



Configurazioni della territorialità

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Turco, A.: Configurazioni della territorialità, FrancoAngeli, Milano, 336 pp., €29.00, ISBN-13: 978-88-568-2257-1, 2010.

A theoretical book is usually an attempt of highlighting one idea or one set of interconnected ideas. This is not the case in Angelo Turco’s book. *Configurazioni della territorialità* not only proficiently organises and develops the theory it is aimed to present (nothing less than the relationship between (any) human society and the surface of the Earth), but it also contains a plenitude of other suggestions and intuitions that would be enough to fill many additional articles and books.

Central to this is the theory/concept of territorialisation, here understood as the way human beings modify the surface of the Earth, turning physical space into a social artefact. This follows three different steps: denomination, the symbolic elaboration of space, through its semiotic signification; reification, its physical transformation, through activities such as agricultural production, water control, and setting; and structuration, the control over the political, social, and administrative organisation of space. The three interconnected processes concur with regard to the making of the territorialisation of human spaces; thus, territoriality is defined by Turco as being the “fundamental geographical quality of the world”. Nevertheless, it is seldom recognised both in theoretical approaches and in the social practice, where other theoretical instruments are often at stake, such as place, landscape, and environment. So, after describing and analysing the three territorialising processes, Turco relates them to those “configurations of territoriality”: landscape, interpreted not as a mere visual relationship between human beings and their context but as the symbolic reinterpretation of it; place, a “scattered concept” in geographical theorisation that can be interpreted as a device for establishing a relationship with the space; and environment, as the territorial shape of “nature”. Eventually, in the third part of the book, the author takes into account the performance of

territory (in the making of an urban landscape, for instance), as well as different practices to gain control over it and ways of describing it, through cartography and scale. And he concludes with a chapter devoted to the history of geography. All this is then enriched by examples from little-known African realities.

As if this were not enough, there are still many other ideas to be found in the book. As an example, speaking about structuration, Turco says that nation-state compartmentations are just one of the many possible structures organising the world, and that the area they define (the one that in political geography is called “territory”) is just an arranged system of relationships. He also adds that some of these structures are self-referential, since many of their functions are devoted to their surviving rather than to their original scope (this leading to a sort of “geographical pathology”).

A book that is unfortunately available only in Italian, since it offers a very intriguing reading even if it is not free from faults: for instance, why does the author insist on referring to human beings with the old appellation of “Man”? We are no longer in the era of *L’Homme et la terre*; however, it is a minor fault perhaps easily emended in a translation or in a second edition.