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Editoriale

- 6 *Mediterranei interni*
Mariavaleria Mininni

Rivolte

- 9 *Territori antagonisti mediterranei*
Roberto De Angelis
- 13 *Space and Protest in the Arab City*
Silvia Gugu

Migrazioni

- 16 *«Che il Mediterraneo sia»*
Paola Piscitelli
- 20 *Ci siamo dentro tutti in questo mare*
Elena Granata

Storie

- 23 *Una storia del Mediterraneo,
mare delle diversità*
Marco Meriggi
- 26 *Un mare popolato di parole*
Francesca Cogni

Geografie

- 35 *Mediterraneo, spazio incongruo*
Matteo Goldstein Bolocan

Prima Colonna

Prima colonna

Non c'è un errore sulla pagina di copertina. Abbiamo chiamato (ibimed) questo numero perché ce lo suggerisce l'argomento al quale è dedicato: il Mediterraneo. Da quando guerre e carestie fanno fuggire milioni di diseredati dall'Africa e dall'Asia in cerca di una vita dignitosa, il Mediterraneo è al centro del dibattito pubblico in quanto porta d'accesso all'Europa. Noi troviamo sbagliato tuttavia ridurre il grande mare – com'è tornato a chiamarlo David Abulafia – alla frontiera tra convivenza pacifica da una parte e insicurezza estrema dall'altra. Non sono mondi estranei quelli che affacciano sul Mediterraneo. Secoli e secoli di relazioni ininterrotte hanno costruito paesaggi, storie, economie e geografie comuni ben al di là delle contingenze. Le letture contenute in questo numero rendono in parte conto dei legami profondi e molteplici tra le sponde e i rispettivi entroterra, senza dimenticare il dramma dei migranti che ogni giorno si ripete nelle acque, nei porti e nei centri di detenzione. Nel disegno originale di Francesca Cogni, scelto per la copertina, abbiamo sostituito la mano della persona che affoga nel mare con la *main ouverte* di Le Corbusier, aperta per ricevere e per donare i beni della terra, perché è quel pensiero cosmopolita che rischia di soccombere insieme al migrante.

La scelta di fare un numero tematico ci ha permesso, inoltre, di selezionare assai più liberamente le opere da recensire: a prescindere dal registro scientifico o narrativo; dalla forma testuale, disegnata o filmica; dalle appartenenze disciplinari. I lettori trovano una recensione che offre parole a un libro interamente disegnato da Armin Greder e un'altra che offre immagini a un libro interamente scritto da Alessandro Vanoli. Una rinnovata cultura mediterranea ha bisogno della contaminazione fertile di luoghi, discorsi e iconografie.

L.G.

Economie

- 38 *Agriculture méditerranéenne: une vision d'ensemble morcelée*
Jean-Baptiste Geissler

Paesaggi

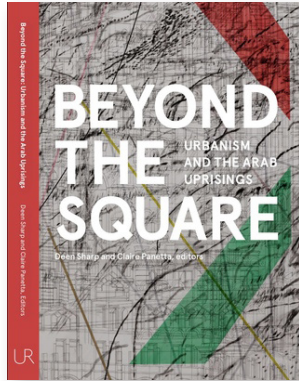
- 41 *Viaggio nella patria dei miti. Andata e ritorno*
Massimo Angrilli
- 44 *Che cos'è il Mediterraneo?*
Roberto Dulio

Diario fotografico

- 46 *Learning from Lampedusa*

Silvia Gugu

Space and Protest in the Arab City



Deen Sharp and Claire Panetta (eds.)
Beyond the Square:
Urbanism and the Arab Uprisings
 Terreform, New York 2016
 pp. 233, \$ 28

The spatial turn in social sciences has produced innumerable revelations on a range of topics. By counterbalancing the ontological and epistemological biases specific to historicism, which privileged timelines and events, it allows for a better understanding of the way land use and geographical position shape human agency. An editorial project that attempts to explore the spatial relationships at play in the Arab uprisings – or lack thereof – in the Mediterranean space sounds then like a justified and promising enterprise. Edited by Deen Sharp and Claire Panetta, the book highlights the urban spatial dynamics in cities marked by the mass protests that have affected the Arab region since December 2010, as well as in cities that remained peripheral to this upheaval.

Classic theories of both conventional political behavior as well as of social movements and protests abound in spatial determinants, which include cleavages between center and periphery, urban and rural, affluent and poor zip codes. Sharp and Panetta's project does not openly draw on these theories. Aiming for a theoretically generative approach, their project starts from a *dérive* through spaces

'beyond the square', that is, out of the regular focus of the uprisings in Tahrir Square in Cairo, Taksim Square and Gezi Park in Istanbul, or Bourguiba Avenue in Tunis etc., and deliberately away from the established literature that examined them. The volume is made up of nine essays and a graphic work, all anticipated by a foreword by Sharp and Panetta. The first group of papers examines places where uprisings failed to erupt: Algiers, Amman, and Kufr Aqab between Ramallah and Jerusalem. The second part is dedicated to locations where they did: Cairo, Istanbul, the various locations in Syria, Manama and Tehran in the Gulf. Based on a meta-analysis of the shared themes emerging from the ten essays, Sharp and Panetta propose an interpretation of the relationship between the urban and protests loosely structured around three vectors: 1) sociospatial relations, 2) sociospatial fragmentation, 3) neoliberal urbanism and urban development.

