Mapping Local Resistance to Anti-Immigration National Law: A Carto-Essay

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Abstract

This article revolves around a map titled *Resistenze locali al Decreto Salvini [Local resistance to the Salvini decree]*, which was created with OpenStreetMap by geographer Cristina Del Biaggio on the 5th of January 2019. The map aimed to dynamically visualise local protests arising against the new legislative decree on immigration and security approved by the Italian Senate in November 2018 (the so-called "Salvini decree"). Soon after its first appearance, the map had been circulated within national newspapers' and magazines' online articles, NGOs' webpages, blog posts, Facebook, and Twitter comments. Adopting an experimental format, this article is assembled in the form of a "carto-essay" which includes: original texts by the mapmaker (Del Biaggio C.), comments by curators (Rossetto T. and Boria E.), and a series of screenshots capturing moments in the map's life. Written on the spur of the moment and following the impulse to grasp in real time the rapid "movement" of a map and the spatial political statement it bears, this carto-essay alludes to questions such as the possibilities for a *cartographic* academic public engagement, the importance of feeling cartographic data in the public sphere, and the opportunity to provide progressive cartographic imageries of the nation.

Keywords: Carto-Essay, Cultural Cartography, Migration Crises, Mobility of Maps, National Map, Protest, Public Engagement, Salvini Decree

1. Premise: The carto-essay format

This article is framed using an experimental and creative format, the "carto-essay". This format is an adaptation from the better-known format of the photo-essay, which has already been experimented with in geographical research and in geographical academic journals (Cronin, 2011; Edensor, 2008). Photo-essays provide authorial, selected, and designed collections of photographs where photos are purposefully arranged, deployed, and assembled with texts to support an argument. The pictures are not aimed at providing a complete documentation of a phenomenon; instead, text and images are deployed in such a way as "to maximize their communica-

tive or expressive potential" (Banks, 2007, p. 98). Within a photo-essay, a sequence of pictures is usually sutured by brief narrative paragraphs to emphasise a set of messages (Bignante, 2011, pp. 94-99). For Ryan (2003, p. 236), who invited geographers to take this technique into consideration, the ideal photographic essay consists of a combination of photographs and text that uses "visual images not simply as illustrations or as some foil for textual theory but as a mode of argument and creative performance". In a similar way, the *carto-essay* is here intended as an assemblage of brief texts and maps purposefully arranged to creatively convey, rather than merely document, a mapping experience. Assemblages of maps and texts may be found in hybrid forms, such as creative writings embedding maps (Greene, 2011), verbo-visual texts merging maps and academic writing (Krygier and Wood, 2009), or photo-essays devoted to cartographic objects (Rossetto, 2018). In the present article, the carto-essay is made up of pieces of academic and non-academic writings and screenshots of maps appearing on the Web. In particular, this carto-essay takes in consideration: a singular map and different versions of this same map as they appeared in several contexts after its first appearance; existing and elicited texts by the mapmaker (Del Biaggio C.); and comments by curators (Rossetto T. and Boria E.).

2. The map *Resistenze locali al Decreto Salvini [Local resistance to the Salvini Decree]*

In November 2018, the Italian Senate approved a new legislative decree on immigration and security. The so called "Salvini decree" (in reference to Matteo Salvini, the Interior Minister who is behind it) introduced several restrictions to the existing asylum and refugee protection framework.

As the ECRE (European Council on Refugees and Exiles) Weekly Bulletin reported (see https://www.ecre.org/salvini-decree-approved-by-italian-senate-amid-citizens-protests-and-institutional-criticism/),

the law includes amendments in qualification and reception provisions, abolishes the hu-

manitarian protection status and restricts access to accommodation in SPRAR (Protection System for Refugees and Asylum Seekers) hosting facilities. Several detention and procedure-related amendments also predict significant changes in asylum standards and living conditions, while the decree includes provisions that make expulsion of aliens and citizenship revocation easier.

The impact of these measures on the rights of asylum seekers and refugees has been subject to institutional criticism, with statements coming from the United Nations Refugee Agency and the Council of Europe's Commission for Human Rights. Criticism has also arisen from inside Italy and in particular from the mayors of several cities both large and small.

