

S. Misiani, G. Sabatini (eds.), *Dalla colonizzazione alle nuove migrazioni. Il contributo della storia all'analisi del mondo contemporaneo*, Guida Editori, Napoli 2020, pp. 218.

The volume edited by Simone Misiani and Gaetano Sabatini derives from a research and work project whose aim is connecting the world of academia with the emergencies of the contemporary world, namely the new migrations, which characterize in a way today's reality, as it has been the case for the entire history of humanity. The interest of the authors of the eight contributions of the book was to carry out an in-depth analysis of the historical significance of the processes of agrarian colonization in contemporary Italy, from the transoceanic "great emigration" to the post-war planning aimed at the development of southern Italy, and to the prospects of new settlements in the area opened in recent decades by incoming migratory flows. The problem of the emergence of new migrations was therefore analysed from the two points of view of Economic History and the History of Economic Thought, trying to clarify the meaning that the original model of agrarian colonization could have on it and whether the latter could provide a contribution that is still relevant today.

The first meeting, that took place in December 2016, was on the occasion of a conference at FILCOSPE Department of the Roma Tre University entitled “Idee per un piano nazionale dei migranti. Il ruolo della cultura della colonizzazione agraria (Ideas for a national migrants’ plan. The role of the culture of agrarian colonization)”, organized in a period in which a debate was under way about the drafting of a national migrant plan: The University, therefore, through this and other cultural initiatives wanted to “act as a meeting point, interacting directly with institutional actors and assuming the responsibility of collaborating in understanding the problems of inclusion, in a concrete framework of space and territory and in a historical perspective” (p. 5). The opinion of the organizers of the meeting was that the theme of hospitality should not be posed in terms of a humanitarian emergency but of “the need for the European cultural world to radically rethink its identity and history” (pp. 5-6). Therefore, the participants in the conference wanted to consider the culture of agrarian colonization in a new perspective, reflecting on the possibility of using a modality experimented in the twentieth century in contemporary Italy to deal with the demographic phenomenon of new migrants. Historical research, in fact, has revealed “the original value of agrarian colonization and of the new settlements created between the two wars” (p. 6). This area of history, however, has met with little interest in the scientific community, as these policies were carried out by authoritarian regimes and by “anti-modern visions”, with a reality that presented itself in a very different way from the propaganda of the regimes. The research presented by the “Centro di Ricerca Interuniversitario e Geopolitico sulle Città di Fondazione¹ (Interuniversity and Geopolitical Research Center on the Foundation Cities)”, on the contrary, has shown that agrarian colonization “is a historical and social modality of the communities that precedes Fascism and, in some ways, leaves it aside” (p. 6). For these reasons, it can be said that the problem of ghettos and suburbs can be solved without erecting barriers, but, rather, by trying to create “sustainable cities that refer to ideal models without interruption between urban and rural areas and between North-West and East of the world”. This perspective therefore allows us to not consider the

¹ CRIGECIF (Centro di Ricerca Interuniversitario e Geopolitico sulle Città di Fondazione) was founded in 2018 by the University of Roma Tre and the University of Teramo with the aim of representing a “meeting point to combine university research with the elaboration of policies aimed at the development of the territory and the regeneration of relationship of trust between institutions and citizens, with a geopolitical vision of the phenomena in progress” (p. 6n).

Mediterranean and the Middle East as “the powder keg of a new demographic war, but as a laboratory for social and cultural integration between different populations” (pp. 6-7).

