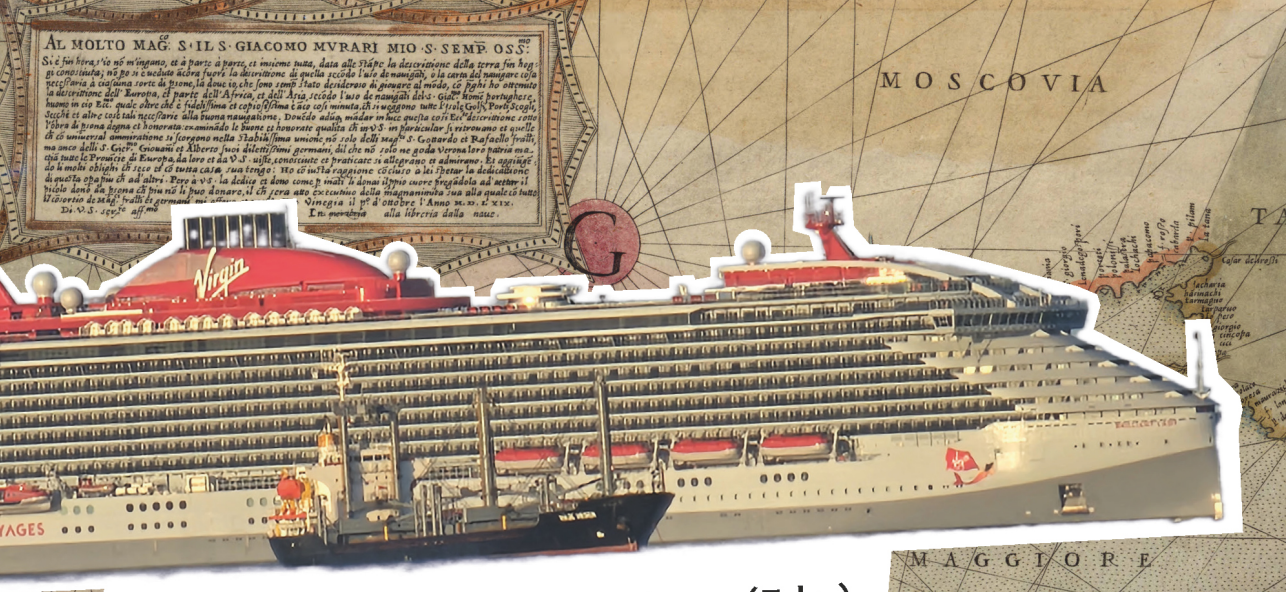

Laura Linzmeier, Thorsten Kruse (Eds.)

Mediterranean Islands and Coastal Areas: Cultural and Linguistic Diversity through the Ages

WAXMANN

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Mediterranean Islands and Coastal Areas

Cultural and Linguistic Diversity through the Ages

Waxmann 2025
Münster • New York

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the
Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data
are available in the Internet at http://dnb.dnb.de

Print-ISBN 978-3-8309-4987-9
E-Book-ISBN 978-3-8309-9987-4

Münster, Germany

www.waxmann.com
info@waxmann.com

Cover Design: Anne Breitenbach, Münster
Arrangement of the following pictures
Ship: © Fotographie von Thorsten Kruse
Street sign: © Fotographie von Johanna Biberger
Map: Forlani, Paolo, Cartographer. Mediterranean Sea Region.
Rome: Claudio Duchetti, 1569, Retrieved from the Library of Congress,
www.loc.gov/item/2021668434/
Typesetting: MTS. Satz & Layout, Münster

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Preface and Acknowledgements

MS ISLA is a research network for Mediterranean Studies on Island Areas funded from 2020 to 2023 by the Center for International and Transnational Area Studies (CITAS) at the University of Regensburg (UR). The interdisciplinary research group – coordinated by Jonas Hock (Romance Literature and Cultural Studies) and Laura Linzmeier (Romance Linguistics) – includes members from the UR and external members specialized in different disciplines and equipped with different regional competences: Verena Ebermeier (Medieval Literature, German Studies), Jan-Christoph Marschelke (Studies of Culture and Collectivity), Jacqueline Nießer (East and Southeast European Studies), Andreas Guidi (Modern and Contemporary History), Thorsten Kruse (Interdisciplinary Cypriot Studies), Sarah Nimführ (Cultural Studies) and Davide Soares da Silva (Romance Linguistics).

The network adopts a comparative and multidirectional approach in dealing with the question of Mediterranean islandness, island identities, representations and languages. It explores these aspects within historical contexts of migration and cultural contact, drawing on transregional approaches inspired by Area Studies (cf. www.uni-regensburg.de/citas/english/islands-network/index.html). The activities of the network were carried out in cooperation with scientific partners such as the Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies (IOS, Regensburg), the Institute for Interdisciplinary Cypriot Studies (University of Münster) and the DFG research network "The Modern Mediterranean: Dynamics of a World Region 1800|2000".

