The Case of Libya: From A Destination Country to aTransit One

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Introduction

The western perception regarding the social and political organization of the African people and their politics has given birth, long before European expansions overseas, to the idea that these societies are organized primarily into rural cohesive communities, homogeneous, ethnically defined and therefore necessarily also stable within their own territory. African social formations thus do not change throughout time and remain within their own lands. Within these groups, the rights of people, and the natural resources they use, would then be defined by an ancient customary order and guaranteed over time by the "traditional authorities"[1]. Indeed, the western perceptions of Africa as well as their models of democracy and politics, and the application of these models in the Third World have always been improper. With the begging of the independence in Africa, the states and political systems in the continent have been analyzed within its relation with the western models of development and modernization, which are different from the internal models of the historical transformation of the western developments (Gentili 2008:11).

Indeed, when we start to argue about the reasons for migration from Africa to Europe we must always consider a very important element, that of livelihood. The livelihood of the African societies and economies as well as "push-pull" factors are currently one of the most important reasons for migration, both regular and irregular. Africans, during the history tried to survive from hunger and poverty. Moreover, social restrictions should also be considered as an important element of migration as well as the political situations in Africa. The diversity of African societies and religions, which in some cases has resulted in civil war and ethnic tensions, as well as the long period of European colonization, has led to the current African reality of poverty and fragmentation. This has resulted in a lack of development in Africa, as well as lack of stability and these are all factors, which have led migrants to want to escape from the reality of Africa towards a journey to search for better opportunities in life. Scholar like Norman Myers, from Oxford University, wrote: *"Poverty serves as an additional "push" factor associated with the environmental problems displacing people. Other factors include population pressures, malnutrition, landlessness, unemployment, over-rapid urbanisation, pandemic diseases and faulty government policies, together with ethnic strife and conventional conflicts. In particular, it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between refugees driven by environmental factors and those impelled by*

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[1]For depthunderstanding of the concept of traditionalauthorities; Pleasesee: Mario Zamponi, *Fra tradizione e modernità . autorità tradizionali e potere nei processi di sviluppo rurale e di decentralizzazione in africa australe*, Bologna, 2011.

economic problems. In certain instances, people with moderate though tolerable economic circumstances at home feel drawn by opportunity for a better livelihood elsewhere. They are not so much pushed by environmental deprivation as pulled by economic promise. This ostensibly applies to many Hispanics heading for the United States. But those people who migrate because they suffer outright poverty are frequently driven also by root factors of environmental destitution. It is their environmental plight as much as any other factor that makes them economically impoverished. This generally applies to those refugees who migrate to areas where economic conditions are little if any better than back home, as is the case with many people who migrate within Sub-Saharan Africa and the Indian subcontinent. In this instance, with poverty and "life on the environmental limits" as the main motivating force, it matters little to the migrants whether they view themselves primarily as environmental or economic refugees.''(Myers 2005:4).

Another fact that must be taken into account is that the social conditions and ethnic problems mentioned above, during the pre-colonization period and even during the period of colonization, led males to migrate in order to search for opportunities to families' survivals. Therefore, history of Africa is full of mobility, and we cannot separate the phenomenon of illegal immigration today from its historical origins. For this reason migration as a means to escape and survive is firmly in the imagination of the African generations (Tornimbeni 2010:11-14).

BelachewGebrewold in his book Africa and Fortress Europe, regardingpush and pull wrote: *"Whendiscussing the causesofmigrationthere are usuallytwocategories of analysis: push and pull factors. The most common pushfactors are economic or demographic (poverty, unemployment, lowwages, high fertilityrates, lack of basichealth and education); political (conflict, insecurity, violence, poorgovernance, corruption and human rightsabuses); social and cultural (discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, religion, gender or caste); and environmental (harvestfailure, resourcedepletion, and natural and/or man-made disasters). Pull factors are economicopportunities (spread by global media) suchasjobs, an increase in living standards, and personal opportunitiessuchasfamilyreunification."* (Gebrewold 2016:86)*media) suchasjobs, an increase in living standards, and personal opportunitiessuchasfamilyreunification."* (Gebrewold 2016:86)

In this artical, I will mainly focus on what has already become known today as the Libya-Lampedusa route or central Mediterranean route. Analyzing how the "Arab uprisings" particularly the collapse of the Libyan regime, caused a negative impact on the security of the Mediterranean. To do so, we should consider some general features; one of the features is the geographical background of the Libyan landscape, as well as Libya's relationships with neighboring countries. Moreover, I will illustrate the political relations between Libya and the West, showing the importance of the Libyan state in terms of geographical location and political influence in reducing or increasing migration to the West, considering that Libya is one of the key actor factors in the growth of the phenomenon of illegal immigration in the last two decades at the very least.

