



Dynamics and Representations of Migration Corridors: The Rise and Fall of the Libya- Lampedusa Route and Forms of Mobility from the Horn of Africa (2000-2009)

Luca Ciabbarri¹

Dipartimento di Beni Culturali e Ambientali
Università degli Studi di Milano
Luca.ciabbarri@unimi.it

Abstract

The migration route towards Italy, which, from various African regions, converged to Libya to reach the Sicilian coasts, reached substantial proportions between 2005 and 2009 and has been, on the Italian media, highly spectacularized and misrepresented at the same time. Migrants and asylum seekers from the Horn of Africa formed an important part of this flow of people coming through this “Libya-Lampedusa route”. The article questions the prevalent representations of this route and of migration corridors in general as unitary phenomena by highlighting their time-specific processes of formation, the social categories generated in them as well as the emerging socio-political dialectics of migration corridors from Africa to Europe.

Introduction

Maps of migrants’ routes directly connecting the Mediterranean Sea to sub-Saharan Africa, crossing the great desert and originating deep in Western Africa or Sudan and Horn of Africa, are nowadays often displayed by newspapers and



journalistic or academic accounts when dealing with migration from Africa to Europe. What is striking in these representations is that they portray a direct link, as if there was a unique road or corridor, between such very far-away places, a link which itself becomes the explanation of migration dynamics rather than being something that should be explained.²

Listening to migration stories from places of departure where I have conducted fieldwork – in particular the Somali areas – the frame is much more fragmented. In some instances, the idea of a unique route leading straight from Somalia to the Libyan coast and then to Lampedusa or Malta seems openly acknowledged: the discourses, plans, dreams and even actions of several young people that I met in 2007-08 indeed included and connected at the same time the various points – places, towns, borders – found along this route (Addis Ababa, Khartoum, Libya, Malta, Lampedusa), mentioning people who were there, travel anecdotes etc., and thus intellectually constructing the unity of that route before actually moving along it. At other times however, these representations depicted more segmented routes and spaces.

I would tend to consider the first kind of description (the idea of a unique connection) as something extra-ordinary, a product of specific historical contingencies rather than as the normality. Migration routes, I will argue in this article, are in fact exceptional phenomena of connectivity based on the integration of spaces, alignment of territories and regions, spatial density, unification of points (towns, cities, hubs, border posts, etc.), connected to specific historical circumstances and provisional combinations of factors. Being the outcome of cultural, economic and socio-political processes, they reflect the interplay of multi-faceted dynamics. In order to enquire on the emergence of these historical forms, on the way spaces are interconnected to the extent of mirroring a unique route combining thousands of kilometres, I will take into account the rise and fall of the migration route towards Italy, shortly named the Libya-Lampedusa route, which, from various African regions has converged to Libya to reach the Sicilian coasts. This route reached substantial proportions between early 2000s and 2009³ as a result of specific contingencies that put in connection several migratory regions and routes that were previously disconnected.

As I will show, besides its materiality, the process of the production of a migratory route or corridor also involves the intellectual construction of the road,

² An initial version of the paper was presented at the conference “Fences, Networks, People: Exploring the EU/AFRICA borderland”, held in Pavia in December 2011. I am grateful to the special issue editor Timothy Raeymaekers and to the reviewers of the article. The final writing of the article has significantly benefited from the support of a Wenner-Gren Hunt postdoctoral fellowship.

³ 2009 has represented a specific turning point, since it marked the beginning of the pushing back policy of the Italian government (condemned in 2012 by the European Court of Human Rights), which has provoked a sizeable reduction of the arrivals in Lampedusa. The war in Libya in 2011 has later re-opened the route, causing a massive arrival of African migrants to Italy. After that, a new season in the Libya-Lampedusa route has been unfolding.

the emergence of specific labels and intellectual categories (prone to eventually become social categories and then the neutral description of reality) portraying what is happening along the road. The unitary representation of the road becomes something “good to think with”, which makes possible actions targeting the road itself: moving along it as well as controlling it or identifying the actors operating on it. This of course calls into question the way migratory routes and corridors take shape on the one side and the way they are represented on the other side. Finally, this process of “road construction” generates its own dynamics: its success, its visibility, its congestion.

