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edited by Farah Polato and Tania Rossetto

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“A paradoxical motion of the map”: Re-connecting cartographic and postcolonial humanities¹

edited by Tania Rossetto and Farah Polato

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Recently, we have witnessed a huge expansion in the field of so-called ‘map studies’. The definition of the field, as given in the “Manifesto for Map Studies” (Dodge, Kitchin and Perkins 2009, 220-243), allows for a renewed, multifaceted and increasingly transdisciplinary consideration of mapping and cartography, one that reaches well beyond the wave of critical and highly influential cartographic thinking that emerged during the late 1980s. In that period, the field of cartography entered a cultural turn through the works of key thinkers, such as John Brian Harley (Harley 1989). Critical cartography adopted the method of discourse analysis to deconstruct the political and ideological content of cartographic text. However, it has been recognised (Edney 2011) that one of the main problems with the critical cartographic theory of the 1980s and 1990s was its tendency to universalise ‘the Map’. Treating cartography as a unified, single practice mainly linked to power, institutions and social/political elites, this approach downplayed the myriad modes of actual diverse and specific mapping practices. Several factors, such as the digital shift in cartography, the pervasiveness of mobile locative devices, the growing convergence between cartography and other forms of media and the consequent new status of mapping practices and spatial imagination in a particularly rich contemporary cartographic culture (Cosgrove 2008) have led to a much more diverse consideration of disparate forms of maps, mapping practices and cartographic experiences.

The interest in cartography, mappings and cartographic metaphors is advancing consistently within several cultural domains and academic fields (Roberts 2012; Brunn and Dodge 2017; Winther 2020), thus contributing to the reshaping of what we consider as the objects of study of cartography as an academic discipline (Kent and Vujakovic 2018). Whereas in the past decades, particularly with the spatial turn, the humanities have been charmed by the figure of the map (Mitchell 2008), we are now seeing the liveliness of a varied realm of ‘cartographic humanities’ that is offering additional research angles from which to consider cartography in all its aspects. Within this trend, the Arts have been particularly lively (Reddeman 2018; Duxbury Garrett-Petts and Longley 2019; Zdebik 2019).

In the last decades, there has been a close relationship between postcolonial studies and cartography. Maps, literally and metaphorically, are dominant features of colonial as well as of postcolonial cultures (see the lemma “Cartography [maps and mapping]” in Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 1998, 31-34). In a seminal 1989 paper, Graham Huggan significantly wrote:

The fascination of Canadian, Australian and other post-colonial writers with the figure of the map has resulted in a wide range of literary responses both to physical (geographical) maps, which are shown to have operated effectively, but often restrictively or coercively, in the implementation of colonial policy, and to conceptual (metaphorical) maps, which are perceived to operate as exemplars of, and therefore to provide a framework for critique of, colonial discourse. (Huggan 1989, 115)

Despite this statement, we should note that since the late 1980s a critical reading of cartographic reason and the cartographic gaze has fed a growing “cartophobic attitude,” which gradually led to a “disfiguration of the map as the evil side of geography” and, ultimately, to an enduring form of the “exhaustion” of cartography (Lo Presti 2017, 8; Lo Presti 2019a). However, in more recent times, a new trend has emerged that provides more diverse and post-critical approaches to cartography (Perkins 2018). Writing in 2004, Pickles effectively expressed the impatience that was slowly arising in map theory:

The still deeply rooted desire for totalizing monochromatic accounts that explain the map in terms of it being a socially produced symbolic object, a tool of power, a form derived from a particular epistemology of the gaze, or a masculinist representation, seem to me to miss the point of the post-structuralist turn: that is, that not only are maps multivocal, [...] but so also must be our accounts of them. (Pickles 2004, 19)

Postcolonial studies have actually been in the vanguard in pushing map conceptualisation beyond the restrictive interpretation of critical cartography, thus paving the way for the unfolding of a multiplicity of mapping practices and the reimagination of the carto-sphere in which we are immersed.

Returning to Huggan’s seminal paper, despite the fact that cartography is seen here as a technology that provides “an analogue for the acquisition, management and reinforcement of colonial power” (Huggan 1989, 115), we should emphasise that the author sees cartographic deconstruction not only as an exercise of cultural critique but also as a form of resistance to cultural domination. In fact, part of the paper is devoted to showing the “treatment of maps as metaphors in post-colonial literary texts, the role played by these maps in the geographical and conceptual de/reterritorialisation of post-colonial structures, and the relevance of this process to the wider issue of cultural decolonization” (Huggan 1989, 122). The map, thus, is involved in ‘reconstructive’ readings, recognised as a transformative agent and a means of imaginative revisioning.

The new spaces of postcolonial writings advocate a cartographic discourse “whose flexible cross-cultural patterns not only counteract the monolithic conventions of the West but

revision the map itself as the expression of a shifting ground between alternative metaphors rather than as the approximate representation of a 'literal truth'" (Huggan 1989, 125). While showing how postcolonial writings came to mobilise and creatively revise the colonial map, thus producing a "paradoxical motion of the map," Huggan puts an emphasis on the Deleuzo-Guattarian definition of the map as "a rhizomatic ('open') rather than as a falsely homogeneous ('closed') construct" (Huggan 1989, 125). In sum, he sees the fascination of postcolonial writers with the map trope as an instance of "creative revisionism" (Huggan 1989, 127):

So while the map continues to feature in one sense as a paradigm of colonial discourse, its deconstruction and/or revitalisation permits a 'disidentification' from the procedures of colonialism (and other hegemonic discourses) and a (re)engagement in the ongoing process of cultural decolonisation. The 'cartographic connection' can therefore be considered to provide the provisional link which joins the contestatory theories of post-structuralism and post-colonialism in the pursuit of social and cultural change. (Huggan 1989, 128)

Postcolonial literary studies have remained particularly concerned with cartographic debates (Howard 2009), and some analyses by literary scholars have addressed key questions of the cartographic debate. For example, Heggund situates James Joyce's reworking of the form of the map beyond the critical binary opposition between an imperial complicity and a revolutionary postcolonial mapping of resistance, stating that since "[map] power can be circulated and rerouted in unpredictable ways [...] maps are perhaps more fluent than many critics have allowed" (Heggund 2003, 188-189). Close readings, such as those devoted to Igiaba Scego's emotional maps in *La mia casa è dove sono* (My Home Is Where I Am), are other examples of more recent interventions (Benini 2014 and Parati 2017).

In its turn, the field of film and media studies has been particularly proactive in establishing a dialogue with cartographic theories (Avezzù 2017; Avezzù, Castro and Fidotta 2018; Lukinbeal et al. 2019). Famously, in her book *Atlas of Emotion: Journeys in Art, Architecture and Film*, Giuliana Bruno explicitly went beyond the critical stance in which the map was a totalising concept produced by a distant eye and reacted to the persistence of a purely negative notion of mapping and the enduring efforts devoted to deconstructing and decolonising maps:

All too often, mapping tends to be dismissed as a commanding, hegemonic instrument. Yet to persist in this position is to risk producing a notion of mapping that is restricted, placed wholly in the service of domination. What remain obscured are the nuanced representational edges of cartography, the diversity of cartographic practices, and the varied potentials of different mapping processes. (Bruno 2002, 207)

Within map studies, the interrogation of colonial/postcolonial/neocolonial/decolonial issues has remained crucial in the research agenda. The 2020 Special Issue titled "Decolonizing the Map" of the leading Canadian journal *Cartographica* is a particularly salient example of a

renovated interrogation of indigenous mappings and decolonial cartographies, intended as both a decolonisation of data and a decolonial cartographic reading (Rose-Redwood et al. 2020). In addition, there is the emerging multidisciplinary body of literature on maps and the migration crises in the Mediterranean Sea (van Houtum and Bueno Lacy 2019; Lo Presti 2019b; Adams 2019; Tazzioli 2016). Moreover, activist and creative practical counter-cartographies have grown exponentially (see the global collection of Kollektiv Orangotango 2018).

This Special Issue is edited by two scholars of different backgrounds who developed a dialogue by means of cartographic interdisciplinary connections. Tania Rossetto is a cultural geographer and map scholar who has worked on cartographic epistemologies (Rossetto 2015b), visual cultures of racialised/ethnicised Others in connection to cartographic imagination and activism (Rossetto 2015a; Del Biaggio, Rossetto and Boria 2019) and the nexus between cartography and literature (Rossetto and Peterle 2017). Farah Polato is a film scholar who has extensively investigated the relations between territories, identities and audio-visual narratives/representations from a postcolonial perspective on local (Costa, Lavarone and Polato 2018), national (Polato 2020, Polato and De Franceschi, 2019; Polato, 2017) and transnational scales (Polato 2016), and questioned the notion of identity and citizenship in the frame of ‘Italian cinema’ (Polato 2013, 2014). The basis for this collaboration was established at a co-organised one-day colloquium titled “Featuring Maps: Cartografie emergenti nel cinema contemporaneo,” held at the University of Padua in 2017, with the aim of exploring more-than-critical approaches to cartography and cinema.

Issue 8 of the journal *From the European South* similarly reflects a transdisciplinary move towards critical/post-critical map thinking. In fact, this Special Issue originated from a call for submissions aimed at grasping the motion of maps in the transdisciplinary arena of the cartographic humanities, with a particular interest in how this germinative field intersects with the postcolonial humanities. We solicited pieces theorising and forging the connections between cartographic and postcolonial humanities, offering cultural readings of colonial cartography and postcolonial mappings, exploring the role of cartographic practice and aesthetics within the contexts of multicultural societies, interpreting cartographic imagery in different media and presenting creative interventions mixing map-like imagery and postcolonial/migration/diversity issues. The call was aimed at endorsing a pluralistic style of thinking about – and also making! – maps. Indeed, our sense is that this Special Issue reflects in full this pluralistic style as well as the multiple possible entanglements of the cartographic and the postcolonial humanities.

Maps, mappings and cartographic imaginings opens with a consideration of how maps, mappings and cartographic imaginings differently intrude upon and are implicated in the experience and narratives of migrant journeys. In “On the migitude of maps,” Laura Lo Presti suggests that there is not a singular or dominant way through which maps of migration can

be critically analysed today. She develops this statement by introducing a conceptual triad around the ‘migritude’ of maps. Cartographic ‘transitude’ evokes the multisensorial experience of undetected border-crossing; cartographic ‘digitude’ refers to the very practice of using navigational digital devices as life-line tools; and cartographic ‘finitude’ relates to the commemorative traces of the current necropolitical regime of migration. Most importantly, the article states that the present cartographic media culture is not exclusively dominated by the aggressive capture or representation of the migrant crisis. Maps are also appropriated in unpredictable ways by the many subjects involved in the migration experience. Thus, the paper invites us to be attuned to the suggestive ways in which maps, once embodied, endowed with personal meanings and put into action to respond to human needs, may disrupt the mainstream cartographic system and open up different spaces of imagination and critical thinking.

In “(Deep) Mapping postmortem geographies in the context of migration,” José Alavez, Lilyane Rachédi and Sébastien Caquard propose the first step of a sensitive, experimental deep mapping of posthumous geographies. They show and discuss the tracing of the postmortem geographies of three migrants who lived and died in Quebec, through the stories told by the relatives of the deceased. When migrants die where they have settled, their families and friends might be mobilised to provide emotional or economic support, help in the administrative burden of repatriation and burial, organise ceremonies or reconnect family memories. A network of travelling bodies, objects, memorial practices and social connections is thus activated. Drawing from recent developments in the geographies of remembrance, grief and mourning, the authors focus on bodies’ transnational mobilities and the networks emerging after death, calling for – and practically adopting – alternative ways of merging maps and stories to study and tell the geographies of death in the context of migration.

In “Data colonialism: the census, the map, and the software,” Tommaso Grossi and Lucilla Lepratti problematise the study of the technologies of management, such as cartography and the census, in relation to both colonial and postcolonial contexts. By drawing from theories of data colonialism and digital politics, the authors trace the genealogy of data extraction in colonial contexts and discuss the relationship between such colonial technologies and the current global forms of data-based governance in postcolonial contexts. In particular, they consider the shift from the census to biometrics through the case study of current practices of digital identification by the Unique Identification Authority of India. Moreover, they expand the notion of data colonialism to the digital mapping of human mobility by the European Union, taking into consideration software of migration mapping, such as Eurosur and Jora. They argue that the management, recording and archiving of migration make data an instrument for the government of people on the move that shares the bio- and necropolitical powers of colonial cartography, but also that migration evades such predictive calculations.

In “Paris ‘bande à part’: sguardi cartografici e tessuti cinematografici nel cinema di banlieue (e dintorni),” Paola Cosma and Farah Polato focus on the recent developments of the so-called French *cinéma de banlieue* (banlieue films). The first section questions the irruption, in the 2000s, of filmic narratives characterised by female directors or with female protagonists, investigating the ways in which female characters re-map the spaces of a cartography centred on a male dominant subject. Starting from the event of the 2019 film season, *Les Misérables*, by Ladj Ly, and then drifting to the independent film, *La vie de Château* (2018), by Mody Barry and Cedric Ido, the second part investigates the notion of the *cinéma de banlieue* as a representation of ‘a world apart’ and the different cartographic models called upon to build the spaces of this representation. Despite the in-depth analyses of the works, the focus is on the space ‘in-between’ them, looking at the plural visual strategies implemented with respect to an asymmetrical field of forces. In this perspective, the annexed maps related to the films are less aimed at verifying the relationship between the filmic space and the ‘real’ one than to encourage the users to produce, themselves, the relationships between the images and itineraries.

In the paper titled “The cartographic impulse: post-representational cartography practices in contemporary visual art,” Diana Padrón Alonso refers to a recent paradigm that has emerged within the field of cartography. This conceptual shift explores the ontogenetic nature of cartography, moving from a representational to a processual understanding of mapping. From a post-representational perspective, maps are conceived of as contingent, relational and embodied entities that are performed by users in their meanings, as well as in their concrete material consistency. In other words, maps are practices, rather than representations. Padrón Alonso suggests several connections between this new attitude towards maps and the ways in which maps and mappings have been involved in artistic practices, showing how these practices have opened up a new form of dynamic, postcolonial and performative cartography. In valuing the connections between the geographical humanities and the visual arts, she highlights the results of a project carried out at the Art Globalization Interculturality laboratory of the University of Barcelona.

Edoardo Boria’s “Confini coloniali e performatività della carta geografica” reviews how critical cartography and the deconstruction of cartographic texts have been recently enriched by more practice-based and phenomenological approaches. In the last 25 years, map studies have emerged from the neopositivistic approaches to embrace a critical reading of the linguistic, semantic, technical, communicative and aesthetic features of maps. The author discusses the case study of the history of Ethiopian borders in Italian cartography during the Fascist period, showing how those borders were progressively erased on maps well before Italian settlement. Through archival research and by adopting a deconstructionist methodology, the author nonetheless problematises such an approach, showing how the powers of maps are less mechanical than they are assumed to be. Considering in a more complex way

the contexts of map production and use, Boria values the contingencies beyond the ideological assumptions on authority-led processes. Enlightening the force of cartographic imagination, the performativity of specific maps and the frictions they encounter once put in motion within particular historical social contexts, he complicates the reading of map production during the Fascist Regime.

With “The ‘lost colony’: Italian colonial irredentism (1864-1912),” Gabriele Montalbano reflects on the role of Tunisia in Italian colonial imagination from the Majba Revolt until the Italo-Turkish War. In particular, he refers to how geographical imagination influenced colonial aims in the development of the imperialist idea of Tunisia as geographically (and so ‘naturally’) tied to Italy. Indeed, Tunisia occupied the particular status of an ‘unredeemed’ colony, linking the nationalist irredentist narration of the north-eastern Italian border with the colonialist one on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. The paper does not employ actual cartographic visualisations but significantly shows how maps hold a force in making worlds not only as material visual objects but also as imaginary narrative and ideological devices.

In addition to research articles, this Special Issue hosts five other pieces. Simona Martini responded to the call of this Special Issue through a poem. “Uncharter’d memories don’t fade” was inspired by a coffee stain on a tablecloth resembling a map of alternative paths. A victim of the “caporalato” (a sort of agricultural neo-slavery) in Italy imagines how it would have been if he’d had a mapped, charted, and therefore reliable and safe route to follow along his journey through the sea. The creative intervention “Mapping memories, charting empathy: framing a collaborative research-creation project,” authored by Martina Melilli and Piera Rossetto, is written in the form of a dialogue between an audio-visual artist and a social anthropologist of Judaism. The conversation unfolds the research-creation practices through which the authors experimented in telling the difficult stories of Jewish migrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. Cartographic visuals are variously and deeply implicated within these experiments as the activators of memories, narrative tools and agents endowed with an affective and material force.

Maps, Mappings and Cartographic Imaginings also hosts two interviews. The first is with the artist Jean-David Nkot, the author of the cover image of this Special Issue. His aesthetic research questions the issue of violence in the contemporary age by giving a central stage to space and its relations with representational regimes, as well as with human sufferings. In particular, the interview addresses the role of maps and stamps in his poetics. The second interview is with Dagmawi Yimer, filmmaker and co-founder of *Archivio delle Memorie Migranti*. His works combine the attention to subjective experiences with the need for their reworking through audio-visual language. The participatory approach, which is typical of his projects, emerges once again in his last work, developed under the frame of *WAIT (Waiting for an uncertain future: the temporalities of irregular migration)*, a research project of the University of Bergen, with which the interview starts.

Finally, this Issue closes with a review of the comic book *Quartieri: viaggio al centro delle periferie italiane*, edited by Adriano Cancellieri (an anthropologist) and Giada Peterle (a geographer-cartoonist). As Juliet Fall writes in concluding her review of a book that showcases five stories and five peripheral neighbourhoods in five Italian cities, *Quartieri* “is a beautiful invitation to stop writing dry academic prose, and instead grab some pencils, a friend or two, a notebook, and go and listen to the voices around us and invent new ways of making them heard.” As the selected illustrations show, cartography intrudes into the stories as a generative storytelling device that helps in making subaltern voices be heard.

The call for this Special Issue was launched before the Covid-19 outbreak; however, the submissions, reviews and processing of the journal issue were carried out during a period in which the lives of tenured, and, above all, non-tenured, academic scholars were heavily impacted by the pandemic situation and its effects on our working condition. Thus, we would like to extend a special thanks to all those who contributed to the Issue, and, in particular, to the authors, reviewers and artists, for their willingness to take part in this endeavour, the enthusiasm they expressed and, most of all, the tenacity they showed in carrying on with their commitments.

Tania Rossetto and Farah Polato

Note

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On the migritude of maps

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ABSTRACT

This paper recognizes the multiple emotional inclinations and political scripts performed by cartographic imaginings and objects in the (anti-)immigration discourse, and explores the diverse cartographic expressions of migration that emerged within the crisis generated at the outer and inner borders of Europe. By referring to the several ways that migrants, policy actors, journalists, writers, filmmakers, artists, and activists relied on mapping and map-like objects to navigate, represent, touch and commemorate the forms of social, cultural, and physical im/mobilisation that characterise the present age of migration, the *migritude* of maps is unravelled through reflections on the *transitude*, that is, the ephemeral and materially transient range of mappings that facilitate the passage across the alpine route; the *digitude*, the portable and often reliable mobility offered by mobile mapping devices to migrants during their terraqueous journey across the desert and the sea; and the tragic *finitude* of many clandestine journeys, which is evoked by necrotic symbols, acts and materials signalling deaths on maps.

Keywords

migritude, immobility, migrant crisis, digital mapping, cartographic humanities

Introduction

In the last few years, there has been a deluge of images, charts, maps, statistics, and discourses depicting human migration as a ‘crisis’, an unprecedented, massive, and faceless flow of people coming from different countries and continents. The ensuing rhetoric incited by the repeated pronouncements on the closure of ports or border walls made by several political leaders in various countries across the world gave rise to the emergence of the public figure of the migrant as a ‘threat’, without any reference to his or her humanness: personal experiences, aspirations, emotions, and traumas. Day by day, year after year, the symbolic and physical processes of dehumanisation affecting people on the move contributed in many ways to the stifling of their life’s breath. Although the number of studies on how images and discourses evoke the feelings of a crisis on the issue of migration have increased in the social sciences and the humanities (Bischoff et al. 2010; Bleiker et al. 2013), cultural and social scientists have surprisingly overlooked the multitude of ways that ‘cartographic’ imagery affects the migrant crisis’s narrative. The popularity of maps within migration discourse, mostly proliferated through Western news and political institutions’ press releases,

is, however, growing dramatically: maps published in the media often indicate ‘irregular’ migration by oversized red arrows and viral flows, raising a subtle anxiety about a continent – either Europe, North America, or Oceania – under siege by millions of clandestine invaders. “In the optic of crisis,” Tyler Morgenstern recently remarked, “the migrant appears as a vector of, or vectoralized, risk – an improper intentionality, an unwanted willfulness, a suspect directionality” (Morgenstern 2019, 56).

Under the conditions of such illegalized and undocumented migration, migrant subjects, rather than boosting viral flows, more realistically float, often invisibly, in a frustrating suspension. Their infinite movement of crossing and refoulement, of back-and-forth across countries, shelters, camps, prisons, fences, deserts, seas, and mountains, perpetuates a condition of paradoxical stasis, an often-imperceptible stillness amid the din and magnitude of an imaginary and continuous flow. Moving across continents and countries to flee war or other unsettling circumstances, the ‘wretched’ of migration experience many forms of immobility in appalling conditions such as lengthy confinement in prisons and detention centres, as well as paralysis and disability through torture and other incidents. ‘Stranded’ is indeed the label defining those people who become stuck in the course of their journey, either in transit or in host countries. Paradoxically, the multifaceted array of obstacles encountered by migrants during the journey is not antithetical to migration mobility but a constitutive, inextricable part of it. For indeed, without a border to cross, there would be no need to call ‘migration’ this human movement (De Genova 2017).

Surprisingly enough, through media and political discourse, the morphology of immobility is often hard to hear, conceive, and see in all its complexity and nuances. And yet, a focus on the temporal and spatial constraints that define the migrant journey should transform the alarmist media perspective on migrants’ movement into a much more intermittent and corpuscular experience. Considering this aspect, as critical scholars and readers who do not want to surrender to the mainstream rhetoric of the crisis, we should pursue this matter further: are ‘aggressive’ arrows in news maps the only symbols by which we can make sense of migration from a cartographic perspective?

Beyond the media spectacle of the migrant crisis, much more sensitive, disturbing, or imaginative representations of migration can flourish unexpectedly. I would argue, at the risk of sounding too general, that every small, large, hopeful, and tragic event of migration might call for the creation of a map. However, it could also be asserted, to the contrary, that a map produces a migratory event, namely by detecting it, channelling our attention to it, and recasting it according to a peculiar configuration.

This paper, with the perspective of a cultural geographer working at the intersection of critical migration studies, map studies, and media studies in mind, aims to compose such a kaleidoscopic view of the contemporary media cartographies of migration. Contributing to the “transdisciplinary and transmedial field of cartographic humanities” – as proposed by the

editors of this special issue – the adoption of a humanistic cartographic lens means situating the bond between ‘mapping and migration’ within an eclectic literature, a messy methodology, and a variety of examples that interlink recent debates on postcolonial literature, critical migration studies, post-representational cartography, and visual culture more broadly. If one listens carefully to the narratives, artistic performances, film experiences, activist projects, and daily events where a deep cartographic stance may whisper and emerge, one can grasp indeed the multiple emotional inclinations and political scripts performed by cartographic imaginings and objects in the (anti-) immigration discourse. This is what I refer to as the migrant attitude of maps or the ‘migritude’ of maps.

The term ‘migritude’ is commonly associated with the title of a poetic oeuvre written by Shailja Patel in 2010. Composed of seventeen fragments, the work celebrates the several forms of migration that are expressed in contemporary society, particularly from the point of view of the author, a third-generation East African of Indian Gujarati descent (Patel 2010). Recalling the antiracist and anticolonialist black movement of *negritude* of the late 1930s, *migritude* also partakes in the sense of continuity between contemporary anti-immigration rhetoric and normalised racist and colonialist discourses. In francophone African literary studies, Jacques Chevrier (2004) denotes *migritude*, for instance, as the third space of postcolonial African writers, whose identity becomes defined through the ongoing negotiation between the culture of origin and the receiving culture, giving rise to hybridity and contaminations. Calling attention to “the material and psychic being-in-the-world of the migrant within the current context of global movements” (Foster 2019, 9), *migritude* has been more broadly conceived in postcolonial literature as an attitude, a critical posture towards the present, and a sensitivity towards the problematics of global mobility that characterise both migrant writers and artists. However, a consideration of *migritude* specifically with regard to what happens during the journey of oppressed migrants has not yet become prominent in postcolonial studies. By contrast, critical migration studies – a heterogeneous socio-geographical field “concerned with identifying and challenging the processes that serve to marginalize and oppress migrants” (Gilmartin and Kuusisto-Arponen 2020, 19) – has become increasingly mindful of migrant experiences formed during clandestine movement toward Europe, drawing attention to how migrants’ undesirable passage is inhibited and interrupted by borders of different kinds.

Without neglecting the genealogy of the term that has influenced postcolonial literature so far, the aim of this brief contribution is to touch on *migritude* as a cartographic disposition towards contemporary undocumented, illegalized, and oppressed forms of migration that are currently addressed by critical migration scholars. In this context, the *migritude* of maps outlines a certain propensity that the cartographic ontology has towards migration issues, including questions of travel, movement, immobility, and necropolitics. What are the conditions and contexts, in short, that make maps, mappings, and cartographic imaginings gen-

uinely *inclined* to represent the migratory journey and its ambivalent rhythms? How does a migrant, motional, emotional, immobilising attitude manifest within a map-minded culture?

If we live in the “age of migration” (Castles and Miller 2003), or more properly the “postcolonial” age of migration (Samaddar 2020), shades, vestiges, and marks of such phenomena should indeed remain impressed on a wide variety of mobile and travelling objects, such as maps and mapping processes. Such a posture thus requires us to find events in which maps appear intertwined with migratory formations, tracing the intricate visual, material, literary, and sonic textures of their emergence.

In media, narratives, and arts, maps indeed take many forms: they are constantly changing contexts, media, devices, and audiences. Therefore, attributed meanings can be modified, enriched, or diminished through several semantic codes. When attention is drawn to the spatial and cultural dynamics of maps, in sum, the idea that maps are meant to move, become contaminated, and change as images of a broader visual culture soon emerge, requiring our deep attentiveness. Additionally, a critical disposition towards the mapping of migration further calls for the deconstruction of the many faces of political power that define the crisis, and the detection of the ideological and symbolical discourses within certain maps of migration that appear at certain times. Unfolding the migritude of maps, whether in the past or in the present, or projecting it programmatically into a future to come does not mean, however, essentialising the function of mapping in migration. It suggests the recognition of the public and intimate intricacies, imbrications, and tensions that arise between the two. In truth, the relationship between mapping and movement has not always been felicitous, especially in geographic circles. Many scholars maintain an unfavourable critique of the Euclidean map as having a static and fixed frame and therefore as unable to depict kinetic geographies and human mobilities (Cresswell 2006; Massey 2005). For instance, Tim Cresswell argued more than a decade ago that traditional maps of movement “neglect” the content of the journey (Cresswell 2006). In a map, geographer Doreen Massey states, “a movement is turned into a static line” (Massey 2005, 108). Beyond the alleged stillness of the cartographic representation, post-representational map scholars argue, however, that there is an often-neglected mapping practice (Dodge et al. 2009). Mapping, in this sense, emerges as a performative trajectory, an agentive tracing of different kinds of movements beyond those that are (sometimes) mistaken for fixed and frozen representations (Lo Presti 2020).

The following sections attempt to make sense of the semantic and empirical richness of mapping acts that are entangled with migration by putting together pieces of the literary, visual, and aesthetic geographies that, together, narrate the current migration crises. This will be done through some extemporal reflections on ‘transitude’, a condition in which mapping emerges as an act of ‘transit’ – of helping migrants passing through or over an unfamiliar alpine route – but performing or leaving often ‘transient’ and ephemeral traces; ‘digitude’, which refers to the portable and reliable mobility offered by devices integrated with GPS to

migrants during their terraqueous journey across the desert and the Mediterranean Sea; and the tragic ‘finitude’ of either a normal life, unsettled by war, as in the recent case of Syria, or the many loose ends of clandestine journeys, which are evoked by activists and artists through persuasive symbolisation and manipulations of exhausted cartographic remnants.

#1 *Transitude*

Getting lost in the snow, in an attempt from Italy to reach France, is equivalent to surrendering to a broken and merciless compass.

Andrea Bajani, “La terra è di tutti” (2019, 9)¹

Without an inscription on a durable material, a map would hardly be imagined to have an aesthetic value or a navigational function. However, the horizon of clandestine human migration is studded with extemporaneous, asynchronous, and fragile mapping acts: a meshwork of directions, paths, loopholes, and shelters that migrants have to learn by heart or in advance and subsequently discover *en route* by following the ephemeral landmarks left on trees, on the ground, on the snow, on makeshift maps, and, at best, indicated by human mappers. For this reason, an unwanted, denied, and hindered movement, as the one embodied by clandestine migration, can still manifest itself in the sphere of landscapes, taking, however, the shape of a transient and transitory environmental mapping, of an empirical navigation.

The Alpine route, known in the last years as the twelve kilometres that separate the Italian border-zone of Claviere from the French town of Briançon, is a dramatic and at the same time genuine example of the transitude of migratory mapping, that is the transitory but crossing-driven salvific bond that mapping builds with the rhythms of unwanted bodies. Not all the people rescued at sea, after crossing the desert and experiencing psychological and physical distress in Libya, land, in fact, on Italian shores with the will to remain in the country. Many so-called ‘secondary movements’ continue in the following months or years inside and outside European member states. Those attempts to cross borders are often obstructed and deterred, hampering the possibility to live in the dreamed-of country of arrival. It should be clear, in fact, that one of the tragic effects of the rhetoric of the migrant crisis is that not only the security of borders between European and non-European countries has been intensified, but also that of borders between countries within the continent. For this reason, “fortress Europe implodes into a multitude of mini-fortresses” (Ponzanesi 2016). In particular, after the closure of the border between Italy and France in 2015, the usual path that would lead migrants from the town of Ventimiglia to France, a growing number of migrants decided to make their way by less-familiar routes, across the Alps. The closure of the road to the Roya Valley, which starts about thirty kilometres north of the Riviera and which has often proved a dead-end for many, pushed migrants to move north to the Briançon passage (see fig. 1).

However dangerous it may be, considering also the unfamiliarity of African migrants with the Alpine landscape, it must be remembered that the Alpine route was also a well-beaten, although neglected, clandestine trail in the past, for instance, during the Italian emigration to France. As remembered by Martina Tazzioli (2020, 3-4), during World War II, many Italians escaped through the Alpine passage and, after the war, they continued to cross illegally the French border to find jobs. Then, in the 1970s and 1980s, the Alps became a crossing point for non-European migrants, especially in the 1980s, when people escaping the former Yugoslavia passed through Italy.

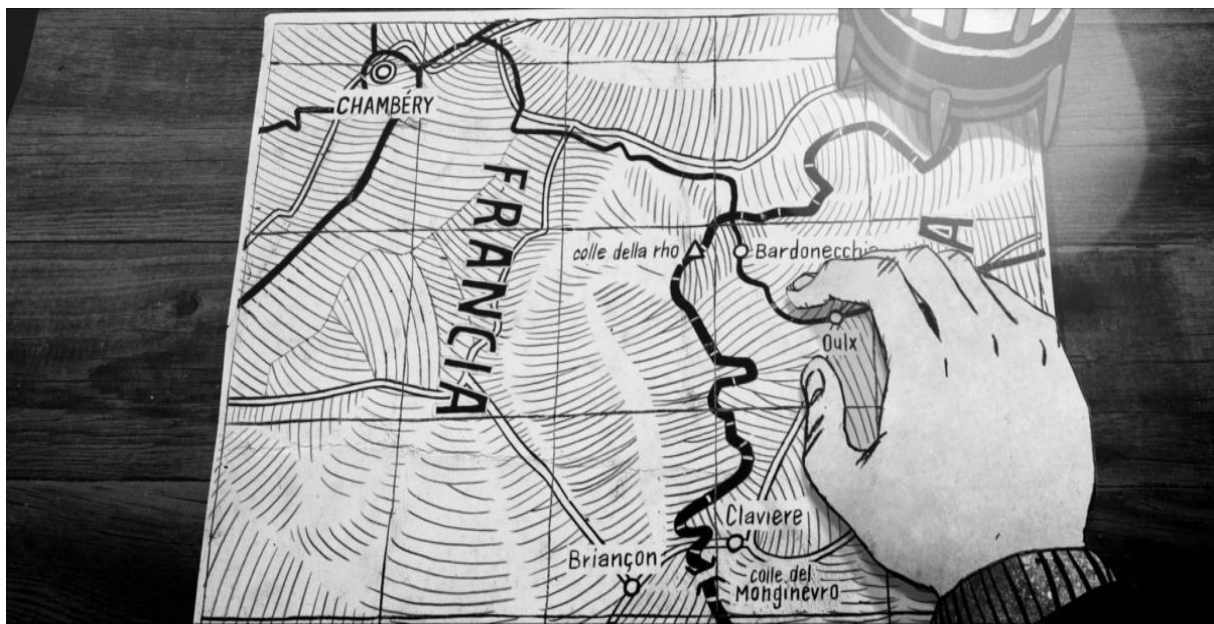


Fig. 1. Video still from the movie *The Milky Way* (SMK Factory 2020 – directed by Luigi D’Alfie). Through glimpses of everyday life and animated graphic novels, the movie tells the story of local solidarity and the dangers faced by migrants during the crossing of the Alpine route. Courtesy of SMK Factory.

Despite the fact that, in media and politics, the spotlight remains focused on migration across the Central Mediterranean Route, there are pathways that are less travelled but no less dangerous or decisive for the lives of migrants, such as the mountain trail. In the recently published narrative reportage of Maurizio Pagliassotti, *Ancora dodici chilometri: Migranti in fuga sulla rotta alpina* (Twelve more kilometres: Migrants fleeing on the Alpine route), a “biopolitical map” of the last passage of the African migration through the inner borders of Europe viscerally unfolds, foregrounding the solidaristic network built through the years between activists of the Susa Valley, locals, religious associations, and the thousands of people attempting to cross the borders between Italy and France (Pagliassotti 2019, 17). The book is rich in cartographic references, suggesting a deep bond between mapping and migration to the extent that migrants are willing to pay “for some verbal indication or a piece of paper that should serve as a map” (Pagliassotti 2019, 74). However, throughout the book, a profound tension emerges between the use that maps can be made of by those with map-reading skills, familiar with the local environment, in comparison with migrants who try to

orient themselves alone in a foreign landscape, often following merely natural signs.

Considering the peculiarity of this clandestine route, both digital and paper maps may be considered sometimes useless for the real-time progress of the journey. Smartphones loaded with the Google Maps app and its well-known automated path should in fact be turned off at night to avoid the detection of the light screen by French gendarmes. The journey thus often results in “a walk into the unknown, following a map they [migrants] don’t even know how to position, or a phone that will soon lose its connection or charge” (Pagliassotti 2019, 54). Alpine ‘*passseurs*’ (usually activists of the Susa Valley or locals, but also truckers), who have better knowledge of the mountain, may thus decide to help these migrants for different reasons, not least because of the impulse to “go and look for a missing person, to give him back, even before a warm place, a location” (Bajani 2019, 9). In an environment which apparently lacks clear indications and coordinates, such clandestine guides easily orientate themselves. They behave like human mappers and sensors, guides ready to offer direction to those unfamiliar with snow who, as if at sea, see only a homogeneous and continuous horizon.

The contested relationship between mapping experienced as a form of transient wayfinding – an empirical navigation – and the map considered a ‘professional’, perhaps abstruse, device requiring specific reading expertise, continues in the following pages. During a visit in the Oulx refuge, the author Pagliassotti found ‘detailed maps’ in a corner that helped him to reflect on the dramatic situation lived by migrants today, where orientation has somehow become a privilege of the few, although its function is vital for the positive outcome of the journey. These detailed maps, personalized by activists with many symbols, represent the points “where to pass, where the border is, where the police are, where the gendarmes are stationed, where the rescue point has been set up” (Pagliassotti 2019, 149). They are not so different from the many counter-maps that activists involved in migration issues have produced in the last years (Campos-Delgado 2018; Casas-Cortés et al. 2017; Kollektiv Orangotango 2019). Commenting on the spread of such counter-mapping attitudes among activists, the author more cynically claims:

I don’t know if it makes sense to put maps in the hands of those who, usually, do not have the slightest idea where they are: but those maps are a symbol that explains many things well, or at least highlights the contradictions of this incredible, extraordinarily human practice. (Pagliassotti 2019, 149)

What are, in fact, these maps a symbol of? They are an attempt to reflect on the conditions of humanity in our times; they hit us with their cruel and cynical geometric evidence, a landscape made of borders which, however, is not static and hermetic at all, since a migrant, counter-border posture continuously bubbles to its surface. On paper as much as on land, migration is interrupted by borders, fences, and defence systems, but it is also defined by the stubborn indolence of crossing those borders. As Nicholas De Genova more incisively

noted, “such human mobility has come to be pervasively construed as migration only to the extent that it is understood to involve the crossing (or transgression) of one or another sort of state-imposed border” (De Genova 2017, 6). The activist attitude towards migration implies that human movement cannot be easily blocked, and such counter-maps open up a space for further introspection and relationality. In this situation, the migritude of maps more intuitively unfolds as a transitude, an ephemeral impulse, offered by mapping performances “of going through, around, along, above or under space” (Willmott 2019, 119) by any possible means. The Alpine route is thus a context in which “mapping as wayfinding – as situated and embodied practices of mobility” (Roberts 2012, 4), takes on different forms, even forcing the deactivation of its artificial functions to then remerge as a sensory and empirical navigation, driven by spoken tips, landscape markers, and the help of local activists.

#2 *Digitude*

In the desert only the man with the GPS knew the right direction: one led to life, all the others to a terrible death.

Francesca Melandri, *Sangue giusto* (2017, 40)

The sense we get from the first scenario is that an essential feature of the map is to allow migrant people to move undetected or at least to give them the hope of doing so, whether this map is imaginary or real, mental or physical, natural or artificial. Yet, the presence of a palpable geometric map can be useless in those environments that are not well marked by anthropomorphic landmarks or where movement is considered suspicious in the first place. Unsurprisingly, a map is an inscription “that does (or does not do) work in the world” (Pickles 2004, 67). For many other reasons that I will discuss below, the transformation of the paper map into a digital device, enmeshed in a wider network of other materials, bodies, spaces, practices, and relations, has in any case enormously impacted the phenomenon of migration. This is why a second disposition that mapping embodies to support or hinder the migration journey is what I call here its digitude.

Over the last decade, many institutions devoted to border control and migration management in the European Union, such as Frontex (the European Border and Coast Guard Agency), have in fact relied on advanced digital mapping tools to track and detect migrant events, even before any actual border-crossing. “These operations” – Sebastian Cobarubbias explains – “can include military vessels, surveillance technology and the deployment of multi-country border guards both in sea and land territories, thousands of kilometers away from the actual EU borderlines” (Cobarubbias 2019, 771). Scholars are often sensitive to distinguishing the cartographic applications of military or governmental policies from civilian ones (Goodchild 2007; Herb et al. 2009), and this distinction proves important even for unpacking the multiplicity of actors involved at various levels in the

exploitation of digital technologies which deal with migration issues and border-control. In this respect, despite the fact that such algorithm-driven forms of bordering are criticized for their oppressive and coercive ways of detecting and containing unwanted bodies (Amoore 2007), it is also fair to underline the bottom-up effects of digital mapping for assisting migrants in their daily crossing of Fortress Europe. As Mark Latonero summarises, “social media, mobile apps, online maps, instant messaging, translation websites, wire money transfers, cell phone charging stations, and WiFi hotspots have created a new infrastructure for movement as critical as roads or railways” (Latonero 2015). This new infrastructure performs what the author calls the “digital passage to Europe” (Latonero 2015). Dana Diminescu also recognises the crucial importance of the digital network for migrants, referring to the figure of the “connected migrant” to highlight the ability of displaced and diasporic subjects to construct virtual spaces of encounter, contact, and organisation where physical ones are hard to find (Diminescu 2008). However, in the context of the clandestine journeys across the desert and the Mediterranean Sea, such a digitude, the other feature that is increasingly imbricating mapping with migration, constitutes a contingent and material space, subjected to the opportunities and limitations of different objects and infrastructures. Not every individual can, in fact, gain access to smartphones and Wi-Fi during the clandestine journey, but these are often considered indispensable, so much so that many migrants prefer to trade or sell their food and water in order to gain access to the digital space through a smartphone. More importantly, the crossing of the Sahara Desert, usually starting in Agadez, would be impossible to undertake for those who are not equipped with satellite technology. In the novel *Sangue giusto* (The Right Blood) by Francesca Melandri, tracing, among others, the story of a young Ethiopian man who embarked on a journey to Italy through the desert, the vital importance of digital mapping is explicitly recognized, as illustrated in the epigraph above (Melandri 2017). Only convoys equipped with satellite navigation have the ability to cross the desert without getting lost.

Mobile digitude, moreover, might activate virtual, open, unfiltered territories that stand in contrast to the physical immobility and the exclusive local information-gathering experienced by ‘stranded’ migrants. Since many countries in Europe discourage immigration, and also finance anti-immigration campaigns directly in African countries, the one who embarks on a clandestine journey is, in fact, vulnerable to exposure because he or she will encounter enormous difficulties in finding trustworthy information about safe routes (Dekker et al. 2018). This information gap is normally filled by smugglers who provide information that is often deceptive or false about the best route to take. There is, however, a third space between the dissuasive one performed by institutions and the persuasive but dangerous passage promised by smugglers, and this is the one that migrants construct autonomously, navigating through the routes marked by Google Maps, and always adopting new strategies, also with the help of activist organisations and the support of family networks already in

Europe. In this contest, mapping technologies are gaining momentum. They are instances of connectivity that allow people to share their needs with peers and organise safer routes, revealing new forms of intimacy, solidarity, and activism.

Since the performance of navigation is exponentially boosted by digital tools, the map can be conceived as what has been elsewhere defined an ‘actionable object’ (Lo Presti 2020), an amplifier of human agency through which the potential for movement is enacted. Whereas along transit routes, the digitude of mapping expresses a real-time adventure, a directional lifeline towards arrival, it can also help to strengthen migrants’ narratives. In this sense, many stories recorded with digital tools unfold the map as a spatial archive, a motion recorder that can be navigated backwards. Many documentaries and memories about migration produced in recent years rely in fact on the immersive and aesthetically engaging atmosphere of digital mapping to retrace and remember the beginning of biographical journeys until arrival in Europe. *It will be Chaos* (2018), a documentary directed by the Italian filmmakers Lorena Luciano and Filippo Piscopo about the unfolding of the migrant crisis in Europe, tells the story of the Eritrean refugee Aregai (who survived the tragic shipwreck of 2013 near the island of Lampedusa) through the narratological proximity of a mobile mapping device (fig. 2). Touching and zooming in and out of the hills surrounding his native city, Aregai cartographically illustrates his journey from Africa to Italy: “I start from Eritrea from the small city of Teseney. It’s near the border of Sudan” (Luciano and Piscopo 2018). Following the fingers and verbal description of Aregai, the spectator is afterwards forced to recognize how Italian past is entangled with the present of African migration. Since 1929, Teseney has in fact been called by Italian colonizers the Village of Gasperini (named after the former colonial governor of Eritrea, a native of Treviso in Italy).

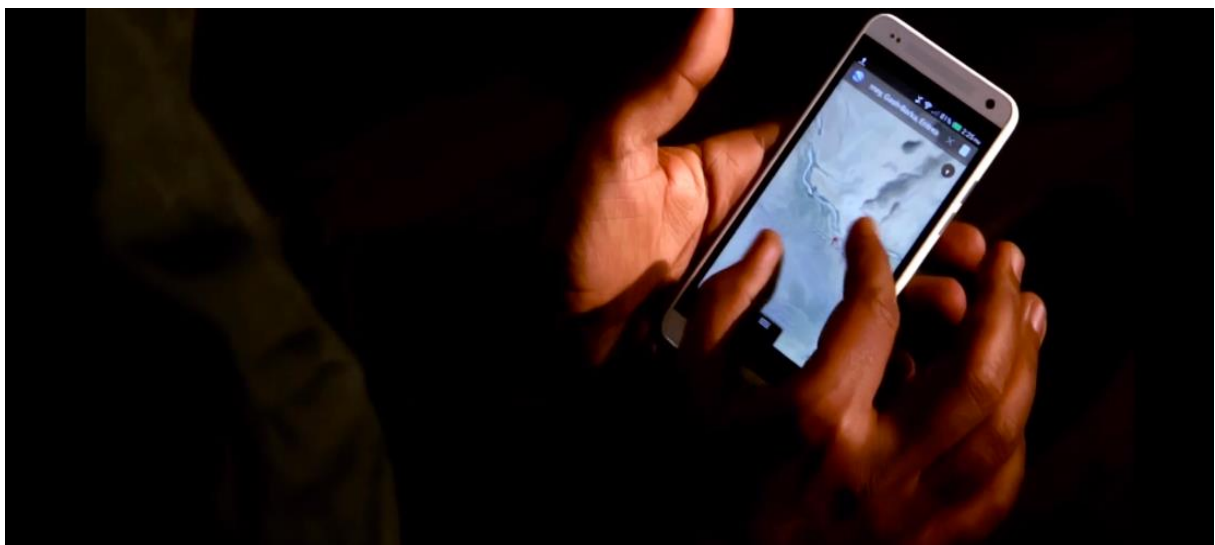


Fig. 2. Video still from *It will be Chaos*, a 2018 HBO documentary directed by Lorena Luciano and Filippo Piscopo. Aregai narrates his journey from a small market town in Eritrea to Italy. Trapped in the bureaucracy of the Italian immigration system, he decides to move to Sweden. Courtesy of Niccolò Bruna and the directors.

