

*Razzismo di Stato. Stati Uniti, Europa, Italia*, edited by Pietro Basso, Milan: Angeli, 2010

### Abstract

An important edited collection on US and European migration policies as vehicles or factors of *institutional racism* are dealt with in this review-essay. In the context of recent literature on migration, Pietro Basso's *State Racism* proposes a specifically Marxist approach and represents a sharp critical analysis of the ongoing surge in racism sweeping across Western Europe and North America by offering an investigation into the authoritarian, racialising, and elitist drift of Western democracies and societies. Particular importance is given to the spread of hostility towards migrants among native workers, often due to a condition of *isolation, weakness, and vulnerabilities* produced by the failures of trade unions and political organisations of the working class. The essays in the collection point towards ways in which these can be effectively thwarted and blocked by renewing collective struggles and solidarity, arguing that solidarity can stimulate the development of anti-racism based on the unity of the working class, capable of combating *all* types of discrimination through self-organisation, equality, and cooperation between migrant and native workers in the common struggle to assert needs and rights. At the present conjuncture, workers across borders can be the carriers of a new form of civilisation, liberated from the supremacy of the commodity and of money, from the exploitation of labour, and from racism and sexism.

### Keywords

migrants, Islamophobia, racism and sexism, devaluation of work, workers' solidarity, sociology of emotions

### State racism and popular feelings

International migrations constitute – and will constitute even more in the coming years – a phenomenon of epochal significance, both for the countries of emigration and for those of immigration. This process has a global and dynamic character, yet the current literature concerned with it is dominated by a substantially descriptive, quantitative, and limited approach, as if the 'immigration question' were only a particular – a *separate* – question, when in fact it is an increasingly essential issue in social transformations, in political institutions, and in the production of state ideology. In many respects the prototype of this kind of mainstream literature, which sees migration policies as fundamentally neutral, is *The Age of Migration* by Stephen Castles and Mark J. Miller,<sup>1</sup> which in its various editions and continual updating has conserved its limited approach.

The approach is completely different in *Razzismo di Stato: Stati Uniti, Europa, Italia* [*State Racism: United States, Europe, Italy*], the rich and copious volume edited by Pietro Basso (627 pages, with full and detailed references to the literature on migration and on racism) that I shall review here.

This book presents the migration policies that have been implemented in the United States and Europe as vehicles and factors of *institutional racism*, in a sharp *critical analysis* of the ongoing surge in racism that is sweeping through the West. Through this critical analysis the text constitutes, at the same time, an investigation into the authoritarian, racialising, and elitist drift of Western democracies and societies. The historical and

1. Castles and Miller 2009.

socioeconomic background of this investigation – repeatedly referred to, particularly in Basso's Introduction – is that of the global crisis that has hit the United States and Europe in the past decade. It is precisely this background – which I shall discuss later, in detail – that allows us to understand the causes, forms, and effects of the qualitative and quantitative surge in institutional racism that are examined in this book, which, in my opinion, has a singular and significant place in the analysis of international migration from a Marxist perspective.

With regard to migration policies, the book forcefully emphasises the connection between such policies and the entire field of neoliberal and, as Crouch puts it, 'post-democratic' state policies.<sup>2</sup> Few texts, in fact, argue with such cogency that migration policies are *by no means* particular – *sectorial* – policies, designed *solely* to regulate the life of immigrant populations; they are, rather, an integral part of labour policies or, more precisely, of the policies *against* wage labour *in general*, which regulate the life of the entire working class, and, indeed, of the entire society.

From this wide-ranging critical analysis we see how both in the United States and in Europe state migration policies have fostered the stratification of the labour market and the exploitation of labour. We see how, especially over the past ten years, they have come to play a fundamental role in all aspects of the institutional activities of Western democracies, acquiring great ideological and propagandistic significance and producing a great number of grave consequences for the existence of immigrant populations and, indirectly, for that of native-born populations as well, especially that of the working class.

This is a central thesis of the book, which distinguishes it also from the Italian critical literature on contemporary migrations. This often tends to narrow the issue as 'the result of a great number of *individual* choices', the 'adding together of many *individual* stories' (Dal Lago);<sup>3</sup> focusing on the 'subjective dimension of migratory processes', 'the individuality, the *irreducible singularity* of women and men who are the protagonists of migrations' (Mezzadra);<sup>4</sup> and often leaving out completely the crucial relationships between immigrant workers and local workers. Instead, for Basso and the other authors of *Razzismo di stato* international migrations are essentially a social phenomenon, and they make a point in underlining the common traits among migrants of different nationalities and the converging destiny of migrants and Italian, European, Western workers.

