



# Shifting Italy/Libya Borderscapes at the Interface of EU/Africa Borderland: A “Genealogical” Outlook from the Colonial Era to Post-Colonial Scenarios

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## Abstract

By adopting the borderscape as “method”, the paper inquires into the Euro/African border nexus by assuming a multi-sited approach, able to combine not only different places where borderscapes could be observed – both in borderlands and wherever specific borderscapes processes have impacts, are negotiated or displaced – but also different socio-cultural, political, economic, and historical settings. From this viewpoint, the paper proposes a shift from exclusively national borders between EU member states and African countries to the multiplying material as well as epistemological borderlands at the interface of their dis-location and re-location, which are producing new forms of borderland in Africa originated by the externalization of European borders.

The article sheds light on EU/Africa borderlands, by diving into the Italy/Libya relational geographies from colonial times to their post-colonial configurations. The Italian/Libyan cooperation in border and migration management is relevant indeed to highlight the ambiguous nature of Euro/African



bordering practices across the Mediterranean. Italy/Libya borderscapes are investigated by referring respectively to: Libyan *oasis-scapes* (Murzuq and Kufra oases) and the genealogy of the border variations between Europe and Africa; the externalization of European borders and *camp-scapes* in Libya; Italy/Libya *business-scapes* and the double mission of Euro/African borderland between politics and economic control.

### **Diving into the Euro/African border nexus through the borderscapes looking glass**

Borders can be regarded as socio-spatial agency in their own right and bordering processes do not begin or stop at demarcation lines in space. As Balibar (2004) argues, the border and its various regimes increasingly disperse across different socio-political arenas and can no longer exclusively be connected to the physical borders of nation-state territoriality.

Taking the borderscape as a methodological angle, the paper wishes to inquire into the Euro/African border nexus by adopting an approach, able to highlight borders as complex multi-dimensional entities (van Houtum et al., 2005). The suffix “-scape” of the term “borderscape” adopted here is connected to the multiple “scapes” (ethnoscapes, technoscapes, financescapes, mediascapes, ideoscapes) as theorized by Appadurai (1996). These various “scapes” suggest an alternative spatial rendering of the present, one that points to the subjective and contested nature of spatiality and is not “fixed,” but which is of various, disjunctive sizes, amorphous, and flowing. Thus, the concept of borderscape enables a productive understanding of the processual, de-territorialized and dispersed nature of borders and their ensuing regimes and ensembles of practices (Brambilla, 2010a). It indicates “the complexity and vitality of, and at, the border” that is perceived as “mobile, perspectival, and relational” (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007, x). Such a reflection offers us opportunity to adopt a kaleidoscopic looking glass by assuming, at the same time, a multi-sited approach not only combining different places where borderscapes could be observed and experienced – both in borderlands and wherever specific borderscapes processes have impacts, are represented, negotiated or displaced – but also different socio-cultural, political, economic, legal and historical settings where a space of negotiating actors, practices, and discourses is articulated at the intersection of “competing and even contradictory emplacements and temporalities” (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007, xxx).

By exploring Euro/African borderlands through the lens of the borderscape, it is possible to highlight the relevant role of “border variations” in the construction of Euro/African relational space from the colonial period up to the present. Such an approach allows us indeed to grasp the “variability” of Euro/African borderlands that seems to correspond to a simultaneous process of doing, undoing and retracing of borders themselves in time and space (Beck and Grande, 2004). To understand the importance of border variations in investigating the Euro/African border nexus,

it is worth referring to the guest editorial by Mol and Law in the theme issue on “Boundary Variations” of *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* (2005). According to Mol and Law (2005, 637), boundary variations are a useful conceptual tool for exploring “the complexity of boundaries in their materialities, their paradoxes, their leakages, their fractionalities, and their practical enactments.” Thus, border variations tell us that borders are blurring; they move around and fold. Borders themselves also travel and are not fixed, but designed to be as mobile as the subjects and objects “on the move” that they seek to control (Parker and Vaughan-Williams, 2012). This would help investigate the multiplication as well as the persistence of borders (Sidaway, 2011) between Europe and Africa, by at the same time contributing to the analysis of the diffusion and stratification of Euro/African borders across the Mediterranean moving away from the borders of nation-states (Brambilla, 2010b).

Within this framework, the paper proposes a shift in perspective from exclusively national borders between EU member states and African countries to the multiplying material as well as epistemological borderlands at the interface of their dis-location and re-location, which are producing new forms of Euro/African borderland in Africa originated by Europe externalizing its southern borders into the African continent. As Bialasiewicz (2012, 848) argues, the “EUropean archipelago of border-work” in the Mediterranean is not simply about the policing of migration and the “‘spectacle of militarised border enforcement’ (to cite Nicholas de Genova),” but “the visible ‘off-shoring’ of EUropean migration controls has also been accompanied by the ‘out-sourcing’ of migration management to African states themselves.” This means to investigate at the same time the conceptual links between EU-internal, EU-external and non-European borders with reference to the relational geographies between EU(rope) and Africa; and to focus on the EU “migration machine” as post-colonial EU/Africa borderscape.

What emerges, on the one hand, is the deep instability and variability of the “traditional” geopolitical borders only as sites of exclusion, conveyed by the use of metaphors such as “Fortress Europe” and, on the other hand, there is the urgency “to analyse the complex tensions that make the border a field in which processes of traversing and crossing meet those of reinforcement and blocking” (Mezzadra and Neilson, 2012, 188). This shows the border as a social institution and migration as a social force influencing and co-producing the border itself.

### **The Italian/Libyan case study and the “scapes” approach**

The paper sheds light on EU/Africa borderlands, by divining into the complexity of Italy/Libya relational geographies starting from colonial times to their current post-colonial configurations. The Italian/Libyan case study and particularly Italian/Libyan cooperation in border and migration management is relevant indeed to highlight “EU’s contradictions in dealing with its southern

neighbours” (Bialasiewicz, 2011, 299), by reasserting the ambiguous nature of Euro/African bordering processes and practices across the Mediterranean.

Adopting a “genealogical” viewpoint, what comes to notice is the nexus between contemporary Italian/Libyan relational geographies and the blurring of historical borders along geopolitical, socio-cultural, economic and ethnic lines within the geo-historical horizon of Italian and European imperial expansion (Kramsch and Brambilla, 2007). This contributes to supporting a critical historical perspective that is crucial for investigating the plural evolutions of Euro/African borderlands throughout time as well. The complexity of Euro/African borders’ biographies (Megoran, 2011) may be revealed indeed by looking at their “time-print,” or what can be called, following Bayart (1993), the *long durée* of any border.

