THE ITALIAN INITIATIVES ON ILLEGAL IMMIGRATION

181.405 migrants have landed in Italy from Libya in 2016. 18% more than the year before. Over 5.000 people have died while crossing the Mediterranean, at least 700 of them were minors. Libya is still the source of 80% of the migrants that reach Italian coasts.

This year the flows have changed: in the first three months of 2017 the arrival of migrants increased by a whopping 60% on the year before. This happened during the winter months, when both climate and sea are usually turbulent. The flow was stopped in the past three months or so, when it dropped by 80%.

In recent years, illegal immigration has gotten out of hand and has turned into a social emergency, a national security threat and an economic burden for the Italian State. There are still a number of unanswered questions: how do you assist those who land, how do you block this flow of people, and how do you return those who have no right to asylum.

How the system works

Italian immigration policies should be capable of dealing with the migrants arriving in the country, but they have been overwhelmed. When they first touch Italian soil, migrants are put into Centri di Prima Accoglienza (First Reception Centers), run both by government and regional states. After that, asylum seekers enter the so-called CARA (Reception centers for asylum seekers), who will then help refugees obtain protection. For those who fail the refugee test, the way out of the country is through the CPR (Centri di permanenza per il rimpatrio, repatriation centers).

According to this scheme, the migrant arriving in Italy is received, evaluated and either hosted as a refugee or expelled. There is hence a selection between those worthy of the protection of the 1951 Geneva Convention and illegals who have no right to remain in the country. Let's pretend it is simple to distinguish a refugee from an economic migrant – when several people provide false identities, including their nationality, and tend to tell the Territorial Commission charged with evaluating their credibility all sorts of stories – the biggest issue is the length of this bureaucratic selection process. While in theory a migrant should be evaluated within a few months, it actually takes over a year, or more than that when a person decides to appeal if they are turned down. And when the legal options are over, the asylum seeker turns into a clandestine immigrant and is handed a request for expulsion.

Another problem are unaccompanied minors. They land in Italy alone (over 12 thousand in 2017, and the figures are on the rise), they cannot be expelled and have a right to be assisted regardless of their provenance. The plan is to create a dedicated section in the

SPRARs (Sistema di Protezione per richiedenti asilo e rifugiati, the protection system for asylum seekers and refugees). In 2016, 28.223 minors entered Italy (16% of all arrivals), and 25.846 were unaccompanied. Over the last three years, out of the 64 thousand minors welcomed in Italy, only 17 thousand eventually made it to the reception centers.

If you are not a refugee or a minor, you are apprehended and put inside a CPR and wait to be expelled. These are not detention centers, although you cannot leave the facilities. And this is where another issue comes into play: how do you expel an illegal immigrant when you don't have a re-admission protocol with his country of origin? Since most migrants come from sub-Saharan Africa where poverty is endemic, there are little or no incentives to welcome a fellow citizen back home. This means the migrant is handed a piece of paper that says he is to be expelled, but the actual expulsion never takes place. And the illegal migrant takes off and starts moving below the radar, possibly using false identities.

The search for deals

What Italy tried to do was to seek bilateral deals with the countries of origin of the migrants, or with the countries along the route. The idea is to block migrants at home or before they reach Libyan coasts. The latest agreement signed with Niger, worth some 50 million euro, goes in this direction.

Other negotiations are ongoing with Egypt (where 10% of boats depart from), Tunisia and Nigeria, statistically the first country of origin of illegal migrants in Italy. It is in this context that the Italian Ministry of Interior signed a deal with the Tuareg, Tebu and other tribes in Southern Libya. The Italians will train desert border patrols and offer other economic benefits.

Italy is repeating the scheme it used in the past. In 2008 the Italian government led by Silvio Berlusconi signed a deal with Muammar Gaddafi which included, among other things, the collaboration of Libyan authorities in taking back the migrants that had left their coast and had been intercepted at sea. The price tag was pretty expensive: 5 billion euros worth of roads, scholarships, development programs, surveillance systems etc.

Recently, the agreement reached with Sayez al Sarraj's government in Tripoli runs on two levels: a political one, whereby the Italians hope his partner will be able to honor his commitments; and on the practical one, by helping Libyans obtain the tools they need to implement the deal.

Looking for a partner

However, Italy is aware of the fact that the government in Tripoli exists only on paper and that it won't be capable of honoring the deal alone. This is why diplomacy has moved its pawns to include forces hostile to al Sarraj in a national reconciliation effort. The recent invitation to Rome of the Prime Minister's arch-enemy, General Khalifa Haftar, and the promise of more aid (humanitarian and not humanitarian) is part of this endeavor.

