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The Economic Bases of Migration from Italy:
The Distinct Cases of Tunisia and Libya (1880s-1960s)

Francesca Fauri and Donatella Strangio

Introduction

The main objective of this endeavour is to offer an original contribution to the issue from a historical-economic perspective. First, this essay will discuss the motivations that led many Italians to emigrate to Tunisia and Libya, evaluating whether, at the time, Africa could offer better economic prospects, living conditions and wages; secondly, it will explore what was the return path from Tunisia and Libya for Italian emigrants.

Why compare Italian Libya with Tunisia? Comparison can help us to distinguish between Italian and French colonisation[1], and between Italian free and planned migration flows (i.e. meaning migration as an independent choice versus migration as a condition imposed/encouraged by unattainable promises on the part of the fascist government). The comparison aims at highlighting the different labour patterns of Italian migrants in these planned vs. unplanned colonial migrations: whereas in the case of Libya Italian migration was the result of a government-designed project in a colonized territory, in the case of Tunisia it comprised spontaneous movement of workers taking advantage of that period's international free labour circulation.

It is also important to provide a synthesis of the research already carried out on Italian emigration to Mediterranean Africa to understand Italy's migration to Africa. For centuries, the country's migration towards the African continent involved exclusively Mediterranean Africa - particularly Egypt, Tunisia and Algeria - and arose primarily out of the obvious geographical proximity, as well as work and trade opportunities. In the second half of the 18th century, most of the masses pouring out on these shores where unqualified labourers from the South of Italy, who were drawn to these countries for their vast investments in infrastructure and public works (Rainero 1982). However, as far as both Egypt and Tunisia were concerned, a considerable number of Italians residing there were actually professionals and rich merchants, who had elected to settle

[1] Comparing French and Italian colonization in the architectural field, Mia Fuller wrote that: "It is too often assumed that Italian colonial history is a minor variation on French colonial history, and that Italian actions and beliefs were much like those of the French. Indeed, planning decisions that may seem to have been alike did not always stem from the same priorities, and Italian policies concerning the walled city of Tripoli are a case in point. In these policies, I read what looks like Italian action - the relative preservation of Tripoli's walled city, which is, superficially, most comparable to the relative French preservation of Tunis's walled city - as a series of planning choices that were, in reality, more passive than active" (Fuller 2000, 122).

there. During the 1870s, the Italians in Egypt constituted the second most important foreign community (second only to the Greek one), counting among its residents merchants, engineers and doctors who had gained the trust of Said and Isma'il Pasha. Yet, soon Egypt lost its appeal due to its bankruptcy and the ensuing British control over the territory (1882) (Foreman Peck 1995, 131). Tunisia, instead, not only hosted the largest Italian emigrant community in Africa between 1881 and 1927, but the roots of the Italian presence there date back to the 1500 and 1600, when the most widely spoken foreign language was indeed Italian and trade between the country and the cities of Pisa, Venice, Genoa and Trapani was constant (Occhipinti 1939, 11). In 1700 then, a group of educated Jews moved from Livorno to Tunis: they were mostly merchants who used their commercial connections in the Mediterranean to play a fundamental role in Tunisia's development (Vernassa 2002, 434-36). They financed most of the sea trade (including privateer cruises) and soon belonged to the dominant elite, for which they functioned as financial advisors, trade representatives as well as doctors for various Beys (Perkins 2004, 20). Thanks to them, Tunisian relations with Tuscany and Sardinia grew considerably, with Tunisia exporting oil and wheat. The unification of Italy only reinforced these long-standing ties, resulting in the signing of specific agreements (1868), which provided for the Italian labourers in Tunisia the possibility of purchasing plots of land and starting new enterprises (De Leone 1957, 242-277). As we shall discuss later, even the creation of the French protectorate in Tunisia (1881) did not scale down the Italian presence and until 1927, by far, most Italians residing in Mediterranean Africa lived in Tunisia (see Fig. 1). The French conquest of Tunisia certainly put an end to the hope of exploiting the Italian emigrant communities in the Mediterranean to widen Italy's reign. However, according to some authors such political ousting stoked the desire to "exact a revenge from Tunisia, "hence pushing, shortly afterward, Italy towards Tripolitania"[2]. As Choate rightly observes, when Crispi became prime minister in 1887 he promoted an aggressive foreign policy: he wanted to colonize Africa, a short distance from Italy, to solve Italy's internal problems and direct there "all that mass of unfortunate that run to America to search their fortune". In 1890 he conquered Eritrea on the Red Sea (and wished to transplant Italian settlers over there) but in 1896 the disastrous Adwa debacle (in trying to conquer Ethiopia) put an end to Italy's settlement projects in Eritrea, it was the (temporary) failure of demographic colonialism (Choate 2008, 32-34). The Italian conquest of Libya (1911-1912) meant the settling of many Italian soldiers in the colony, but it was under the fascist dictatorship (1922) that the colonial empire was extended to Ethiopia (1935-1936), Eritrea

[2] With a new agreement signed in 1900 Italy obtained Tripolitania from France, in exchange for Morocco. Tripolitania thus took the place of Tunisia, and represented "a revenge for the loss of Tunisia, a revenge for Adua, finally a means of great power" (Serra 1967, 27-29).

and Somalia and a large influx of settlers in Africa began. Mussolini brought demographic colonialism back, in order to guarantee the possibility of territorial expansion to "a prolific population, who having cultivated the arable yet often unrewarding land, does not resign itself to starvation" (Mussolini, Il conflitto italo abissino, 18 settembre 1935). His "planned emigration", though spurred by unrealistic promises, pushed thousands of Italian farmers to relocate to those lands, which soon turned out to be quite unsuitable: "Dunes and woods in Somalia, stone quarries in Eritrea and a sandbox in Libya had little to offer in terms of resources, be it of an agricultural, mining or economic-commercial nature" (Filesi 1978, 404).

After the second Italian-Ethiopian war, which would result in the proclamation of the empire and the creation of Italian East Africa on May 9, 1936, the Italian presence in the Horn of Africa grew exponentially. Between 1913 and 1938, the ratio between the Italian population in the colonies and the total population of Italy grew from 5.4% to 29.5 % (the case of the city of Asmara was emblematic, in that the Italian population grew more than the native one) (Podestà 2007, 77). Following the conquest of the Ethiopian empire, Eritrea was converted into a "settlement colony" towards the end of the 1930s, where you could count up to 130,000 Italians. In Somalia (municipal administration of Mogadishu), instead, the Italian community increased to 9,000 individuals (Podestà 2007, 77).

