Doing research on, with and about the island: Reflections on islandscape

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Abstract: Even though the relational turn within Island Studies has long revoked the equation of islands with insularity, disconnectedness and backwardness, these ascriptions are still often deterministically attributed to islands, mainly by non-island scholars. Thereby these designations are not only reproduced, but connections, dynamics, different forms of embeddedness and entanglements remain overlooked. This paper has two main goals: (1) Adding to the relational turn in Island Studies by not only arguing for more inductive approaches to seriously engage with these situated and changing manifestations and meaning-makings of islands, and (2) by drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Malta, we introduce the concept of 'islandscape' (Broodbank 2000) to the Island Studies literature. Through the lens of islandscape, islands can be researched as nodal points of the local, national and global without reproducing 'islandism' while still acknowledging the importance of the island. The combination of -scape and assemblage-thinking which is already present within Island Studies makes it possible to address the tension between global and local and, rather, to look at which concrete, situated assemblages emerge within islandscape. In this sense, we propose to think of the island as islandscape from the very beginning of research, then to show how this islandscape is actually constituted and then to describe partial moments of stabilisation in terms of assemblages.

Introduction

The *Aquarius*, a private rescue vessel, saved 629 refugees from drowning in June 2018. According to International Maritime Law, these refugees had a right to be brought to *a* place of safety. But who is responsible for these refugees and where exactly is *this* safe port of

disembarkation located? These issues were subject to negotiations among several European Union (EU) member states. The case of the *Aquarius* and following incidents reveal the tensions in fulfilling these legal obligations. After the Italian government denied access to these refugees, the government of Malta, an archipelagic island-state located between Italy and Libya, which consists of three inhabited islands (Malta, Gozo and Comino), also refused their disembarkation. Following several days of negotiation during which the refugees and the *Aquarius*' crew suffered from bad weather conditions and health complications, the Spanish government decided to let them disembark in Valencia.

Due to the increase of boat migration in the Mediterranean Sea over recent years, islands, like Malta, located along the EU's southern and external border attracted the attention of researchers from various disciplines (among others Klepp, 2011; Mannik, 2018; Nimführ, Otto & Samateh, 2017; Pisani, 2011; Reckinger, 2013). It is striking, however, that in many (anthropologic)ethnographically and other empirically oriented migration studies recently published and carried out on an island, the characteristics of the island are only mentioned in passing—if at all (King, 2009, p.63) and that references to research of various approaches of Island Studies remain scarce. In addition, conventional analyses evoke Western notions of immobility, isolation, insularity and a collective island identity (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014a, p.43f.), but how those who live on and with the island make use of it, practice or narrate it often remains undertheorised and overlooked. This immutability associated with island life is questionable against the backdrop of increasing mobility opportunities and continuous global changes within and beyond forced migration. There is no doubt that islands were almost always confronted with and affected by migration—first of all, by settlement itself and also by subsequent migration (King, 1996, 2009). Whilst islands used to be considered as places of emigration in the past (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014b, p.3), they are currently the hub of migrants, ideas, refugees, tourists, returnees and guest workers (Mountz & Lloyd, 2014; Schnepel & Alpers, 2018). This is also reflected in research on transnationalism, translocations and mobilities, which analyses how governing and non-governing actors co-produce spaces that are lived, practiced and structured by human and non-human circulations (e.g., Hess & Karakayali, 2016; Nimführ et al., 2017; Nyers & Rygiel, 2014). These forms of migration and mobility are not unique features of islands. Island-specific characteristics do, however, have an impact on migratory movements and how they are dealt with: compared to nation-state borders with security controls on land, maritime borders are more open and difficult to 'close' (King, 2009, p.66).

From deduction to induction: Challenging 'islandism'

One of the main problems we identified amid the scholarly literature, among others (see also Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020), which equates islands with isolation, disconnectedness and closure, was carried out by non-island scholars who seemed to have ignored the broad literature on the relational turn within Island Studies (Pugh, 2016) over the past decade or so. Looking at several studies we realised that metaphors and associations with isolation, insularity and peripherality as well as spatial laboratories approaches were still deductively transferred and not critically questioned (Hintjens, 2016; Klepp, 2011; Mannik, 2016; Perera, 2009). Further, the fact that non-islanders—including us—look at islands from a certain perspective as outsiders impacts research. Our socialisation, societal positionings as well as ascriptions towards the island and its inhabitants from a *white* European mainlanders' perspective surely

also imbues our data collection and its analysis. Pete Hay (2006, p.30) even argues against research carried out by non-islanders on and about islands as "island metaphors not only wrongly represent the politics of island identity as conservative, […] they also render irrelevant the realness of island lives." However, 'coming from the outside' and thus being able to productively make use of one's own irritations and experiences of 'being the stranger' and thus working with and reflecting on one's own irritations is the preferred research design of cultural anthropology, the discipline we are based in. It must be critically mentioned here that there always remains the risk of Othering, and whilst outsiders have the potential to bring fresh perspectives to island dynamics, dangers and limitations of their epistemology need to be acknowledged and spelt out here. Thus, our own research was characterised by this tension. Godfrey Baldacchino (2008) stated that a strict insider/outsider divide is untenable, and consequently encourages scholars to deeply reflect on their own positioning along this spectrum.

