

Reviews of books

S. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton. A Global History*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2014, pp. 640.

As the 2013 *New York Times*' editorial "In History Departments, It's up with Capitalism" underlined, the financial crises of 2008 and its aftermath have created an unprecedented demand for research in the history of capitalism, and more specifically for the – often-complex – relationship between democracy and the capitalism economy¹. Another central feature of the history of capitalism – which has come under scrutiny – is its apparently unstoppable capacity for global expansion. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that in recent years economic history has been characterized by a revival of interest for both the history of capitalism and for global history.

Sven Beckert decided to tell his global history of capitalism by tracking the history of the development and impact of one commodity – cotton – on the global economy. The focus of the book is perfectly justified by the fact that "for about nine hundred years, from 1000 to 1900 CE, cotton was the world's most important manufacturing industries" (p. XII), and remains extremely important today from the point of view of employment and global trade.

The readers will start their journey from the town hall of Manchester, where they will observe the members of the city's Chamber of Commerce seated, assembled, for their annual meeting in 1860. Beckert starts his history of cotton here, describing the Manchester merchants'

1 J. Schuessler, *In History Departments, It's up with Capitalism*, NYT, April 6, 2013.

disbelief in front of their own unequalled prosperity – consequence of the productivity gained through mechanization in the transformation of the world's most important textile fiber – cotton.

The members of the Chamber of Commerce did not know then that the Empire of Cotton as they knew it was about to be transformed radically. By April 1861 – when the first shots of the American Civil War were fired – 61 percent of the United States' exports were constituted by raw cotton which fuelled the seemingly unstoppable growth of European textile industries. The Civil War unleashed a "mad scramble" which saw the efforts of European capitalists to procure a steady supply of cheap raw cotton from other sources.

Beckert follows these efforts and the transformations that they caused (in terms of imperial expansion, but also in terms of labour and land tenure organizations) through the globe. Britain focused its efforts to source raw cotton to the Middle East and to the Far East; Japan expanded in Korea and China; Germany planned to develop cotton-growing plantations in its own recent African colonies. All of this was partly a consequence of the efforts of these imperial entities to protect the growth of their own manufacturing sectors.

In singling out cotton as the fuel that propelled the engine of Imperial expansion in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Sven Beckert demonstrates – contrary to widely held beliefs in *laissez faire* – how capitalism did indeed work best when governments took an extremely active and ruthless role in supporting its expansion, by maintaining armies and navies, building the necessary transport infrastructures and heavily regulated trading the markets for primary goods. Finally, the author shows clearly how the expansion of capitalistic markets did not lead to the improvement of economic possibilities and working conditions through across the globe.

Several parts of Beckert's *Empire of Cotton* are authentic wonders of historical research: for example, the reader will become familiar with the roles that cotton growers in Togo, German colonialists and American freed slaves played – with various degrees of agency – when they were

all brought together by the single goal of providing cheap primary sources for the insatiable European textile industries (pp. 365-375)².

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Pierre Werner: témoignages d'une vocation européenne, Actes de la table ronde des grands témoins. Luxembourg, 27 novembre 2015, Centre Virtuel de la Connaissance sur l'Europe, Luxembourg, 2013, pp. 79.

In the second half of 2015, Luxembourg will hold the rotating Presidency of the Council of the European Union for the 12th time. This country, which lies between France and Germany, has taken on the role of mediator between larger powers and has simultaneously succeeded in defending its vital interests. After the Second World War, its politicians made European integration a key plank of their policy. Since the time of Joseph Bech, from Pierre Werner and Gaston Thorn to Jacques Santer and Jean-Claude Juncker more recently, Luxembourg has committed itself to finding a way out of Europe's successive impasses. In this long list of political figures, Pierre Werner (29 December 1913-24 June 2002), Prime Minister and Finance Minister of Luxembourg for several decades, can be regarded as a *pater familias*. Throughout his life, Werner worked tirelessly to bring his ideas to fruition — from the economic diversification of Luxembourg and its consolidation as an international financial centre to the development of a policy for satellite telecommunications and the introduction of Economic and Monetary Union in Europe — becoming a source of inspiration for future generations. The book *Pierre Werner: témoignages d'une vocation européenne* (Pierre Werner: accounts of a European vocation') reflects the actions and achievements of this eminent statesman and great European as

