

Projecting incompleteness in the case of Libya's migration crisis: fictional representation of image and textual documentation

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This work aims to critically project an incompleteness in mediatic representations of recent African migrations to Europe, analysing in particular Libya, where threshold and climax points of migration have been taking place. Thus, from a cultural architectonic perspective, the scope of the study is fictional, expressing a humanitarian position. This scope communicates methods of interpretation in documentation, namely through questioning testimonies and mediated images, such as selected clips from video reportages, that are used to deconstruct incomplete stories narrated and exploited through (occidental) media about Libya's migration crisis. The deconstruction is thusly a theoretical one that takes into consideration migration events, from the 21st century, happening at the Mediterranean region. These events disclose and communicate the ethics — involved in this migration crisis — of the Libyan and European authorities, journalism (identity protection), and individual experiences that shape these migration contexts.

According to the International Organization for Migration (IOM) (2020b) and Zampagni et al. (2017), the migrant and refugee crises of the 21st century are present time events that dominate and hover over the migration crisis between North Africa and Europe; it is the migration crisis of the Mediterranean region, as a whole, the outcome of the region's multiple human agencies that are dealing with political and cultural unsorted, misled, and corrupted system of "humanitarian" negotiations. To a certain extent, this is due to Libya's geographical positioning between the *Africas* and the Mediterranean Sea that gave the country this augmentation of political ambivalence (though Libya is not "politically"

known to be an all-powerful government) to be questioned. Subsequently, this became more present during Qaddafi's ruling and the aftermath of his overthrow, deposition and death, since 2011, that brought, on the one hand, the production of the beset chaos and inner anarchy of the civic society (including the infiltration of fundamentalists, militia groups and Libyan army forces) and, on the other, the political, international interferences and interests. Those who are compulsorily swayed and seized up in-between this vicious circle of human migration crisis are the (returned, displaced, detained, imprisoned and tortured) migrants in Libya that remain at stake, until this day. These migrants tolerate, to many degrees, the difficulties derived from the inevitable life-choices, because of their circumstances, by mainly having either both or one of the two objectives for migrating to Libya: one, work-related purposes (such as for the improvement of the economic situation), and/or, two, Libya being a point of departure or a temporary, transit zone between their country of origin and Europe.

However, Libya, as a migrant-dependent country, has been continually receiving, on-and-off, migrants from various neighboring and non-neighboring countries. Migrants affected by the conflicts within their mother homeland, especially those all the way from Bangladesh, Pakistan, Palestine, and Syria, but, most evidently and in larger numbers — than the formerly mentioned ones — those from the many *Africas*, have constantly been on the move to attain their rights in having a better life. Surrounded by many hinders throughout their migration routes, African migrants, ranging mostly from the sub-Saharan *Africas* to fewer from the North *Africas*, namely Burkinabes, Chadians, Ethiopians, Eritreans, Egyptians, Ghanaians, Nigerians, and Somalians, who have migrated and are still migrating (including returnees who temporarily went back home or took refuge in Tunisia or Morocco) to Libya are subjected to insidiously consecutive misfortunes and afflictions due to their decision in entering Libya and subsequently their attempts to escape to “safer” Europe. Those migrants are being bound to temporarily head onwards on a journey that drove many, unknown, consequences to be encountered, as many have fled from a violent, unjust and unstable life. Little did these migrants know that their aspirations and dreams of Libya, the country that always welcomed migrants, will turn out to be violent, unjust, and unstable life, from which they fled.