At the end of the Second World War, as we shall see, Italians left or were forced to leave first Tunisia and then Libya. In the case of Tunisia, it was the French administration, initially, that persecuted the Italian community, who later was forced to leave behind properties and assets due to the confiscation carried out by the new independent Tunisian government. In Libya, instead, the situation rapidly deteriorated with the rise to power of Gheddafi and the ensuing confiscation of land and assets owned by foreigners (Cresti, Cricco 2015).

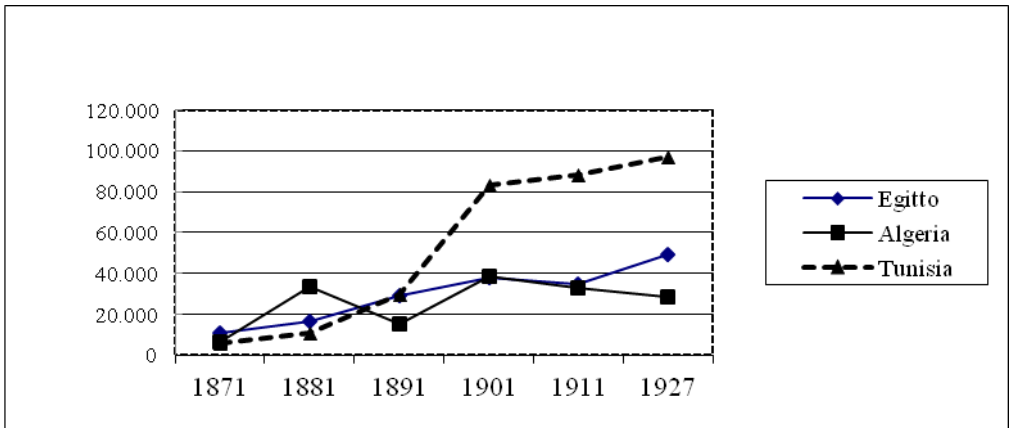
1) Italian emigration and the African allure

In the 30 years prior to the First World War, Italian emigration experienced a tremendous jump, from 100,000 to 600,000 expatriations a year (Fauri 2015a). A small but significant percentage of these migrants – between 1% and 3.5 % of the total in some years (1904) – travelled to Africa looking for fortune. The draw to Africa, set against the general context of Italian mass migration in those years, only existed for those regions that were geographically closest to the African continent and could hence enjoy low transportation costs (with 5 lire and a 6-hour trip you could travel from Palermo to Tunis even on small sailing boats - "bilancelle"), which cancelled the

risk of falling into the *poverty trap.*[3] Yet, Africa's importance as a magnet for migration gradually shrank as North-American destinations became more widely known, more profitable and, hence, more desirable. Still, lest we forget, Africa has always represented a natural destination for the Italian workforce thanks to long-standing peaceful relationships, commercial trade and knowledge exchanges (Speziale 2011, and Annuario Statistico 1858, 441).

The peak of Italian migration to Africa took place during the first decade of the 20th Century and Tunisia was one of its main destinations, with 63,000 Italians moving to Tunisia from 1876 to 1910 (Ministero degli Affari Esteri, 1915). However, to draw a more realistic picture of Italian presence in Tunisia, we need to rely on census data of Italians living abroad, which reflect both the size of the migratory flow and the natural increase of the colony's population. As shown in Figure 1, Italians were the group that grew the most between 1871 and 1927 (from 5,889 to 97,000). Ten years later, the 1936 Tunisian census estimates a presence that still ranges around 94 thousand Italians.

Figure 1 – Italians residing in Mediterranean Africa 1871-1927



Source: own calculations from Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Censimento degli italiani all'estero*, 1871, 1881, 1891, 1901, 1911 and 1927.

The appeal of the Tunisian destination can be easily explained in light of its century-long relationship with the Italian peninsula and the development of well-established migratory chains (first the Tuscans, than the Sardinians and the Sicilians) (El Houssi 2012, 167), as well as the attractive wage differential, further enhanced by the prospect of becoming small landowners, as we

[3] In the case of North-African destinations, the natural proximity to the Sicilian coast allowed even the poorest of migrants to leave, who often chose Africa instead of the Americas exactly for this reason (Faini and Venturini, 1994; Moretti, 1999).

will discuss later. Conditions started to change between 1911 and 1912, when emigration towards Libya started to grow rapidly, even if it was the "forced colonialism […] of Italian military men hired to control the territory" (Labanca 2002, 200). Soon after, under Mussolini, the planned migration of farmers began as we shall see. In the 1930s emigration towards Libya began to increase steadily, in conjunction with the introduction of the fascist policy of populating the Italian empire; indeed, by 1936 Italians in Libya actually outnumbered those that had migrated to Tunisia, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Italians in Tunisia and Libya

	Italians in Tunisia	**Italians in Libya**
1921	84799	20000
1931	91178	38411
1936	**94289**	**112694**
1962	33000	35000

In 1939, following the immigration policy of the Libyan governor Italo Balbo, another 42 thousand Italians (mostly families) joined the population already residing there.
Sources: Italian Census data, Labanca 2002; Cortese 1938, 7).

2) French capital and Italian labour in Tunisia

Italians in Tunisia have always constituted an important immigrant community compared to the other foreign groups present in the area. In 1881, there were 20,000 Europeans in Tunisia; 500 were French, while 11,000 were Italians. In 1906, out of a population of 400,000 inhabitants, 52,000 were Italians, while only 18,000 were French settlers (Gianturco, Zaccai 2004, 33). The first agreements between the new Italian State and the Bey of Tunis, Muhammad III as-Sadiq (1868), were extremely advantageous for Italian immigrants, allowing them to keep their citizenship, granting them immunity, the freedom to engage in commercial and industrial activities and extraterritoriality for their enterprises.

