Entry Denied: Revolution in North Africa and the Continued Centrality of Migration to European Responses.

Polly Pallister-Wilkins

The recent revolutions in Tunisia and Libya have brought the issue of trans-Mediterranean migration to the forefront of popular discussions about Europe's relationship with its immediate neighbors in the Middle East and North Africa. It was on the back of hyperbolic and cataclysmic predictions of Europe being "swamped" by migrants that the case for intervention in Libya was partly made and following this, a number of EU member states have agreed on a temporary suspension of the Schengen Agreement. Schengen is an agreement that deals with the free movement of people throughout the European Union and was first signed on June 14, 1985 by five out of the ten members of what was then the European Economic Community (EEC). Five years later the Convention on Implementing the Schengen Agreement was signed and together these two treaties created what has become known as the Schengen Area or "Schengenland" in Europe. Implementation began in 1995 and in 1999 under the Amsterdam Treaty the rules governing Schengen became part of EU law. An area now encompassing some 4,312,099 km^2 and 25 countries, Schengen has served to erase internal borders and allows for the free movement of people throughout the Schengen area for EU citizens and non-EU citizens alike, while simultaneously working to strengthen the external borders of the EU. Overall it is seen as one of the most important achievements of the European project. The decision in recent weeks by certain EU member states to suspend the Schengen Agreement means that passport free travel through all 4,312,099 km^2 of Schengenland is no longer possible, especially for non-EU citizens or those whose appearance may be interpreted as non-European.

In turn, North Africa is considered a critical geopolitical location in worldwide migratory trends. It has become something of a bottleneck as migrants from Sub-Saharan Africa and elsewhere travel north towards Europe, where they confront the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean in this regard is not just a geographic obstacle that claims the lives of hundreds of migrants every year; it is also a political obstacle, a fault-line, a space demarcating where Europe begins and ends, and as such the warm salty waters are imbued with considerable meaning and are the site of numerous political encounters between migrants and the soft (bureaucratic) and hard (military) power of Europe and Europe's "fixers" in North Africa.

The suspension of Schengen is itself being met with similar levels of panic by the European Commission and European Union Policy Analysts as that directed towards the North African migrant "threat." However, nothing has really changed in Europe's approach to the issue of trans-Mediterranean migration since the revolutions. What has changed concerns the structural capacity of North African countries, specifically Tunisia and Libya, to manage sub-Saharan migration on behalf of the European Union and its member states, as well as an increase in media attention: the overall policy of the EU and individual states – the containment of migration south of the Mediterranean in third-party states, outside of Europe's external borders – remains the same.

In fact you could, and I would, argue that the recent revolutions in Tunisia and Libya and the subsequent threat of migrants "flooding" Europe are being used by the European Union as a neat hook on which to hang further consolidation of a pre-existing EU border policy, all the while simultaneously helping to bolster the EU's liberal sense of self. For it has been argued by others elsewhere that EU foreign policy has always been more about the creation and consolidation of an EU identity through the outward projection of a set of norms than an effective policy for real structural engagement and change.

For example on May 6, 2011 the European Commission (the executive of the EU) published an apparent response to the growing crisis: "Developing a Common Approach to Migration." The article itself begins with the following call for expediency: "Since the beginning of this year, political unrest in North Africa has brought 25 000 migrants to EU shores – mainly in Italy and Malta." However, expediency is not to outdo any attempt by Europe to bolster its liberal (to a degree) sense of self, so the above reference to current events and cause for panic is swiftly followed by: "The EU has a moral obligation to provide a safe haven for legitimate asylum seekers," speedily followed by a call for further consolidation: "But the images of ramshackle boats and crowded beaches obscure the fact that it is also in Europe's self-interest to have a more structured, comprehensive, longer-term approach to asylum and migration."

Thought about in the round, the persistent presence of migration in European responses to the revolutions can be thought of in three principal ways: securitization, continuation and consolidation.

Securitization

Over the past decade and a half in Europe and elsewhere, migrants have found themselves increasingly bound up within the wider process of securitization. The migrant, the refugee, the asylum seeker, the illegal immigrant, all are seen as synonymous and all are seen as a threat, a potential terrorist or simply just a threat. We live, as Doug Massey points out, in "anti-immigrant times." The threat posed by migrants themselves does not have to be clearly defined; in fact, when those so keen to label migrants as a threat are pressed to expand on the exact threat migration and migrants themselves pose, the poverty of the label and the thinking behind it becomes clear.

