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Worlding, worldly or ordinary? Repositioning Rome

"For some time now, I have been plagued, perhaps blessed,
by dreams of rivers and seas, dreams of water",
Tim Parks

The paper questions the urban narrative of the divided and underdeveloped city that is usually applied to Rome. Rome has always been considered a backward metropolis, a divided and dependent city, suspended between the modern and industrial North and the (comparatively) rural and traditional South. Since it became the capital of Italy in 1870, the small population that used to live around the Pope's court was replaced by those caring for the needs of the civil servants in government jobs, Rome having in fact a comparatively weak industrial base. However, administration pushed the growth of the city, creating the need for a very large inflow of poor immigrants from the Southern countryside.

Besides being limited and empirically inadequate, such a view arises a crucial theoretical concern: how we describe and understand the change of cities in an age of global rescaling? For instance, the two main narratives of globalization and competition; and the critique of the resulting social and spatial division, though opposed, share the same epistemological concern with generalization and explication. But the process of globalization confuses geographical scales, weaves local and global dimensions, erases physical and social boundaries.

At the turn of modernity, the city is as solid as ever, though neoliberal developments tend to jeopardize all certainties. The same cannot be said of its representations, that are increasingly less coherent and productive, though encroaching the imaginary of the city and of cities policies. Thus, walking on water is somehow required in order to match new social forms and their narratives.

Marc Augé calls *ville-monde* such new urban environments, as opposed to the global city[1], based upon heterogeneity and juxtaposition. Urban space is socially fragmented, and a strict social zoning articulates society and opportunities. How than making sense of cities when cities change in an increasingly confused and mixed way? This calls for a theoretical repositioning, and a paradigmatic turn in urban studies, as claimed recently by a number of scholars from the Global South. A turn which seems able to capture also some of the distinctive features of cities from a more local, European South.

Positioning urban theory

Why then dealing with a city that has the not minor claim of being 'eternal' but is not really caring about its international projection? Why studying a profoundly worldly city, an introvert social life, a stupendous yet miserable city (Rhodes, 2007) desperately struggling for its everyday survival rather than investing in a future at the height of its often celebrated past? It is not a local concern: "a theorist can hardly garner attention with a city that is less than "global"... With globalization …a place that falls outside its reach is, by definition, marginal" (Beauregard 2003).

Recapturing ordinary cities (Robinson 2013) on the research perspective is a paradigmatic turn in urban studies. The aim is to revise the position of Rome and the position of urban theory at the same time. And in particular, to revise how to conceptualize the process of wording cities (Roy 2010) caught by the process of globalization in a subaltern position.

Reconsidering the way we produce theories has been a recent theoretical concern for some scholars in the area of urban studies (Roy 2009). The task of positioning goes further than the mere descriptive and analytical concern of calibrating the coordinate system. Repositioning Rome requires 'an expansive understanding' of cities as a theory (borrowing from Rao 2006), and Rome among them.

[1] Augé opposes the city-world of global business ne, tourists and architects, to the "ville-monde" , the megacity where all differences became apparent, -social, ethnic, cultural and economic- and a space where "misery and opulence rub each other".

One of the potential conclusion is that overwhelming generalizations fail to account for the increasing diversity in the models of spatial organization of cities, of Southern cities in particular. At stake is the capacity to explain not only the functional coherence, but also the juxtaposing and coexistence of diverse arrangements. In this sense, the paper aims to set the stage for an eventual research on the hybrid development of 'the worlding of cities' (Roy 2009).

The theory of Rome

Rome has been treated in theoretical term, and that this overt theorization has been indebted to large, explanatory frameworks constructed 'elsewhere', this elsewhere being the theoretical context of functional development of cities. Understanding Rome as a theory has meant to use it as a model composed of objects, associated properties, and parameters. As such, Rome has been used to predict the future position of its components.

Viewed from this theoretical elsewhere, Rome appears either the failure of the normal process of constitution of a metropolitan space. Most of the critical research posited a connection between urban space and socio-economic processes, mass culture, social organization, and local politics being consequently the functional components of this model. The prevalent narrative of the city has been elaborated from this approach.

Alternatively, a critical neo-marxist critique has successfully overturned this view, somehow sustaining a progressive and redistributive agenda for most of the postwar period. Although through a tortuous theoretical and political debate: the dysfunctions that plagued the city (housing and labor informality, social marginalization and widespread corruption) have been seen as the actual normative standard as opposed to the pathological 'endpoint of modernity' (Rao 2010). The state of the city has been seen as an exception in Agamben's terms, a space of normative suspension of citizenship and civil rights due to the claim of an extended power by the government.

Scholars influenced by postcolonial concerns (Roy 2010) recently advanced a similar claim. The slum, a generic 'dysfunctional space', is either conceived as the leftover of modernisation, or its fearful accomplishment (Rao 2006). Although both views have consistently advanced our understanding of Southern cities, Rao arguments that the slum is "not merely an empirical object or a spatial container of social processes and effects. Instead, it is a discursive object, at once material and imaginary, that has significant theoretic effects" (Rao 2010, 14).

Tackling Rome as a theory aims at localizing urban theory, grounding models on the specificity of local assemblages; the task is connecting space, politics and culture; with the ultimate aim of exploring change from a combination of material and imaginary representations of the city.

From the South of Europe

As many other old cities, Rome has not been built to fit to a form of production. Rome is not a functional city, not entirely at ease neither with the mainstream functional theory, nor with the critical approaches. Critical scholars have tried to explain cities through the analysis of their economic rationale; often, however, this has led to a misleading research of the economic rationality. A corresponding "rational dream" has tried to match the urban environment to a mode of production, generating a demand for a normative rule of planning.