² See also, "From Tuskegee to Togo: The Problem of Freedom in the Empire of Cotton", in *The Journal of American History*, Vol. 92, n.2, 2005, pp. 498-526.

seen by his colleagues and supporters, political opponents and intellectuals, together with members of his family, all of whom assembled for a round table to mark the centenary of his birth¹.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission (2004–2014), looks back at Pierre Werner's European career and the balance he was always able to achieve between his work in Europe and his commitment to his native Luxembourg. As a Luxembourger, he was attached to the European idea as it offered a response to Luxembourg's main aspirations, which were linked to its specific geopolitical and economic situation. Werner had been aware of the importance of European issues since his university days, and his commitment to European unification took firm shape in 1949, when he became convinced 'of the urgent need for the countries of Western Europe to undertake the economic and political construction of a united Europe. His experience of working in the international arena, particularly his awareness of the weakness and the divided state of Europe, made it almost an intellectual obligation. By becoming more and more closely involved, through his posts in the Luxembourg Government, in the great issues of European integration, Pierre Werner, who was drawn to act as both a Luxembourger and a European, was to leave his imprint on the key events in that process. José Manuel Barroso also mentions the innovative research project 'Pierre Werner and Europe', published on www.cvce.eu, which looks at the ideas and achievements of this eminent figure who contributed to the building of a united Europe.

¹ Also available at www.cvce.eu. The round table was moderated by Danièle Fonck, Managing Director of Editpress and Editor-in-Chief of the *Tageblatt*, and included contributions from Marie-Anne and Henri Werner, Pierre Werner's son and daughter; Jacques Santer, Honorary Minister of State and former President of the European Commission; Colette Flesch, former Minister and Deputy Prime Minister; Luc Frieden, Finance Minister; Sir Brian Unwin, Honorary President of the European Investment Bank; René Steichen, Chairman of the Board of Directors of SES; and Charles-Ferdinand Nothomb, Belgian Minister of State and President of the Pierre Werner European Circle since 2002.

Jacques Santer, Luxembourg Prime Minister (1984-1995) and President of the European Commission (1995-1999), worked closely with Werner and succeeded him as Prime Minister of Luxembourg in 1984. He describes how Pierre Werner's full and active life largely coincided with the progress of European integration in the second half of the 20th century. As a result of Werner's decades-long career at the highest political level and his capacity for influence, this prominent Christian Democratic intellectual and committed federalist played a major role in regional integration (BLEU, Benelux) and in EEC policy-making, and gained a strong reputation for forging a political consensus between larger powers. In this way he succeeded in defending Luxembourg's vital interests, from the financial centre to the seats of the European institutions. Werner was involved in the major ideological debates of the time, and although he was initially in favour of a monetary approach to European integration, he was one of the first to develop arguments for a symmetrical economic and monetary union and for the "effective parallelism" principle. The careful balance he imagined reappeared in the Werner Report of 1970, which was presented as a blueprint for EMU in the EU. Jacques Santer particularly mentions the consensus that Werner secured between the 'monetarist' and 'economist' perspectives during the drafting process for the Werner Report, which can be seen as a "further Luxembourg Compromise" after the first Luxembourg Compromise of 1966, to which Werner also made a vital contribution. Colette Flesch, Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister in the Werner Government (1980-1984), explains how Pierre Werner contributed to the establishment of Luxembourg's own, independent system of diplomacy — thereby continuing the process launched by Joseph Bech at the start of the Second World War — and how he helped to form Luxembourg's diplomatic and intellectual elite. She mentions how she witnessed his concerted action in a crisis situation at first hand. In 1982, a move by Belgium, which put the Belgo-Luxembourg monetary agreements under strain, endangered the Belgo-Luxembourg Economic Union (BLEU), and Luxembourg seriously considered withdrawing

from the monetary union. With Pierre Werner in the driving seat, the Luxembourg Government toned down its reaction and, aware of the considerable political importance of the BLEU, continued the partnership, while at the same time increasingly asserting its monetary autonomy. As a way to a lasting solution, it called in the experts, who concluded that a purely national monetary system was viable. That being so, the Luxembourg Monetary Institute (LMI) came into being, which made it possible for the country to assert its monetary identity and above all put it on an equal footing with the other countries in the European Monetary System (EMS).