The notion of “scapes” is used to structure my analysis of the Italian/Libyan border variations in time and space, by shedding light on the complex range of discourses, practices and places that constitute the borderscape (Hess and Kasperek, 2010). More precisely, three different “scapes” are identified and examined within Italy/Libya borderscapes: Libyan *oasis-scapes* (Murzuq and Kufra oases) and the genealogy of the border variations between Europe and Africa; the externalization of European borders and *camp-scapes* in Libya; Italy/Libya *business-scapes* and the double mission of Euro/African borderland between politics and economic control. The Italian/Libyan border variations described referring to these different “scapes” are also communicated through a powerful communicative tool at the time of the Colonel’s regime, that is billboards distributed all around the country supporting the main ideas of Gaddafi’s identity discourse. The scrutiny of billboards gives me a chance to explain that not only are the messages communicated by these billboards in the heart of Italian(European)/Libyan(African) border variations but they also tell us about the paradoxical nature of Gaddafi’s political project and the way in which it was interwoven with the shifting of Euro/African borderscapes.

Deploying the notion of scapes as “method,” the paper inquires into the Euro/African border nexus by highlighting some relevant bordering constellations within the Italian/Libyan borderland and beyond. My analysis aims to provide new insights into the critical potential of the notion of “scapes” and the borderscapes concept for pushing forward the study of Italian/Libyan relational geographies. By doing this, I combine my conceptual perspective with fieldwork in Libya. Although this paper does not provide a real ethnographic study of the Italian/Libyan borderscapes, fieldwork in Libya offered an opportunity to develop my initial thinking on the oases as key border places as well as advancing my conceptual reflection on “scapes” thanks to empirical work.

I spent three weeks in Libya in April 2004. My field mission was part of a collaborative research project entitled “Research for a Historical Dictionary of Italian Cartographers: Colonialism and Africa” (2005-2007) financed under the

PRIN National Research Programme by the Italian Ministry of University and Research. The aim of my field research in Libya was to understand more about the historical and present role of the oases as key border places across the Saharan Desert as well as the historical and present configurations of the Libya/Chad border with particular regard to the dispute over the Aouzou Strip. I stayed in tourist accommodations and conducted my research under the appearance of a culturally interested tourist. This was a precaution that had to be taken to protect myself, due to the situation in the Country under Gaddafi regime with very little room for research beyond the studies with the consent of the ruling Government. I travelled across the Country back from Tripoli to Libya's southern border with Chad passing through the desert and visiting the oases of Ghadames, Sebha, Ghat, Murzuq and Tmissa.<sup>2</sup> I travelled by car with three other Italian colleagues working in the same PRIN project. My main informants were our English, Arabic and Berber-speaking tour guide and one of our Tuareg-speaking drivers, who helped me greatly to access the field. They both were working for a local tour operator licensed in Libya that had provided me a letter of invitation needed to obtain the visa to enter the Country. My fieldwork methodology involved qualitative research methods and mainly: participant and non-participant observation, the taking of field notes, narrative interviews and informal conversations with targeted actors who I had the chance to meet during my trip.

The oases emerged as key-places in shifting Italian/Libyan borderscapes while travelling across the country, by at the same time enabling significant visions for the other two sets of "scapes" the paper focuses on, camp-scapes and business-scapes.

### **Libyan *oasis-scapes*, or genealogy of the border variations between Europe and Africa**

Libya itself can be considered as a borderscape; not only regarding Italian/Libyan relationships throughout history but also focusing attention on the continuous dis-locations and re-locations of the much-discussed Euro/African borderland across the Mediterranean basin as well as from the Mediterranean countries to Sub-Saharan Africa (Bessis, 1986). Libya location in Northern Africa bordering the Mediterranean Sea and therefore Southern Europe made the country historically attractive for a number of western and non-western Powers to take control of trans-Saharan trade routes and natural resources the Libyan region is rich in. The Ottoman Empire was the first foreign Power to establish its rule over what was called Cyrenaica in 1517 and the Turks extended then their power over Tripoli in 1551. European colonial countries began to promote their interest for Libya at the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A number of conflicts, negotiations and territorial resolutions among different European actors followed in that strip of Africa leaning

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<sup>2</sup> During my tour, I was not able to reach the oasis of Kufra and my argument here on this oasis is based, in fact, upon secondary sources.

out towards Europe up to the present (Vandewalle, 2006). The history of Libya as an Italian colony began in the 1910s – with the Italian conquest of coastal Tripolitania and Cyrenaica from the Ottomans in 1911 – and was buttressed under Mussolini in the late 1920s and 1930s, when Italians regained, reinforced and extended their control. In early 1923, the Fascist Italian armed forces embarked on a brutal re-conquest of Libya. At that time, the only effective Libyan resistance to the Italians left was concentrated in the Cyrenaica, where the Senussi held sway over its tribal affiliates (Vandewalle, 2006, 30-4). The Italian military campaigns in Cyrenaica, supervised by Italy's Commander-in-Chief in Libya, General Rodolfo Graziani (known among the Libyans as “the butcher of Tripoli”), brought enormous devastation to the country, forcibly moved a large percentage of Cyrenaica's population into Italian detention camps. It was a brutal and unsparing campaign of subjugation. A number of major battles took place at a later stage in Libya between Italy, supported by the German Army, and the Allied during the North African Campaign of World War II. The Italian rule over Libya lasted until February 1947, when Italy officially lost all the colonies of the former Italian Empire under the terms of the 1947 peace treaty with the Allies (Ben-Ghiat and Fuller, 2005). After the defeat of Italy, under the relative freedom of the British and French administrations (in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and in Fezzan, respectively), a multitude of political interests, most often at cross-purposes, developed concerning the future of Libya. After years of virtual diplomatic deadlock, the Libyan matter was passed to the United Nations General Assembly (Sidaway, 2012). On 24 December 1951 the United Kingdom of Libya proclaimed its independence as a result of a diplomatic process overseen by the UN, and was ruled by King Idris al-Sanusi. On 1 September 1969 a military coup, headed by Muammar Gaddafi, overthrew the monarchy and established the new regime.<sup>3</sup> Thus, what emerges is the progressive shaping of Libya as a borderscape in one hundred years, from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Borders agreed by colonial Powers at the “adjudicators’ table” performed a crucial role in taking possession of the extra-European world by exporting the “*nomos* of the earth” invented in Europe and for Europe (Schmitt, 1950/2003). The colonial scramble radically simplified Libya, describing it as an empty space to be managed by means of the colonial project. This simultaneously enabled the construction of Libya as a colonial space. Under the rhetorical claim to transform *terra nullius* into knowable territory governable in practical terms, colonial Powers were involved in a process that Godlewska (1995) has rightly defined of “creative destruction”: negating indigenous knowledges and socio-territorial organizations, colonial Powers destructed Libya representing it as vacant space and reconstructed Libyan territory as colonial domain within European epistemologies defined by

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<sup>3</sup> While I was writing a first draft of this paper, Gaddafi was killed, on 20 October 2011, after being captured by National Transitional Council fighters overran loyalist defenses in the toppled Libyan leader's hometown and final stronghold of Sirte.

linear boundaries traced on “imperial artefacts *par excellence*”: maps (Atkinson, 2005, 16).