Nonetheless, trade and investments were not controlled by Italy but rather France. The British economic penetration failed and the Italian attempt did not take root. France, on the contrary, succeeded in securing for itself a privileged role in the trade of industrial products and luxury goods, given that half of such imports came from the French market. Italy exported mainly food products and wine to Tunisia, but was unable to compete with the French industry. In fact, from an economic-financial perspective, the kingdom of Tunis, as pointed out by the French historian Ganiage, had almost become a vassal of France even before it established the protectorate (Ganiage

1939, 55). Additionally, Tunis took out large loans from Paris in 1863 and 1865, which, albeit promoting French supplies, angered the population heavily burdened by taxes; this led to a rebellion in 1864 that was brutally crushed by the Tunisian government. The new loan taken in 1867 led to bankruptcy and the establishment of a debt commission overseen by France, Great Britain and Italy. Later, the weakening of France, as a result of its defeats in the Franco-Prussian War, fostered a revival of Italian ambitions. These were soon undermined at the Congress of Berlin, where Salisbury, with the support of Bismarck who wanted to aid France in forgetting the loss of the Alsace-Lorraine, keep it occupied on other fronts and avoid retaliations, offered the control of Tunisia to France.

Italian capital invested in Tunisia did not amount to much, besides a few minor loans; however, the purchase of the railway stretch between Tunis and La Goletta by the Italian firm Rubattino actually accelerated France's decision to intervene in April 1881 (Dwight 1967, 25, Ferry 1897). Italy sorely regretted its inactivity on Tunisian soil and, as already noted, the desire to exact a revenge led to the military conquest of Libya shortly thereafter.

French financial groups supported France's political penetration, since their capitalistic colonisation had started much earlier: they had already secured the permits to build new railways and obtained mining and agricultural concessions. Many large French enterprises settled in Tunisia (navigation and telegraphic firms, for instance, as well as a branch of Banque du crédit), due to the wide array of investment opportunities they were offered: railways, harbours, agriculture, commercial and industrial installations, which would later support rail and maritime traffic (Ganiage 1968, 565-7; Ganiage 1960).

The birth of the protectorate, thus, opened the doors to French capitalistic exploitation and to large enterprises in search of public works. On the other hand, major French public works were a powerful magnet for the Italian workforce (Gianturco, Zaccai 2004, 41). The Italian population in Tunisia exploded in numbers, with an increase of 88% in the first decade of the French protectorate, soon far outpacing the number of French citizens – with a ratio of 5 to 1 in 1896 (Russel 1977); in 1903 the French census counted 80 thousand Italians (32 thousand labourers, 12 thousand artisans and 11,200 farmers). During these years, the immense development of the Italian community in Tunisia eventually drew in Italian capital as well: in 1904, Luigi Donegani, the founder of Montecatini, launched the 'Tunisian phosphates company' and initiated the exploitation of Kalaa-Djerda, the most important phosphate deposit in Tunisia, knowing he could count on skilled Sardinian miners (Pasella 1931).

Sicilians and Sardinians made up the largest group of permanent and temporary emigrants in

Tunisia: in the first decade of the 20th Century, 60,000 out of 80,000 Italians present in Tunisia were Sicilians, followed by the Sardinians who were approximately 10,000 (ASDMAE 1906, Marilotti 2006). The Sicilians tended to privilege a more stable lifestyle with strong ties to the land, while the Sardinians preferred temporary jobs in cork decortication and phosphate mines (Marilotti 2006, 43). In 1903 consul Carletti provided this account of the Italian population by profession: first were the labourers (40%), then the farmers and artisans (around 15% each), merchants came in third (8%), then sailors and domestic workers (5 and 4%) (ASDMAE 1906, 343). In 1905 a daily agricultural worker in Sicily earned 1 franc per day while if he moved to Tunisia as a temporary worker in agriculture (often to do specific job such as planting a vineyard) or public works he earned from 2.5 to 4 francs a day, while Sardinians working in the mines were the best paid specialized category of workers earning from 5 to 9 francs a day (Fauri 2015b, 34-62).

In this regard, we should point out that remittances arriving in Italy, (around 5,203,617 francs between 1897 and 1902, according to the data supplied by the French Postal Services) came primarily from workers in the mines; remittances by Sicilian farmers, on the other hand, were scarce, because they had already become full members of the local agricultural community (Loth 1905, 163-164, El Houssi 2012, 168).

One of the most interesting aspects of Sicilian migration to Tunisia concerns the progressive transformation of landless labourers in small landowners. Sicilians, in particular, took advantage of the traditional contract of *enzel* (or *inzâl)* to become small landowners. Thanks to this contract, you could buy 5 to 10 hectares of land by paying a 16-year rent (Trombetta 1914, 66, Foester 1919, 216). Between 1897 and 1915, the hectares owned by Italians increased from 19,523 to 84,522, mostly subdivided in small land plots of under 10 hectares (Loth 1905, 175-176). The grapevine was the most widely cultivated variety and the majority of the vineyards of Cap Bon belonged to the Italians. Emigrants from the island of Pantelleria were the first to introduce the cultivation of the vine in Tunisia; they planted Pantelleria's low bush vine, which could withstand the Tunisian heat (contrary to French vines), and achieved great wealth (Fauri 2015c). Daniela Melfa has collected the stories of a group of migrant farmers who were able to become distinguished winemakers and accumulate large assets over the years and many small land owners also confirm success stories (Melfa 2008, 153-158).

At the turn of the 20th century, data showing the growth of the Italian presence started to worry France, which soon implemented policies specifically aimed at discouraging the Italian settlement and boosting the French one, by cancelling many of the privileges enjoyed by the Italians and imposing a new naturalization law in 1923 (easing procedures, lowering costs and extending

citizenship to the applicant's minor children) (Chaldeos 2016, 284, Brondino 1998). As a matter of fact, many authors underline how becoming French citizens was not only an opportunity, but often "the only option left, given the severe implications of a refusal" (Melfa, 2008, 98).[4] Thus, Italian naturalisations increased and significantly impacted on the rise of the French population (at the time contemporary observers underlined how "imposed naturalisation can only produce bad French citizens") (Melfa 2008, 100; Finzi 2003, 65). In the 1930s, for the first time, French and Italian settlers were equal in numbers (around 91 thousand) and in 1936 the French reached their highest presence with 108,060 settlers (overcoming the Italians with 94,289).

