Eurasia corridor and as main hub of new Maritime Silk Road for Central, Eastern and Northern Europe. China's efforts are especially vigorous in improving infrastructure in the Balkans, practicing what some refer to as "railway diplomacy" with Piraeus - Belgrade - Budapest high speed railway, a key complement to port investments like Piraeus and a cross-border transport corridor from the Mediterranean to Central Europe (Zweers, Shopov, 2020: 22). This strategic infrastructure project will give China better access to and increased presence in the European market, but also to the south of the Mediterranean.

China offers an economic and political alternative for the Mediterranean and SE European countries. OBOR promises to mediate exchange across distances, bringing different cultures, people, and objects into interaction via its infrastructure. The question is whether or not it will replace the present politics of domination by the diplomacy of communication, interaction, negotiation, and conversation, where the dialogue of civilizations is based on tolerance, recognition, respect, mutual reference, and mutual learning.

The Power of Connectivity / Snaga povezivanja

Infrastructure has its conceptual roots in the Enlightenment idea of a world in movement open to change where the free circulation of goods, ideas, and people created the possibility of progress (Mattelart, 1996). The way of thinking is the reason why the provision of infrastructures is so closely linked to the sense of shaping modern society. They are "mechanisms to control time," write Graham & Marvin, "instigating waves of progress", and possession of electricity, railways, and running water same to define civilization itself (Graham, Marvin, 1995: 202).

³ The initiative includes twelve EU member states and five Balkan states — Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.

The Czech historian Mrázek describes the experience of infrastructure as an “enthusiasm of the imagination”, referring to the feelings of promise that technologies such as infrastructures can stimulate. Roads and railways are not just technical objects but also operate on the level of fantasy and desire (Larkin, 2013). Walter Benjamin similarly argued that for those who grew up with the railway, one can never analyze the thing itself but must confront, instead, one’s own past, desires and fantasies, which serve as filters through which the object is seen” (Larkin, 2013). Furthermore, according to Mrázek, “infrastructures create a sensing of modernity, a process by which the body, as much as the mind, apprehends what it is to be modern, mutable, and progressive” (Mrázek, 2002: 50).

Through history, human mobility constructed connections and networks by exploiting geographical bounties and facilities, but also overcoming natural obstacles (Blockmans, Krom, Wubs-Mrozewicz, 2017). Geographical conditions did not change that much over the centuries. It was the human interactions that could or could not make the best use of them within the specific constellation of economic, political, technical and cultural factors at any particular time.

The concept of networks in the ancient past was indispensable in dealing with maritime empires that had an overarching political authority. The maritime networks typically crossed or bypassed all kinds of boundaries of a political, religious, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, legal and economic nature. From the fourteenth century to the turn of the sixteenth, the Mediterranean was a world apart, a world - economy. The economic fabric of this world was initially woven and “the whole sea shared a common destiny, with identical problems and general trends if not identical consequences up to first half of seventeenth century” (Tabak, 2008: 92).

These maritime routes connected different geographical and climatic zones, diverse economic systems, religious, linguistic, political and cultural spheres. Around 1300, cargo ships would link the Mediterranean with the Atlantic coasts, the North and Baltic Seas. Crossing all boundaries, maritime trade contributed to fostering a more integrated European market as well as a better understanding of otherness, in material as well as in cultural terms. The Mediterranean had been connected by various thalassocracies – empires having a regional maritime outreach – before the Romans would label it as the *mare nostrum* (Blockmans, Krom, Wubs-Mrozewicz, 2017). As a result, the spirit of discovery freed by sea navigation was tempered by the land which prevented it from degrading into an unlimited will to power and conquest.

‘Empire’, according to Hardt and Negri, is a global condition that encompasses all cultural forms, yet leaves world culture disharmonious and acentred. ‘Empire’, they write, ‘can only be conceived as a universal republic, a network of powers and counterpowers structured in a boundless and inclusive architecture’ (Leonard, 2005). Hardt and Negri (2000: 412) argue that power has become delocalized and diffuse, to be found not in the ascendance of a newly dominating nation-state, but in the operations of transnational markets that are irreducible to national territoriality.

