

## Call for papers

### AIDS BEFORE AIDS

Historical reflections on epidemics and contagions have long pointed to the complexity of these phenomena, within which the 'natural' dimension of disease and its spread is intertwined with the social and cultural considerations that identify it, along with moral and political readings that seek factors and subjects to which responsibility can be traced and causality of contagion explained.

In these terms, research showed how epidemics are socially and culturally dense phenomena, in which these and other different elements mark ways and times of social and institutional response to contagion. Thus, it became clear how the social and institutional response is marked in no small measure by moral and cultural instances that look to the transgression of norms as the main factors in both contagion and spread.

In the context of historical reflections on epidemics, AIDS has always been a relevant historical example through which to grasp the epistemological complexity of epidemics and their social and political repercussions.

Since its emergence, AIDS has manifested itself as an epidemic with an evident global projection. Cause to date of more than thirty million deaths distributed on a global scale, AIDS has signaled a differentiated course of contagion very much linked to the contexts in which it has spread.

Analyses of geneticists and epidemiologists focused on the natural history of the disease have traced genealogies, chronologies and periodizations of AIDS, placing the origin of this infection in 1920s Congo. Historical research has interrogated the complexity of this epidemiological phenomenon, in its natural and cultural interweaving, focusing on the development of the epidemic in the United States since the late 1970s and then from there in Europe. Historians have emphasized continuities, transformations, and mutations occurred in the social and cultural form of the epidemic that have allowed us to question chronologies and periodizations.

While in the African continent, to which research has traced the origin of the contagion, AIDS has manifested itself as a widely spread epidemic capable of deeply affecting local economies, as well as social and institutional structures, in the Western North American and European contexts, AIDS has been configured instead as a "minority epidemic," caused by the transgression of norms - moral, social, hygienic - symbolized in the four H-Risk groups (homosexuals, hemophiliacs, heroin users, Haitians).

The transnational dimension of AIDS has thus clearly re-proposed questions about 1) how in different contexts and moments the epidemic is identified, defined,

addressed, and governed; 2) how these processes act, are interconnected, and influence the definition of institutional responses to the epidemic and the social perceptions of the “sick”; and 3) how the AIDS epidemic itself relates to the redefinition of processes of citizenship promoted by those primarily affected by the infection.

In the experience of AIDS, those processes proper to the history of epidemics return, which have seen the social construction of figures - from the plague-spreader to Typhoid Mary, from patient zero to the super-spreader - to whom responsibility for both epidemic and contagion can be traced – a social process active particularly in those historical moments in which the properly biological dimension of the epidemic is not yet clearly identified.

This issue of “Quaderni storici” aims to focus on the transitional phase, so to speak, the one in which contagion emerges, manifests itself, acts, causing sickness and death, but without yet being understood, nor known in its pathological characters, etiologies, and therapies. What are the social practices - including institutional practices in their contextual genesis - acting at this historical juncture in which the concrete experience of illness collides with the absence of terms and interpretations to counter it? What cultural and social processes are activated to deal with something that is both concretely active and culturally incomprehensible? How do these processes involve sexuality and the history of the way in which it has been thought of, signified, governed?

Proposals (3500 characters, 500 words approx.) accompanied by a short CV should be sent by March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023 to editors Emmanuel Betta ([emmanuel.betta@uniroma1.it](mailto:emmanuel.betta@uniroma1.it)) and Domenico Rizzo ([rizzod@unior.it](mailto:rizzod@unior.it)). Selected essays, due in their final versions by October 1<sup>st</sup> 31, 2023, will undergo the peer review process (anonymous in both senses). The monographic volume is scheduled for release in the second issue of 2024.