One thing is certain, that is, speaking about migrants in a holistic, pluralist form that is based on statistical representations and numbers contributes to merely remote justice, as every case and experience is very specific, different and singular. Each migrant comes from a different Africa and from a different reality, and investigating totality, instead of individual cases, is also a questionable matter, especially due to the critique of today's media coverage in journalism about the migration crisis. Facing the problem of identity protection, many storytelling in media coverages have provided voids in social representations of these migrants. While conducting and documenting interviews and testimonies, whether by not mentioning names or origins of the individual or by not showing facial features, identity protection is a case to be given consideration, as the safety of the migrants is a first and foremost. However, media coverage of the current Mediterranean migration crisis, manifests multifaceted positions, either defending the rights of migrants or opposing these same rights (e.g. Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019; Mattelart, 2019). For many migrants, media is a mediator of their silence and pain, the only way to express their voices and for others it is a dramatized scenario to exploit their identity. Fearing (forged) exploitation, many migrants have averted encountering journalists for the sensitivity of their cases. But, when humanitarian organizations and justice figures are completely out of reach (the majority of cases), media shifts its role to more humanitarian issues on the field and, thus, generates a path for reporting abuse, violence, and robbery (from smugglers to “dubious Berbers”, and so on), in the hope that migrants' words are not censored or appropriated by media vigilance.

Moreover, during the migration journey, migrants have been confronting the question of accessibility and freedom of movement in relation to their reliance and dependence on the usage and navigation of technological advancements, media and the digital culture in general, which range from access to safer migration routes to false and unreliable information and vigilance (Mattelart, 2019). Both of the aforementioned could be transmitted by the social structures of smuggling networks and similar human agencies that target vulnerabilities and perceive the individual migrant as a commodity (amplification of the human presence as an economic advantage for the recipients); an entrepreneur objectified by their limited financial capacity (as their earnings and savings are from

their hard work) to be given in return for their safety (Chouliaraki & Georgiou, 2019; Volpato & Andrighetto, 2015). As capital has always been the critique of power, migrants are the victims of capital and the injustice in confronting such social structures that are apparently obsessed with this power. When these malevolent, local social structures legitimise their implicit and explicit inhumane acts (namely, human trafficking, forced labor, and new forms of slavery) while interacting with migrants and undressing their humanness to the degree of denying their existence, they could unquestionably be comparable to those higher political structures (European and African, such as Qaddafi) that also deny human rights in migration of the African migrants suffering and struggling to this day in Libya, Libya's unsafe port, and at the Mediterranean sea's conflicted international zone (when attempting to escape).

In the vastness of the Mediterranean Sea, increasing conflicts are performed by several actors, from non-governmental organizations and humanitarian organizations' vessels (Sea Watch, Ocean Viking and Alan Kurdi), to the Libyan coast guard and their European alliances, and finally to the migrants themselves. The latter, tied to inflatable rubber boats holding on their repetitive tries, encounter inhumane deaths, and achieve "privileged" victories (arrivals to Europe) which seem larger than Africa itself (Forensic Architecture, 2018). Luckily, media has been part of projecting this performance to bigger audiences. What once (not so long ago) was misrepresented is now more structurally transmitted. Here, fiction is the poetic message and projector of incompleteness — events, that one cannot see through mainstream media and if one has no direct connect with the migrant(s) — as a method of interpretation of the pseudo-realism in information accumulation, the appropriation of image and textual sources, lingers in the corners of Libya's complex migration crisis (see Figure 1). In hopes for a better solution for the current migration and refuge crises, migrants are, in fact, the strongest advocates for their rights. Though many humanitarian bodies have been dealing with these matters of concern; hence, they cannot resolve the entire, continuous problem rooted in unresolved quarrels and arguments about the Libyan migration crisis. For the many factors — the outcome of confusion and chaos present in Libya's speculative, failed governance and the subsequent infiltrations and interferences of those who are interested solely in power and cannot see the humane positivity in human migration — that lead Libya and its

African migrants to be in constant friction, even now, these migrants are still determined to achieve a seemingly impossible plan. Here, media, the digital screen, and the distant audience cannot end the migration crisis of Libya at the Mediterranean region, as long as these representatives of contra migration and human rights still have the same position and are not willing to shift it for the sake of humanity. However, Italy (and Europe in general), as a safer destination for these African migrants, yet, remains a dream for many if not the majority. Then, there is this call out for life; these migrants' dreams of safety, stability and peace, far, far away from insecurity and violence accompany them, where they radically state that the aforementioned wishes could rather be submerged with them at the Mediterranean Sea than kept hanging at Libya's sky.

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