On the 5th of January 2019, the growing resistance to the immigration and security decree was visualised by a map titled *Resistenze locali al Decreto Salvini [Local resistance to the Salvini decree]* and authored by Italian-Swiss geographer Cristina Del Biaggio. The map first appeared on OpenStreetMap (http://umap.open streetmap.fr/fr/map/resistenze-locali-al-decreto-salvini_279671#16/45.6160/8.9489), providing links to online news regarding local initiatives against the decree for each point of resistance marked on the map. On the 9th of January, it was then published in French, Italian, and German on the website *visionscarto.net* – an online hub hosting critical reflections and experiments dealing with cartographic visualisation with a particular focus on participatory mappings, radical cartographies, and narrative or activist projects employing cartographic language and imagery (see https://visionscarto.net/italie-resistances-municipales and Figure 1).

The map appeared together with the following article authored by the mapmaker and titled *In Italia, dei sindaci si oppongono alla politica di chiusura degli Stati* [In Italy, some mayors are opposing resistance to the closed border policy adopted by States].

When the State fails to address its responsibilities, may an alternative come from the Municipalities?, Filippo Furri asked in issue n. 81 (Fall 2017) of the journal Vacarme. *The answer is "YES".*

To demonstrate this, Furri uses the example of the shelter cities network, with forerunners

such as the city of Venice. A network that is increasingly expanding and strengthening.

Today, other cities, in Europe and outside, are joining the network. The network of the resistant municipalities or "sanctuary cities" started to be woven during a meeting coordinated by the mayor of Barcelona, Ada Colau, in June 2017. The Fearless Cities *network includes one hundred members worldwide.*

In opposition to the Nation-States' rhetoric of the closed border, openness is organised at a local level.

In January 2019, in Italy, some municipalities began self-organising and sharing the experience of opposing resistance to the legislative decree on Security and Immigration *approved by the Government in September 2018. As the days pass, new points appear on the maps to say "YES" to the reception of refugees. Points*

that, little by little, form a network that opposes populism and xenophobia.

To date, one hundred mayors have decided to say "NO" to the laws dictated from the "Lega and Movimento 5 Stelle" coalition. The first to oppose resistance have been the mayor of Palermo, Leoluca Orlando, and the mayor of Naples, Luigi De Magistris. Orlando decided to disobey by announcing the suspension of the "Salvini's Decree" and its inapplicability to the city of Palermo. He announced that his municipality will keep registering in the civil registers persons that obtained their residency permit for humanitarian reasons, a protection that has been (un)justly abrogated by the decree.

(Cristina Del Biaggio, originally in French; https://visionscarto.net/italia-resistenza-sindaci).

Figure 1. Publishing the map. *Resistenze locali al Decreto Salvini [Local resistance to the Salvini decree]*, by C. Del Biaggio. Source: https://visionscarto.net/italia-resistenza-sindaci, screenshot.

The map, created with OpenStreetMap, also appeared on the platform seenthis.net together with some posts by the mapmaker (see https://seenthis.net/messages/739544). Presented paired with a similar, preceding map showing the protest against the Salvini decree published by the ANSA news agency, the new map aimed to enhance the previous fixed and static one in terms of dynamism and continuous updating (Figure 2).
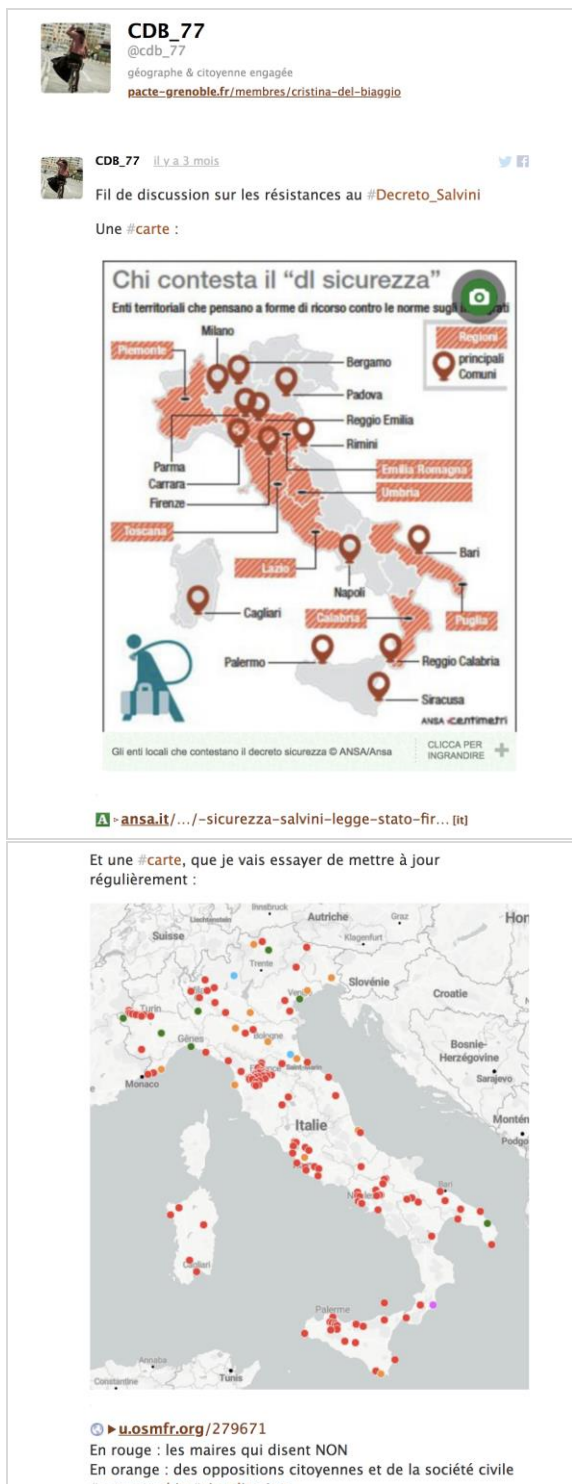
Figure 2. Posting the map. Source: https://seenthis.net/messages/739544, screenshots.