### The democratic state as a primary source of racism in Europe and the US

Far indeed from being seen as neutral, US and European migration policies are, in this analysis, examined pitilessly and presented as *racial* and *racist* policies. In this respect the book sharply distinguishes itself from many other works dealing with the connection between migration and racism. Indeed, the guiding thread of this work, declared in the very first lines of its Preface, is that the 'first propellant' of the *revival* of racism now underway throughout the West is *institutional* racism, and its 'first protagonists' are precisely 'states, governments, parliaments: with their special laws and their public discourse against

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2. Cf. Crouch 2004.

3. Cf. Dal Lago 1999.

4. Cf. Mezzadra 2001.

immigrants, their arbitrary administrative practices, their racial selection between “good” nationalities and dangerous nationalities, their obsessive police actions and internment camps’ (p. 9). This is the thesis that runs throughout the book. And it is a thesis that swims against the stream, since almost all the literature that deals with the spread of race-related feelings, prejudices, discriminations, and violence on both sides of the Atlantic expresses a totally different conviction: namely, that racism rises *from the bottom up*. From the ‘bottom’ of the popular strata towards the ‘up’ of the state institutions that, for their part, do what they can to mitigate and even to combat these spontaneous tendencies of the native-born population. This is a position that is carried to the extreme by Huntington, Caldwell, and the whole host of propagators of the ‘Eurabian Follies’, who maintain that multiculturalism has been able to assert itself in the West only and exclusively through the perfidy of cosmopolitan government elites blatantly unconcerned about their nation, while the vast majority, or even near totality, of the Western populations are in fact (allegedly) ‘naturally’ and heatedly opposed to the transformation of the West into multiracial and multicultural societies.<sup>5</sup>

For Basso and the other authors of *Razzismo di stato*, by contrast, state institutions have played an *absolutely decisive* role in the *social and political construction* of the feelings of hostility to and contempt for immigrant workers and peoples that are spreading through the native-born popular strata of Western societies. And the mass-media industry, often called into question (with good reason) for the harm it does in this field, can itself be seen as a ‘drive belt’ of the two most powerful forces generating racism against immigrants: political institutions and the institution of the market.

In this respect, whether one agrees or disagrees with its approach, this book also contains a theory of the state in the form of a testament to the ongoing *radical change* in that ‘constitutional state’ of which the West has for so long been proud. Today, in the name of the ‘immigration emergency’ police, military paradigms and ‘special’ structures, laws, and practices are continually being imposed on normal democratic everyday life. What is more, this change is a *general* change, which is being implemented by means of a variety of *particular* measures *apparently* concerning only ‘terrorists’ or ‘immigrants’, measures that *Razzismo di stato* examines in great detail.

To speak only of Europe, institutional racism operates both at a central and at a local level, with parliaments busy approving all sorts of discriminatory special laws and regulations, and local legislative and administrative organs of the state engaged in arbitrary practices. Measures, directives, and interventions are often proposed or imposed by parties of the ‘ethno-nationalistic’ right – which are growing stronger in many European countries – but are approved no less often with a consensus that goes far beyond them: suffice it to think, for example, of the multiplication of detention camps built specifically for ‘irregular’ immigrants, or of the – at times violent – police actions against the Roma.

The concrete examples of this way of operating on the part of European state institutions are countless: the building of walls at the border between Greece and Turkey or, more recently, after the book’s publication, between Denmark and Germany; compulsory fingerprinting (treatment once reserved for prisoners); administrative detention (unknown in ordinary law); attribution of the right to apply for residence-permits not to the immigrants themselves but to their employers (one provision of Italy’s ‘Bossi-Fini’ law); the torrent of prohibitions concerning immigrants issued by mayors – in Italy there were 788 in the period

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5. Cf. Huntington 1997, 2004; Caldwell 2009.

between July 2008 and August 2009 alone, regarding access to residence, to nursery school, to public parks, to public housing, to places of worship, to certificates, to supplementary income, to family reunification, even to parking places!

The overall effect of this enormous production of *special law against immigrants* has been the normalisation of a hierarchised ‘model of society’ based not only on class but (also) on national, ‘racial’, and ‘securitarian’ factors, of which the concentration camps for immigrants – they, too, have become an integral part of the European ‘civil’ landscape – are one of the emblems. What is more, there are the specific modalities by which this production of special law comes about – Iside Gjergji writes about them in detail – i.e., the frantic accumulation of laws, memoranda, ministerial notes, and other central and local administrative orders represents a *just-in-time* ‘rule of law’ with *great leeway for arbitrariness* and for *socialisation of the arbitrary* with respect to immigrants. And this ‘new type’ of law is beginning to be seen as a model to be followed beyond the specific area of immigration, because it allows the dominant economic interests to penetrate more directly into the sphere of law, and because of its capacity to adapt rapidly to these interests.

