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Working group proposal: "Migrant protests and political mobilization in North Africa and the Mediterranean: spaces, infrastructures, and embodied experiences of migrant political agency"

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Discussant: tbc

Migrant and refugee political mobilization is attracting growing academic attention. According to Quadrelli (2005) a shift has occurred since 2005 in migrant and refugee collective actions: from a self-destructive, self-mutilating model of protests (migrants who sewed their mouths in identification-and-expulsion camps, or burned their fingers to avoid official identification by Italian authorities in Lampedusa, for example), to more politicized, organized struggles for human rights and recognition. This shift has been of pivotal importance insofar as to draw attention on the migrants' capacity of organizing protests and to stand out as subjects, in contrast to the pervasive de-subjectivization of media representations. At a global level, the rise of 'no borders' movements has led critical scholars to consider the political mobilization of migrants as an important element of contemporary border regimes (Tyler and Marciniak, 2013). As a consequence, migrant-led struggles against detention, deportation and other forms of border enforcement or confinement within the European space have been largely explored – the case of the Calais 'camps' being perhaps the most paradigmatic example. This body of work has emphasized the spread of different kind of actions and mobilizations, going from the simplest demands concerning everyday needs to the formal request for political rights inside migrants and refugees' camps. In this regard, an important shift in the conception of the refugee camp is taking place in the literature. Although camps are generally intended as tools for controlling migration flows (Blanchard and Rodier, 2003) and managing "unwelcomed (o undesirable?) people" (Agier, 2008), by keeping them outside the social and political order, it is increasingly recognized how they can also become political spaces (Bernardot, 2008; Ramadan 2013; Sigona 2015). In this sense, camps are ambivalent places, mixing confinement and control with community life, socialisation and, in some cases, overt mobilization (Agier, 2014).

Mobilizing theoretical tools spanning 'political society' (Moulin and Nyers 2007), 'mobile commons' (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2008), and performativity (Rivetti 2013), research on migrant political mobilization has mostly focus on diasporic communities within Western societies, or on border struggles that take place at the European periphery. Protests and experiences of autonomous organizing by migrants and refugees along the 'externalized Southern European frontier' on the other hand, remain far less explored. Similarly, significant less attention is devoted to the ways in which migrant and refugee political mobilization and autonomous organizing intersect with broader struggles for democracy, human and social rights, and against austerity in the Mediterranean region. Yet experiences like the Mustapha Mahmoud protests in Cairo in 2005, the self-organized camp set up by the refugees after the dismantlement of UNHCR operations in Choucha, Tunisia, in 2013, the contested regularization campaign started in Morocco in 2014, and refugees and migrant workers' mobilizations in different rural and urban areas of Northern Italy highlight the need for a deeper understanding of these phenomena.

This panel aims to bring together analyses of migrant and refugee political mobilization in the MENA and Mediterranean regions which encompass a variety of theoretical and empirical perspectives, as well as researchers from various disciplinary backgrounds. We are interested in particular in analyses of the *material, spatial and embodied* dynamics that allow migrant and refugee political mobilization to emerge. Responding to the call of recent research on post-humanism and new materialism in anthropology, political geography and border studies (see, among others, Squire 2014) we move from a conception of political agency as a *material practice* and an experience of *embodied presence,* which results from relational processes embedded in locality - hence our attention to the dimension of the

camp/encampment, the neighbourhood etc. – and encompasses both human and infrastructural elements. We look at the role of the built environment, of everyday practices of social reproduction, and of embodied, localized 'presence' in the construction of migrant political belonging. We consider these as emerging forms of *non-representational politics* that might – or might not - evolve into more organized and explicit political movements, and we are interested in understanding, from an ethnographic perspective, how these dynamics unfold.

Possible topics include, but are by no means not limited to:

- Dynamics and spatialities of migrant and refugee 'protest camps': empirical analyses of their architecture, logistics, infrastructures and of the way in which space are appropriated and negotiated by migrants (Feigenbaum and Frenzel 2013).

- Humanitarian aid and migrant and refugee political organization: what is the relation between self-organized, informal encampments and camps managed by international humanitarian organizations? The camp as 'assemblage' (Ramadan 2013). Can 'the camp' become a space of 'makeshift citizenship' (Sigona 2015)?

- Labour struggles and alternative experiences of unionization: what makes them possible, particularly in rural/marginal areas? What characterizes relations with hosting societies in this context? How are spaces and materialities used in the context of migrant labour struggles (strikes, occupations etc.)? Analyses of conflicts/diverging narratives between the NGO and civil world and migrants own self-perceptions and representations.