As European trade has shifted toward Asia, improvement in facilities and skyrocketing, *Asian trade have filled the Mediterranean ports.*⁴ In recent years, Europe’s fastest growing ports are again in the south (Van der Putten, 2019: 19-20). Greece’s debt

⁴ The Mediterranean Sea, the world’s largest inland sea, borders on nineteen countries with links to southern and central Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

crisis has definitely contributed to the *rapprochement* between Athens and Beijing, and the growing footprint of Chinese investors in Greece aims at the attainment of at least one significant goal - the construction of a cross-border transport corridor from the Mediterranean to Central Europe. This will then allow China to meet two more strategically important objectives: (i) the reduction of transportation cost; and (ii) improved access to and increased presence in the European market, but also to the south of the Mediterranean (Linden, 2018). The Netherlands Institute of International Relations conducted a study on Chinese Investment in Greece's Port of Piraeus, finding that these investments have the potential to strengthen considerably the influence of the Chinese state over the maritime trade corridor between China and the EU (Van der Putten, 2014: 22).

For the first time since the end of the Cold War, a multi-faceted and severe geostrategic competition in the eastern Mediterranean has emerged, with the traditional 'West' (that is, the EU, NATO and the United States) competing for influence with old and new (global) players, including Turkey, Russia, the Gulf states and Iran, as well as China and, no doubt, Greece has a strategically important position in the region. In 2019, Greece has joined 16+1 platform for cooperation between China and countries in Central and Eastern Europe. On a multilateral level, Greece was one of seven states, which were granted prospective membership in the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) in May 2017 (Tonchev, Davarinou, 2017: 65). On an array of issues, not least of all the ongoing European debate on screening foreign investment, Greece is walking on a tight rope between EU membership and flexibility vis-à-vis China. However, unlike in Italy, positive views of China now dominate in Greece. Greeks are the most favorably inclined toward China of any people in Europe (Linden, 2018). China, meanwhile, has long declared its commitment to supporting Greece and its strong belief in the resilience of the Greek people (Trigkas, 2014).

Mediterranean countries are today part of the world's largest market but also the EU's divided governance and their "vulnerability" or better to say openness to Chinese economic power has grown. The European Council on Foreign Relations reports claim that 'China is buying up Europe by arguing that China is using European division to enter the European markets, meaning that European disunity is to blame (Godement, Parello-Pesner, Richard, 2011).

The surge in overseas investment that has accompanied China's One Belt One Road Initiative has swept into Mediterranean region. Italy, Greece, Spain and Turkey have all seen substantial increases in Chinese investment in the last five years. As Europe's largest supplier of imports, China and its state-owned enterprises have shown special interest in acquiring powerful positions in transportation infrastructure, especially the region's fast-growing ports. Approaches range from taking controlling interest in port operators, for example, in Spain, to owning major port terminals such as Vado, in Italy, or taking over the governing Port Authority, as in Piraeus, Greece (Linden, 2018).

The OBOR offers Italy - which is the end-point of China 21st Century Maritime Silk Road - new opportunities for economic and commercial development. In particular, Italy is directly involved in the OBOR project with its ports of Venice, Trieste and Genoa. These represent important terminals for the maritime branch of the New Silk Road (Cassarini, 2019).

The eighth summit of 16 Central and Eastern European countries and China, which is now known as the 17+1 platform after it was joined by Greece, was

held in 2019 in Dubrovnik where the participating states pledged to support the development of a sustainable global economy and multilateral trade system based on the rules of the World Trade Organisation. On this occasion, the symbolism of Dubrovnik's role in historical time and its political geography has to be invoked. In medieval and early modern times, the main function of Ragusa (today's Dubrovnik) was that of a mediator between the East and the West, i.e. in the changed geopolitical circumstances this meant mediating between the Ottoman Empire and the Christian states. With significant maritime trading network in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, and minimal military expenditures, but with maximum diplomacy, this small Republic maintained Ragusan "LIBERTAS" and kept open trading channels with both sides (Havrylyshyn, Srzentic, 2013). It seems now that what was once Ragusa (Dubrovnik) for the Mediterranean, the Mediterranean is today for global West and global East via the OBOR, i.e. its Maritime Silk Road.

