Mapping the moral city in Africa
Giovedì 22 settembre / Thursday 22 September 11.00-13.00

PROPOSTI: Alessandro GUSMAN (University of Turin, Italy); Anna BARAL (Uppsala University, Sweden)

DISCUSSANTE: Simona TALIANI (Università di Torino Dip. CPS, CRESC – EGE, Rabat)

ABSTRACT: Rapid urbanization throughout Africa raises important analytical and sociological questions concerning processes of transformation of the urban spaces. Demographic, political, cultural and economic changes, both internally and externally driven, are making urban life unpredictable and uncertain (Cooper, Pratten 2015). Urban planning and institutional interventions attempt to contain chaos while at the same time pursuing ideals of good cities and citizens.

The panel focuses on the recent “ethical turn” in anthropology (Fassin 2014) to understand processes of change in the African city, by interrogating subjective and collective experiences of navigation within “multiple moralities” (Zigon 2013) in the urban setting. We invite papers based on empirical research exploring the city as a moral space, with a specific interest for processes of emplacement; practices and discourses of inclusion and exclusion; contested and negotiated spaces; gendered and religious images of the city.

PAPERS:

Marian BURCHARDT, Pentecostal productions of locality: Moral geographies and spiritual protection in urban space

ABSTRACT: In his seminal essay “The Production of Locality”, Arjun Appadurai distinguishes between scalar and spatial perspectives on locality on the one hand, and relational approaches that focus on the phenomenological qualities expressed through certain kinds of agency and reproducibility, on the other. In this paper, I critically discuss this distinction as well as the space-as-container/space-as-flow dichotomy it aims to challenge, from the perspective of the sociology and anthropology of global Pentecostalism. I do so by drawing on the case of Pentecostal Christianity in Cape Town. As elsewhere in the world, Pentecostals in Cape Town put major emphasis on commanding the powers of the Holy Spirit for protection against misfortune, crime, poverty, illness and death, seen to be caused by evil spirits. This protection, however, is not only directed at persons or particular situations but in an important sense at particular sites. While anthropologists have explored practices around the spiritual protection of persons they have largely ignored this spatial dimension of concerns over spiritual security. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in Cape Town in 2010 and 2014, this paper discusses practices of prayer and blessing as religious technologies that site spiritual protection and thus produce and mark urban locality with regard to spatial graduations of spiritual security. Based on participant observations of protective practices in schools, homes, offices, highways, and public squares, the chapter explores how such practices engage with the built environment and urban infrastructure, remap urban space and reconfigure its phenomenological qualities. I show how protective practices are based on symbolic distinctions emerging from spatialized social inequalities (between city and township) and spatialized spiritual valence (between metropolis and rural ancestral homestead). I conclude by locating place-protective practices within a threefold spatial arrangement: the material geography of urban risk, the moral geography of urban Pentecostalism and the spiritual geography of witchcraft.

PROPOSER’S ACADEMIC PROFILE:
Marian Burchardt, Max Planck Institute for the Study of Religious and Ethnic Diversity Göttingen
Marco GARDINI, Urban insecurity, moral orders and the legacies of slavery in Antananarivo

ABSTRACT: The social geography of the capital of Madagascar testifies of the history and the legacies of slavery. The rich neighbourhoods at the top of the central hills (the so called ‘hautes quartiers’) are mainly inhabited by the descendants of the ancient merina nobility and by people of free origin, while many of the poor surrounding neighbourhoods (the ‘bas quartiers’) are inhabited by slave descendants and by migrants from other regions of the island. Statutory distinctions not only permeate the social geography of Antananarivo, but they are used also to read its landscape as a moral space. The increase in insecurity, crime, and violence that many urban dwellers have started to perceive over the last years is often attributed to groups of young people coming from the poorest neighbourhoods of the city. The criminalization of the ‘bas quartiers’ reinforces the social stigmatization against slave descendants and migrants. By contrast, the inhabitants of the ‘bas quartiers’ criticize the greed and the superiority complex of the merina elite and elaborate moral narratives denouncing the local processes of economic and social marginalization that they experience in their everyday life. By exploring these conflicting moral discourses, this paper explores how the social divisions between statutory groups contributed to reconfigure the urban landscape as the moral space in which local political struggles took form.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL PROPONENTE: Marco Gardini is a Post Doc Fellow in Anthropology at the University of Milano-Bicocca

Raffaele URSELLI, Urban cleansing and the morality of trashlabor in Dakar, Senegal

ABSTRACT: The historical relationship of Dakar dumpsite with Senegal public authorities is sorely emblematic of the course of the urban management in African cities. Born at the end of the 60s in a period of ruthless struggle against the “human waste” (or “encombrement humaines”, to regain an expression very often used by politicians in those years), nowadays Mbeubeuss is the only public landfill in a region where more than a third of Senegal population live, totally embedded in the urban fabric. Failing an extensive system of garbage treatment, the community of wastepickers (about 1500 people established within the dump) process almost half a million tones of waste per year with 'bare hands', generating a dynamical recycling economy. Therein the wastepickers play a key role for which they claim social legitimacy and political recognition.

The analysis proposed in this paper is based on the ethnographic research I have carried out into Dakar dump, in order to highlight the proliferation of unprecedented socio-economic realities active in the waste sector. Considering this vitality as a ‘popular tactic’ to face material scarcity and unemployment, I’ll try to establish to what extent this phenomenon can be defined as a form of moral economy. I suggest that the labor ideology of the ‘Bayfalism’ (followers of Ibra Fall, who was a disciple of Sheikh Amadu Bàmà, founder of the Mouride Brotherhood, a large Islamic Sufi order spread in West Africa), plays a key role: the hard work ethics professed by Ibra Fall found a wide resonance among the wastepickers, motivated to work hardly in the trash recovery because “thanks to good will and sacrifice every job becomes noble”.

PROFILO ACCADEMICO DEL PROPONENTE:
Raffaele Urselli, Phd candidate in African studies – Università di Napoli “L’Orientale”. I’m completing the Phd thesis on the social history of waste in Dakar, Senegal. My research interests range from political and social anthropology to popular material culture, from critical geography to global production network and theory of value.