The same can be said of the field hospital that was sent to Misrata to support the militias that fought against the ISIS in Sirte. This armed group supports al Sarraj and, at the same

time, is hostile to Haftar's Libyan National Army. Italy is juggling with a national reconciliation effort that is a pre-requisite for any meaningful fight against the traffic of human beings.

Once this has been achieved – even a detente will do for the time being – the second phase begins. This includes providing the Tripoli government with the tools to block the departures. And since the boats leaving for Italy are concentrated around the Libyan capital, it is here that the Italians are concentrating the supply of coast guard vessels and training. This, again, is a measure already adopted during the Gaddafi regime.

To date Italy has said it will provide 10 patrol vessels – not all of them have been delivered yet – and set up an operations center in Tripoli (with its own radar system to coordinate patrolling activities) and provide logistical support on Libyan soil. Some Libyan requests were turned down because of the UN arms embargo on the country, while some equipment was specifically authorized by the United Nations. The total cost of this intervention will be around 800 million euro.

Libya all the way

The Italy-Libya Memorandum signed on February 2, 2017 includes 8 points with a list of vague needs to be satisfied. The details were added later. It is curious how the Libyans have insisted on including in their wish list article 19 of the 2008 memorandum signed by Gaddafi. It dealt with a radar system to monitor the southern Libyan border and block migrant flows. Back then it was clear that the radar had no use in spotting people, but was requested for military purposes. The estimated cost at the time was 300 million dollars and Selex was the company for the job. The recent meeting with the mayors from Fezzan in Rome could have resuscitated the idea.

As in the past, the Libyan Coast Guard will prevent boats from leaving its coasts and will take back those migrants that have been intercepted at sea by Italian or Frontex patrol ships. During a EU meeting in Malta in early 2017 member states proposed to draw a "protection line" in the Mediterranean to push back migrant-filled dinghies. Until recently, Frontex ships could not enter Libyan territorial waters. This is not the case anymore.

Flows from Libya have actually diminished, at least for the time being. The Italian supplies and the support to the creation of a Libyan Coast Guard are part of the success story. And although Italian officials deny any role, several militias in the Sabratha area have been "financed" to block the traffickers. After all, Sarraj's government doesn't control the area. And the dirty work had to be carried out by the AISE, the Italian secret service abroad and probably the European intelligence agency with the largest foothold in Libya.

We all know human trafficking is a transnational phenomenon that can never be stopped, but it can be reined in. When one route closes, another one opens given the amount of people willing to risk their lives on their way to Europe. And if Libya closes shop, Tunisia and Algeria are slowly taking over and the Balkans are opening up again. The ideal situation would be to prevent people from reaching Libya – or northern Africa – in the first place. An international force will soon be deployed in Niger, Chad and Mali, while the

French continue stationing their troops in their former colonies. Another idea is to create hotspots to identity asylum seekers south of the Sahara with the help of the UNHCR.

THE SOCIAL LIFE OF A SECRET AGENT

We are all led into thinking that, while abroad, a secret agent spends his days in lavish high society parties, copulates with beautiful women and drives fast cars. We know who to blame: Ian Fleming and the movies taken out of his books.

The British author was born into an aristocratic family, went to school at Eton, moved onto the Sandhurst military academy (which he later abandoned) and worked, while still young, as a naval intelligence officer. James Bond brought together his wealthy childhood, what Fleming had learned in the Navy and a good dose of fantasy. But reality is pretty different, as MI-6 agents know all too well.

During operations abroad, socializing is crucial for any intelligence operative. It can bolster the effectiveness of his work, or pose a security risk that could compromise his stature. Hence the agent has to preserve both his contacts, security and cover. All at the same time.

Rather than luxury, the life of an intelligence operative is marked by the tensions deriving from his work, the caution he takes in everything he does or says, the need to cover his back when moving around, the ability to perceive danger and understand other people's intentions, paying attention to nuances while playing the role given by his cover story. This definitely is not the life of a bon vivant.

First of all, forget about beautiful women and affairs. The intelligence sector is abundant with stories of people who ended up compromised or killed for a one night stand. Human weaknesses (sex, alcohol, drugs, gambling, money, resentment and envy) are the fuel for those in search of a source. And if they are to be exploited by an intelligence operative that is trying to convince another person to collaborate and betray, the same can happen the other way around leading to disaster.

When an agent is in the active research mode (the term espionage/spying is hardly ever used by agents because it sounds fictional and has a negative aura for one of the most ancient professions in the world) technically speaking he is carrying out HUMINT (Human Intelligence), and hence the need to meet people. He chooses his counterparts not to befriend them, but to access the information that are of interest to him.