In order not to fall into this trap of 'islanding' (Baldacchino, 2012, p.58) or 'islandism', continuous reflection of the research design and the researchers' perspective is necessary (Reichertz, 2015). Therefore, our purposed goal of this article is to move from deduction to induction in the search for critical understandings of both movements and rests within movements and how the island is significant or insignificant throughout these passages. We do so by introducing Cyprian Broodbank's (2000) concept of "islandscape" to the Island Studies literature, thereby adding to the body of work on the relational turn within Island Studies (Grydehøj, 2017; Pugh, 2016, 2018; Stratford, Baldacchino, McMahon, Farbotko & Harwood, 2011). We refer to Arjun Appadurai's (1998) understanding of '-scape' within the term 'islandscape', hoping that the Island Studies' literature can thereby respond to scholars who continue to refer to the long rejected concepts of isolation and peripherality by Island Studies. Based on our findings, we argue that islandscape enables to focus on the various connections and movements to and from islands by taking also its relations to the sea and the (EU) mainland into account. We contend throughout this article against an understanding of the island as the main factor in determining human behaviour, thereby showing that islands are (made) (in-)significant within islandscape.

Research context and structure of the paper

Based on ethnographic research on refugees and the border regime in Malta (2013-2018, all research participants were given pseudonyms), we demonstrate and analyse movements and rests within these movements and how being an island is (made) (in-)significant throughout these passages. Like scholars who emphasise that islands can be understood as "assemblages" (McMahon, 2003; Pugh, 2016; Sheller, 2009; Stratford et al., 2011), or, as "crossroad islands" (Connell & King, 1999) we, by arguing that islandscape is a helpful analytical tool to overcome false assumptions of isolation, understand islands as embedded and entangled in broader discourses, infrastructures and ideas. The questions which guided us through our research and the writing-up of this contribution thus were: how can we, as cultural anthropologists and non-islanders, avoid representing the Maltese archipelago as closed and unconnected? How can we simultaneously address the island-state's specifics, without fostering further 'islandism'? This is the main puzzle we address in this paper which is structured as follows:

We first briefly discuss several theoretical conceptions of islands which could not explain our empirical findings, followed by engaging with the relational turn in Island Studies (Pugh,

2016) to which our article aims to further contribute. Second—against the backdrop of our own ethnographic and public discourse material—we tell a multifaceted story about Malta's connectivities, and about different actors' mobilities to, in and from the island-state followed by the introduction of islandscape as an analytical tool in a third step. Fourth, we review Arjun Appadurai's (1998) -scape concept and link it with Broodbank's islandscape to overcome 'islandism'. Fifth, we offer a conclusion, contending that it is important to develop a *differentiating* and *differentiated* view on islands' dynamics. What do we mean by this? As there is no "one-size-fits-all-solution" (Grydehøj, 2020), we argue that researchers must show when and how the island is made (in-)significant along their empirical data, thereby adding to the literature on criticism on deductive approaches for studying islands (Grydehøj, 2020). This helps move research away from the island as the main pattern of explaining migration, immobility and movement, or, on the contrary, completely ignore the island and its meaning, and thus offers more accurate accounts of understanding island dynamics.

Conceptualising islands

Islands have long been of scholarly interest, and research on and with islands ranges from historical (Aldrich & Johnson, 2018) and archaeology (Broodbank, 2000) to tourism and mobility (Baldacchino, 2013; Graci & Maher, 2018; Sheller, 2003) or urban studies (Grydehøj & Swaminathan, 2018). In the 1980s, Island Studies as an interdisciplinary research field was established (Grydehøj, 2017). Whilst there is agreement among scholars that an island is a piece of land surrounded by water, "this says nothing about what makes islands matter to people—to those who live on them, to those who look upon them" (Grydehøj, 2020). Scholarship in the context of islands often relies on the concepts of either *insularity* (considering the physical boundedness of islands as their core characteristic) or *islandness*, referring to both the actual physical characteristics of the island (like cliffs, beaches or other geographical features) and to its effects on human islanders (Royle & Brinklow, 2018). For Edward Warrington and David Milne (2007, p.38), insularity is the complex interplay of geography and history. Jean-Didier Hache (1998, p.47), to the contrary, argues that insularity must be understood as a social phenomenon and an instrumental term, mainly used by islanders to create a unique identity and to legitimise their economic, social, cultural and political situation. In this vein, Pete Hay (2003, p.203) argues that the physical boundedness of islands imbues this claimed identity of uniqueness, as it would strengthen the idea of "bounded identities." Further, scholarship on islands often led to a consideration of "islands as a world *per se*" (Arnaud, 2008, p.21; Bright, 2011, p.24), leading to an interpretation of insularity as a common feature of islanders as being isolated by the sea. These understandings represented islanders necessarily as dissimilar from mainlanders (Boomert & Bright, 2007, p.3, cited in Arnaud, 2008, p.21). This strongly normative view of the totality of island culture led to a rather negative connotation of the term, representing notions of isolation, limited resources and a narrow-minded, conservative understanding of islanders (Baldacchino, 2004, p.272; Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014c, p.99). Pete Hay (2013, p.216), however, is less critical towards the term isolation compared to insular and reminds us to distinguish isolated from insular, arguing that islands are indeed connected, but that these connections should not be interpreted as the antithesis to isolation.