Colette Flesch describes how, during the period from 1960 to 1974, the Luxembourg Presidencies of the EC Council were held exclusively by various Werner Governments in succession, and Pierre Werner, acting as President each time, spoke on behalf of the Community at a sequence of international meetings and forums. In his moves to foster dialogue and rapprochement, Werner adopted an approach which he saw in theoretical terms as a method for any presidency: "I regarded my presidency as an opportunity, primarily, for creating an atmosphere and a climate of negotiation which took account of the delicate sensitivities of partners aspiring to reach agreement. The agreement must not leave any losers in a squabble over minutiae of language which may disguise a persistent underlying disagreement".

Pierre Werner's name is inextricably linked with the Luxembourg international financial centre. Luc Frieden, Minister for the Budget (1998-2004) and for Finance (2009-2013), describes Werner's role in the development of the financial centre, having held lengthy discussions with him regarding its prospects and its potential as a "laboratory" for the ECU and the euro. It was Werner who, in 1946, was commissioned to draw up a report on the reorganisation of the banking system in Luxembourg. He was then appointed as banking commissioner with responsibility for setting up an authority to regulate the organisation of the credit market and international financial collaboration. He represented Luxembourg in international negotiations on several occasions, parti-

cularly in Switzerland and within the Benelux. Werner became Finance Minister in 1953 and was involved not only in reforming the country's public finances but also in the legislative infrastructure of the banking sector, which coincided with his reflections on a common European currency. From 1961 onwards he was in close contact with Jean Monnet's Action Committee for the United States of Europe and also with Robert Triffin and other advocates of European monetary integration. In the 1970s, Pierre Werner set up a think tank on the future of the financial centre composed of international specialists and experts from Luxembourg, which made projections about the future. Luc Frieden also identifies Werner's vital role in raising awareness of European issues among several generations of Luxembourg political leaders, including Jacques Santer and Jean-Claude Juncker.

Werner's name is also associated with the modernisation of Luxembourg. As soon as he joined the government as Finance Minister, Pierre Werner turned his attention to the major projects for the reconstruction and development of the country, which mobilised considerable resources. With a view to making Luxembourg a modern, forward-looking country and a "true international platform", a large-scale town-planning scheme to redevelop the Kirchberg plateau was launched in 1961. Specifically, this "European quarter" of Luxembourg City was developed to serve as a significant asset for the country in the battle for the location of the Community's seats and to confirm the country's role as a permanent capital of the Community institutions. Securing the seat of the European Investment Bank was one of the objectives at that time, as mentioned by Sir Brian Unwin, President of the EIB (1993-1999).

In July 1984, when his party emerged as the winner in the general election, Werner withdrew from political life but remained active in public affairs. His favourite fields of action were the promotion of EMU and euro (he was joint chairman, alongside Raymond Barre, of the ECU Institute in Lyon), and the development of the media and the audiovisual sphere, particularly through the project for the *Société Eu-*

ropéenne des Satellites, which marked a new era in Luxembourg's economic development. René Steichen, Chairman of the Board of SES (1996-2014), discusses the foresightedness of this project launched by Werner and implemented in 1995 by the first Santer Government. Luxembourg's bold venture into this field paid off with the development of the audiovisual industry: SES is now the second-largest operator in the world and its satellites cover the entire planet.

Pierre Werner's children Marie-Anne and Henri offer a more personal description of Pierre Werner, as does his friend, theologian Mathias Schiltz. We learn that Werner was an intellectual with a passion for literature and music but that he was also a man of faith, a citizen who was committed, together with his wife Henriette Pescatore and their five children, to those in need. Marie-Anne Werner reminds us of the credo that Werner mentioned in his memoirs, published in 1992, which can perhaps best sum up his personality: "A political achievement is never the result of the intelligence or desire of a single man. A political leader must, above all, serve as a catalyst for the energies of those around him, those who assist him in the pursuit of a major goal. I believe in the greatness of politics when it is underpinned by the desire to bring people together".

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A. De Rose, S. Strozza (eds.), *Fifth Population Report. Italy in the Economic Crisis*, Italian Association for Population Studies (AISP-SIS), il Mulino, Bologna, 2015.

