Libya under Gaddafi

written by Clay Claiborne | July 25, 2018

A CNN report last November about slave auctions in present-day Libya shocked the world.[1] The existence of these slave auctions was widely treated as a new development in the country and a result of the chaos that resulted from the NATO-supported overthrow of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. In truth, however, what CNN discovered is but a surviving remnant of Gaddafi's regime—the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya—a police state with systematic racism and abuse both of Libyans of sub-Saharan African descent and of sub-Saharan African migrants.

Donald Trump has been wailing that U.S. immigration laws are "weak" because they provide some minimal protection to migrants and allow those fleeing from violence and repression to at least apply for political asylum. He would have loved the immigration policies of Gaddafi's Libya, which recognized no refugee status at all and fired on migrants with fatal effect for trying to enter, and even to leave, Libya without state permission. Also, no doubt, Trump would have cheered the extremely racist policies of Gaddafi and his government toward not only African migrants, but also Libyans of sub-Saharan descent, policies that included stripping black populations of Libyan citizenship, bulldozing their homes, bringing in helicopter gunships and tanks when they protested, and busing hundreds of thousands out to the desert to die.

We know about the "slave auctions" that CNN reported on, and many other things—both good and bad—in Libya today, because now the press enjoys freedoms it never had while Gaddafi ruled. It wasn't easy gathering information on Gaddafi's Libya. Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2009, 12) reported that when they visited Libya in 2005, the "first migrant our researchers interviewed on the street was arrested one hour later."

Nevertheless, there was research done on Libya, research that was available to all who cared to pay attention, which unfortunately didn't include a lot of the left. Here's what the record showed.

Gaddafi's Libya Was a Police State

This is the context for everything to be examined below: The Libya Gaddafi ruled was a poorly run police state. In 2004 Amnesty International (AI) did its first country report on Libya in 15 years. They found that government policy

includes the policy of "physical liquidation" of political opponents of the 1980s; numerous deaths in custody without adequate explanation; the "disappearance" of political prisoners, especially since 1996; and the "disappearance" of Libyan nationals abroad and foreign nationals visiting Libya.

Hundreds of families still do not know whether their relatives are alive or dead, or how they died. Many are too scared to ask about their relatives for fear of retaliation. (AI, 2004, 3-4)

The report documented a number of such cases in detail, and also noted, "In 1980 the Libyan authorities introduced a policy of extrajudicial executions of political opponents, termed 'stray dogs.' The policy, known as 'physical liquidation,' seemed to have been endorsed at the highest levels." (5) AI added,

In recent years, the Libyan authorities have used the international context and the language of the "war on terror" to further justify the continuation of a repressive policy at home which severely curtails the right of Libyan citizens to freedom of expression and association. The "counter-terrorism" argument is clearly used as a new justification for an old practice, enshrined in Libyan law, of repression of all political dissent. (12)

AI also had some specific criticisms of Libyan law under Gaddafi, and highlighted these:

Law 71 of 1972 bans any form of group activity based on a political ideology opposed to the principles of al-Fateh Revolution of September 1, 1969.

Article 3 of Law 71 provides for the death penalty for forming, joining, or supporting groups prohibited by law.

Article 206 of the Penal Code (Law 48 of 1956) provides for the death penalty for those who call "for the establishment of any grouping, organization, or association proscribed by law," and even for those who belong to or support such an organization.

Article 208, which bans forming or joining an international association, states that "the punishment is imprisonment for whoever sets up, establishes, organizes, or directs international non-political organizations, associations, or bodies, or a branch thereof, without government authorization, or where such authorization is based on false or insufficient information."

Article 178 prescribes life imprisonment for the dissemination of information considered to "tarnish [the country's] reputation or undermine confidence in it abroad."

Article 207 states that "the punishment is execution for whoever spreads within the country, by whatever means, theories or principles aiming to change the basic principles of the Constitution or the fundamental structures of the social system or to overthrow the state's political, social, or economic structures or destroy any of the fundamental structures of the social system using violence, terrorism, or any other unlawful means." (19).