The article draws on the existing scientific literature and mentions examples from personal fieldwork data referring to the Horn of Africa.⁴ But what I will do specifically, and what ought to be done in my view, is to combine different perspectives, disciplines and regional specializations. The recent emphasis on circular migrations (in this article see for example Pliez 2000, 2004a, 2004b) needs to be complemented for instance with analysis of interdependence between spaces and regions, which integrates regions (Scheele, 2012) and corridors of mobility at times, but closes spaces and generates impermeability (or more prudently relative proximity or relative distance) at other times. Similarly, the analysis of the dynamics in the Sahelian regions has to be combined with perspectives on the Mediterranean scenario (Pastore, 2007; Paoletti, 2011), and the analysis of social dynamics in these migration networks has to be contrasted with their emerging social representations and categories.

General Features

Before describing the dynamics through which the Libya-Lampedusa migratory route took shape in early 2000s, it is useful to point out a few general features stressed by research thus far. These observations sharply diverge from the dreadful descriptions reported in the media:

- 1) The Lybia Lampedusa route (land-route first and sea-route in its final stage) in its substantial forms emerged in the early 2000s as a combined consequence of the historical relationship between Libya and the Sahelian countries, of changes in the Mediterranean routes utilised by human smugglers and in the European policies of controlling them and, as for its south-eastern link, of the exacerbation of factors of crisis in Sudan and in the Horn of Africa.
- 2) Migrants involved in this route originated especially from two regions: Northern Africa (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco) and the Horn of

⁴ On the whole, this is not an ethnographic article, since it essentially tries to combine different segments of literature normally disconnected. It benefits, however, from the author’s research experience since 2003 in Somaliland – Horn of Africa – as well as on research conducted in Italy (in 2005 and 2009) on the trajectories of migration of people coming from the Horn of Africa. A last section of the article directly refers to this field research.

Africa (including Sudan along with Eritrea, Ethiopia and Somalia). According to Perrin (2009) in 2004 two-thirds of the migrants who arrived in Lampedusa from Libya originated from North Africa. These data are confirmed by the Shengen Committee of the Italian Parliament (2009), which reports that in 2004-2005 50% of them were Egyptians. In 2006-2007 on the contrary Moroccans citizens prevailed, in correspondence with the incidents of Ceuta and Melilla, which stopped the access to Spain. In 2008 the majority of migrants in Lampedusa were Tunisians, followed by Nigerians, Somalis and Eritreans. According to the Shengen Committee there were 13,594 arrivals in 2004, 22,824 in 2005, 21,400 in 2006, 16,875 in 2007, and 34,540 in 2008. The route was also used by people from West Africa, following migration circuits from those regions to Libya that existed since long.

3) As for the Horn of Africa, most of the migrants were refugees who could potentially apply for asylum. UNHCR reports that in 2008 about 75% of those who arrived in Lampedusa actually applied for asylum (UNHCR Italia 2009). About 50% of them eventually attained either refugee status or subsidiary protection. Though frequently denied, the Lampedusa question thus eminently was about the right of asylum and the legal duty of the receiving countries, according to the Geneva Convention, to provide protection or at least to comply with the principle of non refoulement.

4) Despite representations in the Italian media, which depicted a kind of invasion, the total number of migrants arriving every year in Lampedusa crossing the Mediterranean Sea represented a very limited amount of the total number of new migrants entering Italy, even when considering only irregular entries. According to Monzini (2007), quoting data from the Italian Minister of Interior, in 2007 arrivals in Lampedusa represented 13% of irregular immigration towards Italy. Actually, if the system of control really functioned, there would be no irregular migration in Lampedusa at all (again, despite what media continuously reported) since those who arrive are either sent back in compliance with the readmission agreements signed by Italy with the sending countries⁵ or apply for asylum. Irregularity occurs only when the system of control does not work, because of its own inconsistencies,

⁵ Agreements are signed between EU countries and non-EU states to facilitate the *readmission* to their own country of persons entering or residing without authorization in the EU. Signing these agreements along with negotiating quotas of legal entry in Italy actually represented a central dynamics in the Lampedusa question since the actual number of irregular entries could be used to influence the diplomatic negotiations (see Hamood, 2006, for the Egyptian case).