In our workshops and meetings, as well as in individual publications, the members adopted diverse, comparative perspectives in their discussions of the key question of whether there are identifiable elements of Mediterranean islandness that through exploration of several individual cases can be developed into a more comprehensive analytical framework. To do so the workshops and publications dealt with numerous aspects of islandness currently under academic discussion, for example: islandness and geological factors, historical and migration-related criteria, island imagination and representation, identity and collectivity of islanders as well as islands in a multidimensional perspective as islandscapes or in trans-Mediterranean entanglement. Other activities and events that emerged from the network collaboration gave students the opportunity to actively participate in the island topics and included the organisation of a lecture series at the University of Regensburg entitled "The Mediterranean and its Blind Spots: Transhistorical Perspectives on a Contested Area" (fall term 2021/22, in collaboration with Andreas Guidi of the Mediterranean Platform Constance) and the spring workshop "Romance Islandness and Mediterranity", organised in April 2022 by the network's coordinators and funded by Deutscher Romanistikverband (DRV),

CITAS and the UR Vielberth Foundation. MS ISLA was also represented in the linguistic online-conference "New approaches and perspectives on linguistic concepts of space and geolinguistics" (2021), that was organised in cooperation with Roger Schöntag (FAU Nürnberg-Erlangen). Furthermore, the excellent interdisciplinary collaboration was evident in joint publication projects such as the collective article "Insular spaces of identification. Multidisciplinary perspectives on collectivization phenomena in the Mediterranean region" (original title: "Insulare Identifikationsräume. Multidisziplinäre Perspektiven auf Kollektivierungsphänomene im Mittelmeerraum", in: Zeitschrift für Kultur- und Kollektivwissenschaft 8/2, 2022, 129–160), while some network members collaborated on the thematic issue "Kontaktzone Adria" of the journal Zibaldone (Autumn 2022, Nr. 74).

The publication at hand is a further outcome of the multiple MS ISLA cooperations. This multilingual and interdisciplinary volume brings together contributions from history, linguistics, literature and cultural studies by some of the network members and participants in events organized by the network discussing cultural and linguistic diversity of islands and coastal areas of the Mediterranean through the ages: In relation to the topic of island identities, Sarah Nimführ and Jan-Christoph Marschelke adopt a multi-perspectival approach in discussing the concept of islandscape which helps to prevent island essentialism. Verena Ebermeier uses a multi-perspectival approach drawing from semiotic, cosmological and philosophical concepts and medieval text reception to discuss the perception of literary islands and island voyages in the Middle Ages. Drawing on travel reports by various authors who visited Sardinia in the 20th century, Maria Eugenia Cadeddu deals with the question of different experiences of the island, the feeling of isolation, and loneliness. Sara Izzo's paper focuses on perceptions of the Republic of Rose Island in contemporary Italian literature that not only perceive and depict the platform island as geostrategic territory but also as memory space and utopia. Using a comparison of French and former Yugoslavian islands (Île du Levant and Koversada), Jacqueline Nießer examines the history of naturist tourism on Mediterranean islands from the 1930s to the 1980s, underlining the importance that these two islands had on the development of naturist tourism on a national and transnational level. Roger Schöntag's contribution opens the linguistic section of the present collective volume: It deals with the spread of Old French on the Romance speaking islands by the Normans by focusing on the Mediterranean island of Sicily and the Channel Islands in the Atlantic. In her article, Simona Fabellini uses the concept of hybridity to discuss the linguistic classification of Elbano – a very complex and hybrid variety of Italo-Romance spoken on the Mediterranean island of Elba. Johannes Gregor Mücke discusses contact linguistic phenomena in the verbal morphology of Corfioto, an endangered Italo-Romance variety spoken on the island of Corfu. On the basis of examples taken from the variety's characteristics he is concerned with the question whether islandness has an impact on the dynamics of language contact and structural phenomena. Laura Linzmeier and Davide Soares da Silva's contribution focuses on a coastal area, in this case the Croatian Adriatic, examining the perceptions and interpretations of business names found in the lin-

guistic landscape on the Croatian Adriatic by speakers of Italo-Romance, especially Veneto-Venetian, varieties.

The funds made available by CITAS during the network period not only allowed us to organise events and collaborate at various locations but also to finance output in the form of publications. We would like to express our sincere thanks to the CITAS Board and in particular to Paul Vickers for his support in organising the network's activities over the last few years and making this publication possible.

Laura Linzmeier & Thorsten Kruse

(Un)Doing Island Identities

Islandness, islandscape and collective identities

Sarah Nimführ & Jan-Christoph Marschelke

Abstract: At first glance, islands could be defined as pieces of land surrounded by water. However, this understanding encompasses a wide variety of phenomena: rocks standing out of rivers, touristic islets, or island nation states. Moreover, the idea of surroundedness may convey stereotypical ideas of islands as bounded, disconnected, peripheral places inhabited by people with a corresponding 'island mentality'. Employing a differentiated epistemology, the article introduces a framework which avoids island essentialism and allows for a multi-perspective analysis. Using the concept of *islandscape*, it argues that islands are the result of "doing space", of practices performed by diverse actors which (re)produce 'islandness' as a multitude of multidimensional (dis)connections e. g., to the sea, to neighboring islands or to the mainland. These (dis)connections are also an integral part of the contested constructions of collective island identities. Hence, the article calls for a careful and differentiated consideration of the diverse (Mediterranean) islands.

Keywords: island identity, islandscape, collectivity, connectivity, Mediterranean, doing space

1. Introduction

What is an island? At first glance, this seems an easy question to answer. A possible definition could read something like this: an island is a piece of land surrounded by water.[1] At second glance, this definition encompasses extremely different phenomena such as a single rock in a lake, a small island in a river (e.g. Margaret Island in Budapest), Mediterranean islands like Malta (an independent state), or even entire continents like Australia. What is more, the term "island" is often used as a metaphor: e. g. for an oasis in the desert, far-off villages in the mountains, enclaves (such as the Spanish cities of Ceuta and Melilla), or language islands such as in the province of Trento in northern Italy, where Cimbrian – a traditional Upper German language of the Cimbri people – is spoken by an even smaller linguistic group. If this metaphoric use is to be understood by a definition, it is necessary to eliminate the water part of it. However, it is possible that people may also wish to use the term in order to refer to 'mental' retreats (where one 'goes' e. g. in meditation), in which case the "piece