Within a wider climate of fear all that has to happen is for the migrant to be classified as a threat for the state to guard against the migrant and for the citizen to (supposedly) subsequently and logically fear migrants. When the fear-mongers are pressed to come up with solutions to a problem of their own making, again the poverty of their practice is revealed, a practice that includes outsourcing, containing, criminalizing and incarcerating migrants or removing them to somewhere else so that they become someone else's problem.

The European responses to the predicted influx of migrants from Tunisia and Libya have been ones of panic; Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi has claimed that Italy will be "flooded" with half-a-million migrants, while the British Prime Minister David Cameron has repeatedly conflated trans-Mediterranean migration with security and Britain's national/capitalist interest, couching it all in liberal interventionist terms. Speaking before Parliament on 14 March 2011 Cameron stated: "Do we want a situation where a failed pariah state festers in Europe's southern border, potentially threatening our security, pushing people across the Mediterranean and creating a more dangerous and uncertain world for Britain and for all our allies as well as for the people of Libya?" Meanwhile the neoliberal interest behind British attitudes to the North African revolutions was plain to see: "Europe needs to follow through on its declaration with a real and credible offer to these countries based on three of the key freedoms – movement of goods, services and investment."

Noticeably while Cameron talks about the "movement of goods services and investment," another key freedom and one that underpins Schengen, the free movement of people, is absent. The contradiction between the free flow of capital and the free flow of people was starkly illuminated by Cameron who in the same speech advocated for the free movement of

capital and at the same time warned against the movement of people in terms that paint migrants as an almost existential threat and seek to conflate migration with terrorism. For the idea of any movement of people from Europe's southern neighbors creates a sense of panic as Cameron so ably demonstrated in a speech to Parliament on the eve of the US and European enforcement of the No-Fly Zone on 18 March 2011: "Libya will become... a state from which literally hundreds of thousands of citizens could seek to escape, putting huge pressure on us in Europe. We must also remember that Gaddafi is a dictator who has a track record of violence and support for terrorism against our country."

The sense of panic has been fuelled further by the decisions by Italy to issue temporary residency permits to North African migrants who had arrived in Italy before 5 April 2011, meaning that these migrants are now "technically" free under Schengen to travel anywhere within Schengenland. The threat of a tide of North African migrants marching north through the Italian peninsula like Garibaldi one hundred and fifty years ago has instigated alarm amongst European member states as far north as the Netherlands – where the Prime Minister Mark Rutte declared: "any Tunisian who got in through the Berlusconi arrangement must leave the Netherlands" – and Denmark, which, on 11 May 2011 decided to reintroduce border controls.

The first member country to respond to the Italian granting of temporary residency to North African migrants was France, which has started border checks on the border with Italy and has blocked trains coming from Ventimiglia, including one on 17 April carrying 300 migrants and NGO representatives. The suspension of Schengen is being interpreted by some policy analysts as a repressive policy response that has emerged in a context of widespread anti-immigration and xenophobic political discourses that, like David Cameron's statements above, link human mobility with insecurity and criminality.

However, issuing temporary residency permits and the suspension of Schengen are solutions that can only be implemented within European territory, inside the European Union. They are solutions that deal with migrants once they have breached the external borders and have penetrated European space. Ideally, in the first instance, member states and the EU would like to prevent the breaching of its external borders by migrants leaving North Africa. There have been media reports of naval crews of various European states leaving migrants to drift aimlessly in the Mediterranean. In late March, one vessel was left to drift for sixteen days, despite alarms raised with the Italian coast guard, resulting in

sixty-three migrants dying of thirst. There have been other reports of naval crews ignoring cries for help while taking photographs. The use of military vessels to deal – or not deal as the case may be – with migrant vessels in the Mediterranean is not a situation that Europe wishes to deal with itself. Can we be so cynical as to suggest that this is why European authorities have ignored migrant boats' pleas for help? Migrants intercepted by European authorities often end up being taken to a European shore to be processed and have, therefore, succeeded in entering Europe. Ideally migrants need to be kept from European space. If North African authorities can intercept the migrant vessels the migrants can be returned to North Africa and the sanctity of Europe can be preserved. This requires equipment that Europe is only too happy to provide. On 11 May Italian Minister of the Interior Roberto Maroni announced that Italy was providing the new Tunisian regime with four light and fast naval vessels to, in the words of the Italian Interior Ministry, counter illegal immigration but also, the Interior Ministry said secondly, to save lives, with Italy's priorities only too clear to see.

Continuation

This apparent dread at the possibility of "literally hundreds of thousands of escaping citizens" is not, however, an idea that is limited to the revolutionary moment. These practices existed long before Mohamed Bouazizi decided to set himself on fire on 17 December 2010, the event credited with kick-starting the Tunisian revolution. The European responses to trans-Mediterranean migration witnessed in the last few months began a long time before this last winter.