its excessively slow and complicated procedures, or because of the congestion of the screening system.⁶

The Rise and Decline of the Route Libya-Lampedusa 2000-2009: A Macro-Description

Despite its extreme visibility in recent years, studies on the Libya-Lampedusa corridor are still incomplete. A few studies concern Libyan internal labour markets and Libyan relationships with its southern neighbours. Scholarly and journalistic accounts predominantly focus on the link with West Africa (see, for example, Bredeloup and Pliez, 2011; de Haas, 2008; Hamood, 2006; Monzini et al., 2004; Monzini, 2008; Pastore 2007; Pliez, 2000).⁷ Very few studies deal with Libya's connection to the Horn of Africa. Few studies have tried to connect the various factors at work and the different regions involved. Among scholars, however, there is a general consensus on the main determinants that have concurred to the emergence of the Libya-Lampedusa route. These concern labour market dynamics within Libya, its relationships with African countries and Europe, changes in the migration systems crossing the Mediterranean Sea in relation to the strategies of control of the European countries and the counterstrategies of migrants' smugglers as well as the cycles of war and instabilities in African countries bordering Libya in recent years. Sporadic

Following the development of the oil industry in the 1960s and 1970s, Libya has become a country of intense immigration, attracting in particular people from neighbouring Northern African states, especially Egypt. Through short-term contracts often implying seasonal movements in and out of the country, migrants were employed in the oil industry as well as in the related infrastructural and agricultural projects in the administration and education sector (Pastore, 2007, Hamood, 2006, Paoletti, 2010). Initially, the number of workers from sub-Saharan Africa was limited. Only the 1990s recorded a decisive escalation, due to the new political scenario and the new policy inaugurated by Gaddafi towards the African continent at that time. The 1990s in fact corresponded to the international isolation of Libya and a United Nations embargo due to the alleged involvement of Libya in cases of international terrorism, in particular after the Lockerbie attack of 1988. Accusing neighbouring Arab countries of not supporting Libya enough in this conjuncture, Gaddafi shifted his attention towards its southern frontier and inaugurated a new policy of political alliances and influence towards sub-Saharan countries. Through diplomatic agreements and announcements on the media, the tension along its southern border – Libya for instance was at war with Chad until

⁶ Boats carrying migrants are generally detected by the Italian authorities before landing in Lampedusa. The whole process of landing and the subsequent screening procedures occur under the supervision of state authorities. Meanwhile migrants are kept in specific detention centres.

⁷ Examples of journalistic accounts on the link Libya-West Africa are Del Grande (2007) and Liberti (2008). For Sudan and the Horn of Africa see Hamood (2006), on Eritrea see Treiber (2007), Treiber and Tesfaye (2008).

the late 1980s – was replaced by smoother relations and cross-border movements were officially re-allowed. Even though for different reasons and in a different context, the move resembles what was happening in the same years in the Middle East, where after the first Gulf war, in the oil economies of Saudi Arabia and Emirates workers coming from the Arab countries were replaced by new immigrants coming from further East, in particular southern India and Pakistan (Jaber and Metral, 2005), the experience of these new African workers in Libya was also marked by a number of difficulties. These were primarily due to the declining fortunes of the Libyan economy under the embargo, the oscillation of Libyan relationships with its new allies as well as the recurrent expulsions of foreign workers from its territory.

Pliez (2000, 2004a, 2004b; Bredeloup and Pliez, 2011) has long studied the socio-economic dynamics of the belt connecting southern Libya to the Sahelian countries (Chad, Niger and Sudan). Setting apart the suggestion of looking at the ancient transaharan caravan routes as basis for current relationships, he describes a process of growing integration and spatial density, which since the 1950-1960's has modified the landscape of the desert towards an increasing urbanization and sedentarization of the population. In those years, southern Libya slowly retrieved its historical role of communication and exchanges with the Sahelian countries, absorbing the fractures created by the disruptive Italian war against the Senussia brotherhood (1920-1930) and by colonial occupation. Commercial and religious networks strengthened by the return to Libya of those who fled during that time overlapped with other forms of integration: the penetration from the south of livestock traders as well as the drought of the 1970s, which produced further forms of mobility and groups heading north looking for opportunities. Local wars and reconciliations, between Chad and Libya or linked to the Tuareg rebellions in Niger, generated further population movements northwards. On the other side, the Libyan state advanced southward, thus contributing to the integration of spaces: driven by the oil rent, the state expanded in the desert through a number of gigantic development projects and agricultural schemes. Kufra for instance, the last bastion of the Senussi resistance, after long years of isolation emerged as pivotal urban centre in the Sahara. Here hybrid figures of traders, migrants looking for jobs, refugees, ex-soldiers, truck drivers looking for chances in the state-driven development projects emerged in the spontaneous economy of trade and transportation emerging around cross-border activities. These actors connected the new Saharan centres, border towns and transit nodes along specific communication routes (the cities of Kufra and Sebha for instance described by Pliez, 2000, 2004b). This urban transformation of the Sahara thus increasingly occurred through phenomena of spatial density, integration and constant mobility through economic and migration networks, war and displacement, the opening of borders as well as regional reconciliations.