Today, the 17+1 initiative document calls for more effective policies to facilitate the access of companies from Central and Eastern Europe to China and build a more balanced partnership. The participating countries at the 2019 summit in Dubrovnik took note of the *Three Seas Initiative* and expressed their readiness to cooperate with it to improve transport connections between the Adriatic, Baltic and Black seas.⁵ The development of a 17+1 initiative demonstrates that China has already become a fully-fledged European power (Kavalski, 2019). Andrea Brinza argues that 17+1 platform nurtures fallacies regarding China-CEE relation since out of around \$126 billions of Chinese Investments in the EU (from 2000-2019), less than \$10 billion were directed to the CEE region, while Germany received around \$25 billion, the U.K. \$57 billion and the U.S. \$149.9 billions of Chinese investments (Brinza, 2020).

As a member state of the EU, goods and services traded with Croatia are not only aimed at the Croatian market but could reach the entire EU with a population of 500 million people. Croatia, as an EU member, also has access to EUR 1 billion of EU structural funds annually aimed at promoting entrepreneurship. Foreign investors, including Chinese investors, who set up businesses in Croatia, have equal access as domestic companies to compete for these funds (Matura, 2020). "The building of the bridge connecting Croatia's southernmost peninsula of Pelješac with the mainland is a synthesis of the idea that 16+1 is a format that exploits the possibilities of cooperation and not one that causes division", said Croatian prime minister Plenkovic at the 16+1 initiative business meeting held in Sofia in 2018.⁶ This bridge is significant for Croatia from a political point of view since it finally connects Dubrovnik- Neretva County with the rest of the country. There has not been any official statement made by the EU following the Pelješac Bridge issue, but it has been portrayed as a sensitive issue in the media. Chinese investment had entered Europe before, however, it was the first time for a Chinese contractor to contribute to a project co-financed by the EU. Transport infrastructure is in the focus of interest in the cooperation between China and Croatia, especially in the context

⁵ The Three Seas Initiative, also known as the Baltic, Adriatic, Black Sea (BABS) Initiative, is a forum of twelve states in the European Union, along a north-south axis from the Baltic Sea to the Adriatic Sea and the Black Sea in Central and Eastern Europe. The Initiative aims to create an Intermarium-based regional dialogue on various questions affecting the member states. The member states are Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, and met for their first summit in 2016, in Dubrovnik.

⁶ HIC (Croatian Information Centre). Available at: <http://www.hic.hr/politika- plenkovic -docekao -visokogosta- iz- kine.html> (accessed June 22, 2021).

of the EU. In the framework of the Trans-European Transport Network (TEN-T), the main port of Croatia, the Port of Rijeka, is inside three corridors: Mediterranean, Baltic–Adriatic and Rhine–Danube. The Mediterranean corridor will link ports in the southwestern Mediterranean region to the Ukrainian border with Hungary, following the coastlines of Spain, France, crossing the Alps towards east. The Baltic–Adriatic corridor will cross or tangent five other corridors: the North Sea Baltic corridor, the Mediterranean corridor, the Scandinavian–Mediterranean corridor, the Rhine–Danube corridor and the Orient/East-Med corridor. The Rhine–Danube corridor, with the Main and Danube waterway as its backbone, connects the central regions around Strasbourg and Frankfurt via southern Germany to Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest and finally the Black Sea. Shipment from the Far East to Europe could be 8 days shorter in transit times if using the Port of Rijeka, compared to the Port of Hamburg and Rotterdam (Matura, 2020).

As opposed to these corridors, the Italian government is now focusing within the OBOR on the ports of Trieste and Genoa, since they have the capability to attract, and service, China's huge cargo ships reaching the Mediterranean Sea via the Suez Canal (Cassarini, 2019). Eager to take part in the economic stimulus provided by the Belt and Road Initiative, Italy has proposed a Five-Port Alliance for the Mediterranean that would include Venice, Trieste and Ravenna in Italy as well as Koper (Slovenia) and Fiume (Croatia) In the past years, EU officials have lambasted China for allegedly undermining the European integration process by turning the CEE countries into "Trojan horses" and sowing division in the continent. This culminated in early March 2019, just as President Xi Jinping was embarking on his trip to Italy, in an official proclamation by the European Commission that for the first-time labelled China as a "systemic rival" of the EU (Linden, 2018).