The presence of a considerable Italian community was the motivation behind the opening of many scholastic, cultural and health institutions; in 1927 Tunisia boasted numerous Italian institutions, specifically 32 schools, an orphanage, 2 hospitals and several mutual aid societies. During the first year of operation of the Italian colonial hospital in Tunis, the Italian government paid a two-franc subsidy for every diseased, for a total of about 70,000 francs. The next year, Rome decided to deposit a fixed sum of 42 francs, establishing the obligation to treat all sick and underprivileged Italians living in the Kingdom. In 1891, the Battaglia brothers from Sfax built a new hospital and the cities of Trapani, Cagliari and Palermo sent their contributions. In 1907 the Italian colonial hospital changed its name into Giuseppe Garibaldi and kept increasing its dimension in the interwar period (Pendola 2007, 75). In 1926, there were 75 doctors, 27 pharmacists and 41 midwives of Italian nationality (the French counted 90 doctors, 20 pharmacists and 18 midwives) (Pasotti 1970, 71; 107). When in May 1943 the allied army arrived in Tunis, the Italian institutions were all shut down, losing forever the wealth of experience and expertise developed and the ties of the local community with its culture of origin (Pendola 2007, 72).

3) Libya and Italian work

It is worth noticing that the colonisation of Libya was the recurrent objective of Italy's foreign policy on the African shores of the Mediterranean, once Rome lost any hope over Tunisia with the establishment of the French protectorate in 1881 (Del Boca 1991, 1997a, 1997b, 2011, Choate 2008, 169-188; Cresti 2011; Labanca 2011). Indeed, most of the other territories on that coast were already in the hands of other geopolitical powers and it was commonly believed that Tripolitania would improve the naval position of Italy in the central Mediterranean. As Labanca notes: "the

[4] According to Anna Baldinetti, the push towards naturalisation by the French "dominant minority" represented "a limitation of the legal pluralism that all religious minorities and different European communities had enjoyed up to that moment, with repercussions also in the post-colonial era" (Baldinetti 2015, 63-82).

steadfastness of Italian's aspirations over Tripolitania is evidenced in the multiple military plans drawn up by Rome, following the blow suffered in Tunisia in 1881" (Labanca 2002, 109).

Italy, as is well known, declared her sovereignty over Libya on November 5, 1911, thereby ending the Ottoman occupation (Choate 2008, 176; Cresti 1996, Labanca 2011). It was a brutal conquest from a military point of view and the occupation tactics were no smoother.[5] From a diplomatic perspective, the Italian government's decision regarding Libya was guided by foreign policy aims, i.e. the general pursuit of international prestige, a strategy of power (Labanca 2002). With the advent of fascism, the Italian workforce was directed to settle in the new Libyan territories and, from that moment on, it was regulated through different royal decrees such as, among them: no. 1695 of 7/6/1928 establishing agricultural, pastoral and industrial subsidies in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica; no. 2433 of 29/7/1928 for the distribution of state taxes to support the demographic colonisation of those territories (Cresti 2000, 2006; 2011a). Starting in 1937, due to the military and political understanding of the time, Italy implemented a policy of peasant colonisation, which led, in the two-year period between 1938 and 1939, to the emigration of 20 thousand settlers from Italy (Del Boca 1997, Podestà 2004, Cresti 2006, Lembo 2011). It is interesting to look at the actual size and population of the major Libyan cities: Tripoli was the most populated, also in terms of Italian presence (see table 2).

Table 2 – Population in Libyan cities (1939)

	Italians	Arabs	Jews	Total
Tripoli	44,442	47,123	18,467	110,032
Misurata	1,735	44,387	977	47,099
Bengasi	23,075	40,331	3,395	66,801
Derna	3,562	13,555	391	17,508
Total	72,814	145,396	23,230	241,440

Source: Annuario generale della Libia 1941.

Born out of the unification of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica in 1934, Libya highlighted the many differences over its land (Cresti 2003). In the colony, Italians, among whom many southerners, crowded in the main cities. Soon, Italians owned large and fertile plots of land, especially in the Libyan plane of *Jafara*. Most migrants, though, privileged jobs in the cities, even artisanal ones, or,

[5] It is not the object of this article, but on the conquest of Libya, the brutality during the war, the strong repression, the confiscation of the lands and deportations and massacres since 1911 see: Del Boca 2005, Salerno 2005, Ahimida 2005, 43-54.

when choosing to remain in the countryside, they preferred to hire "natives" rather than to lead the life of an agricultural settler.

Until 1937, before the increase in the number of agricultural workers due to the demographic migrations of 1938 and 1939, the majority of Italians worked in the industrial sector and in the public administration. In 1936, the industrial firms officially registered in Tripoli were 2,943, of these 1,158 were listed as Arab, 968 as Italian, 691 as Jewish and 126 as foreign (Morgantini 1938, 51). Italians dominated in the construction sector, while Arabs were mainly active in the textile, food and agricultural sectors. These were, however, mainly small, if not very small, firms. Commercial firms totalled 7,915, of which 921 were Italians, 5,384 Arab, 1,415 Jewish and 195 foreign. The retail trade of food items was generally the dominant sector with over 57% of businesses of which 84% were Arab-owned.

In 1938, 1,779 industrial and 7,279 commercial firms were registered in Cyrenaica (Herkommer 1941, 165-166). The sector distribution was quite similar to that encountered in Tripolitania. Wages were higher compared to the homeland, but not considerably more so than in Italian East Africa, whereas the cost of life was slightly lower than in Italy, to the exclusion of the real estate market. The wages of native workers were slightly lower, of around 1/3 against Italian workers.[6] In 1936, a second-class Italian bricklayer earned 2.70 lire per hour, while a Libyan factory worker made only 2 lire; an Italian qualified worker could earn up to 3.45 lire per hour, while a Libyan worker only received 2.25 lire (Podestà 2002, 123-162, Zamagni 2002, 243-254, Fari 2007, 163-212).

