

In the face of the migrants' conditions in Libya: moves to action in a frontier zone.

Rape, torture, enslavement, ransom demands to families, children held prisoners, new-borns left to die. Official detention centres, informal detention centres, houses and farms turned into prisons. Endless reports and dossiers compiled by international organisations – by the UNHCR, the UN, the IOM – as well as by NGOs and journalists, have in recent years detailed the monstrous conditions of migrants in Libya. Sometimes it's a single image: a man sold into slavery, a woman on the ground with chained hands and feet; more recently, images plucked out of this horror by someone who was undergoing it and who risked being tortured or killed for showing them to the world. From the opposite shore of the Mediterranean, the European Union has underwritten and financed agreements to prevent migrants from leaving Libya; with its Memorandum of Understanding with the Al Sarraj government and its "closed ports" strategy, Italy has been financing these camps and the training of Libyan coast guards, and, along with the other member states of the EU, it has been providing ever more sophisticated technology for capturing human beings before they leave the Libyan coast. Stuck in the middle is Tunisia, a small nation whose border is sometimes open and sometimes closed, and that allows or prevents those escaping this Libyan hell via land to enter its territory, but which does not give them any chance of acquiring refugee status or any other form of legal right to remain on its territory. There are no two ways about it: it is absolutely monstrous. It is a monstrosity that is the upshot of decades-long implementation of policies by the European Union and its member states that seek to restrict the movement of people. Just to mention a few of the key tools of these policies: the introduction of entry visas, which drastically limits persons' freedom of movement; the externalisation of frontiers; the creation of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex), with its various missions on land and sea; the agreements with states of origin; the seaborne patrols; the generation of death in the Mediterranean; the ever more costly expenditure on high technology for the security industry; the creation of various kinds of detention centres both in destination countries as well as in transit nations beyond the borders of the EU; the progressive dismantling of the status of political asylum; the criminalisation of so-called economic migrants as well as of so-called "bogus refugees", and the following criminalisation of any form of solidarity with migrants. The list could go on, but this is not the place to spell it out in full. One of the results of all this is the absolutely monstrous and hellish conditions of migrants in Libya, and the daily death toll in the Mediterranean.

As inhabitants and as activists in a zone that passes from Libya through Tunisia to Europe, we are all implicated in the infernal situation of people trapped in Libya. Some of those who are held prisoners in Libya attempt to escape by passing through the land border into Tunisia, and sometimes they make it across. Yet the only way out of Tunisia, apart from visas that are rarely granted, is to take to the sea, with its burden of death and loss. Some do arrive in Europe, but Europe has itself contributed greatly to the Libyan hell. Over the years we have witnessed a gradual reduction in the room for political action capable of undermining the presuppositions of this situation. At the current moment, this is limited to solidarity and aid for migrants to help them through the funnel that is the Mediterranean, or at the choke points of land frontiers, where effective action and the affirmation of rights is ever more restricted. In the face of what seems to be a state of absolute impossibility, must we remain powerless and resign ourselves to being so? Or can we not instead imagine, invent or glimpse towards some possibility of action? In an effort to construct a space in which to exist and to imagine as a collectivity that refuses to be over-determined by government policies restricting the movement of people – policies carrying their burden of death and the monstrous restraint of bodies – we, as inhabitants and activists from parts of the EU border zone, have created the informal group Europe-Zarzis-Afrique. Zarzis is a Tunisian city on the Mediterranean near the Libyan border, from which many young Tunisians have departed and which has been reached in recent years by people from Sub-Saharan African countries, either by having been saved at sea or by crossing the border from Libya. It is a border city that is made aware on a constant basis of the death-dealing migration policies of the EU and its accomplices, of the grief of Tunisian families whose sons have been lost during the crossings, of fishermen who find bodies in the water, of the on-going commitment to bring aid to those who have been shipwrecked, of the burial of the dead and of the recording and construction of the memory of what is unfolding. We have sought to imagine a grassroots action that wholly distances itself from those of

states and of international organisations that are accomplices to these murderous policies, and in complete opposition to the border externalisation policies of the EU and also to the discriminatory policies of the Tunisian state towards migrants. With this in view, we are organising for the beginning of August 2019, in the first instance, a seminar aimed at sharing and imagining alternative forms of economic production and livelihood, both for the citizens of Zarzis and for people fleeing Libya. We will then be staging a march towards the border with Libya, which is currently a crucial site in the game of murderous migration policies. To make these actions meaningful, we need the support and participation of everyone who, like us, refuses to remain fettered in this monstrous absurdity. In the months running up to these mobilisations in Zarzis, we will be contacting organisations, associations, groups, collectives and individuals with the aim of building these actions together.

We therefore ask you to write to us at our email address or on our Facebook page with suggestions about how to structure the seminar (people to invite, topics to discuss, experiences already brought to fruition, search for funding), which we would like to centre on some main themes (agriculture, fishing, craftwork, tourism) and that we view as just a first step towards building alternative approaches to living and sharing a border space.

Our programme in Zarzis:

1, 2, 3 August 2019: workshop

4 August 2019: march to the border

5 August 2019: debriefing meeting and planning for future projects

We hope many of you will join us!