However, there is another “form” that the border assumes in the Libyan borderscape, beyond the linear tracing of borders on maps, both in the colonial period and in the present Libyan landscape. It is a “border form” which, unlike linear boundaries that are visible on the map, but remain invisible in “real” geographies, appears in some key-places for understanding its social dynamics and historical development when travelling across the country: the oases. They can be regarded as icons of shifting Italian/Libyan borderscapes between colonialism and post-colonialism. The oases – that were major crossing points already within the pre-colonial indigenous socio-territorial organization – undertook a relevant role in the European colonial project and colonial expansion over the interior of Libya (Attir, 1992). In fact, whereas the colonial occupation of Libya was characterized by well-organized, stable settlements along the coast, colonial control over the desert interior of the region was more difficult and the oases, small green geographical sites standing alone deep in the desert, represented the only way for the Europeans to establish their rule over the desert. Thus, the oases – whether situated in proximity to borders traced on maps or located hundreds of kilometres away from Libyan state boundaries – acquired strategic importance as borderlands during the colonial period enabling the territorial control of European Powers over Saharan territories (Atkinson, 1999). Therefore, the oases can be located in the heart of the efforts to transform the supposedly empty spaces of the Sahara desert into a settled, modern colonial domain, revealing, once again, not only the military ferocity of European colonial project over the conquered spaces but also its epistemic violence.

During my fieldwork in Libya, I had the opportunity to visit oases in the Sahara Desert and observe the territorial signs that tell us about the genealogy of Euro/African borderland’s variations stemming from Libyan oases. Although almost completely ignored by the studies on Italian/Libyan bordering constellations with reference to the externalization of European border-work and the multiplication of border sites, the oases take the stage as key border places between colonialism and post-colonialism. In particular, Murzuq and Kufra oases – that historically undertook a relevant role within the network of trade routes linking Sub-Saharan Africa (Agades, Zinder, Timbuktu...) with the southern Mediterranean shore – can still be considered at the interface of the Euro/African borderland and the complex relational space between Italy and Libya today (Pliez, 2005).

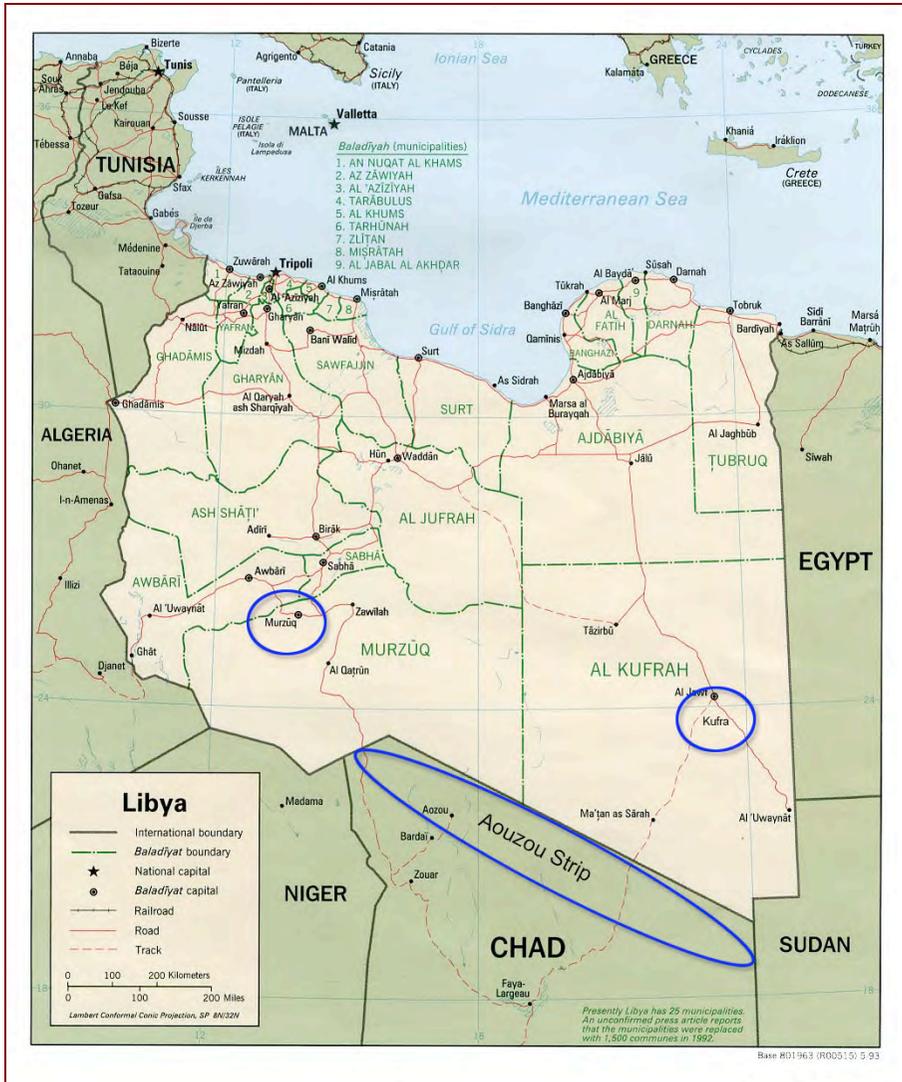
Murzuq is an oasis town and the capital of the Murzuq District in the Fezzan region of southwest Libya. It lies on the northern edge of the Murzuq Desert, a section of the Sahara Desert. In 1934 the newly created Italian colony of Libya was split administratively into four provinces (Tripoli, Misurata, Benghazi, Derna) and the Fezzan area was called *Territorio del Sahara Libico* (Southern Military Territory), administered militarily and organized economically by Murzuq oasis

