

CARTOGRAFIE SOCIALI

Rivista di sociologia e scienze umane

ANNO I, N. 2, NOVEMBRE 2016

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"Cartografie sociali" is a peer reviewed journal



BISOGNA DIFENDERE L'UMANITÀ

I DIRITTI UMANI TRA PRATICHE
DI GUERRA, RELAZIONI DI POTERE,
MOBILITÀ INTERNAZIONALE
E RESISTENZE

A cura di Marco De Biase e Stefania Ferraro

 **MIMESIS**



SUOR ORSOLA
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Pubblicazione semestrale: abbonamento annuale (due numeri): € 45,00

Per gli ordini e gli abbonamenti rivolgersi a:
ordini@mimesisedizioni.it

L'acquisto avviene per bonifico intestato a:

MIM Edizioni Srl, Via Monfalcone 17/19

20099 - Sesto San Giovanni (MI)

Unicredit Banca - Milano

IBAN: IT 59 B 02008 01634 000101289368

BIC/SWIFT: UNCRITM1234

Cartografie sociali è una rivista promossa da URiT, Unità di Ricerca sulle Topografie sociali.

Direzione e Redazione della rivista hanno sede presso l'Università degli Studi Suor Orsola Benincasa

Via Suor Orsola 10 - 80132 Napoli (Italy)

www.unisob.na.it

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UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI
SUOR ORSOLA
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SCIENZE
DELLA FORMAZIONE



MIMESIS EDIZIONI (Milano – Udine)

www.mimesisedizioni.it

mimesis@mimesisedizioni.it

Isbn: 9788857539331

Issn: 2499-7641

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Via Monfalcone, 17/19 – 20099

Sesto San Giovanni (MI)

Phone: +39 02 24861657 / 24416383

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Registrazione Tribunale di Napoli n. 37 del 5 luglio 2012

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THE MARKS OF CAPITAL

Antonello Petrillo (ed.), *Il silenzio della polvere. Capitale, verità e morte in una storia meridionale di amianto*, Mimesis/Cartografie Sociali, Milano-Udine, 2015, pp. 238.

It seems William Dudley Haywood, better known as “Big Bill” Haywood, one of the founding members of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), loved to say: «I never read Marx’s *Capital*, but I have the marks of capital all over me», because of all the time spent working as a miner. I was reminded Big Bill’s sentence after reading in one go “Il silenzio della polvere”.

The socio-ethnological analysis of the Social Topography Research Unit (Urit), directed by Professor Antonello Petrillo, starts with the marks of capital on bodies. We talk about bodies of young unemployed men in Irpinia, a territory close to Naples. Those young men in 1980s had been hired by Isochimica, a local company in Avellino town, to remove, barehanded, the asbestos from the carriages of *Ferrovie dello Stato*¹. Then, at the request of Isochimica’s owner, Elio Graziano, the asbestos was buried illegally under the company building, close to a low-income housing district, called Borgo Ferrovia.

Thus, we are not talking about very visible marks, such as wounds, scars, or blood, but rather about dust, inhaled by workers, by their wives while cleaning work-clothes, by *Borgo Ferrovia* inhabitants, living on the buried asbestos. With the passing of time, the asbestos has been accumulating in their lungs and today, after a long latency, they live the drama of the asbestos-related cancers increase.

The important ethnographical work shows the context of this drama, what we can call “structural violence”. It is the violence of unemployment pushing people to accept any job without questions. It is the violence of the delocalization of a ‘dirty job’ from informed and unionized Northern workers, who rejected jobs without protections, to uninformed Southern young men without a working-class culture. But it is also the violence of

1 The government-owned company, managing Italian railways network.

corruption, since local newspapers criticized the first spontaneous strike, or the violence of nepotism, when workers' family members disagreed with strike, fearing a bad image of their family. Finally, it is the violence of the contested medical knowledge, trying to hide the nexus cause-effect in the contemporary struggle of workers and their families, in order to not give pre-retirement benefits.

Despite its attention for details and microsociological aspects, "Il silenzio della polvere" is not just a monograph of a particular case. Instead, the theoretical reflexion reflects a large-scale effort. Isochimica drama talks about a past which is precursory of contemporary late-liberal present. Isochimica represents a capitalist accumulation process where formal and informal, rational-legal and personal domination, environmental disaster and labour precarity merge in a grey zone, the Italian South. Meridione, as Petrillo highlights in the conclusion, has always been an exceptional space for Italian capital. Since 1980s this exception has been allowing to experiment late-liberal practices of governance, legitimized by a permanent process of internal racialization. Isochimica workers' bodies are like a "synecdoche" of the Southern Italian social body. Thus, there is no humour about capital marks among Italian Southern workers, as in Big Bill sentence, because while capital has been leaving marks, it presents them as a stigma.

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