To counter the "dominance of external perspectives on islands with an insular inner view" (Bendemann, Gerstenberg, Jaspert & Kolditz, 2016, p.9; translated from German by the authors), the neologism of islandness has become established. Islandness is predominantly positively connoted and comprises narrations and perceptions of the island's society and must therefore be understood as less normative, capturing the social construction of island realities instead (Baldacchino, 2004; Stratford, 2008). According to Baldacchino (2006, p.9) the concept of islandness and its potential influence on scholarship, politics, economics and human behaviour constitutes the foundation of Island Studies. Even though most scholars agree that focusing on islandness is important, the term is not defined uniformly. Island geographer Stephen A. Royle (2001, p.42) understands islandness as "those constraints that are imposed upon small islands by virtue of their insularity." Baldacchino (2004, p.278) comprehends this concept much more dynamically between "openness and closure" (Grydehøj, 2017, p.5) by conceiving of islandness as an intervening variable "that does not determine, but contours and conditions physical and social events in distinct, and distinctly relevant ways." In the vein of this dynamic dimension of islandness, Phillip Vannini and Jonathan Taggart (2012, p.227f.) define an island as a practice, as an "outcome of what islanders do, and in particular of how islanders move." Their argument suits well with Adam Grydehøj and Marco Casagrande's (2020) understanding that "a place's islandness is practiced." This necessity of incorporating movement and mobilities in one's understanding of islands is also highlighted by Natalie Bernardie-Tahir and Camille Schmoll (2014a), who introduced the term of "counter-islandness." This concept frames Malta as a space of circulation, which is, however, enclosed and yet again bounded by its physical borders, with, e.g., Bernardie-Tahir and Schmoll describing Malta as a "space of enclosure" (2014a, p.53). With reference to islands in general, they perceive them as "closed spaces" (2014a, 2014c, p.88). Thus, the concept of islandness is neither neutral nor used in a uniquely defined fashion but can still evoke associations with isolation, peripherality and disconnectedness, especially among scholars from outside Island Studies (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020).

Like other humanities and social sciences, the debate within Island Studies has also encountered a relational turn over the past decade or so. While there are different streams within this turn—ranging from structuralist, to constructivist and post-structuralist approaches (Hong, 2017, p.22) —an outcome of this debate has been to challenge the dichotomies of island/mainland as well as land/sea (Stratford et al., 2011; qtd. in Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020; Lee, Huang, & Grydehøj, 2017), as well as problematising and disrupting static tropes of isolation and peripherality (Chandler & Pugh, 2020). By emphasising islands' relationalities (Grydehøj, 2020), their interrelatedness came as much to the fore as the understanding of islands as being "mutually constituted and co-constructed" (Stratford et. al 2011, cited in Pugh, 2016, p.1043). Employing this vocabulary hints at the fact that much of the Island Studies scholarship has moved in the direction of Actor-Network-Theory as well as Science and Technology Studies. This becomes even more visible when we look at Pugh's (2016, p.1041f.) argument that islands are inextricably interwoven "into complex, multifaceted and shifting arrays of relations and assemblages," further stressing that these assemblages are not stable, but only partially stabilised. He pushes the debate even further by arguing for a "thinking with the archipelago," and Hayward's concept of the "aquapelago" also focuses on human–land–sea–interactions (Hayward, 2012). Grydehøj and Casagrande (2020) also point

out that islands are "enmeshed," and Stratford, Baldacchino, McMahon, Farbotko & Harwood (2011, p.113) emphasise the "entanglement among and between islands."

While these approaches form the debate within Island Studies, non-island studies and non-island scholars often still remain within the realm of equating islands with peripherality and disconnectedness, thereby further fostering 'islandism'. As a result, when insular contexts are researched, the island is often predetermined as the obvious category of analysis, as ecologist Robert H. MacArthur and biologist Edward O. Wilson (1967, p.3) also postulate: "the island is the first unit that the mind can pick out and begin to comprehend." With regard to island-states, the physical border frequently equates the nation-state border, so that the analysis of the category of the 'island' becomes enmeshed with that of the nation-state. Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller (2002), as well as Ulrich Beck and Edgar Grande (2010), describe the unconscious adoption of nationally defined categories as "methodological nationalism." A nation-state perspective on social phenomena creates the danger of normalising, legitimising and reproducing these categories without critically questioning categorisation processes acted out by the nation-state's actors. As a consequence, island-states thus not only face 'islandism', but also 'methodological nationalism' in various accounts.