The British occupation of Libya of 1943 had inevitable social, political and economic consequences that also affected later agreements reached during the period of UN Trusteeship under a United Nations Commissioner (1949-1951). This preceded the proclamation of Tunisia's independence (Libya declared independence as the United Kingdom of Libya on December 24, 1951), which established it as a federal monarchy (under King Idris I al-Sanusi who had fought against Colonial Italy in his youth) with the provinces of Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan.[7] The kingdom supported positions close to Great Britain and sealed a 20-year alliance with the latter and the United States, which stipulated in 1954 the maintenance of a military base in Weelus Field. As Calchi Novati pointedly observed, the Federal Constitution supporting the creation of a new Libyan State strived to respect the different identities of Tripolitania - more advanced and attracted to

[6] Because of lack of specialization on the part of Libyan workers but also because of the widespread feeling of racial pride and perceived superiority of the Italian race over the colonized peoples – see De Felice 1993,259, Ipsen 1997, 88, Podestà 2007, 77).

[7] Libya was welcomed into the Arab League in 1953 and became a member of the United Nations in 1956. On April 27 1963, it became a unitary state.

Tunisia, and Cyrenaica - more underdeveloped and still predominantly under the influence of Egypt (Calchi Novati 1994, 274).

Following the fall of Italian East Africa, and particularly of Libya, the first grand return migration wave took place on "white ships" and lasted until the very first months of the Second Post-War period. Those Italians who left behind their colonial holdings were the ones who "had not found America in Africa," or, for some reason, had been unable to move up the social scale, or had lost all of their possessions in the war.

The British Military Administration (BMA) tried to facilitate as much as possible the repatriation of Italians, because it viewed them as "impediments" to the pursuit of their plans in the former colonies. In Ethiopia, instead, it was the Emperor himself, Haile Selassie, to "forgive" the 40,000 Italian civilian residents, personally guaranteeing their safety (all aimed at separating itself from the British tutelage).

Post-fascist Italy, right from the beginning, authorised and financed a series of operations aimed at gathering consensus for an Italian return to Africa.[8] Ties with old collaborators in the Italian administration in Africa – such as salaried supervisors or askaries - were re-established through the Ministry of Italian Africa (MIA). The aim was to encourage the creation of new parties close to Italy, which would support the former homeland's interests, while resisting the new nationalist and separatist tendencies. Italian propaganda, based on the "deep-rooted presence of Italians and the work locally", failed miserably. In fact, it had the opposite effect by triggering protests against the former colonisers who remained in Africa and, as a direct cause-effect, many of the former colonisers elected to repatriate. In the end, the contradictory nature of Italian policies had direct implications for the destinies of the Italians in Africa.

4) The difficult post-war situation and the phases of the (forced) retreat from Tunisia

Between the two Wars, in Tunisia, the turn to Fascism of the institutions and the emigrants – who saw in Fascism a force that had raised the prestige of Italy – led to the deterioration of the relationships with the government of the French protectorate and put a stop to the long-term integration of previous generations into Tunisian society (Sitrux 1947, 61, Brondino 1998, 96, Gallico 1978, 464-468, El Houssi 2012). The "*de-naturalization process*", as Silvia Finzi calls it, began in March 1944 when all Italians born in Tunisia after 1940 (with at least one parent also born in Tunisia) were turned into French citizens and many Italian labourers chose to acquire French

[8] As Tony Ricciardi has so rightly underlined, for the youth at the time, emigration was not just a functional solution and a cap for social tensions; it also represented an extraordinary tool to gain economic and material resources. For instance, in 1945, total remittances have been approximately estimated to reach 57 million dollars (Ricciardi 2017, 11).

nationality in order to secure their job (Finzi 2003, 68). Over a short time-span, first France, then a new independent Tunisian government (May 8th 1956) rapidly got rid of the Italian settlers.

During the conflict, France confiscated Italian public works in Tunisia, such as schools and hospitals, without offering any compensation; requisitions reached the absurd: "beyond properties and real estate, furniture, dishware and bed linen were also targets." (Tomasetti 1988, 237). In total, the French seized a group of 33 properties from the Italians; these included "state-owned and charitable assets as well as assets belonging to Tunisian companies that had, however, been founded by Italians; indeed, their operations and objectives were directly related to our collective community in Tunisia."[9] The French denied the possibility of reimbursement, arguing that the expropriation was carried out on grounds of public security (hence, it was not disputable). In fact, at the end of the war, France's objective was to grab as much as possible, including the 80 thousand hectares of Italian land; to encourage Italians to sell, it launched a propaganda campaign based on the fear of expropriation and expulsion. The vineyards of Cap Bon shrank from 18 thousand to 9 thousand (Tomasetti 1988, 241).

An independent Tunisia continued to pursue a policy of removal of foreigners (thus also, and especially, of Italians and French) coupled with the expropriation of their assets in the name of decolonisation. Simultaneously, a part of the Italian community was growing increasingly destitute at a rapid pace due to the departure of French capital and firms. As the Italian ambassador in Tunis reminded: "Within the Italian community, the number of those who have left Tunisia during the course of the year has not surpassed 2,500. More than a thousand of these have travelled to France, lured by the demand of workforce, but they will come back if the situation in Tunisia improves. Many have left their families behind and much of their possessions as well. The others, entire families, have returned to Italy following a consular repatriation or at their own expense; their departure can thus be considered definitive."[10] In the following years, the exodus continued along the same lines: the young left for France in search of better work opportunities, while families returned to Italy. The mass migration increased dramatically as of 1958, due to the promulgation of a series of laws aimed at protecting the Tunisian workforce and to the progressive substitution of foreign workers with national ones."[11] This decolonisation operation in the private work sector coupled with the work permit regulations for all foreigners approved in 1959 triggered an understandable panic among the Italian workers, which pushed many to leave for Italy or France.

[9] Ministero degli Affari Esteri Archives (ASDMAE) DGAP Ufficio III 1948-1960 Busta 129 31 marzo 1958 Questione beni sequestrati dai francesi in Tunisia.
[10] ASDMAE, DGAP Busta 131 Ambasciata d'Italia 22 dicembre 1956 Esodo degli stranieri dalla Tunisia.
[11] "These laws had immediate "negative impacts on our compatriots, leaving 400 private taxi driver jobless due to their loss of a license. Sooner or later all workers in Tunisia will be out of a job." (Valenzi 1969, 4).