Two years before the Arab Spring uprising of 2011, the *New York Times* found that "Libya is a police state, but the trains still do not run on time." So government services at the time were awful ("Step one block off almost any main road and the streets here are badly damaged or completely unpaved. There are problems with the schools, the health care system, and the government bureaucracy, which is plagued by corruption and inefficiency. Untreated sewage is dumped right into the Mediterranean."), and on top of that, it was also the case that "the police here do not tolerate public criticism, and people still disappear in the night."[2]

Migrant Sales Under Gaddafi

While CNN was able to document a few clandestine "slave auctions" in post-Gaddafi Libya, while Gaddafi ruled-nighttime slave auctions were common. Two or three times a week, the manager of a Kufra camp conducted the sale of several dozen migrants. A 26-year-old Eritrean told HRW,

Every two or three days, the manager of Kufra camp took 25 or 30 persons at night and sold them to Libyan transporters so he could get money from us. Other people were just thrown in the desert. Sometimes they would take people in the desert and run over their legs with a car and just leave them. He sold me with a group of 25 or 30 people to a Libyan man who put us in a big house in Kufra and told us we needed to have our families send $200 to pay for our release from Kufra and to take us to Benghazi. (HRW, 2009, 72)

Even children were used as slaves. One unaccompanied child, Kofi, an orphan from Ghana, was 16 years old while in Libya for one year in 2007. Kofi spoke of being pressed into forced labor after being detained by the Libyan authorities: "The guard took me out to work on his house. I worked all the time every day for four months, but he never paid me. Then he gave me to an Egyptian woman. I worked on her farm for seven months. She also didn't pay me, but she at least gave me food and clothes." (HRW, 2009, 62)

Gaddafi's Libya also regularly brought slaves back from its "adventures" in other African countries (Claiborne, 2011). Speaking of the Gaddafi-supported Arab supremacist terror campaigns in Sudan and Mauritania, Jeff Jacoby wrote in the *Boston Globe*, April 2, 1996, "Tens—maybe hundreds—of thousands of black Africans have been captured by government troops and freelance slavers and carried off into bondage. Often they are sold openly in 'cattle markets,' sometimes to domestic owners, sometimes to buyers from Chad, Libya and the Persian Gulf states."[3]

In 1993, Augustine Lado, president of Pax Sudani, noted,

In 1990, Africa Watch concluded that there was evidence of kidnapping, hostage-taking and other monetary transactions involving human beings "on a sufficiently serious scale as to represent a resurgence of slavery." And a declassified report from the U.S. Embassy in Khartoum released last May by Rep. Frank Wolf (R-Va.) documents how Sudan government troops and armed Arab militias are involved in massacres, kidnapping and the transporting of African Sudanese to Libya.[4]

As we shall see, there can be no doubt that this required the support of the Libyan government. In March 1996, U.S. congressional hearings were held on "Slavery in Mauritania and Sudan" (U.S. House of Representatives, 1996), and while those two countries were the headliners, the subject of Libya kept popping up. For example, Augustine Lado told the hearing, "There has been very critical evidence that the people, our people, some of them were actually sold into slavery in Libya, Saudi Arabia, and other parts of the Arab world."

Charles Jacobs, research director of the American Anti-Slavery Group, testified,

As a result of the war, Arab militias, armed by the government of Khartoum, raid African villages, shoot the men and enslave the women and children. These are either kept as individual booty by the militias, sold north, or, as a recently declassified U.S. State Department document contends, trucked into Gaddafi's Libya.

He added,

Equally incomprehensible is the failure of Western human rights organizations to have marshalled public support for these black slaves. Today you are hearing directly from people who have seen slavery and who have interviewed slaves and escaped slaves in Mauritania and Sudan. But in fact evidence of slavery in Sudan, Mauritania, and Libya, compiled by the most prestigious and reliable sources, has been available for years. If the existence of chattel slavery in the last decade of the twentieth century is tragic, so is the failure of the human rights community to have developed an adequate activist constituency that could come to their aid.

This statement was made in a congressional hearing more than twenty years ago, and it is all still true today. Only now we can add the rank hypocrisy of journalists, politicians, and members of the white left who are suddenly "shocked, shocked" to discover slavery in Libya.
It is clear that the cause of human rights for refugees and immigrants in Libya, let alone the struggles against racism, human trafficking, and slavery there, could make little headway so long as the Gaddafi dictatorship ruled. Nevertheless, the white left seemed to discover slavery and racism in Libya only after the overthrow of the dictator, which they saw simply as a U.S. "regime change" operation, not a successful Libyan revolt. For example, Phyllis Bennis wrote an article in *Fortune* magazine (December 8, 2017) titled "How America Bears Responsibility for Libya's Slave Auctions." Bennis, after acknowledging that slavery's origins in many parts of the world "go back centuries," refers to "a new system of slavery," declaring that "the emergence of slave auctions in Libya has a more immediate basis as well: a catastrophic Western military intervention."[5]

The word "emergence" puts the lie to her statement. Her interest is in using slavery to attack those that overthrew Gaddafi, not in ending slavery in Libya. To do that, you have to start with the truth. And the truth is that this problem didn't just arise with the fall of Gaddafi; it is the remnants of a regime of slavery that he cultivated for 42 years before Libyans changed that regime. Now they can begin to change this system.