John Maynard Keynes wrote in the depths of the Great Depression that "practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist" (*The General Theory of Employment, Income and Money*, 1936, chap. 24, Concluding Notes). This acute observation is applicable to

our current great recession as well. In fact, the newly discredited ideas are not too different from the old, suggesting that Keynes may have overestimated the ability of people to learn from their mistakes, like Temin wrote on receipt of a recent paper (*The Great Recession and the Great Depression*, NBER Working Paper 15645, 2010). He stresses the role of economic models and ideas in public policy and argues that gold-standard mentality still holds sway today. The parallels are greatest in the generation of the crises, and they illuminate the policy choices being made today. Marx (*The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, New York, 1852, p. 1) said famously that history repeats itself, “the first time as tragedy, the second as farce” and this observation fits our current condition.

The most recent crisis has given rise to a broader-based depression than that of 1929 (Alessandrini P., Bettin G. and Pepe M. (2013), *Viaggio nell'economia*, il Mulino, Bologna). Instability in financial markets began in the USA in February 2007 because of the subprime mortgage crisis, with banks granting mortgages to unreliable borrowers, who put their houses up as collateral; and the situation worsened some months later following the bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers, one of the biggest financial companies in the world. The rise in bank rates imposed by the Fed (Federal Reserve System), the American central bank, by generating an enormous wave of insolvency among subprime debtors was then followed by heavy losses for banks and a slump in mortgaged house prices, thus exposing the property bubble (Alessandrini P., Bettin G. and Pepe M., 2013). The mortgages granted to subprime debtors becoming irrecoverable had been sold through international financial circuits to institutional investors, banks and savers. The financial crisis then spread like a disease from the United States to the rest of the world. Furthermore, with the shrinkage of credit and the lack of liquidity circulating in the economic system, the crisis moved from the financial sector to the rest of the economy. The sharp decline in orders and production caused GDP to fall in many countries in 2009. After the partial economic recovery came the Greek debt crisis,

which led to a certain mistrust in the strength of the euro and an intense speculative attack was launched on government securities in European countries risking bankruptcy (Portugal, Ireland, Spain and Italy).

Initially caused by the serious international financial crisis, the intense and prolonged shrinkage of the Italian economy was fuelled by the subsequent depression in the domestic and international productive sector, by the increase in the national debt, which was already extensive and not very sustainable, and by the decrease in the credibility of Italian and European institutions, as well as by an economic system with weaknesses and structural problems (Savona P. (2012), *Eresie, esorcismi e scelte giuste per uscire dalla crisi. Il caso Italia*, Rubbettino Editore; Accetturo A., Bassanetti A., Bugamelli M., Faiella I., Finaldi Russo P., Franco D., Giacomelli S. and Omiccioli M. (2013), *Il sistema industriale italiano tra globalizzazione e crisi*, Questioni d'Economia e Finanza, Occasional Paper n. 193, Roma, Banca d'Italia; Bruni F. (2013), *L'economia italiana di fronte alla crisi*, in Atlante Geopolitico 2013, L'Enciclopedia Treccani, Treccani.it). This recessionary phase has had a negative effect on the labour market with a steady fall in employment and a significant growth in unemployment and, above all, in a sharp decrease in activity rate. What effects on the Italian population? This book edited by Alessandra De Rose and Salvatore Strozza answers this question regularly and thoroughly. As through a kaleidoscope, data and issues illustrated in the volume give us an intense picture of current Italian society. This volume is divided into five chapters: it provides a comprehensive picture of the Italian demographic situation of these years of crisis, cleverly constructed and consistently by the chapters' authors.

In the Chapter 1 (*Economic crisis and demographic dynamics*) an overview of economic crisis and its consequences on population is presented. The reduction in the number of people employed almost exclusively affected men since the current economic crisis has mainly hit the building and manufacturing industries (in total about 880,000 people

have lost their jobs, almost 400,000 of whom were in the building industry), two traditionally male sectors. It therefore caused a different impact compared to the past when female employment acted as a “buffer” and fell which allowed male employment to remain stable (Reyneri E. and Pintaldi F. (2013), *Dieci domande su un mercato del lavoro in crisi*, il Mulino, Bologna).

The greater weakness of Southern Italy has been confirmed, as there was a bigger fall in employment. There are various and significant differences for different groups. The Italians have been hit particularly hard, with almost 1,600,000 fewer employed people, while the employment of foreigners in the five-year period studied increased by more than 600,000, thanks to the continuing demand for domestic workers and care of older people and sick, mostly aimed at immigrant women (Reyneri and Pintaldi, 2013).