In 1958, the Italian Ambassador in Tunis asked the Ministry to implement "a repatriation operation for underprivileged Italians in Tunisia." Such "underprivileged and indigenised proletariat" will not be expulsed by the current government, "however it will gradually be forced in an unsustainable condition … our community, numbering in the 67 thousand according to the 1956 census, has already experienced a decline of 12 thousand units, most lost to emigration to France. Of the current 55 thousand units, one third (farmers, merchants, qualified labourers) are living in good conditions, another third (artisans and semi-qualified labourers) enjoy modest financial circumstances, while the last third (unqualified labourers, tenant farmers, and unemployed) are living in appalling conditions." For this reason, the adoption of an effective evacuation system was recommended, which would include the reimbursement of travel expenses, an offer of shelter in Italy (in hospices for the elderly or poor, or else in refugee reception camps) and the deposit of a sum of approximately 200 thousand lire for each household that moved back to Italy: "2000 underprivileged Italian families live in Tunis thanks to consular subsidies and the assistance of the Italian Assistance Society and of Catholic organisations. We are talking of about 15 thousand people, real wrecks of the Western shipwreck in Africa … they certainly represent a drain for the local community; those who remain here will certainly indigenise and Islamise due to the abandonment."[12]

Indeed, shortly thereafter, the Italian government decided to make the repatriation "of our brothers from Tunisia" less painful. With the law promulgated on October 25, 1960, the Parliament granted Italian nationals who forcibly repatriated from Tunisia (but also from Egypt and Tangier) all the same provisions offered to refugees (pursuant to the law of March 4, 1952 and later ones), including accommodation free of charge and a daily allowance based on the number of members in the household (Valenzi 1969).

In the meantime, with the decree of 1961, Tunisia stipulated that only Tunisians could operate as merchants and on May 12, 1964, it launched the nationalisation of the land: plots of lands, houses, machinery and harvest equipment. The overall losses for Italians totalled circa 30 billion lire, while the French amounted to circa 300 billion. Additionally, since Italians managed most of the lands owned by the French, many of them lost their jobs as a result of the Tunisian requisitions. The implementation of this law effectively drove the exodus of 10 thousand Italians, formerly employed in the agricultural sector. The land issue was settled thanks to an agreement reached in 1967 with the Italian government, which established the reimbursement of 9 billion lire; however,

[12] ASDMAE, DGAP Busta 131 Ambasciata d'Italia a Tunisi telespresso a MAE 13 novembre 1958 Situazione collettività e "operazione rimpatrio italiani indigenti" da AM Mazio.

reimbursement proved a long and complex operation, which became the central issue for the two refugee associations founded at this critical juncture (Pasotti 1970, 166-77, Tomasetti 1988, 244-5). The rate of repatriation, which was already hovering over the 1000/1500 individuals per year since the post-war period, reached 6000/6500 repatriations a year in the first half of the 1960s, declining again to a few hundred after 1969 (Istat 1955, 1959).

The process of forced decolonization of the nation and the nationalisation of the lands compelled many Italians to leave Tunisia permanently and saw them spread abroad, forced to return and choose between two countries, France or Italy, which, to a certain extent, felt both "foreign."

5) The second post-war period and the expulsion of the Italians from Libya

The London agreement signed between Italy and the Allies in 1947 at the end of the Second World War enshrined the surrender of all its territorial possessions in Africa, including Libya. Following the assignment of the Libyan colony to the British, all assets belonging to the Italian State located in Libya were confiscated; this requisition was the starting point for the Italian-British agreement of June 28, 1951, which was in turn based on proclamation no. 122 of December 1st, 1945. This treaty was the first of many agreements, laws and bills concerning the issue of Italian assets in Libya; beyond establishing the principle that all state and state-controlled assets were to be sequestered by the "British" guardian, it also dictated the specific procedures to be followed for the transfer. The agreement's provisions only targeted public properties, in other words those properties that domestic law defined as belonging to the community of citizens through the local institutions in which citizens organised politically.[13]

Such independence led to very icy relations with Italy and to negative consequences for the community living in Libya, especially. Beyond establishing the economic and financial provisions for Libya and the timetable for its future independence, UN Resolution no. 388 also provided for the final decision regarding the Italian State's properties in Libya. As a result, the Italian and Libyan State carried out a series of negotiations, culminating in the signing of the Libyan agreement on October 2, 1956. As stated in its preamble and in the Italian act of implementation and ratification, the agreement strictly adhered to the UN resolution that stipulated the financial and economic provisions relative to the creation of the independent State of Libya. The agreement between Libya and Italy declared that Italy consented to the change of ownership of all infrastructure built, as stated above, by Italians in Libya; additionally, Italy thereby agreed to pay back the former colony for all occupation damages.

[13] ASBI Archivio Storico della Banca d'Italia, Banca d'Italia, Studi, pratt. n. 519, fasc. 1, p. 5.

In the 1960s, the quantity of crude oil extracted increased, yet the destitution of the Libyan people did not improve. In fact, in 1960, the Libyan government approved a law that prohibited foreigners to purchase real estate assets; the law was not retroactive, but it clearly established burdensome limitations. Libyans were demonstrating more tact and patience compared to their Tunisian and Algerian counterparts; however, their ultimate goal did not differ from the brutal objective of Ben Bella and Habib Bourguiba, respectively the first President of an independent Algeria and the President of Tunisia with a 30-year mandate (both were leaders in the fight for independence in their countries). On April 25, 1963, an important reform abolished the Federal Government System and the name of the country was changed to the *Kingdom of Libya*.

