

# Tortura e migrazioni

## Torture and Migration, by Fabio Perocco (ed.)

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Reviewing this volume edited by Fabio Perocco and published as *open access* by University of Venice Ca' Foscari Editions<sup>1</sup> is no easy task. What makes it hard to sum up this work is not its length (430 pages), but rather its interdisciplinary approach, the depth of observations, the richness in contents and points of view and its geographical width. Yet, these aspects make the book fundamental for anyone willing to understand migratory movements in today's world. Its main merit is having addressed, consistently and systematically, the close relation that has come to be, over the course of decades, between torture and migration. Such relation is no recent piece of news: for a long time, torture has been indicated as one of the most widespread reasons for leaving, one of the most frequent experiences lived along the migration path and, more and more often, a reality that mi-

grants are forced to tackle in receiving countries. Nevertheless, the scientific narrative of such relation is often limited, fragmented and, sometimes, manipulated. Torture has so far been extensively studied systematically in relation to power (MacMaster, 2004), wars and dictatorships (Hajjar, 2013; Cohen, 2005). It is considered as lying at the basis of modernity (Reemtsma, 2012) or of the process of civilization (Linklater, 2007), but it has been analyzed less intensively as a structured element of migration. The volume therefore deserves to be recognized as one of the works that can pave the way for an innovative field of research.

The volume, including a broad and sharp introductory essay by Fabio Perocco, is divided in three parts. The first part, composed of three essays, is devoted to the theoretical analysis of the concepts of torture, racism, politics, society, law, and migration policies. It highlights the (historically) unbreakable bond between torture and racism and between torture and current social and political dynamics. Here torture is analysed as a social phenomenon, produced by state institutions and by the modelling of relations within a specific political, legal, economic, social and symbolic system. The general invitation is to “think from the extremes, think of torture, of migration *with* and *beyond* existing tools [...] to think of the enigmas of the relationship between torture and migrations and find again the political freedom to act” (p. 86).

The second part, the core of the volume (composed of thirteen essays), aims at analysing and proving that, at a global level, there is a long-lasting war against migrants, which has created universal preconditions for the massive use of torture practices against them. The connection between torture and migration is considered in the contexts of Spain, Belgium, United Kingdom, United States,

1 Free download from: <https://edizionicafoscari.unive.it/it/edizioni4/libri/978-88-6969-359-5/>.

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Brazil, Argentina, the Balkans, Morocco, Sudan-Israel, Libya, the central Mediterranean and Italy. These essays, though using different investigation and analysis instruments, paint a full picture, rich in details, colors and words, which is also achieved through the use of fresh and effective language; under this profile, it is a welcome breath of fresh air within the global scientific literature, which often stubbornly encloses itself in jargon, difficult for others to understand and to clarify the connections between history and biographies.

The last part, constituted by four essays, focuses on the medical-psychological dimension of torture in migration. There is complete reconstruction of the state-of-the-art in global scientific literature starting from 25 years ago, with the very first epidemiological studies. Other essays relate migration to mental health, investigating both psychopathological reactions in traumatized people and the effects of trauma experienced during their migration path, together with mental illness issues due to the harsh living conditions in receiving countries. It also offers an in-depth look into psychological disorders deriving from torture and their impact on access to international protection, in as well as emphasis on the necessary healing process from the damage caused by torture.

This book is also an important tool to better understand the present, since it makes intelligible today's close port policies in the Northern Mediterranean, as well as the wall between Mexico and the US, or the one between Morocco and Spain. It helps us understand how these repressive and securitarian migration policies violate the prohibition of torture and of inhuman or degrading treatment (Algotino p. 110-112; Ounniche, Saaid p. 291-292; Omizzolo p. 312-316), which clearly constitute a crime against humanity under international law. Although criminal

responsibility is personal, *i.e.* lies with those who personally practice torture, governments are not exempt from responsibility: "Those who, by externalising borders, relocate and outsource torture and inhuman or degrading treatment, are co-responsible, as are those who take measures to close ports, condemning shipwrecked persons to inhuman or degrading treatment" (p. 111).

Moreover, what clearly stands out in the overwhelming majority of the essays – which constitutes one of its distinctive analytical features – is the fact that the economic dimension is often included in the analysis. In this book, torture against migrants is not only explained through a political dimension (which includes only government and state actions), but it also takes into account that the tortured are actually meant to enter the labour market, both in the countries of arrival and in transit. Such a perspective, outlined in different nuances, gives the volume a very interesting character.

If a downside were to be identified in this volume, perhaps it could be that in some essays there is an overlap between torture and degrading or inhuman treatment. Such overlap may be considered scientifically valid or acceptable from a medical or sociological point of view, but from a legal or political perspective the equivalence runs the risk of banalising torture.

The essays in the volume are written in four languages: Italian, English, French and Spanish. Intertwining reflections by sociologists, philosophers, lawyers, doctors and activists from several countries in the world was not easy, yet it was certainly needed, especially for those who conceive research as something inseparable from social action, who wish for knowledge not to be left to rot in academia but rather spread and flourish as energy triggering social transformations.

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