1 Royle – Brinklow 2018, 3.

of land" must be eliminated from the definition as well. An alternative definition of an island could be a place or space (in a broad sense) which is in some way entirely separate(d) from its environment. On closer inspection however, separateness, too, is a difficult element for a general definition of islands for two reasons. First, there are islands that are very close to other islands or to the mainland and are therefore only quasi-separate. Some islands are even connected by bridges, such as the 1.5 km long Krk Bridge, which connects the island of Krk with the Croatian mainland. If one adheres to the European Union's definition of islands as completely separated from the mainland, such a bridge would change the status of the place: it would no longer be considered an island.[2] So, it is not quite clear what "separate" means exactly. The second difficulty is that it would simply be very problematic to reduce islands, in a stereotypical sense, to just one feature: separateness.

This article has two aims: First, it introduces the problem outlined above of how to adequately define what an island is – a discussion which is constitutive of the *Island Studies*. Thus, the first question will be how to understand "islandness" in a way that is compatible with a more complex epistemology (2.). A central category in this enterprise will be "space" or "spatiality" which has received a large increase in attention ever since the *spatial turn*. In this vein, we draw on the *islandscape* approach, which is characterized by "doing space".

A central aspect of answering the first question is how many and whose perspectives on islands are considered. As to this, the article will touch upon the epistemological task of integrating perspectives of both outsiders (e.g. 'mainland' perspectives) and insiders ('islanders'), which also entails adequately dealing with both academic and lay hetero- and autostereotypes of islands. Thus, the definitional and epistemological question reveals itself to be intimately related to the second topic of our article: the construction of island identities (3.). By applying the insights from section 2, we develop an understanding of collective island identities which avoids the pitfall of island essentialism while still taking into account the geographical peculiarities of islands and how these enter into identity constructions.

2. The (im)possibility of an island definition

Islands have fascinated people since at least ancient times. Even Homer's epic Odyssey is ultimately the story of an existential 'island hopping' that confronts its hero with contingency and transcendence.[3] The connection found here between the story of a traveler's search for identity and the spatial form of the island – a place at which the traveler will sometimes encounter something familiar, sometimes something new, strange or threatening – was also widespread in the Middle Ages[4] and is still taken

2 Hache 2007, 173–174.

3 See Ebermeier 2019 on this topic. A brief summary can be found in MS-ISLA 2023, 131 ff.

4 The term "medieval islomania" by Gillis 2004, 23 is significant in this respect.

up and played out today in the so-called *nissopoeisis*, the literary representation of islands.

At present, islands are frequently the focal point of two controversies: One is (anthropogenic) climate change, which could lead to certain islands (e.g. those of the oceanic archipelago of Kiribati) becoming uninhabitable or sinking completely into the sea.[5] The other – and more specific to the Mediterranean – is the movement of refugees towards Europe, which regularly pass through certain islands (e.g. the so-called "hotspots" of Lesbos, Lampedusa and Malta) where they are detained.[6] These two controversies apart, it is worth noting that during the COVID-19 pandemic, islands were noted for the ambivalent role they played. On the one hand, islands were prioritized for vaccinations in order to open them up to tourism (e.g. Mallorca).[7] Due to their supposed isolation, the tourism industry on certain islands advertised with a kind of "COVID-free label" (e.g. Corsica).[8] On the other hand, the concentration of tourism on other islands turned them into "corona hotspots" (e.g. Mykonos).[9]

2.1 The "islanding" problem

The aforementioned examples also reveal the pervasive idea that islands are a demarcated space. This is associated with certain attributes, both negative and positive. Negative attributes, such as peripherality, backwardness, exposure, and vulnerability, are often associated with the delimitation of the island. Conversely, positive attributions such as uniqueness (e.g., for being inhabited by rare species or people with remarkable 'traditions') or paradisiacality have more positive connotations, but expose islands to exotism.[10] This is also reflected in the ambivalent idea of controllability, as expressed in the COVID policies mentioned above[11] or, even more impressively, in the concept of the prison island (e.g. Alcatraz or – in the context of Australian detention policy – Nauru[12]). The inhabitants of islands are accordingly ascribed – often stereotypically – special "collective mentalities". We find such attributions, for example, in everyday discourses or in tourism advertising, but also in the science of islands, *Nissology* or *Island Studie*s, as scholars are not immune to these stereotypes and hegemonic perspectives.[13] This kind of gaze transforms islands into objects of exploitation for tour-

5 Klepp – Herbeck 2019.
6 Panagiotidis –Tsianos 2007, 82; Otto – Nimführ – Bieler 2019.
7 Höhler – Louven – Wermke 2021; Agius et al. 2021.
8 Agence du Tourisme de la Corse 2020.
9 See e. g. Redaktionsnetzwerk Deutschland 2021.
10 Royle 2001, 16; Farbotko 2005, 80; Bendemann et al. 2016.
11 Grydehøj – Kelman – Su 2020.
12 See e. g. Mountz – Briskman 2012.
13 Nimführ – Meloni 2021, 5–6.

ism, for environmental or natural resources and for any other purpose that serves to satisfy the needs of colonizing societies.[14]

In *Island Studies*, assigning stereotypical, often Eurocentric or continental attributions to islands is referred to as "islanding".[15] This "islanding" has been heavily criticized in recent years. Islands should not be thought of as self-contained entities that are essentially the same everywhere. After all, what does a river island share with Australia? What do Mallorca and Greenland, Cuba and Japan have in common? There is a vast array of islands, both large and small, hot and cold, dry and humid, poor and rich. Some islands are difficult to reach and peripheral, while others are well connected, and yet others are even metropolises and nation states (e.g., Australia, New Zealand). Some are part of an archipelago, while others lie alone, etc. As is so often the case, empirical diversity makes a mockery of theoretical-conceptual simplicity.