The word “crisis” means a “sharp and unexpected deterioration in economic conditions” which suddenly reduces the well-being of families and may force individuals to rethink their choices, for example regarding whether they want to marry or have children. This shock might not have only short-term effects on the population: should negative conditions persist over time, as seems to be happening, it might be difficult to restore the pre-crisis equilibrium and therefore cyclical shocks would contribute to consolidating or slowing down demographic dynamics in the long term. In addition, the effect of the cyclical economic change on one factor of demographic behaviour might not be sudden, in which case a certain amount of time needs to elapse before it is visible and can be measured statistically. For these reasons, any reading of the presumed effects of the crisis on recent demographic dynamics needs to be made very cautiously; moreover, the latest available data do not always document a striking impact of the crisis on individual demographic phenomena, but, as we will see, in many cases, they highlight specific problems and make it possible to indicate the most vulnerable categories of family and individual which are therefore most exposed to any consequences. Young people are most

affected by the most dramatic aspect of the crisis, which is the increase in unemployment.

In the Chapter 2 (*Youth and education unions*) is it shown that with the reduction in job opportunities, the number of demoralized young people has increased, especially in Southern Italy and where the levels of education are low, together with the number of NEETS (Not in Education Employment or Training). Who are the young people? For international organizations young people are those aged between 15 and 24 years and data on youth unemployment, useful to compare the employment difficulties of young people between countries, are for this age group. The proportion of couples with two salaries from the total of young couples (those in which the woman is younger than 35) decreased in the period 2007-2012 by about 10 percentage points (it was 73.1% of unmarried couples and 51.5% of married couples in 2007), while, at the same time, the number of couples in which the man works and the woman is looking for work has doubled (it was about 6% both for married and cohabiting couples). In this situation it may be assumed that families continue to act as social shock-absorbers and to support the younger birth-cohorts, especially in a country such as Italy which has always been characterized by strong family networks (Dalla Zuanna G. and Micheli G.A. (eds.) (2004), *Strong Family and Low Fertility: A Paradox?*, Dordrecht, Kluwer Academic Publishers.).

Chapter 3 (*Reproductive behavior*) confirms that also in Italy, as in many other European countries, the positive trend in fertility observed at the beginning of the Millennium seems to have come to a standstill. The average number of children per woman, equal to 1.42 in 2008 fell to 1.39 in 2013, when just over 514,000 births were recorded, about 62,000 fewer than in 2008. This decrease is due mainly to the births recorded for Italian women, but for the first time in the last decade, there has also been a fall in the number of births to foreign women. The tendency to postpone maternity has been compounded which will lead to a further reduction in fertility. Furthermore, 77% of mothers have declared that the recent crisis has influenced at least one aspect of their lives:

21% of mothers renounced or postponed having another child, while for 16% of unmarried mothers the economic crisis has had a negative impact on decisions about marrying their partners and weddings have been deferred. These effects are more noticeable for those families that have experienced economic difficulties after the birth of their first child. The current phase of birth-rate decrease in fertility is taking place in a context of economic downturn that seems to act in the direction of an even greater delaying of births, especially for the more recent generations, the hardest hit by the jobs crisis. The observed variation in the rates of fertility changes in intensity and direction depending on the age group considered, and the order of birth of the children.

Chapter 4 (*Survival and health*) estimates changes in lifestyles, the condition of the Italian population and foreigners resident before and during the crisis. It is more difficult to establish a connection between economic crisis and death rates or quality of survival. Studies of the past have not always produced consistent results: some suggest that the death rate increases in times of economic decline, while others show that a deterioration in the economic conditions is associated with stable or even lower death rates. For example, the Great Depression of 1929 was accompanied by a fall in the death rate in many North American cities. During the oil crisis, a negative association was observed between unemployment and death rates in many industrialized countries, which was due, above all, to the drastic decrease in road accidents, thanks to less available energy sources (UCL, 2012). Nevertheless, studies relating to crisis periods in very different specific territorial contexts show contrasting results: between 1980 and 2000, the periods of greatest economic difficulty in Brazil were immediately followed by peaks in the death rate, just as in Mexico, where increases in the death rates for children and the elderly people were observed during the four economic crises of the 1980s and 1990s.