French scholars (see also Gregoir, 2004) as well as a number of well-informed journalistic accounts have described the migration paths between south

Libya and West Africa through the belt of Chad and Niger (Del Grande, 2007, Liberti, 2008). Sudan witnessed similar dynamics (Bredeloup and Pliez, 2010, and Hamood, 2006). From Sudan, the routes leading to Libya cross Northern Darfur, but also Khartoum are at the crossroad of relationships with Libya, as the flourishing Libya market in the city attests. Khartoum, however, is also a place frequented by migrants, refugees, traders and students coming from the Horn of Africa. The importance of Sudan thus lies also in the fact that it connects two migratory circuits. It integrates, in different times and with variable degrees of success, the Libya-Sudan space with the belt of Sudan and the Horn of Africa. In the 1990s the states of the Horn have witnessed a protracted time of instability and conflict, generating multiple and stratified population movements. Eritreans have been hosted since the 1970s in refugee camps in Sudan, a consequence of the long conflict with Ethiopia. In the early 1990s, with the achievement of Eritrean independence, part of these refugees started to return to their country (Kibreab, 1996). Afterwards, however, in the growing repressive trajectory of independent Eritrea, the exit of people resumed. Sudan itself is linked to Libya not only through trade and labour migration but also through the flight of Sudanese refugees from the war in the South and in Darfur, just to mention the two most visible foci of conflict throughout the 1990s and 2000s. In Ethiopia also, a number of political crises have compelled people to leave: in relation for instance to the border war with Eritrea in 1998 or to post-election violence in 2005. Finally, Somalia throughout the 1990s and 2000s has continuously produced refugees and population movements: in massive forms in the early 1990s, at the beginning of the civil war, and with a new acceleration since 2006, in correspondence with the Ethiopian invasion of Mogadishu. Amidst this instability, Addis Ababa and Khartoum have always represented two important hubs for the Somali refugees, a shelter but also a new starting point for further mobility. Of course, Sudan and Libya never were the unique destinations of Somali wanderings. From Kenya to South Africa and from Yemen to Saudi Arabia and the Emirates, more Somali destinations have unfolded as final shelters or transit points towards other areas.

The literature mentioned thus far has described the integration between the Libyan space and migratory circuits located further south. This is not sufficient, however, to explain the emergence of the Libya-Lampedusa route and to understand how Libya, from a host country, has also become in recent years a transit area towards Europe. In order to understand this situation, one has to add an analysis of the migration routes in the Mediterranean Sea. The policies of control carried out by European countries in recent years have progressively narrowed the spaces and the possibility to reach the northern shore of the Mediterranean.

With regard to the routes converging to Italy, it is possible to identify a significant shift in the early 2000s. The Libya route emerged specifically, as stressed by Monzini (2008), from the decline of two other routes: one through the Suez Canal and the other from Tunisia. The first one was clamped down through military collaboration and diplomatic agreement between Italy and Egypt (Vassallo

Paleologo, 2008), the second one through the signing of readmission agreements with Tunisia. In the background, also the progressive closure of the routes leading to Spain from Morocco and West Africa played an important role in this emergence (Coslovi, 2007, de Haas, 2008).