The examples of migration and integration concerning the labour market in the Agro Pontino and Romano, where the Sikhs have acquired importance for the survival of the local farms, allow us to ask numerous questions about the ways in which the institutions should intervene to address the phenomenon, the limits of integration and the possible compromise. This study suggests that the “categories of progress or social class are incapable of grasping the immigration process that is changing the political agenda of the nation states” (p. 7). The only way to give life to a model of lasting coexistence, as it happened in the past with the examples of ideal cities and as it was the case in the twentieth century with the foundation of cities in Sardinia and in the Agro Pontino, is to listen to the requests of the communities of the new inhabitants. First of all, it is mandatory to overcome the ideological clash between fascism and democracy, but also to abandon the idea of clash of civilization between the West and the East. Therefore, the authors, through their essays, invite democratic parties to “get rid of the baggage of the ideologies of the twentieth century but also to have the courage to affirm the universal character of humanistic thought, which has the ability to rethink itself and govern change” (p. 8).

The ideas that emerged from the 2016 conference gave life to a volume that represents an intermediate stage of the research project and that collects the results of the reflections on the link between new migrations and agrarian colonization; particular emphasis, however, was reserved to the role of agrarian colonization between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, i.e. in the transition period of capitalism following the industrial revolution, during the processes of urbanization and the construction of a mass political system (p. 8). This work also insists on the “organic link” between modern and contemporary history and agrarian colonization, identifiable starting from the seventeenth century with the first settlements in New England and the model of the first founding cities of the United States of America. As the book shows, in fact, the choices of the agrarian colonization process of European emigrants in America depend on various reasons: the first represents the utopian thrust, the biblical dream of the “promised land”; a second concerns “the socio-economic aspiration to carry out a project of independence and expansion of community-type values in the new dimension”; finally, the path is regulated through rational choices, “adhering to the principle of the labour market and the potential for improving social conditions” (p. 8). For all these reasons, agrarian colonization represents a “complex process that reproduces in the contemporary

era a model of the foundation of the polis, and of the origin of the history of a community, with the recognition of individual and collective citizenship rights, the appropriation of the earth as a source of profits and common good" (pp. 8-9).

The model of agrarian colonization of which Italy became the protagonist between the end of the nineteenth century and the outbreak of the First World War, based on the mechanism of transoceanic emigration and the policy of internal colonization, with the decisive support of legislative action, is the background of the first contribution written by Gaetano Sabatini: in this essay, full of archival references and statistical data useful for a better understanding of the problem, the author focuses on the analysis of the specific historical event of a territory protagonist of the great emigration from Italy, which can be considered as "representative of the difficulties experienced by the most peripheral areas of the Italian economy" (p. 17). The demographic depletion that started between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in Abruzzo, caused by the "definitive disarticulation of the traditional agropastoral production apparatus", by the increasing competition of imported products and by inefficient legislative and infrastructural interventions by the post-unification state, quickly led this area towards a condition of marginality within the national and regional balances. This process, however, allowed for a "decisive eschatological and then social design", since with the interruption of emigration during the first post-war period, due in part to the closure of the North American borders and the nationalist policy of the fascist regime, in Abruzzo it was possible to appreciate a tendency towards colonization from inland areas to the sea, which led to the foundation of Pescara (p. 18). The author of the essay, therefore, analysed the problem of the backwardness of Abruzzo by considering four "main points of the economic history of Abruzzo between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries": the crisis of the agropastoral system; the attempt to upgrade the infrastructural network; the start of emigration; the emergence of the shortcomings of the local credit system. Among the examples provided by the author, the attempt carried out between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries through the remittances of emigrants for the purposes of an agrarian colonization is exemplary, which can be considered in many respects as an unsuccessful experiment, since not only it has not linked the local population to the territory, but has accelerated a vicious circuit, increasing the pressure towards depopulation.