The book – which is the successor to an earlier, no less copious, collection of essays on migration by various authors, edited by Pietro Basso and Fabio Perocco<sup>6</sup> – is divided into two parts.

The first part is concerned with general trends in the United States and in Western Europe. It presents and analyses state persecution of undocumented immigrants in the United States and US policies to combat and control immigration from Mexico and Latin America (Justin Akers Chacón); racist laws and directives issued in Italy (Luigi Ferrajoli); key issues of state racism in Europe (Pietro Basso); policies for immigration management in Germany, with their procedures of control, monitoring, reclusion, and exclusion in the context of an ‘institutional violence’ against immigrants and asylum seekers (Dirk Vogelskamp); camps in Germany as variable instruments for the control of migrations (Tobias Pieper); rules of ‘integration’ in a racist and anti-Islamic Great Britain (Arun Kundnani); elements of continuity between the old colonial policies and the current migration policies with respect to immigrants of colonial origin in France today, and the brutal destruction of the refugee camps in Calais, the Eurotunnel city (Dino Costantini); camps for migrants at the borders of Europe (Giovanna Russo); the ‘black book’ on the facts concerning Ceuta and Melilla and Europe’s war against emigrants from Africa (Migreurop); policies against the Roma in Switzerland (Dario Lopreno); and an Appendix on the Swiss referendum against the building of minarets (Mouvement pour le socialisme).

The second part of the book discusses the institutional policies implemented in Italy, which is seen as a *laboratory* of policies of this kind and as a veritable *avant-garde of European institutional racism* (Fabio Perocco), with particular attention to the role played by securitarian ideology in ensuring a subordinate integration of immigrants, as well as to the processes and the regulations that criminalise them (Marco Ferrero). The final chapters deal with the just-in-time regulations and directives produced by central and local institutions, in the context of a ‘permanent emergency’ that has served to create a ‘postmodern’ authoritarian legal system in the iron grip of economic interests (Iside Gjergji); the passage, in the Italian experience, from Islamophobia to racism and to discriminations against Muslim workers and populations (Fabio Perocco); the escalation of violence against

6. Basso and Perocco (eds.) 2003.

immigrant farm labourers perpetrated by the Mafia, which, in the agriculture of southern Italy, controls immigrant slave labour in the interests of multinational corporations and of agribusiness – a scene dotted with massacres and pogroms, but also with magnificent revolts by the immigrants and state intervention against the rebels (Biagio Borretti); and many other episodes of super-exploitation, discrimination, and violence against the women and men who migrate towards Italy, during their voyage and after their arrival as internees in Camps of Identification and Expulsion, where there have been cases of women raped by the police, and where living conditions are so degrading and abuses so frequent that they deserve the name *Lager* (Marco Pettenò). The last essay of this second part is dedicated, also in historical retrospective, to the persecution and marginalisation of Roma populations, whose symbolic degradation is just what the Italian state has needed to simultaneously criminalise immigration and poverty (Luigi Di Noia).

Like all books of essays by various authors, there is agreement and disagreement between them. The points of agreement are quite strong, and we can imagine – the editor only hints at it – that there were intense discussions between the editor and the authors, but also among the authors themselves. The points of disagreement regard above all the question of whether or not the democratic institutions of Europe and the US will, in the future, implement policies that are radically different from the ones criticised in this book. It is here, I believe, that the book may be contested, for the categorical manner in which some essays – Basso's in particular – present Western democracies as, so to speak, *organically* racist: a thesis that is not widely shared, and that certainly deserves to be discussed without ideologism.

This thesis is not shared by other critics of institutional forms of racism – among them Etienne Balibar – whose standpoint is that by enacting racist politics European institutions betray themselves, so to speak.<sup>7</sup> They believe Europe could become the centre of an alternative globalisation, capable of creating a 'democratic regulation of migrations' – if Europe really wanted to do so, i.e., if its ruling classes could get out of the prevalent mindset, a 'disastrous collective incapacity of imagining alternative politics' – where the latter is seen as reflecting the will of a 'globally active citizenship'. Such a position, despite all formal critiques addressed to institutional racism, gives me the feeling of the extent to which internalised Eurocentrism has not been deconstructed, even in the anti-racist movement: the starting point of much reasoning remains Europe, unreflexively represented as the centre of the world, Europe as a continent that should be capable of formulating a new type of universalistic thinking – instead of humbly starting to learn from the rest of the world.