All these changes produced the concentration on Libya of the flows of migrants originating from various African countries. Monzini (2004, 2008), drawing on an extensive analysis of court cases, highlights that the opening of the Lampedusa route was favoured by the transfer, from Tunisia, of traffickers who previously operated along the Tunisian and Suez corridor. This interpretation, which mentions human trafficking organizations as a departure point is further confirmed by the, initially concentrated, departures from the Libyan locality of Al Zwarha (close to the Tunisian border), as well as the homogeneous types of ships used and strategies adopted to cross the Mediterranean sea. At more advanced stages in their development, the strategies used by these traffickers involved the abandoning of migrants in international or domestic waters, thus challenging the duty of receiving states to rescue persons in distress at sea. Traffickers usually gave the command of the boat in return for a travel discount. To congest the procedures of screening and control at the destination points, another strategy involved the organization of multiple departures at the same time.

The change in the human smugglers' strategies in the Mediterranean basin has thus transformed Libya into a territory of transit to Italy. Other factors, however, have determined the success of this route, the enormous dimension it acquired as well as its increasing congestion. In this regard, the influence of the smuggling organizations must not to be overemphasized, particularly as we move away from the immediate managing of the sea crossing from Libya. Research conducted thus far reports that initially foreign people (Tunisians for instance) were involved in the high level organization of smuggling in Libya. More frequently nationals of migrants were at work, often ex-migrants who had stopped along the road (Monzini, 2008). Along the route, networks illegally organizing migrations are described as loosely structured, localized in different segments and nodes of the route but never controlling these routes entirely (Hamood, 2006). In addition, there are along the way different forms of *passeurs* and facilitators, though never connected to each other or constituting a precise organization.⁸ Frequently, those who organize the traffic just tend to spread information along the migration corridors and in their nodes, but most of the times this same information circulates autonomously and without any control from above: the illegal organization of mobility is one of the elements that influences the formation and success of the migratory routes but never entirely and without having the capacity to determine their major dynamics, particularly the further we move away from the Mediterranean Sea. Migration routes are phenomena that interweave local and regional mobility, economic exchanges as well as religious or education networks,

⁸ Of course this specifically regards the route I am dealing with. In other cases, things can be much different.

systems of border crossing, infrastructures of mobility, as well as flows of information which moves along them.

The concentration of the traffic in Libya in the early 2000s derived from the progressive clamping down of other routes in the Mediterranean basin. But the success of this route also and most relevantly has derived from its deep integration into the routes of mobility previously described, which connects several migratory circuits, intercepts flows from areas of conflict and destabilization and from routes that could not be followed any longer. This exceptional combination of elements has unified diverse migration circuits into a unique long-distance route.

There is finally a political factor to take into account in order to complete the picture. Internationally isolated during the 1990s, Libya has witnessed since the end of the decade and the beginning of the 2000s a process of rapprochement to the global North. In the shadow of much bigger stakes and interests, the issue of migration has become an important element of discussion, even a tool to start the same rapprochement process (Pastore, 2007) and an argument to gain leverage in ongoing negotiations. This article will not go into the details of the negotiation between Libya and western countries, and in particular into the details of the treaty of friendship, partnership and cooperation stipulated between Italy and Libya in that process (Pastore, 2007; Paoletti, 2010). The whole process, however, has deeply transformed the migratory dynamics in Libya, producing more rigidity towards and repression of migrants and foreign workers living in the country. Uncertainty about the status of foreign workers, and recurrent repressions and expulsions have always marked the dynamics of the labour market in Libya. From 2000, however, these forms of repression – along with increasing difficulties in absorbing labour migrants in the country – were part of the politics of externalization of the European border and of the pressures carried out by the European countries aiming at establishing control of the migratory flows in Libya. Initially, this pressure had even produced an increase in the attempts of the migrants to reach the Italian coasts (De Haas, 2008; Coslovi, 2007).