town. Yet, the relevant role of Murzuq was confirmed after the end of Italian rule in Libya: under the Treaty of Paris (10 February 1947), Italy renounced its possessions in Africa. As stated before, Tripolitania and Cyrenaica remained under British military administration and Fezzan remained under French military administration pending the establishment of a trusteeship. France attributed a significant administrative role to Murzuq in the region mainly due to its strategically relevant location at the junction of French colonial possessions in Equatorial, Oriental and Southern Africa (Bessis, 1986). Despite of its location approximately 600 km from the southern Libyan boundary with Chad, Murzuq should be regarded, this way, as an important site where Euro/African border variations have been taking place from colonial time up to present post-colonial scenarios. In this regard, Gaddafi's political strategy has been influenced by the legacy of colonial disputes over the Murzuq oasis since he came to power in 1969. The oasis town played a relevant role during the territorial dispute between Libya and Chad when Gaddafi aimed to extend Libyan sovereignty in the Fezzan region over the Aouzou strip, a 100 km-wide uranium-rich stretch of desert land located between the Ennedi and Tibesti massifs at the Libyan/Chad border (Lanne, 1986; Simons, 2003, 47-81). Finally a 1994 International Court of Justice decision found in favour of Chad sovereignty over the Aouzou strip, and ended the Libyan claim. However, despite of the official International Court decision, when visiting the southwestern part of Libyan territory in the surroundings of the Murzuq oasis during the Gaddafi regime, one could not but come across the still high problematic character of the area.<sup>4</sup> Behind the formal opening to Chad, Gaddafi actually continued to hide his strong desire to extend his power over the Aouzou strip and its uranium deposits.

On the other hand, the Libyan/Chad border can be regarded as a shifting borderland, continuously dis-located, re-located and crossed not only by Gaddafi's political project but also by multiplying political-economic interests of European states alike in the present post-colonial period. In this regard, the Murzuq oasis stands as a symbol for a borderland that, never demarcated on the ground, highlights the paradoxical nature of the Gaddafi's identity discourse, which can be grasped by focusing attention on the Libya/Chad border variations where Libya oscillates between being an "open frontier" and a "closed border gate" with reference to the right of mobility of migrants in the area, coming mainly from Sub-Saharan countries and the Horn of Africa. Following this, the genealogy of the Libyan southern border with Chad can be located at the interface of shifting Euro/African borderscapes and the Italy/Libya relational space.

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<sup>4</sup> The Murzuq area was characterized indeed by the still strong presence of Libyan troops as last administrative site controlled by Gaddafi before the desert region leading to the Libya/Chad border. It is also worth mentioning that the maps of Libya sold in the country represented the Aouzou strip as a Libyan possession, a part of the Fezzan region.



**Figure 1: Libya with the Murzuq oasis, the Kufra oasis and the Aouzou Strip.**  
**Source: Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection,**  
<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/libya.html>, accessed February 2013

The border variation we are talking about can be observed by making reference to Gaddafi’s messages that were communicated through a widespread and powerful talkative tool at the time of the Colonel’s regime, i.e. billboards distributed all around the country supporting the main ideas of Gaddafi’s identity discourse. What emerges is a declared institutional representation of Libya as an open frontier welcoming African people and proposing a Libyan national identity based on founding, historical socio-cultural values deeply related to the desert and its oases, the Islamic religion and traditional trade routes in and around the Sahara. These are values that, by positively describing the historical relationship between Libya and other African countries, have played a relevant role in encouraging migration flows from Sub-Saharan and Eastern African countries to Libya during

the Gaddafi regime (Bessis, 1986, 184-89). Taking this perspective, not only is Libya's significant black population – that can be noticed in the oases – connected with the ancient history of black Africans' slavery in Libya, but it also reveals a particular social reconfiguration that occurred within the Gaddafi's political project (mainly in the 1990s) bringing a significant number of black people to Libya to work principally in the gardens in the southern oases, in construction sites, and in garages. Black migrants were described, at the same time, as an important component of the Libya's oases identity, which Gaddafi took as mainstay of the Libyan national identity.



Figure 2: Gaddafi's billboards in Murzuq, 2004. Photo: the author

Yet, by comparing the messages in Gaddafi's billboards with the map of migrants detention centres in Libya, that can be accessed from the Fortress Europe website,<sup>5</sup> what clearly emerges is the paradoxical nature of Gaddafi's political project, deriving from the fact that Gaddafi's identity discourse was characterized by important gaps between what he used to say and what actually did on the ground. In fact, at Quatrun (close to Murzuq), at Kufra, and in the other major Libyan oases (Ghadames, Ghat, Sebha,...) government-run migrants detention centres have been built since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, transforming Libyan oases in the Sahara from an "open frontier" into "gated border sites."



**Figure 3: Migrants detention centres in Libya, 2007. Source: Fortress Europe Libya Report, 2007**

<sup>5</sup> See <http://fortlesseurope.blogspot.com>, accessed February 2013.

Libya represents indeed one of the most problematic examples of African transit country regarding migration inflows from Sub-Saharan and Eastern Africa to European southern shores. This is a border variation that takes, on the one side, the form of the militarization and closing of Libyan boundaries and lies, on the other side, behind the externalization process of European borders to Libya that is going on thanks to the agreements concluded by Gaddafi with the Italian and EU counterparts (Walters, 2002). Consequently, the issue of international migration management represented one of the thorniest concerns in the Gaddafi's foreign policy towards Africa (Lemarchand, 1988). It appears paradoxical indeed that whilst the Colonel started proposing himself in official discourses as the leader of Pan-Africanism and African Unity fighting a struggle against slavery, racism and colonialism at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>6</sup> he acted towards African migrants adopting a violent strategy that – supporting Europe and with the support of Europe – rapidly imposed new barriers to human mobility across Africa and to European southern coasts (Varvelli, 2009a).

To put it differently, this border variation is part of a Euro/African borderland that having left its linear form behind takes the form of a “space of exception,” where geographies of exclusion the post-colonial Italian/Libyan relationships are based on find their home, by limiting or even negating freedom of movement and mobility rights in the country (Mezzadra, 2004). This highlights, on the one hand, that international migration should be regarded as a social force influencing and co-producing bordering constellations themselves. On the other hand, it is the attention on border variations through which bordering constellations are configured and re-configured that allows one to throw light on the European migration regime, by proving the complex interrelations between the discourse of migration management, the European anti-illegal immigration policy and the EU's border-work processes of “off-shoring” and “out-sourcing.”

### **Italy/Libya geographies, the externalization of European borders and *campscapes***

EU's immigration and border policies have been at stake of Italian/Libyan relations since the beginning of the 1990s. However, one cannot but consider the genealogy of the Italian/Libyan relational space to understand its complex plural character made of the interweaving of political and economic affairs, which have contradictory consequences on social experiences, and mainly on the migration issue.