According to most experts, Chinese FDI has been flowing into balkan countries like Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia since they are not members of the European Union, and strict EU level regulations of public procurement and other investment procedures do not apply (Matura, 2020). In a way, Chinese money does represent an alternative to Western financial institutions. Its usage in the region could grow due to the ongoing economic crisis in Europe, and the reluctance of Western financial institutions to engage in large-scale infrastructural investments in the Balkans (for non-EU members) (Grgić, 2019).

Mediterranean connectivity waterborne mobility linked harbour towns all around and all-year round but what was once the sine qua non of the Mediterranean prosperity, seized to endure in modern times. The new Silk Road (OBOR) is emphasizing maritime connectivity as strategically important but will these old ports as new motifs of regional connectivity cherish in prosperity as in the past or will simply serve as gateways for much bigger, global neoliberal trade? Furthermore, building infrastructure in order to bridge the distance from Asia to Europe, does not necessarily mean that this type of connectivity, i.e. new geopolitical positioning, will truly modernize these societies (Herzfeld, 2005).

Also, the question is whether the Mediterranean countries reshaped by the New Maritime Silk Road' technology and infrastructure, will pledge for "political neutrality" for the sake of commercial matters. The fact is that the important part of infrastructure's political address is the way in which technologies represent the possibility of having a future, which allows us to understand how the political can be constituted through different means.

The Mediterranean as Transnational Constellation / Mediteran kao transnacionalna konstelacija

Even though many today are concerned that OBOR is turning Europe into “the periphery of Asia,” the relations between the European metropolis and periphery are not free of conflict. The successive waves of EU enlargement underlined the conflict between the large and small member states of the Union, i.e. between the most and the least developed members of the Union. Their present conflicts are primarily about exclusion from the European core and abuse of agreed procedures and they are being sorted out through complex institutional bargaining over laws and procedures. The term “plurilateralism” was used by Philip G. Cerny in the early 1990s to describe the shift in the world order from a “hierarchy of holistic actors, states, which impose order through power and hegemony, to a more complex, and diffuse set of interactive self-regulatory mechanisms or webs of power” (Zelonka, 2016). Though the sovereignty of the periphery is not denied, it is constrained by the policy of EU conditional help and accession, the former of which has not been exercised so successfully in the recent Greek debt crisis.

The Enlightenment idea of unilinear secular progress did not only reconstruct historical imagination of the Western mind but also developed a new perception for the future of humanity. Accompanying this idea of unilinear progress is the Eurocentric understanding of history that ignores not only the contributions but at times even the existence of non-Western civilizations. In this view, Western civilization as the dominant civilization of the time has a special mission to bridge the past and the future. The exclusion of the other and the inclusion, incorporation and administration of the Same is the essential geopolitical moment. The two processes are complementary; the Other is excluded as the reverse side of the processes of incorporation of the Same. Expressed in terms of space and power, this is the basic process of geopolitics in which territory is divided, contested and rules (Davutoglu, 2016). The ideological dimension is clearly present in how this is justified and explained and understood by the populations concerned; the “Other” is seen as different, if not an enemy. “We” are “the same” in that we are all citizens of the same nation, speak a similar language, share a culture. This theme repeatedly recurs in political discourse where others are portrayed as different as threats; it is geopolitical discourse (Dalby, 1994).

The New Maritime Silk Road provides a golden opportunity for Mediterranean countries - especially Greece - who seek to liberate themselves from Western hegemony and Eurocentrism, and decolonize the image of Mediterranean as premodern, what could change the current landscape of domination with the Mediterranean re-emerging as a transnational constellation in modern times.