The line that divides the documentary universe from that of academic research is thinning. In migration research, data-gathering about the journey through trajectory ethnography (Zijlstra and van Liempt 2017) also shares an increasing appeal with mapping devices, especially for those researchers “unable to physically travel along with their research subjects” (Büscher and Urry 2009, 103). Since trajectory ethnography requires informants to be tracked through GPS, it examines how migrants develop alternative routes and new strategies while being temporarily immobilized at “transfer points” or “places of in-betweenness” (Büscher and Urry 2009, 108). After the process, the researcher can assess the different uses of maps enacted during the convoluted journey. He or she can also consider visualising, through geovisualisations, the final map that emerges at the end of the route. The many digital maps produced during migration research then function as narratives, offering a “back story [...] composed of an intricate network of varied routes crossing the different regions from which refugees and migrants had originated” (Crawley et al. 2018, 33).

#3 *Finitude*

When I thought about life I got sick, so I left.
Abour Bakar Sidibè in *Les Sauters* (Sidibé et al. 2016)²

In May 2018, I had the opportunity to visit the *Imago Mundi* art exhibition in Trieste, Italy. My attention at that time was caught by hundreds of smartphones, set like so many gems on a rocky surface, glistening on a panel explicitly dedicated to Syria (see fig. 3, on the left). Rather than embodying the function of mobile devices, they stayed put, immobile, separated from the continuous wandering of their owners, as illustrated in the previous section. Their screens were, however, animated by different lights, voices, sounds, movements, and gestures that referred to the war in Syria that led millions of people to flee their homes but also to practices of resistance and border-crossing enacted by these now destitute citizens. One of these smartphones streamed a map of Syria. Such a map seemed docile, harmless, and stable compared to the martyrdoms that the Syrian body had experienced throughout the last decade. But first a cigarette and then an iron was suddenly wielded by a hand inside the screen to inflict wounds on the map (fig. 3, on the right). The paper texture of the map, mediated by the screen, curled up; the names of the cities vanished under the ash of the cigarette and the smoke of the iron. The map began to suffer and become corrupted like the territory of Syria. *The map was now Syria.*

Just like human skin, maps can be flexible and resistant but also vulnerable and perishable (Rossetto 2019), marked by violence, holes, and wounds of different kinds. Symbolically, they are ‘finite’ representations of spatial phenomena; physically and temporally, their material suggests that they are destined to die. These ephemeral maps may

also emerge on the bodies of those who embark on the migrant journey. Mrs. Nicoletta, a former teacher who now helps migrants crossing the French border in the Susa Valley, tells the author of *Ancora dodici chilometri* of a bodily map that took shape on an African boy she once hid in her home. Such corporeal cartography is “clearly visible thanks to large scars scattered around the body,” sculptured by the torture and violence that the boy had had to face during his imprisonment in Libya (Pagliassotti 2019, 53).

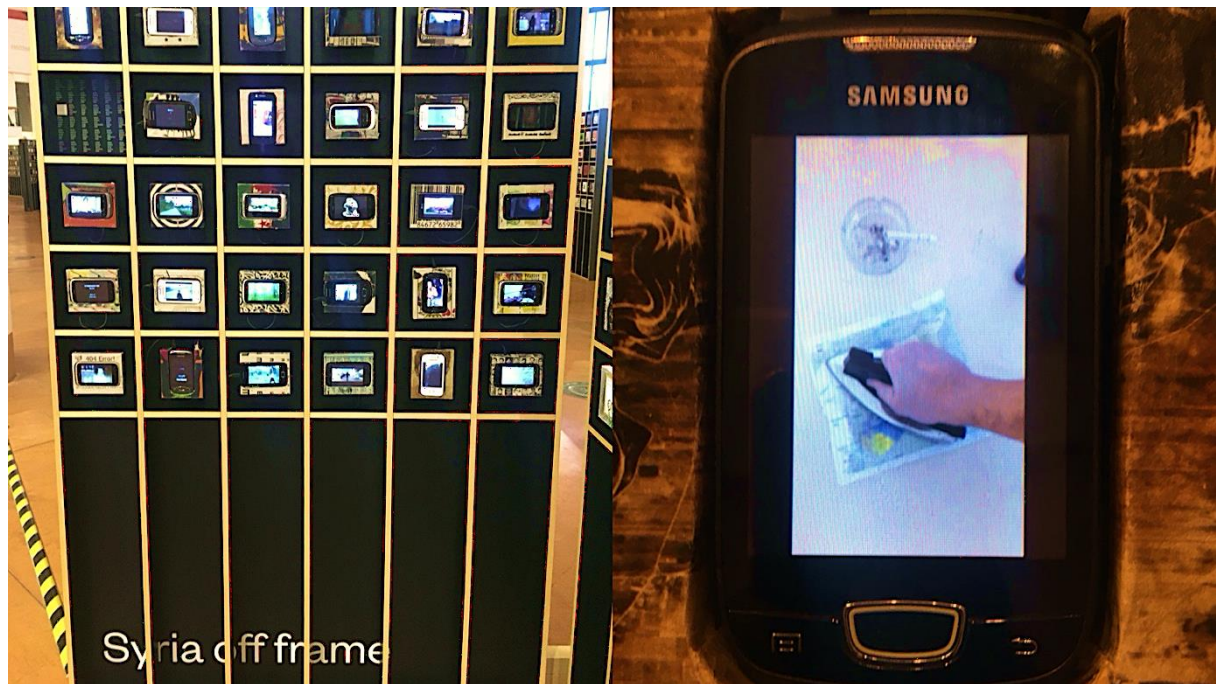


Fig. 3. Ali Safar, Iron, Syria, 2015. Imago Mundi Collection, Fondazione Benetton, Trieste, 2018. Author's photograph.

Beyond the intuitive understanding of the map as a navigational medium that allows humans to physically move from one place to another, these two examples suggest that there is also a symbolical and emotional aspect of the map that links it to the experience of migration. This semiotic aura cannot be easily overlooked. Since the migrant journey has an end or encounters a limit, so do maps, as protheses of migration, experience or represent many expressions of finitude. More generally, the imagery of the map has most often burst into humanistic and artistic work to express, in both an intimate and geopolitical sense, the current and dramatic violence of our times, marked above all by the idea of corruption, deterioration, and the tragic finitude of humanity, which is peculiar to wars and environmental crises. Similarly, cartographic and archival anxiety about migrant fatalities is particularly increased in a time in which migration and border policies are transforming many passages, like the Mediterranean Sea, into deathscapes (Heller and Pezzani 2014; Lo Presti 2019). According to the International Organisation for Migration, more than 19,000 people died at sea between 2015 and 2020, and this number is still far from the actual reality, as many deaths were unreported. Pronouncing the word ‘migration’ more often means equating this

process with death, and maps like affective sponges have started to absorb and dramatize the sense of suffering and tragedy surrounding the whispering of migration. This necropolitical atmosphere is usually expressed by the many red dots that activist researchers and journalists put on maps to make visible the incidents of violence and death that occurred to migrants during the terraqueous passage across the Mediterranean Sea. Vivid examples are offered by *The Migrants' File*, *Migreurop*, *Liquid Traces* (Heller and Pezzani 2014). Those maps transform the aggressive arrows directed to Europe into holes and barriers. Exhausted by the dominant political debate on the crisis of migration and the perils of an invasion, they reveal the lack of humanity in our times, and thus re-signify maps as the “epitome of the unliving” (Lo Presti 2019).

Conclusion

In this paper, the boundaries of the term *migritude* are expanded to include clandestine migrant trails and their cartographies, highlighting several moments and conditions where maps are implicated in the lives and deaths of migrants. The scattered examples discussed above cast light on the ways that maps, mappings, and cartographic imaginings differently intrude upon, infiltrate, and challenge the narratives of migrant journeys. The triad of *transitude*, *digitude*, and *finitude* suggests that there is no a singular or dominant way through which maps of migration can be experienced today nor an exclusive disciplinary gaze that can claim to speak for them; their *allotropy* (the possibility of maps to exist in different forms) makes the agonistic coexistence of surveillant maps and counter-maps, of paper and digital spaces, of mobility and immobility, of humanities and social sciences, thinkable and practicable in the larger subject of postcolonial humanities. Against the heterogeneous background embraced by the *migritude* of maps, displacement becomes both a dense narratological and sociological tool, by which the intensity of the line that links A to B can be progressively unpacked through several inquiries, rhythms, images, and events.

While *transitude* evokes the power of mapping as a multisensorial, undetected, and concerted practice of border-crossing, cartographic *digitude* enhances, in many contexts, the agency of migrants during their decision-making, making maps a means of navigation, a communication device, and often a life-line tool. Moreover, maps can become commemorative images and political remnants of the current necropolitical regime of migration by following not just the movements, emotions, and feelings of displaced people, but also their interruptions and sufferance. In this sense, it would be unfair to refer to the present cartographic media culture as one that has been exclusively dominated by the aggressive, hard-hearted, and vectorial cartographies of the crisis. When maps are re-appropriated, subjectivized, and re-narrated in unpredictable ways by the many subjects involved in the migration trail, we can instead attune ourselves to the suggestive ways that human maps disrupt the mainstream cartographic system and open up to different spaces of imagination and critical

thinking.

The emphasis of cultural map scholars, like that of postcolonial writers and artists, is on those transformative mappings in which the geometry of power can be subverted, subaltern bodies can reclaim the right to inhabit abstract spaces, geopolitics and intimate geography may converge, and the solid and abstract fixity of maps ends up unravelling:

In this myriad of different ways of thinking about mapping, attention shifts onto processes, institutions, social groups, power, interactions between different elements in networks, emotions at play in mapping, the nature of mapping tasks, and a concern with practice. (Perkins 2008, 152)

This practice-oriented perspective is currently handled by post-representational and non-representational geographers to unpack the many roles played by maps in society, but it has not been fully directed onto migratory events where maps and mapping are intensely imbricated. To appreciate the migrature of maps in its variety of cultural forms and practices requires an interdisciplinary effort, and the postcolonial cartographic humanities are an opportunity to retrace alternative imaginations of human mobility that are sensitive to the complex nuances and experiences of migrant stories.

Notes

¹ All citations of sources in Italian that appear in the article were translated by the author.

² Abou Bakar Sidibé is a migrant from Mali who filmed for a year his and other people's attempts to cross the border between Morocco and Melilla. These videos gave birth to the documentary *Les Sauteurs* (2016), co-directed by Sidibé, Moritz Siebert, and Estephan Wagner.

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(Deep) Mapping postmortem geographies in the context of migration¹

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ABSTRACT

What happens to migrants when they die? Inspired by the emerging academic literature concerning death in the context of migration and Avril Madrell's (2016) deep mapping framework to study the geographies of remembrance, grief and mourning, we mapped the postmortem geographies of three migrants who lived and died in Quebec. This mapping process traced posthumous geographies through the stories told by partners and friends of the deceased. While these geographies can cover multiple components of death, such as memories of the deceased and artifacts associated with them, in this project, we focus on the mobilities of the bodies and the geography of the social networks triggered by death. Mapping the bodies' transnational mobilities reveals both the links that are developed over time between the country of origin and the host country, and the journeys that bodies of migrants often take before reaching their final destination(s). Mapping the social networks that emerge after death in the context of migration reveals both their global facets and their local structure, which are ephemeral and extremely difficult to locate spatially. By employing maps and stories, this paper provides insights about the complex dimensions of these postmortem mobilities. Further, it calls for alternative sources of information and forms of spatial expressions to continue the study of the geographies of death in the context of migration.

Keywords

cartography, migration, death, deep mapping, body, networks

Introduction

Death in the context of migration is a growing issue that has sustained attention in both the media and academia. However, death also happens once migrants have reached their destination and have settled down. They have not died while crossing seas, deserts, or borders, but by accident, disease, homicide, or old age (Lestage 2008; Hunter and Soom Ammann 2017). For those migrants, death is not the end of their migratory story; it is another chapter (Marjavaara 2012). Their bodies may remain where they perished, or travel long distances to return to their home country, city, or village (Hunter 2016). Their families and friends' net-

works might be mobilized to help with emotional support, religious ceremonies, financial expenses, and the administrative burden of repatriation and burial (Balkan 2016; Le Gall 2017). Memories of the deceased might travel through the people who carried them and hold them, as well as through the photographs and artifacts associated with them (Rachédi and Halsouet 2017). These virtual, emotional, and physical geographies and mobilities of bodies, artifacts, and memories often overlap in time and space, making them a complex spatial phenomenon to research (Le Gall and Rachédi 2019). Based on a conceptual framework developed by Avril Madrell (2016) to study the physical, embodied-psychological, and virtual spatial dimensions associated with remembrance, grief, and mourning, we propose a cartographic approach to study these posthumous geographies in the migratory context.

This mapping endeavor is the first step of a partnership between researchers in social work and cartography towards a deep mapping project of postmortem geographies. Deep mapping is envisioned here as a process, characterized by its collaborative dimension (Warf 2016; Presner 2019) and the combination of conventional and alternative mapping strategies (Bodenhamer 2015; Bishop 2016). These produce spatial expressions dedicated to representing multiple aspects of places. In this first step of our deep mapping project, we focus on a conventional cartographic strategy to represent postmortem migrant stories. To reach this goal, we have mapped the physical, virtual, and psychological spaces and mobilities described in three postmortem life stories told by relatives of migrants who lived and died in Quebec (Canada). By mapping the spaces and mobilities of their bodies and their social networks, this paper aims to better understand the relevance and the limits of mobilizing formalized maps of stories to study postmortem geographies. This paper starts by reviewing the academic literature related to death in the migratory context. Then, we discuss the methodological framework and the cartographic approach used to map and study the selected stories. Finally, we present the results of this process, highlighting the potential and limits of formalized maps to explore postmortem geographies in the context of migration.

Death in the context of migration

Studying death in the context of migration is not an easy task, given the difficulty of gathering reliable or consistent data about migrants in general and dead migrants in particular (Lestage 2008; Mbiba 2010; Marjavaara 2012; Rachédi and Halsouet 2017). Since official state agencies do not compile these data systematically, researchers have developed their own methods to collect them. Whereas certain issues around migrants' deaths – such as the repatriation of their corpses – can be tracked rather precisely using quantitative data, capturing the emotional, cultural, and social meanings of postmortem geographies is much more challenging. To study these personal and intangible geographies, researchers have based their analyses on particular case studies, employing qualitative methods such as interviews, life stories, and multi-site ethnographies. Through these, they acknowledge the importance of

personal memories and experiences for understanding the complex relationships that exist between death and migration (Hunter and Soom Amman 2017; Rachédi and Kobelinsky 2018). We argue that these studies revolve around four different angles: the body, memorial practices, social networks, and artifacts.

In diaspora, the burial site might be more important than the place of birth (Ho 2006). This is because the body's final destination may help to clarify issues around identity, loyalty, and belonging (Marjavaara 2017). Even though “the literature on the geographies of the body has done little to engage with the significance of bodies once they cease to be living” (Young and Light 2013, 136), a few studies have been interested in tracking and analyzing the burial places of migrants.

In geography, the first study related to this topic was elaborated by Graham Rowles and Malcolm Comeaux (1986). They used death certificates to study the postmortem migration of individuals who died in the state of Arizona. Their assessment found different flows concerning postmortem national migration in this state, such as the predominant postmortem mobilities from Arizona to the Great Lakes region linked to the “snowbirds” seasonal migration (Rowles and Comeaux 1986). More recently, Beacon Mbiba (2010) examined the repatriation of Zimbabweans from the United Kingdom. He studied these migrants' preference to be buried in urban cemeteries or rural homes after having lived in diaspora. Just like Rowles and Comeaux, he collected data from local funeral parlors, but he also conducted small telephone surveys and media coverage. Roger Marjavaara (2012) proposed another method of collecting data to systematically study internal postmortem migration in Sweden. Marjavaara, who coined the term ‘post-mortal mobilities’, gathered information from the burials’ registers inside Swedish churches, which he merged with micro-data on migration patterns. Then, he generated a series of plots and maps to showcase the flows and factors which “might explain the geographical patterns of post-mortal mobility in Sweden” (Marjavaara 2012, 257). In a following study (Marjavaara 2017), he further explored migrants’ desires regarding their perspective places of burial. These various studies have emphasized the importance of migrants’ bodies’ posthumous mobilities and their links to homemaking and belonging processes.

Other studies have focused on the rituals and ceremonies associated with death in the context of migration. Katy Gardner (2002) examined the transnational burial rituals performed for and by Bangladeshi migrants who lived in the United Kingdom. Through a series of interviews, she highlighted the interplay between gender politics, state restrictions, and economic factors on rituals performed in the cities of London and Sylhet. Alistair Hunter (2016) used media analysis, semi-structured interviews, and archival research to reveal the power dynamics and conflicts related to the burial and memorialization practices of two case studies of Muslim and Hindu migrants in the United Kingdom. Johanna Zulueta (2016) offered another angle to the repatriation studies, funerary meanings, and burial of migrants. She inter-

viewed older Okinawan women, mostly widows, who returned to Japan. Zalueta focused her research on the decisions concerning the imaginary of their future funerals and rituals. The study demonstrated that their lives abroad influenced their choices due to cross-cultural marriages and experiences, which created tensions with their hometown' more traditional views (Zalueta 2016).

The corpse presence is not always a condition for memorialization practices in diaspora, as noted by Clara Saraiva and José Mapril (2014). These authors used a multi-sited ethnographic approach to research the funerary practices of Bissau-Guinean migrants in Portugal. They explained that, according to their tradition, communities must conduct funerary rituals for the deceased migrants in both countries. Whereas the body's repatriation depended on economic or symbolic factors, these funeral ceremonies give the dead a final and everlasting connection within their home-country families, ancestors, and diasporic communities, demonstrating the transnational links between countries.

Social networks play a crucial role when death happens in the context of migration. Besim Can Zirh (2012) performed multi-sited ethnographic research following Alevi immigrant communities in Turkey and Europe. He studied how different institutional and family networks are mobilized to assist with funeral and repatriation practices. Furthermore, Zirh claimed that these mobilizations are part of community-making and transnational practices that need to be understood beyond the fixity of national scales, borders, and representations (Zirh 2012). His arguments resonate with Françoise Lestage's (2008; 2009) studies of migrants' postmortem repatriations from the United States to Mexico. In her analyses, Lestage explained how the networks of families and friends might interact with the state, the private sector, and public agencies during the repatriation process, creating transnational dynamics.

Technology is also part of the networks' analysis. Josiane Le Gall and Lilyane Rachédi (2019) studied the cases of migrants who live in Quebec and could not attend funerary rituals of family members or friends in their home countries. They focused on the practices around technology, which enabled these migrants to attend their loved ones' funerals virtually. They argue that even if live streaming has revolutionized the way people connect and interact around the world, "these new methods of communication cannot compensate for physical separation, despite transnational exchanges and rituals" (Le Gall and Rachédi 2019, 79). Giuseppe Beluschi-Fabeni (2018) echoed these claims in a similar study as he analysed the impact of communication technologies involved in funeral rituals on the Korturare Roma community.

Lastly, some researchers have investigated the role of objects in the context of death in migration. Objects can serve as physical proxies of memories and emotions associated with the deceased (Maddrell 2013; Romanillos 2015) while inviting the living to subscribe to a duty to remember (Rachédi and Halsouet 2017). In Montreal, Emma Harake, a Lebanese

visual artist, discussed how photographs helped migrants remember their loved ones who died during their life in diaspora in Quebec (Harake 2019). Objects might also serve as an extension of the body. Saraiva and Mapril (2014) explained how the Bissau-Guinean communities in diaspora return a suitcase with the departed's essential belongings when the family does not have the economic resources to repatriate the body. These suitcases, called *mala*, preserve the links between the countries of birth and death, allowing the community to mourn migrants in two different places simultaneously while giving the deceased a symbolic return to their home ground (Saraiva and Mapril 2014).

Even though academic and media circles often focus on the journeys and geographies of the living migrants (Marjaavara 2017), it is clear that their bodies, artifacts, memories, and networks are still moving in space after their death. These posthumous mobilities are still part of the migrant's experience, since “[they] represent the continuing of human mobility to a place of great significance for the individual or his or her survivors” (Marjavaara 2012, 257).

Deep mapping postmortem geographies in the context of migration

Deep mapping is a movement in the spatial humanities that aims to combine different sources of data and forms of spatial expressions (such as maps, drawings, texts, and videos) to knit together diverse narratives (Presner 2019) and create different databases that help to reveal the deep meaning of places (Bodenhamer 2015). Although the origins of deep mapping are often traced back to the publication of *Prairyerth: A Deep Map* by William Least Heat-Moon (1991), the concept of deep mapping has been greatly developed in the last decade. In particular, there has been clear emphasis on the process of making maps (Roberts 2016) and on their storytelling potential (Harris, 2015). This perspective has led to the production of contrasting projects where stories and memories played a central role (see Wood 2010; Presner 2014; Naramore Maher 2014; Mattern 2015; Cateridge 2015; Scherf 2015; Bishop 2016; Kawano et al. 2016; Novković 2019).

In the context of postmortem geographies, Avril Maddrell (2016) has proposed the mobilization of deep mapping to depict messy, shifting, and multi-layered geographies of living with loss (Maddrell 2016). Maddrell's deep mapping approach focuses on the interaction and overlapping of three concrete spaces associated with grief and mourning: physical, embodied-psychological, and virtual spaces. The physical and material spaces include artifacts, public memorials, and evocative landscapes. The psychological spaces are linked to feelings, emotions, memory, and psychological responses to particular locations (e.g. insomnia, sadness, and agoraphobia). The virtual spaces include online chat rooms, community and support networks, and even religious universes such as heaven, nirvana or, hell (Maddrell 2016).

Maddrell's deep mapping project offers an explicit way to articulate and depict these spaces. In her attempt to visualize them, she created a handful of spatial representations

using the specific case of Gemma, a woman who experienced the loss of a loved one. Inspired by this attempt of mapping remembrance, grief, and mourning; we have designed a first series of formalized maps. This series presented in this paper is envisioned as a first step towards a deep mapping project of death in the context of migration.

This mapping endeavour is part of the project built by the research team Death in the Context of Migration (MECMI). This team of social workers collected thirty in-depth life stories of migrants who lived and died in Quebec. The stories were narrated by family members and friends of the deceased. One of the main goals of MECMI was to reconstruct and then analyse the spatial meanings and trajectories of the deceased and their loved ones to better understand the ordeal of death in migration and to support the bereaved. Moreover, MECMI aims to raise awareness among social work practitioners about the spatial issues regarding death in the context of migration (e.g. mobilization of transnational networks, barriers to mobility to attend funerals, development of emotional and financial assistance).

Among the thirty collected stories, MECMI selected three of them to be mapped due to their representativity and geographical traits. The story of Rahim,² who died by accident a few months after arriving in Quebec; the story of Dragomir, who perished while visiting his home country after living in Quebec for many years; and the story of Eric, a young exile who arrived in Quebec looking for a job. They came from the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Africa, respectively. The stories of Rahim and Dragomir were narrated by their wives, Rabia and Lenka. Paul told the life story of his friend Eric.

The first phase of the mapping process consisted in identifying and cataloguing the sections of each story that had spatial information (e.g. place name or movement) that could be linked to our topics of interest (e.g. body, social networks, artifacts, ceremonies) and time periods (e.g. year, month or day). We used the qualitative software MaxQDA to help us with this phase. Once the data was collected, we selected a mapping application to visualize it. Although there are now a range of online mapping applications dedicated to telling stories with maps, such as ESRI Story Maps and StorymapJS (Caquard and Dimitrovas 2017), there are very few mapping tools designed specifically to map stories to study their geographies. Atlascine is one of these applications. It is an open-source tool designed to map the spatiotemporal structure of stories and to help identify places that are important within stories. It also focuses on the multiple connections (e.g. postmortem mobilities) that exist between these places (Caquard and Fiset 2013). Atlascine offers the possibility to map in parallel stories (such as those of the storyteller and of the deceased) and to compare the geographies of different stories. In our project, we used Atlascine to map the postmortem life stories with a focus on the trajectory of the body before and after death, as well as the social networks that were triggered by this tragic event.

The body

Different factors influence the final destination of a body as families must take into account their economic, social, and political contexts (see Hunter 2016) as well as the will of the deceased and their own wishes. The stories of Rahim and Dragomir illustrate this issue. Rabia explained how her husband Rahim identified Afghanistan as the place where he wanted to be buried – his final home. Days later, after his death, Rahim’s body was repatriated to Afghanistan.

He said, “it’s your choice if you stay in Canada or if you go back to Afghanistan, or Pakistan, or anywhere... For me, the children needed to be safe. Now, all the decisions are yours. But please send my body to Afghanistan.” And I said, “yes, of course,” It was not easy for me, but it was his decision and his last wish... (Rabia)

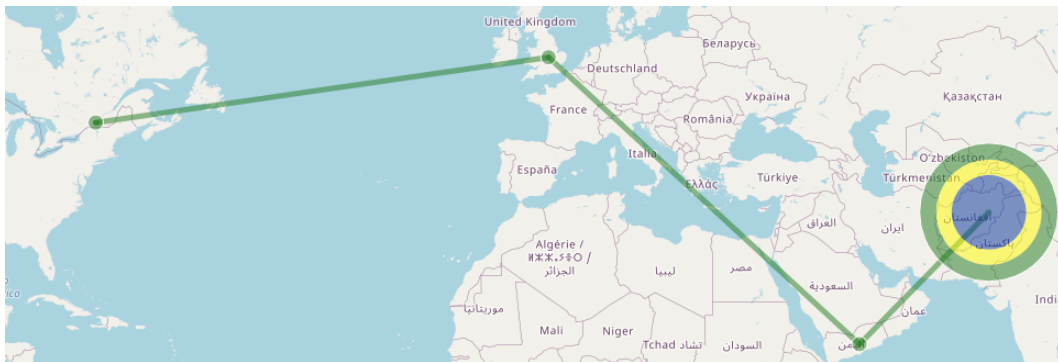


Fig. 1a. Rabia (yellow) and Rahim (blue) travelled as a couple (green) from Afghanistan through Yemen and the United Kingdom before arriving in Quebec (green line), where Rahim died a few days later after an accident.

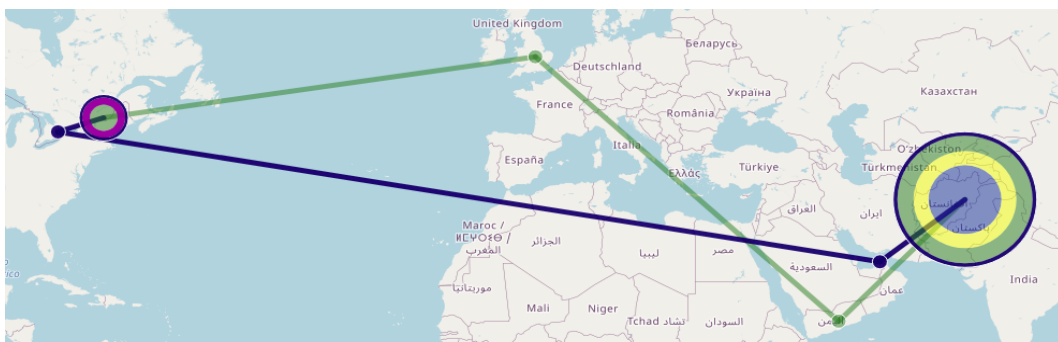


Fig. 1b. Few days after his death (purple), Rahim’s body was repatriated to his hometown. As narrated by Rabia, the corpse transited through Toronto, Dubai and Pakistan before arriving in Afghanistan (blue line).

We split the map of Rabia and Rahim into two parts: premortem and postmortem migrations. The first part (fig. 1a) synthesizes their life as children and adults in Afghanistan and their migration as a couple to Quebec. It epitomizes the diasporic journeys of many migrants, who, like them, left their home countries due to violence or economic issues. However, this map is just one half of Rahim’s migration story; the map concerning his postmortem geographies closed the loop with the repatriation of his body to Afghanistan (fig. 1b). This second map

illustrates a chapter “highly ignored in contemporary migration studies” (Zirh 2012, 1760): the journey back ‘home’ of Rahim’s body, which shows that migration does not stop with death.

The second story that we mapped is that of Dragomir, told by his wife Lenka. Lenka and Dragomir lived together in Quebec for many years. However, Dragomir did not die in Canada like Rahim, but of a heart attack during a visit back to his hometown in Serbia. Lenka and Rahim’s life story map is minimalistic: two points and one line that grows as the couple travels back and forth between Quebec and Serbia (figure 2). The growing lines between both places capture the idea that migrants, after their arrival to their host country, connect societies of origin and settlement (Basch, Schiller, and Szanton-Blanc 1994). Furthermore, this connection captures the idea “that ‘home’ and ‘abroad’ are not distinct spaces of migrants’ lives, but are interconnected through a multifarious web of material and affective exchanges between migrants and their home communities” (Kvietok 2018, 60). As Saravia and Mapril (2014) mentioned, the repatriation of the body and its meanings contribute to strengthening the links between these societies. This issue is particularly evident in the context of Dragomir and Lenka’s story, since this link was strong enough to repatriate the body from the country of origin (i.e. Serbia) to their host country (i.e. Canada) in a sort of reverse repatriation process. Indeed, as recalled by Lenka:

He preferred to be buried in Serbia. But my two daughters told me that they preferred their father to be buried in Quebec because they want to visit his grave. I thought about it, and finally, I decided to respect the wishes of my daughters. (Lenka)

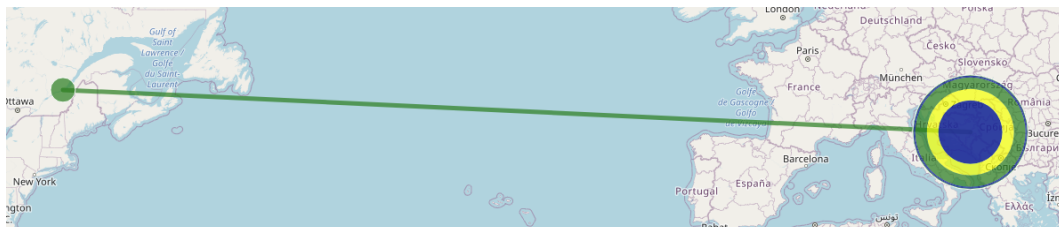


Fig. 2a. The symbols show where Lenka (yellow) and Dragomir (blue) lived in Serbia first as individuals, then as a couple (green) before migrating to Quebec (green line).

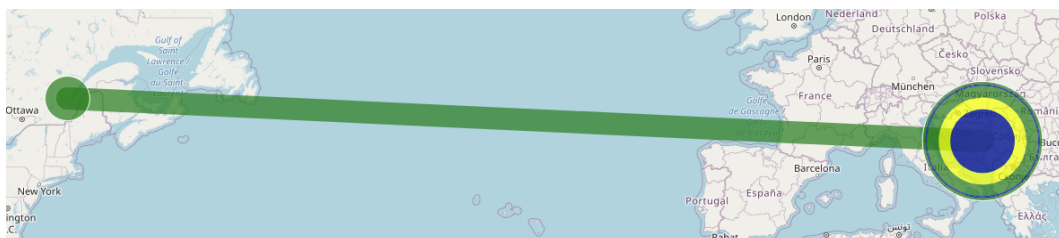


Fig. 2b. During their lives in Quebec (green), the couple travelled multiple times to their home country, which is materialized by the green line becoming wider every time they travelled.

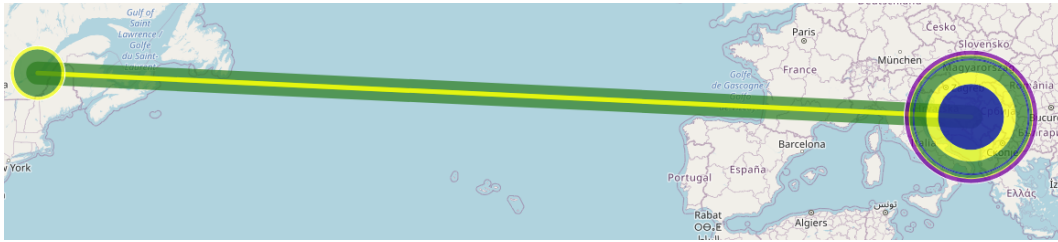


Fig. 2c. In one of their journeys to Serbia, Dragomir suffered a heart attack (purple). Lenka (yellow), who was in Quebec at that time, travelled to Serbia after receiving the news of her husband's death (yellow line).



Fig. 2d. The body of Dragomir is repatriated to Quebec (blue line) a few days after his death.

Classic migration theories, such as the *push and pull* theories, identify economic, political, and demographic factors as the causes pushing people out of their places of origin and pulling them towards their destination places (Castles, Miller, and De Haas 2014). While these factors might contribute to understanding some facets of the postmortem mobilities in the context of migration, the stories narrated by Rabia and Lenka showed that the sense of home and belonging were fundamental to comprehending the decisions concerning the final resting places of Rahim and Dragomir. These decisions could create spatial tensions since the sense of belonging of the family members may differ from the deceased's funeral wishes, showing that inside the stories of migration, home is not often anchored in just one place (Blunt 2007). The maps reveal these tensions as the magnitude of the concentric circles illustrate the amount of time these families spent in certain places, a factor that contributed to their (lack of) spatial attachment to Quebec or to their country of origin. However, what these maps do not show is the sense of home or belonging to these places and how it evolves over time, not just for the deceased or the storyteller, but for other family members as well (e.g. Lenka and Dragomir's daughters).

Networks and archipelagos

Mario Benedetti compared the Uruguayan diaspora to an archipelago in his novel *Springtime in a broken mirror*, as explained by one of his characters, an exile in Australia:

I always said that, in Australia, we are the Uruguayan archipelago. Because in fact, we make up a series of islands, islets, single guys or couples or families, all isolated from each other, existing in solitude, comfortable perhaps, but in solitude, nonetheless. Some send money to their families back in Uruguay. It gives their lives and work some meaning. (1982, 72)

Benedetti suggests that people living in diaspora resemble islands and islets, which together form an archipelago. These islands are isolated from each other but remain connected to the island of departure (i.e. “Some send money to their families back in Uruguay,” 1982, 72). These islands can also be connected during particular national events such as presidential elections and crucial sport events (Malella 2013), as well as during more personal events such as death. Death can contribute to revealing some of the connections between these islands within the archipelago and beyond.

Rabia described how, after Rahim's death, her family and friends traveled to Quebec from around the globe to help her with the ceremonies' administrative and emotional burden (fig. 3).

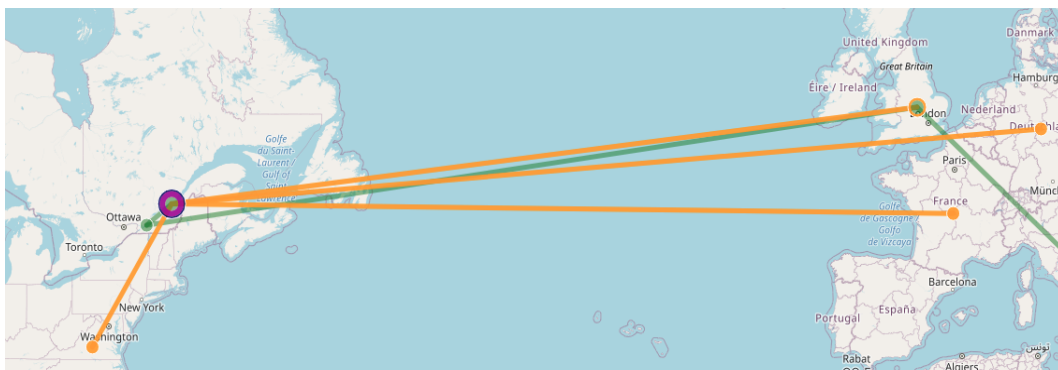


Fig. 3. After the death of Rahim (purple), Rabia’s family and friends travelled to Quebec in a matter of days (orange lines) to help her.

In this example, the network represents the physical mobilities of people who travelled to join Rabia. Still, often these connections remain distant and are mediated by means of communication, illustrating the importance of telecommunications in death and diaspora (Le Gall and Rachédi 2016). This was, for instance, the case in Lenka and Dragomir’s story (fig. 4).

I received condolences. I still remember the calls from his friends and family, and people we haven’t seen since the war. It was very touching to speak with people we have known in ‘another life’. (Lenka)

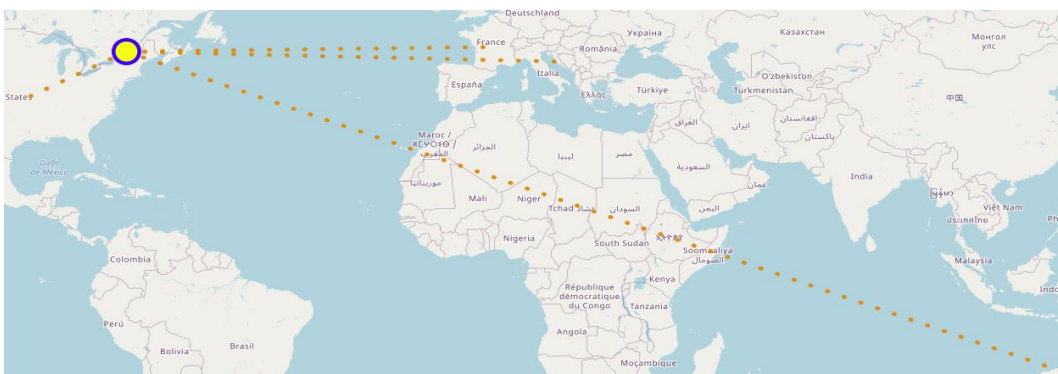


Fig. 4. After Dragomir’s burial at Quebec (blue), Lenka (yellow) received messages from friends (orange dotted lines), who lived in exile around the world.

In these two examples, the archipelago is global, but there are other forms of archipelagos that emerge outside of the communities of origin at a very local scale. Local and global networks become interconnected through the focal point of the death. This is clearly illustrated in Paul and Eric’s story. Paul described in detail the events that occurred the day his friend died, and the difficult task of announcing his death to the family. The map revealed the global archipelago of this segment, but it failed to depict its local geographies, reflecting the lack of precise locations at the local and personal scales in the story (fig. 5a and 5b).

Well, let’s say that the day he died, the first person I called was a friend from work. I said, ‘Listen, I’m alone at home, Eric died, you have to come.’ He left his job. He arrived before the firefighters and all the services.

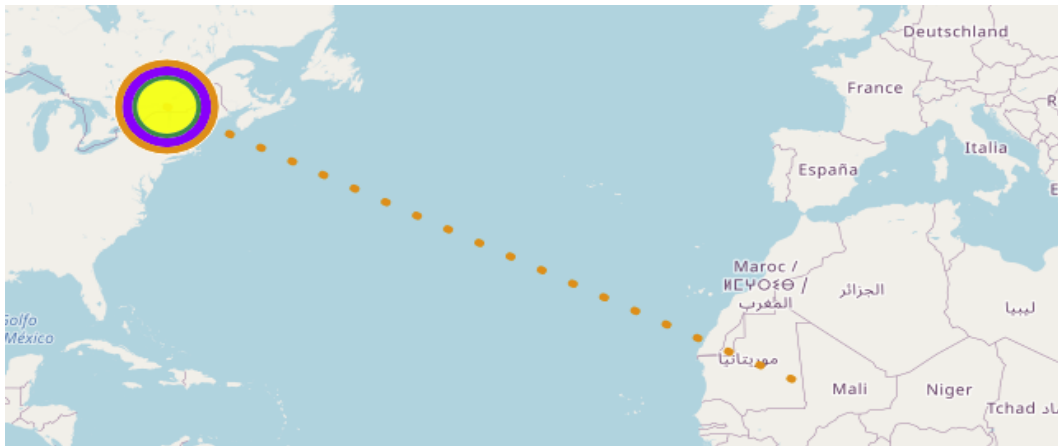


Fig. 5a. Global network of postmortem communications described in Eric and Paul’s story.

I didn’t feel strong enough to do it at the time. Announce the death of a son to his mother [in Africa] by phone. I needed to be sure she has someone next to her before I tell her this sad news. So, I contacted Samuel, who was the one who put me in contact with the family regarding the case of Eric. (Paul)

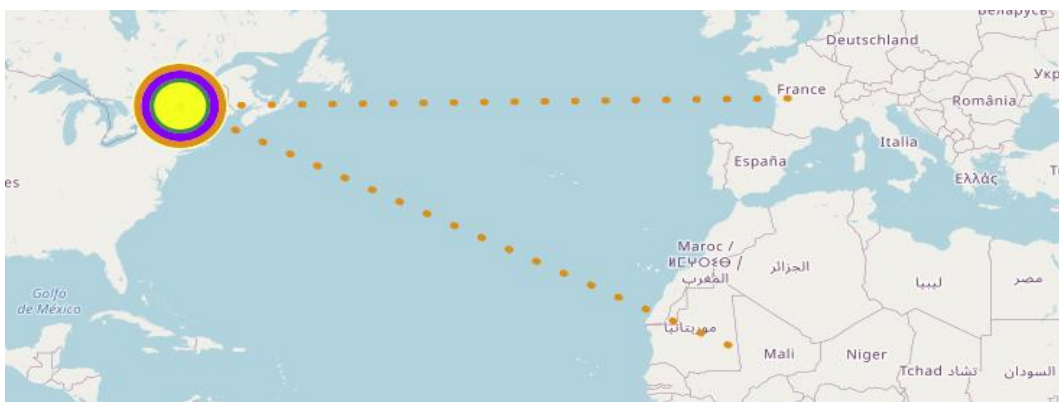


Fig. 5b. Global network of postmortem communications described in Eric and Paul’s story.

As for the father, well, he lives in Paris. I couldn’t reach him... I couldn’t reach him, and he actually saw my phone number, and he called me back. He called me back and told me – ‘how is it going in Canada?’ Spontaneously, I said to him, – ‘well...you know...’. I didn’t know if the mother had informed

him or not. So, he was not aware that his son had died. He responded – ‘what did I know?’... There, I realized that he was not even aware of it. (Paul)

Eric and Paul’s story reveals, beyond the global archipelago to which many migrants belong, the importance of *weak ties*, acquaintances with whom the migrant has sporadic interaction (Granovetter 1973). These weak ties often play a central role during the funerary and repatriation processes (Rachédi and Halsouet 2017; Saramo 2019). A friend from work helped Paul during the postmortem shock, while an organization of African migrants in Canada helped him with Eric’s death’s financial and administrative burden.

People register their family members. I think the repatriation rate is \$ 15,000, so we take this \$ 15,000, and we divide it among all the members who are registered... People arrive by word of mouth. They saw that it is something that works. They took care of everything: the exhibition halls, the repatriations, the paperwork with the embassy and others... Éric was under our wing, so we registered him before he died. (Paul)

In most stories, weak ties are part of a local archipelago. They are activated only when necessary, but they often escape the conventional mapping process since they appear at local scales where places are described with common noun place names such as ‘the hospital bed’, ‘the childhood home’, or ‘the funerary’. Mapping these local archipelagos is about mapping relationships at multiples scales rather than mapping precise geographic locations. It is mapping connections.

On the one hand, Atlascine enables the representation of these relationships when they are associated with geographic locations as illustrated with the mapping of the connection between Quebec and Serbia in Lenka and Dragomir’s story. On the other hand, it is inappropriate for mapping relationships between non-geolocatable entities such as common noun place names or persons; it is inappropriate to map the weak ties between an individual, the organization and the people that provide support on a daily basis; it is inappropriate to map the importance of personal spaces during a difficult time, such as a private room in a hospital.

Mapping these personal geographies is key for revealing and studying postmortem geographies, but it requires alternative forms of spatial expressions that prioritize topological relationships between places, people, objects, events, emotions and memories, instead of their geographic location. This is what led Anne Knowles and colleagues to develop the concept of Inductive Visualization to map testimonies of Holocaust survivors (Knowles et al. 2015) and to propose a topological Geographic Information System (GIS) that prioritizes relations over Euclidean location (Knowles et al. forthcoming). This is also what drove Elise Olmedo (2015) to develop the concept of sensibility mapping to represent aspects of stories (such as emotions) that can be extremely important but quite challenging to map with cartographic tools. This also prompted us to combine conventional mapping approaches with

alternative ones in a previous project that mapped memories of exiles in close collaboration with storytellers. This was done to, as much as possible, respect their experiences and the way they wanted their memories to be mapped (see Caquard et al. 2019).

The diversification of spatial expressions of postmortem geographies becomes particularly meaningful with the diversification of data represented. Deep mapping projects are supposed to include a range of data such as statistics, interviews, archives and stories, with the expectation that this diversity might help understand a particular place in more depth (Bodenhamer 2015). However, as mentioned earlier, outside of interviews and stories, there is a lack of data to extensively study postmortem geographies of migrants. Furthermore, the focus on particular places in a deep mapping project does not fit postmortem geographies, which involve different networks and mobilities at local and global scales. A deep mapping project of postmortem geographies could then focus on mapping one case study, instead of one place, in depth. This might require not only collecting postmortem life stories of relatives and friends, but also untangling the decision-making process, as well as performing media analysis about the postmortem journeys. The extremely complex logistical, emotional and ethical challenges raised by such a project could be addressed by studying a well-known case: a death in context of migration that has attracted enough media attention to produce a large and diverse collection of stories, interviews, and articles.

Such a deep mapping project would require particular attention towards the entire mapping process: from the data collection to the data coding, the development of spatial representations, and their reception not only by the general public, but also by the people who have been directly affected by the death under study. Although all these phases are important in any mapping project, they become even more crucial in the context of mapping postmortem migrations. Mapping is a process of emphasizing and erasing that can take another dimension when representing such a polarizing topic as death and migration. Who decides what should be emphasized and erased in a deep mapping project of postmortem migration, and why? What might be the implications of this decision?

These questions should be addressed while keeping in mind the healing potential of this type of project. While storytelling has proved to be an efficient healing technique (Blanco 2015; Mongeau and Rachédi 2017; Saramo, 2018), mapping can also contribute to the healing process that follows the loss of a friend or relative (Coulis 2010). Activities such as collaborative mapping workshops dedicated to the representation of the life and death of loved ones can be part of this deep mapping project and can be seen as a tribute to the deceased. While these activities might be organized in small discrete groups, their outcome may become public and controversial given the emotional and ideological dimensions associated with death in the context of migration. This brings us to what might be the most fundamental questions to ask ourselves when starting a deep mapping project of postmortem geography: why are we doing it and for whom? or rather, who should do it and with whom?

