

Mobility & Politics

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Series Editors: Martin Geiger, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada; Parvati Raghuram, Open University, Milton Keynes, UK; William Walters, Carleton University, Ottawa, Canada

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Human mobility, whatever its scale, is often controversial. Hence it carries with it the potential for politics. A core feature of mobility politics is the tension between the desire to maximise the social and economic benefits of migration and pressures to restrict movement. Transnational communities, global instability, advances in transportation and communication, and concepts of 'smart borders' and 'migration management' are just a few of the phenomena transforming the landscape of migration today. The tension between openness and restriction raises important questions about how different types of policy and politics come to life and influence mobility.

Mobility & Politics invites original, theoretically and empirically informed studies for academic and policy-oriented debates. Authors examine issues such as refugees and displacement, migration and citizenship, security and cross-border movements, (post-)colonialism and mobility, and transnational movements and cosmopolitics.

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Gianluca Solera

Citizen Activism and Mediterranean Identity

Beyond Eurocentrism

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Gianluca Solera
COSPE
Florence, Italy

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*To Genna, Pietro Ernesto and Yara, children of the sea
To Aleppo, our besieged body and our untamable soul*

SERIES EDITORS' FOREWORD

The phenomenon of migration within the Mediterranean has contributed to accelerated development of solidarity practices. In *Citizen Activism and Mediterranean Identity*, Gianluca Solera, a leading political activist of Italian origin, engages in what is described as participatory observation and analytical mobilization.

In order to connect the issue of refugees and migrants to trans-Mediterranean cooperation, Solera visits areas involved in social mobilization and joins citizens' initiatives of resistance. Drawing on his experience as an activist researcher, he outlines a tentative political vision for the region, where a shared culture of people's struggles for rights goes beyond national or cultural identities and instead builds solidarity amongst those resisting similar agents of oppression. Moreover, he problematises stereotypical views that ascribe a subaltern status to part of the Mediterranean region beyond Southern Europe and instead explores the commonalities between the two Mediterranean shores by engaging with citizens and activists and creating a dialogue about their collective concerns.

The volume also discusses the commonalities in people's response to these concerns. Techniques include the reclaiming of public space, social mobilization through networking, the condemnation of corruption and demands for opportunities, freedoms and democratic accountability. They offer a panoply of potential for expressive freedom across the Mediterranean. And by drawing these together through linked movements Solera argues for a new narrative about the Mediterranean. A narrative going beyond the divisive representations of the region that often associate it only with terrorism, instability and turmoil, and advocating instead for the Mediterranean as a common destiny.

The cycle of antiterrorism measures often leads to social unrest due to the restriction of democratic rights and freedoms, including mobility rights. By presenting counter-hegemonic narratives, *Citizen Activism and Mediterranean Identity* demonstrates how trans-Mediterranean networks can be used to deconstruct inaccurate portrayals of the Mediterranean by describing movements in terms of a shared space of social, cultural and political interactions. Leading an intercultural struggle involves gathering people from different origins, cultures and traditions to address common political, economic and social challenges. The volume contributes to *Mobility & Politics* by highlighting some of the ways in which migration will contribute to wider, more inclusive movements that incorporate an array of values and interests.

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PREFACE

This book is the fruit of a long road I took early in 2011. Since then, after years working in European politics and Euro-Med dialogue, I started a journey that resulted in a first extensive narrative reportage named *Riscatto mediterraneo* (2013), and ended with this condensed and more reflective volume drawing lessons from activism practices, and pointing out a tentative political vision for the region. Through travels, personal contacts, I visited the spots of social mobilization and rebellion against unjust rulers and rules around the Mediterranean, carrying out interviews and joining citizens' initiatives or acts of resistance, in a process of participatory observation and analytical mobilization, if I might say so. It was an experience of participatory action research, where the protagonists of my narration have contributed to debating the issue of Mediterranean identity, and on the same time have been confronted with the necessity to look beyond their own constituencies or struggle fields. Along this journey, I have tried to substantiate or question my observations with relevant academic literature, or to expose the book's political message turning to literary inspiration. Being an activist researcher means to me sharing militant acts and exploring ways of narrating them, so as to be comparable in a scientific context, and transformative in a political one. Giving a Mediterranean perspective to activism as an Italian implies, in fact, the risk of imposing a political utopia as a Southern European projection, thus reinforcing, consciously or unconsciously, stereotypical views that entail a subaltern status for the rest of the Mediterranean region. I have therefore tried, in my research, to remain steadfast in both exploring commonalities between the two shores, and bringing to constant dialogue their citizens and activists around issues and views of a common destiny put forward in the book.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to all those who supported me in writing this book on the Mediterranean. The list is long, and includes activists, researchers, artists, thinkers and civil society practitioners I met over the last few years and who accompanied me during the writing of the earlier Italian-language publication and then of this volume. Besides giving me information and conveying their comments, many of them have been the protagonists of a new idea of citizenship in the region, and have risked their life for that. Some died, such as Abdullah al-Yasin, some disappeared, such as Father Paolo Dall'Oglio, and others are currently in jail, like my friend Ismail al-Iskandarani. Special thanks go to Nicos Trimikliniotis who encouraged me to publish with Palgrave Macmillan. The last thought goes to my three sons, from whom I took too much time away to complete this work. I owe them an immense debt of love.

FORMAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This volume is based on a book originally published in Italian under the title *Riscatto mediterraneo* (2013) by Nuova Dimensione (<http://www.nuova-dimensione.it>); contacts: ufficio.stampa@nuova-dimensione.it).

NOTE ON ARAB NOUNS AND EXPRESSIONS

Arab proper nouns of persons and places have been romanized using the most common forms available in English literature. Sentences and book titles have been transliterated to indicate their pronunciation.

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