### Islamophobia and the infinite war on terror

The period examined in the book is the past decade, dominated by the so-called 'infinite war on terror' and the great crisis of 2008–9. It is not fortuitous, then, if the examination of the policies of the Western states begins precisely with the United States after 9/11 and with Samuel Huntington's bipartisan theorisation of the pressing need to abandon multiculturalism and relaunch assimilationist policies, on pain of the disintegration of US society and of North American institutions. The essays by Justin Akers Chacón illustrate

7. Cf. Balibar 2004, 2007.

very well the substantial continuity between the migration policies of the Republicans and those of the Democrats, but show at the same time how the immigrants in the US – especially, but not only, those of Latin American origin – have refused to submit passively to repressive and violently discriminatory policies, creating a huge mass-mobilisation that culminated on May Day 2006 with the first ‘international’ strike (i.e., spread throughout all the states of the Union) in the history of the United States.

The same tendency that in the US took the shape of the Sensenbrenner Bill (later rejected in the streets – but, then, not even with the advent of Obama have the guidelines of state policy taken any turn ‘for the better’) materialised a few years later in Europe, with features that, often, were even more extreme. While the launch of the harshest state policies against immigrants took place in the US after 9/11, the countries of Europe began to intensify their strategies and their laws against immigrants in 2006, when France, Germany, Austria and Holland established, de facto, that immigrants (or, at least, the more recent arrivals) were to be considered nothing more than ‘guests’ of their ‘host’ countries and, accordingly, are obliged to adapt to the ‘cultural values’ of the countries in which they happened to live – if they want to be tolerated. There is a dash of fundamentalism – of ‘integralism’ – in the very idea of integration. The Latin term *integer/integrum* signifies, in fact, keeping intact, which means: ‘You, immigrant, can become a part of our environment if your presence leaves it as it is, “uncontaminated”’. And there is, in addition, another form of fundamentalism whose content is explicitly material, namely, the demand that immigrant workers accept – if they want to be ‘tolerated’ – every imaginable form of precariousness and discrimination in the workplace and in society.

New forms of nationalistic and white-supremacist rhetoric drive backwards any idea of co-existence, any form of real respect for ‘diversity’, and any prospect of positive exchange on a basis of equality between natives and immigrants. What states demand today is *complete identification with the culture, language, and dominant religion* of the ‘host’ countries and *total assimilation* to their more-or-less declared ‘principles’ and ‘values’ – indeed, to preserve the ‘purity’ of Europe there are countries, such as France, that have gone so far as to rename the ministry whose ‘concern’ is immigration the ‘Ministry of National Identity’. At the same time, to preserve or revive the competitiveness of the European and the US economies, immigrants are required to identify totally with the interests and the objectives of their ‘host’ companies and countries.

In the book’s wide-ranging survey of US and European systems of discrimination against immigrant populations, special attention is paid to Islamophobia. The question – from Great Britain to France, from Switzerland to Italy – is dealt with in detail in a number of essays and is presented as one of the key issues of state racism throughout the West. In a particularly impressive essay, the book’s editor, Pietro Basso, delves deeply into the specific techniques that have been employed to deepen the furrow between ‘them’ (the ‘Islamic’ peoples) and ‘us’. The opening lines of the essay speak volumes:

Like the shrewd entrepreneurs of the Hagenbeckian ‘human zoos’ who went in search of ‘subjects’ – objects of colour to exhibit in the metropolises of Europe from the most out-of-the-way and primitive villages of Africa and Asia – the present-day entrepreneurs of Islamophobia aim to create in the European public a *feeling* of immense distance from the ‘Islamic’ populations, based on a (presumed) organic and insurmountable difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’. And

at the same time they aim to socialise the apparently well-founded *conviction* that ‘we’ are confronted with backward peoples, fanatically clinging to a past that does not pass; peoples *inferior* to us in every respect, both because poorer in material means and because poorer in spirit and in culture – yet determined to export their misery and their material and spiritual backwardness everywhere, at any cost.

The principal techniques used to produce, spread, and amplify the irreducible extraneousness, contempt, and opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’ are the following:

- 1) remove – cover – everything that can bring closer and even join together the populations of Europe and the populations of the ‘Islamic’ world, and in particular the workers of the two worlds;
- 2) present ‘Islamic’ immigrants, political Islam, Islam as such, as aggressive colonisers that threaten ‘our’ security, ‘our’ tranquility, ‘our’ customs, ‘our’ territories;
- 3) bang the drum about the oppression of Arab and ‘Islamic’ women, and about the necessity that it be ‘we’ Europeans, respectful of women by definition, who liberate them (pp. 127–8).