Conclusion

Based on Avril Madrell's (2016) deep mapping approach – which focuses on the interaction and overlapping of three concrete spaces (i.e. physical, embodied-psychological, and virtual spaces) associated with death, grief and mourning – this paper reflects on the potential and limitations of using cartography to map postmortem geographies through the analysis of three life stories of migrants who experienced the death of a loved one. The maps produced for this project made visible the idea that a migration process does not end with death; death is part of a longer personal and collective trajectory that unfolds in different dimensions. In this paper, we focused on two of these dimensions: the final journey of the body and the emergence of postmortem networks.

Through the mapping of these dimensions, this project offers a glimpse of the multiple directions at which the body travels and at which social networks get triggered and activated by death, somehow challenging the classic push and pull theories that conceive migration as unidirectional flows between countries. Yet, these maps fail to reveal most of the local postmortem social and material geographies. Most of the local places were unmappable with Atlascine since they were not attached to geographic coordinates, and parts of the social networks also went missing on these maps for the same reason. This issue underlines the necessity of mobilizing alternative forms of spatial expression that prioritize topology over location, connections over geographic coordinates, and mobility over layers.

The first phase of the project presented here remains at the surface of the stories mapped and the issue under study. This project requires going deeper into the narratives and the connections between them. It is also necessary to mobilize different forms of spatial expressions and – if possible – integrate more data and media. In that sense, a deep mapping project that captures every geography inside death in the migratory context might not be completely achievable. It may be more in the realm of intention than of possibility – a utopia that is impossible to reach, but one that keeps on inspiring us to try.

Notes

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² For confidentiality reasons, the names of the participants and the deceased, places, and dates are not the real ones in this paper. All the stories have been collected after ethical clearance was sought from the Comité institutionnel d'éthique de la recherche avec des êtres humains (CIEREN) of the University of Quebec at Montreal (UQAM).

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Data colonialism: the census, the map, and the software

Tommaso Grossi and Lucilla Lepratti

Independent scholars

ABSTRACT

This paper investigates how colonial logics of population mapping and administration find a continuity with the extraction and use of data in the Global South and its borders to the West. Understanding technologies of colonial management such as cartography and the census as sites of knowledge production, we draw parallels with contemporary, global forms of data-based governance. Rooted in recent theories of ‘data colonialism’, our paper shows how it continues, yet reconfigures, colonial power and objects of knowledge in establishing data-based relations. We develop this case by first discussing the genealogy of data extraction in relation to the organising of bodies and territories in different colonial contexts. One condition of continuity that we present is how European imperial censuses in the nineteenth century and colonial technologies of counting and ordering more broadly, are reshaped and reused in postcolonial contexts. We examine how data colonialism plays out in the Global South, specifically in the advancement of biometrics in postcolonial India. Further, expanding the notion of data colonialism, we look at how European migration management software makes populations on the move governable. In another retooling of the colonial census, the anticipation and management of migrations is enabled through the mapping and archiving of human mobility.

Keywords

data colonialism, census, map, biometrics, empires, borders

Introduction

This paper addresses a question of growing importance within theories of data and digital politics, comparing contemporary forms of data-based governance to colonial technologies of population mapping and knowledge production. With few, if any, political and economic arenas in which data does not play a strategic role, much of the scholarship produced on these topics locates data exploitation within theories of capitalist accumulation (Dyer-Whiteford 2015; Skeggs and Yuil 2018; Srnicek 2017), or within the study of surveillance apparatuses (Bigo 2002; Dijstelbloem et al. 2017; Zuboff 2015). Taking a step backwards, both historically and conceptually, we approach ‘data colonialism’ (Couldry and Mejias 2019a; Thatcher et al. 2016) through a study of biometric and satellite data in relation to the administration of colonies. Although for postcolonial scholars the study of administration is in no way a novelty, it is only recently that it has become a way to frame digital data as a resource sharing striking similarities with archives, demographic tools and cartographies of colonial heritage (Isin and Ruppert 2019). For data is increasingly seen – and used – as an *instrumentum regni* for the making and governing of populations in postcolonial contexts. We

argue that its genealogy should be traced back to the colonial census of populations, territories and resources. This genealogy allows us to draw on scholarship that looks at historical modes of colonial government for an understanding of data colonialism that encompasses and goes beyond extractivism (Couldry and Mejias 2019; Mezzadra and Nielson 2017), surveillance (Treguer 2019; Zuboff 2015), or the digital divide (Thatcher et al. 2016).

However useful it may be to focus on a single paradigm to address the new frontier of capitalism – as Mezzadra and Nielson (2017) have brilliantly done – we agree it is necessary not only to go “beyond the literal extraction” (2017, 193) but to go beyond extraction as a single framework of analysis. After all, data governance does not concern exclusively extractive processes, nor just surveillance or unequal access to the Internet. Rather, it concerns a whole set of operations, more or less visible, in which all of these aspects take part. Since the digitalisation of the economy and its modes of production concern not only the appropriation of data as a natural resource (Terranova 2000; Dyer-Whiteford 2015; Srnicek 2017) we agree with Couldry and Mejias that an expanded study of data colonialism must pay equal attention to how such resources are produced and reproduced. Not just through the exploitation of labour but through a *modus operandi* affecting almost all spheres of human life. Our priority, however, is not to conceptualise new models of analysis, neither to critique others’ approaches to the matter. In this paper, we hope to complement recent works about the rise of data governance by focusing on its colonial architecture. To do so, we intend to discuss how the whole ‘supply chain’ of data governance operated historically in British colonies, specifically in the Indian subcontinent, through different and unique procedures. While British colonial administration developed over time in different territories, the Census of India became one of the major bureaucratic efforts of the British colonial era (Christopher 2008, 276).

Furthermore, we look at the technologies that continue to shape postcolonial states in their relationship with new forms of imperialism, and how they affect power dynamics between the Global North and South. In proposing a condition of continuity, we contend that data, and information technologies more generally, continue yet reconfigure colonial power and objects of knowledge in establishing data-based relations amongst individuals, platforms, and states. Working through links and gaps of data colonialism theories, we identify resemblances especially with administrative tools and techniques that enhanced domination through demographic planning and population management. Understanding this genealogy is crucial to grasp the constitutive force of data colonialism in the organising of individuals and territories (Isin and Ruppert 2019, 207).

To sustain this inference, one has to define the conceptual boundaries of data colonialism and the extent of its force; looking at how it functions and how it differs from historical forms of colonialism. We do so in the first section, showing the strong link between colonial

administration and the use of data. In the second section, we look in detail into how data colonialism takes place in the Global South, discussing its narratives, and the actors it involves through case studies of biometrics initiatives in India and South Africa. Lastly, we discuss how software employed by the European Union for the management and record of migration and digital archives make data an instrument for the government of people on the move.

Data colonialism, digital sovereignty

With the growing economic and political role that data plays on a global level, theories comparing the ‘datafication’ of nearly all spheres of life to colonial expansion have been proliferating (Sadowski 2018; Couldry and Mejias 2019c). How and in which ways data politics relate to colonialism, however, depends on how colonialism is understood. Colonialism is a practice “of domination involving the subjugation of one people by another through military, economic and political means” (Mignolo and Walsh 2018, 116) and “of writing on the ground a new set of social and spatial relations” (Mbembe 2003, 25). Data colonialism, according to Couldry and Mejias, combines the most advanced forms of computing and data mining with the predatory and racial mindset of colonialism, establishing data-based relations in which peoples, objects, knowledge, and power are defined by whoever holds data (2019a, 337). As we will discuss in the following sections, in exploiting labour, information, and infrastructures, data holders restage power dynamics between colonisers and the colonised, reflecting geographical and economic asymmetries between the North and the South (Nyabola 2018).

In this respect, our quarrel with Thatcher et al.’s (2016, 992) argument is that data colonialism is not just a metaphor to describe how data is appropriated. To begin with, it should not be forgotten that the extraction of data and data politics more broadly are facilitated by the very material extractive practices that are taking place today under neo-colonial conditions (Mezzadra and Neilson 2017, 200). However, Mezzadra and Neilson also point out that “it is not only when the operations of capital plunder the materiality of the earth and biosphere, but also when they encounter and draw upon forms and practices of human cooperation and sociality that are external to them that we can say that extraction is at stake” (2017, 188). It is also worth considering that the productivity of extraction and commodification in the case of natural materials bears many similarities with the processes of data extraction, in that like coal or the mushroom, the data gains value through the labour of sorting, counting, inventorising etc. (Tsing 2005; Tsing 2013).

Couldry and Mejias (2019b) have recently opened an interesting line of inquiry centering their analysis around data’s costs and infrastructures. Positing data as a natural resource, the ‘new oil,’ urges us to look at its modes of extraction and refinement: its capture unfolds an opaque set of operations that chimes with colonial practices of the extraction and trading of resources. Both in theory and in practice, this framework resonates with the

pervasive and ubiquitous use of data in governmental practices. Just as historical forms of colonialism favoured the development of industrial capitalism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Arrighi 1990, 387; Williams 1994, 135), capitalism now turns to data to sustain its growth in the face of a long decline in manufacturing (Srnicsek 2017, 6). The result is capitalism's incontrovertible tendency to give data a priority of agency, thus allowing new forms of dispossession that echo colonial missions and ideology (Couldry and Mejjias 2019a, 337).

Let us analyse this point further: in his *Platform Capitalism*, Nick Srnicsek reports an Oracle-sponsored¹ MIT review custom stating that “from a data-production perspective, activities are like lands waiting to be discovered. Whoever gets there first and holds them gets their resources – in this case, their data riches” (2017, 98-99). Or, to give another taste from the same source: “Utilities installing smart meters, brokerages creating mobile advisory apps, travel sites recording all the offers visitors *don't* click on – all of these are colonizing new data lands” (MIT 2016, 6). Nothing better exemplifies our argument than the immediate parallel between such colonialist ventures and *terra nullius*, the notion of ‘no man's land’ in British colonial law: an unowned place at the disposal of adventurers and conquerors ready to be occupied (Cohen 2015, 3). Formulated on the presumption of prosperity and abundance, *terra nullius* – and hence colonial occupation – is a narrative that began around the end of the seventeenth century. As John Locke put it in 1690: “in the beginning all the World was America” (1947, 45), meaning that for the Europeans the Americas were available for occupation due to an alleged absence of prior claims or inhabitants. Just as this framing is relevant for the study of colonialism, to think of data as an unlimited and unowned resource is a framing that allows new colonial powers to thrive. If today we have come to understand, however reluctantly and contentiously, that natural resources are limited, big data is still passed off as an example of unlimited, raw, unowned resource, ready to be exploited (Srnicsek 2017, 98). Although we can confidently argue that “raw data is an oxymoron” (Gitelman 2013, 2), the idea of running out of data is inconceivable because of a lack of transparency about how it is produced, harvested, and traded.

As historical colonialism produced ‘scrambles’ for resources, so does data colonialism, seeking power through “intercapitalist competition” and the imperative to collect more data (Srnicsek 2017, 2). After all, data is not just instrumental to capitalist economic systems, but it is profoundly involved in statecraft and racecraft (Pistor 2020; Benjamin 2016). It is not surprising that platforms and data management infrastructures today hold as much power as states or institutions, to such an extent that they come to affect the very notion of statehood and sovereignty. As argued by Katherine Pistor (2020) in her study of “digital statehood,” sovereignty is today expressed through the dominion over streams of data, so much so that platforms are increasingly involved in the garb of statehood (2020, 4). Mark Zuckerberg himself affirmed that Facebook resembles a government more than just a company and

Libra, the global cryptocurrency circulating on his platform, was named after the Roman empire's coin (Pistor 2020, 6). Trying to further grasp the resemblance between empires and tech companies, Couldry and Meijas have proposed a comparison between the Terms of Service or End-User-License-Agreements of social media platforms and the imperial 'contracts' or proclamations that were used to legalise and legitimise conquest, such as the Spanish *Requerimiento* (2019a, 340; see also Thatcher et al. 2016). However compelling that juxtaposition is, in the following section we propose that to understand the specific ways data relations work in postcolonial contexts and the colonial logic underpinning it, an analysis of the census and the map can add to the existing scholarship.

From empires to platforms, from the census to biometrics

Today, it would be easy to believe that companies like Facebook, Cambridge Analytica, Uber or Palantir have little to do with the politics and administration of postcolonial states, or states in the Global South. The simple reason is that after the 2008 financial crisis, many tech giants have been thriving economically and dominating the political scene mostly in Western Europe and North America (Srnicek 2017, 36). Yet, capitalism is inherently attracted to cheap labour and resources. Although operating in different sectors – consultancy, advertising marketplaces, data analytics and on-demand services – big tech ultimately rely on and benefit from imperial relations they contribute to establishing. The push to set foot in low-income economies is nothing new (Harvey 2003), and neither is the collection of data for the classification of populations. The institutions that collected and interpreted data of a given territory, and which are essential parts of the history of empires (Christopher 2008; Hacking 2015), share striking similarities with the global push of tech giants, states, and international organisations towards the identification of all citizens and communities.

Through the institution of social protection and electoral programmes like the Aadhar in India, the Biometric Voter Registration system in Kenya, or South Africa's Social Security Agency (SASSA), the automation of demographic tools is not only acclaimed, but encouraged. Most major tech companies, including Microsoft, Accenture, Google, Amazon, Palantir, and Facebook, to name a few, have collaborated with United Nations' agencies and humanitarian programmes. In charge of developing so-called innovative and cost-saving approaches to technological fixes and humanitarian issues, tech giants are increasingly responsible for the identification of beneficiaries and the distribution of benefits, which they enforce through the access of development programmes' datasets (Alston 2019). A *quid pro quo* that makes tech giants' philanthropic intents more convincing and easily sells them as benign actors (Madianou 2019). For instance, Facebook's attempt to bring Internet to the Global South derives from its competition with Google, rather than from a genuine humanitarian mission: while Facebook's own services are free to navigate, other services pass through Zuckerberg's platform, increasing the amount of data that Facebook holds (Smicek 2017, 111).

Similarly, public-private partnerships with corporate giants such as MasterCard in South Africa are established to smoothen and verify compliance with the conditionalities associated with some cash transfer programmes, all functioning through biometric technology (Sepulveda-Carmona 2019, 10).

Biometrics aims to reproduce the body itself: through fingerprint, iris scan, voice recording, signature and other bodily measures, data is gathered in exchange for access to a given benefit or programme (Sepulveda-Carmona 2019). Recently, much has been written about the use of biometrics and its resemblance with colonial and racial technologies. According to Ruha Benjamin, the cultural notion of race is increasingly inscribed in innovation processes: technology, she suggests, “is not just a metaphor for innovating inequity. It is, in fact, one of the effective conduits for remaking race” (2016, 3). Looking back at how technology was deployed in the colonies, we agree with Scannell that “it is impossible to distinguish between efforts to inscribe ‘race’ and racial difference on human bodies and efforts to quantify, compare, evaluate, and surveil the human” (2019, 120). UN Special Rapporteur Philip Alston (2019) writes that in low-income countries, biometric programmes are laying the foundation for new forms of governance, pushing for the legal identification of every single individual, as praised by the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals and by the World Bank’s “ID4D,” Identification for Development (2019, 5). Whereas the use of biometric technologies in Western European and North American countries is not frictionless, although increasingly common, in the Global South beneficiaries’ data is exploited almost without restriction and serves as testing ground for experimentation with the mapping of bodies and the census of citizens (2019, 16).

As Immanuel Wallerstein (2011) explains, states are profoundly implicated in the expansion and development of capitalism and colonialism. They are thus no less guilty than tech giants in exploiting data. The Unique Identification Authority of India (UIDAI) is perhaps the most valid example for our argument. Aadhaar, a 12-digit identification number is issued by UIDAI’s database of fingerprints, iris scan, face picture, social data, gender, and other information (Rao 2019, 13). Part of the Indian government’s welfare programme, the Aadhaar scheme was designed in 2009 in concert with Infosys, a technology consultancy corporation that runs its operations, whose CEO Nandan Nilekani was appointed UIDAI’s head (Bhatia and Bhabha 2017, 65). Like other British ex-colonies, as Keith Breckrenridge writes, the Aadhaar scheme is “an effort to escape the limits of the old paper state – of slow, susceptible or unreliable bureaucratic processing, of forgery, deception and translation in the preparation of documents” (2014, 16). Aadhaar is vigorously supported by Narendra Modi, after his former Prime Minister Singh “circumvented traditional government lines of accountability by placing the new programme directly under his office, without the mediating control of cabinet or any other government ministry” (Bhatia and Bhabha 2017, 65). Aadhaar will entirely supplant old welfare programmes, supposedly replacing paperwork and admin-

istrative costs by becoming the only accepted form of ID across the country (Rao 2019, 14). Since independence in 1947, despite a strong focus on national identity and social citizenship, India has been slowly tuning with neoliberalism and its mission to cut and automate welfare provisions in the name of efficiency. Extending Aadhaar numbers to car licences and college degrees, the government creates a sort of digital caste, where freedom of choice of releasing personal data is merely virtual:

There are already reports of citizens being denied welfare services, including children unable to receive school lunches when their Aadhaar could not be authenticated. In this way the New Jim Code gives rise to digital untouchables. (Benjamin 2019, 136)

Making digital identity an integral and mandatory part of Indian citizens, Aadhaar “can be said to produce illegality rather than screen for it,” exposing women, Dalits, religious and sexual minorities to surveillance and sanctions in case of economic non-compliance (Benjamin 2019, 136-7). Not just a matter of surveillance then, but a system for categorising individuals that resembles British colonialism and its assumption about the traceability and legibility of all subjects (Bhatia and Bhabha, 2017). Aadhaar’s promise to “generate real-time data that map an entire population while still allowing agencies to disaggregate statistics [...] in order to see the position of individuals within various systems” (Rao 2019, 16) reimagines the relationship between citizens and data-holders.

The case of India echoes Benedict Anderson’s (2006) study of the census, proving that together with cartography and the mapping of a territory more broadly, these tools are to be intended not just as an administrative, descriptive task for the representation of colonies, but as innovative technologies for the production of knowledge that postcolonial states inherited and reused. As remarked in the second edition of *Imagined Communities* (2006), Anderson observes that technologies of knowledge, be they institutions, disciplines, or objects, were crucial in shaping the relation between former colonies and imperial states. He admits that his original take on postcolonial nation-building was short-sighted in assuming that “nationalism in the colonized worlds of Asia and Africa was modelled directly on that of the dynastic states of nineteenth-century Europe” (2006, 163). Instead, “the immediate genealogy [of postcolonial states] should be traced to the imaginings of the colonial state” (2006, 163), in which the map and the census were a significant expression of colonial dominion. Correcting his first edition, Anderson draws back to these colonial institutions as necessary in making the identity of those nations moulded over the very categories that empires instituted: “they profoundly shaped the way in which the colonial state imagined its dominion – the nature of the human beings it ruled, the geography of its domain, and the legitimacy of its ancestry” (2006, 163).

Likewise, in his study of the use of statistics and demographics, Ian Hacking seems to confirm that “the fetishist collection of overt statistical data about populations,” in controlling

and surveilling its subjects also implies “disinformation and mismanagement” (2015, 281). Hacking identifies the genealogy of big data with the early-nineteenth century ‘invention’ of the population, a study inaugurated by Foucault,² when the British imperial government began to categorise and conduct a census of its colonies. For the British Empire, the map and the census were arguably the most fundamental enquiries. Although fragmented and incoherent, censuses became a requirement for all British colonial governments and were unified in the mid-nineteenth century for collection and interpretation in the Central Register Office (Isin and Ruppert 2019, 213). Enumeration of individuals was only useful insofar as it created a bigger picture of the colonies at a distance, a way of producing knowledge about the colonised population. Dividing and categorising by way of administrative districts and standardised identifiers such as name, occupation, or constructed races, the performative force of the census as well as the map lay in enunciating truths about the colonised land and people that could thus be imbued with the force of law. As noted by Christopher,

the quest for a systemic synchronised population census of the British Empire lasted for a hundred years. It represented an attempt by the Colonial Office to obtain a view of the Empire as a whole as an aid to its efficient administration, although the precise use of the census was never explicitly stated. (2008, 284)

Seeing like a border agency

The expression *fabrica mundi* began to circulate among Renaissance philosophers after its appearance in Gerardo Mercatore’s *Atlante*. In critically analysing the relevance of Mercatore’s work, amongst the first ‘scientific’ cartographers, Mezzadra and Neilson (2013) wonder about the ontological meaning of drawing borders as the passage to modern cartographic science. Only through a focus on the constructive dimension of representation of borders and territory can we fully understand the function of a map: the moment a map is drawn reflects the moment a territory is ‘fabricated’ and thus understood (Mezzadra and Neilson 2014, 11). In a similar manner, Scott states that typifications like the map and the census and similar techniques of schematisation continue to be “powerful form[s] of state knowledge,” allowing management and intervention with new levels of sophistication but unchanging motives (2006, 259). Beyond their descriptive function, “projects of legibility” (Scott 2006, 260) produce the populations and landscapes they aim to describe:

when allied with state power, [maps] would enable much of the reality they depicted to be remade. Thus, a state cadastral map created to designate taxable property-holders does not merely describe a system of land tenure; it creates such a system through its ability to give its categories the force of law. (Scott 1999, 3)

The vast amount of data extracted, collated, and analysed for imperial purposes reveals how knowledge about colonies and colonised subjects was managed and ‘imagined’ in the sense Anderson and Scott identified: as produced. In the following, we look at the functioning of two

monitoring and mapping systems implemented by Frontex, the *European Agency for the Management of Operational Cooperation at the External Borders* funded by the EU: Eurosur and Jora. Tracing the genealogy of these software systems back to the colonial map allows us to recognise their constitutive bio- and necropolitical power.

Frontex works with two migration mapping software systems, Eurosur and Jora, which by “collecting, exchanging and analysing information on incidents [of cross-border movement]” (Asseco n.d.) automatise and visualise migrations to create digital archives and maps of the border. The data feeding the mapping software comes from satellite images, ship reporting systems, and interviews with migrants about the people involved in their journey to Europe (Tazzioli 2018, 280; European Commission 2015). So-called migratory events, usually referring to vessels of people on the move, are visualised as dots on the map, to which the number of passengers and other information about the event is subsequently added. Thus, the cartography of Eurosur and Jora is based on a combination of digital data, aerial and close-up pictures, and a form of migration census, in which migrants are not considered as individuals but as part of groups (Tazzioli 2018, 276) and as ‘cross-border movement.’

Visualisation was always a central technique of modern regimentation (Scott 2006, 250); the gaze at a distance, almost God-like, remains fundamental to the mapping and census-taking operations in postcolonial contexts of Europe’s borders. “Seeing like a state” (Scott 1999) or seeing like a privatised European border agency means to obtain a view at a distance (Christopher 2008, 269) that schematises and codes the population and the territory in such a way to allow governmental intervention. With respect to Frontex’ monitoring mapping systems, Tazzioli argues that its gaze is characterised by multiple scales (from on-the-ground to satellite) and temporalities: “The monitoring activity – visibility as the act of sight – is effectively in real time, while visualization is not – not even the rationality of intervention that [...] is in fact future-oriented” (2018, 282). In fact, even though Eurosur and Jora are described as border surveillance programs, they do not primarily – if at all – surveil migrants crossing borders, because the delay between the detection and the visualisation of vessels in the software is too big to be used for the purpose of border surveillance. Even representatives of the Italian Navy themselves, who use Eurosur, and a representative of a company in charge of improving the software have stated that the quantities of data require time to be processed such that the usefulness of the program lies in its archival and predictive function, rather than real-time monitoring (Tazzioli 2018, 281). Like colonial archives shifted from “archives as source to archives as subject” (Lucarini 2019, 83) – meaning that they were no longer perceived exclusively as a cultural strategy for the preservation of past events, but began to be approached as producers of knowledge (Stoler 2002; Elkins 2015, 853) – so are databases like those created by Eurosur producing knowledge to be used for the calculation of risk. Although these softwares are promoted as a tool to save

migrants from drowning and to fight smugglers, their actual purpose is the tracking of shifts in migratory routes and the prognostication of stress for a specific border territory. The goal is improving and regulating the exchange of information amongst member-states, through a European communication platform with standardised data representation (Ellebrecht 2014, 234).

Jora superimposes a number of different angles from which migratory events are looked at, quite literally, such as an aerial view, or a close-up view of the vessel used by a group of migrants to cross the Mediterranean (Tazzioli 2018, 278). Through satellite and other data that is mainly, but not exclusively visual, Jora allows to track the spatial transformation of an area and deduce economic and infrastructural transformation. For example, in the case of Sabrata in Libya, in one particular section of the coast an increase in boats and people was detected and monitored, and that change in the local traffic was read as the place becoming an important site of smuggling and departure (Tazzioli 2018, 278). Eurosur's maps are characterised by dots representing migratory events and – based on an archive of those dots – a colour code for borders, where three different colours represent three different levels of risk. These risk assessments are used as a basis for establishing the amount of money invested by the European Commission for increased border security in that region (Tazzioli 2018, 279). In fact, the decision on the colour of the border is not a technical but a political one which is not taken without conflicts between member-states and the EU. Ultimately, however, the establishment of these migration monitoring and mapping systems favours the integration of a European border management system and thus the enforcement of a European external border through the sharing of information and the standardisation of data representation and risk assessment (Ellebrecht 2014, 234).

Another system of dots, described by Scott, is found in the map called *The Distribution of Jews in the Municipality* produced by the City Office of Statistics of Amsterdam under Nazi occupation. This map, with each dot representing ten Jewish people, guided the rounding up and the deportation of the Jewish population living in Amsterdam (Scott 2006, 260). Scholars of colonialism and modernity have argued that the same necropolitical logic has characterised the administrative technologies and the terror of colonial occupations, genocides in both Europe and its colonies, today permeating the management of subaltern populations (Césaire 2004, Fanon 2001, Mbembe 2003) which Foucault called “return effect” (2003, 103).

One could argue that the performative force of the mapping system lies in the assessment of risk becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy for migrants crossing those high-risk borders, as increased securitisation has been exposing migrants to ever riskier travels and increased state violence (De Genova 2017). The placement of dots and colouring of borders are data-fuelled processes that make bordering territories and migrating populations objects of power. And, as Isin and Ruppert (2019, 208) argue, “the data produced about an object at the same

time exceeds its will to power and attains constitutive powers in shaping and forming that object.” What ‘giving a picture’ of the European borders through digitalised and datafied cartography really means then, is a remaking of geopolitical reality. Albeit with the new temporal dimension of digitalised borders, migration-mapping software systems remain projects of legibility. Beyond constructing governable migrant populations, migration databases and mapping software reproduce the image and authority of Europe as a rationalised sovereign supra-state (Badenhoop 2020). The “virtual border” has expanded the border mandate, such that the need to assess and respond to risk justifies intervention beyond the territorial border itself (Ellebrecht 2014, 240). Paradoxically, it is the claim of the alleged risk, of the state being exposed to an objective, visible and trackable danger that conveys its sovereignty, because it rationalises a constant preparedness for the imagined threat of the migrant as the Other. And, as Achille Mbembe argues:

The perception of the existence of the Other as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security – this, I suggest, is one of the many imaginaries of sovereignty characteristic of both early and late modernity itself. (2003, 18)

But the risk scenarios projected by Eurosur and Jora are just as much an illusion as the predictability these systems construct. In reality migration evades predictive calculations, not just because data is never sufficient but because people on the move always find new routes, networks and logistics of travel, despite the deadly border regimes they have to surmount.

Conclusion

Although we are not the first to argue that “software alters the condition through which society, space and time, and thus spatiality, are produced” (Kitchin and Dodge 2011, 13), we have tried to offer a historical and comparative perspective on how digital data contributes to the production of knowledge and information in continuity with the function of colonial technologies. In recognising the strength of tech giants and states competing for ‘digital resources,’ especially in countries historically ravaged by colonial powers, we argue that it is essential to recognise the colonial logics underpinning them. The dispossession and racialised violence at play in data relations requires further study of the implications of data in colonial practices and imperialist projects, rooted in a historical understanding of modern (and thus colonial) statehood. Drawing from the work of historian Carlo Ginzburg (2014), we agree with Lucarini (2019, 87) that colonial archives should be read against the intention of those who produced them. For us, this is an exhortation to study the use of data against the intention of those who extract and need it. As we discussed, administrative, descriptive, and bureaucratic tasks fulfilled a function beyond the immediate control and regulation of life in

the colony, as they all responded to the broader missions of producing knowledge. As we have laid out, in the Global South data plays a role that is specific to histories of imperial relations and colonisation: big data is proposed as a way of widening access to the necessary technology of knowing populations (Isin and Ruppert 2019, 217), a legitimising framework akin to the paradigm of *tabula rasa*. The economic and political development of those countries is explained as a lack of statistical, scientific knowledge; as such big data represents the key to capitalist development. The Global North increasingly depends on the collection and archiving of data as a technology for the reproduction of sovereignty, with the necropolitical implications we discussed. Knowledge production about populations and territories is never a matter of national governance; rather, it operates at an imperial level.

Notes

¹ Oracle is one of the most famous data management platforms.

² In his books and lectures at the Collège de France, Michel Foucault coined the concept of biopolitics to describe the regime of regulatory mechanisms that is concerned with population as an object of knowledge and power (Foucault 1978; 2003; 2007).

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Paris ‘bande à part’: sguardi cartografici e tessuti cinematografici nel cinema di *banlieue* (e dintorni)

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ABSTRACT

Paris ‘bande à part’: cartographic gazes and cinematographic fabrics in the *banlieue* cinema (and surroundings). The article positions in the effervescent but slippery space where geographical visual approaches dialogue with film studies, and looks at the recent developments of the so-called French *cinéma de banlieue* (banlieue films). It presents two different but related sections, both based on textual readings. The first section, by Paola Cosma, questions the *cinéma de banlieue* as a cinema centred on a male dominant subject (L. De Franceschi) faced with the irruption, in the 2000s, of narratives characterised by female directors or with female protagonists, giving attention to the recurrences and shifts from the acquired spatial representational modes of the specific filmic category. The second one, by Farah Polato, follows along with the recent film event *Les Misérables* (2019), by Ladj Ly, unanimously affiliated to the *cinéma de banlieue*'s genealogy. Then, the analysis moves on to the earlier *La vie de Château* (2017), by Mody Barry and Cedric Ido, which shows a more articulated relationship with the *banlieue* films, but shares with them the representation of a ‘world apart’ within the city of Paris. Here, the general concept of space-building is explored: in Ly's visual concept, it appears to question the perspective from above and the drone-view, usually linked to an omniscient and dominant ‘eye’; in Barry-Ido's proposal, instead, it adopts a ‘feet-made cartography’ emerging through the character's walking. In both sections of the article, parameters such as scale and distance – shared in their shifting meanings by geography and film studies (Lukinbeal 2012; 2015, 12) – are relevant in guiding the textual reading. The annexed Google maps, by locating the places and itineraries of the narrations, make the dynamics among the concrete, symbolic and emotional distances covered by the characters visible but also highlight their performativity in the space.

Keywords

cinéma de banlieue, maps, Paris, Ladj Ly, Cedric Ido, Mody Barry

Il presente contributo prende in considerazione recenti sviluppi del cosiddetto ‘cinema di banlieue’. L'approccio adottato muove nella direzione di un'analisi testuale modulata in un'ottica orizzontale all'interno delle opere selezionate e in relazione alla catalogazione filmica di riferimento, per taluni un vero e proprio genere. Ripartito in due tracciati, vede il primo, a firma di Paola Cosma, operare su un corpus compatto, definito dall'irrompere negli anni Duemila di un protagonismo e/o di un'autorialità femminile in una produzione tradizionalmente a dominanza maschile sia sul piano della regia sia in quello della narrazione e della messa in sce-

na. Nello specifico, a condurre l'analisi è la verifica dei posizionamenti, rappresentazionali e performativi, delle personagge in spazialità fortemente codificate, espresse e agite nelle ri-mappature prodotte dai corpi e dalle loro prossemiche.

Il secondo tracciato, di Farah Polato, scruta le divergenti disposizioni cartografiche in due film degli ultimi anni investiti, rispettivamente, di una filiazione diretta dalla categoria filmica in questione e di un'attribuzione centrifuga. Raccogliendo il testimone, l'intervento prende avvio dal caso-evento di *Les Misérables (I Miserabili 2019)* di Ladj Ly per poi ritornare al precedente – meno noto nel mercato europeo ma con una interessante circolazione internazionale d'essai e festivaliera avviata nel 2018 – *La vie de Château (2017)*, realizzato a quattro mani da Mody Barry e Cedric Ido. In quest'ultimo, la riconduzione al cinema di banlieue, orientata anche da richiami interni alla narrazione, coesiste nella ricezione critica con un'iscrizione nel più ampio alveo del cinema di immigrazione, entrambe evocanti aree parigine che costituiscono, nella percezione diffusa, 'banda a parte'.

La localizzazione – nella plurivocità della sua declinazione – vi occupa un posto determinante, intervenendo a più livelli, a partire dall'ambientazione concreta: periferica nell'uno, 'parigina' nell'altro. Se il film di Ly marca sin dal titolo il 'territorio' fisico, e simbolico, di appartenenza, sia pure in termini critici, la proposta di Barry e Ido scompagina invece la collocazione univoca che il toponimo e l'ambientazione esclusiva sembrerebbero enfatizzare, per farsi generatore di posizionamenti mobili e multiscala. Il caratterizzarsi per l'uso della veduta aerea – sia essa diegeticamente motivata o propria dell'istanza narrante – in Ly e il punto di ripresa nettamente ribassato di Barry e Ido, immettono le due opere sulla scia di un ampio dibattito, tanto di area cinematografica che geografica, sul rapporto modellante – quando non occludente – dell'impronta cartografica sul territorio, di cui ci limitiamo a citare i principali lavori di Teresa Castro (2011) e di Giorgio Avezù (2017).

In questa prospettiva i due film dialogano con direttrici germinate nello spazio di interazione tra studi filmici e film *geography*, ora interpellate come strumento orientativo dell'analisi ora reinterrogate. Lo spazio di manovra agisce nell'interazione tra la propensione, al contempo problematica e fertile (Cupples, Lukinbeal, e Mains 2008, 4; Avezù e Fidotta 2016), dei *film studies* al prestito di parametri, concetti e metafore derivati dalla geografia umanistica e il consolidamento della componente linguistica e formale filmica nelle analisi di ambito geografico, ricettive delle sollecitazioni da questa prodotta al di là della corrispondenza rappresentazionale (Lukinbeal, Sharp e Sommerland 2019, 11).

Come dichiarato, le pagine che seguono fanno senz'altro perno sull'asse T (*Text*) della partizione rievocata da Laura Sharp e Chris Lukinbeal, nel loro "Film Geography: A Review and Prospectus" (2015, 21-34) con il modello *Author-Text-Reader* (2015, 21-35); pur confermando il testo come "discorso significante localizzabile" (Metz 1971, 8), nella sua propensione orizzontale ne dichiara lo statuto non autarchico, interrogandone il dinamismo relazionale. La verifica del gradiente dei film proposti nel predisporre localizzazioni, produrre e fornir-

re informazioni di carattere geografico, non intende porsi all'interno del paradigma *Real/Reel* – indicata nel medesimo quadro di sintesi e prospettiva del 2015 come “ontologia” ancora attiva nell’ambito degli studi geografici “che riduce il film a mera rappresentazione riproduttiva” – bensì intende utilizzarli per muoversi verso il lavoro del linguaggio in cui i film sono intesi come ‘campi’ di espressione di processi; in essi la rimappatura di disposizioni spaziali date (Cosma) così come l’assunzione, critica, di modelli cartografici (Polato), entrambi mediati dalla messa in scena filmica, evidenziano contestualmente gli impianti egemonici e le mobilitazioni transformative, anche fautrici di nuovi assetti asimmetrici, in eco con l’operatività assegnata da Huggan alla mappa stessa (1989, 128) e particolarmente sensibili nelle produzioni e nelle categorizzazioni filmiche in oggetto.

Accogliendo la lucida consapevolezza espressa nel “Manifesto for Map Studies” (Dodge, Kitchin and Perkins 2009, 220-243) in merito ai rapporti – e al loro gradiente di propulsività – tra le discipline, il presente contributo, dalla propria postazione di affaccio, mira a servirsi del territorio di mezzo tra cinema e cartografia quale trampolino di lancio per ‘far parlare il film e il cinema’ (cfr. al riguardo, l’affermazione di Avezzù, sull’uso funzionale della geografia “per fare dire ai film qualcosa del cinema,” in Avezzù 2017, 39), piuttosto che come base per uno sconfinamento disciplinare. Gli indicatori di scala e distanza, oltre che prospettiva e punto di ripresa, si confermano qui, come evidenziato da Lukinbeal (2012; 2019, 12), particolarmente funzionali alla dislocazione disciplinare e a un’incorporazione analitica.

Un apparato visivo sotto forma di mappe prodotte con GoogleMaps – tra le applicazioni più diffuse e pervasive nelle pratiche quotidiane di orientamento e attraversamento – accompagna la scansione delle due unità d’analisi supportandola e al contempo accogliendone le traiettorie interpretative. Trattasi di tavole che ora localizzano nell’area metropolitana i riferimenti dei singoli film (ambientazioni, location, itinerari) giustapponendo i *frame* di riferimento, ora ospitano ricostruzioni di sintesi tra i diversi film a evocare – nell’accezione medianica dell’espressione – la figura, evanescente, di un immaginario geografico da cercarsi non nei quadri prodotti ma nell’intreccio delle interlocuzioni scaturibili – per similitudine, contrasto, dialogo – tra le immagini e i riferimenti convocati, aperti a integrazioni soggettive, secondo un approccio non vettorializzato dalla mappa al fruitore. La valenza di *counter movie-maps*, infatti, vi agisce, oggi, non tanto nell’immissione di spazialità e rappresentazioni marginalizzate dal *mainstream* (Roberts 2010, 189) – in considerazione della legittimazione della categoria filmica e della buona collocazione di alcune delle opere nei circuiti distributivi, nonché dello statuto autoriale conquistato da alcune delle personalità registiche –, quanto nello spazio aperto ‘tra’ i film, in dialogo con l’esperienza e la mobilità, soggettiva e collettiva, degli interlocutori e delle interlocutrici e le mappe, altrettanto mobili, che ne scaturiscono.

Disegnare la banlieue: singolare/ plurale?¹

Riferito a una produzione francese prevalentemente incentrata sull’area parigina, la formula

‘cinema di banlieue’ lascia intendere, oltre alla mera indicazione dell’ambientazione, un impianto in cui la riconoscibilità dello scenario, nelle sue coordinate storico-materiali, è nevralgica, facendosi termine di confronto per commisurare istanze denotative e connotative, orientamenti discorsivi. Non implicante necessariamente una valenza “dichiaratamente cartografica” delle singole opere (Farinelli 2009, 36), l’indicazione topografica ne prospetta quantomeno una disposizione in tal senso, in parte raccolta dall’apparato visivo che accompagna il contributo. Degli anni Ottanta è la linea di demarcazione tra i *film en banlieue*, girati o ambientati in periferia, e i *film de banlieue* (Milleliri 2011, Millot e Glâtre 2003), caratterizzati dall’assestamento di modi di rappresentazione e di regimi di attesa, che rilanciano la narrazione di una ‘perifericità’ storicamente espressiva di una scissione da un corpo unitario ‘di riferimento’, sia esso la città, la nazione o lo statuto di cittadinanza. Ricondotto all’emersione di soggettività in tessuti sociali e cittadinanze attraversati da flussi migratori ed eredità coloniali, il cinema di banlieue ha introdotto un cuneo nei modi di rappresentazione della metropoli, portatore di istanze rivendicative ma anche di nuove dissimmetrie e assetti egemonici che si assestano nelle forme filmiche, che trova trascrizione nel lavoro di mappatura dei ‘volti’ cinematografici della capitale (Coisne 2018, Phillips and Vincendeau 2018, Touati 2018, Wagner 2011).

Se la messa in scena dello spazio è sempre veicolo di costruzione di senso, nei film di banlieue parametri di sensibilità cartografica – quali distanza, posizionamento, individuazione delle aree rappresentabili, selezione dei marcatori, paradigmi di rappresentazione – si fanno vettori privilegiati di rivendicazione e di interlocuzione, in assonanza con i parametri convocati anche nell’altra territorialità ‘cartografata’ di riferimento, quella che disegna – tra inclusioni ed esclusioni, avvicinamenti – le geografie del cinema nelle sue perimetrazioni nazionali. Indicativa del cortocircuito è la doppia primogenitura assegnata al film *Le thé au harem d’Archimède* di Mehdi Charef (1985): considerato apripista del filone, segna anche, per la prima volta, l’iscrizione di un’opera di un autore francese di origini algerine nella costellazione del cinema nazionale, legittimata da riconoscimenti di carattere istituzionale (il premio César). Oscillazioni rispetto a tradizioni cinematografiche e canoni culturali nazionali si fanno dunque sismografi di appartenenze e di tracciati identitari non lineari, spesso sofferti; gli stessi da cui la banlieue è modellata. Significativo, al riguardo, ricordare – seppur rapidamente – come *Le thé au harem d’Archimède* sia punteggiato da riferimenti al cinema della Nouvelle Vague che, con il suo orgoglioso e strategico rifiuto del “cinema di papà,” aveva imposto uno sguardo “alla prima persona singolare” (Lavarone 2010, 34). La città di Parigi ne è stata specchio riflettente, in un approccio propenso “da un lato a coglierne la verità documentaria, dall’altro a esprimere un rapporto profondamente soggettivo e personale con lo spazio urbano” (Lavarone 2010, 285) che trova nelle *ballade*, marcate dai sobbalzi dei corpi, una cifra di modellazione percettiva che ritroveremo nei film di seguito proposti. La disposizione cartografica vi prende parte anche nella selezione delle aree urbane, oltre che nei mo-

di della loro rappresentazione, assunta sin dal film-manifesto a episodi dedicati ciascuno a un diverso quartiere, *Paris vu par* (*Parigi di notte* 1965). Vi partecipa l'attenzione riservata agli interventi urbanistici che negli anni Cinquanta e Sessanta trasformano il volto di Parigi; ambito rimasto a lungo trascurato dagli studi sulla Nouvelle Vague (con le debite eccezioni, ad esempio *Due o tre cose che so di lei* di Jean-Luc Godard 1967), rimbalza prepotente nelle contro-narrazioni della produzione culturale che si andava contrassegnando come *beur*, cui il cinema di banlieue è ricondotto. Ai flussi migratori interni e al profilo operaio proprio della precedente stagione della periferia parigina si sovrascrive una composizione multiculturale, in gran parte eredità dell'impero coloniale.



Fig. 1. *Le thé au harem d'Archimède*, M. Charef (1985).

Nel loro sistematizzarsi i film di banlieue inclinano verso figure di sintesi in cui a imporsi è una certa idea di banlieue parigina, identificata più dalla sua architettura che dalle localizzazioni e da griglie intersezionali che imbrigliano un'entità invece plurale e dinamica. A dominare è il landmark dei *grands ensembles* alla cui ridondanza Anaïs Coisne imputa l'impoverimento del vocabolario urbanistico della periferia (2018, 49): vedute d'insieme su monolitiche facciate di agglomerati, blocchi di cemento proposti con visioni dall'alto o in profondità di campo, sovente immersi in spazi verdi come fossero isole urbane, si impongono sin dalle prime inquadrature adibite, da manuale, a una funzione di contestualizzazione.

Sotto l'aspetto dei sistemi narrativi, "dato strutturale ineliminabile [è] la centralità del soggetto maschile – plurimo, giovanile, multietnico e deviante", cui si correla la sfocatura delle figure femminili "ridotte a esili stereotipi: perlopiù madri, estenuate custodi dell'ormai pericolante foyer originario, sorelle vessate da fratelli oppressivi, oggetti sessuali intercambiabili, usati dai draguers per ostentare una virilità continuamente in discussione" (De Franceschi 2000, 113-124).

L'io mobile tra la periferia e centro nei film di banlieue gender-oriented

Negli anni Duemila figure femminili, per lo più afroscendenti, emergono da quella sfocatura cui erano state relegate. Le traiettorie e gli sguardi di personaggi, come Desiré in *La Squale* (2000) di Fabrice Genestal, Laura in *La Petite Jérusalem* (2005) di Karin Albou, Ely e Lila in *Tout ce qui brille* (2010) Géraldine Nakache e Hervé Mimran, Marième in *Bande de filles* (*Diamante nero*, 2014) di Céline Sciamma, Brooklyn nel film omonimo di Pascal Tessaud (2014) e Dounia in *Divines* (2016) di Houda Benyamina, concorrono a rimodulare la cartografia stabilizzata. Ambiti privilegiati di messa in tensione dei costrutti socio-culturali e cinematografici acquisiti, espressivi di un panorama marcato dalla subalternità femminile, sono la lontananza dal centro, in cui tradizionalmente la banlieue misura una irrisolta nozione di cittadinanza, e la percorribilità interna in relazione all'appartenenza di genere risultano due campioni interessanti per saggiare la messa in tensione.²

Premminente – ma non esclusiva – è l'eredità di una rappresentazione di sintesi. Per il regista Fabrice Genestal la disseminazione delle location di *La Squale* nei quartieri di Sarcelles, La Courneuve, Stains, Trappes, Montreuil, Drancy risponde all'intento preciso di “evitare una territorializzazione” a favore di “una città immaginaria ma emblematica” (2000). Se per localizzare *Diamante nero* a Les Malassis a Bagnolet, *Divines* a Montreuil La Noue e *La Squale* ancora a Les Sarcelles fondamentali sono le informazioni extratestuali – o il soggettivo competenza spettatoriale –, in *Tout ce qui brille* e *Brooklyn* l'ambientazione è invece esplicitata, mentre in *La Petite Jérusalem* il quartiere ebraico di La Sarcelles compare nel titolo ma il riconoscimento della sua valenza topografica è instabile. Confermata parimenti la funzione localizzante dei *grands ensembles* che, in *Divines* e in *La Petite Jérusalem*, fanno la loro imponente comparsa sin dai titoli di testa (figg. 2 e 3).



Fig. 2. *La Petite Jerusalem*, K. Albou (2005).