Libya: from country of destination to transit country

Geographically, Libya spans over 1,775.500 square kilometers (679 362 square miles), making it the 17th largest country in the world in terms of area. It is bordered to the north by the Mediterranean Sea, and by Tunisia and Algeria from the west. To the southwest it is bordered by Niger and to the south it borders by both Chad and Sudan, while to the east with Egypt. The Libyan coast is the longest of any African country overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. It occupies 1,770 kilometers (1,100 miles) of Mediterranean Sea coastline (Cresti-Cricco 2015:21-25). This geographical background helps us to understand the fact that Libya is a magnet country for immigrants from Sub-Saharan Africa.

Regarding Libya's political history, which is relevant in relation to the recent growing phenomenon of illegal immigration, we should also not forget that economy is a key factor in the migration phenomena. Two questions, from my point of view, must be answered to reach further understanding. The first question is: how did Libya become a transit country? But before answering this question we need to answer anther question: how did Libya become a destination country for immigrants? Oil, desert, work opportunities, and survival; all these words are key factors in order to reach the answer to the above two questions.

Starting first with the answer to the second question (how did Libya become a destination country for immigrants?), after the discovery of oil in Libya in the beginning of the 1960s, Libya began a new phase of life. Olivier Pliez wrote: *"Sin daglianniSessanta del secolo scorso la Libia costituisce un polo d'attrazione per immigrati che giungono l lavorare in tutti i setori d'imoiegoofferti da questopaesevasto e sottopopolato (circa 6,5 milioni di abitanti). Al momento della conquista dell'indipendenzza, nel 1951, la Libia è un paese povero: la ricchezza giunge solo con l'inizio dello sfruttamento dei giacimenti di idrocarburi, a partire dal 1961, e soprattutto con la spettacolare crescita della rendita delle attività petrolifere nel corso degli anni Settanta"* (2006:65).

The State However developed a need for workers in various fields, and with the start of the development process in the 1960s and 1970s, Libya became a destination for different workers in different sectors, the State to maintain the development process. Libya in this era was seen as relatively stable compared to the countries of the Sahel, and it was also considered as a developed country, which gave employment to the citizens of the neighboring countries, providing the opportunity to work in the above-mentioned sectors. Egypt, in particular, was one of the countries that encouraged a large proportion of labor contracts in Libya, which were mainly temporary work contracts. Egyptian workers and new migrants found vacancies in large sectors of the labor market such as infrastructure and education. Everything continued at this pace for nearly two decades, during which Libya saw a leap in several areas, notably infrastructure and the oil production sector; as well as marketing and education, which, as mentioned above was dependent on Egyptian manpower, with a rare presence of sub-Saharan Africans up until nearly the beginning of the 1990s (Sara 2006:17-18).

Olivier Pliez added: *"In un primo momento l'immigrazione araba è largamente preponderante (l'88,6% degli stranieri residenti nel 1973), con prevalenza dei cittadini tunisini ed egiziani; successivamente essa viene bilanciata, nel corso degli anni Settanta e Ottanta, dall'arrivo, per mezzo di contratti internazionali, di lavoratori europei e asiatici (rispettivamente il 19% e il 22,6% nel 1984). Ma questo modello migratorio entra in crisi a partire dai primi anni Ottanta, messo alle corde dal crollo del prezzo del petrolio. Inizia cosi un periodo di espulsioni di massa di immigranti. Durante gli anni dell'embargo la crisi economica si aggrava, e si configurano nuovi orientamenti geopolitici. I residenti stranieri, il cui numero diminuisce di un terzo tra il 1984 e il 1995, sono originari per metà del Machrek e per un terzo dell'Africa subsahariana.*

Da un decennio a questa parte i flussi migratori dall'Africa subsahariana verso la Libia acquistano grande importanza. Mentre Tripoli tende a parlarne in modo generico, inglobando l'insieme del continente africano, la costruzione di questo spazio migratorio si fonda soprattutto sugli stati del bacino del lago Ciad, dal momento che quasi il 90% degli immigranti subsahariani proviene da tre soli stati: il Sudan (70,4%), ilCiad (13,2%) e il Niger (4,4%). Questo nuovo contesto migratorio verrà qui affrontato con riferimento al suo crescente significato nel dialogo multilaterale tra la Libia e i paesi della regione, alla sua incidenza spaziale sulle città saharo-sahrliane e ai numerosi malintesi che sottendono la nuova politica migratoria libica nel quadro della politica di esternalizzazione della frontiere europee."(Pliez 2006:66).