We have seen just how effective these techniques have been even in the placid land of Norway in the recent massacre there – very often attributed to the criminal madness of Breivik *alone*, or to the Christian-fundamentalist movements *alone*, or to the ‘ethno-nationalistic’ and openly racist Right *alone*, when in fact it is rooted entirely in the rising institutional Islamophobia of the last two decades.

The critique of Islamophobia in Basso’s essay is far indeed from the mainstream critiques of the phenomenon. Here, the critique is based on a recognition of the actual existence of Arab and ‘Islamic’ societies, which are actually ‘Islamic’ only to a certain extent because – to give just one of the reasons – in these societies we find an unquestionable domination of labour time, dictated by capitalist rules of production and the capitalist market, over all other times, including the time of the sacred. Arab and ‘Islamic’ societies are undergoing a profound and enduring process of secularisation in which, on the one hand, the new idols of the market economy (money, first of all) assert themselves and, on the other, aspirations to freedom and democracy laboriously advance. Basso emphasises that in these societies a social division of labour is progressively asserting itself – a division of society into classes – that has increasingly modern characteristics, even if this is a modernity of dominated countries, and even if one must distinguish from case to case, because of the many differences between the countries concerned.

It is worthy of note that this unconventional presentation of Arab and ‘Islamic’ societies was formulated *prior to* the events of the ‘Arab spring’ that heralded a revival of the democratic revolution in the Arab world; a revival that brought to light how, even in the context of an enduring influence of the Islamist movements, the basic aspirations of the great masses of workers and young people in the Arab countries have ‘incredibly’ little of the ‘Islamic’ about them. This is indeed a formidable blow for the credibility of that wretched ‘culturalist’ construction which claimed to find irremediable differences *of nature* (a sort of naturalised culture) between Arab-Islamic and Western peoples.

No less noteworthy is the strong link that a number of authors of *Razzismo di stato* forge between the current migration policies of European countries and their colonial experience.

In fact many of the ‘commonplaces’ and many of the discriminations that afflict immigrant populations today have clear colonial origins; that is, they come from a past that refuses to pass and that, on the contrary, many today are beginning to defend as – all things considered – positive.

The effects of this inexhaustible sowing of Islamophobia place a heavy burden on the shoulders of immigrant workers and populations of ‘Islamic’ origin. Indeed, the Islamophobia industry is filling the air with a series of clichés that inferiorise and often demonise ‘Islamic’ immigrants, as is well documented by the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia in its study *Muslims in the European Union: Discrimination and Islamophobia*,<sup>8</sup> and by the Fundamental Rights Agency in its *Data in Focus Report 2: Muslims; Discrimination Experienced by Muslims*.<sup>9</sup> For all these reasons the authors of *Razzismo di stato* are convinced that one of the basic commitments of the scholars who criticise current migration policies is the commitment to combat, forcefully, Islamophobia and all the ‘special’ harassment of which so-called ‘Islamic’ immigrants are victims. Also because we must not believe that these particular immigrants are a special case: on the contrary, the ‘special’ blows aimed at them end up striking, sooner or later, *all* immigrants without distinction, often depicted en bloc as the ‘internal enemy’ of whom we must beware.

One of the aspects of migration and migration policies that certainly deserved more attention in the text is that of the institutional treatment of immigrant women – a question that is complicated and of great importance. In state policies regarding immigrant workers, asylum seekers, and environmental migrants in search of shelter, the question of gender is usually broached in a double sense. On the one hand, to create feelings of aversion and rejection with regard to women who have been raped and sold, women who in some cases arrive in Europe pregnant or with small children – in a mix of racism, sexism, and paternalism; on the other, to spread the idea that Western states can play the role of liberator of women, even though they are themselves the heirs of the old colonial states that so grievously oppressed them.

In this regard, I wish to recall an episode that concerns the country (Italy) where I live and teach, in southern Italy to be precise, in an area of high density of immigrants, but also enslaved sex workers. Recently, Prime Minister Berlusconi, well-known all over the world for his pathetic jokes, after asking the Albanian premier Berisha to collaborate with the Italian government in the ‘war’ on traffickers of ‘irregular’ migrants, added that an exception could be made only for the traffickers that bring ‘beautiful Albanian girls’ to Italy. Such a blatant expression of male chauvinism is a clear symptom of the way in which racism and sexism lurk in the highest levels of state institutions.