The Exploitation Was Systematic

Under the Gaddafi regime, the exploitation of the refugee and of migrant flows was systematic and organized by the state. A major study by Sara Hamood (2006) for the American University in Cairo noted, "There are indications that smugglers and police or prison guards may cooperate in order to make financial gains, both from receiving payments in exchange for the release of detainees and from facilitating further travel by illegal means within or outside the country."

As refugee accounts from Libya at the time show, this was something of an understatement. Habtom, a 28-year-old Eritrean man who arrived in Libya in June 2008, explained, "The police know everything that happens in Libya. They know what is going on with the boats. They get their own share of the money. The only problem comes when the police don't get their share of the money or too little of it. If the government didn't like [the migrant smuggling] they wouldn't do it." (HRW, 2009, 53)

That government was the product of 39 years of Gaddafi rule at that point. The Hamood report (61) gives this picture of business as usual, Libyan style:

A stark example of this alleged corruption was related by an Ethiopian man, Y.U., granted humanitarian status in Italy, who was detained on arrival in Kufra after having crossed the desert in 2002. After about one year of detention without charge or trial for illegal immigration, he was released and told that he should return to Sudan, where he had lived prior to traveling to Libya. He and a group of others were driven to the border with Sudan, and at the last minute the Libyan police offered to take them back with them to Kufra for a fee. Each man paid $300 and they were indeed taken back by the police to Kufra. On arrival in Kufra, the police themselves took them to a smuggler who could arrange for their travel to Benghazi.

HRW (2009, 55) gives us this story:

Aron, a 36-year-old Eritrean who was detained at the airport jail in Tripoli in 2007, said that the cost for a bribe was either $500 in cash or about $800 for a wire transfer. After he paid the bribe, Aron said that a policeman in uniform took him from the jail in the police car and put him on the street in Tripoli. He later made an appointment with the policeman and "gave him money to release my

friends." Aron said, "It's a rotating business. They take people out in the city, get money, and replace the prisoners with other Africans."

HRW also tells us (53-54) the story of Tomas, a 24-year-old Eritrean, who was part of a group of 108 migrants who resisted boarding a clearly unseaworthy vessel in October 2006. Navy officials intervened on the side of the Libyan criminals to force them onto the boat:

Once I saw that boat, I knew I would die if I went on it. They forced two people on the boat and the rest of us began fighting them. Many military men came and caught us at the boat.

The smugglers had an agreement with the Navy forces to take our money. They put us directly into the Navy port office. The people who demanded money from us were wearing Navy uniforms. They had an athletic build. They were clearly Navy, not coast guard. A high-level Naval officer spoke to us.

What surprises me is that the person who told us he would take us to Italy is the same person who arrested us. The ones who arrested us were in civilian clothes. Those who said they were going to take us were in uniforms. But they all arrested us together.

Tomas concluded, "I think the smugglers were 100 percent connected to the police and the military. I saw the officers in uniform with stars on their shoulders talking to the transporters. And the drivers said, 'There is no problem,' when we saw the police or military. The smugglers also told us if we didn't pay them that we would go to prison."

Like other countries that have exploited migrant labor, Libya encouraged this immigrant flow. As Hamood notes (18), "At the same time, Libya ran an internal and external campaign situating Libya in the African domain and encouraging Africans to come to work in Libya, even by placing advertisements in daily African newspapers."

Gaddafi's Libya Refused to Recognize Refugees

The Gaddafi regime took the position that there were no legitimate asylum-seekers in Libya and refused to grant anyone refugee status. As HRW reported in 2010, "Libya is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention and has no asylum law or procedure. In April, Libyan Foreign Secretary Moussa Koussa said his country 'does not have any refugees but only illegal migrants who break the laws'" (HRW, 2010a, 19-20).

Trump would have loved that guy; this guy too: Brigadier General Mohamed Bashir Al Shabbani, the director of the Office of Immigration at the General People's Committee for Public Security, told HRW (2009, 10), "There are no refugees in Libya. They are people who sneak into the country illegally and they cannot be described as refugees. Anyone who enters the country without formal documents and permission is arrested."