From the diplomatic interaction between European countries and Libya two specific discursive categories have emerged. In their apparently descriptive form, they convey profound consequences: the category of transit and the category of sub-Saharan migrants. The first one represents the idea that Libya is essentially a corridor of transit of African migrants who try to reach Europe. Pastore (2007) suggests that in this interaction, which has regarded Libya as well as many other African countries, the idea of transit was a sort of invention of the African leaders aimed at building up negotiation power. Increasing the number of potential migrants in transit was part of this dynamic. The number was based on an estimation of the migrants that cross the southern Libyan border on a yearly basis, without considering the fact that the same individuals could enter and leave the country several times or just stay in the country without having any intention to cross the sea. These assumptions thus denied the long history of Libya as a host country for immigrants. The category of transit has been fully appropriated by the

European governments, reinforcing the general impression of an uncontrollable invasion of people from Africa (De Haas, 2008; Düvell, 2006). Furthermore, the category of transit conceals the fact that the protagonists of the sea crossings were mainly North African citizens (Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco). Opposed to the category of North Africans was the one of sub-Saharan migrants. This term, however, generates other concealments regarding migrants' diverse motivations, trajectories and areas of origin. In particular, what is concealed, because disconnected from any historical background, is the issue of refugees, that is to say the most vulnerable category of migrants along that route. In the next two paragraphs I will refer to a specific context of departure of refugees – the Somali region – in order to see the complex and multi-faceted nature of the processes of forced migration and the long range trajectories that they generate, hardly condensable in a general in the idea of “one route” and “one travel”.

Notes from Somalia: Multiple Dynamics, Multiple Routes

2006-2009: Leaving Mogadishu

Civil war in Somalia since 1988 has recurrently produced massive outflows of refugees towards neighbouring countries – Ethiopia, Kenya, Djibouti – and to a lesser extent towards places further away. These include countries with historical links to Somalia – colonial links as for Italy and UK or religious and economic links as for the Arabian Peninsula – or new destinations, in part following a new geography dictated by western countries' asylum systems: Scandinavia, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany and France, the USA and Canada. At a later time, the growing barriers to migration and the persistent search for opportunities have opened up more pathways, such as South Africa, Malaysia or Australia. Part of these movements has occurred under official programmes of re-settlement of refugees, others under self-managed programmes and strategies. Families whose members are scattered in diverse continents and continuous mobility between these places represent a common outcome of this process (Farah, 2003).

After intense population outflows in the early 1990s, the early 2000s were marked by increased uncertainty due to the reduced possibility to access the European countries and the reluctance of the international community to recognize a situation of extreme instability but not necessarily characterized by open conflict. The new atmosphere of the War on Terror added to this, bringing in further suspicion towards Somali migrants belonging to a State no longer existing or originating from territories allegedly hosting movements and people linked to Al Qaeda. The Ethiopian invasion backed by the US and its occupation of Mogadishu in December 2006 has thus represented not only the return to war and widespread destructions in Somalia (Menkhaus, 2007), with the en masse flight of the civil population from its capital city, but also a partial return to an official recognition by Northern countries of the refugees leaving Somalia. The flight from Mogadishu nonetheless confirmed all the complexities and ambiguities of the population movements from Somalia at the time of the war on terror. The war in Mogadishu

between the Ethiopian army and the Islamic Courts (2007-2009) has caused the flight of about 800,000 people, while the total number of displaced people considering the surrounding regions corresponded to about 1,100,000 (Lindley, 2009: 5). Under these circumstances, Kenya in January 2007 closed its border with Somalia, denying the entry of new Somali refugees with the specific argument that among their ranks there could be people connected to Al Qaeda. During the military operations led by Ethiopia, US forces actually directly intervened several times to bombard within the Somali territory specific targets identified as terrorist strongholds. During the war the Islamic Courts frequently attacked equipment and personnel belonging to UN humanitarian agencies. This impeded the creation of a safe humanitarian space necessary for assisting the civil population (Guglielmo, 2009, 17). As reported by Guglielmo, the Kenyan blockade did not prevent the refugees from crossing the border but just changed the way they could do it: empowering local human smugglers and producing risky adaptive strategies pursued by the refugees. The most vulnerable subjects – children, old people, women – were in several cases abandoned along the border, compelling the assistance agencies on the Kenyan side to rescue them and take them to the refugee camps already existing in the area since early 1990s, while men usually preferred to find a way across the border in order to reach the urban centres in Kenya, searching for better economic opportunities (Guglielmo, 2009, 19). Many refugees thus stayed within the Somali borders. They were thus classified as IDP's, Internally Displaced Persons, by the UN international agencies, and remained in the surroundings of Mogadishu or moved further away, towards their area of origin, towards other safe areas or to other international borders in the north. A few groups went to Somaliland, a region that since early 1990s had successfully restored internal peace and stability, other moved to Puntland, in the north-east corner of Somalia, trying, from there, to cross the sea to Yemen. The sea route to Yemen, always used by Somalis, reached high visibility in the second half of the 2000s, when UNHCR started to recognize the Somali refugees heading there and provided them support. Like in the Mediterranean, this sea route has over the years claimed a vast number of victims, mostly unrecorded (Human Rights Watch, 2009; MSF, 2008). The route was used not only by Somalis fleeing from Mogadishu, but also by ethnic Somalis escaping from the repression carried out in Ethiopia by the national army, in particular in the Ogaden region (Human Rights Watch, 2008) and by Ethiopian citizens looking for jobs and economic opportunities in Yemen and, from here, in Saudi Arabia. Anna Lindley (2009) has analysed a few pathways followed by migrants fleeing from Mogadishu, highlighting their extreme variability and the constant changes occurred during the flight, in relation to shifting perceptions of security, of the available opportunities and of a number of unpredictable contingencies. The micro-narrations she has collected offer a complex picture of forced migration: there are multiple forms of conflict and violence as well as multiple ways in which people perceive the degree of violence and insecurity and multiple ways in which this affects people's decisions to leave. The flight, whereas in some instances immediate and reactive, in other cases just