*Razzismo di stato* has some scathing pages that rail against the hypocrisy of the propaganda in Western states in defence of ‘Islamic’ women, confronting it with the reality of the general commodification of the female body in Western societies in a context obsessively dominated by homosocial discursive practices, in which new forms of collective patriarchy emerge designed to maintain a status quo based on the supremacy of males. While these are interesting critical remarks, the space devoted to the treatment of immigrant women is nonetheless insufficient in a book whose clear intention is to carry out a 360-degree analysis of institutional racism.

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8. EUMC 2006.

9. FRA 2009.



### Migrants and local workers: a converging destiny

The detailed examination of the state policies on immigration in Italy in the second part of the book is crucial for bringing into focus the *extremely close connection between policies against immigrant workers* (which are not policies against immigration as such) and *policies against native-born workers*. Here, the structure of Italian society as a whole is in question, since the policies against immigrants – Fabio Perocco writes – are helping to forge and consolidate an ‘ultra-polarised and elitist society’:

In the current phase of downward spiralling of the capitalist economy and of grave crisis of the Italian political and economic system, the material crushing and symbolic devalorisation of immigrants constitute, from the standpoint of capitalist interests, elements that are more and more necessary. And this is so not only out of material needs of mere protection of profit but also for political reasons, since the ongoing global crisis, and the ‘national’ crisis in particular, is diverted systematically and almost everywhere towards – against – immigration. The war on immigrants is truly a leitmotif that characterises the national policy of many Western chancelleries.

In the spread of the war on immigrants Italy plays a leading role, especially in terms of state measures, socialisation of a politics of fear, and promotion of mass-racism. The Italian situation, then, is not to be considered an exception or a singular and provisional case. The persecution of immigrants – especially if undocumented – in Italy must, rather, be seen as the anticipation of a reality that in the future will be more widespread and deep-rooted, for which a number of European countries are preparing, also with the *placet* of the European Union – which has done its share by giving the green light for measures that are, to say the least, questionable.

This intensification of racism is also a sort of preview of the society of tomorrow, towards which Europe is racing. A society in which the working class is to be set back to the social and juridical conditions of fifty years ago – or, if possible, of the nineteenth century! The war on immigrants, elevated to a fundamental element of national policy *tout court*, prefigures, then, the condition the ‘powers that be’ have in store for *all* workers (pp. 388–9).

That which has been socialised in Italy in recent years by the ruling classes, the mass-media, and the political and state institutions is not an ordinary, or ‘soft’, racism. Perocco insists that, on the contrary, it is a *surly* racism – worthy of the Europe that attacks labour and of the history of its colonising nations. It is a racism that is able, first of all, to keep immigrant workers in a condition of constant precariousness and of economic, legal, residential, cultural, emotional, and spiritual inferiority, in order to neutralise – in advance if possible – their social, human, and spiritual demands.

This, then, is a racism that is able to make its own contribution to the full implementation of neoliberal policies and to the mystification of the causes of the worsening of the population’s living conditions that is the result of these policies. The ongoing processes of capitalist concentration and accumulation, which produce a generalised worsening of working conditions, have found in racism a most useful ally in the production of ultracausalised labour-power and in the construction of a public danger to which all social

anxieties can repair. As Perocco expresses it, ‘in the final analysis, this reinforced racism constitutes an instrument that is indispensable to the process of formation of the ultraparalysed and elitist society now in the offing’ (p. 389).

This, indeed, seems to be the aim of the combination of migration policies and labour policies that in the last three decades have literally dismantled the ‘traditional’ rights of European labour, which in Italy, after 1968, had a particularly vigorous flowering. In this sense the analysis of the ‘Italian case’, carried out with care in the seven essays by young scholars, takes on paradigmatic value, since Italy was hit harder than many other European countries by the economic crisis, and because it was precisely and exclusively a surge in immigration that managed to brake (somewhat) the free fall of the Italian economy and to plug the holes opened in the ‘domestic economy’ of many families by the drastic cuts in welfare.

As for the reasons why we are witnessing this surge in institutional racism, the general conclusion we can draw from the editor’s texts and from some of the 20 essays contained in the book is, roughly, the following: first, the West is undergoing a global economic and political crisis of colossal proportions that intersects with the decline of the world order that came out of World War II. However incredible it may appear to poor mortals, for the financial turbo-capitalism that has held the centre of the world stage for the past thirty years the only possible ‘solution’ to this crisis is to *reduce* as drastically as one possibly can the remuneration, rights, ‘guarantees’, level of organisation, and ‘social recognition’ of *wage labour*. And for the success of a shock therapy of this kind nothing could be more appropriate and useful than incitement of the sharpest possible competition and, even, open conflict between workers of different nationalities and ‘races’. And to obtain this result the Euro-US power elites need to perform a dual, complex operation: reduce the immigrant workers, men and women alike, to the rank of *Gastarbeiter*, guest worker, *lavoratori temporaneamente ospiti*, a just-in-time labour force, bound hand and foot, with no freedom of circulation, no family, no permanent rights, no trade union. And then *blame* this pitilessly crushed naked labour power for the *general worsening* of the working and living condition of the *other* workers, i.e., immigrants of long standing and natives. And this, in order to deepen the divisions and the ‘antagonisms’ within the working classes and within the world of immigrant workers itself, and thus bring about a *general devalorisation* of labour.