We can glean Muammar Gaddafi's views from this report on his 2009 visit to Italy:

During his first visit to Italy, in June 2009, Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi said that the issue of asylum-seekers "is a widespread lie." He went on to say that Africans are "living in the desert, in the forests, having no identity at all, let alone a political identity. They feel that the North has all the wealth, the money, and so they try to reach it. … Millions of people are attracted by Europe, and are trying to get here. Do we really think that millions of people are asylum-seekers? It is really a laughable matter." (HRW, 2009, 10)

Libyan oil money fueled conflicts in Nigeria, Chad, Niger, and Darfur that many of the refugees were

fleeing (Claiborne, 2011). Commenting on Gaddafi's EU visit, Ethiopian author, poet, and journalist Hama Tuma (2010) wrote,

Over the years Libya has been accused of racism and of officially provoking the beating and killing of African migrants. Gaddafi's pan-African pretensions have always appeared shoddy and hollow as a consequence, and his recent statement in Europe—calling Africans ignorant and barbarian invaders—has nailed his coffin as an Arab racist.

For Gaddafi, the really big money to be made off the African migrants was the millions he got, some say extorted, from the European Union (EU) for all that he was doing to suppress that migration. That was what he was selling in Italy.[6] When he spoke to Italian senators in June 2009, he told them that the money he was already getting wasn't enough, saying, "Many billions of euros are needed to stem the flows of immigrants into the Mediterranean."[7] The BBC reported on his August 2010 visit, "Libyan leader Col. Muammar Gaddafi says the EU should pay Libya at least 5 billion euros (£4 billion; $6.3 billion) a year to stop illegal African immigration and avoid a 'black Europe.' Speaking on a visit to Italy, Col. Gaddafi said Europe 'could turn into Africa,' as 'there are millions of Africans who want to come in.'"[8]

Needless to say, the millions of euros[9] paid to Libya went straight into bank accounts controlled by Gaddafi with no accountability.

Human Rights Abuses of Migrants in Gaddafi's Libya

In 2004 HRW reported,

Libya's recent immigration "reforms," introduced by Colonel Muammar Gadaffi, apparently after overtures from Italian Premier Silvio Berlusconi, resemble a catalogue of human rights abuses against migrants and asylum-seekers. African internees and migrants in Libya are being detained in what one [member of the European Parliament] has described as "catastrophic conditions." And Libya continues forcibly to deport Eritrean refugees to Eritrea, where they face arrest, illegal detention and torture.

The Hamood report simply stated (5), "In Libya, refugees and asylum-seekers are not afforded adequate protection due to unclear policies regulating their stay in the country and to a lack of recognition of the specific legal status of refugees."

The UN Human Rights Council's 2010 review of Libya's record found that Libya "does not have a law on asylum-seekers and refugees"; that "Libyan women married to non-Libyan nationals are not granted equal rights with respect to the nationality of their children"; that personal status laws "do not provide for equal rights for women and men"; that there was a "discrepancy between the State's assessment, according to which Libyan society is ethnically homogenous, and information indicating that Amazigh, Tuareg, and Black African populations live in the country"; that there was an "absence of legislation prohibiting racial discrimination" and inadequate information "to guarantee that migrant workers are treated on a non-discriminatory basis"; and that Libyan laws prohibited "the use of languages other than Arabic or the registration of non-Arabic names for newborn children." (UNHRC, 2010b)

The U.S. State Department country report on Libya in February 2001 stated,

The government discriminates against and represses certain minorities and tribal groups. The government continues to repress banned Islamic groups and exercises tight control over ethnic and tribal minorities, such as Amazighs (Berbers), Tuaregs, and Warfalla tribe members. The

government restricts basic worker rights, uses forced labor, and discriminates against foreign workers. There have been reports of slavery and trafficking in persons.

Hamood reported (22) that the Gaddafi regime used the immigration issue to promote racism in a way that is becoming increasingly familiar to Americans:

However, statements by Libyan officials reported in the media more regularly describe the phenomenon of illegal immigration in negative terms, describing it as an "invasion" (AFP, August 9, 2004) and recalling the heavy price Libya has paid for the rise in immigration, especially after the increase in smuggling activities. Migrants are often presented as causing wide-ranging problems in Libya related to health, cultural norms, social relations, and the economic situation. They are also portrayed as bringing about a degradation in the security situation. Thus, they are said to be at the heart of the rise in criminality, the spread of disease (particularly HIV/AIDs), the decline in morality, the economic downturn (brought about by the abundance of cheap labor), and even to be linked to "terrorism."