- Struggles for residence and mobility rights, particularly in the context of regularization or deportation campaigns. What is the role of migrant bodies in struggle against deportation in particular? Can we conceptualize "presence" as political in these contexts?

- Migrant struggles for housing: what is the political significance of home-making practices and the built environment for political mobilization?

- New theoretical and methodological perspectives on 'autonomy' in migration studies, in particular: what is the role of infrastructures (for instance, telecommunications, the built environment, symbolic or culturally significant objects etc.) and materialities in the emergence of migrant political mobilization? What is the role of affect and embodiment?

- Political mobilization of migrants vis-a-vis the "externalization" and "de-responsibilization" of European migration policies? (Rodier, 2006)

- Media representations of migrants' revolts and protests: how do the security and humanitarian discourse intersect in media and policy representation? Militarization and securitization as performative utterances (Austin, 1962) in response to migrants' quests for rights. How are migrant protests and revolts represented in the pervasive spectacularization of emergency situations (e.g. Lampedusa, see Cuttitta 2014)?

Papers' description

Cristina Brovia, PhD candidate, University of Turin and Universite' Paris 1-Panthéon Sorbonne

"Control and mobilizations in migrant seasonal workers' camps. The case of Saluzzo (Northern Italy)"
In Italy as in most Southern European countries intensive-agriculture areas with a significant need for seasonal workforce are characterised today by the prevalence of migrant labour, often working and living in precarious conditions. The question of housing during the agricultural season is a major concern not only for workers and employers, but also for rural communities dealing periodically with large inflows of migrant workers. In many regions of intensive agriculture in Europe, precarious

settlements have spread, including squats, encampments and self-constructed shacks. In some areas, as in the agricultural district of Saluzzo (North of Italy) unauthorized settlements have been progressively replaced by institutionalized camps managed by humanitarian or employers' organisations with the contribution of local administrations. On the one hand, these camps provide a decent standard of services and hygiene and allow the maintaining of a reserve of available labour during the season, while facilitating the confinement and the control of workers, then their evacuation when they are no longer needed. On the other hand, the co-presence of hundreds of people in specific and confined spaces, sharing similar paths and conditions, can also facilitate forms of socialisation and collective mobilization (Hmed, 2009). Moving from these observations, this paper aims to show that this sort of camps can be at the same time an efficient instrument of control and a powerful vehicle of a common identification, resulting sometimes in different kind of collective actions. In this sense, we will then try to question how the geographically confined space of camps can influence the raise, the development and the results of these mobilizations (Auyero, 2005).

Giuseppe Grimaldi, Phd candidate in Social and Cultural Anthropology, University of Milan-Bicocca

We are all on that ship: refugee mobilization and social belonging in Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora

Nowadays, social belonging is decreasing in multiple and unexpected ways. As a total social fact, the journey of refugees towards 'Fortress Europe' may activate new imaginaries and new everyday practices which, at first glance, might be seen as totally disconnected from the experience of forced migration. By analyzing the neighborhood of Porta Venezia, the social hub of the Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora in Milan, the purpose of this contribution is to investigate the social value of the mobilization run by Italian young people of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins following the shipwreck of October the 3rd, 2013, in Lampedusa. The organization of a parade to commemorate the victims – who were mostly of Eritrean nationality - mixed media flows of the Italian public discourse, transnational imaginaries and symbols, (e.g. global symbols of mourning like lighted candles) and imagined affiliation to the refugee community based on common origins (the main slogan of the march was: *we are all on that ship*), revealing the hybrid belonging of Ethiopian and Eritrean second generations. The performative nature of the mobilization went beyond a mere commemorative parade, challenging the dynamics of social signification in the diasporic social field of Porta Venezia. As a matter of fact, most of the elders within the community boycotted the organization of the parade. The mobilization marked the entrance of the young in the social and political space of the neighborhood, bringing new cultural practices, new political affiliations and new patterns of belonging that opened an intergenerational gap with the first generation of the diaspora. The analysis of refugee political mobilization thus offers a perspective from which to enquire the contemporary processes of belonging reproduction.

Anitta Kynsilehto, senior researcher, Tampere Peace Research Institute, University of Tampere (Finland).