Focusing on the genealogical developments of Italian/Libyan relations, what emerges is a past full of ups and downs (Segrè, 1978; Del Boca, 1988). After a decade of very tense relations, from 1999 Italy's and European countries' relations

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<sup>6</sup> In this regard, I would like to point out that on 1 February 2009, a “coronation ceremony” in Addis Ababa (Ethiopia) was held to coincide with the 53<sup>rd</sup> African Union Summit, at which Gaddafi was elected head of the African Union from 2009 to 2010.

to Libya gradually improved, with the aim to facilitate its integration within the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. Italy was the first European country to approach Libya and Italian then-foreign minister Lamberto Dini expressed his desire that the issue of the 1988 Lockerbie bombing could be solved already in 1998 (Simons, 2003), allowing Libya to restart its relations with the other Mediterranean countries, by declaring that the evidence was that Libya had not been involved in acts of terrorism either directly or indirectly for some time (Matar and Thabit, 2004, 163). This led to the first visit of a western leader to Libya after the Lockerbie incident, when Italian then-Prime Minister Massimo D'Alema went to Tripoli. During his visit in December 1999 D'Alema presented for the first time Italy's apology for mischief during the long years of colonial occupation. A delighted Gaddafi declared while receiving D'Alema, on 28 November 1999, that "Libya will become Italy's bridge to Africa and Italy will be for Libya its door to Europe." In the following years Gaddafi often argued that Italy was a favoured commercial and financial partner for Libya adding that he considered Italy as a strategic ally (Vandewalle, 2006). It is worth mentioning the year 2004 when Gaddafi turned history upside on 7 October by declaring, with Berlusconi standing on his side, that from that moment on the "revenge day" – a reminder of the 1970 expulsion of Italian former colonizers from the *Jamahiriya* celebrated on the same date – it would be known as "friendship day." The 2004 visit of the Italy's then-Prime Minister Berlusconi to Libya was primarily linked to the inauguration on 8 October of the Greenstream pipeline, a natural gas 540 kilometres long submarine pipeline running from Mellitah in Libya to Gela, in Sicily, Italy.<sup>7</sup>

The improvement of international relations of Italy and European countries with Libya since the end of the 1990s is characterized by a rising attention to international migration management and control in the Mediterranean Sea.<sup>8</sup> Within this context, it is interesting to investigate how the migration issue has been handled through political and social practices stemming from a certain kind of official discourses and mainly Italian/Libyan bilateral agreements: "Bilateral agreement on terrorism, organized crime and illegal trafficking in narcotic drugs and psychotropic substances and fight against illegal immigration," Rome, 13 December 2000; and "Treaty on friendship, partnership and cooperation," Benghazi, 30 August 2008. These official documents have greatly contributed to proposing the issue of migration as closely linked to terrorism and criminality in line with a long-standing political rationality of Europe since the 1980s. Not only is this tendency clear in the title of the 2000 bilateral agreement but it also becomes

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<sup>7</sup> The pipeline is constructed and owned by Agip Gas BV, a joint venture of the Italian energy company Eni and the National Oil Corporation (NOC) of Libya. See <http://www.greenstreambv.com/it/pages/home.shtml>, accessed February 2013.

<sup>8</sup> For an overview of the Euro/African Conferences on Migration and Development respectively held in Rabat (2006), Paris (2008), and Dakar (2011), see <http://www.dialogueuroafricanmd.net>, accessed February 2013. For more information about the key role of the African/EU partnership on migration within the joint EU/African strategy, as a framework for dialogue established at the Lisbon Summit in 2007, see <http://www.africa-eu-partnership.org>, accessed February 2013.

evident by reading the Treaty of Friendship signed by Berlusconi and Gaddafi in August 2008. In the preamble reference is made to the common intention of the signatories “to operate in order to strength peace, security and stability in the Mediterranean region,” and the part of the text focuses on migration is exactly in Art. 19 “Collaboration on the fight against terrorism, organized crime, drugs trafficking, and illegal immigration” (Gazzini, 2009; Ronzitti, 2009).

The issue of shifting Italy/Libya borderscapes, with particular reference to the international migration management, can also be analysed focusing on the other oasis, Kufra, that I have mentioned in the previous paragraph. This is a basin and oasis group in Al Kufrah District (southeastern Cyrenaica) that is historically important above all because at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century it became the centre and holy place of the Senussi order (Evans-Pritchard, 1946). Moreover, it played a role in the Western Desert Campaign of World War II. It is in a particularly isolated location not only because it is in the middle of the Sahara Desert but also because it is surrounded on three sides by depressions, which make it dominate the passage in east-west land traffic across the desert. For the colonial Italians, it was also important as a station on the north-south air traffic to Italian East Africa. These factors, along with Kufra’s dominance of the southeastern Cyrenaica region of Libya, explain the oasis’ strategic importance (Atkinson, 1999). The Kufra oasis assumed – like the oasis of Murzuq – a border form during the colonial time and today it is the place where new forms of confinement are articulated at the expense of mobility and human rights.<sup>9</sup> Observing the Google map of migrants detention centres in Libya on Fortress Europe website, it is the isolated name “Kufra” to catch the eye. Yet, the name does not localize, in this case, the most southeastern oasis of Libya, but it signals instead the detention camp for migrants in the far east of the Country at the southeastern Libyan border with Egypt and Sudan, which the 2005 European Commission report on migration in Libya has already stated to be financed by Italy (European Commission, 2005).

These considerations enable us to push our reflection on Italy/Libya borderscapes between colonialism and post-colonialism further, by making reference to the strategies of confinement that have been and are still carried out through a particular border form: the detention camp. In fact, the camp as a form of confinement is not new to the Kufra oasis that undertook a relevant role within the harsh campaign against the rebellious Senussi tribesmen commanded by Graziani from 1921 to 1931, sealing the Egyptian border with a wire fence and imprisoning the nomadic population in camps in order to carry out the Italian re-conquest of Libya (Del Boca, 1988, 174-232). By focusing attention on the camp’s genealogy as a form of confinement, it is possible to highlight the contradictions at the basis

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<sup>9</sup> Migrants coming from the East African coast and the Near East pass through and compulsorily stop in Kufra. It is a little village of transit along the traditional route between Khartoum and the coastal Libyan towns, which has lately turned to be a spot gathering Libyan/Sudanese criminal organizations involved in the illegal transport of immigrants, police officers controlling the boundaries and the need of people working in local productive activities (Bredeloup and Pliez, 2011).

of present Italy/Libya relational geographies between colonial memory and post-colonial border(land)scapes (Salerno, 2005). Going back to the 2008 Treaty of Friendship between Italy and Libya,<sup>10</sup> it was meant to put an end to the dispute between the two countries and Libya's claims relating to Italian colonialism and according to this Treaty Italy would have been obliged to invest 5 billion dollars in compensation for abuses committed during Italy's rule in Libya and the money should have been invested by Italy over a 20 years period in different infrastructure projects in Libya. Yet, a pressing question that cannot be postponed to a later time is: how would it be possible to repair the Italian colonial atrocities committed against Libya, when new horrors are going on in the same country using unchanged strategies of confinement?