The following essays analyse a national process. The contributions by Aldino Monti and Giancarlo Di Sandro consider the same problem from different perspectives, analysing the policy of integral reclamation and internal colonization promoted by the Serpieri Law of 1933. The

first used a theoretical approach on the economy of development and the debate regarding the southern question, or rather “on the different economic policies to push Italy’s Mezzogiorno on the road to economic and civil development” (pp. 53-54). In this way, Monti was able, for the first time, to link the origins of the Italian planning vision to two pillars: “1) agricultural policy and modern architecture; 2) the international debate on the limits of urbanism within mature capitalist countries (Great Britain, the United States and Germany) “(p. 10), presenting the examples of the “città di Fondazione”, namely Littoria, Aprilia, Sabaudia, Pomezia, Pontinia in the Roman and Pontine countryside (created within six years between 1934 and 1939) (p. 61-62). Di Sandro, on the other hand, focused his attention on Arrigo Serpieri and on his work at the service of the country’s economy, considering the successes and failures of his ambitious and far-sighted agricultural policy, which, after being launched during the period between the two wars worldwide, was effectively implemented throughout the twentieth century.

The essay of Francesco Dandolo analyzes the characteristics, purposes and reasons of the agrarian reform implemented in Italy in the 1950s, with the aim of explaining the contribution and problems of these interventions for the modernization and development of the South of Italy.

The subsequent contribution, written by Simone Misiani, continues along the lines drawn by the previous essay, deepening the extensive historiography produced on the theme of agrarian reform by Rossi-Doria, Ceriani Sebreghondi, by SVIMEZ (the Association for the development of the Italy’s Mezzogiorno) and by many other intellectuals engaged in the debate around the contrast between agrarian colonization, territorial inclusion and reactionary and anti-modern culture, placing it at the foundation of a post-war plan of social inclusion (p. 12).

The essay of Filippo De Iorio, which is linked to the works of Dandolo and Misiani, explores the problem of agricultural development in areas and countries with delayed development, using a theoretical approach: the work presented explains, in fact, the operational provisions of an agrarian reform, assistance in the agricultural field, the contribution of agrarian credit, finally coming to present the example of agricultural development in the Mediterranean area during the 1950s.

The contribution by Marco Zaganella introduces a topic of great interest regarding agrarian colonization, namely the case of Argentina, in which Italian emigrants played a predominant role. In this work, the author deals with the analysis of the Italian-Argentine cooperation during the 1940s and early 1950s, which took integral Italian reclamation as a model and had the Italian communities as the main actors of agrarian colonization.

The author of the last contribution, Cristóbal Gómez Benito, presents a study of agrarian colonization policies in Spain during Francoism: the author, after a rich historical introduction on the approach of the pre-war Spanish governments, argues that the Spanish government looked with interest at the Italian model, as well as at the US one, especially about development policies during the interwar period and the post-war period (pp. 200-201).

Even if the political proposals for the formulation of a National Migrants Plan were no longer followed and despite the great distance in the contents from the current period, the series of promoted meetings and debates made it possible to bring together scholars, academics, economic policy operators and representatives of foreign communities in Italy. The colonization of inland areas has enjoyed a new fortune in recent years due to two main reasons: first, because of the pandemic and in view of a more general reconsideration of the conditions and quality of life, i.e. the possibility of working remotely, which has led to the repopulation of depopulated, non-urban and decentralized areas; second, for the integration of migrants.

The final intent of the volume, therefore, is to provide an interpretation – through a chronological and thematic path based on the study of economic history and the history of economic thought – of the problem of the link between models of agrarian colonization and new migrations, both international and internal, starting from the analysis of the past, with the aim or the wish to “elaborate a valid project for the present and for the future” (p. 14). Despite the substantial differences of the present compared to the past, having to deal with events that today have a global dynamic, it is necessary to identify new global rules: reference is made to two problems of today’s reality, namely migrations, that are no longer relegated to national and European borders, because these have acquired a global dimension, and the agrarian question that is currently conditioned by both the phenomenon of climate change and global competition. In this context, the governments, which have not been capable of anticipating the problem adopting policies to manage the local impact of new migrations, have caused phenomena of rejection which only coordinated paths by all European countries will be able to address. There is the need to “foster cultural dialogue and counter the anti-immigration line that undermines the meaning of the European project” (p. 15).

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