And Hamood noted (37) that these policies had results: "On 21 July 2004, 110 Eritrean nationals were returned from Libya to Eritrea, where they were at risk of torture. On arrival, they were arrested and reportedly held in incommunicado detention—that is without access to the outside world—in a secret prison. … Until today, there is no news of their fate and whereabouts."

Migrant Detention Was Brutal in Gaddafi's Libya

The detained immigrants and refugees were imprisoned under squalid conditions and regularly beaten as more monetary demands were made of them. Tomas, the Eritrean mentioned earlier, recounted an experience he had while he was being held at Jawazat Prison in 2006:

One day we were singing songs. The guards came and said, "Who is making this noise?" The others said, "The Christians." (HRW, 2009, 81)

Migrants were subjected to very long periods of imprisonment in Gaddafi's Libya. A diplomatic source in Libya told HRW (2009, 74) that migrants could be detained "from a few weeks to twenty years."

Amina, a 19-year-old Somali woman, spoke about her experience in Kufra: "They held us for ransom. They hit me and the others too. They hit us with a special stick for hitting people. Every time the smuggler guard entered the room he beat us. He said that we needed to pay them money." (HRW, 2009, 59)

In late 2004, the European Commission interviewed some immigrant detainees in Libya and reported on the lack of due process they were receiving: "Throughout this period of detention, they had no access to a lawyer, nor were they presented before a judicial authority. In addition, no trial took place to establish their guilt or innocence, so far as they were aware" (Hamood, 31).

Instead of due process, beatings and torture were regularly used to resolve cases, as AI explained in 2004 (32):

From the testimonies collected by Amnesty International, it appears that if a detainee "confesses" quickly, they are usually subjected to light beatings or other forms of ill treatment. However, if a detainee refuses to "confess," torture is used in order to extract a "confession." The most frequently reported techniques are beatings with electric cables, beatings on the soles of the feet (falaqa), the use of electric shocks, and being suspended from a height by the arms.

Slavery, called “an obligation to perform labor,” was also a feature of Gaddafi’s detention system.

The 2001 State Department report stated,

In its report this year, the Committee of Experts of the International Labor Organization (ILO) stated that in Libya “persons expressing certain political views or views ideologically opposed to the established political, social, or economic system may be punished with penalties of imprisonment,” including “an obligation to perform labor.” The ILO report also noted that public employees may be sentenced to compulsory labor “as a punishment for breaches of labor discipline or for participation in strikes, even in services whose interruption would not endanger the life, personal safety, or health of the whole or part of the population.”

There have been credible reports that the government arbitrarily has forced some foreign workers into involuntary military service or has coerced them into performing subversive activities against their own countries. Libyans, despite the Penal Code’s prohibition on slavery, have been implicated in the purchase of Sudanese slaves, mainly southern Sudanese women and children, who were captured by Sudanese government troops in the ongoing civil war in Sudan.

The Hamood report (32-33) had this to say about the racist treatment African migrants received while in detention in Gaddafi’s Libya:

Both men and women reported being regularly insulted by guards who used racist remarks. …

A Sudanese man, A.K., reported being detained in al-Janzur Prison, near Tripoli, in 1996 for two days, during which time he, and more than forty other Sudanese arrested alongside him, were made to roll around in dirty water until they became dizzy and immediately forced to stand and run for short distances from wall to wall, causing some to fall to the ground. They also had dirty water poured on their heads.

An Eritrean man, B.G., granted humanitarian status in Italy in November 2004, also related having to roll around in dirty water, as well as being forced to stand in the burning sun for long periods of time. He was detained for one month in late 2002/early 2003. …

D.G., an Eritrean asylum-seeker in Italy, was detained in 2003 for six months in four different locations. He described regular evening beatings and on one occasion being burned with a cigarette butt on his leg. He recalls the horrific experience of seeing a newly arrived inmate, a Chadian, being struck on the head with an iron stick which caused him to fall to the ground. The guards reportedly ignored the fall and continued to beat others. The Chadian detainee died shortly afterwards in the presence of D.G. and the guards. …

As documented by Amnesty International, “the practice of unlawful detention after completion of sentence seems to be widespread.”