The outsourcing of migration control to third-party states in North Africa – Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya – began concomitantly with the Barcelona Process in 1995, and migration control remained a central pillar of the European Neighborhood Policy that replaced the Barcelona Process in 2004 and later the Union for the Mediterranean in 2008. Libya is not a member of the Union for the Mediterranean; however, EU-Libya engagement has been ongoing since 2004, and along with HIV, migration was one of two priority areas for engagement, as noted in the words of the EU's Mid Term Review of its engagement with Libya: "both… constitute domestic political crises in Libya with implications for the EU." Libya may be outside of the bureaucratic structure governing EU-Mediterranean relations, but, it was still very much considered a working partner; for example, since 2007, Libya has co-chaired along with Spain, the Africa-EU Migration, Mobility and Employment

Partnership. In addition, Libya has developed bilateral relations with individual European states, especially Italy, and has received significant funding from both the European Union/Commission and Italy for the management of migrants before they reach Europe.

This outsourcing of migration control by the European Union and individual member states to states south of the Mediterranean has seen the creation of an elaborate network of control designed to keep African migrants in Africa. In 2010 Libya alone had nineteen detention centers for the incarceration, processing, and removal of third country nationals. Tunisia had nine. This does not take account of the increasing use of the militaries of North African states in the prevention of migration. Italy providing Tunisia with four naval vessels to combat migration is not new. According to the International Boundaries Research Unit, in 2009 a secret deal was struck between Italy and Libya that saw €50 million in funding given to Libya to patrol its 1,250 miles of coastline for migrants headed to the EU, and to take back migrants intercepted by the Italian coastguard. The system was intended to prevent migrants – mostly from Sub-Saharan Africa – from heading north across the Mediterranean and worked by capturing, holding, processing and returning those who managed to make the journey north. This system of control was located across Europe but importantly in North Africa with the backing of President Ben Ali in Tunisia and Colonel Gaddafi in Libya, and was designed to preserve the EU's external borders and to keep the migrant "problem" south of the Mediterranean in third-party states.

Even the suspension of Schengen by certain member states, and the subsequent alarm this has caused those who see Schengen and the freedom of movement it affords European citizens as a fundamental right (one that transmits a certain liberal narrative about Europe beyond its frontiers), is in and of itself nothing new. Since its conception in 1985 and its implementation during the mid-1990s, Schengen has only ever been partly implemented. Individual member states have always had the power to suspend Schengen and between 1995 and Denmark's reintroduction of border controls on 11 May, I have counted 67 separate occasions that Schengen member states have temporarily suspended freedom of movement and have re-introduced border controls. My list is by no means necessarily accurate; there may be many more times, as there is no systematic official EU record of instances where Schengen is suspended, something that in and of itself says a lot about how the Schengen Agreement and the freedom of movement it provides, is a central part of an important narrative for the European Union about what the EU is and what the EU means.

In that sense, the European Union or Schengenland should not be confused with a Europe where borders no longer exist. The French re-introduction of border checks earlier this year is not that surprising when one considers that France maintained border checks on its Benelux frontier from 1995-1998 due to French misgivings over the Netherlands drugs policy. In fact, according to my calculations, since 1995 and including the re-instatement of border checks at Ventimiglia, France has suspended Schengen eighteen times.

There are many justifications given for the 67 suspensions I have counted; however, most can be said to fall into three categories:

1. large scale sporting events such as the football World and European cups and concerns over hooliganism;
2. high level political summits, like the G8 or European Union summits, where there is a fear of political activism;
3. the curtailment of free movement for non-EU citizens/migrants within Schengenland.

Schengen, in this sense, is like many things within the European Union: a policy whose power comes from the idea it articulates rather than any tangible, fixed reality in the day-to-day practice of European politics.

Consolidation

Schengen has always been about removing internal borders and strengthening external ones. Since the implementation of Schengen in 1995 that has seen the removal of internal borders between signatory states a simultaneous program of strengthening Schengenland's external borders has been underway. The European Commission for years has sought to get member states to agree to a standardization of external border policy across the Union and this crisis has presented the Commission with the perfect opportunity to finally push for further consolidation of its European border policy. Such a policy also chimes with the desires of certain member states, especially those (Italy, Malta, and Greece) that find themselves responsible for the policing of part of Schengenland's southern border. These states have for many years been calling for greater "solidarity" amongst member states over issues of trans-Mediterranean migration. So any standardization and strengthening of external border policy across the EU would benefit these states who claim that they have unfairly, due to geographical misfortune, had to shoulder the burden of migrants from the south who successfully make it north into Europe.