Politics of presence, politics of representation: on the making of new migration praxis in Morocco

The new migration approach, announced by the King Mohammed VI in September 2013 and the ensuing regularization campaign over the course of the following year for irregularly residing migrants, coupled with the possibility for migrants' associations to officialize their existence are essential components of changing migratory landscape in Morocco. However, many aspects have remained the same, such as the criminalization of migrants residing in areas close to the Spanish borders that translates into diverse forms of violence targeting in particular, yet not solely, those present at these border areas. This paper draws on my on-going ethnographic research on mobilities and solidarities across and around the Mediterranean Sea. It focuses on challenges in accounting for a rapid social change where the nascent representation of issues related to migrant lives by migrants themselves does not always enter into a harmony with critical civil society organisations both nationally and transnationally. By charting diversely positioned individuals' and groups' analysis of the changing migratory landscape in Morocco, it asks how different forms of migrant presence are accounted for in

the representation of migrant voices. Central questions, alongside this multivocality and ownership of voice, are those concerning multiple loyalties and solidarities at play in research praxis that entwines more activist-oriented practices.

Elisa Pascucci, postdoctoral researcher, RELATE CoE, University of Tampere (Finland).

"Refugee protest camps: material infrastructures and migrant political mobilization in Cairo"

Recent research has identified protest camps as an emerging field of social movement research (Frenzel et al. 2013, forthcoming). This body of work identifies in the material and spatial practices that characterise protest camps – like living together in shared spaces, building makeshift beds, engaging in reproductive and care work, organizing political action through slogans, banners, marches and sit-ins etc, – as politically significant. Through them, it is argued, a particular form of non-representational politics is articulated, one where affective atmospheres and infrastructures play an essential role. Moving from such a perspective, the paper focuses on two protest camps organized in by Sudanese and Ethiopian refugees in Cairo in 2005 and 2013, with the aim of contesting the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) policies. Through the analysis of both grey literature and interviews with migrants that took part in the protests, the paper argues that the refugees' experience of building self-sustaining infrastructures in the protest camps – where large group of migrants lived for several months – worked to re-appropriate and contest the 'governmentality of care' that characterizes humanitarianism, exposing at the same time its growing inadequacies. The conclusion examines some of the implication of the analysis for the study of refugee and migrant protests, particularly in relation to questions of materiality, autonomy, and humanitarian governance.

Marta Scaglioni, University of Bayreuth and University of Milan-Bicocca

A self-organized refugee experience: the camp of Choucha and the political and social engagement of refugees fleeing 2011 Libya

Over the last few years, the growing interest in migration across the Southern European border has led to scarce academic and media attention towards migratory movements that take place within North-Africa. As a result, the consequences of 'border externalization' processes, whereby the European Union outsources to third countries in the MENA region significant parts of its border patrolling and migration management operations, remain underexplored, in spite of the constant violations of human rights these extra-European countries perpetrate. In the context of these processes of de-responsibilization of European migration policies (Rodier, 2006), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) is also carrying out asylum procedures in third countries, in some cases resulting in practices of confinement far from the Western public scrutiny.

The Libyan unrest of 2011 caused a large inflow of migrants into neighbouring countries, triggering a humanitarian crisis and a political and diplomatic impasse that put Sub-Saharan migrants particularly at risk. Contrary to widespread media narratives of 'invasion', less than 30,000 refugees landed on the Italian shores, while nearly one million people fled violence and harassment in Libya, and were sheltered mostly in Tunisia and Egypt.

The flow of asylum-seekers from Libya to Tunisia involved primarily the Governorate of Medenine, a rural and deeply conservative area where long-standing social structures maintain static hierarchies, in a country in which international observers report systematic violations of basic human rights. Choucha, a UNHCR refugee camp created 7 km away from the frontier outpost of Ras Jedir, was opened in 2011 and dismantled officially in 2013, after the closure of all procedures asking the status of refugee of refugee status determination. However, as of 2015 nearly 70 persons still occupy the former Choucha camp, living in a legal vacuum, and with limited social, economic, and psychological resources. Nonetheless, the refugees' human identity, deconstructed institutionally, has been

reaffirmed by the subjects themselves, who organize collectively their daily lives and engage in an embryonic yet sustained political mobilization, forging contacts with European advocacy groups and institutional subjects. This paper aims at analyzing the transformation of the imposed anomie of the Choucha camp into a self-constructed, bottom-up political and social space.

Publication plans:

The selected papers will be considered for publication in a special issue in a peer-reviewed academic journal. Possible outlets include *Fennia*, and the *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*.

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