There is the urgency to critically consider the humanitarian cost of the space of liberty, security and justice that the Euro/Mediterranean context would pretend to be (Geisen et al., 2008). In this regard, it is worth considering, as van Houtum argues (2010, 962), "the degree of moral (in)justice of the increasingly fierce external border regimes that coincides with the development of extraterritorial European civilizational politics." The EU(ropean) concern for migration and border security policies – mirrored in the shifting Italy/Libya borderscapes – has been generating indeed a serious humanitarian problem: immigrants and asylum seekers become the victims of a securitization process carried out by Europe in an attempt to strength liberty, security and justice for its members only (Klepp, 2011). However, even more important is considering that this widespread political strategy of b/ordering migrants in the Euro/African borderlands ends up denying that migration itself is a social force co-producing the borderscape, by simultaneously depicting migrants only as victims (without any agency) of a securitization process by the EU (Transit Migration, 2007).

Amnesty International, Human Rights Watch and Fortress Europe have strongly accused the fact that the Treaty of Friendship did not respect fundamental human rights and the principle of non-refoulement (Andrijasevic, 2009) reporting the stories of several thousand migrants arrested and deported to *Jamahiriyya*, included women and children, the so-called "economic migrants" and political refugees.<sup>11</sup> Reports by these non-governmental groups – based on information obtained from interviews with former detainees – identify 27 distinct immigration detention camps in Libya (Human Rights Watch, 2006, 2009; Fortress Europe, 2007, 2009; Amnesty International, 2010).

Among the facilities that have been frequently criticized is the one in the Kufra oasis. Multiple observers have reported that conditions at this centre are

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<sup>10</sup> The Friendship Treaty was suspended on February 26, 2011 in the aftermath of rebellion in Libya.

<sup>11</sup> Libya is not a signatory of the 1951 UN Refugee Convention or its Protocol and does not officially recognize the presence of refugees on its soil.

among the worst in the country.<sup>12</sup> By referring to the oasis of Kufra, it is possible to introduce another actor who is performing a relevant role in shifting Italy/Libya borderscapes at the interface of Euro/Africa borderland: the Frontex agency. This EU agency based in Warsaw started to be fully operational in 2005 as a specialized and independent body tasked to coordinate the operational cooperation between Member States in the field of border security.<sup>13</sup> Despite the fact that Frontex's official documents, which can be consulted on the agency's website, underline its crucial role in offering operational solutions to the humanitarian needs at the EU external borders, what emerges from an analysis of the practical strategies adopted by Frontex during its operations is the violation of fundamental rights (Kasperek, 2010). By taking this view, it is worth making reference to the way in which the camp in Kufra is mentioned in the 2007 Frontex report on its technical mission to Libya. Kufra, as well as the southern-eastern region of Libya where it is located, is cited indeed not because of the urgency to denounce the brutal human rights violation in the detention camp for migrants (this issue is not reported at all). Frontex report (2007, 7) focalizes the attention, in effect, on a mere description of the camp "as rudimentary and lacking in basic amenities," without adding any moral considerations on the alarming consequences of this situation on human beings detained in the camp. Yet, Frontex members add to their technical description of Kufra a kind of aesthetical judgment on the unique beauty of that desert area, "which bears no comparison to any geographical region in the EU" (Frontex, 2007, 17). Such an aesthetical thought is not commented in the text to make known the way in which the beauty of the area contrasts with the awful, unacceptable life conditions in the camp, but it is mentioned instead to bring the difficulty to carry out border control and management – according to European standards in such a different environment – to Europe and Europeans' attention. Therefore, it is cited the need to develop imaginative thinking for improving controls of a vast desert space (what they call "brown borders") and not for making the violence of hidden camp-scapes emerge.

To better understand the role of Frontex within Italy/Libya borderscapes, it could help mention that the Italian Government was able to suspend, after initial hesitations, the Friendship Treaty with Libya right on February 26, 2011, that is to say the day after the Italian Government officially obtained Frontex support in sea border Joint Operation Hermes, which concerned the Channel of Sicily.<sup>14</sup> However, despite Frontex is the most visible actor in the EU's exclusionary border and migration regime undertaking an important role with reference to Italian/Libyan borderscapes, it should be also borne in mind that it is part of a much wider group of inter-governmental organisations contributing to policies of border and

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<sup>12</sup> See also the film "Come un uomo sulla terra" (Like a man on earth, 2008), <http://comeunuomosullaterra.blogspot.com/>, accessed February 2013.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://www.frontex.europa.eu/>, accessed February 2013.

<sup>14</sup> For further information regarding the Hermes mission realized from 20 February 2011 to 31 March 2012, see <http://www.frontex.europa.eu/operations/archive-of-accomplished-operations/178>, accessed February 2013.

migration management on behalf of/for the European Union (Bialasiewicz, 2012, 845). Furthermore, there is a growing number of EU border and migration policies and practices that – as documented by recent empirical studies (Klepp, 2011, 289-322) – do not involve Frontex and rely on a plurality of bi-lateral agreements between EU Member States and African third countries, showing once more the complexity and ambivalence behind EU border-work.

But then, one of the biggest problem facing post-conflict Libya is right the huge influx of refugees from Sub-Saharan Africa and East African Countries dropping by Kufra that remains one of the main crossroads for migrants trekking to the Mediterranean coastlines, as well as the social divide caused by clashes in the town of Kufra between the Arab Zuwayya tribe and the dark-skinned Toubu tribe mainly fighting over the trading of people.<sup>15</sup>

### **Italy/Libya *business-scapes*: the double mission of Euro/African borderland between politics and economic control**

Besides the socio-political and historical settings that I have already described, I take it to be crucial to shed light on the relevant role of the economic dynamics involved in shifting Italy/Libya borderscapes. These dynamics give rise to what can be defined as business-scapes that are often strictly related to politics while dictating its rules.