3. Eliciting the cartographic gesture

As we will see, this activist map authored by a geographer based at the Université Grenoble Alpes has attracted wide attention in the media. Notably, the Association of Italian Geographers (AGEI) promptly mentioned the "map in progress" on the website of the association on the 9th of January 2019, due to its connection to current political affairs and related burning debates. From the angle of cultural map studies, this initiative, which holds affinities with forms of cartographic protests or counter-mappings (Rundstrom, 2009; Wood and Krygier, 2009), holds particular interest as a cartographic gesture coming from academia but aimed to intervene in the public sphere at a national and international level. Indeed, the protests are local, but the cartographic means helps in visualising their national shape, both materially and conceptually.

Radical scholars developed harsh criticism towards traditional cartography, and are experimenting with alternative cartographic practices (Crampton and Krygier, 2005; Herb et al., 2009). Anglo-Saxon literature speaks of "resistance maps" and "resistance mapping" to indicate cartographic practices and purposes which are alternative to the official line (Dorling, 1998; Crampton, 2003). The expression "counter-mapping" assumes the same antagonistic value in the face of official cartography, but in general it is used to indicate projects of identity and local environmental promotion which employ cartographic practices that are specifically adapted to those needs, and therefore opposed to traditional practices imposed externally (Sparke, 2005; Webster, 2001; Mohr, 2006; Harris and Hazen, 2005).

Del Biaggio's map is not properly a form of counter-mapping: it does not counter cartographic conventions or aspire to give shape to a counter-world by using cartographic conventions (i.e. the two main strategies of counter-mapping). Del Biaggio's map is perhaps more akin to a protest map. This map does not propose a new world; rather, it asks that we look at the world anew: it is the way facts are framed, as Wood and Kryger (2009) suggest. Indeed, in mapping data (i.e. the local protests), Del Biaggio provided a spatial framework, and a related political statement, for these data. Moreover, since these

data are precisely the locations of protests, this map could also be seen as a kind of map "of" or "to" protests (a map materially showing how to get to a protest), which Wood and Krygier see as a cartographic genre appearing in the register of the street. Rescaling the *map to protest* to a national register, Del Biaggio's map seems to invite other social actors to join the protest and to feel united within a national context.

The curators of this essay asked the mapmaker to describe her cartographic practice, the genesis of that mapping gesture, and the phases of its development from both technical and experiential perspectives. Asking mapmakers about their practices, observing cartographic performances, and applying other kinds of ethnographic techniques to cartography is indeed a recent and highly promising field of research for cultural map scholars (Kitchin, Gleeson and Dodge, 2013; Boria and Rossetto, 2017; Duggan, 2017). In what follows, Del Biaggio's auto-ethnographic notes are reported (originally in Italian).

About the "cartographic gesture" per se, I have not so much to say... Unless that it is something like a professional automatism. You read some information and start asking: Will it have some spatial/territorial significance? What if we were to put it on a map? What will happen?

This is what I did that Saturday morning, without thinking about it too much. And with rudimentary tools (tools which can be used by any person, such as the application umap on Open Street Map).

Because, despite the fact that I am a geographer, I am not a cartographer. So, actually, I am not able to make maps. So I do what I can, and get in touch with colleagues that are much more expert than me (as in the case of the team of Visionscarto, for instance).