Mediterranean remains a place where no single culture or tradition has ever been successful at imposing one single, unified vision (Bouchard, 2011: 343). Because of this proximity of self and other in war as well as in peace, the Mediterranean thought has developed a profound consciousness of the limen, the border that encompasses not only the physical morphology of land meeting the sea, but also ethnicities, cultures, and religions. It is a porous border that divides but, in the division, also unites: ‘frontiers, confines, limits, edges, margins are also the set of points one shares. As Italian geophilosopher Cassano writes “We have the same

borders with another country because the line of separation is also the tract we have in common with it, the location where our points come into contact with each other" (Cassano, 2005: 94). In Cassano's geophilosophy, the Mediterranean nomos of land and sea and the values that emerge from its spatial reality as an internal sea, are easy to navigate and bounded by lands that are never too far (Cassano, 2005: 107). Revisiting, like Cacciari before him, Carl Schmitt's articulation of the opposition between a thought of the sea and one of the land, Cassano endorses the view "that the Ocean is the space of an empire that, having embraced the unlimited expanse of the sea, comes to depend upon a freeing of technology" (Cassano, 2005: 121).

Because the border is inherently porous, the Mediterranean is the geography of many voices and forms of knowledge that, by testing all attempts at universality and ethnocentrism, carries the promise of a more democratic citizenship (Cassano, 2005: 72). According to Italian geophilosophers, the Mediterranean shows us the limits of Europe and of the West and it is where the old continent redeems itself of its Eurocentrism.

Derrida (1992: 50) in *Other Heading* refocused the reflection on post-Wall Europe to its Mediterranean heritage of openness to difference and alterity. This heritage was seen as a path to answer mounting concerns over Europe's creation of internal and external frontiers amidst a triumphant rhetoric of liberal capitalism as its manifest destiny. Guénoun and Nancy note that this rethinking follows the path of inquiry of Husserl who, in 1935, and therefore at the same moment of crisis of the European nation-states, "found in the idea of Europe conceived as an offspring of Greek philosophy a thought potentially capable of fracturing totalitarian, nationalistic forms of European belonging" (Bouchard, 2011). In *The Other Heading*, Valéry identifies Europe as a "cape or appendix" to Asian continent, while Nietzsche called "geographical Europe the little peninsula of Asia" (Nietzsche, 1986: 15).

For Cacciari, however, "Europe provides no clear cartography of culture, language, geography, and ethnicity". As such, it exists as a paradoxical identity. Thus, in the wake of supra-national integration and ever growing global migratory flows, the various attempts to think of a European nation-state with borders and frontiers but also with centers of cultural heritage have little legitimacy. In short, Europe is but "tópos â topos", a cultural and political project destined to be forever incomplete (Cacciari, 1994: 49).

Guattari and Deleuze (1991: 108) argue that "European political and economic organizations represent a history of the majority and the hegemony of capitalism and as such not only prevents the becoming of minorities and of subjected peoples but demands the creation of new, future forms of concepts". Modelled on Mediterranean philosophy, on the "Greek features of immanence, friendship, and opinion", these "concepts can lead to the becoming-Other of European identity in a deterritorializing of the self, class, nation, and language to the point where no difference will exist between the European *Autochthon* and *the stranger*."⁷

After all, the Mediterranean is the story of the port cities in which merchants and settlers from all over the sea and far beyond gathered and interacted. But the merchant pioneer is almost by definition an outsider, someone who crosses cultural

⁷ „The Autochthon can hardly be distinguished from the stranger because the stranger becomes Autochthonous in the country of the other who is not, at the same time that the Autochthon becomes stranger to himself, his class, his nation, and his language: we speak the same language, and yet I do not understand you" (Guattari and Deleuze, 1991: 88).

and physical boundaries, encountering new gods, hearing different languages, and finding himself (much more rarely, herself) exposed to the sharp criticisms of the inhabitants of the places he visits in search of goods unavailable at home (Abulafia, 2021: 34). The unity of Mediterranean history thus lies, paradoxically, in its swirling changeability, in the diasporas of merchants and exiles, who had a transforming effect on these different societies, introducing something of the culture of one continent into the outer edges, at least, of another. The first philosophers — who were foreigners and émigrés from the Mediterranean borderlands — came to the Greek isles where they found a space conducive to form associations and debate opinions. This favourable milieu enabled the birth of philosophy where “philosophers are strangers, but philosophy is Greek” (Deleuze, Guattari, 1991: 87-88).