Informal group Europe Zarzis Afrique; Carovane Migranti

<http://europezarzisafrique.org>

<https://buonacausa.org/cause/europezarzisafrique>

<https://www.facebook.com/europezarzisafrique.org/>

europezarzisafrique@gmail.com

Primi firmatari:

Asociación Elín (Ceuta); Association La terre pour tous (Tunisie); Asociación pro derechos de la infancia, Prodein (Melilla); ATI (Associazione Tunisini in Italia); Adif (Associazione diritti e frontiere); Caravana abriendo fronteras (España); Comitato Verità e Giustizia per i Nuovi Disaparecidos nel Mediterraneo; Familles des Harraga Disparus (Algerie); Forum Antirazzista di Palermo; Forum Tunisien pour les Droits Economiques et Sociaux (FTDES); Karabana Mugak Zabalduz (Euskal Herria); LasciateCIEntrare; Madres de Plaza de Mayo-Linea Fundadora (Argentina); Movimiento Migrante Mesoamericano (México); Nawart Press (collettivo giornalisti* indipendenti); Pontes dei tunisini in Italia; Red Mundial de Madres de Migrantes Disaparecidos; Palermo Senza Frontiere; Rete Antirazzista Catanese; Stop Mare Mortum (Catalunya); Tous Migrants (France);

A Zarzis dalla Libia: Osman (Bénin); Abou Baker, Mamadou, Omar (Côte d'Ivoire); Charif, André, Hassan, Hassan, Ibrahim (Guinea Conakry); Aifa (Kenya); Ahmed, Ali, Ibrahim, Omar (Senegal); Amine, Omar, Issa, Mohamed (Sudan);

Yasmine Accardo (attivista); Santiago Alba Rico; Gennaro Avallone (docente ricercatore Università di Salerno); Iker Barbero (profesor de la Universidad del País Vasco); Kamel Belabed (Porte parole Familles des Harraga Disparus); Marta Bellingeri; Chamseddine Bourassine; Farouk Ben Lhiba; Enrico Calamai (Comitato Verità e Giustizia per i Nuovi Disaparecidos nel Mediterraneo); Antonio Esposito (ricercatore Università di Napoli); Stefano Galieni (giornalista Left); Gabriella Guido (attivista); Paola Gandolfi; Noureddine Gantri; Domenico Guarino (missionario comboniano); Juan Hernández Zubizarreta (profesor de la Universidad del País Vasco, Ongi Etorri Errefuxiatuak); Mohsen Lihidheb (Musée de la Mémoire de la Mer de Zarzis, Tunisie); Melissa Mariani; Chamseddine Marzoug (Cimetière des inconnus, Zarzis, Tunisie); Alessandra Mecozzi (Comitato Verità e Giustizia per i Nuovi Disaparecidos nel Mediterraneo); José Palazón Osma (Prodein, Melilla); Domenico Perrotta (ricercatore); Gabriele Proglia (Universidade de Coimbra); Fabio Raimondi (Università di Udine); Arturo Salerni (Comitato Verità e Giustizia per i Nuovi Disaparecidos nel Mediterraneo); Imed Soltani (Association La terre pour tous, Tunisie); Dorsaf Wartatani; Kouceila Zerguine (avocat, Annaba, Algerie).

Presentation of the "Informal Group Europe Zarzis Afrique"

Just a few words to explain who we are. Despite space limits, we must begin in 2011, with the departure of tens of thousands of young Tunisians towards Italy in the aftermath of the revolution, and with the death and disappearance of many of them along the journey. As a result of the struggles of their families in seeking the truth surrounding their disappearance, contact was made across the Mediterranean, and was consolidated around the condemnation of European Union immigration policies – which were accused of being responsible for deaths in the Mediterranean – and which also lead to demands on the Tunisian state in the struggle to make them take responsibility for those disappearances. The group Europe Zarzis Afrique is the outcome of this political encounter between Italian activists and Tunisian families. Since then, there have been countless meetings and exchanges in light of the Tunisian families' claims, especially, to take account, on both shores of the Mediterranean, of the lives that have been lost, to reclaim them and to denounce the ways European policies limiting the free passage of persons are producing death and loss. Some of the key struggles undertaken have been: the various petitions directed to both Italy and Tunisia as states guilty of having caused these losses initiated by Tunisian families and the anti-violence feminist collective Venticinqueundici; the political and judicial denunciations of the two countries; the founding in Tunisia of the first association of families of the missing La terre pour tous; actions by the Carovane Migranti group together with La terre pour tous in Italy, France and Tunisia; the meeting with the Central American Caravan of Mothers, and the participation of some of the families, including some from Zarzis, in the World Summit of the Mothers of Disappeared Migrants in Mexico City in November 2018; the struggle for the liberation of the fishermen from Zarzis who in August 2018 were arrested in Italy and unjustly accused of human smuggling, while in fact they have been rescuing people in distress in this stretch of sea for over twenty years; and the mobilisations for dignifying the cemetery of unknown persons, victims of the EU border, in Zarzis.

March, 2019

(Federica Sossi, Farouk Ben Lhiba, Monica Scafati, Mohsen Lihidheb, Slaheddine Mcharek, Chamseddine Marzoug, Chamseddine Bourassine, Valentina Zagaria)