

Recensione

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This volume has the ambitious objective of «representing the complexity of the Italian migration policies and reception systems» (p. 11) in the last ten years. An honest, comprehensive, and critical analysis of such policies and systems has a renewed importance in the current context. The book documents how racialized groups were strongly penalized by the pandemic in all spheres of social life such as health, work and housing. Those who found themselves in vulnerable situations saw their perspectives worsen dramatically, due to intersectional forms of social exclusion. A disadvantaged position in the labor market, encountered during the pandemic greater wage insecurity, and remittances to countries of origin had a drastic decrease. The ghettoization and higher saturation of reception center environments brought greater risks for the health of migrants, which was inadequately protected. The media exposure of cases of reception center widespread infection generated a return to the prejudiced trope of migrants as plague-carriers, instead of an honest reflection on inequalities and the social determinants of health. The volume argues that instead of being an opportunity to reassess migration policies by thinking of all components of society in more equal terms as bearers of rights, the pandemic revealed and exacerbated a utilitarian view of immigrants and created new forms of inequality.

Editors underline the mechanisms by which the Covid-19 pandemic has indeed exacerbated the model of «physical and legal containment of refugee seekers» who find themselves «stuck» both inside or outside the reception system, in conditions of severe rights limitations, with deteriorating opportunities for mobility, work, integration and social life, both «undermining the right to mobility and movement, but also the right of rooting and immobility» (p. 15). This model precedes the pandemic, as the decline of life conditions of immigrants in Italy has been exacerbated by the “Salvini Law” (D.L. 113/2018), which tore down the “second reception” system along with abolishing civil registration and humanitarian protection, factually pushing migrants into irregular status, and not effectively countered by successive measures advertised in the media as the “removal of Salvini Decree” (D.L. 130/2020). Such “emergency approach” to migration governance has been renewed during the Covid-19 pandemic. The analysis of Dal Zotto *et al.* of the amnesty law passed in May 2020, shows that «the health emergency accelerates the resort to administrative and bureaucratic emergency practices in the management of

migrations, thus contributing to the reproduction of an emergency frame, that relegates laborers to the role of “victims of exploitation” and at the same time regulates their possibility of movement and their employment opportunities» (p. 321).

As others before (e.g. Ambrosini 2011), the volume strongly criticizes the “security and emergency approach” to asylum-seeker reception in Italy and its contradictions, arguing that it has generated «a system that contains rather than welcomes, that distances rather than brings people closer to the local society, that disciplines rather than promotes socialization» (p. 45). The value of the contribution lies in the contextualized analysis of the mechanisms by which persons on the move, treated as objects and hardly ever protagonists of the reception system, are structurally isolated and differentiated from locals, classified in taxonomies of deservingness, and attributed a sub-set of confined choices, thereby enacting a stratification of citizenship and human rights (Nash 2009). In addition to the analysis of the reception system and its mechanisms, the volume explores the detrimental effects of the policies and systems in place on groups that face specific vulnerable situations: undocumented migrants and asylum seekers who have left reception centers and «can find a little help only when “framed” as homeless, thus transforming the material and legal protection in a scarce resource that people have to fight for» (p.86), unaccompanied minors, in «a state of true institutional abandonment» (p. 162) or trafficked persons, caught between experiences of violent exploitation and institutional requirements of certain performances to access credibility. The book’s criticism doesn’t even spare areas often considered virtuous in the system – such as the SPRAR model (p. 16) or the Bologna model (p. 117).

The valuable research gathered in this volume do not lack limitations. The most notable regards the endemic difficulty of migration studies to access sufficient, reliable, and comparable data. A problem exacerbated in Italy by the important gaps in data collection, especially at a public and national level. This limitation, recognized by several authors in the volume, should arise the question of why, after decades of migration flows, public data collection systems have not yet adapted homogeneously and structurally instrument design to take such flows into account in their representation of society. Although recognizing it is not technically a simple task, and that there have been some steps taken in the right direction, the political nature of these shortcomings shouldn’t be overlooked, as it determines who has access to representation in society and who has not. Limitations in data collection do not regard solely statistical systems, but the limitations and barriers set in place through policies and red tapes that create significant obstacles for researchers and scholars to access the field of reception systems.

It could also be questioned whether the lack of efficient measures for the improvement of life, lodging, health and work conditions of migrants is «the effect of a precise government migration policy to vulnerabilise immigrants, to deny their human and social rights, including the right to mobility» (p. 20) or if this result is caused less by a calculated and orchestrated effort and more by the unsystematic approach of Italian migration policies, moved by contradicting forces within and between different sectors, actors and levels of governance, in what Ambrosini (2021; 2020) rightly describes as a “battleground”. Not a priority to begin with, migrants’ rights are the first casualties of the fragmented, inconsistent, and ever-changing Italian policy landscape, characterized by very principled rhetoric, but often lacking appropriate applicative regulation, implementation governance, financial investments and control mechanisms.