All'interno delle coordinate indicate da Coisne e De Franceschi, lo spazio aperto è di dominio maschile, a esibizione di un sistema patriarcale pervasivo, imperante anche negli interni domestici dove le donne si vorrebbero confinate.



Fig. 3. *Divines*, H. Benyamina (2016).

Perturbazione performative: il corpo, lo sguardo, lo spazio



Fig. 4. *La Squala*, F. Genestal (2000).

L'agibilità dello spazio aperto – ma non pubblico – è per le donne – e rigorosamente solo in età giovanile – subordinato a un mascheramento che modella corpo e atteggiamenti al maschile, sempre esposto all'arbitrio dello smascheramento. In *La Squale* (fig. 4), è la 'nera' Desirée, performante nell'indossare i comportamenti dei suoi coetanei maschi, a padroneggiare lo spazio tra i palazzoni, contrariamente alla 'beurette' Yasmine, figura che riprende la "giovane donna di origini maghrebine "sexy, studiosa o velata, di solito una vittima" (Tarr 2012, 49).

Prosemiche tra corpi ed edifici, tra interni ed esterni, declinano politiche della mobilità e dell'interdetto. In una funzionale perversione del disegno progettuale, mirante a un raccordo tra le aree aperte e i caseggiati, i *grands ensembles* del cinema di banlieue esibiscono "itinerari esposti al pericolo" dove "le ragazze vivono come in un acquario, sempre sotto lo sguardo dei maschi che le sorvegliano e giudicano dalla sommità delle scale" (Chiesi 2014, 7). Riprese di grate, cancelli, barriere, che già hanno tradotto l'orizzonte ingabbiato dei personaggi (fig. 5), rilevano ora, nell'adozione della modalità rappresentativa, la cattività delle personagge (fig. 6).



Fig. 5. *Le thé au harem d'Archimède*, M. Charef (1985).



Fig. 6. *Divines*, H. Benyamina (2016).

Nel panottico dato, è il passeggiare a forzare le circoscrizioni di una mappatura non trasposta su carta ma incarnata: “piccola perturbazione performativa” (Butler 2017, 128) che, nella sua duplice implicazione fisica e politica, fa del desiderio femminile di rivendicare “un posto per se stessa negli spazi dominati dagli uomini” (Tarr 2005, 119) una sfida a un certo regime costituito la cui gittata eccede l’istanza di genere. Così è per le lunghe passeggiate, spesso a tarda notte, di Laura in *La Petite Jérusalem* che rispondono contestualmente anche all’esigenza di scardinare gli assunti del reticolo sociale per i quali la banlieue persiste come stabilmente abitata da “antillani, beur, neri, arabi ma non ebrei” (Albou 2009, 47-63).

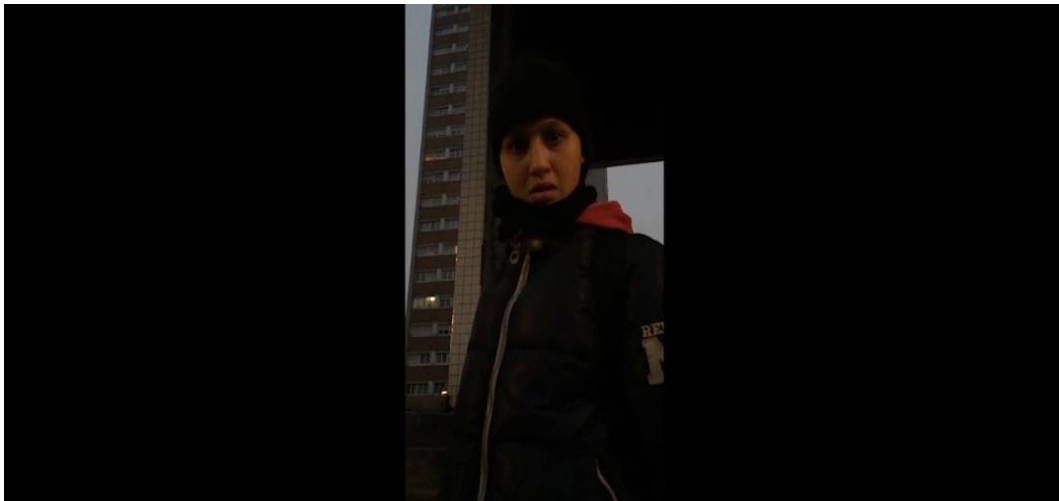


Fig. 7. *Divines*, H. Benyamina (2016).

La soggettivazione del punto di vista è un altro cuneo perturbativo che, sintomaticamente, si riversa nello stilema dei *grands ensembles*. In *La Petite Jérusalem* la consueta ripresa area dei titoli di testa trova reinquadratura nella cornice delle finestre dell’appartamento della protagonista. Se lo spazio domestico risulta così ‘invaso’ dalla sfilata monocorde delle facciate degli edifici, la scelta enfatizza contestualmente anche, nel punto di ripresa pri-

vilegiato, la soggettivazione fenomenica. Procedimento assimilabile si ha nell'inatteso *réca-drage* della sequenza iniziale di *Divines*, rivelaasi autorappresentazione realizzata con lo smartphone in cui, conformemente all'estetica del selfie (fig. 7), sono i soggetti – e non lo sfondo – a fungere da fuoco prospettico.

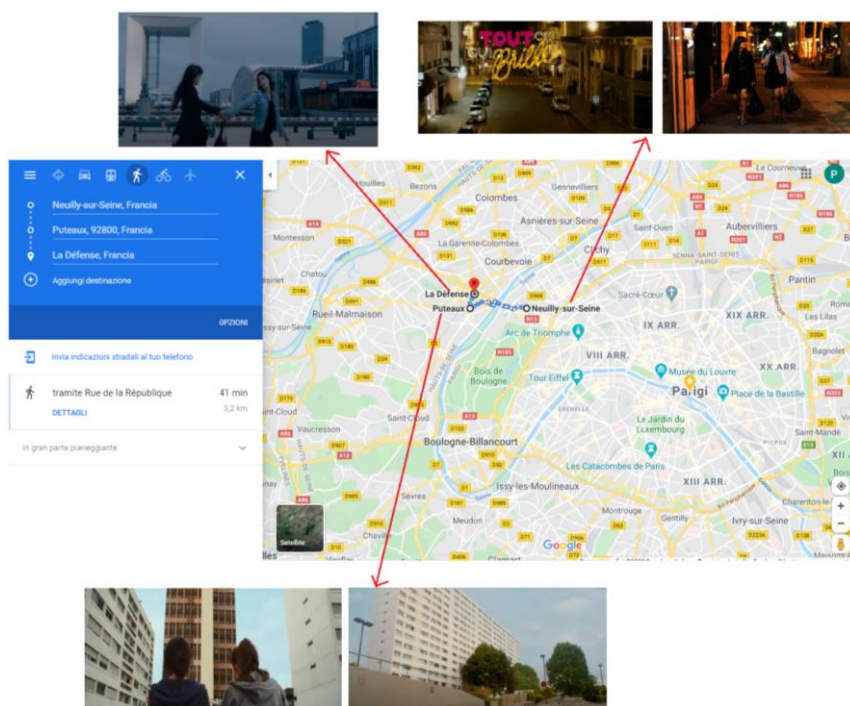
Oltre l'isola, la penisola?

In *La Squale*, a più riprese l'occhio si distende fino all'area verdeggiante disposta ad anello, in un prolungamento della città post-industriale verso la campagna piuttosto che verso la città la cui lontananza è enfatizzata dalla presenza ricorsiva della ferrovia. Già caratterizzante il precedente cinema di banlieue (Lavarone 2010), il motivo della distanza trova nel mediometraggio di Maurice Pialat, *L'Amour Existe* (1960) traduzione in una zonizzazione scandita da quattro configurazioni architettonico/urbanistiche: il centro da 'cartolina', i *pavillon*, i *grands ensembles* e la *bidonville*, "grado più basso del tessuto urbano" (Vogt 2017, 39). La sua comparsa in *Divines*, benché in una sola inquadratura, nell'affiorare da una fitta vegetazione l'agglomerato di lamiera, segnala il posizionarsi 'appena più in alto' della banlieue adiacente.

La distanza dal centro città è commisurata nei film in esame a due campi di tensione. Il primo, sedimentato, chiama in causa una griglia connessa ai motivi dell'origine, dell'estrazione sociale, dell'attribuzione razziale e incistata al luogo di residenza. Il secondo riflette invece la nuova dinamica di genere in cui la messa in scena del centro – spesso limitata, nell'economia narrativa, a poche sequenze – si dà prioritariamente come fuoriuscita che permette di forare costrizioni e codici. In ogni caso, raggiungere "Parigi necessita sempre uno sforzo, che è fatto in modo unilaterale: dalla persona che vive in periferia verso Parigi, raramente dall'altro senso" (Touati 2018, 28).

Spetta alla metropolitana, figura topica del cinema di banlieue, scolpire la vettorialità. A rappresentarla – da *Diamante nero* a *La Squale*, *La Petite Jérusalem* e *Tout ce qui brille* – è sintomaticamente di Chatelet-Les Halles, (figg. 8-9), snodo tra il centro città e "l'extra fuori dalla cinta muraria" della rete ferroviaria sotterranea (RER).

La metropolitana concorre a cartografare le distanze misurandole in tempi di percorrenza, nella decorazione scenografica delle stazioni, nella frequenza delle corse, nella manutenzione delle linee che traducono una zonizzazione – istituzionalmente prodotta o socialmente percepita – che ridisegna l'apparente neutralità della sua mappa cartacea, talora persistendo negli immaginari condivisi anche là dove siano intervenuti cambiamenti trasformativi. Di qui la durata filmica dei rientri, la laboriosa alternanza di percorsi a piedi e in metro (fig. 10), il contrasto tra le architetture e la dissimulazione delle personagge, che si dichiarano residenti altrove, per il tragitto Puteaux-Neuilly, separati dalla Senna ma non sono significativamente distanti geograficamente (*Tout ce qui brille*).

Fig. 8. *Brooklyn*, P. Tessaud (2014).Fig. 9. *Diamante nero*, C. Sciamma (2014).Fig. 10. *Tout ce qui brille*, G. Nakache e H. Mimran (2010).

L'uscita dalla banlieue può forare la pervasività del sistema dominante nelle relazioni, che possono essere agiti liberamente solo 'lontano', come nella fuga di Yasmine e Toussaint al giardino di Buttes Chaumont, nel XIX arrondissement a nord-est di Parigi, immerso in una cornice enfaticamente bucolica (Tarr 2005) sulla quale, dallo sfondo, incombe il profilo dei *grands ensembles* (*La Squale*).

Le fuoriuscite verso il centro, annota infatti Tarr, non offrono alle giovani un'alternativa permanente; le approssima piuttosto a delle 'turiste per un giorno', rimarcando l'estraneità alla Grande Narrazione delle scenografie monumentali. Al contempo, è questa estraneità a predisporre 'set' in grado di accogliere l'anelito delle giovani donne: liberare voci e gesti in canti e danze, operare poliedriche pratiche trasformative che asseriscono la centralità del corpo desiderante nell'intervallo creativo prodotto da prassi di adeguamento. In *La Squale* e in *Divines* ci aggiriamo in una la Parigi spesso da cartolina, riconoscibile indipendentemente dal fatto che la si sia visitata o meno. Vi campeggiano piazza di Charles de Gaulle e gli

Champs-Élysées, l'Arco di Trionfo, che occhieggia alle spalle di Dounia e Maimouna in decappottabile e abiti scintillanti (prestito di costumi di scena di un teatro) per una notte elettrizzante, da vivere fino in fondo (*Divines*, fig. 11). In altri casi i maestosi landmark sono invece posto sullo sfondo, a distanza: l'Arco di Trionfo da La Défense; la Torre Eiffel incastrata tra i *grands ensembles*, dal balcone dell'appartamento di Ely, per finire nel più classico souvenir, inneva nella palla di vetro (*Tout ce qui brille*, fig. 12).

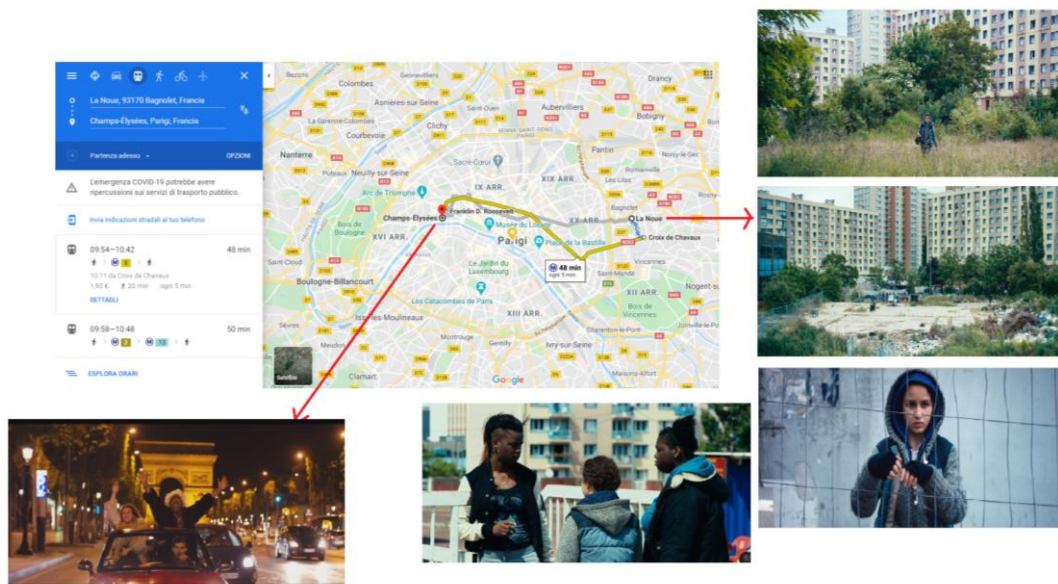


Fig.11. *Divines*, H. Benyamina (2016).



Fig. 12. *Tout ce qui brille*, G. Nakache e H. Mimran (2010).

In *Diamante nero* (fig. 13), come anche in *Tout ce qui brille*, sono l'Arco de La Défense e il complesso affaristico omonimo, con l'ambizione avveniristica dei suoi edifici eretti nella zona periferica tra i comuni di Courbevoie, Puteaux e Nanterre, a subentrare come spazio altro (cfr. *topoi* danza e travestimento).



Fig. 13. *Diamante nero*, C. Sciamma (2014).

In *Tout ce qui brille*, malgrado la dicotomia tracciata nelle prime sequenze tra il centro, “dove tutto brilla” e il “contesto e habitat ben precisi” (Vincendeau 2018, 91) dei *grands ensembles* di Puteaux, la mobilità più frequente delle ragazze verso l'esterno della banlieue più che accentuare l'ospitalità della residenza e l'imponenza estranea di Parigi, immette il piacere sensoriale della percorrenza delle strade interne alla cinta muraria della *ville lumière* senza tuttavia scardinare il peso della reciproca percezione di alterità, proprio dei film di banlieue.

Procedimenti di interposizione tra le due polarità canoniche – centro/banlieue – si riversano in quelle spazialità che Marc Augé ha indicato come rappresentative di non-luoghi. Più che sovrascrivere la tassonomia individuata dal sociologo, interessa qui ricordarne la configurazione non impregnata da “identità singole, né relazioni,” cui si correla la possibilità, temporanea, di non essere “sempre presenti a se stessi” (2012, 96).

La rete dei trasporti urbani vi partecipa come spazialità terza, oltre che come misura della distanza, in cui lo sguardo può sostare senza implicazioni nelle diversità dei suoi ospiti o in grado di proteggere, nella densità dei suoi vagoni, esternazioni di legami interdetti (come la dichiarazione della ‘donna/ebrea’ a l’‘uomo/musulmano’ in *La Petite Jérusalem*). Similmente, mete privilegiate delle protagoniste sono grandi parcheggi, centri commerciali, camere di albergo, stazioni della metro, autobus, supermercati agendo come set compensativi o di sperimentazione all'interno del gruppo di soggettività e interazioni non omologate (*La Squale*, *Diamante nero*, *Divines*, *Tout ce qui brille* e in *La Petite Jérusalem*). È nel reparto di cosmetici-

ci di un supermercato che ci si può concedere di giocare con una ‘femminilità’ così penalizzante nel luogo da cui proviene (Dounia in *Divines*); è una camera d'albergo ad accogliere la dinamica dei posizionamenti tra il gruppo di amiche (*Diamante nero*); è il centro commerciale a offrire spazio di socializzazione (*Tout ce qui brille*); ed è in una gita a Eurodisney, destinata a farsi memoria condivisa, che si può confessare la propria fragilità (ancora *Diamante nero*).

Non si tratta tuttavia di spazi compensativi ma di campi attraversati da forze che trovano espressione negli assunti del mercato e della sua targetizzazione. Così centri commerciali, profumerie, negozi di cosmetica respingono quello slancio del desiderio femminile a una ridefinizione del sé, che vi si era insediato. “Tutto il peso della melanina” – per citare Franz Fanon (2015, 142) – si riflette negli sguardi sospettosi di commesse dalla pelle rigorosamente bianca e dagli occhi azzurri (*Diamante nero*, *La Squale*, figg. 14-15), nelle dis-formità materializzata nelle nuances troppo chiare dei cosmetici di lusso (“Tu sai come si chiama questo? ‘Porcellana!’”, *La Squale*).



Figg. 14-15. *Diamante nero*, C. Sciamma (2014).

A palesarsi è anche il risvolto ‘cartografico’ della stigmatizzazione sociale, da cui gli insulti (“scarafaggi”) di un agente di sicurezza, egli stesso afrodiscendente, con l’intimazione alle *banlieusardes* di “tornarsene” alle case popolari da cui provengono (*Divines*).

Traiettorie di sviluppo, dal volto ancipite, si ravvisano in *La Petite Jérusalem* e in *Tout ce qui brille*. Nel primo la protagonista – unica della famiglia – ambisce a costruire la propria esistenza in Francia e non in una agognata Israele cui “tornare”. Il trasferimento della *banlieusarde* in centro, grazie a una borsa di studio, si prospetta tuttavia come un’assimilazione che comporta la disintegrazione familiare. Nel secondo, l’arco del movimento porterà una delle due amiche alla meta tanto desiderata, mentre l’altra solo ad accorciare le distanze in una banlieue più vicina alla Torre Eiffel.

Solo in *Brooklyn*, ambientato a Saint-Denis, il dinamismo si fa propriamente interno, mutando di segno all’ospitalità abitata. La periferia, presentata ancora come un microcosmo separato, offre anche occasioni di riscatto per la protagonista, giovane *rappeuse* in fuga dalla Svizzera, e per la comunità che la accoglie. La ‘dis-formità’ al corpo cittadino, sancito dalla ‘cintura’, prospetta ora un – terzo – spazio, generatore, nel pulsare delle sue lacerazioni e nella mediazione di un gesto artistico riconosciuto, come l’indugiare “nel bel mezzo del film” su una scena di graffiti” a esplorarne la bellezza. È, qui, un’inquadratura “apparente-

mente innocua” nella sua inutilità causale a introdurre una strategica perturbazione narrativa capace di invertire il segno (da gesto vandalico e forma espressiva legittimata) e “far sì che Saint-Denis esista in un altro modo attraverso immagini, lontane dai cliché trasmessi dai telegiornali” (*Images de la diversité*). E così la musica e le parole dell’hip hop che si fanno vessillo di una lotta per la parola e l’azione (fig. 16).



Fig. 16. *Brooklyn*, P. Tessaud (2014).

Dal cielo/dalla terra: prospettive cartografiche

Ouverture. “Un ragazzino nero, avvolto nella bandiera francese, esce da un fetido palazzone di periferia. Incontra gli amici, giovani, maschi, meticci, tutti con una bandiera, un cappellino o la maglia della nazionale. Si mettono in viaggio, tra autobus e treni, per arrivare a Parigi città. Inquadratura davanti alla Torre Eiffel. C’è la finale del Mondiale 2018, in Russia, la Francia vince la Coppa del Mondo” (s.n. 2020).

I *Miserabili* di Ladj Ly, scritto con Giordano Gederlini e Alexis Manenti (anche attore nel ruolo di Chris), è il caso – evento francese dell’ultima stagione cinematografica tanto per il mantenimento del record di incassi al botteghino, non distolti nemmeno dalla sospensione Covid, quanto per i riconoscimenti che, sul piano nazionale, sanciscono un imprimatur che passa dal Festival di Cannes, ai Cesar, ai Lumiere, oltre che dalla selezione per la rappresentanza della Francia agli Oscar, per la prima volta affidata a un regista ‘black’ francese al suo approdo al lungometraggio.

Girato a Montfermeil, periferia dell’hinterland parigino a 40 chilometri dalla capitale, dove il regista è nato e cresciuto, il film sviluppa in termini finzionali il precedente cortometraggio, *365 jours à Clichy-Montfermeil* (2017), opera collettiva di impronta documentaristica incentrata sulle rivolte giovanili del 2005 filmato da Ly in collaborazione con Manenti, a sua

volta originario della periferia orientale (Bagnolet, dipartimento Senna – Saint-Denis Île de France, arrondissement Bobigny).

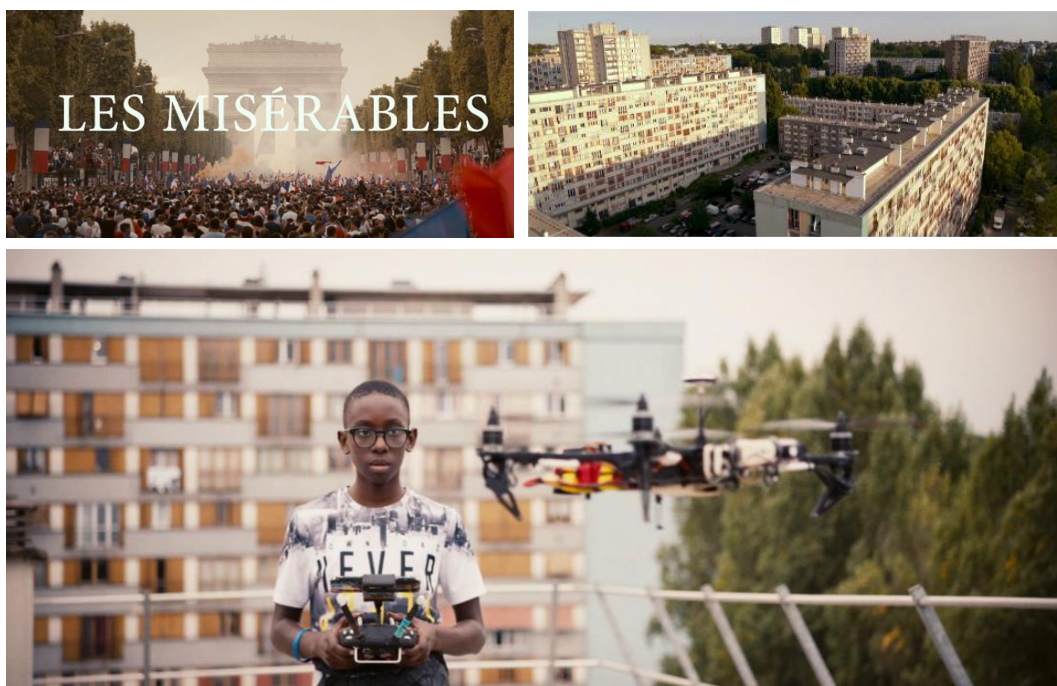
L'apertura della recensione italiana e le tessere bio-filmografiche riportate, debitorie di un corredo critico-informativo trasversale nella corposa rassegna stampa sul film e il regista, introducono alla rete di referenze e di ascendenza cinematografiche quasi inerziali (fig. 17) in cui non mancano da un lato l'accostamento, per l'ambientazione e l'inesco narrativo, alla pellicola culto di Kassovitz, *L'Odio*, dall'altro la filiazione a *Le thé au harem d'Archimède* di Charef. Con quest'ultimo, Ly condivide il processo di legittimazione: se la legittimazione di Charef apriva una traiettoria che ai nostri giorni approda all'acclamazione di Abdellatif Kechiche come novello *enfant terrible* del cinema nazionale, oggi i tributi all'opera del regista di origini ciadiane incoronano un nuovo pioniere in un contesto e nozione di cittadinanza ancora a disagio con la pluralità del suo tessuto.

Nel nesso biografico ritroviamo quella rappresentazione territoriale in 'prima persona' propria, come si è visto, di una certa tendenza del cinema francese, sostenuta dalla valenza documentale/cronachistica (i 'fatti' ovvero le insurrezioni giovanili che si fanno carsicamente tornasole di tensioni sociali e istituzionali e dell'apparato di repressione del mantenimento del cosiddetto ordine pubblico) calata nei moduli sedimentati nel cinema di banlieue.

Che il prestito del titolo, *I Miserabili*, non funzioni solo come suggestione ma lavori sul piano di una continuità, al contempo, di orizzonte discorsivo e di iscrizione identitario-culturale è segnalato sia dalla ripresa finale (il riferimento ai buoni o cattivi coltivatori, citazione dal romanzo) ma soprattutto dalla localizzazione. Il raccordo con l'affresco politico-sociale tratteggiato da Victor Hugo trova infatti ancoraggio nella topografia urbana dove luoghi di ambientazione del romanzo si sovrascrivono all'area 'problematica' assegnata nel film alla pattuglia, in cui si snoda gran parte delle vicende. Les Bosquets, uno dei quattro quartieri del comune di Montfermeil, vicino alla foresta di Bondy e confinante con Clichy-sous-Bois, che oggi ospita il liceo intitolato al grande romanziere, non cessa dunque di incombere nei destini dei suoi abitanti. L'usuale rinvio all'affresco è affiancato da altri prestiti, come quelli al mosaico e alla mappa, riscontrabili nella ricezione diffusa³ a restituire uno dei tratti connotanti la proposta di Ladj Ly, vale a dire la mobilità di uno sguardo che da una visione di insieme muove verso i dettagli. La dinamica non risponde tuttavia a un'istanza di complementarità mutuamente rafforzata nella sua spinta conoscitiva; esibisce piuttosto lo scacco di cui l'uno e l'altro sono segnati.

Lo sguardo dall'alto con cui, spettacolarmente, il film si apre e che avvolge il fiume umano di corpi che, all'ombra dell'Arco di Trionfo (fig. 18), si compattano e mescolano vibranti sui *grands boulevards* in occasione del match decisivo, è unanimemente ricondotto a quel miraggio di un corpo della nazione capace di accogliere le differenze dei suoi volti ma anche – aggiungiamo – il brulicare fremente delle sue fisicità. Se la visione dall'alto d'apertura fa tutt'uno con lo sguardo ordinatore del cinema, di cui Giorgio Avezù ha ampiamente

tratteggiato la fallacia (2017), è la mobilità chirurgica delle perlustrazioni di un drone (fig. 19), che subentra dopo le prime sequenze, a occupare la scena attrazionale. Appropriazione domestica dell'apparato sorvegliante concesso dall'accessibilità tecnologica, qui protesi che potenziano la possibilità di 'vedere tutto' del giovane Buzz (interpretato dal figlio del regista, Al-Hassan Ly), il drone va ad aggiungersi alla successione delle tecnologie con cui il cinema ha alimentato il suo dispositivo.



Figg. 17-18-19. *I Miserabili*, Ladj Ly (2019).

L'implementazione del dispiegamento scopico, unitamente alla sua introiezione ed esibizione sul piano narrativo, si associa a una riflessione sullo statuto della visione che contiene ed eccede il cinema. Il drone del giovane co-protagonista, abilmente manovrato, mappa la vita del quartiere, spingendosi là dove l'occhio non potrebbe giungere, ma soprattutto là dove non dovrebbe spingersi: dallo spiare l'intimità di giovani coetanee all'assistere al sopruso della polizia su un minore. Si tratta di una dimensione potenziata che tuttavia è, per il giovane *banlieutard*, segnata indelebilmente da un limite: non può infatti farsi testimonianza né rappresentazione. Non può, in definitiva, restituire la 'forma del mondo' cui ha assistito.⁴ Lo sguardo di talune componenti della società, lo sguardo dei 'subalterni' – sia esso tecnologico o umano, come quando verso la fine Buzz spia attraverso un foro lo scatenarsi della violenza dei coetanei sui poliziotti – può guardare solo finché non si palesa, finché non si nomina. Nel momento in cui ciò accade, la possibilità testimoniale e rappresentazionale soccombe alla sua funzionalizzazione all'interno dei rapporti di forza (di una coalizione femminile sull'altra per i video intimi, dei potentati di quartiere sui poliziotti per la registrazione dell'abuso di potere). E lo sguardo terzo, quello di Stéphane Ruiz (Damien Bonnard), il poliziotto trasferitosi dalle zone rurali, sconta la de-legittimazione di chi viene da un altrove.



Fig. 20. *I Miserabili*, Ladj Ly (2019).

Estraneo a conoscenze, informazioni, codici condivisi – a partire dalla sua incapacità a orientarsi nel quartiere – non è inscrivibile in alcuna delle ‘appartenenze’ entro cui precipitano, volenti o nolenti, tutti i personaggi. Sarà la sua esitazione a fornire l’esatta localizzazione dell’edificio della banlieue (“Vous êtes où?” “Quelle est votre position?” chiede insistentemente l’agente di collegamento, fig. 20) dove sono assediati i suoi compagni di pattuglia a sospendere tra la tragedia e la risoluzione l’esito di uno scontro finale immerso in atmosfere di una violenza epica ed allucinata. E poco importa che proprio questa estraneità lo affranchi da automatismi, facendo affiorare inattese (per i personaggi, non certo per gli spettatori) affinità che permettono di vedere lucidamente: non spetta nemmeno a lui tracciare né restituire la forma di quel mondo.

Malgrado l’incalzare di eventi e situazioni e la mobilità senza posa dei personaggi, malgrado il ricorso al piacere di un’invenzione narrativa (il furto del leoncino come motore narrativo, la suggestione dell’universo circense, violento e *naïf*, l’estetica allucinata dell’assedio finale) la linea interpretativa qui proposta impervi l’ancoraggio rappresentazionale de *I Miserabili* sulla centralità dello sguardo quale principio strutturale che risponde a una spazialità figurata come ordinamento differenziato, non intaccato dalle sue interne perversioni additate dalla narrazione.

Tout cela, mais c'est Paris

Et c'est Paris, qui fait la parisienne / Qu'importe, qu'elle vienne du nord ou bien du midi / Et c'est aussi le charme et l'élégance / Et l'âme de la France / Tout cela, mais c'est Paris.

Paris, Paris, Paris (1949)

“Je suis Parisien, moi” controbatte Charles (Jacky Ido, fratello del regista Cedric), inappuntabile leader di un drappello di *rabbateurs*, all’amico che prospetta una dislocazione delle attività commerciali a Bobigny, in periferia. La precisione del riferimento, non determinante ai fini dello sviluppo narrativo, chiama in causa questioni di posizionamento. E l’osservazione

“Nous sommes à Paris, Madame,” con cui Charles accompagna il galante baciavano che avvia il film alla sua conclusione, torna ad asserire un’iscrizione necessitante di conferme. Siamo a Château d’eau, nel cuore di Parigi, come ribadisce una successione di inquadrature che, partendo da una vista – cartolina della Tour Eiffel dai tetti cittadini giunge fino alla florealle, caotica, stazione omonima della metro (figg. 21-22).



Fig. 21. *La vie de Château*, M. Barry e C. Ido (2017).



Fig. 22. *La vie de Château*, M. Barry e C. Ido (2017).

La vie de Château di Moddy Barry e Cedric Ido, scritto con Joseph Denize su un’idea originale di Matthew Gledhill, al di là delle variazioni di intenti e di progettualità che hanno scandito le diverse fasi del suo sviluppo (si veda Barry, Ido in Diao, 2017), si prospetta come “film su un quartiere,” quello che dà il titolo all’opera. Anche qui ritorna la rivendicazione del nesso bio-filmografico che vede una familiarità dei registi con il luogo, per averlo assiduamente frequentato o per l’esservi vissuti per periodi. Definito come l’ultimo quartiere popolare della metropoli (Barry), sfida nell’aggettivo l’interazione tra la qualificazione sociale, l’attribuzione di censo, di gusto e un’idea di appartenenza che richiama il cuore profondo di un

territorio nonché il suo fascino non privo di ombre e ruvidità, cui a Château concorrono i molti *sans-papiers* giunti nella capitale francese con il sogno di mutare i propri destini e quelli dei loro cari (Ido). *La vie de Château* partecipa dunque di una mitologia popolare innervata di “generi musicali, danze e mode” e “di tutta una cultura dall’enorme portato, spesso ignorato dai parigini” (Barry, Ido in Diao 2017) la cui ispirazione ed espirazione disegnano qui un orizzonte espanso, che vede nel continente africano e nelle sue diaspore la principale – ma non l’esclusiva – direttrice.

Il posizionamento espresso da *La vie de Château* allude infatti a metonimie cangianti, entro cui, questo ‘mondo a parte’ si fa ombelico di mondi. Geolocalizzato nel X arrondissement di Parigi, il quartiere è modellato da una spazialità duttile, multiscala che risuona dal suo epicentro, la fermata della linea 4, landmark cui il quartiere deve il nome. Fulcro di quella vitalità culturale che si riversa sulle strade che vi convergono (Ido, in in Diao, 2017) si dà – inesorabilmente – come punto nevralgico e cardine della rappresentazione filmica, nella varietà di fisionomie, origini, lingue che non solo lo abitano ma anche che lo attraversano e vi si riversano, affiorando con flusso incessante dalle scale mobili della metro. Qui sostano, si incontrano e scontrano i vari personaggi, in uno ‘stare’, per quanto sempre in procinto di ripartire, che li distingue da quegli ‘altri’ parigini che semplicemente transitano. Qui due squadre di *rabatteurs* si fronteggiano, attendendo al varco i passanti (residenti o turisti che siano) per sponsorizzare questo o quel negozio di parrucchiere. Qui, in una linea critica che propende a ricondurre il film nella narrazione cinematografica francese di immigrazione e di cittadinanza, la banlieue, legittimata da una tradizione che ne scompone il corpo materiale nell’astrazione che non necessita di localizzazione esatta, farebbe il suo ingresso nella cintura metropolitana nel ‘mondo a parte’ di Château. Ma là dove i due giovani protagonisti di Charif approdavano nella fuga senza speranza dalla periferia (Gennevilliers, banlieue nord-ovest nel dipartimento Des Hauts-de-Seine en Ile de France, nei ringraziamenti dei titoli di coda), gli ‘eroi’ di Barry e Ido stanno e marciano il territorio (cfr. figg. 23-24).



Fig. 23. *Le thé au harem d'Archimède*, M. Charef (1985).



Fig. 24. Copertina di DVD di *La vie de Château*, M. Barry e C. Ido (2017).

pa e location. Punti di riferimento sono insegne, facciate, fisionomie di strade che restituiscono, nella pluralità dei tragitti percorsi, le relazioni differenziate tra i residenti e i vissuti materiali-individuali. In questo cosmo rutilante c'è chi non sfugge alla tentazione di porre un ordine, di scomporre il corpo in zone secondo un principio di funzionalità e di utilità che ne imbrigli, attraverso una congrua ripartizione, l'energia anarchica. L'ipotesi, avanzata nel film dal concorrente di Charles, è, almeno temporaneamente, sventata.

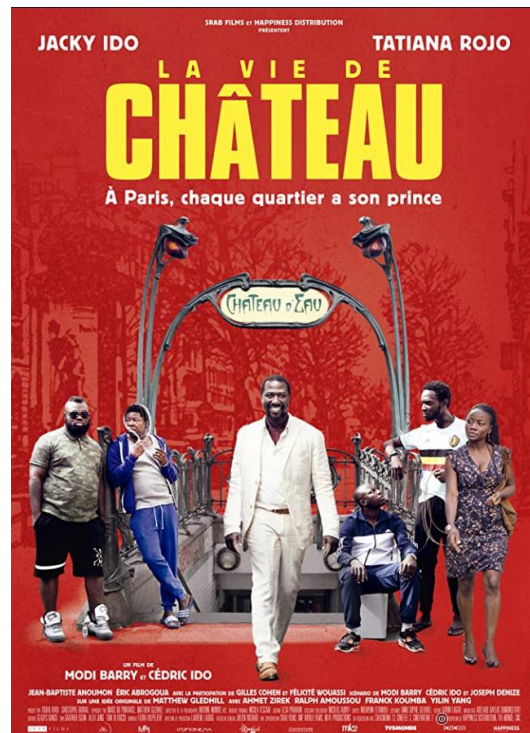


Fig. 26. Locandina *La vie de Château*, M. Barry e C. Ido (2017).

Una tentazione quella della scomposizione e dell'ordine funzionali – all'opera anche nei modelli cartografici del cinema, oggi reinterrogati nelle geografie acquisite da “ridisegnare” (Cervini 2020, 16) nell'oscillazione di nuovi parametri territoriali e fluidità dei confini. Chiedersi invece in quale sezione dell'atlante del cinema si possa ricondurre *La vie de Château* diventa domanda fertile nel momento in cui alla successione delle tavole si sovrascrive la profondità della matassa, nei suoi ancoraggi che riverberano i 'qui' e gli 'altrove' rivelatori di piani concomitanti di contiguità.

Mille e una banlieue

Geolocalizzazione delle banlieue e dei 'mondi a parte' esplicitati nei film analizzati in questo articolo, o rintracciati dall'apparato informativo relativo. Cliccando sulle singole localizzazioni, in Google Maps, compaiono i riferimenti al/ai film:

- *Le thé au harem d'Archimède* (M. Charif, 1985)
- *La Squale* (F. Genestal, 2000)

- *La Petite Jerusalem* (Albou, 2005)
- *Tout ce qui brille* (G. Nakache e H. Mimran, 2010)
- *Bande de filles* (*Diamante nero*, C. Sciamma, 2014)
- *Brooklyn* (P. Tessaud, 2014)
- *Divines* (H. Benyamina, 2016)
- *La vie de Chateau* (M. Barry e C. Ido, 2018)
- *Les Miserables* (*I Miserabili*, L. Ly, 2019)

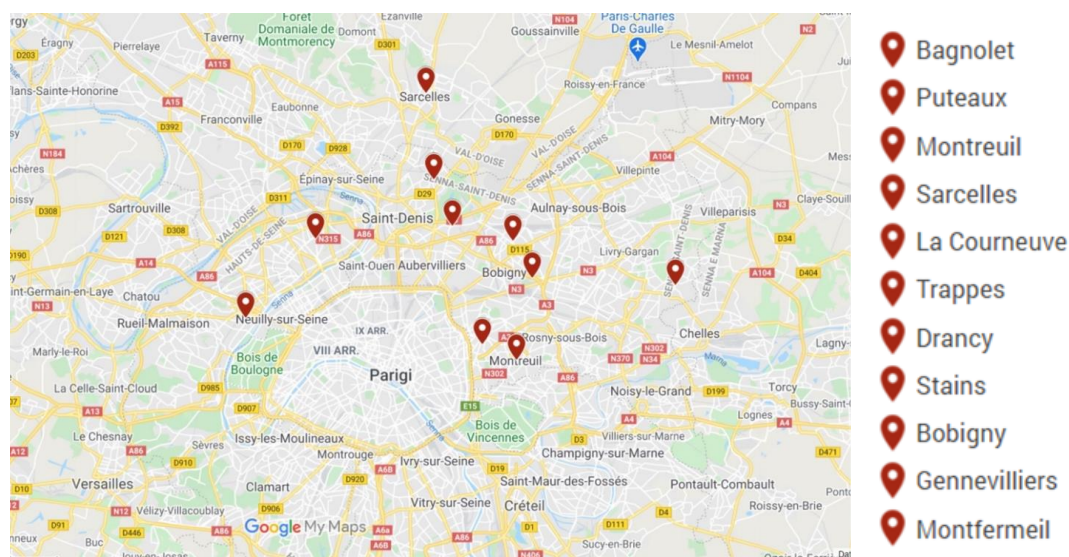


Fig. 27. Parigi, 'bande à part'.

Note

¹ Il saggio è stato discusso e condiviso nella sua interezza dalle due autrici per procedere poi a uno sviluppo focalizzato dei due tracciati, come indicato.

² Utile strumento di analisi comparativa atta a indagare ricorsività e varianti è offerto dalla Fiche interattiva di *Diamante nero*. <http://www.poleimagehn.com/images/LyceensAuCinema/Fiche-interactive-Bande-de-filles.pdf>.

³ Ricontrabile per esempio nella recensione di Giovanni Bogani (2020) nel *Focus* riservato alle recensioni del pubblico di *MyMovies*.

⁴ Si noti la diversa connotazione impressa a sequenze assimilabili nel corto di Ly per l'antologica *Home Made* (Netflix), realizzata durante il primo lockdown 2020. Qui il volo del drone di Buzz e il suo occhio indiscreto ritessono i fili relazionali aggrediti dalla limitazione pandemica.

⁵ Société des ambassadeurs et des personnes élégantes, da cui il fenomeno culturale e sociale originario del Congo Brazzaville.

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The cartographic impulse: post-representational cartography practices in contemporary visual art¹

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ABSTRACT

Post-representational cartography is being approached from broad interdisciplinary fields such as cultural studies and geographical humanities. Since poststructuralism and postmodern theory, political and cultural readings have emerged which consider dynamic, performative, and postcolonial realities in cartographic practices. Taking the hypothesis that contemporary visual arts have played a fundamental role in this paradigm shift, this article presents a part of the research developed within the R&D project on critical cartography in the framework of the *Art Globalization Interculturality* laboratory at the University of Barcelona. With the aim of understanding the relationship between post-representational cartography and contemporary visual arts, a brief state of the art of the most significant contributions is presented, as well as a set of categories as interpretative conceptual tools for the case studies: contingent cartographies, sedimented cartographies, embodied cartographies and cosmographies. In the same way, these results are analysed by problematizing the challenges and contradictions found when confronting cartographic practices in contemporary visual arts from a post-representational perspective.

Keywords

post-representational cartography, postcoloniality, contingent cartographies, sedimented cartographies, embodied cartographies, cosmographies

Introduction

The following Generations, who were not so fond of the Study of Cartography as their Forebears had been, saw that that vast Map was Useless, and not without some Pitilessness was it, that they delivered it up to the Inclemencies of Sun and Winters.

Jorge Luis Borges, "On Exactitude in Science"

The title of this article takes as reference the "mapping impulse" concept of John Brian Harley, as well as two key contributions of art theory, being the articles "The Allegorical Impulse" by Craig Owens and "An Archival Impulse" by Hal Foster, both published in the journal *October* around the turn of the twenty-first century.² While Craig Owens sought to draw up a new theory of art by contrasting allegory with the symbolic meaning of modern art (Owens 1980, 67-86), Hal Foster approached contemporary art as an alternative enunciation strategy that avoided the assumptions of modern representation (Foster 2004, 3-22). Some years earlier, Hal Foster had published his well-known essay "The Artist as Ethnographer?," where

he confirmed the interest of contemporary art in the methodologies of the social sciences and their irruption “into the expanded field of culture” (Foster 1995, 306). He argued that post-colonial discourses, the cultural other, and subculturality occupy the theoretical concerns of cultural studies, displacing the previous place of proletarian subalternity in the humanities (Foster 1995, 302-309). In addition, art has also experienced a shift from its traditional ‘aesthetic’ domain to a social, geographical or ethnographic sphere, and this is the reason why “mapping of a given institution or a related community is a primary form that site-specific art now assumes” (Foster 1995, 306).

Indeed, in the face of the models of representation of space derived from Euclidean logic and systematized during colonial modernity, since the second half of the 20th century artistic practices involved in the reinterpretation of cartography and mapping processes have proliferated. These practices have coincided with the effervescence of certain theories that, in opposition to the objective knowledge of modern thought, have formulated a critique of language, science and totalizing knowledge systems. This paradigm shift would imply, in cartographic terms, the discrediting of the modern colonial map centred on political logic and the opening to a new form of cartography that, from a post-representational logic, is capable of taking in dynamic, postcolonial and performative realities. In this respect, our hypothesis was that artistic practices responsive to the critique of representation in cultural studies have played a fundamental role in this paradigm shift. Therefore, the contribution of our research resides in approaching the post-representational cartography debate from the analysis of contemporary visual art, as well as in categorizing a set of stages of case studies as a conceptual tool that could be used in understanding the relations between art and cartography. But before unfolding such case studies, the state of the question of the most significant contributions in post-representational cartography and its relationship with the visual arts will be briefly recapitulated.

State of the question

The use of spatial metaphors in the analyses of Gaston Bachelard, Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault definitively contributed to ‘spatializing’ the humanities and social sciences through a critical narrative that combined the analysis of space with its social, political and cultural dimensions (Bachelard 1957; Lefebvre 1974; Foucault 1975). This interdisciplinary turn brought together geography, political theory, economics, urban studies, anthropology, sociology, pedagogy, literature, philosophy, cognitive and technological analysis, architecture and the visual arts. Starting in the 1980s – coinciding with the global diffusion of the poststructuralism of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault – with the consolidation of the school of cultural studies, the interdisciplinary debate of the spatial turn was opened up, promoting policies of recognition or “criticism of representation” (Foster 1995, 302-209). In these analyses, the concept of ‘ideology’ – which had been central in critical theory – was

replaced by that of ‘representation’, prioritizing cultural criticism when addressing space and cartography. The configuration of this new framework was central in several works published in the 1990s, such as *The Location of Culture*, by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha (1994), or the commitment of the anthropologist Arjun Appadurai in *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization* (1996) to link the discourse of cultural studies to the emergence of a new postcolonial and globalized spatial imagination. To some extent, this goal was also shared by urban theorist Edward Soja in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (1996).

As a consequence of all this, critical geography has been established as a topic of research from which to be able to map multiculturalism and a diversity of global identities, in contrast to radical geography focused on Marxism and class conflict (Gregory et al. 2009, 123).³ For this purpose, new perspectives such as global studies, gender studies, postcolonial and decolonial studies, ecology, antispeciesism and the Anthropocene theory have been added to the geographical humanities. All these perspectives have participated in discrediting modern cartography as a representation of the Eurocentric, white, patriarchal and anthropocentric model of modernity, appealing to a new form of cartography and polyphonic geographical imagination. Some of these fronts underlie the volume *Rethinking Maps: New Frontiers in Cartographic Theory*, edited by Martin Dodge, Rob Kitchin and Chris Perkins in 2009, where the poststructuralist ideas of Gilles Deleuze, Felix Guattari, Judith Butler, Bruno Latour and Donna Haraway were introduced with the aim of defining a new type of post-representational cartography, linked to the multiplicity of identities, spaces of experience and performative logic: ‘mapping’ (Dodge, Kitchin and Perkins 2009).