The representations of island boundaries as "paradigms of hard-edgedness" (Hay, 2006, p.22) are also largely rejected within Island Studies. Most of the literature advocates that island boundaries should be regarded rather as permeable membranes permitting and denying passage (among others Baldacchino, 2005, p.248; Hay, 2013, p.220; Terrell, 2004, p.11). Even though Island Studies has moved in the direction of challenging both 'islandism' and 'methodological nationalism' as an outcome of the relational turn, within migration studies examples in which the island was denoted a 'laboratory' (Klepp 2011, p.130, translated from German by the authors), or a "place of condensation" as well as a "chamber for many issues" (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll 2014c, p.94) and "as protypes and microcosmic images of the nation-state" (Perera, 2009, p.6) can still be found.

As these understandings did not purport to accurately describe what we experienced in Malta, we assumed flexible analytical tools which propose more nuanced categories (Hong, 2017, p.9) as both the empirical and conceptual levels are needed in order not to explore islands as a fixated entity. As a result, we examined the historical and contemporary mobilities to and from Malta, and then developed the idea of linking island to the term -scape, borrowing from Appadurai's (1998) work. This thereby enabled research designs which focus on island *context,* acknowledging differentiated meaning and significance, which leads to an understanding of viewing islands in contingent ways (Grydehøj & Casagrande, 2020), rather than viewing islands as fixed, gated or closed. Following the ethnographic research tradition, we argue that inductive and deductive phases alternate in research, thus agreeing with Grydehøj (2020) that merely deductive approaches tend to ignore varied spatial and relational contexts. Within the realm of the relational turn we thus aim at adding islandscape as a concept to the existing literature. Against the backdrop of our material, which we briefly analyse in the following part, we then discuss our understanding of islandscape and its benefit for the debate in more detail.

Malta's connectivities and actors' mobilities to and from the island

Negotiating autonomy in a multinational framework

Ever since Malta's accession to the EU in 2004, the island-state's national politics and policies have been embedded within a broader, multinational framework, thus making Malta part of a broader "enforcement archipelago," often tactically used by nation-states to keep refugees and unwanted strangers at bay (Mountz, 2011). Due to its membership the Maltese state has received a greater political voice (Mainwaring, 2014), but it is also charged with responsibilities in the context of forced migration, e.g., in terms of the Dublin Regulation. As mentioned in the introduction, the example of the *Aquarius* rescue mission once more demonstrates that Malta is part of a greater political system, although its government was autonomously "delinking" the responsibilities with which it was charged. This clearly underscores Malta's increase of political importance and its (non-)action beyond the island's physical borders. However, the *Aquarius* incident is not the only one in which the Maltese government made clear that refugees are rather unwanted. In 2013, the government threatened to send Somali male refugees back to Libya (ECRE, 2013), not only attracting attention from the EU, but also illustrating the Maltese government's connections to the African continent and its embeddedness in a broader migration regime.

The Dublin Regulation is yet another good example of Malta's political connectivities and its embeddedness within the EUropean border regime. This regulation was first adopted in 2003 to determine that the EU member state, in which refugees first enter the EU, is responsible for examining their asylum applications. In other words: refugees must remain in the EU member state of first arrival. Many refugees nevertheless manage to leave Malta and try to apply for asylum in another EU country, thereby producing connections through their movement. Some of our research partners were successful in this endeavour, whereas others were returned to Malta as Dublin cases: Yahya Sonari, a Somali, left Malta in 2013 when he was still considered an unaccompanied minor. He settled in Germany and just found out about the influence of the Dublin Regulation when he was returned to Malta shortly after his 18th birthday. Back in Malta, he was punished with mandatory chores and threatened with imprisonment were he to leave the country again without documents. Whilst Yahya Sonari was allowed to remain in Germany until he reached adulthood in legal terms, Mansuur Hanad was returned from a Scandinavian country back to Malta when he was still considered to be underage. On the contrary, Buba Sesay from Sierra Leone, who left Malta for Italy in 2016, was not sent back due to the complex intra-EUropean processing procedure: "From Italy they don't send back, because that actually is very complicated," a representative of a local NGO in Rome stated in August 2016. Knowing about the possibility of forced return nevertheless scares some refugees, leading to a feeling of 'being stuck on the island'. That Malta is an island, however, is only one reason that they feel isolated: the main components of immobility are their lack of legal status and a proper passport, as "it's all about the paper," according to the Gambian Ebrima Jawara. This importance of documents legalising mobility also counts for other, non–island EU member states. That refugees' mobility is restricted and that they feel stuck may lead to the assumption that insularity would be the appropriate theoretical framing for this finding. This would, however, override seeing that despite these restrictions and feelings of isolation, they nevertheless make use of their agency and leave Malta, highlighting that ascribed isolation is not deterministic but experienced in various ways.