An agent is forced to pretend he likes a person that he despises, he has to go out with people he would definitely avoid in normal life circumstances, he has to act complacent, be flattering, support ideas he doesn't share, pretend to show interest, express feelings he doesn't feel, but that are useful in the context he is operating in. There's a lot of sociology, a load of psychology, and a good dose of patience involved.

An intelligence operative is also forced to keep an updated list of the people he meets. This is not a diary to aid his memory, but a tool for his bosses to know who his contacts. In fact, thanks to this list, the Central can evaluate the quality of the ongoing contacts, can provide information on the people in the list, or warn in case of dangerous relations. But, above all, the list will be extremely useful if an agent is compromised. This list will help the bureau understand in which circumstances the agent's cover was blown or who blew the

whistle. In which case, the agent not only endangers himself, but also compromises a long work, a number of other people and exposes facts that should have been concealed. Along with the agent, also a number of procedures that are followed while carrying out an operation are compromised.

During his public meetings, he might meet agents or sources from other intelligence agencies. They are like him: they seek information, while the don't offer it. And when they pretend they do so, they could be spreading disinformation.

In the myriad of work-related contacts, some are accidental, while others are not. This means there is a second list of people, labelled as "useful". As the adjective says, they are individuals who become the focus of an intelligence operative's social attentions with the aim of obtaining informations of interest to him. While the target of safeguarding one's national security is common to every agency, the informational priorities vary in each country. They can range from the stability of a regime, to some illegal traffic, to the production of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism, armed forces and so forth.

There are people who hang out where our informational target lies and through them it is possible to obtain details and information. The process is pretty straightforward: identify the information you need, find the person who can give it to you. Once you've found the person, you need to create a situation, as fortuitous as can be, to meet her/him. This requires a good dose of groundwork in order to plan your moves. Sometimes you are dealing with people down the social ladder who might have access to what you're looking for. In other instances, you're talking to a big shot, who has access to documents or facilities where decisions are taken or knowledge is hidden.

In both cases – and this is where the ability of an agent comes into play – it is crucial to establish a certain degree of intimacy or familiarity with these people. The fact that their social status might differ requires some flexibility in our behavior. And this is not always an easy task because the people an agent meets are usually foreigners, with different behavioral stereotypes, different cultures, different scusceptibilities and relational patterns. In most cases it is hard to discuss certain topics because of prejudices, shyness, surliness or confidentiality.

The intelligence operative has to be both a sociologist and a psychologist, and has to be capable of overcoming any character trait or behavior to become close to that one person. He will be able to use the passions and weaknesses we all have, or could exploit vanity, pride, family relations. Anything is allowed to befriend a person deemed as "useful". A small gift here and there, a favor at the right time, an act of courtesy to wife or children, sharing a common hobby or the same opinions and prejudices.

If this works out, the person the intelligence operative has focused his efforts on, in the end, in either an accidental or voluntary manner, will decide to "speak". He usually does so without realizing he is revealing a secret that is of interest to us. He does so unconsciously, while keeping up with the discussion, or during an argument. Or to show off what he knows, to fuel his ego and narcissism. Either way, everything has to happen spontaneously.

There are no direct questions on the topic the agent is after, because this could arouse suspicion. Two people talk about a number of things, and yet, at some point, you end up talking about a certain topic. And when this happens, the agent never gives away his interest, but behaves as if this was a futile or secondary part of the discussion. Furthermore, he ought to discredit the information in order to stimulate the counterpart to add more details. In the role-playing, it is not the agent who wants to know, but rather his interlocutor who feels the need to speak out. It is the technique of maieutics. There are of course people pretend to know and talk bullshit. It is up to the agent to figure out the reliability of his informations.

One could think a person capable of obtaining information and willing to talk can be easily recruited as a source. It doesn't work this way. Not every "useful" person can turn into a source. Not all of them are available or suitable for the job. Going from an accidental chat to the clear decision of collaborating with a foreign intelligence agency requires the overcoming of a number of psychological steps. These include: an irreversible decision, a strong motivation to betray, the reliability of a subject on his path to becoming a source. A "useful" person that possesses all of the above will still have to go through a thorough procedure (see "How a Source is Recruited" - Invisible Dog #10, October 2012).

There are also a number of key differences. A "useful" person is not after any sort of personal gain in saying what he knows. He is responding to a psychological stimulus, nothing more and nothing less. A source instead knows what to look for and how to look it up. The relationship with the agent is institutional, almost like a full-time job. Everything a source does is agreed upon. And when an intelligence operative leaves his post to another colleague, sources are passed on, while the same doesn't necessarily happen with "useful" people.