Likewise, discrediting modern cartography and analysing how Europe was consolidated as the driving force in the production of global space and the centre of the world during modernity, has also been the goal of critics of the Latin American decolonial sphere such as Aníbal Quijano in *Modernidad, identidad y utopía en América Latina* (1988), and Walter D Mignolo in *Local Histories / Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking* (2000), as well as from what have been called “epistemologies of the south,” systematized by Boaventura de Sousa Santos in *Epistemologías do sul* (2009). These studies, which also take as their reference cultural studies, French poststructuralism, and very particularly Jacques Derrida’s idea of deconstruction, have had a special impact on fields of research in the Spanish language and have encouraged a growing interest in artistic practices related to mapping or critical cartography in these contexts.

All of the above has had a significant impact on both art theory and art practice, which has led to the launch of numerous artistic projects as well as the publication of several analyses in regard to critical and post-representational cartography; some of these contributions are enumerated below. It is no coincidence that we began this text by referring to the journal *October*, considering its fundamental role since the end of the 1970s in translating the ideas

of poststructuralism and cultural studies for the contemporary artistic sphere. In the article “Sculpture in the Expanded Field,” Rosalind Krauss described certain artistic practices already interested in a new type of landscape, the construction of sites and axiomatic structures, as well as other forms of “signaling” the territory (Krauss 1979, 30-44). It was precisely around the work of both post-minimalist land-art artists, and what has been termed the “new genre of public art,” where critics and art historians have located the first cases of these kinds of practices. The volume *Mapping the Terrain: New Genre Public Art*, edited by Suzanne Lacy in 1995 as a result of a symposium organized a year earlier, should be understood as an attempt to reflect on a new kind of procedural artistic practices, many of which were taking over public space using cartographic methodologies as a cultural and social tool.⁴ Within this volume, in her article “Looking Around: Where We Are, Where We Could Be” (the germ of a book that she published two years later with the title *The Lure of the Local: The Sense of Place in a Multicentered Society*, 1997), art theorist Lucy Lippard recognized that

[f]irst, the postmodernist impulse [...] has spawned a plethora of exhibitions, articles, and books called re-viewing, re-visioning, re-mapping, re-thinking, re-photographing. Second, the titles of exhibitions about land and nature are becoming melancholic and even apocalyptic: for instance, *Against Nature*, *The Demoralized Landscape*, *The Unmaking of Nature*, *Lost Illusions*, and *Utopia, Post-Utopia*. Third, the terms “territory,” “land,” “earth,” “terrain,” and “mapping” are also ubiquitous in both theory and practice. The map as a micro/macro visual concept has long been of interest to artists, and particularly to “conceptual” and “earth” artists from 1965 to 1975. On one hand, mapping the turf can be seen as abetting surveys, fences, boundaries, zoning, and other instruments of possession. On the other hand, maps tell us where we are and show us where we’re going. (Lippard 1995, 114-130)

In a way more focused on post-representational cartography, and in the same year as the symposium organized by Suzanne Lacy, the exhibition *Mapping*, curated by Robert Storr, took place at MoMA, New York. This exhibition, which sought to inscribe the fascination and interest of art in the history of cartography, following the model of exhibitions such as *Cartes et figures de la terre*, organized in 1980 at the Centre Pompidou, would be the trigger for a debate that would hold sway for many years (Storr et al. 1994). As part of this debate, the following year the artist Peter Fend organized an exhibition at American Fine Arts in New York with the title *Mapping: A Response to MoMA*, which refocused the topic of cartography of contemporary artists not so much towards their fascination with the history of cartography, but as a critical position and in terms of their goal to use cartography as a transforming tool of the social environment and the role of maps. In the catalogue that was published in this regard, the artist’s text appealed to definitively replace the concept of ‘map’ with that of ‘mapping’, underlining the procedural, counter-representative and performative connotations of the latter (Fend 1995).⁵ In the same way, as a result of their performative possibilities, many of these artistic mapping practices have been directly connected to the “direct action” of social and environmental movements, especially since the First International Earth Sum-

mit, organized in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. The actions – carried out by both Greenpeace and activist artists during the Earth Summit to criticize the interests of economic dominance that were concealed amidst the event – produced a wave of replicas by artists, critics and theorists who, from the activist and postcolonial discourse, demanded to transform the world-image.⁶ Among these, the statements of the artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña were especially significant for his defence of a map without political borders. His words were:

Artist and writers throughout the continent are currently involved in a redefinition of our continental topography. We imagine either a map of the Americas without borders, a map turned upside down, or one in which borders are organically drawn by geography, culture, and immigrations, no by the capricious fingers of economic domination. (Lacy 1995, 19)

In recent years, contributions – both from theory and art practices – have continued to be made in regard to the possibilities of rethinking the idea of cartography in the shift towards a critical and post-representational cartography.⁷ Among other existing research programs, the findings presented in this article are part of the R&D project *Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Era: New Methodologies, Concepts and Analytical Approaches*.⁸ Such research is the result of the phenomenon that I have briefly described and confirms its consolidation as an object of study in contemporary visual arts. Specifically, this research began in 2012 with the consideration that, despite the large amount of evidence emerged in recent years regarding mapping practices in the visual arts, there has not been a methodological will or historiographic labour to analyse the phenomenon as a whole from the field of art theory, which has caused a certain dispersion or fragmentation of the contributions we have elucidated. In the same way, despite being a topic of discussion that has brought together a great variety of disciplinary fields in the humanities and social sciences, including the expanded field of cultural studies or the geographical humanities, there have continued to be isolated analyses along disciplinary lines. Taking into account the necessary interdisciplinarity when facing this new paradigm, our research emerged in its beginnings with the aim of overcoming these disciplinary limits, as well as inscribing within a common mission in the humanities the aim to rethink, in both ontological and epistemological terms, modern cartography and the study of new mapping practices.

In order to analyse this in detail and place such kind of artistic production in an interdisciplinary framework, a large assemblage of mapping practices developed by art over the last 60 years was carried out, with up to a total of 100 case studies. The way to approach this large number of case studies has been to elaborate five categories of analysis that might allow us to interpret each of the artistic works according to the possibilities they offer when challenging the logic of modern cartography: the visualization of complex, often cross-border relationships and dynamics which are invisible on political maps (Contingent Cartographies); the surpassing of the false dichotomy *chronos-topos* that has excluded the temporal

dimension from maps (Sedimented Cartographies); the recognition of the body as a geographical, biopolitical and performative space (Embodied Cartographies); the possibility of redeeming a negative and self-critical narrative in modern cartography (Negative Cartographies); and the appeal to a definitive escape route, through which it might be possible to imagine other kinds of territorial orderings (Cosmographies).⁹ As a summary of this research project, just a brief overview of four of such categories are presented in the second part of this article in order to focus on some critical, post-representational and postcolonial cartographies, as well as to present these categories as a conceptual interpretative tool.

Contingent cartographies

The Situationists proposed a new aesthetic based on chance, mutability and the playful sense of the city. An aesthetic “as a sum of possibilities” that materialized in the practice of *detournement*, with press clippings, photography, film and music, as well as with maps (Debord 1955, 11-15; Debord and Wolman 1956, 2-9). By creatively distorting the sense of cartography and introducing motion-related arrows and vectors, they were able to achieve their goal of “renewed cartography” (Debord 1955, 11-15). Even though they were using their artistic techniques in a larger attempt to overturn capitalism, the numerous subsequent analyses and practices are related to the complex and dynamic relationships of territories and the need to search for other post-representational cartographic models. This would be the case of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari in *Mille Plateaux*, where they introduced a new cartographic possibility that was open, connectable in all its dimensions, removable, alterable, capable of receiving constant modifications, which they called a “rhizome” (Deleuze and Guattari 1980). In addition, postcolonial theorists such as Arjun Appadurai or Homi Bhabha have argued for the analysis of the territory from a complex approach that would take into account ‘in-between spaces’ (Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1994). Along with them, numerous artists have tried to challenge the statism of maps and propose another class of cartographic devices that are able to visualize this complexity and account for cross-border realities.

The Mexican artist collective Torolab works on artistic processes that include extensive research on territories. These investigations are the starting point of projects that can materialize later in very diverse devices, such as new technology, clothing, maps, self-construction systems, experimental laboratories and even food stalls. Through collaborative work, they have been able to draw a complex cartography of Tijuana and of “cross-border” life. In *La región de los pantalones transfronterizos* (2004-2005), Torolab did a mapping of the movement on the border between Mexico and the United States (Tijuana / San Diego) through GPS devices placed on the clothes of five people who were constantly in transit between both countries. The locators traced transnational routes based on the economic, family and work movements of the participants. Within the daily life of these five inhabitants,

palimpsestic memory of territories. In addition to this, many communities in colonized territories conceive space inseparably from the histories of their ancestors and their places are intimately linked to time. As Bruce Chatwin deftly showed us, this would be the case of Australian aboriginal communities (Chatwin 1987). This gaze towards the temporal sediments of the territory is shared by several visual artists and, in some cases, has also been linked to the ‘artistic practices of time’, such as sound art, music, cinema or video art.

Present Tense (1996) is an installation composed of 2,200 square Nablus soap prisms, which Lebanese artist Mona Hatoum pierced with small red dots. These points reproduce the outline of the Middle East, outlining the map drawn up in the 1993 Oslo Peace Agreement by the Palestinian and Israeli authorities to demarcate the land that was to be returned to Palestine. This soap is in fact a traditional Palestinian product whose industry has been developed in the city of Nablus from the 10th century to the present. Mona Hatoum’s cartography highlights the ephemeral state of recent territorial mapping and, at the same time, reflects the persistent and enduring history of the Palestinian people. The work’s title reinforces both the sense of constantly changing territories and the tensions that arise from the different political agendas in the region, referring precisely to this condition of temporality that in turn has to do with territorial tension and the construction of histories.



Fig. 2. Alÿs, Francis, *The Green Line*, 2004. In collaboration with Philippe Bellaïche, Julien Devaux and Rachel Leah Jones. Courtesy of the artist.

For its part, *The Green Line* (2004, fig. 2), by Belgian-Mexican artist Francis Alÿs, is a continuation of an action carried out by the artist in the summer of 1995 in the city of São Paulo, marking a line in his path with a pot of paint. In June 2004, that same action was repeated following a line parallel to what had been the Green Line that crossed Jerusalem, with 58 litres of green paint used to walk the 24 km. This line had been drawn in pencil on a map by Moshe Dayan at the end of the war between Israel and Jordan in 1948, and it remained the boundary until the Six Day War in 1967, when Israel occupied the territories inhabited by Palestinians east of the line. The filmed documentation of the walk was shot involving various spontaneous observers who joined the action. The artist thus proposed a reflection on what the role of poetic acts could be in violent political situations, and on how the production of space also has historical implications.

Embodied cartographies

Following the poststructuralist perspective of Michel Foucault in his works on biopolitical spaces, the recognition of the body as a geographical, biopolitical and performative space would emerge from a critical analysis of the tradition of Western cartographies linked to anatomy, psychology, immorality, disease and healing (Foucault 1976). Examples such as Leonhard Ludwig Finke's atlas of diseases, Dr. John Snow's map of cholera, Charles Booth's map of poverty and maps of the human brain from the phrenology experiments of Dr. Franz Joseph Gall and the Fowler brothers, up to the map of the Human Connectome Project or the latest cognitive neuro-cartographies, would be part of this tradition. These cartographic works were especially linked to statistical or morphological cartography developed since the 19th century and, although their main goal was controlling the bodies for scientific achievements, some cases served as an argument to elaborate criminal profiles, defend racial purity, diagnose non-normative behaviours or justify colonial settlements. Numerous post-representational cartographic practices carried out by contemporary artists or researchers assume the geographical condition of our bodies and the challenge to liberate this first essential geography from the biopolitical control of traditional cartography and the infinite space of the geometrician. In this way, several artistic projects have focused on the act of "walking as an aesthetic practice" (Careri 2017), but also have visualized the wound that colonial violence leaves on bodies (Vergès 2003, 10-15).

The work of Brazilian artist Adriana Varejão examines issues such as anthropology and miscegenation in contemporary Brazilian society. Her works include painting, sculpture, works on paper, installation and photography. She is interested in modern forms of colonization in contemporary Brazilian society. The *Contingente* work (1998-2000) is an installation which shows the signs of colonization on the body. The line of the equator, barely indicated by a minimal legend, is marked as a stigma or wound on the palm of a hand, in the same way that colonization remained as a scar through cultural tradition or language.

Through this symbolic gesture, the artist delves into the tragedy of that chapter in colonial history, which was also a chapter in the history of the domination of bodies.

Mapa-corpo (Decolonizing the Body, 2002-2005, fig. 3), was a series of interactive poetic rituals by the Mexican artist collective La Pocha Nostra, which explored neo-colonization/decolonization through acupuncture and the enactment of post-9/11 'corpolitica.'



Fig. 3. La Pocha Nostra, *Mapa-corpo (Decolonizing the Body)*, 2005. Courtesy of the artists.

La Pocha Nostra (Guillermo Gómez-Peña, Roberto Sifuentes and Nola Mariano) denounces global culture, xenophobia, organized crime violence, the economy in free fall, and how these factors impact the human body as well as our notions of identity and nationality. Guillermo Gómez-Peña invited the public to participate in the images created by La Pocha Nostra to embody “the border experiences” (Britto et al. 2012, 35). La Pocha Nostra is a transdisciplinary artistic organization that involves a support network for artists from diverse fields, generations and ethnic origin, with the aim of erasing the boundaries between art and politics, artistic practice and theory and artist and spectator.

Cosmographies

Finally, cosmographies would appeal to a definitive escape route through which we might be able to imagine another kind of territorial planning, even opening up to non-Western geographical imagination. Unlike political modern cartography, cosmographies tend to imagine an integral conception of the world, where a separation or rupture between the outer and inner world cannot be conceived. These behaviours could be considered a subjective planning of the whole, a primal will to know and make sense of the universe through mystical

diagrams or other cartographical devices. These other worldviews were a milestone of the editorial plan of John Brian Harley and David Woodward for the *History of Cartography* project carried for the University of Chicago (Harley and Woodward 1987). They were also described by Michel Foucault as *des espaces autres*, and post-/decolonial theorists have encouraged consideration of these non-Western geographical imaginations (Foucault 1967, 12-19; Vergès 2003, 10-15). Michel Foucault took account of traditional Persian carpets, but this would be also the case of the Mandala, the Candomblé or the Aztec diagrams, such as the map of Tenochtitlan in the Mendoza Codex. Following Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the potential of these cosmographies lay in the ability to break free from the matter of expression and the machinery of production of hegemonic subjectivity (Deleuze and Guattari 1980).

The *Reincarnation of an Ornithologist* (1978) is a video piece by British artist and filmmaker Peter Greenaway that examines over 92 mixed media images, most of them paintings by the artist himself. The film is related to the migration of a soul following the migratory paths of birds, and the subjective movement of the camera focuses on each of these itineraries. Such travel is described in detail using the paintings as if they were maps or some type of cartography. This mapping work is not intended for the territorial planning of a physical location, but as a means of reflecting on life itself. This work by Greenaway demonstrates the cartographic possibilities of the video medium, but at the same time opens the door to reconsider the *oeuvres* of art, either abstractly or figuratively, as cartographies in themselves, able to be traversed and walked as if on a geographical surface.

In the late 1970s, German artist Lothar Baumgarten lived with indigenous communities for 18 months in the forests of Venezuela and Brazil. During that time, he made more than 500 drawings, as well as photographs and films with the Yanomami. In this way he experimented with notions of territoriality linked to the question of rituality, repetition, oral culture and sound. Additionally, the artist absorbed nouns and place names that followed another kind of geographical imagination and linguistic parameters, different from those of the West. These place names had been phonetically composed through a tradition of melodies that acted as mapping mechanisms of the territories associated with the Guyana topographic basin, as well as other areas in Venezuela and Brazil. These melodies had already disappeared from the group's memory, but their names remained on the indigenous maps. Lothar Baumgarten collected these place names to test various forms of cartography, installations and objects, following a cosmological logic, as "*Venezuela*" *Map of Indigenous Societies* (1985, fig. 4).



Fig. 4. Lothar Baumgarten, "Venezuela' Map of Indigenous Societies," 1985. Photographer: Bill Jacobson. Published in *Lothar Baumgarten. Autofocus Retina* by Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona (Marí et al. 2008, 51).

Conclusions

Postmodern criticism focused on exposing how science, especially Newtonian mechanics and Euclidean space and language, exercised its domination by presenting itself as "a unique, indisputable, authentic, true and absolute system, quintessence of white, patriarchal discourse, and symbol of the colonialist power of the West" (Bishop 1990, 51-65). Faced with modern science, other possible systems influenced by what is termed the critique of representation were proposed. As part of this challenge, absolute classification systems and watertight categories, as well as genealogical and arborescent systems were suspect. Precisely, Michel Foucault and especially his contemporary Jacques Derrida, placed the question of classification systems and taxonomy at the centre of poststructuralist reflection (Derrida 1995). This leads us to confirm that the crisis of certain forms of language classification coincides with the crisis of knowledge systems and modern cartography. In fact, this had already been noticed by John Brian Harley when he transferred the post-structuralist debate to the discipline of geography (Harley 1989, 1-20).

As a consequence of all this, since the postcolonial debate it has been proposed to intervene or distort modern maps to adjust them to this new reality. This would be the case of the well-known Arno Peters proposal which, taking James Gall's cylindrical projection,

corrected the shape of the countries against what he considered to be the representation of eurocentrism and colonial exploitation visible in the Gerardus Mercator projections (Monmonier 2004). In the same way, discourses that defend a southern orientation on maps have proliferated, starting from the idea that the northern orientation presupposes a centre in this hemisphere. Taking as its reference the famous poster *La escuela del sur* (1943), by the artist Joaquín Torres García, decolonial theory and the ‘epistemologies of the south’ have called for turning the map (de Sousa Santos 2009). However, we have concluded that these campaigns do not propose an effective solution for different reasons: on the one hand, because they do not start from a post-representational and performative will that allows for profound challenges to the logic of the map; and on the other hand, because they do not take into consideration that the centrality of the world has been supplanted by a complex polycentric network of powers, which makes any attempt to standardize one type of orientation unfeasible.

Likewise, the decolonial analysis of how Europe was consolidated as the engine of the modern production of global space and the centre of the world, has made it possible to understand modernity not only as an economic and political project, but above all as an epistemic project. From these analyses, Walter D. Mignolo has understood that modernity would be constitutive of a colonial world system of domination, fundamentally through the production of a “historical-cultural dependence” (Mignolo 2010), while Aníbal Quijano has approached the colonial project of European modernity as a colonization of knowledge (Quijano 2010, 22-32). Like Bruno Latour’s concept of the “immutable mobile,” these contributions confirm that only through an epistemological critique of the material and social conditions of the production of knowledge is it possible to deeply challenge the logic of cartography (Latour 1987).

Lastly, the challenge to the modern centre as a system of colonial domination has opened up the possibility of unfolding other ‘diffuse’, ‘displaced’ or ‘demultiplied’ identities through a new topology that has assimilated the theory of complex systems, disseminated thanks to the studies in cybernetic anthropology of Gregory Bateson and its application in the field of economics by Friedrich Hayek (Deleuze and Guattari 1980; Weizman 2007, 185-218). This new topology would correspond to the “micrological fabric of identities, individualisms or intensities” of complex latitudes of the Internet and Big Data (Deleuze and Guattari 1980, 224). Beyond the fact that we consider it necessary to carry out studies that analyse this phenomenon from the point of view of a post-representational cartography, the role currently exercised by financial and market powers on new forms of geographical imagination invites us to also reconsider the possibility of a cognitive cartography as Fredric Jameson suggested in regard to Kevin Lynch (Jameson 1991). In turn, this cognitive cartography would be able to ascertain a clear sense of where we are in relation to broader ideological structures and determining the place of post-representational cartography in them.

In conclusion, contemporary visual arts have not only tackled early and prolifically the debate on critical, post-representational and postcolonial cartography but have also played a crucial role in establishing this paradigm shift. The ability of art to transform the logic of modern cartography has to do, precisely, with its potential when it comes to putting a knowledge system in crisis, and its ability to create other models responsive to other thought systems. Whether incorporating complex, temporal, corporal or cosmological dimensions, the cartographic practices of the visual arts that we have elucidated account for the multiplicity of proposals and the impossibility of thinking about cartography from a single and absolute system, rather inviting us to think about the problem from the expanded field that is art itself. At the same time, as Foster recalled in regard to Walter Benjamin's text "The Author as Producer" (1995, 302-309), they would be able to side with the other, to intervene in the problem, to change the techniques of traditional cartography, to transform the apparatus of dominant culture. But a correct tendency is not enough, that is, to assume an ideological place, an impossible place: an impossible cartography.¹⁰

Notes

¹ Funding: R&D project *Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Era: New Methodologies, Concepts and Analytical Approaches* (MICINN: HAR2010-17403 / MINECO: HAR2013-43122P / MINECO: HAR 2016-75100-P). Art Globalization Interculturality laboratory, University of Barcelona.

² We are particularly interested in the idea of 'mapping' beyond physical artifacts: "There has probably always been a mapping impulse in human consciousness, and the mapping experience – involving the cognitive mapping of space – undoubtedly existing long before the physical artifacts we now call maps" (Harley 1987, 1).

³ "Critical human geography emerged from a long tradition of dissent. Although its predecessors include the anarchist geography of scholars such as Reclus and Kropotkin, Anglo-American critical geography's roots are to be found in the radical geography that emerged in the 1970s. A self-identified field of critical geography began to emerge in the late 1980s. Important departures included a rejection of some of the structural excesses of Marxism (in line with a general postmodern turn), and a sharpening interest in questions of culture and representation, as opposed to the economic focus of radical geography. Radical and critical geography, while closely related, are not interchangeable" (Gregory et al. 2009, 123).

⁴ See also Smithson 1969 and Smith 1981.

⁵ See also McDonough 2002, Holmes 2009, and Thompson 2009.

⁶ Among other actions, a world map flag was presented, in which the global allocation of states was being reconsidered.

⁷ For some more contributions on critical cartography in contemporary visual arts see Bourriaud 2000, Rogoff 2000, Barriados 2007, de Diego 2008, O'Rourke 2010, Risler and Ares 2013, Careri 2017.

⁸ R&D project *Critical Cartography of Art and Visuality in the Global Era: New Methodologies, Concepts and Analytical Approaches* (MICINN: HAR2010-17403 / MINECO: HAR2013-43122P / MINECO: HAR 2016-75100-P, Art Globalization Interculturality laboratory of the University of Barcelona) was funded from 2010 to 2019 by the Spanish Ministry of Science and Innovation, together with other state and regional organizations, with 25 researchers from various international universities participating with the aim of analysing the relationships of contemporary artistic practices with the ideas of cartography, interculturality, multiculturalism, 'glocality', border crossings, diaspora, postcolonial discourse and geo-aesthetics.

⁹ The first results of this research have been partially presented both in the artistic field through exhibitions, round tables and workshops, and in academic research conferences, lectures, scientific articles and as a PhD project, *El Impulso Cartográfico: Comportamientos cartográficos del arte contemporáneo en la era del capitalismo deslocalizado, 1957-2017*. See Padrón-Alonso 2018 and 2020.

¹⁰ "My title is meant to evoke 'The Author as Producer', the text which Walter Benjamin first presented

at the Institute for the Study of Fascism in Paris in April 1934. There, under the influence of Bertold Brecht and Russian revolutionary culture, Benjamin (1978) called on the artist on the left ‘to side with the proletariat’. In vanguard Paris in April 1934 this call was not radical; the approach, however, was. For Benjamin urged the ‘advanced’ artist to intervene, like the revolutionary worker, in the means of artistic production – to change the ‘techniques’ of traditional media, to transform the ‘apparatus’ of bourgeois culture. A correct ‘tendency’ was not enough; that was to assume a place ‘beside the proletariat’. And ‘what kind of place is that?’ Benjamin asked, in lines that still scathe. ‘That of a benefactor, of an ideological patron, an impossible place’” (Foster 1995, 302).

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Confini coloniali e performatività della carta geografica¹

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ABSTRACT

Colonial borders and the performativity of the map. By putting together materiality, perception, and intervention on a geographic environment in the same visual representation, the map gives evidence to both the factual and imaginary features of a territory. Thus, the map is a crucial device for interrogating both reality and imagination. But precisely how does the map situate itself between reality and imagination? What kinds of powers does this positioning involve? And who exerts these powers? This article stems from such questions, which are discussed by acknowledging the recent theoretical and empirical advancements in the field of map studies. After introducing new theorisation and research in the field of cartography, the article will engage with an empirical application, namely the cartographic production regarding the Fascist colonial experience. In particular, I will address the case study of Ethiopian borders, which were progressively erased in cartographic products well before Italian settlement. This analysis will offer a paradigmatic case study to show the social climate within which colonial events unfolded, as well as the performances of cartography in the public space opened between collectivity and authority.

Keywords

cartography, Fascism, borders, colonies, visuality

Il rinnovamento degli studi cartografici

La carta geografica non è il territorio. Usava questo aforisma quasi un secolo fa il filosofo polacco Alfred Korzybski per spiegare la rappresentazione metaforica di un concetto (Korzybski 1933). Molti anni dopo lo riprendeva Jean Baudrillard stabilendo una cronologia tra i due termini – “la carta geografica precede il territorio” (Baudrillard 1988, 166)² – che Michel Houellebecq si incaricherà successivamente di gerarchizzare – “la carta geografica è più interessante del territorio” (Houellebecq 2010, 82).³ Non sono provocazioni ma prese di posizione che poggiano su una solida base di riflessione ormai largamente acquisita nel pensiero occidentale. È oggi infatti ben chiaro il condizionamento decisivo giocato dalle rappresentazioni sull’agire umano: nel loro incessante progettare e intervenire sul mondo gli uomini non si confrontano direttamente con la realtà ma con quei prodotti culturali che sono le sue rappresentazioni, mai esiti neutrali ma sempre di parte poiché “alla fine, la rappresentazione delle idee è sempre prodotta da e per uno specifico gruppo” (Shirlow 2009, 308). La rappresentazione, insomma, contrariamente al senso comune non segue l’azione ma intrattiene con essa una relazione circolare. Infatti, le due dimensioni si modificano reciproca-

mente e progressivamente, con le rappresentazioni che non si limitano dunque a raccontare ma 'performano' la realtà.

Questa posizione intellettuale trova un ottimo esempio nella più diffusa e radicata forma grafica di rappresentazione spaziale sviluppata dalla cultura occidentale: la carta geografica. Inserendosi appieno nei nuovi orizzonti aperti nelle scienze sociali da lavori quali quello di Edward Said sul postcolonialismo (1978) e di Michel Foucault sul rapporto tra potere e conoscenza (1980), anche negli studi cartografici si è sviluppata un'ampia letteratura di matrice post-strutturalista e critica (Perkins 2018). Inoltre, due fenomeni concomitanti sono risultati decisivi per aprire un campo di studi introverso e specialistico, quale quello cartografico, a fecondi contatti interdisciplinari con altri ambiti delle scienze sociali: da un lato, l'interesse generato nei confronti della spazialità da quello che è stato definito *spatial turn*, vale a dire la generalizzata rivalutazione della dimensione spaziale sollecitata da studiosi del calibro di Frederic Jameson (1991) e Edward Soja (1996); dall'altro, l'attenzione verso la visualità, anch'essa trasversale alle discipline, che ha rivalutato l'uso scientifico delle immagini spingendo a riorganizzare la conoscenza attorno a paradigmi visuali (Mitchell 1994; Boehm 1994; Mirzoeff 1999).

Dopo una rivoluzionaria fase iniziale di problematizzazione critica in cui si cominciava a evidenziare la natura parziale e soggettiva della carta geografica elevando il livello della riflessione sullo spazio, l'opera di demolizione degli stantii approcci neopositivisti è poi continuata con il successo degli inviti fenomenologici (Del Casino e Hanna 2006) e post-rappresentazionali (Dodge, Perkins e Kitchin 2009) che hanno messo l'accento sui processi e sulle pratiche (di costruzione e di fruizione) invece che sui tecnicismi dell'oggetto-carta, di cui veniva sempre più sottolineata la natura contingente e fluida. Inoltre, in tema di politicizzazione della carta sono state rilevanti le critiche mosse nell'ambito delle cosiddette *activist cartography* e *resistance mapping* (Crampton 2009; Cobarrubias e Pickles 2009; Wood 2010, 111-119).

Nel breve giro di due decenni i *map studies* hanno quindi vissuto una serie di proposte intellettuali che ne hanno profondamente ampliato gli orizzonti di ricerca e rinnovato le basi epistemologiche. Pur in una situazione attuale ancora molto instabile che registra la compresenza di una pluralità di opzioni in campo, compresi addirittura vecchi approcci neopositivisti ostinatamente sopravvissuti, i *map studies* sono riusciti non solo a rinnovare gli orizzonti estetici, linguistici, semantici, tecnici e comunicativi della carta geografica ma anche ad attirare l'attenzione su temi prima trascurati quale la politicizzazione del *mapping*.

Sulla base di questi riferimenti essi hanno, tra l'altro, messo bene in evidenza le spiccate valenze performative della carta, ovvero le sue capacità di costruire una realtà e indurre azioni coerenti con tale costruzione, cioè azioni che intervengono sul territorio per adattarlo a quanto previsto dalla carta (Dematteis 1985, 95-103; Jacob 1992, 48-52, 350-352 e 384-386; Wood 1992; Farinelli 1992, 65-70; Ó'Tuathail 1996, 31; Casti 1998, 22-34; Minca e

Białasiewicz 2004, 31-48; Besse 2008, 19-32; Gerlach 2017). Essa sarebbe, in quest'ottica, un formidabile strumento di produzione ontologica della realtà, un efficacissimo agente di costruzione di luoghi.

Questo ruolo è stato indagato soprattutto con riferimento alla specifica narrazione dello stato moderno. Di essa si è sostenuto che la carta ha contribuito all'iniziale processo di produzione cognitiva di uno spazio unitario (Harley 1988; Buisseret 1992; Black 2008; Strandsbjerg 2008; Wood 2010, 27-35; Branch 2014; Quaini 1976; Konvitz 1987; Biggs 1999; Harvey 2002), che successivamente ha favorito l'esportazione delle pratiche di controllo del territorio nelle regioni colonizzate (Winichakul 1994; Edney 1997; Bernado 2007) e anche la costruzione di una retorica nazionalista (Anderson 1991, 163-185; Herb 1997).

Sull'inclinazione statocentrica della cartografia è stata in particolare la critica decostruzionista di Brian Harley a lasciare il segno (Harley 1989; 2001b). Il suo debito esplicito è a Michel Foucault, la cui sensibilità spaziale è evidente nella concezione del potere come relazione e nei modelli pervasivi delle istituzioni disciplinari che hanno suggerito ad Harley stesso un parallelismo con la cartografia: "La cartografia, di fatto, produce una forma di potere, aspira a realizzare un *panopticon* [...] Quello che succede ai dati nel laboratorio del cartografo è analogo a quello che succede alle persone all'interno delle istituzioni concepite per disciplinare la società – prigionieri, scuole, eserciti, industrie – descritte da Foucault: in entrambi i casi assistiamo a un processo di normalizzazione" (Harley 2001a, 254-255). Harley ha valorizzato il potenziale narrativo della carta, i suoi significati nascosti, la sua natura ideologica di strumento di legittimazione di un progetto politico che può essere smascherato indagandone i dispositivi retorici e persuasivi.

Il presente articolo si colloca in quella scia in quanto adotta strategie decostruzioniste tipiche dell'approccio critico e si basa su meticolose ricerche d'archivio. Tuttavia, perviene a esiti che si distaccano dalla lezione harleyana la quale risulta, alla luce dei risultati empirici forniti dal presente caso di studio, eccessivamente meccanica e incapace di problematizzare a fondo la distinzione tra potere e autorità. Tornerò ovviamente più tardi su questi risultati dopo aver descritto il caso.

La strana storia dei confini dell'Etiopia nella cartografia del periodo fascista

La politica estera fascista guardava inizialmente ai Balcani come sua naturale area di penetrazione. Ma l'avvento al potere dei nazisti in Germania rese subito chiaro che quel programma non poteva più essere perseguito e si puntò allora su due altre regioni, la Libia e il Corno d'Africa. Su di esse si impostava una strategia complessiva che nel medio periodo avrebbe dovuto progressivamente condurre al controllo dell'intero bacino mediterraneo, in linea con l'idea di recuperare l'eredità dell'antica Roma (Mammarella e Cacace 2010; Collotti 2000; Rodogno 2003).

In questo quadro la conquista dell'Etiopia offriva la possibilità di congiungere le due colonie già italiane dell'Eritrea e della Somalia dando vita a un unico grande possedimento che consentiva all'Italia di assurgere al rango di primaria potenza coloniale e dunque mondiale. L'invasione dell'ultimo paese africano ancora libero da vincoli coloniali venne lanciata il 3 ottobre 1935 da un ardente discorso dal balcone di Piazza Venezia di Benito Mussolini, che altrettanto ardente era stato come anticolonialista ai tempi della conquista giolittiana della Libia. La guerra si concluse il 5 maggio 1936 con la vittoria italiana e la conseguente proclamazione in forma pomposamente imperiale dell'Africa Orientale Italiana, comprendente oltre all'Etiopia le colonie già italiane della Somalia e dell'Eritrea.

Analizzare la produzione cartografica di quegli anni offre uno spaccato significativo del clima sociale entro il quale accaddero quegli eventi. Rispetto all'inizio del secolo, infatti, la cartografia aveva vissuto una straordinaria popolarizzazione con un consistente aumento della domanda e un'evidente diversificazione dell'offerta. Le carte geografiche erano ormai stabilmente presenti sui quotidiani, sulle riviste generaliste e nell'editoria scolastica. In quest'ultimo ambito, se fino alla Prima guerra mondiale la produzione di atlanti era consistita nella replica di edizioni straniere malamente tradotte e per nulla adeguate ai bisogni degli studenti italiani, dopo quella guerra l'aumento dei tassi di scolarizzazione aveva comportato una crescita della domanda e di conseguenza la nascita di un mercato della cartografia scolastica che si faceva sempre più remunerativo. Lo dimostrava il successo commerciale dell'Istituto Geografico De Agostini, prima casa editrice italiana di tipo moderno specializzata nel settore. Si assisteva dunque a una fase decisamente nuova per la carta cartografica, che da mezzo a disposizione di una ristretta élite si apriva ora a un pubblico molto più ampio.

Relativamente alla cartografia del Corno d'Africa, si rileva che essa subì modifiche sostanziali, e formalmente ingiustificate, già molti anni prima della conquista italiana. L'elemento paradigmatico che si andrà a focalizzare sarà quello dei confini di stato dell'Etiopia con le colonie italiane della Somalia e dell'Eritrea. Quei confini verranno progressivamente eliminati dalle carte anticipando quell'operazione militare che poi si occuperà di eliminarli per davvero, esattamente come la dichiarazione di guerra era stata anticipata dalla predisposizione di un'opinione pubblica favorevole all'intervento che aveva anche cominciato a familiarizzare con la geografia di quei luoghi lontani (fig. 1).

Per una stringata ma indispensabile ricostruzione della storia diplomatica di quei confini occorre iniziare da quando l'Italia riuscì a capitalizzare l'incoronazione a imperatore d'Etiopia del suo alleato Menelik con un'estensione territoriale della propria colonia eritrea. Il Trattato di Ucciali (2 maggio 1889) individuò una prima delimitazione del confine tra Etiopia ed Eritrea. Quando poco dopo le relazioni si guastarono, Menelik volle precisare i limiti del territorio che riteneva proprio con una lettera indirizzata ai sovrani europei (10 aprile 1891), chiudendola con il grandioso quanto velleitario proponimento di voler ristabilire le antiche frontiere d'Etiopia da Khartum fino al Lago Vittoria. Dopo la disfatta di Adua i nuovi equilibri

italo-etioptici resero necessario un nuovo trattato che ridimensionava le pretese italiane (26 ottobre 1896). Faceva però riferimento al solo tratto settentrionale del confine, e solo per definirne una linea provvisoria da ridiscutere successivamente. Seguirono allora altre tornate negoziali che completarono nel 1908 il confine per l'intero suo corso; da notare, però, che per un breve tratto (70 km circa) si ricorreva alle appartenenze etniche invece che alle fattezze del territorio.⁴



Fig. 1. *La Domenica del Corriere*, 22 settembre 1935. Copertina e quarta di copertina fanno esplicito riferimento all'imminente campagna d'Abissinia.

Lo stesso vago criterio etnico diventava addirittura dominante nella determinazione dei confini meridionali dell'Etiopia, quelli con l'altra colonia italiana della Somalia, anch'essi fissati con la convenzione del 16 maggio 1908. Il relativo confine risultava quindi piuttosto approssimativo (Historical Section of the Foreign Office 1920a, 103). Questo ricorso al criterio etnico era del tutto comprensibile per la parte etiopica, che aveva importato dall'Europa il concetto di stato ma lo applicava adattandolo ai locali costumi consuetudinari dell'ordinamento territoriale (Pase 2011). Di conseguenza approcciava il tema avendo in mente il "concetto di 'frontiera' piuttosto che quello di 'confine', vale a dire più una nozione di fascia separativa areale, planimetrica, se non addirittura graduale, che non una nozione lineare, metricamente unidimensionale" (Ciampi 1998, 531).

Comunque, fino alla fine degli anni Venti le relazioni italo-etioptiche rimasero cordiali: l'ingresso dell'Etiopia nella Società delle Nazioni avvenne nel 1923 anche grazie al sostegno diplomatico dell'Italia (Salvadori 1982, 817; Segré 1991, 134) e nel 1928 i due paesi siglarono un *Trattato d'amicizia* per la costruzione di infrastrutture che consentì nuove esplo-

razioni italiane delle risorse minerarie e petrolifere della Dancalia (Santarelli 1981, 157-158).

In realtà le mosse del regime fascista rientravano in un ben ponderato piano di ingegneria nelle questioni interne dell'Etiopia finalizzato a preparare il terreno per la futura conquista. Mussolini lo aveva concepito già un decennio prima e nell'imminenza della spedizione gli aveva dato un'accelerazione utilizzando qualsiasi mezzo: dalle false promesse e gli accordi ingannevoli alla corruzione di capi etiopi (la cosiddetta offensiva dei talleri) fino all'istigazione all'odio razziale e religioso che aizzava i musulmani contro i copti, gli amara contro i tigrini, gli scioani contro i goggiamiti (Labanca 2015; Del Boca 2010).

In questo contesto si collocano anche le questioni confinarie, sulle quali la diplomazia italiana intenzionalmente sorvolava (Ciampi 1998). I confini dell'Etiopia con le colonie italiane della Somalia e dell'Eritrea venivano dati per certi nelle carte geografiche fino alla metà degli anni Venti. Successivamente, come si vedrà con alcuni esempi, il segno grafico di quei confini cominciò a subire variazioni. Molto significativamente, questi interventi avvennero prima della guerra tra Italia ed Etiopia, che scoppierà solo molti anni più tardi, e in assenza di ridefinizione degli accordi confinari, quindi in condizioni formalmente ingiustificabili ma utili a sublimare l'espansionismo italiano che poi in effetti si materializzò. È la cartografia che anticipa la storia. Non la cartografia che illustra i cambiamenti territoriali fissati dalla storia, come suggerisce il senso comune. Un'osservazione che invita a considerare l'ipotesi che la cartografia, pur priva del potere di erigere o abbattere confini nella realtà, possa farlo nella percezione degli individui.

Nella rassegna che segue, il primo prodotto preso in considerazione è anche il più popolare nell'intera storia della cartografia scolastica italiana: l'Atlante Geografico Metodico De Agostini. Confrontiamo le edizioni che vanno dai primi anni Venti fino al 1936 con riferimento alla medesima tavola, cioè quella relativa alla regione del Corno d'Africa. Nelle diverse edizioni, che si susseguono incessantemente con una frequenza che diventerà addirittura annuale, si osservano una serie di fondamentali differenze relative al confine tra l'Etiopia e la Somalia (figg. 2 a-f): inizialmente raffigurato con linea interamente continua (edizione non datata ma del 1922 e precedenti), poi per metà continuo e per metà tratteggiato (1927), successivamente esteso nella sua porzione tratteggiata (1931, 1932, 1933) fino a esserlo quasi per intero (edizione non datata ma del 1934), infine sparito del tutto (1935). Le tavole successive alla guerra ovviamente non riporteranno più il confine di stato tra Etiopia e Somalia, che diventano delle semplici province divise da nuovi confini amministrativi interni imposti dal conquistatore (1936). Addis Abeba perde il rango di capitale di stato.



Fig. 2. Evoluzione della tavola relativa alla regione del Corno d’Africa in diverse edizioni dell’Atlante Geografico Metodico De Agostini.

Interverrà inoltre la nuova denominazione imposta dal conquistatore, ‘Africa Orientale Italiana’, con un unico confine esterno a delimitare il nuovo soggetto politico di cui farà parte anche l’Eritrea. È da notare anche che a partire dall’edizione del 1933 sparisce la parola ‘Etiopia’ dal titolo, come a volerne cancellare la presenza quando nella realtà essa continuava ad essere formalmente uno stato sovrano (da “Etiopia, Eritrea e Somalia” il titolo diventa “Eritrea, Somalia e Paesi Finitimi”). Le scelte del 1933 arrivavano proprio mentre il regime cominciava esplicitamente a mostrare le proprie bellicose intenzioni (Salvadori 1982, 816-817; Santarelli 1981, 156 e 163-164). Una sorte analoga toccò anche al confine che l’Etiopia condivideva con l’altra colonia italiana a nord, l’Eritrea. Inizialmente continuo, successivamente la sua porzione meridionale sparì dando al lettore la sensazione che l’Etiopia, un paese ormai privato di buona parte dei suoi confini, si ‘aprisse’ alla conquista.

Scelte identiche a quelle ora descritte riguardarono tutta la vastissima produzione del leader di settore De Agostini, non solo negli atlanti ma anche nelle carte sciolte.⁵ Ma come si comportava in quegli anni il resto della cartografia privata italiana, formalmente libera e autonoma?



Fig. 2a. Etiopia, Eritrea e Somalia, da Atlante Geografico Metodico, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, senza data (ma 1922).

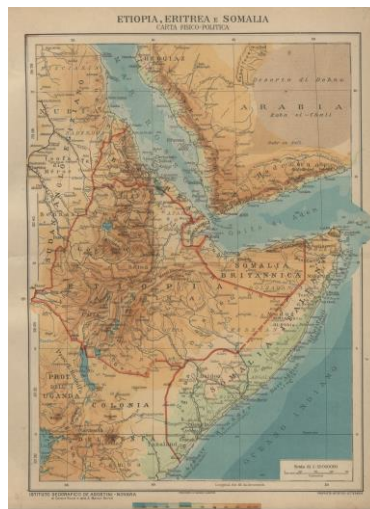


Fig. 2b. Etiopia, Eritrea e Somalia, da Atlante Geografico Metodico, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 1927.

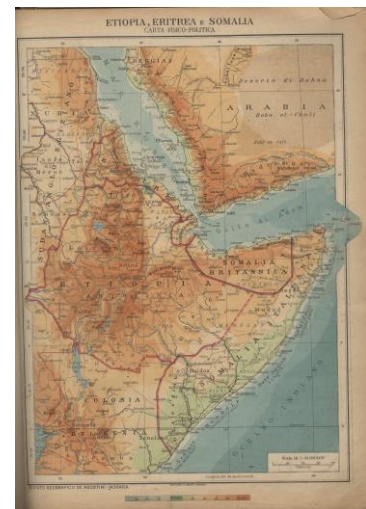


Fig. 2c. Etiopia, Eritrea e Somalia, da Atlante Geografico Metodico, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 1931.

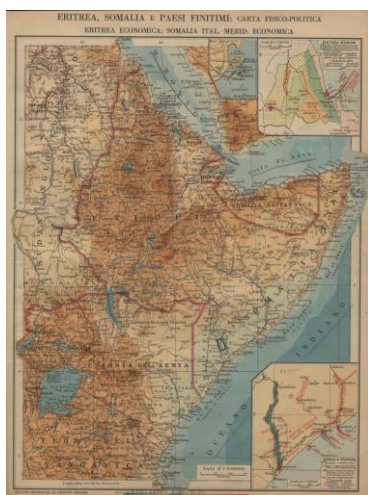


Fig. 2d. Eritrea, Somalia e Paesi Finitimi, da Atlante Geografico Metodico, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 1935.

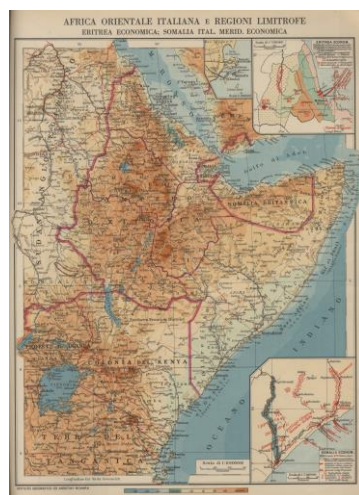


Fig. 2e. Eritrea, Somalia e Paesi Finitimi, da Atlante Geografico Metodico, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, 1936.

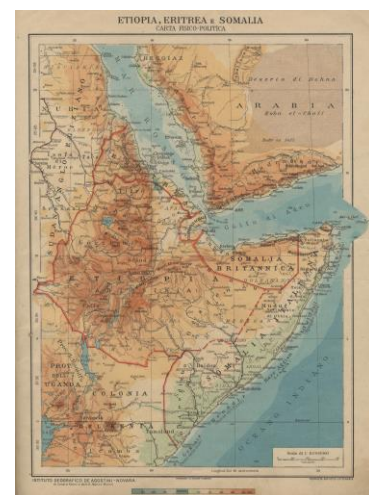


Fig. 2f. Etiopia, Eritrea e Somalia, da Atlante Geografico Metodico, Istituto Geografico De Agostini, Novara, senza data (ma 1934).