Giovanni Vecchi (*In ricchezza e in povertà. Il benessere degli italiani dall'Unità ad oggi*, il Mulino, Bologna, 2011, p. 74) in his reconstruction

of the situation in Italy during the 150 years Unity, has compared the path of improving the living conditions of the Italians, as indicated by the epidemiological indicators, with that of the GDP per capita (i.e. the indicator most used by economists to describe the well-being of a country). He concluded that the picture that comes from the history of health transition in our country could be different from that recorded by more closely macroeconomic indicators. In terms of well-being, in short, the GDP does not tell everything and not always tells the true story.

Yet, survival and health also contribute cultural, environmental and genetic factors and mortality is the termination point of a personal journey to which these factors participate in synergy. Yet a crisis involves specific risks (Danziger S. (2013), *Evaluating the Effects of the Great Recession, The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 650, pp. 6-24.): first of all an increase in suicides, secondly a decline in living standards for those who experience (or are simply afraid of) unemployment, in terms of harmful behaviour (alcoholism, smoking) or people eating badly and not taking care of themselves.

The current recession seems to be producing analogous effects, apparently contradictory, on health and death rates in European countries including Italy. Survival levels did not change over the period corresponding to the crisis, in fact life expectancy continued to increase, although this increase slowed down slightly for men in Southern Italy. However, the number of suicides rose, from 2008 onwards, a trend mostly found in the 35-69 working age group: there were 1,832 suicides in this age group in 2011, 345 more than in 2007. In contrast, the number of deaths in road accidents fell (from 1.4 per 10,000 residents in the 15-34 age group in 2007 to 1.0 in 2011), but in line with a tendency towards a reduction that had started a long time ago: it is hard to say how much of this positive trend is due to a beneficial effect of the crisis – the reduction in the use of cars – and how much is due instead to a more detailed and careful policy for accident prevention that the Italian institutions have recently imple-

mented. The same considerations are valid for the decrease in tobacco and alcohol consumption, which is also documented by our data: long-term policies have an effect on people's behaviour and are far more important and long lasting than a temporary reduction of consumption due to the fact of having less disposable income.

The health indicators also provide some clues about a possible effect of the decrease in individual and collective economic wellbeing. The perceived individual physical health seemed to improve in 2013 compared to in 2005, but the perception of psychological status seemed to be worse, especially that of adults and young people; there were more general and specialised medical examinations, although the latter increased more among those who have greater economic resources, as did the number of diagnostic tests. In particular, during 2013, a part of the Italian population gave up on health services and assistance and on purchasing medicines for economic reasons, except for treatments for children, and this was the case for both men and women and more in the South than in the North.

The economic crisis has redrawn the European scenario regarding migratory flows (Chapter 5 – *Internal and international migration of Italians and foreigners*), although numbers are still very high. Some countries, such as Spain, have experimented with a drastic reduction in entry flows during times of crisis, while others, such as Germany, have actually recorded increases in the numbers arriving from countries hit harder by the crisis since 2008 (Bertoli S., Brücker H. and Fernández-Huertas Moraga J. (2013), *The European Crisis and Migration to Germany: Expectations and the Diversion of Migration Flows*, Etudes et Documents, 21, Centre d'études et de recherches sur le développement international (CERDI); Strozza S. and Buonomo A. (2014), "Gli italiani nei flussi migratori e tra le popolazioni straniere dei principali Paesi europei di accogliimento", in *Rapporto Italiani nel Mondo 2014*, a cura di Fondazione Migrantes, Todi (PG), Tau editrice, pp. 94-107).

Italy is experiencing the twofold effect of a drastic reduction of the entry flows of foreign citizens and an increase in the emigratory flows

of Italian citizens towards destinations with better economic and work prospects. Furthermore, the data relating to internal mobility seem to suggest the persistence of people moving from the South to the North of Italy. As for the labour market in quantitative terms, the data relating to participation in the labour market show that the crisis had hit much more foreign workers than those of Italian and foreign workers little more than Italian. The activity rate and employment decreased most among foreigners; among Italians while the unemployment rate has almost tripled in the first, that of the latter doubled.

Demographic changes (Chapter 6 – *Families and new families*) taking place in Italy have led, on the one hand, to a change in family structures and, on the other to the spread of new family forms more than traditional types. A consequence of economic uncertainty may be the increase of young people living in families with multiple nuclei; it is perhaps of those who out of necessity or by choice, are forced to return to the parental home after working or become double failures. As for the new family, forms are born essentially as a result of marital instability and include single-parent families and stepfamilies and also those of foreign citizens.