1965 was a significant year because it saw an increase in the number of Italians employed in Italian firms operating in Libya for the construction of large-scale public works. The Italians arriving in Africa in this period were different from their predecessors; they were mainly technicians and qualified workers. Thanks to the hiring of workers by Italian firms, the numbers of the Italian community grew, reaching 26,825 members by 1968 (of these, all of 23,000 were in the Tripoli district). Specifically, Italian companies commissioned works in the order of 12 billion lire, as part of the implementation plan of local authorities in the sector of public works. Some of the main procurement actions included the extension of the harbours of Tripoli and Homs, the construction of the aqueduct in El Beid, the Libyan coastal road as well as other roadways, the colossal bridge over the Wadi el Kuf, as well as hospitals, social housing and other buildings. In addition to the works just cited, many Italians were also hired in the field of research and petroleum production, where Italy was a main player with two companies: CORI, i.e. "*hydrocarbon research company*" (partnered with AGIP) and AMI, i.e. "Ausonia Mineraria" (owned by EDISON). CORI, in particular, secured a grant over 30 thousand square kilometres south-west of Jaghbub and, after a series of failures, finally completed its first producing well (it employed 133 Italians and 511 Libyans). AMI was not far behind; indeed, it won 30 square kilometres in the heart of Libya, between Fezzan e Cyrenaica; around 100 Italians worked for this company (Il Giorno 1963). During Idris's kingdom and following the Italian-Libyan agreement of 1956 (Strangio 2012, 295-310, Betts 2004) the commercial relationship between Rome and Tripoli likewise improved. In this period, Italy held a monopoly over exports and imports from and towards Libya. The exchanges accelerated once the production and sale of crude oil began. Between 1962 and 1967, Libyan exports toward Italy grew from 9 million lire to 85 million, while imports from Italy jumped from 17 to 49 million (Il Giornale di Tripoli 1969).

Complications arose when the Egyptian "Rais," Gamal Abdel Nasser, entered the stage with

his separatist rhetoric that stoked the "nationalist fever" and spread also to Libya, affecting its agreement to maintain British bases on Arab soil (the population clearly regarded these British bases as a tangible sign of Imperialism, although Idris held a different view, since he owed his crown to British support). King Idris succeeded in imposing his will (the maintenance of the bases), though at a high price, plunging the country in a violent spiral. The king attempted to find a resolution through a "public works policy;" he not only refinanced a 5-year plan, but also launched the "Idris Housing Plan." It allocated 400 million Libyan lire (corresponding to 700 billion lire) for the construction of tens of thousands of workers' lodgings over a period of five years – evidently, these grand investments were only possible thanks to the oil revenues, which increased steadily each year.

As a result of these developments, for the first time in the history of Libya, we can speak of "wealth:" income per capita increased from 25 thousand Italian lire to 800 thousand between 1959 and 1968 (higher than the average Italian). Yet, we should point out that only one fourth of the Libyan population, in other words those who actively participated in the production process, experienced this wealth, hence causing further turbulence and imbalance. In light of this, it would be more appropriate to refer to a "partial wealth" or even to a "silo wealth."

Such a policy, however, did not slow down the fracturing between a substantially moderate government and the widespread pan-Arab and pro-Nasser sentiment, which were shared by trade unionists, students and even officers of the army. Towards the middle of 1967, tension reached its breaking point in Libya. On September 1st, 1969, a group of pro-Nasser officers overthrew King Idris. The country was renamed "Arab Republic of Libya" and Muhammar Gheddafi headed the provisional government, which championed a programme of nationalisation of all large enterprises and Italian possessions, simultaneously closing down both the US and British military bases.

On July 21st, 1970, critically important laws were passed that provided for the requisition of all assets owned by Italians and Jews, in addition to the expulsion of all members of both communities. Specifically, one of these laws dictated the return to the Libyan people of all existing real estate assets from the day the decree came into force, be they farmland, arable land, steppes, deserts, uncultivated land or buildings, without prejudice for the State, rather than the people, to demand reimbursement for the damages suffered under the Italian occupation. These real estate assets had to be returned to the State together with stationary and mobile machinery, means of transportations, animals and any other accessory linked to the asset specified (Curotti 1973, Morone 2011, 20-35, Scoppola Iacopini 2015).

The value of all confiscated properties was estimated at around 200 billion lire in 1970.

Companies associated to ENI (Ente Nazionale Idrocarburi, the state energy provider company set up in 1953) and FIAT were exempt from requisition; the Libyan government will always entertain a special relationship with these companies. Paradoxically, Italy became Libya's first commercial partner, thanks also to the dependence from oil imports. Indeed, in October 1972, a few years after the departure of most Italians from Libya, ENI entered into a joint-venture agreement with the Libyan Oil Corporation (NOC) for the development of the rich Bu Attifel field, successfully avoiding nationalisation – a fate that struck many foreign oil companies. Two years after said agreement, a new economic, scientific and technical cooperation was developed that established Italy's role as Libya's "privileged partner." (Varvelli 2008, 1-7,Vndewalle 1988, Cricco 2017, 31-41).

At any rate, the expulsion of the Italian community and the requisition of all Italian assets in 1970 put an end to the colonial period. As an Italian citizen, Rosaria Trovato Macciaro, who returned to Italy following the 1970 law, pointed out «it took years before life went back to normal. For years, we were like nomads. Those of us who left Tripoli are still plagued by a longing for Africa, although I'd never go back to Tripoli» (Varvelli 2006, 2008).

Concluding remarks

The cases discussed in this essay investigate two different realities of Italian emigration, a "free" migration toward a country colonised by others and a migration promoted and sponsored by the Italian-government. In the first case, we observed how Italians, particularly from the South and the islands, were predominantly drawn to Tunisia because the country offered various opportunities to Italian emigrants. It allowed them to escape the "poverty trap" (given the accessible cost of the trip) and to earn a decent salary thanks to public works or, for the more qualified workers, thanks to mining and forest jobs (in all these cases, we're dealing with a temporary migration). Sicilians, instead, showed a strong preference for settling down, turning the temporary migration into a permanent one, which allowed them to become small landowners thanks to a particularly advantageous purchasing credit system. In Tunisia, the Sicilians who elected to stay introduced their own architectural traditions, their crops, in particular the grapevine for the production of wine, which found a flourishing export market in France. Many Sicilians made their fortune in Tunisia and, with time, provided for working opportunities for their compatriots, who travelled there for the harvesting season or other seasonal jobs.