Sempre nel genere degli atlanti scolastici, indirizzati a un pubblico giovanile e quindi tendenzialmente meno politicizzato, un processo analogo lo troviamo nel *Nuovissimo atlante di geografia fisica e politica* dell'editore Paravia, che già nel passaggio dall'edizione del 1925 a quella del 1928 aggiunse un vistoso tratteggio al confine tra Abissinia (Etiopia) e Somalia italiana (figg. 3 a-b). Lo stesso editore scelse in almeno quattro diverse edizioni pre-belliche di una propria carta di indicare le sovranità con bandierine nazionali ma escludendo qualsiasi segno di confine tra la Somalia e l'Etiopia (fig. 4).



Fig. 3a. Evoluzione della tavola "Eritrea, Abissinia, Somalia, e bacino dell'Alto Nilo" in due edizioni del Nuovissimo atlante di Geografia fisica e politica della Paravia. Da edizione del 1925, tav. 43.



Fig. 3b. Evoluzione della tavola "Eritrea, Abissinia, Somalia, e bacino dell'Alto Nilo" in due edizioni del Nuovissimo atlante di Geografia fisica e politica della Paravia. Da edizione del 1928, tav. 44.



Fig. 4. Africa Orientale (Eritrea, Abissinia e Somalia), Paravia, senza data (ma 1935).

Nell'Atlante Universale del 1927 del prestigioso Istituto di Arti Grafiche di Bergamo i confini tra Somalia ed Etiopia e tra Eritrea ed Etiopia diventarono tratteggiati quando invece nei precedenti atlanti dello stesso editore del 1921 e 1923 erano continui. In assenza di mutamenti reali di questi confini, la variazione di segno grafico si può spiegare con un mutamento nella loro percezione: da confini stabili a confini messi in discussione. Nello stesso atlante, e contrariamente ai costumi dei più avanzati atlanti dell'epoca che procedevano nella rappresentazione dei paesi secondo un ordine per continente, le carte delle colonie italiane sono collocate nella sezione 'Italia' ('Eritrea Etiopia Somalia', tavola 25 subito dopo quelle delle regioni italiane). Tale scelta potrebbe anche apparire accettabile se non fosse che vi rientra pure l'Etiopia che, nel 1927, colonia italiana non era affatto. Va precisato, in proposito, il fervore colonialistico del promotore dell'atlante, Luigi Filippo De Magistris. In più occasioni egli aveva sostenuto la causa coloniale italiana e criticato le classi dirigenti di scarsa atten-

zione verso la geografia rivendicando alla disciplina un posto consono alla cultura di una nazione colonialista.⁶ Quindi, non solo l'atlante dell'Istituto d'Arti Grafiche riportava carte specifiche delle colonie italiane e le collocava nella sezione dedicata all'Italia equiparandole in tutto e per tutto alle regioni della madrepatria ma, come detto, si spingeva a far rientrare in questa categoria anche l'Etiopia, in quel momento paese sovrano e membro della Società delle Nazioni.

Lo stesso Istituto di Arti Grafiche, che lavorava anche per il Ministero delle Colonie, presentò confini non integrali nelle varie edizioni del 1934 e del 1935 delle sue carte dal titolo "Africa orientale," "L'Italia e le sue colonie" (1935) e "Carta dell'Africa orientale" (1936, ma uscita nei mesi che precedettero la conclusione della guerra).

Numerosi altri esempi testimoniano comportamenti analoghi a quelli appena descritti, consistenti nell'anticipazione dell'eliminazione dei confini dell'Etiopia non solo rispetto alla conclusione del conflitto italo-abissino ma addirittura al suo inizio. Ad esempio, l'editore Bemporad (fig. 5). E, ancora la prestigiosa Mondadori, molto vicina al regime che la sostenne tramite l'IRI nel 1934 con mutui di favore per 6 milioni e mezzo di lire e nel 1935 le affidò in esclusiva la stampa dei due sussidiari unici per le scuole elementari e medie intitolati rispettivamente *Primo* e *Secondo Libro del Fascista*. Confrontando due sue carte, 'Eritrea e Somalia' della metà degli anni Venti e 'Africa Orientale' della metà degli anni Trenta, si rileva che nella più vecchia i confini ci sono ancora mentre successivamente spariscono.



Fig. 5. Etiopia (Abissinia), Bemporad 1935.

Il peso dei contesti

Mentre la maggior parte degli editori italiani toglieva o smorzava i confini dell'Etiopia, quelli stranieri invece si comportavano in genere diversamente lasciandoli con linea continua. Confini disegnati regolarmente, cioè senza segni di incertezza, sono presenti in carte francesi (fig. 6), svizzere (fig. 7) e cecoslovacche (figg. 8 e 9). Fanno eccezione gli editori di paesi po-

liticamente vicini all'Italia e dunque più indulgenti verso la sua aggressione all'Etiopia (fig. 10). Per non parlare della cartografia geopolitica nazista che presenterà quell'invasione segnata dal destino sulla base dell'accerchiamento 'naturale' che l'Italia esercitava sull'Etiopia tramite le sue colonie somala ed eritrea (fig. 11). Al netto delle simpatie politiche l'atteggiamento prevalente all'estero consistette comunque nel riconoscere, anche cartograficamente, la piena integrità dei confini dell'Etiopia.

In Italia, invece, furono tanti gli editori che registrarono le variazioni confinarie prima che venissero sancite sul terreno.⁷ Certamente la maggioranza. Ma, significativamente, non tutti: ancora nel 1935 la prestigiosa Vallardi nel suo *Atlante scolastico di geografia moderna* alla tavola "Eritrea, Etiopia e Somalia politiche" attribuiva all'Etiopia confini assolutamente certi disegnandoli con riga continua ben marcata (fig. 12).

Il caso anomalo di questo storico marchio dell'editoria italiana rivela chiaramente che gli interventi sopra menzionati sui segni confinari non erano imposti dal regime attraverso una specifica direttiva indirizzata a tutte le case editrici ma erano iniziative proprie degli editori. Ciò può stupire ricordando che il regime esercitava un ferreo e sistematico controllo sulla produzione editoriale. Tuttavia, da ricerche d'archivio sui rapporti tra gli stabilimenti cartografici e la classe politica dell'epoca (Boria 2020) integrate con altre appositamente condotte per questo caso di studio, non risultano tracce di interferenza diretta ed esplicita delle autorità su come disegnare i confini dell'Etiopia, né sotto forma di documenti pubblici (circolari ministeriali, direttive del governo agli editori) né sotto forma di disposizioni riservate (scambi epistolari tra esponenti del regime e case editrici, messaggi privati).

D'altra parte, l'assenza di un indirizzo preciso in qualsivoglia forma è dimostrata dalla compresenza di modalità diverse, con editori che eliminarono questi confini, altri che li riportarono in varie forme tratteggiate e infine qualcuno che li lasciò inalterati con segno continuo per l'intero periodo. Il tutto in palese carenza di un coordinamento dato che le variazioni avvennero in tempi diversi per i diversi editori. Queste carte non erano dunque né commissionate direttamente dal potere politico, né frutto di pressioni politiche dirette, bensì erano prodotte da autonome decisioni delle case editrici. Il convergere delle loro scelte si può dunque considerare un'operazione collettiva tutto sommato inconsapevole indotta dall'atmosfera politica del momento. È l'ennesima prova che la carta, prodotto sociale, non è solo il frutto di un procedimento tecnico-scientifico formalizzato ma è anche pesantemente influenzata da fattori di contesto che la rendono, più che il risultato consapevole della volontà manipolatoria dell'autore, l'esito di un riflesso condizionato.



Fig. 6. Érythré – Ethiopie – Somalies, Girard & Barrère, Parigi, luglio 1935.

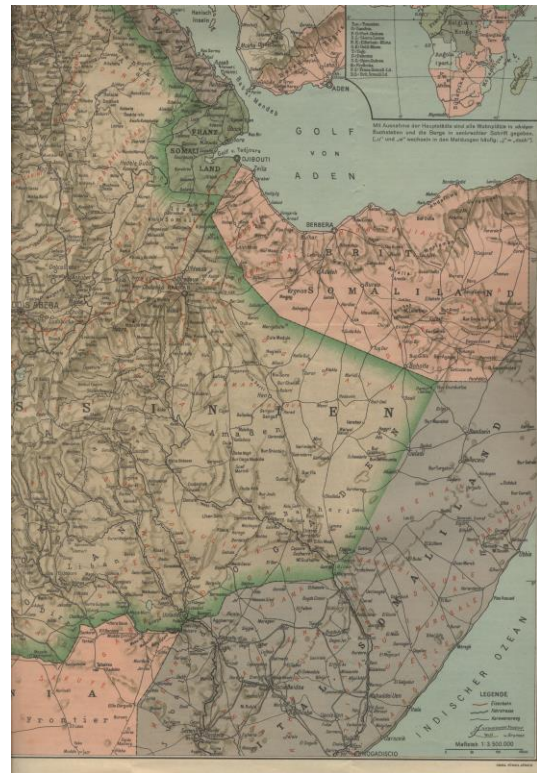


Fig. 7. Neue Karte von Abessinien (Nuova carta dell'Abissinia), Orell Füssli Verlag, Zurigo, senza data (ma precedente al conflitto).



Fig. 8. Habeš. Dějiště války italsko-habešské a cesty k němu (Abissinia. La scena della guerra italo-abissina e la sua ambientazione), Melantrich, Praga, senza data (ma 1935).

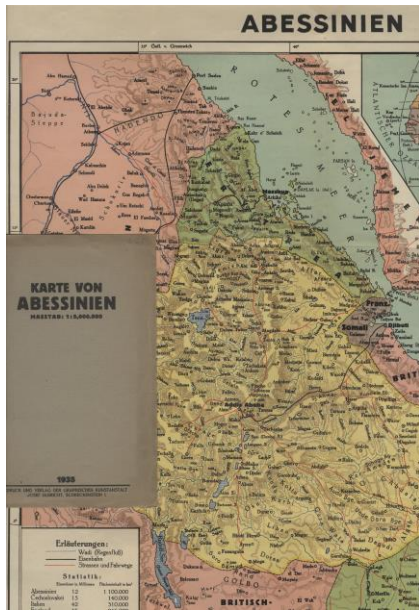


Fig. 9. Karte von Abessinien (Carta dell'Abissinia), Ulbricht, Schrecken-stein (allora in Cecoslovacchia), 1935.

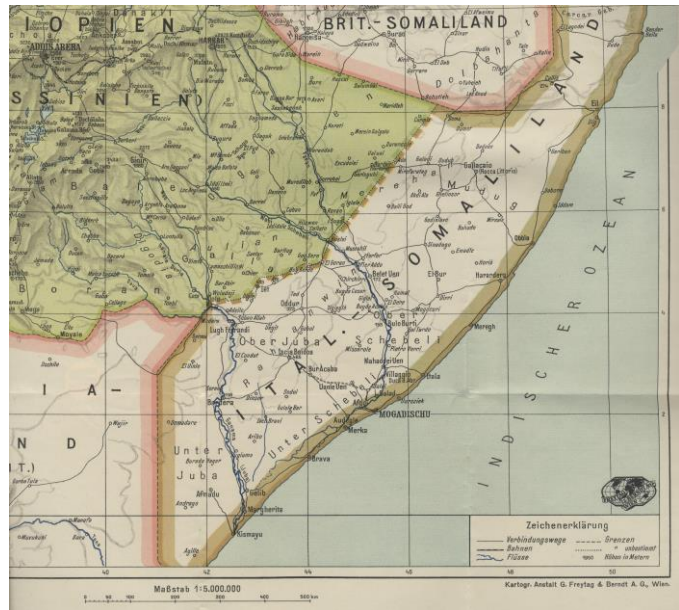


Fig. 10. Abessinien, Freytag & Berndt, Vienna, senza data (ma antecedente al conflitto).

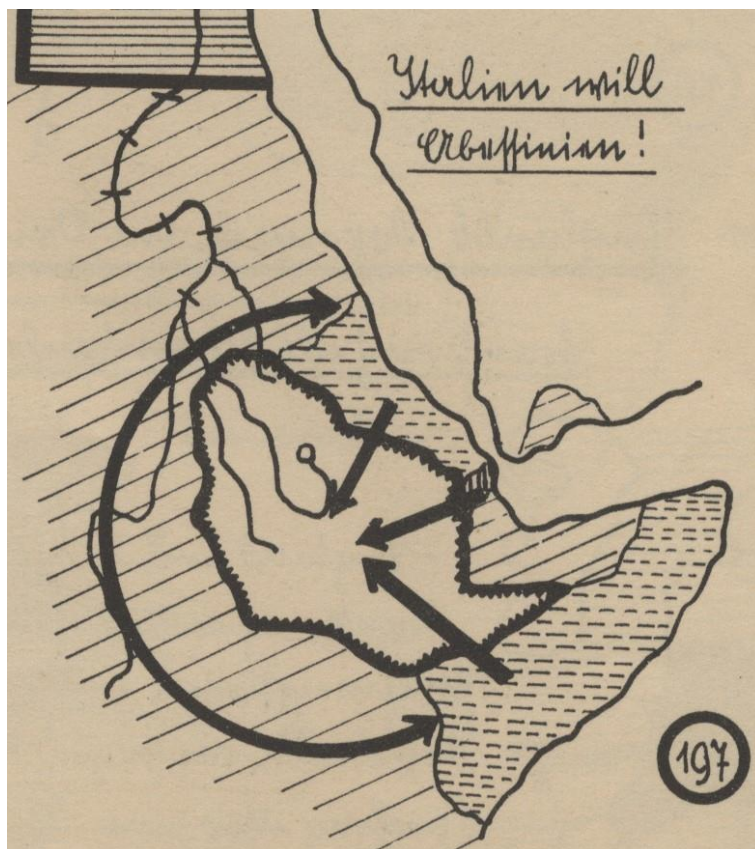


Fig. 11. Italien will Abyssinien (L'Italia vuole l'Abissinia), da Karl Springenschmid, Die Staaten als Lebewesen. Geopolitisches Skizzenbuch, Lipsia, Wunderlich, tav. 49.

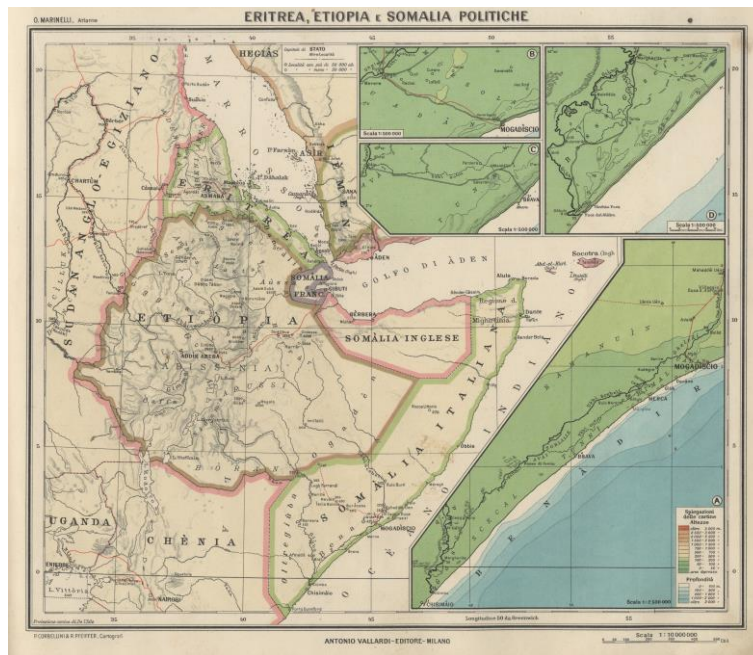


Fig. 12. Eritrea, Etiopia e Somalia politiche, da Atlante scolastico di geografia moderna, Vallardi, 1935.

Tra i fattori di contesto, però, non figurano solo quelli indotti dal clima politico. Ne figurano anche altri sottostimati dal decostruzionismo post-harleyano, tutto preso dalla retorica dei discorsi: sono quelli di tipo individuale, quali la specifica formazione culturale del cartografo, le sue convinzioni politiche, il suo retroterra sociale, l'ambiente di lavoro ecc. Ed è stato altrettanto sottostimato da quell'approccio, se non addirittura ignorato, il fatto che gli elementi di contesto non intervengono solo sugli autori delle carte ma anche sui loro lettori. Ognuno di loro possiede infatti la propria formazione culturale, le proprie convinzioni politiche ecc. che daranno vita a tanti significati personalizzati. I fattori di contesto, quindi, incidono anche sulla ricezione della carta, facendo in modo che il messaggio veicolato sfugga in buona parte all'autore.

Inoltre, come mette bene in evidenza l'approccio post-rappresentazionale ridimensionando l'aspetto ideologico e valorizzando il peso delle contingenze (Dodge et al. 2009), ulteriori discordanze tra intenzione dell'autore e interpretazioni dei lettori possono essere dovute al frangente e all'ambientazione in cui la carta viene osservata. Se penso a quegli anni, immagino che ci sarà stata una differenza tra l'osservare una carta del Corno d'Africa in un'aula universitaria e osservare la medesima carta in un padiglione della "Mostra della rivoluzione fascista." La carta assume il proprio significato non quando esce dalla tipografia ma quando viene effettivamente osservata, cioè esperita, dal lettore. Ne risulta un quadro che mette seriamente in discussione la stabilità della rappresentazione, e l'imprevedibilità che ne deriva smentisce ogni illusione circa la possibilità dell'autore di controllare il contenuto della carta.

Occorre poi sottolineare anche un altro aspetto altamente indicativo del clima di quella fase storica. Questa esorbitante produzione commerciale non era indotta tanto dal regime,

che pure amava sbandierare con ogni mezzo la propria inclinazione aggressiva. Invece, più che da un regime seppure autoritario, l'enorme aumento di carte fu provocato dagli interessi commerciali di tante società private che ne approfittarono per farsi pubblicità. Molte carte coinvolte mostrano infatti inserti promozionali nei settori produttivi più disparati: dagli inchiostri tipografici (nella carta della Bemporad, fig. 13), alle assicurazioni e la farmaceutica (carte Paravia, figg. 14 e 15), all'industria alimentare e dei distillati (Istituto d'Arti Grafiche, figg. 16, 17 e 18).

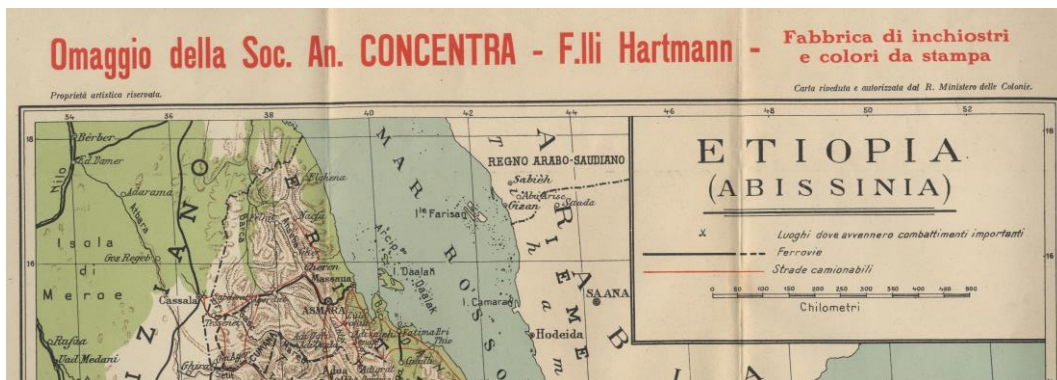


Fig. 13. Etiopia (Abissinia), Bemporad 1935, sponsor privato.

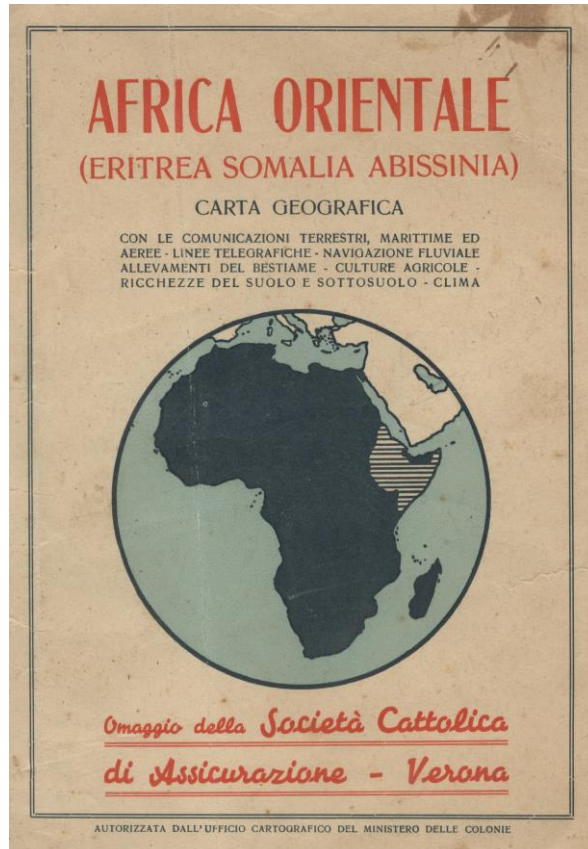


Fig. 14. Africa Orientale (Eritrea, Abissinia e Somalia), Paravia, senza data (ma 1935), sponsor privato.



Fig. 15a. Africa orientale, Paravia, 1935, due inserti pubblicitari dello sponsor privato.



Fig. 15b. Africa orientale, Paravia, 1935, due inserti pubblicitari dello sponsor privato.



Fig. 16. Africa orientale, Istituto d'Arti Grafiche di Bergamo, 1935 sponsor privato.



Fig. 17. Carta dell'Africa orientale, Istituto d'Arti Grafiche di Bergamo, 1936, sponsor privato.

La successione di carte dell'Etiopia ha mostrato un processo in tre fasi: a quella iniziale nella quale i confini vengono raffigurati come ufficialmente riconosciuti con linee continue ne segue una in cui essi si fanno via via sempre più incerti fino a scomparire. Un'escalation in cui pare intravedere una progressiva acquisizione cognitiva della presunta predisposizione dell'Etiopia alla conquista italiana. Infine, a conquista avvenuta appaiono carte recanti i segni che il conquistatore ha impresso alla nuova colonia. Tra questi emergono ancora una volta i confini in qualità di segni che decretano emblematicamente l'avvento di un nuovo potere. La figura 19 mostra i nuovi confini regionali stabiliti dal conquistatore, estranei alle ripartizioni in uso presso le popolazioni locali ma guidati esclusivamente dalla volontà di imporre un nuovo ordine territoriale e sancire un nuovo soggetto dominante, presente nella stessa denominazione di "Africa Orientale Italiana."

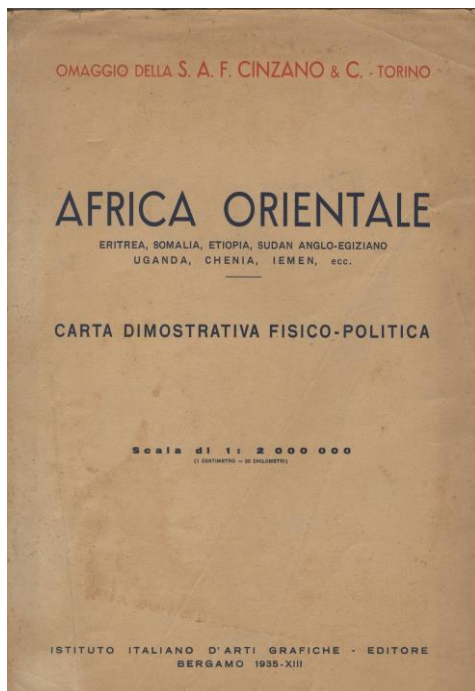


Fig. 18. Africa orientale, Istituto d'Arti Grafiche di Bergamo, 1935, sponsor privato.

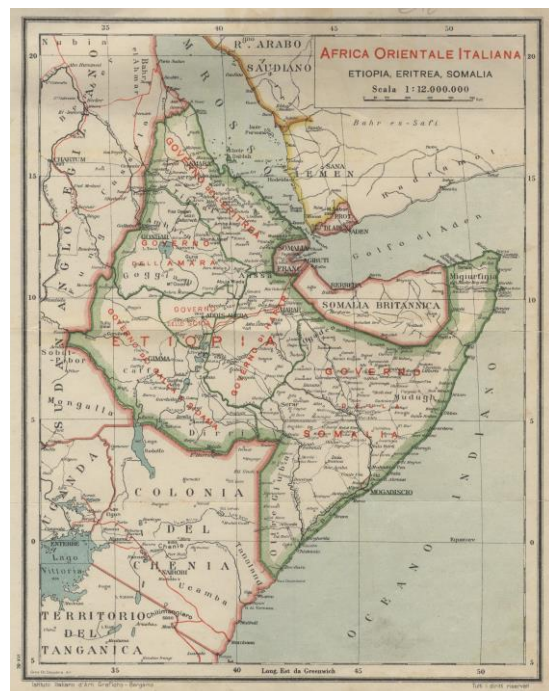


Fig. 19. Africa Orientale Italiana, Istituto Italiano d'Arti Grafiche di Bergamo, 1936.

L'inganno cartografico

Dal caso illustrato emergono una serie di osservazioni. La prima è ontologica. Rispetto all'infinita lista degli oggetti del mondo la carta geografica identifica quelli che una specifica società in uno specifico momento storico considera più rilevanti e li riproduce in un'astrazione visiva. Nel catalogo delle categorie più pertinenti alla rappresentazione della realtà geografica nel corso della modernità occidentale figurano certamente i confini. La carta non ne certifica solo l'esistenza formale ma ne restituisce anche la percezione diffusa. Se n'è avuta una prova con i confini dell'Etiopia nella cartografia fascista.

La seconda osservazione tira in ballo l'ultimo Harley, quello che ha fatto scuola. Egli

riconosceva due ispiratori: Derrida e Foucault. Dal primo prendeva il valore incorporato nella testualità della carta, riassunto nel classico enunciato “nulla esiste al di fuori del testo.” Dal secondo lo stretto connubio tra sapere e potere. Applicate agli studi cartografici queste ispirazioni hanno condotto Harley a postulare una connessione molto stretta, quasi meccanica, tra discorsi di potere e rappresentazioni cartografiche. La ‘costruzione della realtà’, che nello stesso sostantivo incarna autenticamente l’approccio costruttivista che l’ha esaltata, è espressione che nell’interpretazione di Harley tende a richiamare la razionalità di una volontà e di un disegno. Il suo decostruzionismo, come rivela già il prefisso privativo, puntava programmaticamente a smascherare tale razionalità. Ma forse ha preso il compito troppo seriamente, come rivelerebbe il nostro caso di studio che mostra un panorama cartografico non eterodiretto dall’autorità.

Una terza osservazione considera significativo che l’abbattimento dei confini dell’Etiopia sia avvenuto prima sulle carte e solo successivamente nella realtà. Ciò va a favore della potenza performativa della carta: la naturalizzazione del segno che essa opera, con efficacia massima proprio quando si tratta di concepire l’altrove, permette la confusione tra il piano della rappresentazione e il piano della realtà rendendo la carta immediatamente operativa. Dunque, il rappresentare cartograficamente una situazione nuova stimola all’azione finalizzata a realizzarla. Nel nostro caso di studio si trattava del disegno di un progetto politico per il sovvertimento dell’ordine riconosciuto dalla comunità internazionale. L’omologazione degli operatori del mondo cartografico nella scelta di omettere i confini di quel paese registrava una diffusa percezione collettiva e la radicava ulteriormente, contribuendo a persuadere la popolazione della ragionevolezza di scatenare quella guerra.

Quest’ultima riflessione si colloca nel campo, ancora in buona parte da esplorare, della carta come dispositivo privilegiato per indagare l’incrocio strategico tra il piano della realtà esperibile e il piano dell’immaginario. In proposito, può essere utile considerare quello che passa tra i due nel caso affrontato: cosa accade quando alla rappresentazione di una realtà spaziale segue un’azione tesa a modificarla? Nel nostro caso, a un dato assetto politico una guerra? Cosa è passato tra l’originaria carta politica del Corno d’Africa dove i confini dei paesi erano continui, la successiva mappa mentale degli italiani con l’Etiopia sempre meno differenziata dalle altre colonie e infine la carta del conquistatore, che ne sanciva la riorganizzazione effettiva sotto sovranità italiana? In mezzo ci sono tante cose. Solo per ricordarne alcune: un tempo lungo un decennio, 4.350 morti di guerra (a cui ne vanno aggiunti dieci volte di più negli anni successivi per reprimere le ribellioni), 40 miliardi di lire di spesa per la più grande spedizione della storia coloniale italiana (ma per Angelo Del Boca addirittura la più grande di tutti i tempi) con 400.000 soldati e 100.000 lavoratori, le sanzioni e l’isolamento internazionale che spinsero l’Italia verso Hitler cambiando direzione alla storia del paese (Del Boca 2010).

In mezzo ci sono anche le tante cose contro cui si è scontrata la traduzione della carta in realtà: i progetti concorrenti delle altre potenze (inglesi in particolare); la necessità di governare situazioni nella loro materialità (la conquista di un territorio reale, non di una figura astratta); il tempo, che avrebbe potuto rendere il progetto obsoleto per mille ragioni (ad esempio, la caduta di Mussolini oppure un ripensamento delle autorità sugli effettivi benefici dell'impresa). Tutte queste variabili e molte altre ancora hanno reso piuttosto fortuito l'adeguamento della realtà a quanto immaginato nell'originaria mappa mentale.

L'astrazione cartografica oscura le difficoltà di realizzazione del progetto tradendo e illudendo i suoi utilizzatori, facendogli sembrare il loro compito più semplice, qualsiasi esso sia. Ciò è dovuto al fatto che la carta moderna – o più precisamente la metrica topografica di cui si alimenta il suo canone geometrico-euclideo dettato del pensiero cartesiano – restituisce con freddezza una rappresentazione dove lo spazio appare vuoto, disabitato, quindi pienamente disponibile a essere occupato e plasmato. Ce lo ricordano Roland Barthes commentando la *Guide Bleu* (Barthes 1957) e Italo Calvino quando scrive che “dalla carta dei Cassini sono scomparse le figure umane” (Calvino 2002, 27). E gli esempi sarebbero infiniti: sulle carte dei colonizzatori europei non c'erano i popoli da sottomettere ma solo degli enormi territori poco conosciuti e pronti a essere spartiti; sulle carte dei generali della Prima guerra mondiale non c'era il sangue dei milioni di soldati morti ma solo l'intricata rete delle trincee e i simboli delle postazioni nemiche; sulle carte degli architetti delle case popolari non c'è la miseria dei poveri ma solo terreni da lottizzare. La carta rende il lavoro di tante categorie professionali un esercizio asettico. Si può ritenere che sia stato così anche per quelle dell'Etiopia nell'Italia fascista?

La tendenza della carta a semplificare il reale e dargli un ordine familiare suggerisce che il ruolo giocato dalla produzione cartografica sull'immaginario degli italiani sia andato nella direzione di predisporli ad accettare quella guerra. Inoltre, i vuoti che quelle carte presentavano (di centri urbani, di elementi naturali, di confini) possono aver fatto sembrare quella guerra più agevole a chi l'ha scatenata. Ingannati dalla decifrabile astrazione che ci fornisce la carta e dalla sua assurda pretesa che gli oggetti geografici siano riproducibili in termini matematici attraverso schemi razionalizzati da sistematiche procedure tecniche, tendiamo a dimenticare l'aforisma di Korzybski con cui prendeva avvio questo articolo: una carta non è il territorio (Korzybski 1933). C'è invece tutto un mondo con cui fare i conti che la carta – questa presuntuosa immagine del mondo – non ci mostra.⁸

Note

¹ Questo articolo riprende un caso di studio già trattato in *Pólemos. Materiali di filosofia e critica sociale*, 9 (2) del dicembre 2018: 15-38. Le considerazioni generali vengono qui replicate ma il materiale documentale mostrato, che proviene interamente dall'archivio privato dell'autore, è in gran parte inedito.

² Traduzione dell'autore.

³ Già il titolo del romanzo di Houellebecq è significativo: *La carta e il territorio*.

⁴ Per la precisione, il dispositivo diplomatico (Convenzione del 16 maggio 1908, che seguiva il Trattato del 10 luglio 1900 e il suo allegato del 15 maggio 1902) faceva riferimento al territorio dell'etnia dei Canama ponendolo sotto sovranità eritrea. La questione non venne mai chiarita del tutto, e ancora oggi questo territorio è oggetto di disputa tra Etiopia ed Eritrea. L'ultimo atto, la dichiarazione congiunta del 9 luglio 2018, lascia sperare nella definitiva conclusione di uno scontro ultracentenario. Anche relativamente all'altra porzione del confine, quella meridionale, la Convenzione del 1908 evitava di dare precisi punti di riferimento: "Dal punto più orientale della linea stabilita dai fiumi Mareb, Belesa e Muna, il confine corre in direzione sud-est parallelo alla costa a una distanza di circa 60 km da essa fino al territorio della Somalia francese" (Historical Section of the Foreign Office 1920b, 2 [traduzione dell'autore]).

⁵ Si vedano, ad esempio, la "Carta geografica dell'Africa Orientale" (1935), quella intitolata "Africa orientale" (senza data ma antecedente al conflitto) e la "Carta fisico-politica dell'Africa Orientale" (1935).

⁶ Particolarmente polemico fu l'intervento effettuato nel 1931 a Firenze durante il Primo Congresso di Studi Coloniali dal titolo "Geografia e politica coloniale." Da notare che, pur autore di numerosi articoli sull'Africa, De Magistris non vi si recò mai.

⁷ A quelle già menzionate si possono aggiungere le seguenti case editrici che pubblicarono carte prive dei confini integrali dell'Etiopia e precedenti alla conquista italiana: Vallardi ("Colonie dell'Africa orientale italiana," senza data ma antecedente al conflitto), Visceglia ("Africa Orientale," 1935 e altra dal medesimo titolo senza data ma antecedente al conflitto), Moneta ("Africa Orientale," 1935), Moiraghi ("Carta murale dell'Africa Orientale, senza data ma antecedente al conflitto), Mantovani ("Africa orientale e Abissinia," senza data ma antecedente al conflitto), Chiesa ("Africa orientale," senza data ma antecedente al conflitto), Istituto Editoriale Nazionale ("Carta storico-politica dell'Africa orientale," senza data ma antecedente al conflitto). A volte le soluzioni grafiche tradivano un aggiustamento dell'edizione precedente, sommario nel disegno ma profondo nel messaggio veicolato. È il caso di una carta della "S.A. Prof. G. De Agostini & figli" (da non confondersi con l'Istituto Geografico De Agostini da cui pur discende) che aspira a presentarsi come ufficiale precisando a margine le autorizzazioni burocratiche ricevute ("Edizione Autorizzata dal Ministero delle Colonie" e "Distribuzione autorizzata per tutto il Regno dalla R. Questura di Milano in data 23 agosto 1935"). Qui il confine tra Etiopia e Somalia sembra cancellato, preludio cartografico al destino storico che si compirà poco dopo.

⁸ L'autore ringrazia i due anonimi referee per i loro costruttivi commenti.

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The “lost colony”: Italian colonial irredentism (1864-1912)

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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on the place that Tunisia held in Italian colonial imaginary from the Majba Revolt (1864) until the Italo-Turkish War (1912). The main interest is to point out how geography, and geographical imagination, has been used as a colonial tool to legitimate the imperialist aims of Italy over Tunisian Regency and secondly to Tripoli. Tunisia occupied a particular status of an ‘unredeemed’ colony, linking the nationalist irredentist narration of the North-Eastern Italian border with the colonialist one on the Southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea. Starting from speeches and declarations of geographers, politicians and policymakers of the second half of 19th century, this research uses the writings of nationalist intellectuals and politician of the 1910s that played a major role in Italian public opinion to encourage the war against the Ottoman Empire. The paper aims to demonstrate not only the importance of geographical imagination in legitimating colonial ambitions but also the pivotal role of foreign colonial spaces in the imperialist imaginary of other metropolises as, in this case study, the place of the French protectorate of Tunisia in Italian colonialism.

Keywords

Tunisia, Italy, irredentism, migration, colonialism, Libya

Colonial imaginary and imperial geography

Since the very beginning of postcolonial studies, geographical production and imagination have been underlined as fundamental aspects in understanding the spatial and cultural dimension of colonialism (Said 1978; Idem 1993). Following this interest, scholars have often analyzed the colonial geographical relation between metropolis and ‘its’ colonies (Jazeel 2012; Blais, Deprest and Singaravélou 2011; Finaldi 2009; Proglío 2016). Even though studying the historical links and exchanges between the metropolises and ‘their’ overseas territories helped supply a better understanding of these relations, at the same time, this perspective could foster an approach that considers colonial empires as coherent and self-sufficient units. Some scholars considered colonial relations through a trans-imperial approach including other spaces in their analyses, in this way challenging the national-imperial category (Hart 2003; Burbank-Cooper 2011; McClintock 2013). Following this perspective, our main interest lies in assessing the place of foreign colonial spaces in the geographical imaginary of other metropolises. In particular, this paper aims to propose a historical panoramic view of the role of Tunisia, before and, overall, after French occupation, in Italian

colonial imaginary through a geographical focus. This paper defines the imaginary as a shared mindset of a group of people (in this case: geographers, politicians, intellectuals), a collective cultural system that performs specific narrations and underlies the perceptions and the choices of the group. Studies on national imaginary (Anderson 1983; Bhabha 1990; Banti 2000) and, more specifically, those on Italian colonial imaginary (Finaldi 2009; Schiavulli 2009; Proglia 2016) demonstrated the role of the ruling class in the production and spread of colonialist narration. Accordingly, this contribution analyzes the writings of politicians, geographers and intellectuals that played an influential role in the making and spreading of a particular geographical representation of Tunisian territory. There are two main reasons, intertwined, that according to the author make the Tunisian case noteworthy in the Italian colonial studies. First of all, by analyzing a minor and unsuccessful part of Italian colonialism, we can assess how colonial failure and imperialist regret shaped the following colonial ventures. For instance, the case of Tunisia, occupied by France in 1881, paved the way for an Italian interest in Libya (Larfaoui 2010). Secondly, the Tunisian case is an outstanding link between migrations, colonialism, and geographical representations for imperial purposes. The latter is the main object of this article. Among its geopolitical interests since the foundation of the Italian kingdom, Tunisia played a major role in Italian colonial imagination due also to the massive migration of Italian nationals to the Tunis Regency under French protection. Rainero and Bessis analyzed, in their pioneer studies in Italy-Tunisia relations during the 1920s and the 1930s (Rainero 1978; Bessis 1981), the political aspects of geographical considerations that claimed a special bond between Italy and Tunisia. A specific analysis of the evolution of geographical assessments concerning Italy-Tunisia relations during the Italian liberal period has been neglected until now. Most of the studies about Italians in late modern Tunisia deal more with their social and political aspects in local society (Pendola 2007; Choate 2010; El Houssi 2012; Faranda 2016) overlooking how geography was a tool to build and to legitimate Italian ambitions. Geographical proximity of the Sicilian and Sardinian islands to the Tunisian shore was interpreted as proof of the legitimacy of Italian claims, as well as human mobilities from Italy to North Africa. This paper considers how migration from Italy developed the particular role Tunisia had in Italian imperial imaginary by claiming the irredentist status on the southern shore of the Mediterranean Sea from Tunisia to Libya.

A “shred of our Italy” in the African continent

To understand the role of Tunisia in Italian colonial imagination, we must analyze the attempts to include the Tunisian region in the Italian space from a diachronic perspective. Geographical proximity and colonialist fantasies had long paved the way for Italian claims on the Regency. These claims stated that Tunisian territory belonged to Italy. This irredentist idea has a long history which begins in the aftermath of the political unification of Italy.¹ In

1864, a member of the moderate left, Mauro Macchi (Conti 2006), introduced his speech at the Chamber by declaring that: “Tunisia can be really considered as a reflection, an extension, or another shred of our Italy” (Atti del Parlamento Italiano 1888, 4272).² His speech concerned the danger for Italians living in the Regency due to the Tunisian uprising of 1864 – the Majba Revolt (Slama 1967; Anderson 2014, 85) – and he asked for the details of the naval expedition that was sent jointly with France and England to protect their interests in the country. In addition, Macchi asked the Minister if there was a political plan behind this intervention: “I would like to know from him if the assignment given to our representatives is limited to a defense of that numerous and worthy colony, or if he has also given them the right to take part in political affairs, if this were required by the further development of the events” (Atti del Parlamento Italiano 1888, 4272). Only three years after the proclamation of the Italian kingdom, with Rome still under temporary power of the Church, the idea of taking part in internal political affairs of that “shred of our Italy” in the African shore was already present. The Minister of Foreign Affairs, Visconti Venosta, reassured Macchi telling him that a naval expedition was sent to protect national interests adding that “I don’t need to explain to the Chamber the reasons why no important event in the Tunis Regency can remain unrelated to the interests of Italian politics” (Atti del Parlamento Italiano 1888, 4286). Some years after, in 1868, Macchi praised the treaty that Visconti Venosta stipulated with the Beylik of Tunis, defining it

a treaty that will make the ties that, by nature, already run between our homeland and Tunisia, closer and stronger; ties that are envied by other people, who would like to exercise a predominant influence in that country, and thus achieve a long-desired aim, for which they would like the Mediterranean to become a lake that is *not ours* (Archivio Storico della Camera dei Deputati 1868).

The international treaty between Tunisia and Italy had, according to this deputy, a natural basis that formed a special bond between the two countries. Geographical nature, like the closeness of Tunisian and Italian shores, acquired, in the words of this deputy, political value. Nevertheless, this hierarchical relation revealed the struggle of European influences over the country and the aim of making the Mediterranean Sea a ‘national’ lake ruled by one power, in this case, Italy. Later, Macchi specified the nature of the ties he assessed in 1868. A few years later, in 1871, he returned to the concept of Tunisia as a ‘shred of our Italy’, specifying of which shred of Italy Tunisia was an extension: “Italy has an interest in keeping good economic and commercial relations with Tunisia, which, in a word, can be considered as an appendix of Sardinia” (Atti del Parlamento Italiano 1871, 610). In his imperialist perspective, the Tunisian region, part of the African continent, was an appendix of the island of Sardinia. If the deputy Macchi considered Tunisia ‘like’ an Italian fragment and in particular of Sardinia, Attilio Brunialti – geographer and politician – claimed in 1876 that there was an Italian geological origin of Tunisian territory: “Tunisia, a piece of Italy detached and thrown away by the

force of some volcanic upheaval at the gates of the desert” (Brunialti 1876, v). Brunialti became committed to Italian colonial policy: as publicist and founder of *Giornale delle Colonie*, he collaborated with other geography journals, such as the *Bollettino della Società Geografica Italiana* (D’Amelio 1972). For Brunialti, the Italian geological origin of Tunisia was a conviction that he maintained in his following writings. In 1881, the year of the French occupation of Tunisia – the ‘slap of Tunis’ for Italy – Brunialti published a book in which he asserted that: “the chain of Italian volcanoes extends into the interior of Africa, irrefutable testimony to ancient telluric affinities” (Brunialti 1881, 101). He did not support these pseudo-geographical considerations by chance, but to legitimize a project of Italian domination over the Maghreb country: “nature and history would, therefore, have given Tunis in the first place, among all the powers, to Italy. This country is much closer to us than others, almost an extension, certainly it was united to ours in prehistoric times” (Brunialti 1881,133). Such an idea is made clear from a geopolitical perspective when he asserts that Tunisia “is the land of Africa closest to Sicily, geographically almost Italy, economically its appendix, militarily a threat or a shelter” (Brunialti 1881,133). Brunialti’s thesis supported a geographical justification of Italian colonial ambitions over Tunisia. The nature of Tunisian territory is interpreted as proof of its legitimate ‘belonging’ to Italy. The imperialist ambition over Tunisia had its place in the colonialist narration. It is important to underline here that Italian governments did not have a military plan to conquer Tunisia before 1881 (and until the fascist period). The Italian strategy, considering its political and military weakness, of an equilibrium of power in the Mediterranean with France and England aimed at formal independence of the Regency in which Italy could have played a prominent role thanks to its industries, interests and settlers (Lewis 2013). So, the ‘loss’ of Tunisia was more a poisoning fruit of Italian colonial narration – the regret of imperialist dreams – than a real defeat.

From Trento to Tunis: expanding the borders of the imagined nation

After the French invasion and the installation of a protectorate over the Regency, a considerable flux of migrants fled from Italy to Tunisia (Fauri 2015). In 1906, the Italian Vice-Consul in Tunis, Tommaso Carletti, affirmed that “for reasons of proximity, climate, customs, Sicilians, Sardinians and Southerners are more at home in Tunisia than the Italians of the Center and North” (Commissariato Generale dell’Emigrazione 1906, 334). Several French colonialist publicists saw in the Tunisian-Italian climatic similarity one of the reasons for the success of immigration to the country. ‘Natural’ adaptation factors are once again mobilized to explain, or legitimize, the relations between Italy and Tunisia, both in regards to the colonial project and the migratory movement. Tunisia, because of its proximity, its climate, and its immigrants, had a special place in the Italian imagination: an almost-colony or a lost colony. Proof of this, according to the nationalist perspective, was the Italian workers’ presence in the country. Tunisia, protected by French rule and populated by Italian workers, became the

link between the emigration of Italians and the colonialist ambitions of the Italian kingdom. An important turning point in this Italian-African irredentism occurred during 1911 when nationalist discourse claimed an Italianness of Tunisia more through human settlements than geological factors. This idea is the continuation and the development of the speeches about the Italianness of Tunisia which date back to the day after Italian unification to Macchi and Brunialti. Gualtiero Castellini, nationalist publicist (Ficini 2008), nephew of the sociologist and criminologist Scipio Sighele, wrote in 1911 – before the start of the Italian colonialist enterprise in Tripolitania – these considerations on Tunisia and its relationship with Italy:

in Tunisia, populated by 150,000 of her sons, Italy must accomplish a work of culture today. Not a political work, but a national one. It must transform a slavish colony, a colony that might stumble like Argentina, into an irreconcilable land. We have to slowly get used to considering this land in fact Italian land, and to call it quite simply, like the northern lands, Italian land subjected to France. When we will have surrounded the country with ideally unredeemed regions, from Brenner to Carthage, then we can also think of the necessary vindications [...] Whoever wants to predict the future could say that perhaps Tripoli will be our African Trento; Tunis our Trieste. The first could be Italian with Italy; the second is perhaps condemned, as Trieste is condemned, to be Italian outside Italy [...] Irredent Tunis teaches us, like Trieste, that Italy was half-made (Castellini 1911, 152-153).