Leaving Malta as a common practice

Movement and mobility are inherent to society and thus forced migration is *one* form of movement among many others. With the recent hype of migration, researchers have mainly focused on refugees and forced migration when research was carried out in Malta (Bernardie-Tahir & Schmoll, 2014c; Gerard & Pickering, 2014; Klepp, 2011; Mainwaring, 2014; Mountz & Lloyd 2014; Pisani, 2011). This trend, however, tends to overlook the many other forms of migration, movement and mobility to and from Malta which also shape the island's society. In this article, we only refer to forms of movement that played a role in the empirical material we collected by using ethnographic research methods. It must be mentioned here that High Net Worth Individuals (HNWI) are also attracted to Malta by being offered a special tax status, entailing particular forms of (im)mobility, as Baldacchino (2018) demonstrated. As we were not personally in touch with persons considered as HNWIs, we do not further discuss their (im)mobility patterns here.

It is not only (young) refugees who believe that their possibilities of educational, professional and personal development are limited in Malta. Young Maltese encounter the same impression as young refugees, as told by Caroline Oliver, a leading politician in June 2018: "Most of our young people today go abroad for study, so that compensates to the smallness, to the experience of living on a small island. […] But when they come back, they feel that we have this advantage [of smallness]."

This experience not only enables them to enjoy another educational and social environment, but also significantly increases their chances on the competitive, local job market, noted a young Maltese who studied in the UK and returned to the island five years ago to start his company which offers guided city tours in Valletta, the country's capital. This example illustrates that the island is only *one* unit of analysis to better understand young peoples' desire for mobility. Using the island here as the main pattern of explaining this form of movement tends to foster a misinterpretation of the island as the only unit of analysis that could explain all social practices, entailing further 'islandism'. It is not only young people living on the Maltese island who have the wish to internationalise themselves, but this is rather a phenomenon which has become normality throughout the EU (van Mol, 2015). Being flexible and studying abroad is actually often expected of young people today and is viewed as 'normal'. It is thus not predominantly their 'insularity' which leads young Maltese to seek out international opportunities; rather it is a broader phenomenon which exists across the EU and has led to increased movement abroad.

How migration and settlement in Malta, and the forms of possible changes they might entail are interpreted in society, also differs significantly between refugee and non-refugee movement. Whilst refugee movement to and their settlement in Malta is often understood as an "Africanisation" (Mizzi, 2010) and thus dangerous, British colonisation is frequently viewed as a positive "process of overlapping" (Giordano, 2016, p.138). This is reflected, *inter alia*, by the current official English language—in addition to Maltese—and the British-oriented school system.

What we learned during our research is that actually many Maltese families speak English in their homes as the English language is often viewed as more educated and sophisticated compared to Maltese: "English in Malta is also the language of aspiration, it's a prestige language," a Maltese Social Anthropologist stated in June 2018. Yet, it cannot be

denied that the Maltese are also proud of their own unique language, which shows how Maltese people were always able to adapt to new influences, as the politician Caroline Oliver stated in the summer of 2018:

> It is basically Semitic and comes from the Arabic, but it is written in the Roman form. […] Over the centuries we have come to adopt words from other languages […] Italian […] French […] Our language has evolved, it has stayed very unique and it is evidence of our different colonization periods […] that is very much what gives us an identity.

Heading to the island: Malta as a lure for tourists and foreign workers

Between 2013 and 2016, Malta experienced a population increase of almost 10,000 people per year. In 2016 alone, foreign nationals relocating to Malta accounted for 84% of the 9,882 increase in population (Sansone, 2018). A look at the current national statistics numbers reveals that the majority of the population growth occurs due to the immigration of foreign workers. While some voices argue for the need of recruitment of foreign workers to handle the "country's extraordinary economic growth" (Sansone, 2018), others highlight the "misunderstanding about the value added which foreign workers in our society could bring to the economy" (Sant, 2018). According to Baldacchino, small islands tend to draw resources from elsewhere that support the islanders' standard of living, such as foreign investment, tourists, goods and know-how (Debono, interview with Baldacchino, 2018). The enormous increase of tourists also created new (contemporary) jobs requiring different forms of refugees' movement, of which four main types can be found: first, commuting to Malta and thus being a foreign worker; second, leaving Malta during the low season associated with seasonal unemployment; third, leaving the island-state due to the lack of regular access to the labour market; and fourth, commuting within the Maltese archipelago.

