

XIV Convegno SeSaMO

PERCORSI DI RESISTENZA IN MEDIO ORIENTE E NORD AFRICA

Università degli Studi di Torino

31 gennaio – 2 febbraio 2019



SOCIETÀ PER GLI STUDI SUL MEDIO ORIENTE

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.

PAPERS:

1. Alex Mahoudeau

TITLE OF THE PAPER: MANIFESTING POLITICS THROUGH PLACE: URBAN PROBLEMS IN THE PALESTINIAN REFUGEE CAMPS OF BEIRUT

ABSTRACT:

The concept of “place” as conceived in critical and humanistic geography has been one of the main interests in the study of the spatial dimension of mobilisations: while for some authors, place appears as a source of contention, for others it can be a threat to the upscaling of social movements and their claims. Nonetheless, if many studies have shown that contention over specific places is a frequent source of politicisation and mobilisation, the processes through which these happen have tended to be overlooked and reduced to arguments either on urban “needs” or on the identification of social groups to places. Cases in which politicising place fails have in particular been a blind spot for a part of the literature. In this presentation, I inspire myself from the work of the French pragmatic school in sociology in social movement theory, and particularly the concept of “sensitising devices”, to show how politicisation occurs not mechanically, but as a series of trials and denunciations related to a context. To do so, I will rely on nine months of fieldwork in the Palestinian camps of Beirut, discussing how local activists employed the materiality of the camps as devices to thematise and denounce urban problems. I will show how these categories were contested and legitimised by the activists, and employed to confront what they conceived as the authority, in a situation in which they anticipated the expression of political conflict to be impossible based on previous experiences.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

(50 words max for each profile, font: calibri 10)

A Postdoctoral Fellow at Université Paris-Est, I completed my PhD in Political Science at King's College London's in April 2018.

My thesis interrogated the relationship between space and mobilisations in the Palestinian refugee camps of Beirut, bringing together Social Movement Studies and Human Geography.

My research focuses on the spatial dimension of social movements and collective action.

2. Ripensare i conflitti sociali e politici nel Maghreb in una prospettiva di territorialità : *spazi locali, urbanità e scale territoriali globali*

Raffaele Cattedra

ABSTRACT:

La storia recente dei paesi del Maghreb (considerando il termine nell'accezione francese ristretta: Algeria, Tunisia, Marocco), è segnata ciclicamente da momenti, da "luoghi" e da movimenti di contestazione sociale, di rivendicazione politica o civile, di ribellione: insomma di conflitto e di messa in discussione del potere politico.

Già prima dei movimenti contestatari, delle ribellioni e delle Rivoluzioni, 2011 nonché degli effetti del post-2011, possiamo ricordare i primi anni 80 del secolo scorso avevano già visto irrompere, soprattutto sulla scena urbana, importanti movimenti di rivendicazione e episodi di rivolta nei tre paesi. Tuttavia, nello studio di questi fenomeni, la questione relativa alla territorialità delle mobilitazioni sociali è stata spesso poco trattata o omessa. In questo contributo s'intende proporre un quadro lettura per ragionare sul ruolo delle spazialità e delle territorialità proprie delle rivolte e del conflitto, nel contesto del Maghreb, considerandole per quanto possibile nel loro intreccio con la questione della scala territoriale, simbolica e politica di riferimento e di significazione (per brevità locale, urbana nazionale, globale...). Saranno trattati esempi relativi a :- spazi pubblici urbani della rivolta o della rivendicazione (piazze, grandi arterie urbane, giardini, Parlamento, Ministeri); - contesti locali più larghi di espressione della contestazione (quartieri urbani marginali o centrali, bidonvilles, piccoli centri rurali, città medie, grandi metropoli, Capitali.. etc.; - territori regionali caratterizzati dalla rivendicazione (etnica, culturale, politica) che coinvolge la dimensione culturale, linguistica e identitario (la Kabilya, il Rif, il Sahara Occidentale...). Sullo sfondo la rete di interconnessione globale (e virtuale) di internet e dei social media.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA PROPONENTE:

Raffaele Cattedra, Professore ordinario di geografia, Dipartimento Storia, Beni culturali e territorio, Università di Cagliari

3. Debora Malito

ITOLO DEL PAPER: Foreign interveners and contentious politics in Libya post-2011

ABSTRACT:

The 2011 Libyan insurrection has been approached as a case of contentious politics, culminating with the collapse of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. Even more contentious dynamics at the spatial levels have shaped the attempt of creating a new political order. Conflicts and fragmentation within the forces that opposed Gaddafi represent a major challenge to the stabilisation of the country, currently divided into a multi-layered frame of political and military authorities. While many have pointed out to feudal, tribal and religious explanatory arguments, contentious politics holds also an international component. Foreign actors assumed a pivotal function in undertaking disruptive practices while operating upon pre-existing spatial categories of identity and mobilisation. Yet, how do international, national or sub-national actors collaborate or compete in establishing new authorities and political orders? This article investigates how foreign interveners held a crucial function in operating upon the spatial differences and boundaries that led to the proliferation of governance structures in post-2011 Libya. To do so, it focuses on the transitional period, comprised between the formation of the National Transitional Council (February 2011), and the signing of the Libyan Political Agreement (December 2015). By analysing how the interplay of political negotiations and counter-terrorism shaped the formation of post-regime change authorities, this article claims that the formation of procedurally-based authorities informed contentious politics. It set in motion empowering and disempowering strategies among competing actors, informed new mechanisms of exclusion and inclusion, while fomenting east-west legitimacy clashes.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL/DELLA PROPONENTE:

Debora V. Malito is Assistant Professor in International Relations at *Xi'an Jiaotong Liverpool University*. She received her PhD from the University of Milan (2013) and held research positions at the European University Institute (2013-2016) and University of Cape Town (2015-17). Her research interests intersect critical theory in IR, peace and state formation.

4. Creating a Space for Politics: Reading Egypt's Uprising with Jacques Rancière

Mohamed El-Shewy

ABSTRACT:

Much of the analysis of Egypt's 2011 uprising has either focused on its *causes* (socio-economic marginalisation, social movement mobilisation, etc.) or on its *outcomes*, namely why the revolutionary moment failed, particularly following the state's resurgence beginning in 2013. These approaches largely focus on the nation-state as the primary instigator, or preventer, of change. As such, they often take the state for granted and ignore how the uprising challenged it from below. Using the political thought of Jacques Rancière, this paper will argue that creating alternative political spaces is a key part of the formation of new political subjects.

Despite a recent scholarly interest in Rancière's work, his political thought has not yet been applied in a thorough manner to the Egyptian Uprising. However, his unique understanding of politics as 'dissensus' – a political process that challenges dominant frameworks of thought, perception and action – allows us to move away from focusing on the 'results' of political mobilisation. For Rancière, politics is always disputatious, a collective action where the invisible 'act as if' they are equal to the existing status quo and assert their claim as political subjects. The process is both creative and dramatic, involving an argumentative and theatrical demonstration of an alternative politics. Key to this is the creation of a space for 'dissensus' to take place. Through such a view, we can understand spaces such as Cairo's Tahrir Square as a spatial practice intended to create a new ordering of society, away from the dominant image of the 'nation-state'.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Mohamed El-Shewy is a PhD candidate in the Department of Politics and International Studies (PAIS) at the University of Warwick. His thesis explores the intersections between art and politics in Egypt's 2011 uprising. Using the thought of Jacques Rancière, he is interested in exploring political movements through an aesthetic lens.