After its occupation and the creation of the Empire, Libya was organised as a settlement colony. Colonisation bodies were established for Tripolitania and Cyrenaica; in 1932, the two

provinces were united into one with Tripoli as its capital. Libya was the colony where Italy pursued a true assimilation policy at its fullest (Dore et al. 2013, Calchi Novati et al. 2005, 148). Despite the investments made, especially by the government, the development of the territory was limited to colonial agencies or infrastructure. Still, the Libyan colony was the largest source of revenue among all the territories of the empire. The fascist colonial model aimed at creating settlements inhabited by Italians and thus enhance the development of an authentic Italian colony, whose residents were to overtake local population in certain areas in due time. Italian demographic colonization of Africa aimed at enlarging the empire, allow the natural and rapid increase of the Italian settlers in numbers (restrained in Italy by its s limited territorial extension) and offer a better standard of living to Italian agricultural masses (Meregazzi 1939, 33, Podestà 2004, 262, Goglia, Grazzi 1981, 203-415, Goglia 1988, Del Boca 1991, Lessona 1937, 619-622, Riccardi 1937, 631-6). Besides, even if it proved a sandbox at the time, Libya was meant to soothe the "constant state of anxiety regarding Italy's supplies of raw materials… and her dependence on others in this respect." (Bovill 1933, 358).

Libya has represented the greatest settler-transplant effort ever attempted by Italy in Africa: 20 thousand people per year over five years (1936-1940) were moved there, while important investments were carried out in new crop production and infrastructure, leaving a lasting mark on agriculture activities and fundamentally altering the landscape (Calchi Novati, Valsecchi 2005, 252-3).

The settlement patterns of the two distinct Italian communities in Tunisia and Libya are quite different because of the historical differences guiding the two migration movements. Italian emigrants moving to Tunisia were often specialized workers hired (for good salaries) in the mines or working in urban areas as electrical technicians, mechanics, foremen (the three most common urban occupations of Italians in Tunis) or skilled fishermen (Finzi 2003, 79; Francolini 1937, 147). As we have seen, rural occupations tended to focus on vineyard cultivation, which attracted mostly Sicilians who were often able to fulfil their dream of becoming landowners. Mussolini saw demographic colonialism in Libya as a form of territorial expansion regardless of the real opportunities offered by the land to Italian settlers. Planned colonialism meant that the majority of Italians working in an urban context in Libya were either employed in the public administration or in the construction sector, as we have seen. Each of the two sectors was highly dependent on the fascist government as regards the overall amount of job positions and work contracts. After the onset, beginning in 1936, of the demographic and rural conquest of Libya, Italian public investments again allowed the land transformation we mentioned earlier, even though the land

offered limited opportunities for improving the settlers' standard of living (ASBI, Banca d'Italia, Studi, Pratiche, n. 530.0, fasc. 2, p. 66; *Annuario generale della Libia: pubblicazione ufficiale delle camere di commercio, industria e agricoltura della Libia*, 1941, Vol. 9, s.n., Tripoli). While in the case of Libya Italian migration was the result of a planned project in a colonized territory, in the case of Tunisia, Italian migration benefited from the free global movement of labour of those years which was certainly unrepeatable in terms of the people's opportunity to freely seek a better life abroad (Foreman-Peck 1999). Tunisia soon hosted the largest number of Italian emigrants on African soil and gave an opportunity to Italian settlers to fulfill their hopes and aspirations while their positive experience attracted more and more compatriots.

The reasons behind the repatriations, in both cases, lie in the decolonisation of the African continent, which started in Libya in 1951 with the withdrawal of the British and the French; while Tunisia gained independence in 1956. The decolonisation process in both countries proceeded through a first phase where they privileged the recruitment of local or "African" workforce rather than "foreign/Italian" labourers, and a second phase that saw the requisition of all foreign assets and properties. In both cases, the Italian state did not intervene. As Morone correctly observes, the echoes of nationalisation were heard in Italy as well, but the Italian government chose not to pursue a policy of protection of migrant communities in the Mediterranean and preferred a new cooperation policy towards Africa, which entailed a removal of colonialism from the history and the memory of the Republic (Morone 2015, 42-3).

In the case of Tunisia, the French policy of prohibiting Italians to work and, later, the policy of nationalisation of all lands introduced by the new President Habib Bourguiba put an irreparable end to the Italian community in that country, which was split in half between France and Italy as choice repatriation countries. As Leila El Houssi well observed: "In this context, the Italians in Tunisia, despite inhabiting a dimension that is "other" in the North-African country - as neither colonised nor colonisers, still suffered grave consequences because of the decolonisation" (El Houssi 2017, 14-23; see also Melfa 2010).

In the case of Libya, on the other hand, change occurred when the Egyptian "Rais," Gamal Abdel Nasser, (in power from 1956 through 1968) entered the stage with his separatist rhetoric that stoked the "nationalist fever" and spread to Libya, affecting its agreement to maintain British bases on Arab soil. The "Libyfication" phenomenon, as it was called (Acone 1971, p.3, Scoppola Iacopini 2015, Di Giulio 2016, 13), culminated in 1969 with the rise to power of the military and the proclamation of the Republic. In 1970, all Italian-Libyan assets were confiscated and Italian citizens were forced to leave the country before October 15, 1970 (Cresti, Cricco 2015). These events

triggered a “return” migration, which was “forced” since it was rooted in mass expulsion. At the beginning of the 1970s, there were 75,000 return migrants in total, of which 20,000 were Italians; they marked the beginning of the last “forced mass return migration” from the African continent (between 1962 and 1976). Finally, in the 1980s, the Italian presence in the former colonies reached its lowest numbers yet (it should be noted that those who stayed behind were required to take up citizenship in their country of residence).

In conclusion, although the emigration stories of Italians in Tunisia and Libya are markedly different – a natural, free migration the former and a forced one the latter - they find a similar ending. In both cases, few migrants were able to organise their repatriation, in order to salvage their possessions in the colonial country; most former settlers were forced into a suffered and often sudden departure, which, in many instances, also meant a long stay in refugee camps. “White” migrants, even the poorest, had managed to create for themselves the conditions for a decent life, thanks to agricultural work or other artisanal/commercial activities in the main city centres in both Tunisia and Libya. Furthermore, both forced return migrations (Ferrara, Panciola 2012) were a consequence of the political hostility nurtured by the separatist movement against all foreigners on African soil. Italians were stripped of their jobs, assets and properties, turning rapidly from settlers into refugees. As seen above, starting in 1960, all migrants benefited of the support of the Italian State, which granted to all Italians returning from Africa the same provisions and economic aid provided to refugees. However, Italy’s new postwar foreign policy could not entertain open support of the Italian community's claims in Tunisia or Libya. Priority was given to the development of good political and commercial relations with the new independent states, to the detriment of the defence of Italian emigrants' residual interests.

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