As the editors point out (De Rose and Strozza, 2015, p. 29) overall, in the examined period, the demographic structure of the Italian population has generally continued in the ageing process as a result of a further fall in the birth rates and in a situation in which the foreign component also seems to be less dynamic. The role of the current economic instability is identifiable in these processes, although it is not completely clear since it influences people's behaviour and choices through complex mechanisms. Surely, it leaves marks that will continue to affect the Italian population in the years to come.

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F. Bethencourt, *Racisms: from the Crusades to the Twentieth Century*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2013, pp. 464.

The book *Racisms: from the Crusades to the Twentieth Century*, by the Portuguese historian Francisco Bethencourt, marks a turning point in the national and international studies on its subject. The work aims to provide an historical outline of a topic whose treatment still retains its urgency, since different forms of discrimination, violence and enslavement based on ethnic origin continue to be practised to this day. Indeed, the author concludes his *Introduction* by paraphrasing Marc Bloch, “we need to study the past in order to understand the present and prepare the future” (p. 10). The space-time framework chosen by Bethencourt is extensive: he focuses his attention on the Western world – embracing, with the emergence of colonial empires, the European continent as well as Africa, Asia and America – from the Middle Ages to the Contemporary era. This global and long-term approach allows an ideal application of the comparative analysis, sharpened through the author’s former investigations.

The reach of his comparative studies imparts to Bethencourt an international profile shared by few other Portuguese historians. His books are published in various languages and are widely read not only in Europe, but also beyond its borders, especially in the United States and in Brazil. His scientific method reflects and, at the same time is reflected by, his professional career which has progressed in and out of academia.

As Bethencourt revealed in an interview¹, two ruptures with traditional Portuguese historiography at a young age have been crucial in defining his main concerns as a historian. The first one was the chasm with nationalist ideology, resulting from his political commitment to combat fascism and the Portuguese colonial war. This meant, for Bethencourt,

¹ F. Bethencourt, “Entrevista”, in *Revista Topoi*, Março 2003, Rio de Janeiro: 2013, pp. 165-178.

becoming aware of the need to keep an epistemological distance from the investigated matter, abandoning a nationalistic emotional engagement with the past. The second was a departure from a self-referential historiography, an outcome of his contact with Vitorino Magalhães Godinho. This led him to insert Portugal's history into a global context and to look at it through a comparative perspective, as could be seen in his earlier works *História da Expansão Portuguesa* (1998, edited together with Kirti Chaudhuri) and *The Portuguese Oceanic Expansion, 1400-1800* (2007, ed. with Diogo Ramada Curto).

The internationalization of Bethencourt's career was consequent on the assumption of these choices. His Master's degree at the Universidade Nova de Lisboa was enriched by his sojourns in Paris. He obtained his doctorate at the European University Institute in Florence, conducting research in Spanish, Italian and English libraries and archives. There followed several teaching residences in American and Brazilian universities. From 1999 to 2004, he was the director of the Centro Cultural Calouste Gulbenkian in Paris. Lastly, since 2005, Bethencourt holds the Charles Boxer Chair at King's College of London. His various international activities contributed to enhancing the ties between Portuguese and foreign universities, in addition to broadening his personal horizons. The long-lasting interest in oppression and repression in Western history may be considered as an ulterior element of continuity between Racisms and the rest of the author's oeuvre, which began with works about the history of magic, such as *Imaginario da Magia* (1987), and of the *Inquisition*, *Les Inquisition modernes* (1992).

The starting point of the research on which Bethencourt's book is based coincides with a query made explicit in its *Introduction*: "how can the same person be considered black in the United States, colored in the Caribbean or South Africa, and white in Brazil?" (p. 1). In the attempt to formulate an answer, the historian concentrates on racial classifications, attracted by their power to shape human behaviour. This intuition is decisive: gradually, in the course of the investigations into the immaterial constructions, it becomes apparent that, ultimately,