5. Beyond victims or threats – Exploring the political subjectivities and means of transnational activism of Syrian exiles in Germany

Nora Jasmin Ragab

ABSTRACT:

The current media and public debate depict 'refugees' as either passive victims in need of humanitarian assistance, or a threat to European society, identity and culture. These crisis narratives leave no space for non-violent political mobilisation, activism and resistance since they reinforce the construction of refugees as voiceless, powerless and agency-less objects. Based on 30 in-depth interviews with exiled Syrian activists in Germany, participatory observations of selected political activities and events, as well as countless informal conversations, the paper explores how the political subjectivity of Syrian displaced activists is enacted on multiple sites of contestation. Focussing on the journey of Syrians activists, the chapter addresses the question of how the experiences and conditions of displacement transform the nature, repertoire and sites of activism, contestation and resistance? The findings show that through displacement the initially local struggle for democracy and freedom inside Syria became transnational in nature, as activist continued their non-violent resistance to the Syrian regime from various locations across the globe. Furthermore, their grass-roots activism aimed at challenging the discourse of pity and exclusion present in the current refugee debate, by highlighting the complexity and diversity of refugees' experiences. Thus, the experiences and conditions of displacement and exile lead to several sites of contestations, in which the constructed agency-less of refugees is challenged through various acts of participation and resistance, which connect the political struggle for human rights and against marginalisation and discrimination in the host country, with the geopolitical root causes of their displacement.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Nora Jasmin Ragab is a PhD Fellow at the Migration and Development research cluster at Maastricht University/UNU-merit. Focussing on diaspora mobilisation in conflict-settings, her PhD analyses how social and political transformations in Syria and the host country, influence the space, nature and trajectories of Syrian diaspora mobilisation in Germany.

6. The 'Myth of Moderation' Following the Arab Uprisings. A Quantitative Text Analysis of Party Manifestos in Tunisia and Egypt's Founding Elections

Valeria Resta

ABSTRACT:

From the actor-centric perspective of party politics, it is widely held that the two transitional outcomes observed in Tunisia and Egypt are to be attributed to the different amount of polarization across the two party systems. Polarization, in turn, in these countries is often framed as the by-product of the moderation attained by the main Islamist parties, namely Ennadha and the Freedom and Justice Party (FJP) resulting from inclusion in past electoral politics. Through a quantitative text analysis of the party manifestos of the main transitional parties in Tunisia and Egypt, this contribution shows indeed that the end result of the two transitional experiences has little to do with polarization. By contrast, findings emerge that inclusion within previous competitive authoritarian politics encourages parties to keep playing the same undemocratic game even at the time of transition with noxious effects on the process of democratization.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DELLA PROPONENTE: Professoressa a contratto di Scienza Politica. Dipartimento di Scienze Politiche. Sapienza Università di Roma.

7. COLLECTIVE VIOLENCE AND REGIME CONSOLIDATION IN EGYPT AFTER 2011

Sara Tonsy

ABSTRACT:

After 2011, Egypt's political field was revived and showed patterns of continuity rather than change. The rising of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) and the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) to the forefront of the Egyptian political field was not new and had revisited outcomes. Charles Tilly in his book, *The Politics of Collective Violence*, outlines the different circumstances that could lead to a form of collective violence. This violence could be carried out by the people demanding certain claims or by the regime in attempting to repress the people and their claims. How could the events that took place in Egypt after 2011 – and in other similar historical instances – be explained using the idea of failed or broken negotiations? The failure of the SCAF and MB to reach an agreement on the eve of the departure of Mubarak resulted in broken negotiations, which in turn created a spiral of violence on both sides and among the people – who were the ones with the original 'bread, freedom and social justice' claims. However, broken negotiations are not a new outcome to MB-army relations in Egypt. Before 1952, similar happenings took place, which had more or less similar consequences on the Egyptian political field in general and the MB in particular. This paper represents a small excerpt of a wider research project that covers the case of Egypt, power and mobilization after the 2011 uprising comparatively.

ACADEMIC PROFILE:

Sara Tonsy is a PhD candidate in Political Science at the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, Aix – en – Provence, France. Tonsy is currently working on her thesis entitled “Power, Symbols and Mobilization: the case of Egypt.” She terminated her Master Degree in Political Science at the American University in Cairo in 2014.