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TITOLO: A geography of Contentious Politics: Investigating the spatial dimensions of social mobilization

PROPONENTI: - Ruth Hanau Santini
- Irene Costantini

ABSTRACT:

Today, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) is an arena where peaceful and wartime political orders experience contention, various forms of mobilization and counter-mobilization, reassertion of state control through cooptation but more often repression appears as an example of the possibilities and shortcomings of both contentious action and regime resilience. While Tunisia stands as standard-bearer of a still fragile transition to democracy, Egypt succumbed to the heavy-hand of a martial regime. Civil war in Libya, regional war in Yemen and globalised war in Syria keep people hostage of a cycle of violence generating a spiral of refugees. In Tunisia, Morocco, but also Lebanon in the Levant and Iraq in the Gulf, varying shapes of contentious politics have had to adapt and respond to changing circumstances: democratic backsliding, a return to authoritarianism, forms of limited statehood, political violence and conflict.

Since 2010/11, scholarship on contentious politics in the MENA region have proposed a renewed reflection on regional political economy structures as well as on the contentious agents erupting in its midst. While these studies have certainly improved our understanding of the Arab uprisings and their aftermath, some aspects remain understudied. This panel focuses on the spatial dimensions of contentious politics in the MENA region, before and after the 2010-2011 uprisings, but looking at the geography of protests beyond its pure territoriality dimension.

A geography of contentious politics in the MENA region can contribute to unpack often unproblematized concepts, foremost, the state and its boundaries by questioning the territoriality of social mobilization and state responses to it; it can critically assess how contentious politics can both create new political spaces as well as strengthen existing ones; it questions the heterarchical production of authority and attempts at countering or reforming it from below; it investigates how space is represented in contentious politics; and finally, it invites to reflect on constructed ideas of the 'national' by focusing on the 'local' or transnational geographic dimension of contentious collective action.

The panel seeks original papers that elaborate on the spatial dimension of contentious politics and critically read and problematize the geography of multiple forms of social mobilization. Sound-methodological and theoretical-informed contribution are invited from all relevant fields (such as Political Science, International Relations, Geography, Sociology, Anthropology, Area Studies, etc) which can contribute to shed light on spatial dynamics of contentious politics before, during and after the Arab uprisings of 2010/11.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DELLE PROPONENTI:

Ruth Hanau Santini is Senior Assistant Professor of Politics and International Relations at Università L'Orientale, Naples. She has previously worked at Johns Hopkins University in Bologna, The Brookings Institution in Washington DC, and was Visiting Fellow at SWP in Berlin, CEPS in Brussels, the University of Warwick and the University of Birmingham. She has recently published *Limited statehood in postrevolutionary Tunisia. Citizenship, economy, security*, with Palgrave.

Irene Costantini is Postdoc researcher in Politics and International Relations at Università L'Orientale, Naples. She was previously Research Fellow at the Middle East Research Institute (MERI) in Erbil and at the University of York, UK. She holds her PhD from the University of Trento. She has recently published *Statebuilding in the Middle East and North Africa: the after of regime change*, with Routledge.