Overall, it has to be recognized that the necessary critical appraisal of the Italian reception system contained in this volume, is not unilateral or pessimistic. It also documents points of strength, such as the wide room that the system enables (and often finances) for advocacy mo-

vements, civil society initiatives and third sector practices, such as the Wonderful World House (p. 49). The book points a way forward in collaborative efforts in several contexts and actors that mobilize resources to create inclusive pathways. For instance, civil society organizations piecing together pathways of social and labor inclusion within and outside of the reception system, constructing with asylum seekers themselves opportunities that make sense in their biographical trajectories. Or reception system workers perceived by society as having «no real job» (p. 210), who attempt to foster the reproduction of a sense of home, even if a temporary one. Or bottom-up forms of hosting asylum seekers, as a political act of families, who reject the native/immigrant divide by enacting what has been called elsewhere “grassroots refugee hospitality” (see Boccagni, Giudici 2021; Boccagni 2020). Or the various forms of mobilization and self-organization of migrants themselves, generating what Pasqualetto and Perocco represent as «the rise of asylum seekers as political and social subjects», despite the recognition that «there is no unified movement in the struggles of asylum seekers» and that «many of the mobilisations are, necessarily, temporary and occasional» (p. 216).

In this light, the book does not seem moved by a mere political statement, but by a deeper search of a contextualized and robust understanding of the mechanisms that are reproducing inequalities, in the effort to generate concrete solutions. The constructive attempt of the book brings to mind Bourdieu’s words: «to denounce hierarchy does not get us anywhere. What must be changed are the conditions that make this hierarchy exist, both in reality and in minds. We must work to universalize in reality the conditions of access to what the present offers us that is most universal, instead of talking about it» (Bourdieu, Wacquant 1992: 84-85). Faced with complex problems, no isolated actor can develop solutions: concerted efforts are required. The book offers an avenue for policy makers to access knowledge that has been developed in the field. Otherwise, top-down policies risk a fundamental disconnect. Promoting autonomy without institutional abandonment, offering protection without imposing confinement, entails walking a delicate tightrope. A closer and contextualized understanding of claims is necessary in the configuration of adequate solutions: «Many migrants are not calling for the right to enter and stay, but rather for the right to come and go (...) calling more attention to the need of mobility to overcome the tendency of migration policy to implement “sedentary” solutions» (p. 183). Such understanding is instrumental to constructing pathways in the direction towards which contributions seem to point: policy-supported but community-based forms of integration that brings refugee seekers from displacement to emplacement; rights-based and case-oriented systems, which are able to foster both material and symbolic wellbeing; economic integration as much as intercultural relations, protecting the right to move as well as the right to stay in place.

That is why the methodological strategy of the book seems particularly adequate. It showcases the effectiveness of transdisciplinary methods, where researchers co-construct knowledge and develop solutions by engaging at eye-level with those who in their life or work experience the social problems at the focus of the enquiry. Social innovation requires, in fact, transdisciplinary forms of conjunct theorizing in problem-centered networks, allowing for a wider circulation of data, pooling of resources, and concerted action (Moulaert *et al.* 2013). Especially in migration studies, such methods bring a significant advantage to research, as they are particularly suited to document complexity – or, as Marabello and Parisi put it, «how polysemic, heterogeneous and multi-faceted the social and political field of migration really is» (p. 163) – and can transform practice, by reinforcing reflexivity among those engaging directly with developing solutions: «Stronger collaboration and reflexive analysis among all people who are engaged in the welfare system is needed and it seems to us that these processes are ongoing and reinfor-

cing» (p. 209). As Marchetti's contribution underlines, «the real challenge is to keep together, as co-creators of policies, not only the third sector and the State, but [...] citizens and refugees themselves» (p. 64).

This review argues that the way forward hinted by this publication involves reframing relations and collaborative dynamics through social innovation research. It entails involving in the creation of solutions a variety of public, private and third sector actors, as well as the public at large and its interest groups in the participative reshaping of migration policies. There is no denying that it can be a hard book to read for policymakers that are working to shape inclusive policies in the migration area, as it pulls no punches to the severe shortcomings of such policies in the current Italian reception system. However, it also constitutes a roadmap, as it gathers the insights of the real experts: those whose life and work is directly affected by such policies in the field.

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