Island scholars agree that an island is "a piece of land surrounded by water", as mentioned in the introduction,[16] but "this says nothing about what makes islands matter to people – to those who live on them, to those who look upon them".[17] Islanding ultimately consists of two intertwined problems. One is the essentializing definition of islands in terms of enclosure and seclusion. It manifests itself in corresponding terminology for and judgments about islands and their inhabitants. The other problem relates to the question of who makes these attributions. In this respect, the diagnosis is that "islanding" often occurs from an external perspective, i. e., from the point of view of actors who live on the "mainland", including islanders who live in non-island areas. The island perspective is underrepresented in the discourse. In this respect, "islanding" can be seen as a (quasi)colonial phenomenon of orientalization. In response to this problem, those involved in the theoretical discourse in *Island Studies* have been conducting a lively debate for years on how research on and about islands can be carried out without essentializing and reifying them on the one hand and/or changing or colonizing them on the other.[18] Recently, attempts have been made to address the latter with decolonial approaches,[19] which are intended to take greater account of island perspectives, in particular with regard to their relationships with the mainland.

Meanwhile, the problem of reification has been the subject of a terminological and conceptual debate surrounding the concepts of "insularity" and "islandness" for around three decades. The term insularity declares the physical limitations to be the core characteristic of islands and tends to have normative connotations, insofar as it suggests the above-mentioned attributions. At the same time, it tends to represent an external view on islands. In contrast, the now widespread neologism of islandness –

14 Nimführ – Meloni 2021, 3–4.

15 Baldacchino 2007, 2–3.

16 Royle – Brinklow 2018, 3.

17 Grydehøj 2020.

18 King 2009, 55.

19 Among other Gómez-Barris – Joseph 2019; Nadarajah et al. 2021; Nimführ – Meloni 2021; Teiawa 2020.

introduced by the founding father of *Island Studies*, Godfrey Baldacchino – stands for the endeavor to counter the "dominance of external perspectives on islands with an insular internal view".[20] Although most scholars agree that the study of islandness is important, the term is not uniformly defined. Island geographer Stephen A. Royle[21] defines islandness as "those constraints that are imposed upon small islands by virtue of their insularity". Baldacchino[22] takes a much more dynamic view of this concept between "openness and closure" by understanding islandness as an intervening variable "that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant ways". In terms of this dynamic dimension of islandness, Phillip Vannini and Jonathan Taggart[23] define an island as practice, as the "outcome of what islanders do, and in particular of how islanders move". Their argument is well aligned with Adam Grydehøj and Marco Casagrande's[24] understanding that "a place's islandness is practised". Common to all approaches is that narratives and perceptions of island collectivities should be systematically included in research as an integral part of the social construction of island realities. This prevents one-sided attributions and enables a more descriptive approach.[25] Like the problem of islanding, the approach to its solution is also a two-sided one: the concept of islandness solves the problem of reification by integrating internal island perspectives.

However, trying to completely replace external or mainland perspectives with internal or island perspectives would be throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Islands and the mainland are intricately intertwined, both socio-historically and epistemologically, and one cannot be clearly separated from the other.[26] According to Grydehøj, it is therefore impossible to pursue island epistemologies without mainland perspectives.[27] Baldacchino concurs with the view that a strict separation between "insiders" and "outsiders" is untenable, as hybridity is the norm on islands.[28] Instead, it is important to relate different island constructions to one another. Imaginations of islands developed on the mainland, for example, can collide with local, insular ideas.[29] In the following, we propose a translation of these considerations into a conception that does not fall prey to "islanding" and that takes particular account of both spatiality and collectivity.

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20 Bendemann et al 2016, 9; translated from German.
21 Royle 2001, 42.
22 Baldacchino 2004, 274.
23 Vannini –Taggart 2012, 227–228.
24 Grydehøj – Casagrande 2020, 2.
25 Baldacchino 2004; Nimführ 2020, 74–75; Stratford 2008.
26 Pöllath 2008.
27 Grydehøj 2018, 5.
28 Baldacchino 2008, 37.
29 Lee – Huang – Grydehøj 2017.

2.2 *"Islandscape"*

As to the relationship between islands and spatiality, the term 'islandscape' proposed by Sarah Nimführ and Laura Otto appears to be the most suitable from the variety of *Island Studies* concepts put forth.[30] Islandscape is based on a relational understanding of space following Doreen Massey and Arjun Appadurai.[31] The concept of islandscape can be understood as a result of the process of "(un)doing space". It refers to a constructed, unbounded landscape that combines island, sea, mainland and other islands into a networked, multidimensional, deterritorialized ensemble. Islandscape is constructed, for example, through discursive thematizations, in everyday life, in media representations or in politics. The constitutive role of mobility practices is a topic of particular interest in *Island Studies*.[32] Which actors come to the island from where, by which means of transport, how often, how quickly and for what purpose, and how do they move on and off the island? Undeniably, islands have almost always been exposed to and influenced by various forms of mobilities – initially through settlement itself and also through subsequent migration.[33] In the past, many islands, particularly (but not only) in the Mediterranean, were often regarded as places of emigration;[34] however, today they have become hubs for migrants, ideas, refugees, tourists, returnees and foreign workers.[35] This is also apparent in studies on transnationalism, translocations and mobilities, which analyze how governing and non-governing actors jointly produce spaces that are lived, practiced and structured through human and non-human circulations.[36] These forms of mobilities are not unique characteristics of islands. However, island-specific features have an effect on mobilities and how they are handled; in comparison to nation-state borders with land-based security controls, maritime borders are more permissive and difficult to 'close'.[37]