Cacciari claims that the loss, or the weakening of the forms of Greek thought, must compel Europe to a process of anamnesis. This process is necessary for a political/ethical project of a polycentric, multicultural Europe built upon the complementariness of the other to the self and the self to the other, assuming, that Europe is willing to accept its condition of tramonto (Cacciari, 1994: 51).

Thus, the Mediterranean rearticulated allows geophilosophy to stretch past the spatial boundaries of the Eastern, Western, Northern and Southern Mediterranean to outline an idea of the Mediterranean as a metaphor for the “Global South(s)” and for an idea of “south-alternity”, or “sud alternità, but that is also finally inclusive enough to encompass other areas, cultures, and traditions. It is perhaps in light of this broad, more inclusive vision that the focus on borders and limits that characterizes the geophilosophies of the Mediterranean can unfold into a valuable theoretical and practical program of *translatio* and intercultural dialogue within Europe (Cassano, 2012: 51).

In other words, geography is not confined to providing historical form with a substance and variable places. It is not merely physical and human but mental. Geography wrests history from the cult of necessity in order to stress the irreducibility of contingency. It wrests it from the cult of origins in order to affirm the power of a ‘milieu’ (what philosophy finds in the Greeks, said Nietzsche, is not an origin but a milieu, an ambience) (Deleuze, Guattari, 1991: 95-96).

Dalby (1994) is suggesting that the very process of the production of identity and difference, of selves and others, is geopolitical. Speaking of a separate and discrete “geopolitical discourse,” therefore, is not appropriate, since all political discourse is geopolitical discourse. There is a particular geography of the Other, a geography which is interpreted in deterministic terms. This discourse of the Other is also geopolitical in the sense that it accepts the reification of political power in the particular relation of power and space of territorially defined states.

However, although there was intense cultural intermingling in the Mediterranean, there was hardly any cultural unity, but rather the ecological one. The Mediterranean culture area is defined by the very system of symbolic equivalences and oppositions that validate the claims of cultural homogeneity based on the strength of imaginative reconstructions. The process of forming mental connections or bonds between linking such imaginaries is forming a kind of association/alliance, although with a completely different meaning, but under the concept of acting for a common goal.

New Silk Road discourses craft pasts and futures around certain ideologies analyzed through specific concepts/ images/ effects, i.e. the system of imaginary representations such as “shared destiny” or “shared past” that are reading regions differently in a form that is interpreted as a dialogue.

One of the “shared” concepts between China and the Mediterranean is cosmopolitanism. Nevertheless, these terms have a very different context on both sides. Civilized commingling made the Mediterranean the very embodiment of European cosmopolitanism – a legacy as notable as its monuments of art and architecture (Herzfeld, 1980). Callahan argues that China today is using OBOR to try to solve global issues while promoting a patriotic form of cosmopolitanism that masks “nationalist” tendency of revival of imperial governance (Callahan, 2008). Similarities between the ancient and the modern are vital to the rhetoric of nationalistic ideologies. We see it along the coasts of the Adriatic, the Tyrrhenian, and the Aegean sea, we see from Rabat to Tunis to Cairo to Tel Aviv, Istanbul to Salonika, and Dubrovnik to Trieste that the Mediterranean became ethnically purified and socially impoverished where modern nationalism destroyed the multicultural diversity of the old port cities and their cosmopolitanism. The post-modern condition of the Mediterranean is characterised by an ironic appreciation of the ancient past, and the production of images of a generic Mediterranean culture with relatively young nation-states (the Balkans) embroiled in crises that bespeak the discontents of aggressive modernity: war and nationalist extremism (Herzfeld, 2001).

The Mediterranean today is only (re)unified by tourism industry and its reinventions of tradition, and as such it lacks the defining features of the Present and even more of cosmopolitanism (Driessen, 2001).

The notions of unity and coherence that were for almost two millenia unchallenged truth for the Mediterranean are now being re-mobilized through imaginaries of OBOR (with new Silk Road infrastructure instigating/promising the waves of progress). The coexistence that fostered alertness and flexible adjustment to alien ways in the history of the Mediterranean, now and through OBOR tries to enable antiquity coexisting with but not crowding out modernity. But if OBOR is remaking the old Silk Road, which relics of the Mediterranean (past) achievement will it remake? And, how this coming together of old and new, i.e. commingling of two imaginaries - the ancient Mediterranean and the OBOR - will remake each other? Can the Mediterranean easily reconnect to this new path of modernity while being a victim of its fabled history for two millenia?