The Commission published a hastily produced "Communication on Migration" on May 4 that very clearly sets out the Commission's plans for further consolidation of pre-existing border policy and crudely uses the events in North Africa as a foundation on which to outline such policy plans. The introductory paragraph starts off thus: "The events in the Southern Mediterranean…" and the second paragraph continues with "These events of historic proportion in the Southern Mediterranean have confirmed the need for a strong and common EU policy in the field of migration and asylum." As such, the panic that the Commission is expressing at individual member states' desires to re-introduce border controls is somewhat Janus-faced, as it too – like individual member states, especially those on the southern frontier – is using such fears to pursue its own policy of border consolidation.

When the Commission says in the introduction to its "Communication on Migration" that "…the need to address this challenging and evolving situation should not lead to a short-term approach limited to border control without taking account of longer-term issues," it is saying three things:

1. We are prepared to exploit the current issue of migration from Tunisia and Libya.
2. States should not act independently of the EU and unilaterally suspend Schengen as this damages the perceived power of the Union itself.
3. The longer-term issues that we need to take account of are the Commission's plans for a further consolidation of our external border policy and a standardization of border policy across the Schengen bloc.

Interestingly, since I began writing this piece, the Commission on 26 May, proposed new measures for what it calls "managing immigration fairly and effectively" that build on the 4 May Communiqué and make much of the ongoing situation in North Africa and it's impact on the EU's migration policy.

So the Commission is on the one hand spreading panic about migration and on the other spreading panic about unilateral action at the individual state level and the "End of Schengen," both of which serve to bolster the Commission's calls, which have been ongoing since 1995, for further consolidation of the Union's external borders. As an aside, it is interesting to note the parallel timelines for the both the implementation of Schengen and the increased engagement with states to the south of the Mediterranean, starting with the Barcelona Process. In fact, the Commission is being downright disingenuous, pouring oil

onto an already panic driven bonfire when it cries "End of Schengen." In its own Communiqué the Commission states clearly that a mechanism for the suspension of Schengen may need to be introduced when Schengenland finds itself under such migratory pressures. Importantly, though, it states that such a mechanism should be drafted and implemented at the European level. All of this suggests that the Commission has used the apparent crisis over migration amidst the North African revolutions to ensure that Europe's border policy is consolidated, and not only consolidated but consolidated on its terms.

If one were a cynic, one might also think that Italy's decision to relieve itself of the burden of migrants and "share the problem" with the rest of Europe by issuing temporary residents visas was a way of forcing the hands of not only the Commission but also other member states into agreeing to a standardization and consolidation of external border policy. The reintroduction of border checks by France was almost inevitable following the Italian's decision to "share the problem," and the French response has been something that the Commission has gained maximum traction out of while at the same time crying foul and stressing that we were witnessing the "End of Schengen."

Conclusion

As has been suggested, EU foreign policy has always been more about the creation and consolidation of the EU itself than any effective policy for real structural engagement and change or any real recognition of the component parts of European policy towards outsiders, both inside Europe's borders and outside. Taking the suspension of Schengen as an example, we see that such a move is being viewed as detrimental to the EU's image abroad, with critics claiming it suggests that the EU and its member states are failing to extend European solidarity, and to externalize a set of liberal-democratic norms, to those suffering from violence abroad. Such a sentiment only goes so far, however, when one considers that for years Europe has sought to bolster its southern border, doing deals with and selling weapons to the likes of Gaddafi and Ben Ali, a form of solidarity that I, and I suspect many others, do not recognize as such. In fact, only days before Ben Ali got on a flight out of Tunis, France was offering to send French riot police to help quell the demonstrations.

And yet the attempts to express solidarity with the people of North Africa rising up against dictatorship in search of democracy is entirely in keeping with the EU's externalization of a set of norms that it has sought to promote throughout the Barcelona Process, a set of norms that help to define "what" the EU actually is, while the seemingly contradictory securitization and consolidation of Europe's external borders help to define "where" Europe is and "who" is European. This process is nothing new; the need to define in relation to the "other" is no longer revelatory to anyone with even a passing knowledge of post-colonial critiques. However, while bloody fighting still continues across Libya and NATO bombs rain down on Tripoli, why care about European responses to migration from North Africa? Because they tell us a lot more about the state of European "liberal" thought and practice than any interruption by a bare-chested Bernard-Henri Lévy. It seems that nothing has really changed from the times of European colonialism in North Africa. We Europeans can use your space, we can profit from your markets, we can control your people and we can even unleash deadly violence upon you, but you may not come here; your place is there on the southern shore of the Mediterranean, in Africa. This is Europe: entry denied.

Migration, North Africa, Revolution, European Union

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