In other words, the empathy that was built over time through friendly relationships fades away once the intelligence operative is replaced. Sure, the agent can still introduce his colleague to his friends, can favor the newcomer's approach to these "useful" people or hand out a few tips on how to best go about it. Yet, his personal relationship with them is simply lost. And this is the biggest limit these contacts have for any intelligence operative.

THE FAILED ROLE OF THE WOMAN IN THE MIDDLE EAST

In the Muslim world, where religion often legitimizes dictatorships and regimes, the Islamic law is the basis for national legislation regulating individual rights.

Consequently, the application of the Sharia, which is often interpreted in a literal and restrictive sense, without any possibility of amending the precepts of the Koran as time passes and customs evolve, allows for the woman's role to be kept marginal in society. This despite the 1500 years that have passed since Mohamed's coming.

The saving grace of the Middle East – though partially so – are the secular regimes that need to defend themselves from religion in order to hold on to power. In those nations, at least in part, the role of the woman is more relevant.

There are limited scenarios of freedom, like those of the Syrian Kurd women fighters of the YPJ (Yekineyen Parastina Jin – Women's protection unit), the female units of the Peshmerga in Kurdish Iraq and the PKK. Kurdish women have always fought alongside their male counterpart to defend their ethnic group and culture, allowing them to win their freedom and individual rights on the battlefield.

Algeria

There are also cases that lay somewhere in between, like the woman's status in Algeria. After the liberation war against France (which caused over 1 million dead, mostly men), women were assigned a central role in the country's reconstruction. This circumstance, however, did not prevent the Code of Family, drafted in 1984, to set rigid limits on gender parity and on the rights (especially in the matrimonial field) originally enshrined in the Algerian constitution.

Lately, the issue of Algerian women has been addressed by a specific UN committee for the elimination of discrimination against women. But there are still strong limitations: the women inherit less than their male siblings and are penalized in divorce cases, they cannot marry non-Muslims (while the men can marry up to 4 wives, provided their first wife agrees), they are discriminated in the job market and are juridically disadvantaged if they incur in family abuses.

Notwithstanding, Algerian women – when compared to the other nearby Muslim countries – enjoy a measure of freedom that other women are denied: they can study at any level and can choose who they wish to marry.

This is due in part to the long history of Islamic terrorism in Algeria, which makes the government less inclined to second social movements that have a rigid vision of the Islamic law. At the same time, however, these governments try to avoid further social conflicts derived from the fracture between Islamic and modern society.

Tunisia

Tunisia is the most striking case. After the ousting of the secular regime led by Ben Ali, the temporary stretch by the Islamist government of Rachid Gannouchi and the moderate reconciliation government, Tunisian women were able to acquire further social rights.

One of these refers to a 1973 legislation that prohibited Tunisian women from marrying non-Muslim men, at the risk of seeing their marriage invalidated. Now this limitation has been abolished because it was not in line with the new constitution drafted in 2014.

A few months ago, there followed another social victory for Tunisian women: the abolition of the so-called shotgun wedding, which cleared rapists from the legal consequences of their actions.

Tunisian women enjoy more liberty than those in other Muslim countries. Polygamy is banished by the social code issued by Bourghiba in 1956.

Yet again there is still a long road ahead: women inherit half of the wealth destined to their male siblings and the possibility to eliminate these last bits of discriminating social heritage are presently quite scarce. The patrimonial rules are derived from the Koran and are therefore defended staunchly by Imams in rural areas of the country. The clash between tradition and modernism has yet to elect a clear winner.

Egypt

Egypt is also facing its social contradictions, caught between a secular regime, a traditional society, a radical opposition and the consequences of terrorism.

The Egyptian women are the first victims of these elements combined.

Initially, the regime tried to prohibit the use of the burkini, but they were soon forced to repeal the legislation. Was it religious discrimination, as many said? A violation of individual rights? A question of hygiene? The danger of crawling Islamism feared by the regime makes it difficult to find a compromise between tradition and modernity.

At any rate, the Egyptian parliament has recently approved legislation that prohibits female genital mutilation.

A special commission to monitor the "national strategy for the fight against violence on women" was created in 2015, proving that the issue is still an endemic social scourge.

Also, as in the other Arab countries, there is discrimination in the patrimonial field, in the field of divorce and in the custody of children. There is a very permissive approach to the so-called "honor-related crimes" and a silent complacency with regards to domestic violence.

Lastly, there are the "urfi" weddings ("traditional/customary") which are not part of the official system but mere wedding contracts certified by a notary. A situation that leaves women without any legal defense.