In summary, the deterritorial islandscape is constituted by mobility connections from, to and on the island. This perspective allows the complexity of the notions of space, place and society to be worked out, namely that particular island collectivities have connections beyond the physical island.[38] Accordingly, islands or the sea are no longer seen as entities, but as the result of entanglements which are both constituted by, and the sites of, movements.[39]

30 Nimführ – Otto 2020.
31 Massey 1994; Appadurai 1998.
32 E.g. Vannini – Taggart 2012.
33 King 1996, 2009.
34 Bernardie-Tahir – Schmoll 2014, 3.
35 Mountz – Lloyd 2014; Schnepel – Alpers 2018.
36 E.g. Hess – Karakayali 2016; Nimführ et al. 2017; Nyers – Rygiel 2014.
37 King 2009, 66.
38 Hau'ofa 1994.
39 Nimführ – Otto 2020

3. Collective identities – and islands

Given this complex approach to islands, what can academia say about island identities? "Identity" is, without any doubt, an essentially contested concept.[40] A lot of ink has been spilled on the subject. While it is beyond the scope of this paper to reconstruct this debate, we aim to selectively pick out some general thoughts on collective identities (3.1) before reflecting on the specific case of island identities (3.2).

3.1 Seven problems with the question "Who are we?"

What must an approach to collective identities take into account if it is to avoid the epistemological pitfalls that beset "islanding"? It might be helpful to start with the following consideration: Could we not just say that collective identity is the answer to the question: "Who are we?" On the one hand, the answer to this question may indeed provide us with an information absolutely crucial to collectivities and collective identities: which commonalities people (believe they) share.[41] On the other hand, approaching collective identities in this way enables us to reveal a number of problems. *First*, this question fails to acknowledge the negative aspect of collective identities, namely, "who are we *not*?" Even if a group of people were to declare nothing but "we are Catholics!", this would still imply that they are not Protestants, Hindus, or agnostics.[42] However, collective identities are not only about implicit differentiation. In fact, the social construction of collective identities is often characterized by both explicit and devaluing (symbolic) boundary making and providing answers to the question of who belongs 'to us', and who does not.[43] The processes of inclusion and exclusion are, inevitably, ever at work, though not necessarily in a discriminatory or even violent way.[44] The demarcation of "who we are not" is fundamental to claiming "who we are";

40 Accordingly, some scholars have argued, academia should avoid using the term 'identity' (e.g. Brubaker – Cooper 2000) or, at least, 'collective identity' altogether (e.g. Niethammer 2000).

41 The centrality of commonality for the formation of collectivities – especially in times when scholars focus a lot on the construction of differences and exclusions – has been underlined by Hansen 2009, 2022. Such commonalities are partial, though, they do not encompass all the aspects of the person thus collectivized (see Hansen 2022, 25; Straub 2011, 298). From the partiality of such commonality follows the multicollectivity of actors, their multiple belonging (Hansen 2022, 25–26).

42 Cf. Rosa 2007. Moreover, the implications (and implicit differentiations) change according to the context of the statement: "We are Catholics!" may 'mean' quite different things depending on whether it is uttered by Spaniards, people from Northern Ireland, Chinese in the PR China, by US-women fighting for the right of abortion.

43 Eisenstadt – Giesen 1995. One of the most advanced post-Barthian boundary making approach is by Wimmer 2008, 2013. Critical on the boundary making approach: Hirschauer 2014, 174–175 who prefers to speak of (human) differentiation.

44 See e. g. Straub 2011, 296, 298.

collective identities are in need of "constitutive others".[45] What is more, there can be more than one constitutive other, and this may change over time (s.b., third problem).

Second, the question seems to be concerned with nothing but the description of a present, actual state. But on the one hand, identities are not merely descriptive; they are also normative and full of aspirations. They are closely linked with how we like to see ourselves and how we desire to be (seen).[46] This may be best understood by the concept of imagination as both connected to reality and referring to (desired) possibilities, and it can be read, for example, into Benedict Anderson's famous concept of an *imagined community*.[47] Politically, this can lead to normatively regulating how people must 'be'.[48] On the other hand, identities – including the aspirations they contain – do not only refer to a present state. This is the *third problem*: The question lacks temporality. How we see ourselves has a lot to do with how we understand our past (collective memories) – our actual or alleged experiences and the narrations in which they are referred to. At the same time, collective memories are always bound to drafts of a future 'us', to what 'we desire to become'.[49] Therefore, identities are ever changing, being based on (constructions of) the past and the future; they are constructions of continuity[50] – it is about what we have, what we will, and what we want to become. *Fourth*, the question lacks emotionality, as if people were merely providing an academic record when they are dealing with their collective identities. There are two aspects to this we would like to mention. On the one hand, social psychology has argued for decades now that people have a fundamental need to belong to and to identify with positive we-identities.[51] People are not emotionally indifferent towards their we-identities; there is a nexus between the normativity of collective identities and their emotional significance.[52] On the other hand, given late modernity in liberal societies and the abundance and plurality of possible identifications, the emotional impact and attractiveness of collective identities is an important factor in explaining why some identity offers are chosen above others – something a merely cognitive approach would fall short of doing.[53]

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45 Cf. Delitz 2018, 25, 28–29, who argues that the constitutive other is not only other collectivities which people try to differentiate themselves from, but also a foundational other like e. g. the idea of God or human rights which is thought of as being separate and different in order to serve as (external) ground to build upon.

