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BOOK REVIEW

Barile, A., Raffini, L. and L. Alteri (2019), *Il tramonto della città. La metropoli globale tra nuovi modelli produttivi e crisi della cittadinanza*, Roma: Derive Approdi

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Once upon a time, there was the city. This could be the subtitle of this book, which describes the crisis of contemporary cities, and the difficulty of sociology to describe it in all its significance and consequences. As the authors recognize, it is difficult to develop a theoretical approach and find proper definitions, but the aim of this book is rather to describe what contemporary cities actually look like, not to propose academic definitions that in no case could fit the evolving reality of metropolis. Nevertheless, the authors maintain a strong theoretical approach, which is fundamental to avoid confusion between causes and consequences. Economic factors shape the social environment, not vice versa. Just as modern capitalism gave birth to the modern city, the current neoliberal globalization determines the basic features of contemporary metropolis. The modern city had different shapes, included different realities and its social life was determined by the basic conflict between the centre and periphery. Nevertheless, modern cities had an inherent unity, which helped the periphery to gain political representation and get its share of the political arena.

The basic feature of the contemporary city, instead, is its de-structuration. Its constituencies are shed apart; they live one next to the other, but not really together. Sometimes this lack of connection is also practical, as shown by the collapse of mobility in Rome's "Tiburtina Valley", where an ambitious development project left behind a landscape of ruined buildings, traffic jam and broken promises. Mobility is actually an essential factor to define social roles. The ruling elite is growingly transnational, in a globalized horizon it can project its activities in several cities at the same time. The working class, instead, maintains national characters; the local dimension determines its social life. Its attachment to local and national culture becomes an ideological tool to oppose both the transnational elite and the growing number of immigrants, whose forced mobility puts them in direct competition with the local proletariat. Here lies the basic divide that explains the success of the rightist, "populist" parties among the working-class suburbs. However, populism lacks a real political

project. It just expresses an instinctive (and fruitless) opposition of those social sectors that, impoverished by the erosion of the welfare state, see migrants as a competitor for low-paid jobs and social assistance (mostly in the form of public housing).

The de-structuration of contemporary cities has significant consequences in terms of social and political representation. Just as the nation-state is incapable to impose its rules on a globalized economy, the city administration is incapable to deal with urban realities, whose complexity reflects a globalized world on a smaller scale. Integration policies are doomed to fail, for they lack a theoretical approach and a practical recognition of the complexity of the city. Furthermore, the real causes of the problems lie far away from the local dimension. Mayors and city councils are therefore unable to project interventions that can have a significant impact on the suburbs' problems, let alone to solve them. The periphery itself (or rather the peripheries) lacks homogeneity and cannot express a political representation of its own. The relation between the centre and the periphery, consequently, reminds colonial schemas. The periphery is an essential part of the economic life of the city, it hosts working classes that cannot afford to live in the centre, but whose contribution is essential to help the centre maintain its competitiveness in the global economy. In terms of politics, however, the periphery has no role; it cannot make its voice heard in the political agenda, and finally becomes the tacit recipient of the choices made by the centre. The result is that while the centre becomes increasingly aseptic, in order to suit the commercial and touristic brand imposed upon it, the suburbs become the landscape of those unpleasant realities that is better to keep away from the eyes of the tourist.

Though the three authors develop their essays in different directions, the book maintains its unity and coherence. The three different perspectives, together, develop a comprehensive approach on the subject and as such, the book represents a full-blown picture of contemporary metropolis. The authors offer no cheap proposal on how to deal with the crisis of the city. Yet, this book offers several insights that should be taken into consideration by all those (institutions, social movements, political parties) who wish to deal with current urban realities and provide answers to their most serious questions.