

Doctoral Dissertation.
Interuniversity Doctoral Program in
Urban and Regional Development (XXXVIII Cycle)

Political Reproduction, Urban Solidarity and Migrant Infrastructures.

From Ararat to Rome and Beyond.

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Abstract

This research explores the practices of political reproduction, solidarity, and mobility among a migrant community that organizes within an occupied space in Italy. This research delves into the lived experiences of the Kurdish migrant community that gathers at the socio-cultural center of Ararat in Rome, Italy.

Methodologically, this work is based on an in-depth ethnography, which involved an extensive period of participant observation (over a year) and 27 semi-structured interviews. The participant observation in Rome took place working as a volunteer at the center, attending meetings, helping set up events, joining protests, rallies, conferences about the Kurdish question and following the group in their mobilization around the city. By looking at practices in Ararat, this research reflects on how migrants' spaces of activism persist and reproduce through contradictions, between inclusion and exclusion, precarity and durability, marginalization and empowerment.

To better articulate and disseminate the research findings, this thesis is structured as a collection of papers, each of which engages with a specific theoretical debate that, taken together, allows the research to fully address its overarching aim. This structure facilitates an organic exploration of Ararat, treating the space as a prism through which various interconnected dimensions of migration can be examined. The work situates these experiences within the socio-spatial dynamics of migration, occupation, and collective political life.

The first paper focuses on the internal dynamics of the center, illustrating how the migrant community organizes to sustain the center and their lives within a situation of uncertainty and precariousness. This paper focuses on the concept of 'political reproduction' meaning, how political mobilization intertwines with the everyday work of social reproduction. The concept of 'situated persistence' is introduced, emphasizing that despite the ever-changing and transient nature of the community and potential conflicts, shared practices and collective forms of mobilization endure due to the very existence of the space itself. This persistence emerges through a dialectical process in which the space and the collective practices that sustain it continually shape one another: the center

endures because of ongoing social and political efforts, which, in turn, are enabled by the center's continued existence.

The second paper (DOI:10.1285/i20356609v18i2p365) focuses on the local network of Italian activists in solidarity with the Kurdish community by examining the historical and current mobilizations in favor of the Kurdish cause in Rome. It reflects on 'political solidarity,' a form of strong commitment grounded in shared moral values and a common vision for the future, and proposes the definition of 'political urban solidarity,' which is a form of solidarity rooted in a shared vision of the future with a strong emphasis on place-making and community empowerment. Viewing urban solidarity through a political lens highlights its profound role in place-making and its ability to foster a sense of belonging to a shared urban project grounded in political struggle and co-presence. Simultaneously, this perspective allows for the consideration of the deeply contested and ambivalent nature of solidarity. In doing so, this paper moves away from considering solidarity as merely a humanitarian or civic commitment.

The third paper (Urban Studies, forthcoming) explores the mobility of migrants through the lens of infrastructure. It frames Ararat as a socio-material infrastructure, a hub where stories, lives, and narratives intersect, and where material resources are shared, generating encounters that facilitate migrants' mobility across Italy and Europe. In doing so, it reflects on what the literature defines as 'alternative migrant infrastructure', meaning a set of information, spaces, and resources independent of government and institutions that migrants can rely upon arrival or movement across countries. The paper particularly emphasizes the significance of the diasporic dimension of these infrastructures, arguing that infrastructuring practices rely on various forms of social capital that are not merely solidaristic or evenly accessible. The paper argues that the analysis of alternative infrastructures, necessitates a reading of infrastructuring practices that is sensitive to potential inequalities and imbalances between communities and individuals with varying access to different social capital networks.

Keywords: migrations, political reproduction, solidarity, migrants' infrastructure, ethnography, Rome.