But there is more to it than that. Another process of great impact is broached quite briefly when, in my opinion, it deserved fuller treatment: namely, the process in which China first and foremost, but also the other emerging countries of the global South, are calling into question in all fields the primacy of the United States and Europe. This challenge increases the need of Western companies to have recourse to immigrant labour because, as we have just seen, such labour – underpaid and with few or no guarantees – is a lever of crucial importance for economies that have been afflicted with a great loss of competitiveness. At the same time, however, the continual growth of the size of the immigrant populations (in the US the Latino immigrants alone amount to some 46 million people, while there are more than 30 million immigrants in Western Europe) is giving rise to increasing concern in government circles on both sides of the Atlantic. These populations are perceived, in fact, as possible ‘Trojan horses’ of the new competitor capitalisms of the global South inside the walls of Western nations. The polemical writings against ‘multiculturalism’, from Huntington to Caldwell, from Fallaci to Enzensberger, from Bernard Lewis to Thornton, with several degrees of differences, are analysed in the text also in this perspective. Apropos, the editor

states: “The long march of the peoples and the workers of the former colonies and, in other respects, of their “respective” capitalisms (understandably) frightens the Western elites and drives them more and more to consider immigrant peoples as the fifth columns of this march, to be kept under strict and severe control. In this task states and governments are attempting, more and more, to recruit and mobilise, in addition to the institutional machinery, also their respective *societies*’ (p. 12). And it is precisely ‘at the head, heart, and belly of their respective populations and of the native-born US and European workers’ that the machinery of institutional racism aims, in order to ‘demonstrate’ to its own citizens and its own workers that the different cultures and civilisations are incompatible, that immigrants are carriers of material and moral evils of all kinds, that they exercise a form of unfair competition with respect to the natives and that, therefore, no ‘precaution’ and discrimination is excessive where they are concerned. Such ‘demonstrations’ invariably conclude with the usual nationalistic, ‘Westernistic’, and white-identity rhetoric, and with this injunction addressed to the immigrants: ‘if you want to stay here, you have to identify yourselves totally with our countries, our values, our customs.’

### Glimmers of light in a dark scenario

*Razzismo di stato* presents us, then, with a 360-degree critique of Western state policies on migration and on legal and social (in)equalities between immigrants and natives, and in this respect it is a hard, pitiless book that leaves no room for illusions (about ‘our’ institutions). But this does not mean that it is pessimistic about the future. On the contrary, the impression one draws – or that I did, at any rate – is very different.

The book contains, in fact, some important indications regarding the question of ‘what is to be done’ to oppose the spread of racism, anti-Islamic feelings, hostility to the Roma, hate/fear of immigrant workers and asylum seekers, the new wave of antisemitism in Eastern Europe and, everywhere, of authoritarian and repressive policies.

What we learn from many of the essays is that the first thing to be done is to cut the connections between the racism of institutions and popular feelings, by working to strengthen the current forms of class and gender solidarity through the creation of new networks and associations that connect immigrants of various nationalities with natives. In fact the spread among native workers of feelings and behaviours that are hostile to immigrant peoples is often due to a condition of *isolation*, of *weakness*, of *particular vulnerability*, produced by the failures of the trade-union and political organisations of the working class, and can be effectively thwarted and blocked only by a renewal of the struggle and of collective solidarity.

From this point of view, the ongoing rise of institutional racism in Europe and in Italy can be seen also, paradoxically, as a historic opportunity, because this process is also stimulating the development of a more solid anti-racism based on the unity of the working classes, capable of combating *all* types of discrimination through the practice of self-organisation, equality, cooperation, and solidarity between immigrant and native workers in the common struggle to assert their needs and rights. In the book’s conclusions Basso maintains that the social force that can take up such a task is the one Saskia Sassen described as the ‘global class

of disadvantaged people',<sup>10</sup> but in Basso's view this 'global class' is not composed exclusively of immigrants or of emigrants – it is, at bottom, the class of wage labourers *as a whole*. At the great historic watershed that we are crossing, this great social force can be – he believes – the carrier of a 'new form of civilisation', liberated not only from the supremacy of the commodity and of money, and thus from the exploitation of labour, but also from racism and from sexism.

