

This book is an analysis of migration as a historical, political, economic and social phenomenon characterizing human history. This interpretation of migration movements and of their increase leads to admit that what is now happening in Lampedusa is «an appointment with history», a chance to rethink the dynamics and mechanisms causing these biblical mass migrations, also considering the past of Italian migrants looking for a better future. It is, above all, a reflection on the meaning of migration as a border zone, a passage, a moment of change and of uncertain transformation, the moment when anything could happen.

How «distant» are migrants landing at Lampedusa from the Italians who arrived at Ellis Island between 1870 and 1920? Which are the similarities and the differences between the reasons leading today's migrants to leave their native country and reach Europe, and those causing the transoceanic displacement of millions of Europeans towards America?

Economic need, political instability, no access to natural resources, armed conflicts, famine, negation of human rights and persecutions are only some of the reasons leading populations to emigrate. By retracing the history of Italian emigration, it is evident that these are not «new» reasons. How can we understand these «recurrences», which analytical instruments can we use to reconstruct a picture of the phenomenon by considering all the subjects involved in migration? The «case» of Lampedusa is, above all, a humanitarian problem forcing us to feel responsible for a phenomenon originating from the unequal world distribution of resources. It is therefore fundamental to meet migrants' requests for health, justice, and hope, by accepting and respecting their suffering, their dignity, and human rights, trying to go beyond the experience of Lampedusa. If we do not recognize this, declarations of institutional representatives, mass media and intellectuals on justice, peace and solidarity may be shared, but they clash with the actual denial of a concrete and immediate help.

The purpose of this text is to be a means of knowledge of the Italian emigration and immigration phenomenon, an information and educational instrument free from sensationalism and alarmism, a wide-ranging analysis aimed at abandoning the stereotypes that Italian society attributes to migrants, since not so long ago the Italians themselves were foreigners in other countries.

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