46 Cf. Straub 2011, 279–280. To be sure, Straub refers here to personal identity and explicitly warns against applying insights about personal to collective identities – not even in an analogous way (2011, 290). But in this case (normativity, aspiration) we dare to do so.

47 Ismer 2014, 132.

48 Cf. Straub 2011, 299.

49 See J. Assmann 2013, 130 ff.

50 Cf. Delitz 2018, 24 f., 31–32.

51 Tajfel – Turner 1986.

52 Theoretically, one way to grasp this is to resort to such theories of emotion who bind emotional responses to normative judgements.

53 See, with regard to national identification, Ismer 2014, 135–136.

Fifth problem: Conceiving of collective identity as the answer to the question "who are we?" implies that we are only dealing with the explicit, perhaps even reflected and discursive dimension of identities, but people do not only express identities in what they say (or write). What we 'are' has a lot to do with what we actually do.[54] Collective identity evolves from practices of identification[55] (or identifying side-effects of practices); it is, thus, to be understood as performative.[56] Moreover, a lot of implicit knowledge, understandings and evaluations are at play in what we do,[57] which may even contradict our explicit self-understanding. People may describe themselves as open-minded, hospitable and advocators of human rights (explicitly, normatively, aspirationally), while in fact they are politically committed to rigid and discriminatory migration regimes. Given the epistemology we have used in section 2, it is this kind of understanding we propose here: collectivity and collective identity as something both processual and relational, more specifically, as the contingent and contentious result of practices.[58]

Sixth, who is this 'we' – and how we are – is contingent and often contentious. The social potency of collective identities depends on how intensely people identify with it.[59] This is constantly changing, even among people who agree in principle that they belong to a 'we' (cf. first problem). It may be contested (and negotiated) how 'we (should) see/describe ourselves'. And, as a rule, the larger the collectivity, the more different explicit answers (and implicit doings) we will get. Thus, right-wing populists are likely to have different ideas about 'their' nation state (including the question of who belongs to it) compared to socialist citizens. One of the reasons why both the 'we' and the 'how' of an collective identity is heterogeneous is that the commonality on which it is based is ever only partial.[60] Accordingly, people are multi-collective beings, that is, they belong to a multitude of collectivities and, thus, partake in a multitude of collectivization processes and identity constructions which resonate with each other.[61] 'Being' Cretan (or a woman, German, or middle class, etc.) is not the same for every-

54 In what we do, in turn, many dimensions are at play, bodily, affective, spatial, temporal, cultural, discursive, normative, subjectivating, collectivizing, things-/artifacts related dimensions (think of expressions of identities in images, architectures, flags etc.), see Marschelke 2023.

55 Cf. Straub 2011, 299.

56 Such a point of view enables us to grasp even very ephemeral understandings and feelings of we-ness as collective identities (such as the ones shared by an accidentally formed group of co-travellers sitting close to one another in a train experiencing troubles with delay).

57 Straub 201, 300. The importance of the implicit level of knowledge and understanding is a central tenet of praxeological approaches to human activities, see e. g. Reckwitz 2002, 253 ff.

58 Marschelke 2019, 2023.

59 Assmann 2013, 132. Brubaker (2002) makes a similar argument about the reality of social categories.

60 S.a. fn. 40.

61 Hansen 2022, Hansen – Marschelke 2017.

one, as we can combine several collective belongings (as in a Cretan, homosexual, catholic, black, middle class woman). Thus, not only is personal identity multidimensional and a mixture of many collective influences, but, at the same time, individuals entangle the collectivities they belong to. From this angle, it is obvious that reducing island collectivities to their relation to the island would be a shortcoming. But collective identities are not only contested among the fellow members of a collectivity: 'We' are confronted with how 'outsiders' see 'us' (as in the notorious topic of auto and hetero stereotypes, the power-laden practices of categorization of our fellow beings into humans and animals, sexes, races, ethnicities, classes etc.). In other words, accounts of collective identities are out there and part of what some social philosophers have called the "fight for recognition" – among both insiders and outsiders.[62] Thus, it has a lot to do with (mis)representation, with the availability of resources, and, last, but not least, with (micro or macro) political opportunities. And while hegemonic understandings of collective identity are possible, they are never definite or final.

Seventh, and finally, the constructions of collective identities may be – and usually are to a certain degree – instrumental and strategic. The catchword here is *identity politics*. Consequently, the primary objective of collective identity construction may not be to devise an image of 'who we (really) are' (how 'we actually see ourselves/desire to be'), but rather of what will meet (e.g. political) expectations by others and attract people and mobilize support of any kind etc. This can be a powerful tool in fights for emancipation, but it can also have negative consequences, such as political polarization, exclusion, and forced homogenization.[63]

3.2 The multivalence of 'being surrounded by the sea' – islandness, islandscape and collective island identities

How can we apply these thoughts to the conception of (collective) island identities? One of the most important and basic insights from section 3.1 is that there is never simply *one* unanimous island identity (image, imagination, understanding), but many. We also have to ask who is responsible for the construction, propagation, and manifestation of particular kinds of identity in which context, and to what end? To adapt an example by Baldacchino:[64] Tourists may have a (hetero stereotypical) idea of an island as a sunny paradise. This may correspond to the image strategically promoted by the tourist industry, both domestically and abroad.[65] At the same time, locals who have little or no share in the tourism business may see their island as economically underdeveloped and plagued by unemployment – some spending the winters looking for work on the mainland, some emigrating to other countries. Others have done so