In 2010, Malik Darboe arrived in Lampedusa from the Gambia and was transferred to the Italian mainland. He received a Temporary Subsidiary Protection Status. Due to this status he is allowed to travel within the Schengen Area for up to 90 days. After not being able to find work in Italy he decided to try his luck in Malta, where he is allowed to stay for up to three months, but his Subsidiary Protection Status issued by Italy does not provide him with Maltese labour rights, which is why refugees like him started to work informally in Malta. Malik Darboe is required to go back to Italy to renew his documents every few months. Over the past five years, he has commuted regularly between Italy and Malta to maintain both his legal status in Italy and his job in Malta. This illustrates that refugees fluctuate between immobility and mobility leading to an interesting observation (see also Otto, Nimführ, & Bieler, 2019): whilst the majority of refugees have difficulties leaving the 'island prison', refugees like Malik Darboe enter the island on purpose as it offers more job opportunities compared to Italy. Malik Darboe does not conceive of Malta as a 'prison' or as 'closed', but rather as a place he can easily enter and exit, as he stated in October 2015: "I'm happy to meet my friends and family there [Italy], but I'm also happy to have a great job in Malta."

With tourism being Malta's main industry, the mobility of these travellers must also be considered as constituting the island's connectivities. Tourism enables refugees to work as seasonal labourers in hotels, restaurants or at the beach where they rent out deck chairs and umbrellas. However, as the seasonal tourism business in Malta comes to a close during the

winter months, many refugees depend on jobs in other businesses. If they are not successful in finding other jobs, the thought of leaving the island plays a big role. For a couple of years, Khady Sembène from Senegal has worked as a deckchair porter at one of Malta's famous beaches. Since he could not find regular work off-season, he left Malta for Spain and France despite not having the proper documents. In 2016, Ebrima Jawara also left Malta after several years of working in tourism. Because his employer did not want to sign a contract with him and he did not find another regular job, he left for Spain, where he now lives undetected with his uncle.

Lessons learned from fieldwork: Reflections on islandscape

The empirically oriented preceding section provides insights into several facts: movement and migration to Malta are not new phenomena, but how they were perceived changed over time. Not only young refugees aim to leave Malta, but also young Maltese go abroad to study—movement towards and from islands thus seems to be a very normal practice. The Maltese island-state is broadly connected to the sea, the EU-mainland, and to the islands and states in the Mediterranean region through tourism and refugees' movement, as well as through business. Framing Malta, as already argued, as closed or unconnected does not hold up to scrutiny; nor can state and society be equated here. An anti-essentialist and relational understanding of space (Massey, 1994) supports the argumentation and research practice towards challenging this untenable equation. Consequently, islands and also island-states must not be understood as territorially limited, but rather arise through the practices of various actors; we suggest that analysing these dynamics from an islandscape perspective can be insightful.

Islandscape as an analytical tool

To understand Malta as the nodal point of the local, national and the global without falling into the trap of 'islandism', we develop the concept of islandscape (Broodbank, 2000, p.21) for inductive, empirical research on, about and with islands as a further contribution to the debate on relationality within Island Studies. This concept has already received broad attention in geography (Arnaud, 2008), environmental studies (Vogiatzakis, Zomeni & Mannion, 2017), as well as archaeology (Bright, 2011; Frieman, 2008). According to Broodbank (2000), islandscape understands the island with its connections to other islands, to the (EUropean) mainland as well as to and with the sea, and is therefore a much more flexible concept compared to insularity, speaking to concepts like the aquapelago (Hayward, 2012) or approaches as thinking with the archipelago (Pugh, 2016). Hayward's (2012, p.5) concept of the aquapelago is defined as "an assemblage of the marine and land spaces of a group of islands and the adjacent waters," enabling researchers to better understand how these connections are navigated and shaping "social group's […] senses of identity and belonging." Islandscape as introduced here, however, goes a step further by encouraging scholars to look at the practices of islandscape co-production beyond identity and belonging. Additionally, islandscape also takes into consideration that its very production is characterised by hierarchies, and that not all actors perceive islandscape in the same way.

The concept of islandscape also relates to that of islandness, as islands are understood "beyond their physical boundaries" (Vogiatzakis et al., 2017, p.2), and acknowledges that

"islands have a physical existence, but they are also made and remade by people" (Broodbank, 2000, p.33), thereby arguing against an island as a geographical entity; rather, it emphasises its multidimensionality. Thereby, Broodbank (2000, p.23) refers to the individual's own perception of islandscapes. In this vein, Timothy Morton (2016, p.71, as cited in Pugh, 2018, p.100) also highlights these aspects of multidimensionality and relationality by reconfiguring islands as "hyperobjective spaces" that can only be understood partially. Accordingly, islands within the understanding of islandscape are seen as social constructs rather than as physical entities, as also mentioned by Ari Boomert and Alistair Bright (2007, p.10f).