I have already mentioned the 2004 visit of the Italy's then-Prime Minister Berlusconi to Libya, which was principally due to the inauguration of the Greenstream pipeline. This last is at stake in Italian/Libyan borderscapes with particular regard to the issue of business-scapes, as it addresses the fact that Libya is a country rich in natural resources, mainly oil and natural gas. Such richness in natural resources has been strongly influencing indeed the Italy/Libya border variations through the evolution of the business relationships between the two countries since the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Libya's economic politics, which is reliant on its petroleum reserves, stands at the heart of the international relations that the country has established with Western States, from the monarchic period up to the history of Libya under the Gaddafi's regime (Vandewalle, 1998). In order to understand Italy/Libya political relationships, one cannot but pointing to Italian/Libyan business-scapes linked with the petroleum and gas industry. Regarding this, there is an actor who performs a relevant role: Italian energy company Eni, which has been operating in Libya since 1959 and is widely perceived as the second pillar of Italy's Libya foreign policy

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<sup>15</sup> See "Libya struggles to cope with refugee crisis", BBC News Middle East, 21 March 2012, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-17465440>, accessed February 2013; "Libya: Central Government must protect Kufra residents from militia clashes", Amnesty International News, 23 April 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/zh-hant/node/31053>, accessed February 2013; and the show Presa Diretta on the Italian TV channel RAI3, special episode on post-conflict Libya, 2 April 2012, <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/search/label/Libia>, accessed February 2013.

after NATO, especially after Italy gave up nuclear power in the early 1980s. In 1972 Eni entered into a joint venture agreement with the National Oil Corporation (NOC), the Libyan state-owned company, to which it transferred 50 percent of all its rights and obligations in relation to both the previous concessions that Eni had obtained from the Libyan government respectively in 1966 and 1967. Even during the years of international terrorism and sanctions on Libya, Italy continued trade relations with Libya thanks to Eni, which maintained a constant presence in the country (Varvelli, 2009b, 179-85, 204-46). Libya is Eni's largest source of oil and gas and is home to one-fifth of the company's developed oil fields. After the 2008 Treaty of Friendship, Eni pledged to invest 28 billion dollars in Libya to extend its oil and gas contracts into 2040 and develop new field. Furthermore, the Treaty represented the chance for Libya to raise investment in Italy as well. The Libyan Central Bank and the sovereign Libyan Investment Authority (LIA) bought about up to 5 percent of Eni.<sup>16</sup>

In 1997 there was a significant discovery of oil reserves in the Murzuq basin, which led Eni to the launch of production in the *El Feel* (Elephant) oil field in January 2004 (Vandewalle, 2006, 53-61, 89-94). By referring to business-scapes and one of the most relevant economic actor – Eni – “inhabiting” them, it is possible to draw attention once more to the Murzuq oasis, which is situated in the centre of a leading oil region that has gained importance in the country mainly due to its location in a southwestern area, where no other deposits have been discovered until now, and undertaking, as already argued, a particular strategic role in controlling the Libyan southern border with Chad. Following this, it is important to clarify that Gaddafi's billboards in this part of the country not only referred to values deeply related to the desert and its oases, but they also aimed to underline that the Murzuq area is rich in oil and Libya was able to establish an advantageous collaboration with Italian Eni in the oil industry. Consequently, one can argue that Italian/Libyan business-scapes and the very way in which they are communicated contribute to demonstrating the relational complexity at the heart of shifting Italy/Libya borderscapes (Vignolo, 1981).

In order to dive into the complex intertwining that inhabits the connection between business-scapes and political dynamics fostering the Italy/Libya borderscape variations, I cannot help pointing out some particularly significant issues. Firstly, I would like to make reference to the fact that Eni and NOC signed new petroleum contracts (EPSA IV) and established the foundations for joint development of new oil and gas projects exactly in 2008, in conjunction with the Treaty of Friendship. Contracts have been renewed for 25 years from January 2008. The new expiry dates set by the agreement are 2042 for production of oil and

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<sup>16</sup> I wish to clarify that the tight economic links between Italy and Libya do not interest only Eni. Other Italian business giants – such as Finmeccanica, Unicredit, Impregilo and Fiat – have in common relevant economic ties with Libya. See Varvelli, 2009b, 290-308; Varvelli, 2012, 109-35. Also see [www.LaRepubblica.it](http://www.LaRepubblica.it), 13 February 2009, 24 April 2009; [www.IISole24.it](http://www.IISole24.it), 3 March 2009; [www.IIFattoQuotidiano.it](http://www.IIFattoQuotidiano.it), 20 March 2011; [www.NYTimes.com](http://www.NYTimes.com), 5 March 2011.

2047 for gas.<sup>17</sup> However, not only performs Eni a leading part in the genealogy of evolving Italian/Libyan borderscapes as one of the main actors in the Italy/Libya business-scape, but the company continues to locate itself at stake in the relationship between the two countries also in the present post-Gaddafi Libya. In fact, during the civil war in Libya Eni was preoccupied to sign, on 29 August 2011, a Memorandum with the Libyan NTC (National Transitional Council). Under the terms of the Memorandum, Eni and NTC were committed to creating the conditions for a rapid and complete recovery of Eni's activities in Libya and to doing all that was necessary to restart operations on the Greenstream pipeline, bringing gas from the Libyan coast to Italy. From this standpoint, I wish to underline that Eni - Libya's first economic partner in the oil industry under the Colonel's regime and a company in which Gaddafi had stake thanks to the agreement with the Italian Government on the occasion of the 2008 Treaty of Friendship - has been working hard to establish a good relationship both with the Libyan NTC and the present new Government<sup>18</sup> only aiming to protect its huge turnover and Italian government's economic interests in Libya. During Libya's transitional period after the civil war, Eni repeatedly stated in its press releases that the Libyan NTC was recognized by Italy and the international community as a legitimate representative of the Libyan people; and in a press release dated 19 August 2011 the company declared that "Eni also provides NTC with humanitarian aids by supplying medical equipments".<sup>19</sup>

However, such a legitimacy provided by the international community has never been confirmed on the ground. Well-recognized observers and experts on Libya's history have called the NTC's legitimacy and its ability to enable a democratic shift in the country into question. In this regard, it is important to take into account that various associations, NGOs and international media have denounced black people being beaten, detained and killed in Libya by rebel fighters who suspected them of backing Gaddafi.<sup>20</sup> The rebels seemed to confuse black people with mercenaries, but the conflict in Libya has dramatically exposed an "endemic" racism in the North African Maghreb. This racism is not just against other Africans, meaning non-Libyan Africans, but also within Libya itself. Such a worrying situation of violence is witnessed by a number of black migrants who succeeded in reaching the Italian coast during the Libyan civil war; and more than 15 videos shot on mobiles uploaded to YouTube document black Africans tortured

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<sup>17</sup> Eni press release, 12 June 2008,

[http://www.eni.com/en\\_IT/media/press-releases/press-release.page?country=LY](http://www.eni.com/en_IT/media/press-releases/press-release.page?country=LY), accessed February 2013.