On the other hand, new imaginaries in recently flourishing Mediterranean geophilosophy are already shaping contour of new Europe towards non eurocentric modernity by invoking sophisticated rethinking of globalization from the perspective of the regionalisms - which is the idea of the Mediterranean as the only available source of resistance to domination by few powers and cultures, that is to challenge binary understandings of the West versus the rest.

Imaginative Geographies / Imaginativne geografije

The Mediterranean imaginaries remain an important dimension to international affairs today as countries pursue influence and connection across regions, and seek to cultivate forms of nationalism and populist politics at home. These are connected

processes. OBOR is recasting the narrative of Chinese history, towards the idea of a civilisational state that is most successful where it engages with the world, learns and bridges with other regions, gains cultural and economic enrichment from border-defying trade. The Mediterranean is getting reimagined as connective infrastructure – which speaks to outward connectivities – a process that speaks to how the shifting world order of today, driven by the rise of China, remaps the Mediterranean and thus the contours of Europe. In short, One Belt One Road is remaking the Mediterranean as a geocultural/geophysical imaginary.

Geophilosophy is one of many cultures of resistance to Geography as imperial truth, state-capitalized knowledge, and military weapon (Gregory, 2006). It is a small part of a much larger struggle to decolonize our inherited geographical imagination so that other geographings and other worlds might be possible. The Mediterranean countries can facilitate this by enabling contact between unlikely partners which have developed largely independently of one another but are, once the sea is discounted, actually near neighbours (Abulafia, 2021: 36).

The capacity to enlarge imagination can be crucial to the discourses of power but the real power is not lodged inertly and only in governmental form, nor in the soft power that is inevitably mediated by space around us (Dovey, 2008: 185). Today, it is the power of connectivity as Khanna argues, i.e. functional geography- in layering transportation routes, energy grids, forward operating bases, financial networks, and Internet cables on top of our natural and political geography- that has the most leverage (Khanna, 2016: 401).

We are at a moment, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein (Foucault, 1986).

Simmel (1997) observed: 'It is not the form of spatial proximity or distance that creates the special phenomena of neighbourliness or foreignness. Rather, these are facts caused purely by psychological content'. That is why the 'great divide' between West and East as both geographical and cultural entities is just one example of imaginative geography – an imagination that works on the level of both the individual and the collective (Frank, 2009).

As Foucault claimed in *Other Spaces*, "things before 1900 were primarily perceived in terms of their temporal relationship, but nowadays we tend to focus more on their relationship in space; the concept of continuity has become increasingly superseded by that of contiguity" (Foucault, 1986). Therefore, it appears that (re)thinking the Mediterranean via geophilosophy is one of the scholarly imperatives today.

The historical moment in which we live creates an opening onto cultures and religions different from our own, and it does so not only for reasons of knowledge and spontaneous curiosity but also to establish comparisons and to strengthen connections, all in the hope of realizing the unity of humanity that goes beyond difference (Quintern, 2017).

It is also a moment when new reconceptualisation of Europe after Brexit is taking place that reflects upon the meaning of a European heritage, cultural legacy, and identity as well as on the implications of a Europe has become "fortress," as Etienne Balibar, among others, aptly put it (Bouchard, 2011: 359).

So, when imagining possibilities for this region via new nodes and powers of connectivity we have to question, and force out alternative modes of perception and conceptualization that throw an illuminating spotlight on the matters, which we too often take for granted. Through alternative ways of being together we might induce a vision of an organic, constantly self-reflective, tolerant and open-ended society based on specific singularities.

The New Silk Road imposes itself at the level of economic policy where the Mediterranean, which has always been a crossroads of civilizations and cultures, has become an 'area in which the reception often seems to be impossible, and at the same time is seen as a crucial platform for expansion for dialogue between emerging markets and developed countries.