represents one of the possible ways utilised by people to avoid insecurity and decay. The direction and destination of the flight is equally subject to innumerable variables, from the perception of safe places to the resources available to reach them to the effects of the many uncontrollable events which can occur along the way. Only from these areas of initial refuge, longer trajectories are then planned or organized (including the attempts to reach the Mediterranean Sea), often through the hubs of international migration like Addis Ababa, Khartoum or Cairo (see for instance Al-Sharmani, 2003; Zohri, 2003). The flight thus appears as a sum of pathways and attempts, which can cover vast spaces and long periods of time.

After Forced Migration: The Diasporic Society of Somaliland and the Time of Tahrīb

In 2007-08, the time when I carried out my last long-term fieldwork in Somaliland, the country was crossed by different kinds of population movements.⁹ There were groups of Ethiopian citizens on transit trying to reach Yemen via Puntland; there were people who had fled from Mogadishu; other ethnic Somali groups, formally Ethiopian citizens, were also heading to Yemen to escape Ethiopian internal repressions. In addition, Somalilanders, especially young people, were trying to reach Northern countries, through air routes, for instance in the case of family reunification, or by land, especially those who had to rely on irregular channels. Part of them set foot on Ethiopia, Sudan and Libya, trying to do what locally came to be known as *tahrīb*. Somaliland diaspora has built up a kind of society where remittances play a fundamental role. Remittances in fact had strongly contributed to the internal reconstruction and development which accompanied the peace process, by assuring the restart of the local economy, by supporting most of the families and by setting up fundamental education and health services. The outward projection of society, which characterized the times of the flight, was transformed into a permanent option, one of the strongest social forces producing local development and ensuring security for any family in Somaliland (Ciabbarri, 2011). Through their effects at local level, the communities living abroad thus, act as pole of attraction for new migrations. Their role is fully included in the local economy, determining a social dynamic that compels also the new generations to emigrate. Other elements of economic development, in particular international trade and the development projects carried out by the international community, have a minor significance if compared to the remittance economy. The major economic resource of Somaliland, the export of livestock towards the Arabian Peninsula, has suffered in these years by the ban imposed by the Arab countries. Besides the economic impact, the new diasporic society also builds up new social dynamics and sources of inequality. One of the major axes of differentiation emerges between those groups and individuals who have access to the transnational society and those who have not, between families who have members living abroad

⁹ Fieldwork focused on the interplay between post-war dynamics, migration and trade. Background analysis draws from Ciabbarri (2010, 2011).