Castellini departs from the strictly colonial framework by interweaving it with the irredentist narration. As Italy had ‘unredeemed’ national lands, it also had ‘unredeemed colonies’ such as Tunisia and Tripolitania. Castellini advocated for an expansion of the Italian national imagination, seen as a first step in the imperialist political process. Before military expansion, it is necessary to conquer the national imagination and to expand the imagined borders of the nation-empire. It is worth noting that this work was published before the invasion of Libya. The expression ‘considering this land in fact Italian land’ highlights the ideological work that must be done to expand the spatial boundaries of the national imagination. Such enlargement includes the Tunisian-Libyan space which is called upon to play the role of a ‘colonial’ counterpart to the question of Trento and Trieste.

The main reason that pushed Castellini to affirm this Italian Africanist irredentism in Tunisia was the quantity of Italians settled there (88 thousands in 1911), more so than the geology of the territory. The voluntary and spontaneous emigration of the Italians had formed an ‘unredeemed’ Italian land on the southern coast of the Mediterranean. Castellini is not the only one who used the Tunisian case to encourage a colonialist enterprise in Tripolitania. The journalist of the newspaper *La Tribuna*, Giuseppe Piazza, made a trip to Tripolitania in March-May 1911 (some months before the outbreak of the war). His report, published in the Roman national newspaper, is collected in a book entitled *Our Promised Land – Letter from Tripolitania* (Piazza 1911) which reveals from its title the intention of the author who incites public opinion and the Italian government to occupy the Libyan region (Schiavulli 2009). If the focus of the report is Tripolitania, ‘the Promised Land’ of Italian colonialism, the passage of his journey through Tunisia is essential more rhetorical than geographical. Piazza devotes

the introductory chapter to the passage in Tunisia with the very eloquent title *Through the Lost Land*. Describing French policies as limiting the activities of Italians and as convincing them to voluntarily apply for French nationality, the Sicilian journalist asserts, projecting the near future of Italian settlement in the region, that: “And so, from this lost land, the last rampart of Italianness will be disappeared, erased forever [...] recriminations are useless. It is better to live, repair, compensate. There is yet another ‘Promised Land’” (Piazza 1911, 29). The ‘lost colony’, on the one hand, remains a kind of ‘colonial shock’ which is reactivated during Italian colonial enterprises; on the other, it justifies, in the colonial imagination – thanks to immigration – Italian ambitions for new overseas expansion. Enrico Corradini, founder and leader of the Italian Nationalist Association, was of the same idea when he insisted on the imperialist function that emigration must have for Imperial Italy. Corradini published in 1912, after the outbreak of the Italo-Turkish War, his work dedicated to General Giovanni Ameglio – one of the military protagonists of the war – entitled *On the Ways of the New empire: From the Emigration of Tunis to the War in the Aegean*. The colonialist enterprise in Tripolitania and Rhodes did not make the Italian colonial imagination forget about Tunisia. In the preface to the work, we read:

The ‘ways’ of our new empire are in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, while here we are talking about Tunisia, Italian emigration to Tunisia and the Aegean islands that we occupied rather than conquered [...] emigration is in a way a principle of imperialism, because, at least, the people who emigrate can become raw material of imperialism. Otherwise, we would not understand why I speak of Tunis with this title, of Tunis which, rather, was a province taken from the new Italian empire (Corradini 1912, IX).

Corradini knew the Tunisian context quite well thanks to his travel to Tunis and Sfax in 1910, invited by the local committee of the Dante Alighieri Society to give political speeches in private meetings (Archivio Storico della Società Dante Alighieri 1910). The local upper-class mostly supported nationalist ideas taking part in the Italian colonialist imaginary through newspapers and writings, and in 1911 supported the Italian invasion of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica. The ‘Lost Colony’ was not only a narrative figure in the colonialist imaginary but also a concrete political laboratory of Italian imperialism beyond its borders.

Conclusions

Tunisia in its role of a ‘Lost Colony’ or according to Corradini, of a ‘taken province’ (but, for it to be ‘lost’, when was it first ‘taken’ by Italy?), produced important outcomes in Italian colonial imagination. The presence of settled Italian migrants qualified Tunisia as ‘irredent’ land according to Castellini (1911), or as a ‘province’ of the Italian empire (Corradini 1912) which included migrant settlements too (Aqarone 1989). According to this view, migration must become a vanguard of the expansion of Italy overseas. In another writing, the leader of the Italian nationalist party asserted the need for Italian colonialism to harness the energy and

will of Italian migrants. Emigration is interpreted as proof of the potentially imperialist attitude of the Italian people:

the Sicilians in French Africa, like the Italians in the rest of the world, are dispersed, each abandoned to their fate; but if, one day, Italian blindness can be enlightened, and if what is today dispersed can become a united force, then here is the race of people who truly want to be colonizers (Corradini 1911, 117).

Corradini explicitly referred to the concept of ‘race’ to define those who are (or should be) responsible for colonizing overseas spaces. Colonialism played an important role in representing Italians as a ‘people’ and as a ‘race’ (Re 2010; Giuliani and Lombardi Diop 2013). This analysis demonstrated that a particular geographical imagination influenced colonial aims. In addition, it showed how foreign colonial spaces played a significant role in Italian colonialism. Labour migrations from Southern Italy, Sicily, and Sardinian to Tunisia were included in the colonialist imaginary as a tool of imperialist power. This inclusion developed the imperialist idea of Tunisia geographically (and so ‘naturally’) tied to Italy in an ‘irredentist’ claim to push the border of the imagined nation further south. Historiography has proved the prominent link between colonial ventures and nation-building, focusing mainly on the actual national colonial space. This contribution aimed to shed some light on how foreign colonial spaces could be implied in the colonialist imaginary of a nation as well, because “it is not only about soldiers and cannons but also about ideas, about forms, about images and imaginings” (Said 1993, 7). Thanks to considering colonial spaces beyond the national-imperial unit, we can understand the deep connections and exchanges that formed not only our contemporary international relations but also our geographical perspectives.

Notes

¹ Other irredentist claims concerned Corsica, Malta (Paci 2015) and the Balkan area (Rodogno 2003), especially during fascism.

² All citations of sources in Italian that appear in the article were translated by author.

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Uncharter'd memories don't fade

Simona Martini

Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck

Poem¹

A coffee stain spread on the tablecloth

'Twas late morning
and I had no time to muse

'Twas late morning

And I spent it lost in a wading memory
The mind map of my brain
that felt safe

strangely safe

looked like a map.
A sketch map with many routes
A liquid chart made of water of colour.

And I began to feel discomfort.

The map I traced overlays itself
on top of all the old ones
that my fellows spread on the same tablecloth
The same
always the same
All traces of us
all routes of us
overlap
or divert, sometimes

And my own, freshly made,
makes me think of the routes we trace

An invisible sea map
for the blind to see.

All routes leading here.
No routes leading anywhere.

The lines spread more if you just touch them
- which I did
Yes, I did.
Each line spreads
across the sea of memories
runs through like a vein
becomes the sunshine in my brain

Now it all was clear.

If only we had a map
- What's the name for maps at sea, Sir?
Seamaps, can we call'em? -

If it's not on a map then it doesn't exist
If it's not on a map, it's unknown, unexplored.

I heard a story of a man of the past
A hero, or something like that, at last.
He would carry the weight of the world on his shoulders
As we carried the weight of the water
beneath us
or above us as we fall
crushed under heavy skies
crushed under heavy lies

If only we had a map
A clear, secure one
A sea map that wouldn't drown
all the secrets
our brothers won't tell

to get to a place where pain is shared
and a burden gets a loss of weight.

'Twas late morning
I was late for work as I showed up
Told 'em the map wasn't working
And led me astray

But the missuh wouldn't take it
No more cash for me that day

"Lift that crate and hold it tight
Not a single piece must fall to earth
Take it where you know
You know the road.
And since today you came so late
You'll sleep in the field tonight."

If only we'd had a map
A map to follow our own designed path
not by fate
but by our own will

Uncharted water makes unchartered waters

Obviously I'm misspelling, missuh.

Never knew how misspelling
 misseing
 miswatching
 misbelieving
 could make the sea feel so deceiving.

'Twas late morning.
 Every morning is late
 if you waste it.

It's always late.

It's always too late.

Nota

¹ Il tema cartografico mi ha suggerito un componimento in versi: il punto di vista di una vittima di quella forma di neoschiavismo che è il caporalato in Italia, che immagina come avrebbe potuto andare diversamente la sua vita se nel tragitto di mare che lo ha portato qui avesse avuto una mappa affidabile e sicura.

I tragitti “not mapped” suggeriscono una possibile mappa alternativa al protagonista, che si esprime in una lingua frutto anch'essa di manipolazioni e impossessamenti personali del *poetic I*.

Tutto parte da rivoli di caffè che si spandono su un piano, ramificandosi come un altro tipo di mappa, la mappa mentale delle connessioni neuronali dell'io, che crea collegamenti e attiva connessioni.

La macchia di caffè nero sulla tovaglia chiara è vista come “acqua di colore” che cerca di farsi strada, di trovare una nuova strada, e si sovrappone alle macchie/mappe lasciate sulla stessa tovaglia dai compagni dell'io poetante: tracce del loro passaggio che gli ricordano i tragitti compiuti da ognuno di loro in mare. Rotte diverse che li hanno condotti tutti in un unico luogo. Un unico luogo che è anche un non-luogo, dove i neoschiavi assurgono a macchie invisibili.

Simona Martini holds a PhD in English Studies from the Università degli Studi di Milano and is a member of the Scientific Committee of ATeM Archiv für Textmusikforschung at Leopold-Franzens-Universität Innsbruck. Her interests include poetry, text analysis, Irish Studies, Cultural Studies, Theatre Studies, along with Popular Music Studies. Alongside poems and short stories, among her publications are: “Anime migranti in musica: la visione mediterranea di Almamegretta e Piero Pelù” (2018); “When Italian Popular Music Sings about Ireland: Homage, Inspiration and Kindred Spirits” (2018); “Cantare una nuova nazione: un archivio della musica pop-rock italiana” (2016); “La Grecia del passato, l'Irlanda del presente: i ‘Plays for women’ di Brendan Kennelly” (2009).

Mapping memories, charting empathy: framing a collaborative research-creation project¹

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ABSTRACT

This short dialogue presents the theoretical framework used by the two authors – a visual artist and a social anthropologist of Judaism – as the starting point for the development of a scientific partnership. The aim of the collaboration is to explore the potential of “research-creation” (Giacco et al. 2020) to find alternative ways of representing ‘difficult stories’, like those of Jewish migrants and refugees from the Middle East and North Africa. Specifically, the authors are experimenting with creative visualisations inspired by maps, in all their various forms and in all meanings of the word.

Keywords

memory, Sephardi and Mizrahi Jews, Libya, research-creation, creative mapping

To Martina from Piera

I can’t remember exactly when or where my fascination with maps began, so I can’t say it was love at first sight. However, to continue the metaphor, we have always had a stable relationship. Wherever I travel, the first thing I do is ensure I have a map of the city I am visiting: a ‘real’ paper map, with no internet or connection problems. I consider this an essential object, one which allows me to set off without worrying about getting lost.

A reproduction of a historic map of Venice, purchased in a small print shop in Campo San Tomà in the city, has followed me on several house moves. However, the first time I went to Venice, when I started university, I bought a map of the city at the railway station. Before setting out on a route among the city’s *calli* and *campielli*, the narrow streets and small squares that would only later become familiar, I would make sure I had a landmark to navigate the labyrinth of alleys, bridges and arcades. I still have that map, creased and mended with sticky tape. And for the last few years, I have also owned a colour print of a 1929 map of Tripoli, the hometown of your grandparents Antonio and Narcisa.

Like you, however, I have never been to Tripoli. Or at least not physically. The Tripoli I know is the one described by the people I have talked to during my research: men and women who were born and lived in Tripoli, Jews from Libya who between the 1940s and

1960s decided – or were forced – to leave their homes and move across the Mediterranean and beyond.² People like Rachele, who was born in Tripoli in 1922 and passed away in Milan in 2012, whose family roots and routes in her long, intense life trajectory included, among other places, Izmir (or Smyrna), Jerusalem, Rome and Caracas.



Fig. 1. Old Map of Venice.



Fig. 2. Old Map of Tripoli, Libya, 1929.

The stories I deal with are the memories of North African and Middle Eastern Jews. They are difficult stories to tell for those who have directly experienced displacement, loss and hardship across the Mediterranean, as with every story of forced migration; but they are also difficult for me to ‘re-tell,’ as I try to make sense of their inherent complexity and heterogeneity. Their heterogeneity is often equated with historical unreliability (Bensoussan 2014), and their complexity has become much thornier given the political charge these migrations have assumed in recent decades (Baussant 2018).

In my efforts to throw light on the complex processes these Jews underwent in their forced migrations, I see my ethnography as a “diary of the streets I walk” (Roberts 2012, 6), the streets being the recollections, emotions and perceptions of my interlocutors. I soon realised that this land made of life stories, this labyrinth of memories and recollections, did

not merely extend across a temporal Cartesian plane: its complexity also required me to go downwards (Ridge et al. 2013; Rossetto 2017). I needed deep maps, “a different way to achieve the goal of capturing complexity” (Bodenhamer 2015, 17); “thick maps” (Presner et al. 2014) to deal with the layers of history and the multiplicity of spaces; and “sensitive maps” (Olmedo 2011) as an experiential and experimental tool to “establish respectful and creative relationships” between the researcher and her interlocutors in the research field (Mekdjian and Olmedo 2016, 1).

But why mapping, you may be wondering. At first, I turned to maps because the interviewees themselves inspired me to do so. They often adopted a spatial language and various cartographic practices spontaneously, such as sketching a map on a piece of paper or using objects on a table to reconstruct the former urban environment. Later on, I interpreted these as an invitation from my interlocutors to embark on a virtual journey through the streets of their past, as a way to try to ‘take me there’ and “to walk in their shoes” (Jones and Ficklin 2012, 103). Is this not how empathy is forged? “A complex imaginative process involving both cognition and emotion,” the ability to take up another person’s psychological perspective and imaginative experience while maintaining “a clear sense of my own separate identity” (Coplan 2004, 143)?

With these ideas in mind, I decided to write to you to invite you to work together on a research-creation project, to find an answer to a question I have long pondered: does the form of a map – whether creative, deep or thick – fit the knowledge – complex, diverse or contradictory – embedded in a life story?

To Piera from Martina

Cartography is the only interesting, indeed the only possible, way of thinking about something like a biography, or a relationship with places or between life and places. Biographies are usually linked to time, but time is too intimate, and it is also connected to memory... since I am so forgetful, I prefer space and places, so it is better to project a life onto a large, imaginary city.³

I love maps, in the widest possible sense of the word, and I have been using them and experimenting with them in many different ways for some time. I’m forgetful too, and agree entirely with Agamben’s thoughts in the quotation above. I’d also add that a map can bring time and space together and move in multiple temporal and spatial dimensions simultaneously. It can choose how they are assembled and how they cross over. And it can opt to consider emotional time and space too. A map is an attempt, and the form it takes is one of many possible ways of representing the story of a life. It contains a desire to see, to watch, to go beyond verbal language and to enter inside events, which are considered on multiple levels but laid out on a single, shared surface. And to observe what effect this has, and how the events intersect, whether they meet or stay distant, detached and nontangential, but

nevertheless on the same plane, part of the same story. Allowing one to explore new potential directions, trajectories, traces (including hidden traces) and narratives.

A map is never unambiguous. It always wants you to ask yourself a question: where am I, both within the map and compared to the map? To work out the ‘where,’ I first consider the ‘who’: my relation (and correlation) with whatever the map represents. The map takes on meaning through my positioning – through the position I take – and through the context in which it is created and then interpreted. And often in this step, in this drift or shift, the meaning changes and is reinterpreted, presenting both a risk and an opportunity.

This was the first thought I had when you told me Rachele’s story: where do I stand in relation to this story? How can I look at it and then represent it?



Fig. 3. Work in Progress, Martina Melilli, Rovereto (Italy), July 13, 2020.

I grasped – and sought to tackle – the issue I found myself facing, trying to give Rachele’s memory all the space it needed to exist, to be, in its specific details and individuality. Suspending judgement, going beyond classification and looking into the gaps and intersections we are urged to ignore by the dualistic polarity that underpins the world familiar to us, where everything is either good or bad, right or wrong, respectable or not respectable, and so on. First of all, I tried to acquire all the content and information available, digest it and give it an order in a defined space. The result was an initial map – a mental map, if you like, packed full of information, and a first step towards something else, something as yet undefined, definitely lighter and simpler. But to make something lighter, you first need to see everything, or work out what has been left out, or what emerges (or re-emerges).

Observing and reflecting on this first map led me to design my vision of Rachele’s map, her hypothetical treasure map depicting the most precious things in her memories. A map I imagine she would have kept in a handkerchief, one she always kept in her pocket or tied around her neck or hair. Both for protection and to ensure she could always find the right

road.



Fig. 4 and 5. Work in Progress and Storyboard Rachele Abravanel, by Martina Melilli, July 21, 2020.

I asked her daughter Manuela if, by any chance, she still had one of Rachele’s handkerchiefs, perhaps embroidered with her initials. And I searched the town where I live, Rovereto in Trentino, northern Italy, for a woman of Arab culture and origin who could embroider my design onto Rachele’s handkerchief. Through the embroidery, another route crosses this land, another hidden story. And the cotton thread and Souad’s hands have the job of reuniting and retracing the broken threads of history, seeking to reconcile times, spaces and stories, both in ideal terms and in their intentions. Meanwhile, I shoulder all the responsibility for this action I have created, instigated and chosen.



Fig. 6 and 7. Preparatory drawing and embroidered Mindili (my handkerchief), Martina Melilli, Rovereto (Italy) September/October 2020.

Notes

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² Between the establishment of the State of Israel in May 1948 and the end of 1951, about 350,000 Jews from Arab countries – mainly Yemen, Iraq and Libya but also Morocco, Egypt, and Tunisia – moved to Israel in a complex migratory phenomenon that “has become a source of both nostalgia and widespread contention” (Meir-Glitzenstein 2018, 114). Several thousand Jews were still living in the Middle East and North Africa in the late 1960s and early-to-mid-1970s, but various events that destabilised the entire area almost completely eradicated their presence in the region. Colonial and post-colonial tensions, the rise of Arab nationalism and the Six-Day War between Israel and Arab countries in 1967 encouraged, and forced, Jews to leave the countries they had called home for centuries (Abécassis and Faü 2011). There are now only a few thousand Jews left in the region, mainly concentrated in Iran, Morocco and Tunisia.

³ Interview with Giorgio Agamben by Roberto Andreotti and Federico de Melis published on 13 May 2000, in *Alias* 3 (19): 2-5, quoted in Pignatti 2011, 6.

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Cartografare la violenza, preservare gli orizzonti soggettivi: le sfide della forma nelle mappe di Jean-David Nkot

Jean-David Nkot

Artista visuale

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ABSTRACT

Cartografare la violenza, preservare gli orizzonti soggettivi: le sfide della forma in Jean-David Nkot's maps. Jean-David Nkot's aesthetic research is devoted to question the notion and practices of violence in the contemporary globalized world. Looking for artistic forms to represent and locate these practices, Nkot's work is confronted with material objects, such as stamps and maps. He shows their relationship with dominant structures and subverts their symbolic compositional structure. In Nkot's work, on the one hand, the so-called 'subaltern subjects' dominate and take position in space. On the other hand, maps shape different spaces that include personal desires and the imagination of a new life in the future.

Keywords

space, violence, imagination, map art

Douala-Padova, 2 novembre 2020



Fig. 1. Jean-David Nkot. Douala, 2 novembre 2020.

Dopo molti scambi via messenger, whatsapp, email, finalmente riusciamo a vederci in una conversazione skype. I primi tentativi non sono fortunati, la connessione sembra non tenere. Jean-David Nkot appare a intermittenza e così il sole che entra da una finestra alle sue spalle. Proviamo allora a togliere il video e lasciare solo l'audio. Parliamo 'al buio', in una sottrazione in linea con il momento, che smaschera la vicinanza tecnologica nella sua illu-

sorietà e fragilità. Oppure no? La conversazione si snoda fluida permettendo a noi di FES di farci guidare attraverso le ricerche e gli interrogativi che scandiscono la creazione di Jean-David Nkot.

FES: Buongiorno Jean-David. Da quanto abbiamo potuto leggere nelle tue interviste, le mappe arrivano nella tua produzione artistica dopo una riflessione su mobilità e spazi. Prima delle mappe ci sono state altre 'figure': vorresti parlarci del tuo percorso, dirci come si è definita la centralità della mappa nella tua produzione recente e quali sono le linee di sviluppo che ti hanno condotto a questa precisa figura della mappa?

JEAN-DAVID NKOT: Effettivamente è così come dite... è stato un procedimento lungo, gestito e controllato passo a passo. Possiamo risalire al 2015, quando ho iniziato a interrogarmi davvero sulla questione della violenza. Non è infatti la migrazione il soggetto principale del mio lavoro, ma è piuttosto la questione dell'impatto della violenza nella società contemporanea. È questo che mi preme far comprendere. Nel 2015, nel condurre le mie ricerche su questa questione della violenza, mi sono concentrato in particolare sulla situazione del Camerun, che a partire dal 2013 è stato flagellato dagli attentati terroristici di Boko Haram. Per me, come artista, si imponeva l'esigenza di chiedermi come materializzare questo specifico momento nel contesto della società camerunense, quella in cui vivo ancor oggi, e come veicolare questo messaggio a tutto il mondo.

Nella mia ricerca artistica è così... c'è questa volontà di rispondere alla domanda, a questa domanda, soprattutto a livello estetico: come presentare, come comunicare il mio messaggio?

Tutto questo concerne l'universo del ritratto. Nel mondo della ritrattistica sono state fatte al riguardo molte cose... allora... io mi interrogavo su quale forma dare al 'mio' ritratto per presentarlo agli occhi del mondo. Ed è così che la figura del francobollo mi si è imposta. Il francobollo quale vettore che poteva farsi carico della circolazione del mio messaggio in relazione a tutto quello che il Camerun stava vivendo in quel momento, ma anche a ciò che stava accadendo nell'orizzonte del mondo... Certo, il riferimento principale era al Camerun... La questione che si poneva era: come parlare della violenza? Come dare una nuova vita o un'esistenza a chi è vittima di questa violenza? Come fare in modo che il mondo fosse a conoscenza di ciò che stava accadendo in Camerun?

Quando pensiamo alle funzioni storicamente assolte dal francobollo, vediamo che è stato un elemento di circolazione; lo si può considerare una sorta di visto, perché storicamente il francobollo è stato un supporto per la comunicazione, come è uno strumento commemorativo. Le persone di solito si interessano al prezzo del francobollo, senza fare troppo caso, e dunque avere consapevolezza, dell'immagine che è vi è iscritta.

FES: potremmo anche dire che là dove ottenere un visto è impresa difficile, che pone molti problemi, i francobolli circolano con maggiore facilità.

NKOT: Sì, infatti in questo senso parlavo dei francobolli come 'visti'.

FES: Come dire... un visto speciale che tu offri alle persone che sono state vittime di violenza, perché le loro storie possano viaggiare.

NKOT: Sì, è così... e quindi, per riprendere il filo del processo creativo, mi sono ritrovato a usare nel mio lavoro esattamente gli elementi che strutturano il francobollo, che si caratterizza per la forma dentellata, il nome del paese in cui viene fabbricato e il prezzo del francobollo stesso. Allora io andavo a inserire al posto del nome del Paese che ha emesso il francobollo i nomi dei luoghi dove sono stati commessi gli attacchi terroristici. Se per esempio si tratta di un francobollo camerunense, al posto di 'Repubblica del Camerun' io mettevo Kolofata o Bangui, vale a dire le zone in cui ci sono stati attacchi terroristici. Era un modo di 'scolpire' questi spazi, di materializzare questi luoghi attraverso l'iscrizione dei loro nomi in quel preciso francobollo.

Sulla scorta di questa operatività, arrivo nel 2016 a domandarmi in quale altro modo sia possibile materializzare lo spazio... allora ecco definirsi la questione dello spazio, del territorio: come è possibile rappresentarli al di là del termine scritto che li designa? Perché scrivere Kolofata andava bene, ma mi domandavo se non ci fosse un altro modo per rappresentare Kolofata. Ed è così che, nel corso della mia ricerca – volta a comprendere che cos'è lo spazio, cos'è un territorio a partire dalle definizioni stesse, dal nome – mi accorgo che la mappa e la cartografia sono imprescindibili nella rappresentazione spaziale. Ecco dunque le domande che, nel corso del tempo, hanno posto le basi per l'affiorare della 'mappa' nel mio lavoro.

Bisogna inoltre sapere che io vivo in un quartiere che è un serbatoio per la migrazione; vedo i migranti lasciare il mio quartiere e andare a esplorare altri spazi. A un certo punto mi sono posto la domanda su come avrei potuto sensibilizzare questi giovani rispetto alla 'lotteria' della migrazione, come portare la gente a comprendere che si tratta di un processo estremamente violento. Vedevo tutta la complessità della questione e come artista mi chiedevo quale fosse l'approccio più appropriato per poter condividere la sofferenza e le pene di chi prende la strada della migrazione, ed è così che ho deciso di concentrarmi su questo fenomeno. E, quando parlo di migrazione, non è il punto di partenza e di arrivo che per me sono interessanti quanto invece la zona di mezzo, che sono solito chiamare 'la zona grigia'.

FES: È una definizione molto interessante quella di 'zona grigia', fertile di implicazioni... quello che succede 'tra' o anche quello che deve ancora 'prendere forma' nello sguardo e nei discorsi.

NKOT: Sì, esatto... anche perché si tende ad associare il mio lavoro alla migrazione. Non è così... io lavoro sull'impatto della violenza (fig. 2). E, a partire dalla violenza, la questione della condizione umana diventa il centro nevralgico dell'interrogazione complessiva. Interessarsi alla zona grigia di un processo di dislocazione, significa avere a che fare con la violen-

za. Come viene considerato l'essere umano nel momento in cui si colloca in questo *frame*, entra in questa 'zona grigia', in queste zone-cuscinetto? Perché tutte queste inter-zone, zone-cuscinetto – i campi in cui si trattengono le persone, i campi per i rifugiati – sono tutte zone grigie. Cosa vi succede? Qual è lo sguardo rivolto a queste zone e alle persone che risiedono in queste aree 'cuscinetto'?



Fig. 2. #G20@on today's agenda.com, 2019. Acrylic on Canvas.

Per il termine di 'zona grigia' mi rifaccio a Primo Levi, in riferimento alla sua esperienza della deportazione e del campo di concentramento. 'Zona grigia' per Levi era il rapporto tra la burocrazia e la vittima. Per me la zona grigia è il rapporto che il mondo instaura con tutti coloro che si ritrovano in queste spazialità 'tra'. Quale sguardo rivolgiamo a queste zone? Come percepiamo le persone che vi si trovano? Come giudichiamo le azioni che compiono? E quelle che noi operiamo nei loro confronti, come le percepiamo, come le giudichiamo?

Ecco allora la cartografia... Attraverso la cartografia cerco di dare forma ai fenomeni del mondo contemporaneo, attraverso la mappa cerco di rendere manifesto tutto ciò che il mondo sta vivendo oggi... perché tutto quello che il mondo sta vivendo oggi, gli eventi – che sia negli Stati Uniti, in Nigeria, in Congo o in Camerun – si svolgono in spazi ben precisi. Allora, la questione è: in che modo questi spazi testimoniano gli eventi? Come ne sono segnati? Come possono farsi rappresentazione di ciò che l'essere umano sta vivendo in quel preciso momento? È questo, quello che cerco di fare con il mio lavoro: rendere lo spazio un luogo di rivendicazione, un luogo di protesta.

Allo stesso tempo, quello che cerco di fare con il mio lavoro è dare un valore aggiunto all'individuo. Non rappresento soggetti annientati, soggetti violentati. Conferisco invece alle attitudini e alle posizioni dei soggetti ritratti la consistenza di un'esistenza, la forza che è loro

propria, nonostante tutto ciò che possono vivere in quegli spazi.

C'è un aspetto politico nell'uso della cartografia nel mio lavoro che fa riferimento alla nozione di geografia. Jean-Christophe Victor diceva che per capire il mondo di oggi è necessario basarsi sulle cartografie. E nel mio lavoro mi interesso ai rapporti tra il Nord e il Sud, sia a livello economico che livello politico... in tutti gli ambiti. Mi sto concentrando molto sulle materie prime: qual è il rapporto tra Nord e Sud oggi sulla questione delle materie prime? Quale l'impatto prodotto oggi sui paesi estrattori di queste materie prime, sulle politiche economiche che intercorrono tra i paesi del Nord e i paesi del Sud, sulle disuguaglianze prodotte? Tutto questo avviene in spazi che trovano rappresentazione nella cartografia.

FES: Grazie di averci dato questa visione d'insieme. In effetti quando dici che non lavori sulla migrazione ma sulla violenza, subito si impongono le tue serie sui lavoratori, dove la violenza scaturisce dai rapporti asimmetrici, dalla sperequazione della ricchezza.

La componente visiva di queste opere è talmente forte che l'immagine della migrazione, di coloro che partono dal proprio paese, resta in effetti impressa. E tuttavia ciò che ci hai detto dona uno spettro di articolazione più ampio, che ricomponete le fasi e le opere all'interno di un processo unitario di ricerca artistica. Per tornare sulle tue ultime parole, davvero il modo in cui dai forma alla figura umana e in particolare ai corpi sottrae gli individui, benché le condizioni parlino di fatica e sofferenza all'assoggettamento... i corpi nelle tue opere non sono mai assoggettati... penso, per esempio, alla serie sui lavoratori e le lavoratrici.

Ci piacerebbe che ti soffermarsi sul trattamento dei piani, il rapporto tra avan-piano e sfondo, su cui ti sei soffermato anche in altre interviste, sulla scelta di disporre il volto, o le mappe, nell'uno o nell'altro. A essere chiamate in causa sono anche spazialità diverse: geografiche, materiali, ma anche quelle immaginate, per esempio.

NKOT: Nelle mie opere i piani e gli spazi fanno riferimento a una pluralità di entità che si contendono e si scontrano. Ci sono gli spazi esistenti che tutti conoscono. Ma esistono anche gli spazi immaginati. Nel caso della dislocazione affrontata dai migranti, questi sono gli spazi sconfinati delle speranze e dei progetti che alloggiano nella mente dei migranti. E dunque abbiamo gli spazi fisici, che per me sono generalmente i luoghi di partenza: quali sono le condizioni che inducono una persona a partire, a cambiare luogo di vita, a spostarsi?

Poi ci sono gli spazi mentali, quelli che l'individuo vive, e questi sono materializzati nelle emozioni, nelle espressioni che do ai miei soggetti. Che cosa vi accade? Come si configura tutto questo nelle loro teste? A che cosa pensano? Che cosa immaginano vi sia altrove? Sono le domande che pongo. E quando discuto con queste persone, mi accorgo che vedono tutto 'in rosa', tutto è bello e meraviglioso. E per me è importante, nella rappresentazione dei miei soggetti, preservare questa bellezza immaginata.

E poi c'è la cartografia fisica, diciamo quella esterna, che loro sublimano. Che può essere la cartografia degli spazi esistenti o dove io ricreo gli spazi in relazione a quello che i

soggetti immaginano, ai loro desideri e progetti. La persona può dirmi che ha bisogno di andare in Spagna ma che poi desidera andare negli Stati Uniti... allora compongo la cartografia modellandola sul suo immaginario. Di qui l'esigenza di creare spazialità nuove, che non sono necessariamente spazi esistenti ma che io faccio esistere a partire da quello che l'individuo immagina per sé.



Fig. 3. *Between Living and surviving*, 2020. Acrylic & Posca on canvas.¹

FES: Ci sono modi diversi di trattare la figura umana: a figura intera, dove veramente si esprime la forza del soggetto, che si impone, malgrado le circostanze, la fatica, rispetto allo spazio, e poi ci sono questi volti che diventano un po' astratti.

NKOT: Sì, e perché tutto ciò? Perché in effetti ci sono due modi di approccio: astratto e realistico. L'astratto corrisponde alla cancellazione dell'identità nella zona grigia. A forza di rimanere nella zona grigia, ci lasciamo fagocitare dallo spazio, non sappiamo più che cosa è stato di noi, perché non abbiamo più identità, non possiamo contare sui punti di riferimento del luogo da cui proveniamo; diventiamo fluttuanti, come un albero senza radici. Allora, im-

provvisamente, siamo catturati nella morsa dello spazio in cui ci troviamo, nello spazio di 'accoglienza'. L'individuo inghiottito dentro il processo di dislocazione subisce una cancellazione progressiva e viene catturato da uno spazio che gli impone un modo di guardare, gli impone uno stile di vita; all'improvviso non possiamo più vivere come eravamo abituati a vivere prima, perché dobbiamo integrarci nei nuovi spazi. Si accetta di snaturare la propria identità ed esistenza per poter esistere in uno spazio che non è il proprio.

E, ancora, come ricostruisce questo individuo lo spazio in rapporto sia alle realtà sia alla propria esistenza? Se vengo dal Camerun, non appena arrivo in Francia, per ritrovarmi nella mia identità in Francia, ho bisogno di elementi che mi ricordino di dove sono, da dove vengo... così all'improvviso mi ritrovo a fabbricare uno spazio altro in un altro modo.

Quando arriviamo per esempio a Barbès o Château rouge – prendo l'esempio di un paese che conosco, la Francia – abbiamo l'impressione di essere in Africa perché lo spazio in cui gli Africani si sono ritrovati è stato rimodellato un po' all'africana.

Allora, come posso io ri-creare, dare forma, a spazi come questi di cui stiamo parlando? Come ricreare spazi, come quello dei campi profughi, che non sono repertoriati nella cartografia ufficiale? Come ricreare le cartografie immaginarie a partire da là?

FES: Ci viene in mente il titolo di una tua serie *L'ombre de l'espace (The Shadow of Space)*, che ci riconduce ancora all'attenzione che tu rivolgi a determinate spazialità: dallo spazio come 'zona grigia', allo spazio immaginato fino all'ombra dello spazio... Normalmente pensiamo agli spazi nella loro materialità...

Ci chiediamo se il tuo percorso artistico, che ha toccato anche la tecnica del collage, se ricordiamo bene, ha in qualche modo orientato e promosso questa concezione di piani spaziali sovrapposti.

NKOT: In effetti ho praticato il collage, con fogli di giornale sovrapposti... all'epoca lavoravo sull'informazione, su come ai nostri giorni l'informazione si è tramutata in un sistema di alienazione, su come analizziamo le informazioni che riceviamo. Della fase del collage ho ripreso essenzialmente la tecnica del collage di informazioni, a partire dal giornale come strumento di trasmissione delle informazioni.

L'accesso stesso alle informazioni diventa un'arma fatale nel contesto attuale. Quando si passa una giornata intera davanti alla TV, oppure ascoltiamo la radio, c'è una quantità enorme di informazioni che ci arriva. Allora... la domanda è: in quanto individui, come le analizziamo?

Ci ritroviamo dunque al punto in cui, entro questo dispositivo che vede le informazioni recepite sulla scorta dell'emozione, dal momento che non abbiamo il tempo di una distanziamento critica, non abbiamo il tempo di una sedimentazione per elaborare meglio le informazioni che riceviamo... Allora per me si trattava di fare breccia su questo sistema dell'informazione e far sì che le persone si interrogassero sulle informazioni che ricevevano. Come pote-

vano le mie opere provocare in chi le stava guardando uno shock tale da mettere in questione l'apparato?



Fig. 4. *The Shadows of Space #1*. Ink, acrylic and silkscreen printing on canvas.ⁱⁱ

FES: E dunque in questa prospettiva la tecnica del collage ti permetteva di mettere in 'forma' l'enormità massiva delle informazioni ma forse anche di portare l'attenzione sul procedimento, si potrebbe dire, del montaggio delle informazioni restituito dall'incollare una informazione a un'altra.

NKOT: Certamente... qual è il rapporto tra due informazioni diametralmente opposte? Talvolta un'informazione è capace di sviarci, magari pensiamo che sia un'informazione valida e invece è un'informazione che ci porta fuori strada, ci depista. Pensiamo al sistema delle *fake news*, per esempio, o al fatto di trovarci a domandarci se un'informazione è o meno attendibile. Oggi bisogna sempre rapportarsi con molta prudenza, mettere una certa distanza perché non sappiamo mai a cosa miri un'informazione, dove vada a parare.

FES: E c'è qualcosa della tecnica del collage anche nel lavoro sulla disposizione dei piani

delle tue opere più recenti?

NKOT: La sola cosa che ho conservato della tecnica del collage è l'idea del francobollo. Prima pensavo alle mie opere come a un francobollo gigante, come si diceva prima. Oggi considero piuttosto le mie tele come delle buste da lettera nelle quali deposito le mie informazioni. E perché queste buste possano circolare, io ci appongo un vero francobollo, che compro in posta e che incollo in un angolo. Se guardate le mie tele troverete uno, due francobolli incollati, tipo *priority* o altro. Ecco, questa direi è la sola eredità del collage: il francobollo.

FES: Le tue opere colpiscono, oltre che per la composizione, anche per l'uso e la qualità del colore.

NKOT: I colori hanno evidentemente una funzione espressiva. Ho abbandonato i colori brillanti; nell'attuale gamma uso colori molto riposanti, dei pastelli. Perché? La gamma precedente accoglieva tutta la violenza, tutta la cacofonia, tutto il disordine del mondo: questo mondo che ribolle, che vibra, che si muove e che si impenna e ridiscende. Tutto questo ritornava nelle vibrazioni dei colori.

Attualmente uso tinte più rilassanti, come a invitare il mondo a un tempo di riposo, un momento di riflessione. Perché, quando si è nella gamma dei colori grigio o pastello chiari, si è in un panorama cromatico che invita alla meditazione. Per me oggi è un po' questo... trovare il modo di invitare le persone a fermarsi, a farsi domande su quanto sta accadendo... questo è ciò che vorrei che il colore trasmettesse davvero nel mio lavoro.

FES: Grazie di queste considerazioni, perché in effetti il colore è una componente davvero incisiva nelle tue opere. Vorremmo adesso soffermarci sulla serie *L'histoire de pieds* (*The Feet Story*), anche in relazione all'immagine che ci hai permesso di utilizzare per la copertina di questo numero e di cui ti ringraziamo davvero.

NKOT: Si tratta di un progetto che parla del rapporto esistente tra il piede e gli spazi perché, quando camminiamo, siamo soliti pensare che stiamo lasciando le impronte sulla terra o sugli spazi. Non ci rendiamo invece conto della quantità di informazioni che lo spazio ci trasmette attraverso la pianta dei nostri piedi a terra, attraverso le scarpe e le relazioni che intessiamo con quegli stessi spazi. Così gli spazi diventano scrigni di storie. Nel caso di *The Feet Story* raccontano storie degli spostamenti del mondo di oggi; di come le persone si spostano e quali sono le loro vite, le loro storie, le frustrazioni e gli incontri di tutti coloro che si spostano ai nostri giorni. E di come questo si possa raccontare attraverso i piedi.

Sapete, avendo come artista lavorato lungamente con il ritratto, ero convinto che, nel ritratto, il volto fosse il luogo per eccellenza deputato a rappresentare le emozioni proprie dell'essere umano, di ciò che noi siamo. Con il tempo ho capito che il volto è solo l'esito di ciò che il nostro corpo subisce, l'espressione della sofferenza del corpo.



Fig. 5. *The feet story@gmail.com*, 2019. Indian ink, acrylic and posca on canvas.ⁱⁱⁱ

Allora ho cominciato a pensare al piede, che sostiene l'intera struttura del nostro corpo... e così ho realizzato come il piede ne porti la frustrazione, il dolore e la sofferenza. Quando il piede non funziona più bene, quando abbiamo i piedi doloranti, abbiamo l'impressione che tutta la nostra vita si fermi lì, abbiamo l'impressione di una grande impotenza... Malgrado ciò, il piede non è valorizzato, è considerato una, fra altre, componenti del nostro corpo. Allora ho deciso di concentrare il mio sguardo sul piede, su come il piede possa raccontare gli spostamenti attuali e la violenza che subisce, per noi, oggi.

FES: Non so se sei d'accordo, ma oltre a quanto ci hai appena detto, ci sembra che, in *The Feet Story*, i piedi, oltre a ritrarre la sofferenza, emanino anche una grande forza, una dimensione di potenza correlata a questa parte del corpo. Come dire: "Tocco la terra, soffro ma allo stesso tempo, io, piede, sono l'asse che ti sostiene." Nei contesti di sofferenza, addirittura di esilio, c'è comunque questa forza che scaturisce dall'atto del piede di toccare la terra, come a dire: "ecco, io sono."

NKOT: Sì, assolutamente. Ritorniamo al rapporto che noi oggi abbiamo con la terra e con lo spazio, alla rilevanza di questo rapporto. Come possiamo il nostro piede al suolo? Qual è il

nostro modo di camminare? Di percepire lo spazio? Ogni tassello ci identifica, afferma ciò che siamo. Come dicevo, nella mia estetica parlare della violenza significa farlo con molta circospezione, attenzione. Ma anche rimanendo sempre nella bellezza. Ecco, è questa la sfida del mio lavoro: parlare di violenza ma preservando la grazia, e la bellezza.

FES: Le persone che compaiono nelle tue opere sono persone esposte alla violenza. E se volessimo nominarle altrimenti?

NKOT: È molto semplice: sono innanzitutto persone con cui ho un rapporto. Sono amici, componenti della famiglia, amici di amici o persone che incontro anche casualmente, ma con cui tesso dei legami. Grazie al mio lavoro riesco a entrare facilmente in contatto con le persone. Al contempo bisogna comprendere che, per la natura di quello che faccio, non è necessariamente la persona direttamente investita dalla violenza a venire rappresentata; la sua rappresentazione può passare attraverso un'altra persona.

Ho cominciato a utilizzare sistematicamente questo procedimento quando dovevo parlare di me stesso, nel 2016, quando ho fatto una mia personale intitolata *A fleur de peau* (*A fior di pelle*). Era un periodo difficile per me, di esteriorizzazione delle mie paure, dei miei timori. Non volendo 'mettermi in scena' nel mio lavoro, ho utilizzato la nozione di 'criptoritratto'.

Si tratta di un genere ritrattistico che invita a usare il corpo o il volto di un'altra persona per parlare di sé, parlare di sé stessi attraverso un altro. Come parlare di sé attraverso un altro? Dipende molto dalla persona di cui si sta parlando. Se parlo di me stesso a sei anni posso fare ricorso al corpo di un bambino di sei anni. Dunque, dovendo parlare di lavoratori o migranti, possono essere altri lavoratori o migranti, colti nell'atto di lavorare come possono essere altre persone che accettano di posare per me per rappresentare il lavoratore... perché, giustamente, non tutti vogliono farsi riprendere o fotografare.

Ma quando incontri una persona con una storia davvero potente, come rappresentare questo soggetto ricorrendo a un'altra persona? Come restituire tutta la forza dell'emozione che ha contrassegnato il momento dell'incontro, della conversazione con la 'vera' persona?

FES: Queste tue riflessioni ci portano alla questione della violenza dello sguardo, di come la rappresentazione può essere essa stessa una forma di violenza. Il 'come' che tu evidenzi, l'interrogarsi sul 'come', è fondamentale: 'come' operare per rispettare, e al tempo stesso additare e denunciare violenze senza 'sfigurare' i soggetti? C'è qualche altro riferimento che vorresti indicare per parlarci della tua ricerca artistica?

NKOT: Si passa attraverso molte letture, letture appassionanti, che suscitano il mio interesse... Per esempio l'opera del brasiliano Salgado, il lavoro incredibile che ha fatto sulla 'mano' dell'uomo. Ci parla del rapporto degli esseri umani con il lavoro, di lavori scomparsi con il passaggio alla fase industriale. La riflessione passa attraverso i libri – come nel caso di

Primo Levi, di cui abbiamo parlato – ma anche attraverso le discussioni con miei colleghi o i componenti della famiglia... momenti intensi che concorrono a sostanziare il mio lavoro, a permetterne l'esistenza stessa. Perché ho enormemente bisogno di queste emozioni e dei confronti, degli scambi, per dare vita ai personaggi che ritraggo. Per me, infatti, il ritratto non è solo una questione di tecnica o di saper dipingere 'bene' un personaggio. Bensì, qual è la sua dimensione emozionale? Come 'traspira'? Come rappresentare la sua 'traspirazione' senza materializzarla fisicamente nella mia pittura?

Servono molti scambi, collaborazioni anche discussioni... A volte sono i momenti che passo a bere una birra o a guardare la gente giocare al pallone, mangiare, ascoltarli discutere... sono tutti momenti come questi che danno forma al mio lavoro. Ciascun istante che posso trascorrere con una persona, o con più persone, si riversa nella creazione e nel dare forma al mio lavoro.

FES: Grazie davvero, Jean-David, per quello che ci hai detto, di come nel tuo lavoro ci sia davvero 'la vita': leggere un libro, magari di un grande autore/autrice, ma anche guardare la gente 'vivere la loro vita'. E questo ci porta al Covid... impossibile sfuggire al riferimento.

Dove siamo noi, Padova, in questo momento la fase del contagio è molto preoccupante; ci viene chiesto di stare in casa, di uscire solo se necessario. Passiamo le giornate davanti allo schermo del computer: una finestra che certo ci permette, per esempio, di parlare con te...