Since 2013, Egypt have undergone a campaign of intimidation and persecution against variant sexual behavior that has led to arrests, torture and all kinds of abuses.

Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries

The recent news that Saudi king Salman issued a decree authorizing women to drive automobiles in the future had a widespread echo. Thinking that the decision could cause social and religious upheaval, the king arranged for the measure to become effective in 2018. Actually, the decision is likely ascribable to Salman's son Mohammed whom, because of his younger age, is probably more inclined to hear the requests of the female part of the country.

This could be a positive element for Saudi society, seen the social and religious context in which the decision was taken, but it is also a very limited measure, compared to the way the world is evolving.

But in Saudi Arabia progress is very slow. In 2013, king Abdallah agreed to allow women to participate in elections and to become part of the Council of the Shura. Was this part of Saudi society's evolution or was it just the late recognition of a long-denied fundamental right that could no longer be ignored?

The Saudi monarch thought the former to be true.

Almost all of the Gulf countries share a discriminatory approach on the role of women in society but in Saudi Arabia, being the cradle of integral Wahabism, the circumstance reaches new, extreme, heights.

Saudi Arabia's Basic Law is governed by the radical interpretation of the Sharia and Article 8 of the Law defines the criteria for its application: justice, consultation, equality ("equivalence" would be the right term, since rights and duties are diversely distributed).

According to the local social system, the parity of gender is embodied by this approach.

By virtue of this principle of "equivalence", women inherit half of what their male siblings receive but are not forced to destine the wealth to their husband or children. The husband has an obligation to provide for the family. The husband should also guarantee the protection of the woman with regards to her relationship with the institutions (even though this guarantee strips women of rights and emancipation).

And there are other, collateral, obligations: women must guarantee the honor of the family; they must wear appropriate clothes (see the Niqab or the Abaya, period); they cannot be accompanied by strangers in public places; if they marry a foreigner, they do not pass their citizenship on to their children (unlike men); they must be escorted by their "mahran"; they can receive an identification document only if authorized by their mahran; they cannot work as lawyers and have to be represented by a male lawyer, even when divorcing; their witness account is worth half of what a man's account is worth; they cannot travel abroad alone; they cannot manage commercial activities or have bank accounts, make reservations at hotels, rent an apartment, have free access to all public places; they must certify to their virginity in the matrimonial agreement (if the woman in question is not a widow or divorced); their husbands have the right to divorce without a reason; if they undergo domestic violence or marital rape, Saudi women are not protected by the law. And the list goes on and on.

Legal, social and religious limitations put Saudi women in a position of subjection compared to the men.

The small social victories of the past (other than driving a car – in the future – they can work in hospitals, government structures or laboratories where promiscuity is limited; women can also appear on TV) are not produced by an evolving society but by a social backwardness that the country has never really dealt with in a serious way.

The future

The Middle East and North African countries have societies that evolve less rapidly than the world around them, both with regards to gender parity and, obviously, with regards to other individual liberties.

There is always a connection between the denial of rights and fundamental liberties and the rights inherent to the status of women.

In the Middle East, there exists no democracy and no culture or specific sensibility on gender parity.

These traditional, patriarchal societies live in fear that external influences, such as the modernism of foreign nations, could alter the balance of powers and roles; not only within society, but within single families as well.

Sometimes, as is the case of Algeria, women achieve a better status thanks to the nation's ordeals. Even the ISIS, now faced with military defeat, has authorized women to take part in the fighting.

But there are also positive influences derived from religious coexistence. These can be found in Egypt, where there are roughly 10% Coptic Christians and in Lebanon, where Shiites, Christians and Sunnis live side by side.

With the advent of the internet, television and all the other mass media where everything is visible without limitations of time and space, Arab and Muslim countries have trouble remaining free of new ideas and behaviors and denying the rights that others, in other parts of the world, have already granted to their people.

Muslim women still have a long fight ahead in order to win the freedom which is currently denied them by society. It's not a mere religious issue, but rather a cultural one.

Examples like Israel, where two women were placed at the helm of the secret service Mossad, are like science-fiction for the Arab world.

And there is also another problem: if the role of women were to change, it would probably have social repercussions, something that many regimes are afraid of. And this also slows down their resolve for emancipation.

There is much left to do. The Saudi legislation, based on the strict interpretation of the Islamic doctrine, strips women of their fundamental rights and bases their social and economic life on the existence of a male tutor (be it father, husband or brother). Saudi women cannot travel alone, open a bank account, inherit, donate, start an economic or commercial activity. To put it very simply, they do not exist as a legal entity.