“racial classification [...] was intended to include all people of the world in a relational, systemic, and hierarchical arrangement” and that “different forms of racism emerged in time and place, in relation to specific conjunctures” (p. 2). Thus, Bethencourt realized that the focal point of the work could have been fruitfully shifted from intellectual history to political and social practice and that the issue of colour couldn’t exhaust the problem synthesized in the opening query. Thus, the key to solving it was found by the author in a definition of the concept of racism which allowed him, in his words, “to study racisms as ethnic prejudice as well as practice of discrimination and segregation” (p. 1) and “to chart its different forms, continuities, discontinuities, and transformation” (p. 2). It raised new questions, which ended up structuring the work: “how were system of racial classification produced? How did these systems vary in time and place? How far did they shape human action? How were racial classifications influenced by conflict and social interests? How did racial hierarchies reflect prejudices and stimulate discriminatory action?” (p. 2).

The change of perspective made by Bethencourt brought him to reject the broadly accepted idea that it wouldn’t be legitimate to talk about racism by referring to phenomena which occurred before the emergence of the theory of races, between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, which divided humankind into groups that were supposed to represent common physical and mental characteristics susceptible to justify relations of superiority and inferiority, and, secondly, the correlative argument that those cases would be ascribable to confessional antagonisms. As we have seen, according to the author, prejudices related to ethnic origin coupled with discriminatory and segregationist actions result in racism. The analysis of the particular circumstances in which these conditions were manifested, even before the eighteenth and nineteenth century, carried out throughout the book, demonstrates that there were cases of racism long before the prejudices underlying those actions were framed in the modern notion of race. The first case

identified by Bethencourt concerned the New Christians and the so-called *moriscos* in Iberia from the fifteenth century onwards. The ongoing discrimination and segregation these converted populations were subject to prove the existence of a prejudice based on ethnic origin, not on religious belief, already in the late Middle Ages. Moreover, the fact that the same groups were economic competitors of the predominant majority reveals the instrumental character of those practices and their function in the hierarchisation of society, already in these first stages.

While recognizing the importance the theory of races, which provided a scientific dressing up of ancient prejudices, thereby securing a new and powerful justification for the associated practices of discrimination and segregation, for Bethencourt, therefore, racism would precede the establishment of the biological paradigm, but would not be something immanent in human nature. In line with his approach, it is required to verify the presence of the defining elements of racism in any given historical reality.

The topics that the *Introduction of Racisms* raises are explored by Bethencourt throughout the five chapters of the book, by means of a wide-ranging documental *corpus*, among which iconographic sources occupy a prominent place. "The European expansion", explains the author, "provides the framework for my research in time and space" (p. 8). The exposition, in fact, follows the main steps in the European expansion process, presenting a cross-cutting analyses which considers the phenomenon of racism in its non-linear evolution.

The first part deals with the movement's early stage, represented by the Crusades in their thrust to the Holy Land and by the *Reconquista* of Iberia and Sicily: in the course of which the tension between Christian universalism and local interests produced episodes of integration, as well as cases of discrimination and segregation, that did not yet display the distinctive hallmarks of racism identified by Bethencourt. The second part examines the early-modern European vision of humankind: it focuses on the notion of purity of blood, a medieval inheritance, and

on the interpretive schemes determined by the voyages of discovery, which served the economic exploitation and were destined to live a long life. The third part surveys, in a comparative perspective, the processes that have structured the colonial world, between the sixteenth and the nineteenth century: the conquest and the occupation of non-European spaces, the introduction and consolidation of the slavery system, up to its abolition, and the institutionalization of discrimination and segregation supported by classification, legitimizing the *status quo*. In the fourth part, centred on the history of ideas and science, closer attention is given to the development of the theory of race and its related debates and conflicts. Finally, the fifth part studies the fusion of the concepts of race and nation and its political consequences, from the end of the nineteenth century onwards, ending with an historical overview of racism in Asian countries which have not been significantly affected by the European expansion.

In the book, racism is deconstructed as a phenomenon and reconstructed as phenomena, hence the title *Racisms*. It is a valuable work, highly informative, but precisely from the wealth of information derives its only flaw: in a bid to marry an all-encompassing outline, in terms of time and space, coupled with detailed analyses of the singular cases, not all topics are investigated equally in depth, or with the use of a complete bibliography. However, Bethencourt does succeed in offering a much-needed historical synthesis accessible to a non-specialist public, while providing a general useful key for its interpretation. Furthermore, *Racisms* is engaging now that new challenges seem to be reawakening ghosts from the past.

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