To better understand the project, it is worth opening a parenthesis about the book's editors. Both are doctoral candidates at the CUNY Graduate Center in New York. Deen Sharp is specializing in the geography of the Arab world in the Earth and Environmental Sciences Program, after a career in journalism; Claire Panetta in anthropology, with a focus on the protection of the Egyptian architectural heritage. The explorations set forth in their book align neatly with the interests pursued by the publisher, Terreform - Center for Advanced Urban Research, in their UR (Urban Research) collection. A book series «devoted to speculation about the condition and future of the city», aimed at encouraging «the most vigorous debate», UR Books are curated by architect Michael Sorkin as editor in chief, with an advisory board that includes other well-known architectural professionals such as Thom Mayne of Morphosis Architects, landscape architect Walter Hood, Teddy Cruz of Estudio Teddy Cruz and so on. The focus on urban forms and dynamics may thus be at the heart

of the project as the nexus of the interests that animate both editors and publishers.

The first part of the book can be described as an attempt to explain, through spatial lenses, why certain countries failed to erupt in protest during the Arab spring events. In the first essay, Ed McAllister draws on ethnographic fieldwork in the Bab el-Oued neighborhood of Algiers to argue that social memories of the past created expectations related to economic equality rather than collective ownership of institutions, which would explain why social unrest in Algeria is limited to small protests over economic issues rather than large political upheaval. Bab el-Oued encapsulates this reality at the neighborhood scale, where people longed «for a society regulated by traditional forms of morality and social connection» (p. 37) as opposed to the fragmented social environment that emerged from past internal conflicts. The second essay, by Helga Tawil-Souri, describes the conditions of (urban) spatial exclusion in Kufr'Aqab, which has been progressively appropriated by Jerusalem but is still on the Palestinian side of the dividing wall, as a suburb of Ramallah, yet is not benefitting from services and infrastructure from either city. This situation keeps people in a state of disempowerment and political disengagement by denying them access to basic infrastructure and resources. The author concludes that the conditions of social fragmentation that have enabled the existence of such an 'exopolis' in Palestine are also the ones standing in the way of a political uprising. Aseel Sawalha contributes a third piece, which depicts the gentrification process of Jabal al-Weibdeh in East Amman. He suggests that neoliberal policies have channeled the energies of refugees into a cosmopolite urban identity, exemplified by the increased featuring of Syrian and Iraqi artists by new local galleries.

In the second group of essays, we are confronted to places that bred protest movements. The first piece, by Azam Khatam, shows how protests and the Green movement in Tehran mobilized the symbolic capital of historic Enghelab Street, to suggest allegiance to the 1979 Revolution. At the same time, it also spilled over to another street in order to engage new segments of the population and to reflect new social and political aims. We are

then presented with the brief graphic interlude of Julie Mehretu, *Mogamma (a painting in four parts) and Cairo*, which is left to speak for itself. Further on, Deen Sharp uses urban destruction in Syria to illustrate and expand the concept of urbicide. He shows how, empirically, urbicide is not limited to the simple destruction or construction of the urban environment in order to impose a homogeneous political or ethnic arrangement, but also to interim processes that may entail for example the provision or withholding of infrastructure. He further expands the concept 'volumetrically', to take into consideration the space above and beneath the planimetric definition of an area on a map – such as the control of aerial space or, in Syria, the use of the subterranean shelters by the resistance. The following essay, signed with two pseudonyms, G. Ollamh and C. Lanthier, narrates and analyzes the interplay between center and periphery in the Manama protests in Bahrain. Duygu Parmaksizoglu continues this theme by exploring the way in which the protests in the central Gezi park of Istanbul have impacted existing urban struggles in the peripheral neighborhood of Fikirtepe, one of Istanbul's old informal areas. A penultimate piece by Khaled Adham interprets two science fiction novels from 2007-2009 and the Cairo Vision 2050 plan as proof that a revolt had been brewing for a long time before protests erupted in Cairo in 2010. The author contends that, when political contestation is censored in public spaces, it bubbles up in parallel culturally produced spaces such as literature or film, and that in Egypt this phenomenon resulted in a wave of subversive publications that denounced the future of the country as dystopian. Moreover, leaked visions of the government sponsored Cairo Vision 2050 plan matched their anticipations, thus turning their premonitory speculations into plausible concerns that articulated «the sociospatial roots of the revolution» (p. 201). Finally, Susana Galán provides an inventory of anti-harassment tactics mobilized by the community in Cairo to protect women who participated in the protests after 2011 and to encourage them to maintain their presence in the public space.

Drawing on these essays, Sharp and Panetta use the foreword to identify the emerging common threads that linked urban places and the Arab

uprisings. Their meta-analysis suggests three main conceptual categories that fit the spatial conditions relevant to the protests: sociospatial relations, sociospatial fragmentation, and neoliberal urban development. They call for a «broad temporal, spatial and geographical framework» in order to «clarify the fluidity and diversity of the spatial practices that shaped, informed, and/or were born out of the uprisings» (p. 21).

The book leaves us with beautifully, vividly written and painted glimpses into the sociospatial dynamics of the Arab cities, whether related to protests or not. However, in the absence of a more precise preliminary *décompage* and control to tie them together, the sense fails to emerge from the kaleidoscopic blur of fluid, unstable relationships observed. The meta-analysis is thus constrained to resort to generic categories that could emerge from anything, anywhere.