NKOT: Per me è un momento importante per il pianeta; un'occasione per gli esseri umani di cambiare il loro modo di porsi in relazione con il mondo. Il modo attuale, in cui ciascuno ritiene di essere onnipotente nel proprio spazio d'azione. Rispetto al Covid, io non lo percepisco unicamente come malattia, come qualcosa di negativo. Mi dicevo che si apriva una fase in cui ciascuno avrebbe dovuto essere portato a riflettere sul proprio modo di vedere le cose, a partire dai rapporti con il suo vicino di casa. Quando si è imposto il confinamento alcuni si sono ritrovati totalmente soli nelle loro case, senza compagnia, e senza che altri avessero la possibilità di andarli a trovare. Non potevi farci niente. E in momenti come questi, pensi a cosa ti fa sentire un essere umano.

Pensavo a come le persone potevano mettersi insieme, lottare contro qualcosa che distrugge il pianeta, e che, dopo l'esperienza del confinamento, avremmo potuto cambiare la nostra mentalità nel rapporto con il pianeta. Ecco, queste erano le mie riflessioni durante il confinamento... Come ci si guarderà? Continueremo con un sistema di frontiere in un momento in cui la malattia ci ha dimostrato che le frontiere non esistono. Puoi esser dall'altro capo del mondo e comunque essere raggiunto da un virus che si trasmette semplicemente salutandosi.

Dunque per me il ripensamento dell'umano era il faro della mia riflessione: come concepire l'umano? Come concepirsi come individui? Alla fine del confinamento ho allacciato

dei rapporti stretti con il mio vicino con cui prima non scambiavo neanche il saluto. Ecco... era un po' questo il centro delle mie riflessioni.

E poi è intervenuto un momento estremamente violento perché mi sono reso conto che non si è colta l'urgenza di mettersi in questione, che si è continuato nel meccanismo del profitto personale e che si è sfruttata la malattia per avere un rendiconto personale, per specularci, per contese politiche individuali, per mettere in discussione diritti acquisiti. Non poche strutture sono state messe in discussione per effetto di questa malattia e mi chiedo davvero verso quale direzione stiamo andando... se riusciremo a far fronte comune per trovare una soluzione. Se continueremo invece ad avanzare a ranghi distinti, certamente non usciremo da questa malattia.

FES: Credi che tutte queste riflessioni, che hai condiviso con noi, confluiranno nella tua prossima attività, nel tuo lavoro? O magari sono già confluite in quello su cui stai attualmente lavorando?

NKOT: Entrerà un domani ma, per il momento, intendo prendermi del tempo perché non è proprio del mio approccio lavorare su un soggetto finché è di attualità. Nel senso che occuparsi di un'urgenza non significa farlo quando è ancora calda e tutti fanno a gara per trattarla. Certo, emoziona, perché le persone lo stanno vivendo. La mia prospettiva è invece di chiedermi come le persone reagiranno rispetto a questa questione tra due, tre, quattro, cinque anni... è questo che trovo interessante: come le persone percepiranno tutto ciò. Adesso prendo delle note per non disperdere le riflessioni fatte sul momento e che, chissà, potranno confluire in una qualche opera. Ma, nel presente, riservo i miei pensieri alle persone con cui discuto.

FES: E puoi dirci qualcosa sul tuo lavoro attuale, o preferisci aspettare?

NKOT: Al momento, come dicevo, mi sto concentrando sulle mobilità economiche. Un mio riferimento è l'artista newyorkese Mark Lombardi. Lombardi ha fatto studi di storia dell'arte e, al contempo, il giornalista. In questa veste ha fatto tutto un lavoro di investigazione economica, come quello sulla 'macchina' economica di New York. I suoi diagrammi, le sue cartografie sono state una fonte di ispirazione per me, mi hanno permesso di parlare della mobilità nell'economia, della circolazione delle materie prime dal punto di estrazione fino al loro consumo finale; di come oggi la coscienza ecologica sia aggredita dal capitalismo, e dal profitto delle grandi imprese... è di questo che mi sto occupando adesso... e, in particolare, delle ricchezze, a partire dalle ricchezze del sottosuolo dell'Africa. Ricchezze possedute dagli Africani senza che essi abbiano realmente consapevolezza di tale ricchezza. E di come altri approfittino di questa ricchezza. Ecco, attualmente continuo a lavorare sulla questione delle mobilità, ma sotto l'aspetto dell'economia... vedremo. Non appena prenderà forma, vi lancio un segnale!

FES: E noi aspettiamo il tuo segnale. Grazie, Jean-David!

Note

ⁱ La serie è visionabile sul sito della Jack Bell Gallery: <https://www.jackbellgallery.com/artists/76-jean-david-nkot/works/>.

ⁱⁱ La serie è visionabile al sito di Afikaris: <https://afikaris.com/search?q=shadows%20of%20space>.

ⁱⁱⁱ La serie è visionabile al sito di Afikaris: <https://afikaris.com/search?q=feet%20story>, <https://www.jackbellgallery.com/exhibitions/98/works/artworks-7876-jean-david-nkot-the-feet-story-.com-2019/>.

Jean-David Nkot was born in Douala (Cameroon) where he lives and works. After the painting A-level at the Institute of Artistic Training of Mbalmayo (IFA), he joined the Institute of Fine Arts Foumban, where he obtained a degree in drawing/painting. Throughout his training in Foumban he was awarded several artistic distinctions as sculptor, installer and painter. In 2017 he attended the Post Master *Moving Frontiers* organized by the National School of Arts of Paris-Cergy (France) on the theme of borders, a decisive experience for his subsequent artistic researches. Bodies and territories shape his artistic approach that is centered on the theme of violence, at the base of his interest in migratory dynamics. His works have been selected and exhibited in many national and international institutions. Among the recent ones: (solo exhibitions) *Voyages en Léthargie*, Jack Bell Gallery, London, UK (2019); *Cartographies Mentales*, Jack Bell Gallery, London, UK (2018); *A fleur de peau*, Doual'art, Cameroun (2016); (group exhibitions) *Métaphore du Big Bang*, Afikaris, AKAAs Paris, France; *Métaphore du Big Bang*, Galerie Carole Kvasnevski, Paris, France; *Urban attitude*, RAVY, RAVY (Rencontre d'Art Visuel de Yaoundé) Biennale, Yaoundé, Cameroon (2018), *Mémoire libérée*, Musée National du Cameroun, Yaoundé, Cameroon; *Behind the Portal*, Bandjoun Station, Cameroon; *Our wishes*, Léopold Museum, Wien, Austria (2017); *Congo/Cameroun : esthétique en partage au-delà des géographies*, Biennale de Dakar, Sénégal (2016); Cape Town Art Fair, South Africa (2015).

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Farah Polato is a lecturer at the Department of Cultural Heritage, Archaeology and History of Art, Cinema and Music of the University of Padua, where she teaches Filmology. She is interested in narratives, memories and identities in the context of postcolonial migrations. Since 2013, she has been part of the *postcolonialitalia* project, a platform for research on postcolonial studies in Italy. Her recent research focuses on landscape, cultural heritage and citizenship in contemporary Italian cinema. Her most recent publications on the subject include: "Paesaggi con figure. Spazialità in divenire negli altrove quotidiani," *CoSMo. Comparative Studies in Modernism* 17 (2020); *Narrazioni postcoloniali della contemporaneità, tra conflitto e convivenza*, edited by Farah Polato and Leonardo De Franceschi, *Imago* 19 (2019); "Fantasmi d'altrove, o dell'ospitalità: Scappa - Get Out di Peele," *Fata Morgana* 6 (2019); and "Where are my houses?" *Cinema & Cie* 28 (2017).

A partire da *L'attesa*: conversazione con Dagmawi Yimer

Dagmawi Yimer

Regista

Farah Polato

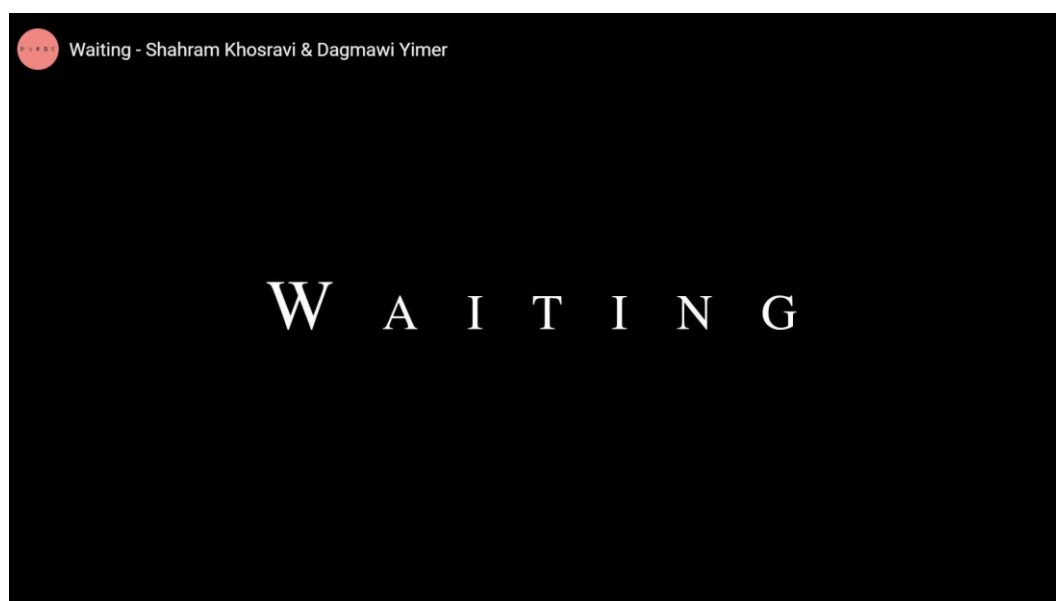
Università di Padova

ABSTRACT

Starting from *L'attesa (Waiting)* a conversation with Dagmawi Yimer. The recent work by Dagmawi Yimer, *Waiting*, realized with Shahram Khosravi in the context of the international research project *Wait* based at Bergen Universty, is the starting point of a conversation that questions the notion of time as a map. In particular, the interview explores 'time in between' as a relevant space that allows one to build up a personal map through which the subject repositions herself/himself in a new context. In so doing, 'time in between' is related to the act of appropriating language: the language of cinema but also, in a broader sense, the multiple languages that enable the subject to enter and constantly reshape a relationship with the world.

Keywords

time, waiting, migrations, language



Video disponibile agli indirizzi <https://youtu.be/JGrLtZYsXsU> (in italiano) e <https://youtu.be/ROYJsgqqFWA> (in inglese).

La conversazione con Dagmawi Yimer prende avvio da uno dei suoi ultimi lavori, *Waiting – L'attesa* (2020), realizzato con Shahram Khosravi, che avevo avuto modo di visionare prima

della sua messa in circolazione, in una fase di confronto allargato sul film sollecitato dal medesimo Yimer.

La modalità collaborativa e partecipativa, tratto caratterizzante l'operare e lo sguardo di Yimer, trova qui un'ulteriore conferma. Il film *L'attesa* è stato infatti ideato all'interno del progetto internazionale *WAIT* dell'Università di Bergen, volto a indagare funzioni, trasformazioni, assetti delle temporalità nei fenomeni migratori del presente, ed è pubblicato nel numero *Migration* di PARSE (Khosravi e Yimer 2020), piattaforma editoriale dedita alla promozione ed esplorazione delle dinamiche di interazione tra prassi di analisi e di creazione, tra produzione di senso (*meaning-making*) e approcci analitici alle produzioni.

In questa cornice ha luogo l'incontro tra Yimer e Shahram Khosravi, docente di antropologia sociale alla Stockholm University. Le linee di ricerca di Khosravi investono i contesti geografici-culturali dell'Iran e del Medio Oriente, i fenomeni migratori, le mobilità forzate e i *Border Studies*, i quali sono anche alla base dei suoi interventi sulla stampa internazionale in un dialogo costante tra attività accademica e condivisione in contesti allargati. L'attenzione congiunta alle condizioni materiali e alle strategie individualmente messe in atto per farvi fronte caratterizza lavori quali *After Deportation: Ethnographic Perspectives* (Khosravi 2017), e contestuali e precedenti opere come *Precarious Lives: Waiting and Hope in Iran* (Khosravi 2017) e *The Illegal Traveler: An Auto-ethnography of Borders* (Khosravi 2010).

Vi si delinea la centralità di forme ed esperienze del tempo che configurano vissuti, situazioni e azioni stratificati e plurivoci; tra questi, il regime di attesa convocato da *WAIT* quale specifica condizione prolungata, sospesa, caratterizzata dall'instabilità e dall'incertezza propria dei contesti di migrazione, irregolare e non; imposta ai soggetti migranti, è passibile di convertirsi in uno spazio di esperienza, incorporazione, reazione ed elaborazione di forme di resistenza contro i regimi condizionali. In questa direttrice, *WAIT* si propone di articolare nuovi strumenti concettuali operanti nell'interazione tra istanze temporali e inclinazione *spatial-centred*. Manifesta in termini ricorsivi quali de-territorializzazione, dislocazione, spiazamento, la centralità dello spazio si correla, su un piano visivo, alla rappresentazione dei sistemi detentivi connessi alla gestione delle mobilità dove le figure della perimetrazione e della chiusura risultano percettivamente più immediate. In un certo senso, si potrebbe affermare che *WAIT* predisponga una ri-mappatura dei 'luoghi' individuati dagli studi e dal dibattito sulle mobilità migratorie attraverso la lente temporale per sondarne (nell'accezione della chimica) le reazioni combinatorie.

Padova-Verona, 11 novembre 2020



Fig. 1. Dagmawi Yimer. Verona, 11 novembre 2020.

Farah Polato: Buongiorno Dagmawi e ben ritrovato. Nell'avviare questa conversazione 'a partire da *L'attesa*', mi chiedo se il film non configuri una sorta di approdo che mette a fuoco una linea che ha sempre percorso la tua produzione audiovisiva, attraversabile per l'appunto anche come interrogazione di costrutti temporali: dalla prospettiva storica nel rapporto tra l'Italia e le ex colonie approdante alla cronaca del presente in *Come un uomo sulla terra* (2008), al *nostos* di *Soltanto il mare* (2011) che, a partire dal ritorno a un luogo fisico – a Lampedusa – mette in atto un'azione di riappropriazione rispetto alla de-soggettivazione e all'espropriazione relazionale provocata dai protocolli di gestione delle cosiddette emergenze migratorie. Così, la visione proposta in anteprima del tuo lavoro è stata anche un po' una conferma di una linea interpretativa espressa già in occasione della presentazione di *Va' pensiero. Storie ambulanti* (2013) a Padova (corso di Filmologia, 10 gennaio 2014; al Simposio InterRGRace, *Visualità e anti-razzismo*, 22 gennaio 2016) nell'assegnare al trattamento del tempo una funzione di perno strutturale: il tempo del trauma come un tempo che non trascorre, che 'sta', che ti congela in una situazione...

Ecco, allora ti proporrei di partire, se vuoi, da come è iniziata questa collaborazione con il progetto *WAIT* per poi magari ripercorrere, in una sorta di 'mappatura', le declinazioni, categorie, figure del tempo nei tuoi lavori.

Dagmawi Yimer: Per partire da uno dei punti menzionati, il tempo stesso sviluppato nella narrazione ha una sua investitura temporale, quella dell'elaborazione che la sottende... perché tu riesci a predisporre 'la narrazione' una volta che hai elaborato e 'lavorato' quanto hai vissuto nel passato, e dopo che hai acquisito – il che richiede tempo – gli strumenti che ti permettono di prendere in mano la situazione, di darle forma, di 'dirigerla', come si direbbe al cinema. La narrazione ti si svela piano piano, col tempo, per l'appunto. Vale a dire che è il tempo il fattore che ti rende in grado di narrare. In *Soltanto il mare* il ritorno è reso possibile dal tempo interposto tra il primo arrivo, quando sono sbarcato, e il secondo arrivo, che è il mio ritorno per filmare.

Il momento del ritorno sull'isola è dunque secrezione del tempo dell'elaborazione, scaturisce dal tempo che si distende tra i due eventi. Nel 'fra-tempo' si colloca *Il deserto e il mare* (2007), incentrato sulle esperienze, tra vita passata e presente, di alcuni richiedenti

asilo etiopi e sudanesi a Roma e in Sicilia e realizzato in forma partecipativa, con Sintayehu Eshetu, Solomon Moges, Menghistu Andechal, Adam Awad in un laboratorio di autoformazione audiovisiva avviato all'interno della Scuola di Asinitas e coordinato da ZaLab.

Sono poi venuti *Come un uomo sulla Terra* (2008), che ripercorreva le tratte migratorie dal corno d'Africa verso l'Europa attraverso l'inferno della detenzione libica, la coordinazione e regia di *C.A.R.A Italia* (2009), un'altra opera collettiva sui vissuti dei cosiddetti centri di accoglienza per richiedenti asilo, e infine *Soltanto il mare* (2011), che è il ritorno materiale all'isola di Lampedusa. Mentre le altre narrazioni sono geograficamente limitate a Roma, o comunque esenti da grandi spostamenti materiali, *Soltanto il mare* è un ritorno materiale, come dite, no? È ri-vedere uno spazio che hai osservato, guardato da un altro punto di vista...

Nel frattempo c'è stata l'acquisizione del linguaggio, l'aver imparato il linguaggio, inteso come mezzo di narrazione – il cinema o la 'forma' documentario – e contestualmente anche l'acquisizione di un permesso di soggiorno. L'attesa è dunque tutto questo: cioè non concerne solo 'il permesso' a soggiornare, il rilascio di un documento, ma è anche il fare proprio un mezzo linguistico. Il che ci riporta verso il progetto *WAIT* e verso *L'attesa*, dal momento che uno dei suoi assi prioritari riguarda esattamente i processi di *agency, empowerment*.

FP: Possiamo dire che se intendiamo la mappa anche come un dispositivo di orientamento, di appropriazione, il tempo serve a ché questo dispositivo possa, nel tempo, dispiegarsi, stabilire dei punti di orientamento? E che quando questa mappa ha finalmente preso la sua forma, allora – solo allora – posso tornare e rimodellare gli spazi, convertire i luoghi in altri luoghi, come accaduto per Lampedusa, per attraversarli dotati di una mappa, una 'propria' mappa, però...?

DY: Sì, e talora questa dimensione temporale va parallelamente allo spostamento fisico, come accaduto un po' con *Il deserto e il mare* per me e miei amici, e poi per me individualmente nel ritorno di *Soltanto il mare*.

Per tornare all'*Attesa*, all'interno del progetto *WAIT* c'è stata questa iniziativa, organizzata dall'Università di Göteborg e da PARSE – Platform for Artistic Research Sweden alla quale sono stati invitati accademici e artisti da tutto il mondo, dall'Australia all'America Latina e così via... tantissime persone impegnate nell'arte ma anche nelle università e nella ricerca accademica. Il senso era di far scaturire una collaborazione tra artisti e accademici... questo era il punto cruciale.

Là mi sono trovato ad assistere all'intervento teorico di Shahram Khosravi, anzi alla sua 'lettura', che mi è piaciuta tantissimo. Tutti i contributi degli altri accademici erano molto forti, molto belli ma qui in gioco c'era anche l'interpretazione. Noi lavoriamo sulle immagini, quindi cerchiamo sempre anche la componente visiva, la componente della rappresentazione. Mi ha colpito la sua modalità di porgere il *paper*.

Allora subito gli ho fatto una proposta. Gli ho detto che avrei voluto averlo in un mio lavoro, fargli interpretare la sua ricerca accademica sull'attesa... gli ho chiesto cosa ne pensasse...

Si trattava di trovare un modo per fare uscire la conoscenza che è prodotta e circola dentro le università, di sbloccarla, di renderla disponibile anche a chi non può accedere all'università, di farne una conoscenza condivisa attraverso il mezzo dell'arte. Era una sfida... ero sicuro che non sarebbe stata facile perché portare una conferenza, una lezione in una sala cinematografica, farla proiettare può sembrare qualcosa di noioso... risulta difficile per chi vi assiste.

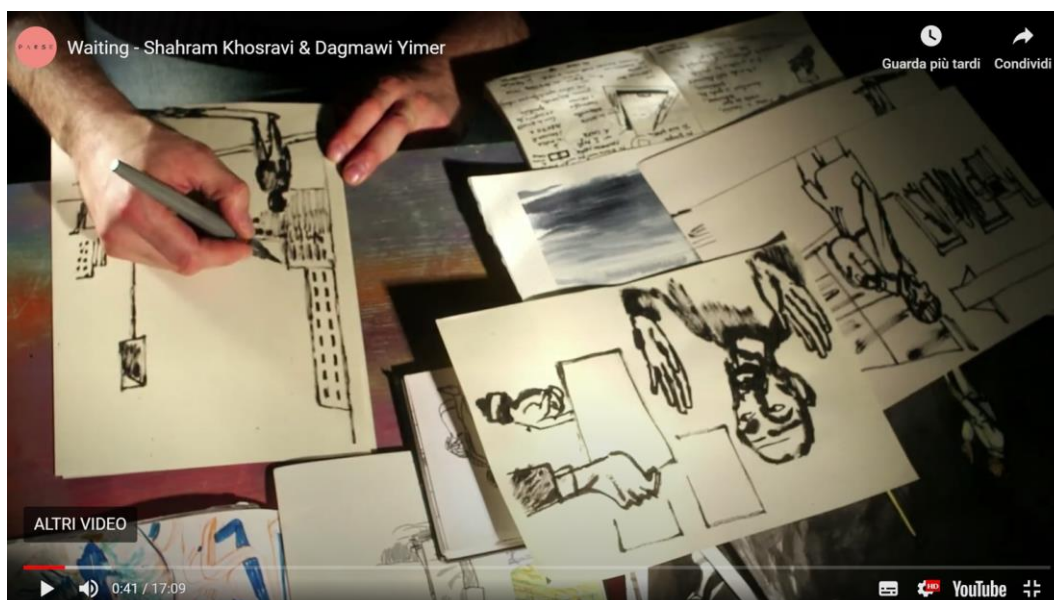


Fig. 2. I disegni di Marco Paci in *L'attesa* (S. Khosravi e D. Yimer, 2020).

E, in effetti, questo è l'unico progetto, tra quelli avviati tra artisti e accademici, a essere stato portato a compimento. Noi – io e lui – ci siamo riusciti, siamo stati gli unici a creare un materiale che fosse l'esito di una collaborazione multidisciplinare, dal momento che vi prendono parte anche i disegni di Marco Paci (fig. 2), che sono un'interpretazione dell'attesa dal punto di vista del disegno.

Geograficamente parlando – magari è banale ma mi pare valga la pena rilevarlo – ci troviamo con una persona, Shahram Khosravi, partito molto tempo addietro dal proprio paese, l'Iran, e divenuto svedese di nazionalità che è portatore di saperi che correlano luoghi lontani; e poi ci siamo io, a Verona, e Marco Pace a Bologna. Quindi è anche l'incontro a essere materializzato nel progetto. E poi c'è Salif Keita, insegnante, del Burkina Faso, immigrato in Italia, dove ha lavorato nell'agricoltura.

La parte riguardante Salif è costituita da riprese fatte anni prima, che non sono state girate specificatamente per questo progetto. Sono materiali rimasti in sospeso, appartenenti a un altro progetto riguardante la storia di Salif, che avrei voluto realizzare. In effetti spero un

giorno di poter comporre una trilogia, di aggiungere un terzo racconto... mi piacerebbe continuare perché con Salif siamo rimasti in contatto. Salif è un'ulteriore presenza, un'altra persona ancora... E poi ci sono i luoghi: *L'attesa* si ripartisce tra un luogo fisico, Saluzzo, dove Salif scrive la sua lettera (fig. 3), e poi il forte di San Braccio a Verona¹ dove troviamo invece Shahram (fig. 4).

Questo secondo luogo fisico, grazie al lavoro della fotografia e alla modulazione della luce sulla scenografia, diventa uno spazio simbolico che ci sollecita a vedere l'antropologo Shahram, intento a esporre le sue riflessioni ed elaborazioni, come se fosse il 'Guardiano' di tante storie nascoste (fig. 5).



Fig. 3. La lettera di Salif Keita in *L'attesa* (S. Khosravi e D. Yimer, 2020).



Fig. 4. Le note di Shahram Khosravi in *L'attesa* (S. Khosravi e D. Yimer, 2020).



Fig. 5. Sharam Khosravi in *L'attesa* (S. Khosravi e D. Yimer, 2020).

Era una sfida, ovviamente, però ero sicuro che la storia di Salif avrebbe apportato un suo specifico 'impulso.' Usando un'immagine derivata dalla meccanica, il 'corpo filmico' sarebbe dunque stato sottoposto e mosso da due spinte, due 'impulsi', nella reciproca interazione: quello del 'vissuto' e quello delle parole 'tecniche' di Shahram, del docente universitario; l'impulso' umano, quello di Salif, accanto alla densa elaborazione concettuale di Shahram, per quanto depurata dall'uso del vocabolario specialistico di impronta antropologica proprio dell'ambito di ricerca di Shahram. Tra questi due 'impulsi' c'è la disseminazione dei saperi.

FP: Sì, disseminazione, come dici, nel senso di far muovere – viaggiare – i saperi ma anche disseminazione nel senso trasformativo, del procedimento chiamato in causa quando si adotta un'altra forma espressiva rispetto a quella della prima formulazione e quando, dunque, interviene sempre anche uno sviluppo. Vale a dire, il tuo filmare non è solo a servizio della lezione sull'attesa, diventa anche una tua riflessione. E del resto, come dicevi tu stesso, il film è l'esito di un incontro e di una collaborazione. E infatti nel film si riconosce molto di te; in questo senso si avvera l'incontro... alla base c'è comunque una scelta. Tu hai scelto lui, tra altri. Al riguardo, ritorno per un attimo alle finalità del progetto *WAIT* per chiederti se l'obiettivo era più la produzione di opere condivise – dicevi che tu e Shahram siete stati gli unici portare a compimento un lavoro – oppure più l'attivazione di processi, di una reciproca contaminazione tra forme dell'espressione del pensiero dalla quale provocare, per così dire, 'scintille' che eventualmente, anche in seguito, potessero nutrire i rispettivi campi.

DY: La piattaforma mirava all'incontro, non c'era alcun obbligo. Gli studiosi hanno realizzato delle pubblicazioni. Invece non ci sono stati altri prodotti di collaborazione diretta artistico-academica.

FP: Anche se plausibilmente a loro volta gli artisti, oltre agli accademici, sono stati sollecitati nel loro lavoro... quindi contaminazioni da riversare nel proprio ambito, diciamo...

DY: Non so esattamente quanti artisti abbiano partecipato individualmente. La posizione geografica era un po' di ostacolo a questa collaborazione, ma non era impossibile... ci si può comunque provare. Io per esempio non avevo mai fatto un'esperienza di questo tipo e mi interessava capire come e se si potesse fare, se era fattibile.

Non sono partito con un progetto già definito. Come dicevo, non avevo inizialmente l'idea di utilizzare la storia di Salif, ma la storia di Salif è proprio il racconto dell'attesa. Si è rivelata nel processo: l'attesa di una lettera che deve 'tornare indietro', di una lettera, soprattutto, che non è ancora stata letta dal figlio.

Il figlio potrà farlo adesso, tramite il film; io l'ho contattato alla fine delle riprese. Ho fatto tradurre e sottotitolare in francese per mandargli il link, così si accorciano i tempi di consegna. Così la dinamica avviata continua, prende le sue strade: il piccolo diario tenuto da Salif diventa un video, che restituisce una parte di una situazione. Adesso Salif non lavora più lì, quindi il video ne è la memoria. Adesso Salif sta a Como, lavora in un magazzino in una ditta con un contratto regolare. Però è comunque la sua vita. Come dico sempre: si tratta di parentesi, segmenti, che vanno fotografati senza assolutizzarli. Quella non è 'la' fotografia della persona, ma fa comunque parte della sua vita. E per lui, Salif, è preziosa. È soddisfatto del film che ne è uscito.

FP: E con Shahram come avete lavorato?

DY: Ci siamo scambiati delle note, delle parti, prima di lavorare sull'interpretazione. Non essendo lui un attore era difficile che potesse prepararsi per conto suo. Io non ho voluto insistere al riguardo, gli ho detto semplicemente di leggere, di imparare delle parti a memoria.

Quando è venuto qua a Verona abbiamo girato in due giorni, con un po' di fatica perché c'era contestualmente un evento in corso che disturbava le riprese [risate], quindi dovevamo fare sempre in fretta per non essere colti dai rumori. Io ero da solo, senza neanche l'assistente per le luci, e quindi correvo avanti e indietro: accendevo e poi correvo a guardare le inquadrature... un'impresa, veramente... alla fine, io, tutto sommato, sono soddisfatto.

Ho fatto poi qualche piccolo intervento, ho aggiustato ad esempio l'audio rispetto a quello che avete visto voi, che era pessimo. Abbiamo lavorato molto sui dialoghi, asciugato... volevamo dieci minuti, ne sono usciti venti, quindi ho dovuto tagliare ulteriormente.

Io ho seguito un po' una traccia che comprendeva un insieme di elementi: la questione dei confini, i confini dell'attesa all'interno dei confini, la dimensione sospesa di questa esistenza, in cui non sai se il luogo fisico della tua vita sarà definitivamente 'qua' o se sarai cacciato via, fuori... il dilemma dell'immigrato. Ma anche l'attesa come parte di un processo e della strategia dei migranti per sopravvivere nel presente, come sostiene anche Shahram.

FP: Hai lavorato in maniera indipendente e poi hai fatto delle proposte o vi siete confrontati sin dall'inizio?

DY: Shahram non sapeva quello che gli stavo ‘cucinando’... neanche dove l’avrei messo a recitare... sapeva soltanto che ci sarebbero state delle foto o dei disegni... qualcosa del genere. Io stesso ho trovato l’architettura strada facendo, come per l’idea di riutilizzare il piccolo racconto di Salif. Messe insieme le parti gliel’ho mandate come bozza.

Non si è trovato a suo agio non essendo né attore... il racconto di Salif gli è piaciuto ma si sentiva a disagio all’idea di ‘essere piazzato lì’ a tenere la sua lezione. C’è anche la questione delle convenzioni accademiche... Shahram è stato coraggioso perché il mondo accademico è anche un campo minato e, ad esempio, le citazioni dovevano sparire perché non c’era spazio per esplicitare chi ha detto cosa. E tutto questo è stato, di fatto, deciso da me per i vincoli del tempo. L’unica citazione esplicita, fortemente voluta, è stata a Frantz Fanon all’inizio.

Io quando, come dicevo, l’avevo visto presentare il suo *paper*, molte citazioni non le conoscevo... ma ero attratto dalla dimensione visiva, dal suo impatto.

Bisogna misurarsi con le finalità del lavoro... E però, davvero, non è stato facile per lui: era molto preoccupato da questo punto di vista. Alcune parti, proprio per queste ragioni, sono state tolte. Shahram ha comunque accettato la sfida, di misurarsi con le esigenze del progetto. Mi aveva anche mandato delle foto che non ho messo, sempre a causa della priorità di asciugare il testo. Fatta la bozza con i tagli gliel’ho sottoposta e lui non ha avuto nessuna difficoltà ad accettarla.

Tutt’altra cosa per il titolo. Ne abbiamo provati tanti, davvero tanti. Io puntavo sempre alla massima sintesi; il titolo non doveva essere uno slogan ma cercare l’astrazione.

Una volta definito, ho fatto vedere il film ad altre persone, che hanno fatto le loro osservazioni. Io poi ho impegnato altri due giorni di ulteriore ‘asciugatura’, di montaggio; ho lavorato con Lizi Gelber, che ha sempre sostenuto e consigliato i miei lavori per quanto riguarda il montaggio. Lei ha proprio dato una fluidità al racconto.

FP: Mentre parlavi tornava in mente *Va’ pensiero* (fig. 6), che ho ricordato all’inizio. Anche in quel caso, peraltro, hai recuperato delle riprese fatte precedentemente... Ma, al di là di questo, in *Va’ pensiero* c’è, di nuovo, un lavoro molto forte sulla dimensione temporale, attraverso cui si elabora la questione della violenza e del trauma. E stranamente verrebbe da dire che, mentre *l’Attesa* si presenta come tempo sospeso, ma dove poi la costrizione è passibile di schiudersi a una strategia, invece in *Va’ pensiero* il passare del tempo in realtà dà forma a un tempo immobile, occlusivo...

DY: In parte sì, però ci sono delle situazioni, come ad esempio quella del matrimonio di Mohammed Bâ dopo l’aggressione, la decisione di avere dei figli, che si proiettano invece nell’uscita da quella occlusione, prospettano il tornare a vivere la propria vita, un’apertura alla speranza. Ovviamente poi c’è quello che dici...

FP: Nel film mi sembra coesistano nettamente due linee temporali: quella della vita con il de-

siderio di andare oltre e poi però questa gabbia temporale che invece inibisce continuamente e che si riverbera poi anche sul corpo: come la voce di Mohammed Bâ, performer, che non 'esce' più, la perdita del rapporto con il proprio corpo, come nelle sequenze della riabilitazione o, ancora, il continuo ritorno sull'aggressione, la persistenza delle immagini testimoniali che si trasformano in un'immagine che ti resta appiccicata addosso, cannibalizzandoti.

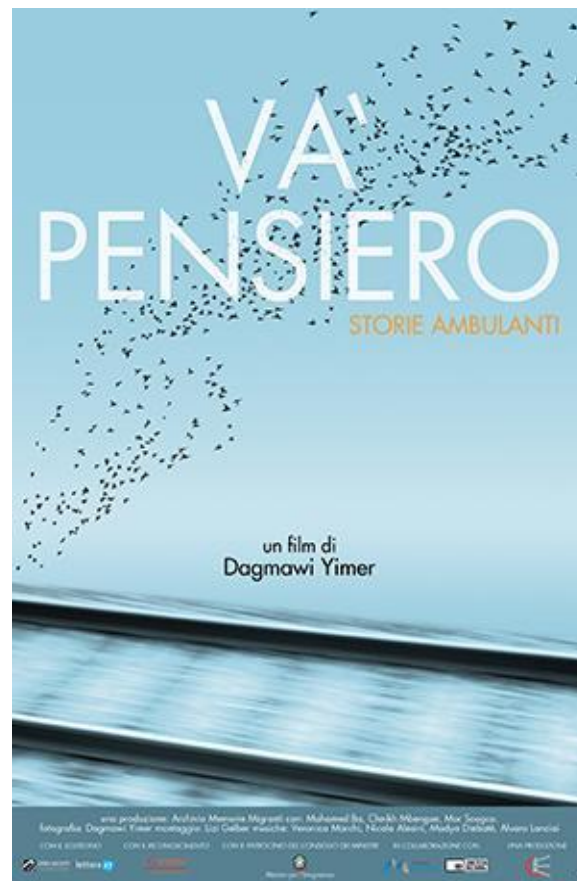


Fig. 6. Locandina di *Va' pensiero. Storie ambulanti* (D. Yimer, 2013).

DY: Sì, indubbiamente... e questo ci riporta al punto da cui abbiamo iniziato la conversazione. Ritroviamo qui la doppia linea: il trattamento del tempo nelle narrazioni e il tempo dell'elaborazione dei vissuti, e del linguaggio, non sono disgiunti. Ognuno disegna una mappa che risponde a sollecitazioni contestuali, che vale per quella fase, ma concorre anche alla successiva. La commutazione dell'attesa in una temporalità strategica si sostanzia di volta in volta, nel concreto, delle specifiche esperienze delle temporalità precedenti.

Nota

¹ Complesso architettonico di origine militare, edificato tra il 1883 e il 1888 ad opera del genio militare italiano sul colle da cui prende il nome, nel comune di Lavagno (Verona), in un'area abitata già in tempi remoti, come testimoniano i reperti archeologici ritrovati all'epoca della sua costruzione. Il forte faceva parte della linea difensiva nord Lessinia della città di Verona, che doveva presidiare la roccaforte scaligera dagli attacchi austriaci (Forte San Briccio 2021).

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Dagmawi Yimer was born and grew up in Addis Ababa. He left his country after the 2005 post-election unrest in which hundreds of young people were killed and put in jail. After a long journey across the Libyan desert and the Mediterranean, he came ashore on the island of Lampedusa on 30 July 2006. In 2007 he participated in a video-making workshop in Rome. This experience introduced him to the activity of filmmaking, which led him to realise his subsequent works, often in collaborative and participatory ways, as coordinator or co-director. Recently, he directed the short films *Asmat-Nomi (Asma-Names, 2015, <https://vimeo.com/114849871>)* and *Waiting-L'attesa (2020)*. Presently he conducts and collaborates on laboratories and workshops in various schools and universities in Italy and elsewhere. He is co-founder and vice president of *Archivio delle memorie migranti (Migrant memory archive)*.

Farah Polato is a Lecturer at the Department of Cultural Heritage, Archaeology and History of Art, Cinema and Music of the University of Padua, where she teaches Filmology. She is interested in narratives, memories and identities in the context of postcolonial migrations. Since 2013, she has been part of the *postcolonialitalia* project, a platform for research on postcolonial studies in Italy. Her recent research focuses on landscape, cultural heritage and citizenship in contemporary Italian cinema. Her most recent publications on the subject include: "Paesaggi con figure. Spazialità in divenire negli altrove quotidiani," *CoSMo: Comparative Studies in Modernism* 17 (2020); *Narrazioni postcoloniali della contemporaneità, tra conflitto e convivenza*, edited by Farah Polato and Leonardo De Franceschi, *Imago* 19 (2019); "Fantasmi d'altrove, o dell'ospitalità: *Scappa - Get Out di Peele*," *Fata Morgana* 6 (2019); and "Where are my houses?" *Cinema & Cie* 28 (2017).

Mapping and making visual stories

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Adriano Cancellieri and Giada Peterle, eds. *Quartieri: viaggio al centro delle periferie italiane*, Padova: BeccoGiallo 2019 (127 pages)

ABSTRACT

How can we make our studies socially relevant beyond the academic world? How can we map the results of qualitative studies, making them visible in a manner that is both creative and engaging? In this review essay, the author reads the comic book anthology *Quartieri. Viaggio al centro delle periferie italiane* edited by Adriano Cancellieri and Giada Peterle to reflect on the role of comics as a visual method for research in the social sciences. Indeed, the spatial visuality of comics has received substantial attention from comic book scholars and, more recently, from geographers and other social scientists. The maps drawn by *Quartieri* provide an example of how to mobilise comics to – literally – draw people into taking an interest in left-behind spaces, like the five peripheral neighbourhoods at the centre of this comic book anthology.

Keywords

comics, urban maps, neighbourhoods, social studies

How can social science research be made available to a broader audience? How can we make our studies socially relevant beyond the academic worlds we inhabit? How can we make the results of qualitative studies visible in a manner that is both creative and engaging? How can comics be mobilised to – literally – draw people into taking an interest in left-behind spaces?

Quartieri. Viaggio al centro delle periferie italiane (BeccoGiallo, 2019) provides a beautiful and effective answer through the successful interdisciplinary collaboration and dialogue between people working across and beyond academia, led and inspired by Adriano Cancellieri and Giada Peterle. It uses carefully crafted visual storytelling to showcase five stories and five neighbourhoods in five Italian cities: distinct, contained, and visually different worlds to discover, explore, and inhabit for a few minutes of blissful reading. I found myself completely drawn into each, feeling that I was discovering new places through people, and hearing the voices of people through the worlds they have crafted. By centering the marginal and marginalised, and providing room for their voices to emerge through the talent of those drawing and producing the five short stories, this book provides a powerful example of how

graphic narratives and visual representations can change perceptions and, potentially, shape alternative political futures.



Fig. 1. The cover of *Quartieri. Viaggio al centro delle periferie italiane* is a cartographic mosaic composed with the maps of the five Italian neighbourhoods represented in the collection. If read as a whole, the collection creates an unforeseen urban map (illustration by Giada Peterle).

To achieve this, the authors of each chapter have worked together as part of a broader interdisciplinary network on urban studies called *Tracce Urbane* to combine talents and insights from the graphic arts, sociology, urbanism, anthropology, and geography – at times wearing multiple hats – but each time with one person crafting the actual comic. A short written introduction to each chapter provides a brief presentation of each neighbourhood. These are voluntarily kept free of jargon and are written in an engaging style as a sort of situated tourist description for the discerning, socially aware traveller. An aerial outline map of each neighbourhood reminds the reader that while the visuals and tone of each story are different, they are all part of a broader tableau. Each comic is visually distinct, with a diversity of artistic styles, some use well-behaved strips and frames (Bolognina, Bologna; Zen, Palermo), another erases the frames to give space to particular episodes (San Siro, Milan), another uses images that burst over and across the pages (Tor Bella Monaca, Rome) or a collage of photographs (Zen, Palermo), and one makes full use of the creative format to collapse and recraft scales, spaces, and voices (Arcella, Padova). Readers will prefer the styles of one or the other, but the diversity and multitude of aesthetic voices is impressive, and does much to embody the ideal of multiple, situated voices.

Comics are distinctive in that current practitioners are also their theorists, their historians, and their critics. This is particularly true in the case of this book, as some of the authors, including Giada Peterle and Giuseppe Lo Bocchiaro, have hybrid identities as researchers and artists, building on both to create this new research output. There have been many attempts by English-speaking scholars to coin or use new terms to describe comics, such as sequential narrative, graphic narrative, or comic journalism, partly as a strategy for

requesting respectability for a marginalized and frequently trivialized genre, while French and Italian scholars have not worried so much about supposed respectability and have continued to use their language’s respective ordinary names *bande dessinée* and *fumetti*.

There is certainly no need here to apologise for using comics as an integral yet distinct part of careful and rigorous social scientific research. It actually seems to me that a new genre of *fumetti* is emerging here, even if it doesn’t need to name itself distinctly: a genre of research-based visual storytelling that owes much to the language of comics but that also draws very effectively on the epistemologies of critical and feminist social sciences that seek to give voice to the marginalised by centring them as experts of their own experiences, while making visible the positionality of those carrying out the research. This is not a standpoint that draws upon dry statistics and stark tales of urban decay, but one that is grounded in daily lives, episodes of acceptance and resistance, and the knowledge gained from surviving the daily grind of social and spatial marginalisation. It is not, as the two main authors note, “da fuori e dall’alto” (from outside and from above) (Cancellieri and Peterle 2019, 7). These are tales whispered on the ground, not those found in grandiose government reports, glossily produced and rapidly ignored; nor are they urban fantasies caricatured by populist political discourse. Crucially, neither are they some sort of aestheticized poverty porn: the varied tales of marginalisation ring true and deep and narrate a worrying and broader tale of urban decay across cities in Italy that needs to be heard, beyond the heart-warming episodes of hope.



Fig. 2. The inside cover of the comic book anthology shows the single maps of the five neighbourhoods represented in *Quartieri*. Like tales of a bigger mosaic, the maps of the neighbourhoods recur in the comic book to give readers a sense of graphic continuity despite the different graphic styles of the single chapters (illustration by Giada Peterle).

These snapshots or fragments of people and places construct a wider landscape through multiple short episodes and encounters. The result is a visually superb exploration from the ground up of places inhabited, shaped, and given life by multiple people who take on shifting roles as tour guides, characters, narrators, and crafters of their own worlds. At the

same time, the places themselves – including the buildings, the streets, and the specific shapes of the urban landscapes – are lovingly portrayed as characters in their own right, not simply reduced to backdrops. These are stories of working-class neighbourhoods, of long-standing inhabitants, of migration and new beginnings. Tales that appear as distinctly Italian as the old men sitting on street benches all day, while reflecting values as distinctly cosmopolitan as the Chinese-owned bar transformed into language classrooms or as the intercultural school parties for extended families.

The spatial visuality of comics has received substantial attention from comic book scholars and, more recently, from geographers and other social scientists. They have pointed out how reading comics is a specifically embodied and learnt activity – as is reading – with unique codes that are learnt and culturally situated. *Quartieri* uses this viewer involvement very effectively to explore complex urban experiences through the distinctive devices, vocabulary and grammar of comics, in which parts are observed while the whole is sensed. Scott McCloud, an American theorist who writes comic books about what he calls sequential art, has noted the power of cartooning to move readers by commanding viewer involvement and identification through these distinctive devices. Readers are engaged, producing meaning in the active task of reading. Likewise, geographer Jason Dittmer has suggested that “reading comic books requires the internalisation of a specific visuality involving the ability to translate the spatiality of two-dimensional sequential images into four-dimensional narrative [...]. Indeed, ‘a comic strip is literally a map of time’ in that its producers are attempting to render the passage of time visible through the use of static, sequential images” (Dittmer 2010, 222). Comics and graphic narratives are certainly more than just a combination of texts and images, like successive PowerPoint slides. Instead, the coming together of the two leads to something more, at times self-aware of its own production, but always created not only by the artist but also by each reader’s own efforts. There is nothing passive about reading a comic, but at the same time it can be skimmed in a way a film cannot, with some passages read more slowly and others lovingly returned to.

This active reader involvement is particularly well-used in the case of the chapter on Arcella (Padova) that fully exploits this rich visual language of comics, drawing upon and playing with maps, orientation, and the embodied act of walking to make sense of place, all narrated by the authors who appear in the comic. This clever *mise-en-abîme* makes excellent use of the potential to create fully situated and truly reflexive research that nevertheless gives voice to others. Another comic chooses to focus just on the story of just one woman, Valentina, struggling to be a good mother in impossible circumstances (Cancellieri and Peterle 2019, 89-100). Other pages are fantastic at condensing and presenting dense information – on the historical evolution of the urban landscape, for example – in a way that makes it immediately accessible (Cancellieri and Peterle 2019, 52-55; 68; 70; 108-109; 112), often narrated through carefully-chosen witnesses. I found myself coming back again and again to

these particular pages and spending longer exploring them after having read the whole book, wishing to know more about each character, but pleased to have understood something of their lives.



Fig. 3. The comics story about Arcella, Padua, starts with a hand-drawn map of the neighbourhood, which metaphorically also represents the starting point of the research process (illustration by Giada Peterle).

This book is really a delight: a creative, clever, subtle reflection of what can happen when scholars take risks, and experiment something new. It is a beautiful invitation to stop writing dry academic prose, and instead grab some pencils, a friend or two, a notebook, and go and listen to the voices around us and invent new ways of making them heard.

References

Dittmer, Jason. 2010. "Comic Book Visualities: A Methodological Manifesto on Geography, Montage and Narration." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 35 (2): 222-236.

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