Along time, cities are progressively restructured to match an ever evolving form of production; this is one of major difference between European and American cities, but it interferes consistently with both historical and colonial cities in the global South; while "events" and occasions have interfered consistently, being cities exposed to the long list of humanity disasters, calamity, wars, flooding and migrations waves. The adaption process is thus sometimes delayed, and sometimes accelerated.

But modernity does not unfold equally at the core and at the periphery of world systems. Where power and money concentrate, the logic of development seems easier to retrieve. Elsewhere, development and modernity seem to lose some of their features. Two equally disappointing logics

have tried to justify these cases; modernity has been delayed, as if it were a train; or exceptions have been made, as if modernization were a one-fit-all set of rule.

The same can be said of the cities from the (local, European) South. They represent " a set of conditions with social, political and cultural effects" that have to be investigated on the ground avoiding the double risk of excessive generalizations, and the blurred superimposition of normative models elaborated elsewhere.

There are analogies between the views of the scholars concerned with cities from the global South and the closer South of the Mediterranean cities, equally neglected from urban theories. A small array of thoughts has investigated the condition of being Southern in Europe, Italy being equally suspended between North and South Europe. The Mediterranean city has notoriously escaped the fate of Fordism, partially contrasted the modernist neglect of the past, and somehow preserved traditional features of local culture and societies. Odd enough, features that modernism had condemned as both residual and retrograde, postmodernism re-evaluated as key tenets of competitive development (Leontidou 1993). Which again opens the way to a reconsideration of the neoliberal mix (Parnell and Robinson, 2012) and the features of the merging new urban question (Cremaschi, ed. 2008).

The fatigue of urban policies

In the first half of the 20th century the bureaucratic capital was consolidated inside the ring of the urban railways. Rural workers moved to the city from all the southern regions. New neighbourhoods were built informally, around unplanned settlements (the 'borgate') often originated by the evictions force by the fascist regime upon the urban working class. The cultural movement of neorealism characterized Italian movies and literature during the 50s, providing a worldwide celebrated narrative of that extraordinary process of change. The outcome of this extraordinary growth was a new social geography. Instead of the historical social mix that had characterized the city up to the beginning of the 20th century, a new pattern emerged: the working households were offered a location in the emerging belt of peripheral, very dense, high density urban districts; while the upper class occupied the central and most valued historical neighbourhoods, however slowly encroached by a less permanent population of tourists and visitors.

In the post-war years, many informal settlements were built by Italian immigrants in the city's first belt, where eventually half a million people came to live. Most of these neighbourhoods were started as informal hamlets or small township (the "borgate") where the fascist regime had relocated part of the poor living in the city centre. Thus, the location was peripheral, the intention being to segregate the potentially dangerous working class, while the central area had been sanitized and cleansed. Though the first constructions were precarious and were basically shacks, most of these areas were progressively consolidated and improved. A twisted interplay between informal networks and regulatory powers allowed for the exploitation of market opportunities and flaws in planning regulation. Most of these areas lacked basic urban services and infrastructures.

The narrative of spatial division

As in 19th century London, the narrative that tried to capture the process of city change in the case of Rome has been based upon the image of the two cities, the first corresponding to a bourgeoisie which was central both in spatial and in political terms, and was able to influence in particular the stream of public resources; the second, to a populace relegated to the physical and political margins. This narrative produce two major consequences.

The first has been a solid representation of the city as a backward metropolis, a socially divided and economically hetero-dependent agglomeration (Macioti and Ferrarotti 2008). The novelist and director Pasolini contributed to the shaping of this vision that has been rarely questioned. Over the past forty years , since the first leftist government in 1975, Rome has changed radically. Today the city is no longer 'poor and magnificent' as Pasolini wanted. The divide between the city centre and

the peripheral districts was the great narrative of the seventies, a spatial metaphor that has ever since oriented the leftist understanding and policies of the city. At the same time, the metropolitan area of Rome occupies a prominent place in the regional hierarchy both in terms of population and employment, in particular the service sector (public sector, white collar, business services).

The second consequence has been the inclusion of informality in the political agenda. Urban informality has since then influenced politics and policies in Rome. For instance, the political priorities of the main left party, the Italian Communist Party were reoriented towards urban issues and a concern for the quality of life. Eventually, both leftists and Christian-social activists coalesced in a civil rights movement that required an agenda for urban rehabilitation. Henceforth, informal neighbourhoods became the object of consistent policies of regularisation and upgrading since the 70s, when the first progressive coalition came to power. Urban claims (housing, schools and transport) reframed the political agenda to some extent.

However, both consequences are not anymore viable and have to be questioned, both from an empirical and a theoretical point of view. The capital is not anymore central, as far as state politics is concerned, because of the specific process of national statehood restructuring experienced in the case of Italy, torn apart between the rising regions and the consolidating EU. The city is not anymore geographically central since the North-South divide has been reframed by the process of economic internationalization and cultural homogenization. Finally, Rome is not anymore the agglomerative core of the region, since urban development has structured a vast urban field almost coincidental with the region.

On the other hand, the policies dealing with informality have not been successful. The implementation of such a vast program of upgrading policies took more time than expected and was hampered by lack of public investments. In the meantime, the post-war economic boom had brought about a new sense of wellbeing and optimism. Eventually, the expectations of people went well beyond the administration's capacity and it was unable to fulfil even the original strategy. Even more important, the political space has been restructured along the patterns of informal organization. The history of the Roman periphery has since been the history of a divorce between the declining commitment toward collective policies and growing claims for individual wellbeing.

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