Old Europe seems to have exhausted all the possibilities of discourse and counter-discourse about its own identification. Derrida argues that "it is necessary to make ourselves the guardians of an idea of Europe, of difference of Europe, but of a Europe that consists precisely in not closing itself off in its own identity and in advancing itself in an exemplary way toward what it is not, but toward the other of the heading, which would be the beyond of its modern tradition, toward another border structure, another shore" (Derrida, 1992: 49).

Envisioned and reconceptualized by the Maritime Silk Route' infrastructure and trade, the Mediterranean is revoking the *idea of aura* that allows for a view of the states that are both unconfined to their physical boundaries and that melt into its contiguous neighbours. The auratic geographies of the OBOR could pave the way in which soft power, infrastructure, telecommunications radiate outwards outside political boundaries. Shaped as networks, these spaces beyond borders would interact with other states to create interferences, entanglements and assemblages (Billé, 2021). By proclaiming and fostering interactions between microregions, the Maritime Silk Road as a network and huge connectivity project in the Mediterranean maritime landscape could have an effect on the establishment of reconciling social relations in conflicted areas (Middle East, Cyprus/Turkey, North Macedonia, Greece, etc) as much as by any physical movement of goods and people.

As these countries seek new ways to find cultural connectivity with China, the question is whether the narratives of "balkanisation" will emerge, or those of an integrative civilisation space? Foregrounded as strategically important ports, old and new, will Piraeus, Dubrovnik, etc. become the motifs of regional connectivity, or just the gateways of neoliberal trade?

There seems to be no limit to the ways in which the Mediterranean region may be reimagined: as maritime spaces, territorial arrangements, and political processes that seek to transcend national boundaries and enmities (even as they often also reinforce them) (Horden, Purcell, 2000: 170).

Hanley (2019) is challenging us by asking: "What might we do, we researchers? How might we inquire? What kinds of inquiry might be thinkable in different modes of being, different ontologies?". Firstly, we might inquire if Mediterranean (i.e. European) intellectuals today are facing the same dilemma that Chinese intellectuals first identified in the nineteenth century - how to make Eurocentric sociocultural, economic and political theory and praxis compatible with Sinocentric sociocultural,

economic and political circumstances? Secondly, how the expression of different ethical values on both sides (Mediterranean “honor and shame complex” of moral values vs. Chinese harmony and *Tianxia*) will find its common aim in the context of the exercise of power (Herzfeld, M. 1980)? Finally, can the Mediterranean become a Third Space, a place where hybrid identifications are possible and where borders are seen as meeting zones (Bhabha, 2004: 55)?

Ernst Bloch (1932) coined the term “nonsynchronism” to identify the phenomenon of living in a range of different times at once and in the same place; where the montage of new and old held potential for the emergence of new hybrid meanings and producing a coexistence of realities from different moments in history (Brighenti, 2016: 185).

Dalby (1994) declares that our postmodern concern is “to leave power nowhere to hide since power is something that operates by being concealed”. Thus, the task of the critical theorist, therefore, is to expose, reveal, and demystify it, to make it explicit. Such operation treats geopolitics as the enigma that reveals all, the missing jigsaw piece that finally reveals the pattern.

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Poetika infrastrukture: (Nova) percepcija „suvremenog“ Mediterana

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Sažetak

Cilj je rada istražiti globalne percepcije o mogućnostima budućnosti mediteranske regije, odnosno njezine sadašnje i buduće rekonceptualizacije na temelju političke ekonomije povezivanja kroz Pomorski put svile (MRS) kao dijela OBOR-a. OBOR obećava posredovati u razmjeni na daljinu i dovesti različite ljude i stvari u interakciju svojom infrastrukturom. Pitanje je hoće li OBOR sadašnju politiku dominacije zamijeniti diplomacijom komunikacije, interakcije, pregovora i razgovora, gdje se dijalog civilizacija temelji na toleranciji, priznavanju, poštovanju, međusobnom upućivanju i međusobnom učenju. U članku se tvrdi da rekonceptualizacija Mediterana od njegove sadašnje, stereotipne slike drevne prošlosti prema modernoj paradigmi uvelike ovisi o kontrastnoj geopolitičkoj dinamici ove regije.

Ključne riječi: pomorski put svile, infrastruktura, moderni Mediteran, hegemonija, imaginativne geografije