Pietro Basso emphasises how the epochal social transformations we are witnessing today are laying the concrete foundations for overcoming the antagonism between workers of different nationalities, because, in spite of what appears on the surface, such transformations are fostering a growing inter-relation between native and immigrant populations and workers.

In their campaign to spread anti-immigrant racism at the popular level the powers that be in Europe and the United States come up against no small contradiction: the Western populations and workers that are urged and, in some respects, commanded to move against the immigrant populations and workers are already and will be increasingly carried by the force of things to feel that they are themselves *immigrants in their own native lands*; and they will themselves have the concrete experience that all the policies against immigrants produce negative effects on the existence of the native populations, who are not divided from the immigrant populations by a Great Wall of China. Indeed, it is for this reason that a hefty and repeated administration of racist poisons is needed to divide them in their minds and in their feelings from the immigrant peoples whom they will tend to resemble in everyday life more than they do today (and more than they would like to).

Both in the countries of longstanding immigration such as the United States, Great Britain, France, and Germany, and in the countries such as Spain and Italy that more recently have become countries of immigration, *there is a growing de facto 'connection' between natives and immigrants*. The close weave of their presence together in workplaces, schools, neighbourhoods, towns, consulting rooms for women, associations, trade unions; the multiplication of affective relationships and marriages between natives and immigrants; the growing length of the immigrants' stay; the acquisition of citizenship; the even greater rise in the number of the children of immigrants born in Europe or the US – all this, in spite of a hostile institutional climate, is greatly and continually enlarging a *molecular network* of contacts, friendships, and solidarities that soften and downplay the 'differences' of culture, religion, and custom, while highlighting and accentuating that which – even in the enduring hierarchical differentiation of their social and legal positions – immigrant and native peoples, immigrant and native workers, *have in common* (pp. 620–1).

Basso notes that Caritas, in its most recent report, in the case of Italy spoke of 'an ever closer interweaving between the new arrivals and the society that has taken them in' – an

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10. Cf. Sassen 2007.

interweaving that goes well beyond the workplace and that Caritas described elsewhere as ‘a growing symbiosis’ between Italians and immigrants. Interweaving, symbiosis, are strong words, which can even sound excessive because, at the moment, in the dramatic enfeeblement of all the forms of wage-labour organisation, most of these connections, of these ‘interweavings’, appear, and are actually experienced, as mere private facts, as relations *between single individuals* and not also as relations between peoples, races, continents, civilisations, former colonisers and former colonised – as the exception and not the rule. But even with these limits, the reduction of the distance between immigrant and native populations is nevertheless a reality, and it is continuing. If quite a few Italian workers are beginning to feel as if they are immigrants in their ‘own’ country, *vice versa* many immigrants are beginning to be considered (and to feel themselves) less like ‘foreigners’ in the country that is not their country of birth. Basso concludes that ‘this objective, and not *only* objective, *convergence* is an irrefutably real fact. In particular the big cities, fundamental territorial articulations of the global market, are fully-fledged mills “that grind national differences”’ (p. 622).

But it is not only a question of big cities: also smaller cities, towns, and even the smallest villages have been involved and transformed by this growing, and positive, *de facto* ‘connection’ between natives and immigrants. An excellent example, which I would like to recall, is that of the small town of Riace, in Calabria in southern Italy, which has opened itself in recent years to the contributions of immigrants, expressly inviting them to settle in this town that was threatened by depopulation. A good number of immigrants accepted the invitation, and their presence has led not only to a demographic rebirth but also to the recovery of local real estate, a revival of traditional activities and trades, the launching of ecological garbage collection, new multicoloured school classes, etc. In this way the entire town has been enlivened and beautified, to the satisfaction of natives and immigrants alike.

In the middle of this historical process that is developing on a large scale and to an increasing depth, one can see a glimmer of light, a future that has, in a certain sense, already begun. This is not a utopia but, rather, a new reality that is asserting itself, a transition that is underway.

There is no question that, up to now, popular feelings have been skilfully cultivated by the institutions of the state and the reactions of the native-born population have been skilfully influenced by the mass-media. But in the long term manipulation cannot win out over material conditions, which produce even stronger collective feelings and intuitions capable of modifying the course of events. It cannot win out if this progressive reduction of the distance between the conditions and feelings of ‘white’ workers and workers ‘of colour’ will be accompanied by an anti-racism that is up to the times, and by a workers’ movement that is, once again, independent of governments and firms. Pietro Basso concludes: ‘everything has already been written, but nothing has yet been decided.’

*Translated from the Italian by Giacomo Donis*

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