sending back remittances and those who have not. The struggle for social inclusion, the search for upward social mobility, the economic aspirations of families and individuals are directed outwards and prescribe a passage abroad. Especially from the standpoint of the youngest generations who have very little chances to find a job and social stability in Somaliland, this mechanism functions by dictating the forms of social value and of social ascent and by building up a strong push for further emigrations. However, whereas past emigrations could occur under the publicly recognized mark of asylum law or other legal forms, the new outflows are hardly recognized, apart from family reunification. The oil economies of the Arabian Peninsula now in fact preferably recruit their labour force in countries like India or Pakistan, while legal entries to Europe normally do not contemplate these areas of origin, even for educational purposes. This closure of the European borders has thus produced various routes for irregular emigration. In correspondence with the rise of the Libya-Lampedusa route and its strict integration with circuits of migration located deep inside the African continent, this route has been included among those available for the Somaliland youth, who could follow the path of other refugees and migrants gathered along the migratory hubs of Addis Ababa and Khartoum. This possibility, particularly in the second half of the 2000s, gave birth to a real fever and obsession to leave among local youth, the fever of the *tahrib*. *Tahrib* is an Arabic word meaning contraband and illegal cross-border activities in general. Hamood (2006) reports that this was the accusation advanced by the Libyan police against those migrants arrested while they were planning to cross the sea. But for the Somaliland youth, *tahrib*, which for them also implies danger, challenge and freedom at the same time, meant taking the road of adventure and personal emancipation, getting rid of those links and limitations of a society without opportunities. It was a survival strategy for the most marginalized groups, for whom sending somebody outside is a form of insurance for the future. But it was also an act of rebellion for the better off teenagers, or the two things altogether in other instances: rebellion against the past generation who could build its security by migrating abroad, against the fathers who prevented their sons from setting off on risky and uncertain travels, or again against the difficulty to find a job. But it was also – and this was explicitly declared by these young people – a rebellion against the rigid forms of control and the limits on migration from the South of the world set up by the Northern countries that impede any form of regular and safe migration.

Conclusions

The sketches presented here from a country of origin of migration further problematize the uniform dimension of migration corridors and the factors presiding over their formation. The analysis of migration routes and corridors demands the understanding of an ample number of factors and dynamics. Actors involved, as mentioned in this article, include migrants and other people on the move (drivers, traders, facilitators and traffickers, policemen soldiers and state agencies), each of them endowed with a certain degree of agency and power. The

impression of a unique road directly connecting the countries of origin to Europe as represented in “migratory maps” can only emerge as the exceptional outcome of the intertwining of different dynamics. But what is at stake in questioning these homogeneous representations? First of all, this alternative understanding clearly poses the issue of the time and periodization of migration: rather than a linear development of events, what emerges are different seasons and histories of migration, each of them rooted in specific historical conjunctions, characterized by a different intertwining of social dynamics and different power relationships. This makes it possible also to properly connect representations of migration (the idea of transit, the category of sub-Saharan, the trope of invasion) to power systems and related forms of production of information and knowledge. But time also allows capturing, within each conjuncture, specific dialectics of corridors characterized by their progressive visibility and cyclical congestion and, as noted by Bredeloup and Pliez (2011), linked to other corridors’ accessibility or closure. Moreover, the dialectics of these corridors also allows highlighting peculiar forms of interaction, proximity and distance between the various actors at play. Whereas repression is perhaps what really unifies any segment of the migration route from the standpoint of migrants, as a cause of the migratory movements, as the experience along the route and in the systems of regulation and control of mobility in the receiving countries, its pervasiveness also creates unexpected rapprochements. This is all the more evident when we look at forced migration, a central feature of the Libya-Lampedusa dynamics. Considering the final route segment corresponding to the crossing of the Mediterranean Sea, the visible scenery was dominated, on the one hand, by traffickers directly challenging the duty of the states to rescue the migrants by actually abandoning the latter in the sea. In response to that, on the other hand, the Italian state adopted an indiscriminate “pushing-back” policy establishing collaboration agreements with the Libya of Gaddafi. This agreement proved to be so strong that it survived the toppling of Ghadafi’s regime. The sacrificial victim of this, however, was the right to asylum, with further advantages for Mediterranean states to free themselves from the costly obligation to provide appropriate assistance to refugees. In Lampedusa it was thus not the refugee law to prevail but the interests of states and their public opinions. In the unusual rapprochements and distances built up by the current struggle to curb international migration, humanitarian law and democratic states’ law often acutely diverge, paving the way for irresistible attractions between nominally very different actors located along the migration corridors and sharing a repressive attitude towards migration.

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