<sup>18</sup> Libya's first elections since the fall of the country's long-time leader Gaddafi were held on 7 July 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Eni press release, 12 September 2011,

[http://www.eni.com/en\\_IT/media/press-releases/press-release.page?country=LY](http://www.eni.com/en_IT/media/press-releases/press-release.page?country=LY), accessed February 2013.

<sup>20</sup> See Amnesty International's news, 30 August 2011,

<http://www.amnesty.org/en/features-news-and-updates?page=12>, accessed February 2013; the article "Le calvaire des africains noirs en Libye", *Le Monde*, 3 September 2011.

to death by those opposed to Gaddafi.<sup>21</sup> As Amnesty International (2012a, 2012b) has repeatedly denounced, the situation of foreign nationals, particularly from Sub-Saharan Africa, in Libya continues to be difficult also after the new Government's taking office. In particular, abuses against black people in present post-conflict Libya are at stake in relations between Tawargha community of black Libyans and Misratah's people.<sup>22</sup> Black people were forced to experience the violence of the Gaddafi's paradoxical attitude towards them and cannot but being portrayed as victims again, even in the new Libya freed from Gaddafi's 42-years of rule: it appears to be hard to establish a novel democratic rule while 35 percent of Libyan population is black and in danger of being persecuted under a climate of growing xenophobia.

In sum, these considerations on business-scapes shed light on the fact that shifting Italian/Libyan borderscapes at the interface of Euro/African borderland are the site of a struggle not only for political dominance but also for economic control (Kearney, 2004).

## Conclusions

The Libya war and Arab revolutions do not seem to have significantly affected the policies and practices of migration and border regimes across the Mediterranean. Italy immediately resumed cooperation with Post-Gaddafi Libya in the field of migration and border control recalling agreements concluded between the two countries during Colonel Gaddafi's rule. On 3 April 2012, the Italian Interior Minister, Anna Maria Cancellieri, and her Libyan counterpart Fawzi Abdulaal concluded a Memorandum of Understanding on security so as to combat the unauthorized departures of migrants from Libya.<sup>23</sup> The Italian technical Prime Minister Mario Monti prepared the ground during his visit in Libya on 21 January 2012, in which a high priority was put on strengthening the privileged relationship in countering illegal immigration.<sup>24</sup> With the conclusion of these new agreements, it appears that Italian/Libyan cooperation will follow the trail beaten when Gaddafi was in charge, without any prior scrutiny of the shortcomings of past cooperation.

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<sup>21</sup> See: <http://fortresseurope.blogspot.it/search/label/Rivoluzionari%20e%20razzisti%3F%20I%20video>, accessed February 2013.

<sup>22</sup> For further information, see Amnesty International News, 19 April 2012, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/news/libya-ntc-must-investigate-death-another-tawargha-man-under-torture-2012-04-19>, accessed February 2013; Human Rights Investigations News, 12 September 2011, <http://humanrightsinvestigations.org/2011/09/12/libya-the-racist-revolution-tawargha/>, accessed February 2013.

<sup>23</sup> It was journalist Guido Ruotolo of the Italian newspaper *La Stampa* who first published in an article "La lotta ai clandestini riparte da Gheddafi" of 18 June 2012 the official record (*processo verbale*) of the meeting between the Italian and Libyan interior ministers, in Tripoli on 3 April 2012. "Processo verbale della riunione tra il ministro dell'interno della Repubblica Italiana ed il Ministero dell'Interno della Libia", Tripoli, 3 April 2012, <http://www.stranieriinitalia.it/images/accordolibia18giu2012.pdf>, accessed February 2013.

<sup>24</sup> "Meeting summary", of the meeting between prime ministers Mario Monti and Abdurrahim el-Keib, 21 January 2012, <http://www.stawatch.org/news/2012/sep/ita-lib-meeting-summary.pdf>, accessed February 2013; "Tripoli Declaration", arising from the above meeting, 21 January 2012, <http://www.governo.it/backoffice/allegati/66256-7318.pdf>, accessed February 2013.

In this context, the European Commission should be extremely cautious about bilateral cooperation that Member states could be tempted to develop. It has responsibility of checking their compatibility with and their respect for EU law and human rights. These obligations do not stop at the EU's physical southern borders and cannot be exported.

In the light of these considerations, the focus on borderscapes that this paper tries to develop might cast fresh light on present agendas in Italian/Libyan relational geographies at the interface of Euro/African border nexus. Firstly, the borderscapes perspective enables me to assume a multi-sited approach not only in space but also in time revealing different historical settings where competing and even contradictory temporalities are hosted. Adopting a genealogical viewpoint offers the opportunity to re-read present patterns of Italian/Libyan borderland through the reference to past histories that should be regarded as possible pathways to bring new complexity into light. This means not to continue to be blind to experiences in colonial history as well as in the contemporary relationship between Italy and Libya under Gaddafi's rule by assessing the problems that Italian/Libyan cooperation in the field of migration and border control has given rise to. Secondly, the borderscape approach shows us that borders take many forms (i.e. oasis-scapes and camp-scapes) and can be found at a multiplicity of different points within a society (i.e. business-scapes). Accordingly, borders cannot be searched at territorial demarcation lines of nation states; they are diffusing throughout society shifting away from EU member state and African state national borders. As Rumford (2009, 85) points out, "the diffusion of borders throughout society has given rise to the notion that 'borders are everywhere'". However, Rumford goes further, arguing that borders "can be elsewhere too, often remote from the national (or European) territory to be bordered" and "one important consequence of Europe's borders being 'elsewhere' is that not everyone will recognise them as Europe's borders." Said differently, EU border-work with its off-shoring and out-sourcing of border and migration regimes beyond European southern border renders bordering practices invisible in the consciousness of most of European citizens.

Accordingly, it is my assumption that each border regime also entails a certain regime of visibility that reflects peculiar de-territorialized politics of b/ordering the Mediterranean space. A spotlight on borderscapes might thus help "thinking through, about, and of alternatives to dominant," visible borderscapes "of power" (Rajaram and Grundy-Warr, 2007, xxviii). Re-conceptualizing the multiple emplacements and temporalities at, and of, the border, the notion of borderscape hold out possibilities for making the invisible visible, while at the same time challenging established regime of visibility and the border politics of the "immanent outsiders" to describe "irregular" migrants (McNevin, 2006, 141) that are at stake of contemporary EU border and migration management policies at the interface of Euro/African borderland. By diving into Italy/Libya borderscapes, this paper has attempted to enlighten the critical potential of borderscapes to grasp this chance.

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