Then, gradually, since Sunday the little points started to become more and more, and then the map started showing some things, to let a reality, which had remained hidden and invisible until it was mapped, emerge.

I started reading articles explaining that this or that municipality was opposing resistance to the decree, but that an overview of the entire phenomenon was lacking.

Well, I thought, this is what the map allows for: to let a network emerge; to make the people fighting against the closure feel less alone.

And the little points are located all along the Boot: from North to South there is someone who says no.

That's all, in the end.

The social networks did the rest.

The aspect which remains to understand (but I will not be able to work on it) is:

Has the map allowed some mayors to come out of hiding? I don't think so.

Will this map allow mayors, municipality members or citizens to get in touch and join in a network? Perhaps it will. I know that it has been useful to Gianfranco Schiavone of the ASGI association (Associazione per gli Studi Giuridici sull'Immigrazione) to contact people in order to build networking. He told me so.

To all these questions, which are essential to understand the value of a "cartographic gesture" that wants to be a counter-cartography, or a critical cartography, I have no answers.

4. Mediating cartographic resistance: following the map

As recent post-representational approaches suggest, cartography may be researched also by unfolding mapping practices (Kitchin, Gleeson and Dodge, 2013), attending to the "biographical qualities of maps", and analysing their social lives and "complicated afterlives" (Oliver, 2016, pp. 79-80). Soon after its first appearance, the map of the local protest against the Salvini decree was circulated within national newspapers' and magazines' online articles, NGOs' webpages, blog posts, Facebook, and Twitter comments. The map initially attracted specific interest in the mapmaker's personal initiative (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Telling the story of the map. Source: http://www.vita.it/it/article/2019/01/08/i-comuni-resistenti-al-dl-sicurezza-sono-piu-di-100-la-storia-della-ma/150278/, screenshot.

Local resistance to Salvini's legislative decree, 100 and counting. In a few days more than one hundred Italian Municipalities advanced clear actions against the application of the legislative decree on immigration and security which was enacted by the Italian Government in the Fall of 2018 and is raising serious concerns for its impact on the rights of migrant people. From Palermo to Florence, just to mention the municipalities of the major cities, to small villages all along the Boot, "every municipality is acting by itself but feels stronger because it is not alone", Cristina Del Biaggio explains. She is an Italian-Swiss university researcher and professor working at the Institute of Urbanism and Alpine Geography of the University of Grenoble. Last Saturday, she made a dynamic map of the municipalities opposing resistance to the decree primarily advocated by the Minister Matteo Salvini. A map which, as the hours pass, became filled with red points and now makes visible the growing dissent of Italian mayors of different political colours.

"In my work I adopt a distant gaze on social phenomena", Del Biaggio, who is working on European borders, explains. This is not to say she adopts a cold gaze, "because I know well to what extent a map may be important for the life of people: the map brings them into a network". Indeed, this is happening with the map in question: "Local phenomena are often 'in-

visibilised', made invisible if compared with national ones. Instead, maps such as this make these phenomena visible and therefore open to the act of interpretation", Del Biaggio continues. A kind of positive emulation, which is crucial to those who see the decree as an attack on the rights of migrant people: "The mayors and citizens see that their refusal of the decree is not isolated". The map includes different categories of "resistance": total resistance, partial resistance, resistance wanted directly by the mayors, and resistance emerging from actions of citizen groups and associations.

The Italian-Swiss researcher is working in contact with colleagues from all over Europe. "Everyone must pull in the same direction because on such a sensitive theme competitiveness cannot exist: we must make visible things as they are because what is missing in the current surplus of information is access to authoritative and clear sources", Del Biaggio adds while expressing her worry about the route taken by European governments concerning the closure of borders.

(Article and interview by D. Biella, 8 January 2019, originally in Italian. Source: http://www.vita.it/it/article/2019/01/08/i-comuni-resistenti-al-dl-sicurezza-sono-piu-di-100-la-storia-della-ma/150278/).

After the publication of Del Biaggio's map, very soon cartographic visualisations of the local resistance to the Salvini decree traversed the Web (from Twitter to national newspapers), being hosted in contexts of different political backgrounds, from those valuing the protests and Del Biaggio's "beautiful map" (Figure 4) to those favouring the decree against the "rebel mayors" (Figure 5).

The map also became a tool to recall the resistance beyond its concrete presentation: in the webpages of *Internazionale*, the map lives in the form of a mere link (Figure 6).

Figure 4. Sharing the map. Source: https://twitter.com/BaobabExp/status/108203714032 4868098, screenshot.