Ferruccio Pastore and Luca Trinchieri in therestudies*La Libia nel sistema migratorio mediterraneo* howeverwrote:*"Petrolio e deserto : ricchezza naturale e scarsità demografica. Come nei paesi del Golfo Persico , questa particolare combinazione di fattori spiega perché la Libia sia stata a pa   rtire dagli anni Settanta un importante paese di immigrazione. Le cifre ufficiali, con tutte le loro carenze e i loro limiti intrinseci (innanzitutto il fatto che non includono i lavoratori stranieri irregolari), sono sufficienti a confermarlo. Il numero di stranieri residenti nel paese era di 618.000 nel 2005, in crescita costante dal 1985 a un tasso del 2% annuo (United Nations, 2005). Con una popolazione complessiva stimata sui 6,16 milioni (ma in rapida crescita: secondo le previsioni delle Nazioni Unite dovrebbe raggiungere la soglia di 8,08 milioni entro il 2025 e di 9,68 milioni nel 2050) (United Nations , 2006), la Libia si avvicina ai più grandi Stati europei d'immigrazione in termini di percentuale di immigrati sulla popolazione totale e si situa tra i primi in Africa (tab. 1)."* (Pastore-Trincheri 2008:21).

Tab. 1: Ten African countries with highest percentage of international migrants on total[2]

1. Gabon	17.7
2. Gambia	15.3
3. Côte d'Ivoire	13.1
4. Libya	10.5
5. Comoros	8.4
6. Ghana	7.5
7. Congo	7.2
8. Namibia	7.1
9. Seychelles	6.1
10. Burkina Faso	5.8

From this we can understand that the geographical nature of Libya is a key factor in how the country becomes a transit country, after having mainly been for years a country of destination.

One historical event should be considered, the Chadian-Libyan war from 1978 until 1986, and the subsequent developments in the border area between Libya and Chad and Niger, as well as Sudan. By the end of this war, Libya was compelled to establish a cautious relationship with Chad, a fact that led to a continuous tendency of the Chadian army to enter Libyan territory. Moreover, the historical tribal ties between the population of the northern region of Chad and the southern cities of Libya, or the common borderlands (The so-called Aouzou strip) allowed smuggling movements in this region. This war, in fact, greatly contributed to the development of the desert. The city of Kufra, for instance, completely changed during and after the war, from being a remote village and rural area to being an urban city and a cultural center, which helped to develop the border strip between Libya, Sudan, Chad and Niger (Cresti-Cricco 2011:94-98), thanks to the project of Great Man - Made River[3]. In fact, the Gathafi regime's desire for the development of the city attracted the attention of smugglers and laborers to this city, looking for opportunities and a stable livelihood. This urban transformation in the Sahara led not only to the development of the Sahara, but also to new integration and mobility between Libya and its Southern countries.

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[2] Source: United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, PopulationDivision, *International Migration 2006,*http://www.un.org/esa/population/publications/2006Migration_Chart/2006IttMig_wallchart.xlsmRetrieved 18 Feb.2017.
[3] The Great Man-Made River is a network of pipes that supplies water to the Sahara in Libya. It is the world's largest irrigation project. For a deeper knowledge about the project see: F. Cresti, M. Cricco, *Gheddafi I volti del potere,* p. 94.

Olivier Pliez; however, is one of the author who was from my point of view very clear in clarify the relation between Libya and its southern border countries, showing the importance of this relation on the movements of migration flews, migration flows indeed, from sub-Saharan Africa to Libya have contributed, to change the geography of the Sahara, the cities where migrants pass by as a transit point to the north, have indeed seen development of economy as well as the engine of local development for the residents. According to Pliez: "*I flussimigratoritral'Africasubsahariana e la Libiahannocontribuito, nelgiro di qualche anno, a modificare la geografia del Sahara. Le cittànellequaliimigrantifannotappahannoinfatticonosciuto lo sviluppo di un'economia di transitochesi è rivelataallostesso tempo unarisorsa per colorochesono di passaggio e un motoredellosviluppo locale per iresidenti* ". (Pliez 2006:72).

