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Unframing and Reframing Mediterranean Spaces and Identities

By G. Summerfield and R. Pollicino, Leiden: Brill, 2023. ISBN: [978-9-00-467886-6](#)Laura Restuccia 

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In the last 20 years, the Mediterranean has regained the interest of academicians and related aficionados (see Horden and Purcell [2000](#)). We have witnessed publications from historians, political scientists, antiquity and religion scholars, with some sporadic volumes on arts and literature (see A. Fabris, A. Goeschl, and S. Schneider [2022](#)). Scholars have also questioned the teaching of the Mediterranean in the classroom, tackling methods and synergies from area studies or 'systematic regionalism', trying to hone the commonalities and differences to explain a larger scope. We have also seen a growth in institutional and organizational interest, with more journals coming to the fore and academic programmes such as certificates, minors and majors focused on Mediterranean awareness. All in all, these are all individual efforts that do not consider the polyhedric region in a polyhedric fashion. The praiseworthy (and ambitious) goal of the editors and contributors of *Unframing and Reframing Mediterranean Spaces and Identities* is to do just this.

As part of the Brill's series Cultural Interactions in the Mediterranean, created with the aim to delight the readers with cross-regional and multidisciplinary approaches about the Mediterranean, the volume opens with an assessment of Mediterranean Studies and a pledge: to provide more interdisciplinary and humanistic inquiries and approaches, thus to adopt Franco Cassano's more holistic and innovative *alternativa mediterranea*, a consideration (and reconsideration) of a world of multiple cultures that struggle but also learn from the experience of living together and/or in conflict, acknowledging thus a Mediterranean as a space of movement. The 14 chapters, penned by international scholars in many fields of study (social sciences, literature, art, philosophy), are herein aligned, centring their analyses on certain geographical areas, such as Spain, Sicily, Malta and France, but never losing sight of the *fil rouge* of the volume and of how the cultures and events discussed have been the direct results of such hybridity and challenge. They 'seek to restimulate interest and provide a more cohesive cultural study of the area; they take on full

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Readers are pleasantly surprised by the first essay, by Antonio Cecere, on Mediterranean reason, where the author reveals the biggest secret of Mediterranean studies: the ongoing dialog among contemporary philosophers about Mediterraneity, about a Mediterranean critical thought. The author asserts that this is not a new concept but a 'shared tradition'— One that, unfortunately, has not been divulged within the context of Mediterranean Studies, with philosophers been almost excluded thus far from this scholarly field. Another innovative essay is the one authored by Marco Pioli. Although Boll and Licata analyse Hispanic realities, Pioli writes about Spain and the Mediterranean through Sicily, a 'metaphor for the modern world' (117), thanks to the work of Leonardo Sciascia. Sicily is the focus of five other essays, one by M. Sorbello, focused on gastro-tourism; one by E. Frasca, on marriage annulments in the 19th century; one by V. Grasso, on decorative arts of the 12th century; one by S. Hafez on the Madonna delle Milizie and its annual celebration in the town of Scicli; and the last one by G. Serrantino, on southern clientelism, and more specifically on Catania as a case study. It is no surprise that these authors have been attentive to Sicily, as the largest island of the Mediterranean, at the crossroads of multiple cultures and languages, provides the perfect microcosm to analyse and understand this complex region.

Chapters 4, 7, 12 and 13 draw the readers' attention to equally interesting topics such as representations of Muslim otherness in public feasts in early modern Malta (Tagliaferri), one of the most celebrated authors of our last years, Neapolitan Elena Ferrante and her female voices (Cauchi-Santoro), cooperatives from 1848 to 1900 (Boscarello) and welfare policies in Italy and Spain, during the interwar period (Serina). The volume closes with a challenge advanced by R. Pollicino about the 'borders' and 'memberships' of the Mediterranean. Conscious of the considerable migratory movements, the author invites the readers to be more inclusive and understanding of the impact of these novel movements. Through the use and analysis of art, this concluding essay focuses on the Ubuntu philosophy ('I am because you are'), emphasizing a universal bond of sharing, an interdependence of individuals as expansion of the Mediterranean space in contemporary times.

Unframing and Reframing Mediterranean Spaces and Identities is a must read. It is relevant, well-written, engaging and a necessary tool for anyone who teaches or studies the Mediterranean. It is a wonderful opportunity to see this exciting area of studies through a multiplicity of lenses and to hopefully incentivize more scholarship in this field, with a more contemporary focus.

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