Figure 6. Linking to the map. Source: https://www.internazionale.it/bloc-notes/annalisa-camilli/2019/01/09/residenza-anagrafe-decreto-sicurezza, screenshot.

Beyond its proper visualisation, the map has come to symbolise an anti-racist standpoint (Figure 7). Living in the Web through different forms of mediation, the map began not only to attract comments but it came also to activate relations and "inter-actions" (Figure 8).

Figure 5. Acknowledging the map on national press. Source: http://www.ilgiornale.it/news/politica/decreto-salvini-i-sindaci-ribelli-si-contano-spunta-mappa-1625453.html, screenshot.

Figure 7. Symbolising the map. Source: http://www.cronachediordinariorazzismo.org/resisten ze-locali-al-decreto-immigrazione-e-sicurezza/, screenshot.

Figure 8. Stimulating inter-actions through the map. Source: http:// http://www.ciaconlus.org/la-mappa-interattiva-di-chi-dice-no-al-decreto-salvini/, screenshot

Facebook comments relaunched the map, which came to function as a sort of imaginative projection for people opposing the anti-immigration decree. In other words, as in the comment reported below, the map showed something of an invitational quality as if it were able to stimulate further protests: the map was inviting local actors to take part in it (Figure 9). The cartographic visualisation of those data was provoking emotions (Kennedy and Hill, 2017) (Figure 10).

Figure 9. *"Empty space on the coast of Tuscany, except for Livorno. We need to gear up"*. Source: https://www.facebook.com/checca.zampagni/posts/2223136234372828?notif_id=1547104754775560&notif_t=mention, screenshot.

Figure 10. *"Resistance does exist and you can see it!"*. Source: https://www.facebook.com/cospeonlus/posts/10156809496552225, screenshot.

5. Unaware cartographies: To conclude

This carto-essay has been written on the spur of the moment, following the impulse to grasp in real time the rapid "movement" of a map and the spatial political statement it bears.

Many reflections could be made about the role of counter-mappings within academia, the possibilities for a *cartographic* public engagement, the importance of feeling cartographic data in the public sphere, or the opportunity to provide progressive cartographic imageries of the nation. By displaying moments in a map's life, this essay just wanted to provide an open space for cartographic thinking, experience, and intervention.

Nonetheless, as curators, we would like to advance a brief final reflection. We were particularly touched by the following words of Cristina Del Biaggio: "So, actually, I am not able to make maps". This sounds somehow paradoxical; despite the attention given to *her* map, she feels unable to make maps. Del Biaggio belongs to the main category of contemporary cartographic communication, namely the category of the *produsers*, which came to upset the given distinction between producers and users (Budhathoki, Bruce and Nevodic-Budic, 2008; Coleman, Georgiadou and Labonte, 2009). Yet, the intrin-

sic normalising power of cartography, whose rigid, formal apparatus of rules and protocols was established during a long tradition, still persuades the non-specialist that official cartographic sources are the sole legitimate ones. We have recently exited a durable and rather conformist historical phase in which cartographers were those with a specific cartographic formation and entered a new anarchist and creative era in which self-taught cartographers obtain full public recognition (Gerlach, 2018). However, in the story of the map against the Salvini decree, there is little awareness of either this change or the crucial role played by all those "unaware cartographers" who commented upon and circulated Del Biaggio's map. We need to raise awareness of this because of the ethical dimension of cartographic acts. Those unaware cartographers handle a powerful tool for interpreting reality – a kind of representation that has the potential to affect public debates about the relational spatialities that are embedded in contemporary social phenomena. Indeed, if Del Biaggio would have used other forms of expression, she would likely not have reached the forcefulness of showing a network of resistance. An online or printed article or a visual product, such as a video or photographs, would have been unable to either give an incisive networked shape to that protest or emphasise and activate the connections between the insurgent local actors. A list would have been insufficient for both providing a sense of the national dimension of the protest and inviting additional protesters to fill the gaps in the map. Instead, once put on the map, Del Biaggio's call broke through.

In the current bulimic and overcrowded communication arena, maps seem to have great potential for communicating the spatial dimension of social phenomena, while the abovementioned revolution towards an anarchic and creative cartographic expression definitely changes the status of cartography within the public sphere. Indeed, Del Biaggio's map is not a counter-map: It is neither a conscious act of rebellion against cartographic conventions nor is it the creation of a reality that is parallel to that circulated by what we once knew as official or standard cartography. Rather, it is a counter-power that is exerted through cartographic modesty.

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