In the 70s and 80s the first waves of migration are part of a migrationcontextcharacterized by proximityspatial, acrossborders and ethnicconnotationsuchas the Tuareg, the Tubu and the Sudanese. In the nineties, migrationprocesses are continued to grow from Africancountries, callingintoquestion the spatialreference of the Sahara, aswellas the ethnic and religious, and the directrelationshipbetweenimmigration and emigration from the Sahel in Libya. Thisdichotomyisreflected so evident in urbanlandscapes, underlining the differencebetween a first period, in whichmultiply the villages of refugees on the outskirts of the city of the Libyan Sahara, and a secondperiod, in which the villages are overwhelmed by the rapiddevelopment of informalhousing. thus made the example of Sebhaisrevealing (Pliez 2006:72-74).

However, by the end of the 1980s, Libya began to pursue a new foreign policy. In December 27th 1985, the international airport of Rome (Fiumicino) and Vienna airport, at the same time, faced terrorist attacks from four armed persons who belonged to the organization "Abu Nidal" which had a Libyan support; the terrorists attacked the check–in of the Israelian air company El AI and the American air company TWA, and they killed 16 passengers; this led to impatience of the U.S government Ronald Reagan who was already against the regime of Gathafi, as consequence; April 15th 1986 the American air force bombed Tripoli and Benghazi (Cresti-Cricco 2015:249-250).

Moreover, at the beginning of the 1990s, Libya was officially condemned due to its involvement in international terrorism, because of its direct involvement in the Lockerbie attack in December 1988, when two man of the intelligence service of the Gathafi regime were involved on the bomb explosion on the Pan Am Flight 103. This was a Pan American World Airways passenger flight that flew from London to New York City. On 21 December 1988, while fighting over Lockerbie, Scotland, crashed and 270 people were killed (Cresti-Cricco 2011:90).

The International community, immediately after the condemned act, imposed international isolation on Libya. On March 31st 1992, the Security Council of the United Nation decided resolution N. 748 of the embargo, and this lead to a difficult economic situation in the country(Cresti-Cricco 2011:90). When Gathafi found himself alone in the face of the international embargo, he was forced to completely change his policy, and turn to his African allies. This alliance became clearer with the declaration of the African Union, in the Libyan city of Sirt, the stronghold of the Gathafi regime on 1999(Cresti-Cricco 2011:90).

However, this is still not enough to explain the cooperation between Libya and the countries of the Sahel and the Arabs countries. In March 1989 in the capital city of Tripoli, Gathafi announced a rapprochement with neighboring countries; this rapprochement was significant unilateral opening of the eastern border with Egypt, and a few days after the western frontier with Tunisia and Algeria, this alliance bring more than 70.000 of manpower from this countries, spicily, after the agreement that allowed the citizens of these countries travelled among without passports (Cresti-Cricco 2011:120).

Considering the Ethiopian– Eritrean war in the late of 1998-2000 and the common border between Sudan and the war zones, and the fact of the exodus of migrants from Eritrea to Sudan to escape from conflict, these migrants found other ways in the borderland between Sudan and the city of Kufra. In addition, with the increasing pace of tension and conflict in the desert there was an increasing number of victims, and this, together with the prevalence of hunger and disease as well as the lack of infrastructure, put pressure on the Libyan health sector. Libya had become, by that time, the focus of attention for migrants and smugglers, where the vast geography of the area helped towards the evolution of the phenomenon of illegal migration to the heart of Libya (Ciabarri 2014:251-252).

Since the begging of 2000s, Libya entered a new phase in it history, and its foreign policy. So far, it is very important to highlight that the first gesture from the Gathafi regime to engage with the international community took place in 1998 when the regime declared that Osama bin Laden was a terrorist, submitting a memorandum to Interpol against him claiming his cooperation with Libyan radical groups (Mezran-De Maio 2007:440-444). Not only this, but immediately after 9/11 Gathafi condemned the attack and offered his support and assistance in the fight against international terrorism (Mezran-De Maio 2007:440-446).