62 Giesen 1999, 118 ff.

63 Straub 2011, 296 ff.

64 See Baldacchino 2012, 58; Nimführ 2020, 71; MS-ISLA 2023, 138.

65 This may not be identity politics in its classical sense, but is, of course, a strategic way of displaying an island.

long ago, maybe made a fortune and returned: either they build rarely-frequented summer houses because they regard the island as a nostalgic place, or they come as investors who both feel a patriotic obligation towards their home island and see it as a place of business opportunity. Some seasonal workers who only stay for the summer months to earn money to live off through the winter (be it in far off villages or abroad) may see it as a place of prosperity – others as a site of exploitation. Refugees who have just arrived after a perilous flight over the ocean may temporarily experience the island as a safe haven, whereas those who have been stuck there for years may regard it as more of a prison. Patriotic locals may react with indolence to the refugees and construct an essentialized, particularistic, homogeneous island identity (based on its being surrounded by the ocean), while others see it as a historical cross-road – open, connected, diverse and hospitable towards anyone who happens to arrive there.[66]

This example illustrates three key points: *First,* as previously stated, the heterogeneity of island understandings which depend on the different positions of the actors constructing it. Empirically exploring the diversity of identity constructions (and constructors) and interrelating them is one method which can help to avoid "islanding". *Second*, it also makes clear that the participant and observer perspectives have to be neatly severed. Participant islanding – as by the patriotic locals in the example – is something the academic observer will notice. As Rogers Brubaker famously recommended to scholars: "We must, of course, take vernacular categories and participants' understandings seriously [… , b]ut we should not uncritically adopt *categories from* […] *practice* as our *categories of analysis*."[67] In other words, people do that which scholars must refrain from: interpellating collectivities and collective identities in a reifying way – sometimes even successfully so: Conjuring national pride or family loyalty may, under certain circumstances, have a binding effect even though academics would point to the actual openness, heterogeneity and conflict-riddeness of these collectivities.[68] *Third*, another lesson can be learnt from Brubaker. With regard to race, ethnicities and nations, he claims that these are only categories that gain significance and meaning (and, thus, eventually existence) through the actions of those who use them. Comparably, the aforementioned demand (see 2.1) – i. e., to listen to islanders without disregarding external perspectives – could be met by observing non-discursive practices and 'recording' discursive ones which refer to a specific island and islandness in general.

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66 Obviously, in this kind of analysis collectivity plays a double role: On the one hand, it is about identity relevant collective constructions of islands. On the other hand, these are attributed to (actor) collectivities which are constructions, too (tourists, seasonal workers etc.) – constructions by the media or scholars who use them as analytical tools. Moreover, the collectivities empirically overlap and are entangled.

67 Brubaker 2002, 166.

68 Marschelke 2023, 109. It is worth noting that participants are very well able to interpellate collectivities in both ways (reifying, non-reifying) dependent e. g. on the situational needs, see e. g. Bauman 1996.

Of course, the whole enterprise of *Islands Studies* would be rendered meaningless if there was no element of uniqueness or peculiarity associated with island identities. The concept of islandscape (s. a. 2.2), for instance, demonstrates that the fact that most of the objects of *Island Studies* are actually surrounded by water[69] enters into the practices (including imaginations) which construct island realities, though this influence manifests itself in very different ways which cannot be defined and theorized *a priori*. This applies to island identities, too, which eventually become part of the more encompassing notions of "islandscape" and "islandness"[70]. Even if there is no *single* island identity, island identity construction typically has a common point of reference: the role of the sea. According to long-term studies, geographical location or isolation have an impact on the formation of collective identities.[71] This *can* result in a geographical, psychological and social boundedness that contributes to a strong connection with and feeling of belonging to the respective island, the so-called "island effect".[72] Furthermore, it can result in 'participant islanding'. Scholars have observed that islanders often feel that the surrounding water holds them together, giving rise to a certain sense of community and sense of security.[73] It seems plausible, as studies have shown, that this "island effect" is more likely to occur on smaller islands where there is a greater probability of familiarity between the population. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to suppose that only the inhabitants of tiny islets experience such "island effects". Referring to a number of islands – Barbuda, Mauritius, Marquesa Islands, Solomons etc. –, the island scholar Henry Srebrnik argues that "the feeling of distinctiveness which living on an island or archipelago inculcates typically facilitates the existence of an insular-based nationalism."[74] Similarly, Baldacchino and Eve Hepburn diagnose some islands with territorially-based nationalism, an island nationalism which manifests itself in both a strong desire for island autonomy and a reluctance to share sovereignty with other offshore territories, including other islands, as is the case with Mayotte.[75]

However, boundedness and "the island effect" are not the whole story. Artifacts, infrastructures or practices (including imaginations) can somewhat dissolve boundedness. Bridges, tunnels, and ferries are examples of such artifacts, practices of us-

69 Bear in mind the introductory remarks in chapter 1 that islands can be surrounded in a comparable way by other things/geographical formations, too (e.g. oasis by desert sand and rocks).

70 See Roitman – Veenendaal 2023, 5; Grydehøj 2017, who argue that the concept of islandness not only functions as a geographical term, but also relates to a specific political, psychological and social environment on the framing of which a range of social phenomena can be described and interpreted.

71 Baldacchino 2006, who speaks of "psychological effects" which are related to geographical barriers such as mountains, rivers, and oceans.