Islandscape as a concept highlights the island's dynamics and does not understand the sea as isolating, but as a nexus of islands, the sea and the mainland (see Gosden & Head, 1994). Social and cultural interactions, which Broodbank (2002, p.21) coins as "human imprint," are thus inherent to viewing islands from the islandscape perspective, which makes this concept fruitful for empirical research, as social practices related to and producing the island can be taken into account. This results in an understanding of islandscape under which islands are considered as "liminal environments" (Frieman, 2008, p.137), or, as Vogiatzakis et al. (2017) put it, islandscape is the fabric which meshes socioeconomic, ecological and cultural processes. This implies that the unit of analysis is not limited to the island's physical boundaries. Contextualising Malta from the islandscape perspective does not foster an understanding of the island as the *object* of study, but rather emphasises the importance of its *contextualisation* and its *production* for contingent research outcomes where physical boundaries may be transcended. Consequently, connecting movements from, towards and across the island can be captured, representing the latter as a dynamic landscape of circulation, ridding oneself of the understanding of the island as a self-contained unit. At the centre of the approach developed here are practices of the various actors, shaping the island and its meaning. Whilst we have clarified so far what we understand as an 'island' and that the extent to which the island matters for people and their practices varies, we shall now turn to a more specific definition of –scape. Even though several scholars made reference to the concept of islandscape (Dawson, 2012; Boomert & Bright, 2011; Broodbank 2000), a detailed description of the term –scape itself is still a theoretical void in this debate. When we first encountered the concept of islandscape as cultural anthropologists, we were immediately reminded of Appadurai's work (1998). In the following part, we engage with his concept of 'ethnoscape' in more depth and illustrate why it is fruitful for empirically studying islandscapes.

Appadurai (1998) developed his understanding of ethnoscape against the backdrop of cultural dimensions of globalisation. He refers to both actual landscapes and imaginations of people living in these landscapes, thereby also producing them. "By ethnoscape, I mean the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect politics of (and between) nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree" (Appadurai, 1998, p.33). Appadurai further calls for combining historical work and contemporary ethnographic approaches to better understand and contextualise these degrees of impact and affection (p.186). He does not understand landscapes as fixed, territorially bounded but states that "the suffix –scape allows us to point to the fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes" (p.33). Appadurai further contends that different agents both experience and constitute formations of landscapes, leading to differing interpretations of the same locality (p.55). Consequently, the ethnoscape is not objectively

given (p.33). This points out two important points: first, human actors actively produce –scape; second, the perceptions and interpretations of the similar -scape depend on the (social and juridical) position of individuals as well as on their perspectives.

Bringing together Broodbank's thoughts of 'doing islands' with Appadurai's deterritorialised concept of -scapes brings us to the following understanding of islandscape: the islandscape represents a constructed, unbounded landscape that connects and constructs the island, the sea, the mainland and other islands into an interlaced, multidimensional, deterritorialised landscape. This landscape is constituted through connections via mobility from, to and on the island and thus enables us to identify that notions of space, place and society have become more complex, resulting in the fact that a 'single island society' may also be diffused beyond the physical island. In line with this, islands or the sea are no longer conceived as entities but rather the result of entanglements in which movements take place. Islandscape, thus, is first and foremost a heuristic tool enabling us to overcome narrow-minded 'islandism' by broadening our view to economic, social, historical and political facets of the past, present and future. What became obvious from the empirical material is that various (human and non-human) actors—refugees, students, tourists, researchers, but also political agreements—produce islandscape. Thus, the "human imprint" (Broodbank, 2000, p.21) constituting islandscape must not be reduced to refugees, keeping in mind that refugee and non-refugee actors, as Appadurai (1998, p.33, 55) also argued, experience and interpret the formation of -scapes both differently and in the same way. Island societies are then defined as the sum of various non-isomorphic and non-representable horizons: they are "deeply perspectival constructs" (Appadurai, 1990, p.296).

What also became clear is that the island did not serve as the main explanatory pattern for all of an actor's movement. Ebrima Jawara, for example, had to move not because Malta was 'too small' or because it was 'an island', but due to financial hardship and the lack of a working contract. These aspects thus highly impacted his opportunities of position-taking within islandscape.

Further, we pointed out that islandscape is not just a matter of space, but also of time—and how individual actors perceive time within islandscape varies significantly. While Malta became a short-term transit destination thanks to its connectivities to some actors, the island rather constituted a moment of pause along refugees' journeys. Although Appadurai's suffix '-scape' refers to the highly fluid and dynamic nature of globalisation processes, we explicitly emphasise here that these moments of (forced) pausing are part of islandscape and its construction, and not its antithesis. The fact that certain individuals within islandscape have (temporarily) to stagnate does not mean that islandscape dissolves. Rather, it yet again comes to the fore that islands are embedded in infrastructures, discourses and ideas and their specific entanglements affect individual actors in different ways. By studying islandscapes empirically, researchers can come to know when and how the island is (made) (in-)significant. While the concept islandscape thus might first be misleading to see 'the island' as the fixed object in this term, it rather plays with the interplay of significance and insignificance of islands in contemporary global flows. At this point it is also important to emphasise that a one-to-one translation of Appadurai's -scape concept, in which he argues that the individual -scape is characterised by disjuncture from other -scapes, is not possible for current research on islandscape. Rather, we assume that -scapes overlap and form each other. Nevertheless, the combination of -scape and assemblage-thinking which is already present within Island Studies

makes it possible to address the tension between global and local and, rather, to look at which concrete, situated assemblages emerge within islandscape. In this sense, we propose to think of the island as islandscape from the very beginning of research, then to show how this islandscape is actually constituted and then to describe partial moments of stabilisation in terms of assemblages. This said, islandscape and the understanding of islands as assemblages are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. The concept of -scape and assemblage entail different understandings of temporality und durability. While no doubt remains that islandscape is fluid and constantly reshaped, the concept does not speak to its dissolving as much as assemblage does. Appadurai (1990, p.297) argues that "the warp of stability is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion," not meaning, however, that the respective -scapes completely disappear. Assemblages with reference to Paul Rabinow (2004), however, cease to exist and their very specific temporality, as Gisela Welz (2009, p.206, translated from German by the authors) has shown, is "the no more and not yet."