This historical phase of Libyan history, which is known in Libya as the reform period, was a period led by the son of Gathafi, "Siyfe Al-Islam" who was destined to take over the rule of Libya after his father. Gathafi 's son worked in this period to try to maintain broad alliances with European Union. Siyfe, the first son of Gathafi's second wife, who studied for his PHD in Great Britain, turned back immediately to Libya and started his economic development projects (Cresti-Cricco 2011:125), and to address most of the outstanding issues between Libya and some Member States of the European Union since the

late 1980s. In spite of the difficulties, he was able to form a new foreign policy of Libya, and closed many of the outstanding dossiers using effective diplomatic channels. Indeed, between 2003 and 2004 he played a very important role on behalf of the Libyan regime regarding Libya's nuclear program after the collapse of the Iraqi regime in 2002, and Libya was able to close this program by 2005. Another very important question addressed by Libya was concluding a comprehensive agreement with the US regarding the case of the Lockerbie bombing; the issue ended with an agreement to pay compensation to the victims' families. Moreover, the regime also managed a settlement regarding one of the thorniest issues that has gripped public opinion for more than a decade: the HIV trial, the case of AIDS victims in Libya is an issue involving five Bulgarian nurses and a Palestinian doctor who were working in al-Fateh Children's Hospital in the city of Benghazi in Libya put on charges of infecting 426 Libyan children with blood contaminated with HIV. The settlement ended with the release of the six defendants after the Libyan judiciary had issued a death sentence on them. It is believed that this was the result of intensive interventions and pressure by the European Union to settle this famous social-political scandal known as the Bulgarian nurses' scandal.   This, too, ended by paying compensation to the families of the Libyan victims, and the release of the accused after a trial that had lasted for a decade. All this after discussions and agreements in which France played a key role during the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy, who was able to convince the Gathafi regime to abandon the death sentence against the accused in mid-2007 (Cresti-Cricco 2015:268-270).

Through the strengthening of its relations with Africanstatesafter the declaration of the African Union in 1999, the closure of itsnuclearprogram in 2004, and the settlement of itsinternationalterrorisminvolvementwhichended with the payment of compensation to the families of the victims, and alsoitsrenouncing of the execution of the nurses in the AIDS case, Libya began a new politicalphasecharacterized by a reneweddiplomacy, whichhelped to strengthen the Italian-Libyan.

Conclusion

To sum up, Libya became a destination for irregular migration, attracting citizens from Sub-Saharan states since the 1970s. Its desert borders with Niger, Chad and Sudan, manned by meager mobile patrols, are virtually uncontrollable, as well as much of the 2000 kilometers of coastline bordering the Mediterranean. As I mentioned above, however, this analysis of the Libya political and economic situation as well as its geographical position leads us to think about the answer to the second question: Libya has for almost three decades become a destination country for migrants, but how did Libya became a transit country? To answer this question it is very important to be aware of international agreements between several northern African countries and Italy in particular[4].

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[4] Regarding the international agreement that took place between Italy in particular and Northern African countries it is worth highlighting one important agreement for the moment - the Egyptian/Italian agreement. The agreement between Italy and Egypt was a result of the worsening numbers of migrants coming from Egypt to Italy. The quantum leap in the collaboration between Italy and Egypt, in 2004, the "route of Suez" which led to the return of thousands of Sri Lankansfleeing the civil war. The practice of police cooperation resulted in the torture and death of many of those who had been deported from Cairo to Colombo. The Readmission operations between Italy and Egypt, with direct flights from Catania and from Rome to Cairo, were made possible by the agreement of collaboration signed in January 2007.

However, Libya has become a transit country in order to impose its position and empower its role in the Mediterranean, and to become a link and security key factors of the region. Obviously,Gathafi's policy used the country position in order to force Europe to engage with Africa as a symmetrical partner. Of course Gaddafi did this with the collaboration of other African leaders by using the migration phenomena to control Mediterranean security as well (Pastore-Ferruccio 2007:3).

This agreed that in exchange for a few thousand sites for Egyptian workers in the units admitted annually with the flow decrees, forms of attribution of nationality, if not of personal identity and age, were to be allowed. In 2005, however, the Italian government and the Egyptian government signed a "cooperation agreement in the field of bilateral migration flows for work", in Cairo on November 28, 2005. In the text of the agreement it was expected that the two governments, in order to "effectively manage migration flows and to prevent illegal migration", undertake to facilitate the meeting between the demand and supply of migrant workers to and from Egypt. For deeper knowledge see: http://www.meltingpot.org/Italia-Egitto-Accordi-di-riammissione-e-divieti-di.html#.VU9yCSwqNzk 27.02.2016
However, the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in collaboration with the Ministry of Labor and the Ministry of Higher Education, signed several other agreements dealing with the readmission of northern Africans to countries of origin: with Morocco (1998), Tunisia (1998), Algeria (2000), and Egypt (2007).

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