72 Baldacchino 2007, quoted from Royle – Brinklow 2018, 9.

73 Royle – Brinklow 2018, 9.

74 Srebnrik 2004, 338.

75 Baldacchino – Hepburn 2012, 556.

ing them open and connect[76] and, thus, co-define islands[77]. In particular, bridges can modify the nature of islandness for islanders and visitors alike as Laurie Brinklow and Andrew Jennings remark: "Fixed links overcome the sea and transform island 'place' in a way that ferries cannot."[78] Obviously, this transformation can have effects such as cheaper transportation or a stronger connection to the (outside) world. However, on the level of collective identities, such a connection can lead to a sense of loss of "islandic identity"[79] (or even to islanders no longer feeling like islanders[80]) among those who had constructed their identities on the idea of the boundedness of the island.

But what about the sea? The sea itself is not always regarded as a boundary, but can also be seen as a fixed link of its own kind. However, merely considering the sea as a possible link, in general, and regarding the crossing of the water as "one of the defining elements of islandness" is insufficient.[81] Rather, the manner in which the water is crossed and by whom is the matter that requires further investigation. Water crossing can happen in very different ways, e. g. by swimming, paddling in a canoe or navigating a motorized yacht, by airplane, ferry or by car through a tunnel. It must be understood as a "multistep process"[82] that is characterized by the associated experiences, performances, narratives, and practices of various crossing actors[83] – all of which have an impact on identities. In this vein, the Tongalese anthropologist Epeli Hau'Ofa (1994) states that the sea can be interpreted as a connecting element between islands through the mobility of various actors and may even counteract attributions of smallness. Using the example of Oceania, he shows that the islands cannot be thought of without the sea and their inhabitants. Hau'ofa explicitly speaks of 'ocean people' whose world has been a 'sea of islands' for thousands of years and not 'islands in the sea'. This perspective breaks with the island definition discussed in the introduction: it is not the island in the form of a landmass surrounded by water that is self-evident, it is the perspective and the mobility practices across and with the water of various actors that constructs the island and the identity associated with it.

But even if islanders practice boundedness, there is never a complete closure of the island and the identity of its inhabitants. Thus, even a very tightly-knit island community may eventually produce the opposite of closure, as the constant co-presence may be a reason for (especially young) islanders to leave – thus establishing another link between the island and the 'outer world'. What is more, the impact of such links

76 Royle – Brinklow 2018, 13 f.; Brinklow – Jennings 2023.

77 S.a. 2.2, especially Vannini – Taggart 2012.

78 Brinklow – Jennings 2023, vii–viii..

79 *Ibid*., x.

80 Remember the introductory remark that e. g. the EU definition of an island is no longer fulfilled once a bridge provides connection to the mainland. This is not just a game with words, but a powerful ascription by a powerful institution.

81 Brinklow 2023, 2.

82 *ibid.*

83 Vannini 2012, 13.

can be enormous: The historian Andreas Guidi has provided compelling evidence of how people from the Dodecanese islands who had previously emigrated to places as diverse as Florida, Argentina, Congo, or Australia subsequently returned and became major investors, thereby playing a pivotal role in the island's transformation.[84] At the same time, Guidi's examples demonstrate the multi-collectivity of these actors; they are not just islanders (from Rhodes, Kasos, Kastellorizo etc.), but also Jews, Argentinian, traders, middle-class etc.

In other instances, it is the other way around: As the case of Malta shows, openness, connectedness, and mobility can induce processes of closure and the desire to construct a more bounded national island identity. Malta's accession to the EU in 2005 initiated both a process of "Europeanization"[85] and quite contested debates about Maltese identity ('Malteseness' as opposed to 'Europeanness').[86] For a brief period, Europe became that constitutive other which identity formation processes revolve around. Thus, Maltese sociologists and anthropologists found their co-islanders fighting over the typical nationalist 'search' for 'purity', 'authenticity', and 'uniqueness' while, from their academic angle, it was clear that Maltese language, food, and traditions are the perfect examples of hybrid mixtures which result from the openness of an island historically situated at the cross-roads of many worlds.[87] At the same time, the arrival of (mainly sub-Saharan, black) refugees triggered many Maltese to distinguish themselves from them and their island from the African continent. In this context, they emphasized Malta's 'Europeanness' as a bastion of Christianity.[88] This shows how identity shifts in relation to context and varying constitutive others: When confronted with the rest of Europe, many Maltese sought to find their particular 'Malteseness'.

84 MS-ISLA 2023, 147–148 with further references.

85 Pisani 2013; Abela 2005.

86 Mitchell 2002, 16. In the same vein, Baldacchino (2002, 191, 198) attested that Malta was a "nationless state" before its accession to the EU.

87 Cf. Abela 2005. A Maltese social anthropologist, interviewed by Sarah Nimführ in June 2018 in Malta, confirmed this statement when the conversation turned to the topic of the growing influence of the English language in everyday life on Malta and the decrease of the importance of Maltese language. This, he said, would underpin the feeling of a lack of national consciousness: "Some people complain about it. They say we don't have a real national identity. Because we don't have something that's just ours, that's unique, special. It's just a mixture of all sorts of things. Nationalists love authenticity, as you know. And purity (…) Some people in Malta are worried that we don't have our own culture. But if you look at the practices, the food and all that, you actually find a mixture and always a relationship with the outside world, especially through the sea." Malta´s historical and strategic significance which lead to many different collectivities taking control of the island figures prominently e. g. in Abulafias biography of the Mediterranean (2011).

88 Pisani 2013, 74. In 1987, the Nationalist Party was elected to government and formally applied to join the EU in July 1990. The Nationalist Party had a strong interest in joining because they saw themselves as the ones who could give Europe back its Christian values (cf. Nimführ 2020, 131).