Even though there is agreement that these flows and relations exist, Elaine Stratford et al. (2011, p.125) remind us to avoid assuming *a priori* how they manifest. Thus, studying islandscape remains the task of every single researcher and, in this vein, we agree with Hong (2017, p.5) and Farbotko, Stratford and Lazrus (2015) that ethnographic, and other empirical, inductive approaches help to seriously engage with these situated and changing manifestations and meaning-makings.

Conclusion

Looking at our material has shown that practices and narratives which have a clear reference to the island indeed exist. However, it should also be acknowledged that similar practices and narratives can also be found in other and different non-insular contexts: refugees are also detained in the United States of America, young Germans likewise leave the country to study abroad and tourists can be found on the EU's mainland, too. With the concept of insularity lacking a focus on practices and human action, which has always shaped and is still shaping islands, we argued to capture these crucial moments of islandscape production to add to the debate on relationality in Island Studies. Surely one would also find empirical examples that could be summarised under insularity. But what we argued here is the importance of a differentiated and differentiating view on dynamics researched on islands to emphasise if, when and why the island really matters.

We do not set the island as the main unit of analysis. The island, consequently, is not the explanatory pattern for all the practices and narratives researched, but is important for contextualisation (King, 2018). Economist Percy Selwyn argued that islands are not useful categories in the context of social analysis, but "that the attempt to use them in this way is an illegitimate extension of biological to social categories of thinking" (1980, p.945). Whilst we do not fully agree with Selwyn—as we know that materiality does shape cultural practices and social thinking, too—we nevertheless believe that his statement is a helpful reminder not to fall into the trap of 'islandism'. To bring together the existing materiality and how it is produced and made use of by human actors, or, to return to Broodbank (2000), to highlight the "human imprint," we introduced islandscape as a useful approach to better grasp these dynamics.

King (2009) argued that doing island research might simply produce another layer of the colonial gaze islands have always been confronted with. This danger is of course existent

once researchers pursue 'islandism'. Viewing and researching islands against the backdrop of islandscape helps to unpack, as we argue, these different layers and enables researchers to analyse both their interwovenness and simultaneity. While research which only mentions the islands' characteristics in passing might prevent researchers from fostering 'islandism', it simultaneously prevents the possibility to accentuate the island's importance, or its insignificance. Simply ignoring the fact that islands (might) have a meaning to the actors engaging with or producing the island is consequently not the way out of 'islandism'.

As we have highlighted, islandscape must not be viewed as non-hierarchical, or as equally accessible to all human actors. Whilst refugees produce islandscape due to their arrivals in Malta, juridical and social processes limit their further participation in both using and producing islandscape. Rather, by producing Malta's islandscape through their movements and inherent pauses, this led to a situation in which the Maltese government further produced islandscape by using their arrival and stay in Malta—e.g., through threatened pushbacks to Libya or through denying disembarkation to the *Aquarius*. Tourists and guest workers certainly also do not have the same opportunities to participate in islandscape and they take different positions in this, or they are assigned to different positions. Some individuals thus produce islandscape by using their mobility, others by making use of their political or economic power. Islandscape, consequently, must not be understood as timeless and permanently existing but is rather contested, fluid and non-deterministic. By revealing that islandscape has different material and symbolic forms, functions and actors, this concept has clearly highlighted the limitations of 'island-centrality' accounts. This ubiquity of islandscape is, on the one hand, an important insight, yet, on the other, it points to the limitations of the approach: islandscape cannot, due to its diverse actors, meanings and functions, be understood in its full complexity. However, as we have shown, this approach is nevertheless helpful to avoid representing islands as closed, insular and unconnected. It simultaneously enables researchers to address the island's specifics in a sense of a "relational rootedness" (Pugh, 2016, p.1054), without fostering further 'islandism'. In this regard, the concept of islandscape as introduced here, is a contribution to the development and diversification of Island Studies and its practicality can only be determined by following engagements with it. Introducing concepts like islandscape to the interdisciplinary study of islands is important, because islands are part of networks and connections, whether they come into existence through trade, mobility, environmental change, migration or infrastructure. Furthermore, these relational concepts also help to challenge dichotomies between non-islanders and islanders, as "those who find themselves in between" (Grydehøj, 2017, p.12) are also considered in the debates.

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