In 2004 AI reported (24) on seven Eritrean refugees detained in Libya:

For some 18 months of arbitrary detention, the seven men lived in fear of being deported to Eritrea, where they would be at risk of serious human rights violations. They have been moved to several different prisons. In two separate instances, the men described being beaten with sticks; … Michael Yemane Tekle said that he was particularly badly injured on the second occasion and lost consciousness after being hit over the head with a truncheon. … The men told Amnesty International, “We just want to get out of detention. We have seen here in prison what we never saw in our country.”

The most notorious killing in Gaddafi's prison system took place in 1996, although the regime denied it until 2004. It was mentioned in the 2010 report of the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC, 2010a, 4), which summarized relevant human rights reports:

Libyan authorities had failed to adequately address the killings of up to 1,200 prisoners in the Abu Salim Prison, in June 1996. Most killings occurred the day after a riot took place sparked by appalling prison conditions as well as the denial of medical treatment and family visits. Official recognition of the facts came only eight years later, when the Libyan leadership acknowledged in February 2004 that killings did take place.

It should be added that in those eight years, while Gaddafi regime officials continued to deny family visits to the murdered prisoners, they continued accepting family payments into the dead prisoner's welfare fund.

The Abu Salim Prison massacre was far from the only one. It was just the most famous. Abukar, a 25-year-old Somali, was interviewed about a shooting at Ganfuda, a migrant detention center outside of Benghazi, where he had been held for more than a year. First, he spoke about their treatment: "The guards just keep us locked up here. They humiliate us. They beat us. If we talk to them, they punish us very hard. They hurt us with electricity." Then on August 10, 2009, "a group of Somalis and Nigerians saw the external gate was open and tried to escape. The guards opened fire on them. There were around thirty guards, but five did the shooting. I could see most of my friends were injured, and some fell to the ground" (HRW, 2009, 91).

Somali news sources reported twenty detainees had been shot and killed; Mareeg news website reported on it from Mogadishu: "At least twenty Somalis have been confirmed dead and fifty wounded in Bangazi town in Libya. The Libyan soldiers reportedly used knives and electric machines for torturing the Somali prisoners."[10]

And, of course, sexual abuse in detention was pervasive. A twenty-year-old Somali man told HRW about a "special house" outside of Tripoli where migrants were held and where women were raped. Daniel, a 26-year-old Eritrean man, was also held in a smuggler's house in Tripoli where women were preyed upon. He was also detained in Misrata, where, he reported, "Every night the guards took women for their pleasure." It was even worse in Kufra, where "all feared that they would be left in the desert to die." Berihu, a 32-year-old Eritrean man, saw women taken away (HRW, 2009, 60, 61, 83-84, 78).

Route 666—the Migrant Ping-pong Path Through Libya

Sub-Saharan Africans trying to go north for a better life, or to escape war, followed a well-traveled route that usually started with paying a smuggler to bring them across the Sahara and the Libyan border to Kurfa. This account from the 2009 HRW report (64) is typical:

The smugglers were drug addicts. They didn't bring spare parts for the vehicle. We were left stranded in the desert with no food or water. The original agreement was to pay them $250 to go from Khartoum to Kufra. But in the middle of the desert the Sudanese turned us over to the Libyans, and they told us we had to pay another $300 or they would abandon us in the Sahara before we reached Libya. About 75 percent of us were able to pay. We paid for the other 25 percent, so no one was left.

Once in Kufra, they had to try to find transport to the coast while avoiding arrest and detention in desert outposts. Hamood (61) reports on an interview with B.M., an Eritrean man, about this leg of his journey:

On release from seven months' detention in Kufra in 2004, he explained, he was met by two officials, whom he understood to be the governor of Kufra and the director of the prison. They asked him how he had traveled to Libya, and he replied that he had come by means of a smuggler. The officials went on to offer to organize to take him and a group of 127 Ethiopians, who were released at the same time, to Benghazi for a fee of $200 per person. When the detainees said that they did not have the money to pay such a fee, they were transferred some 5 km into the desert to a detention camp and threatened with being abandoned there if they did not pay the money. After the detainees insisted that they did not have money, the officials suggested that they use the "hawala" system [an appeal to loved ones back home for money]. The detainees agreed and were taken to a farm, apparently owned by a police officer, while they waited for the money to arrive. Those who had money were released immediately, and once each group of twenty or so had paid their fee, they were sent with a smuggler in a pick-up truck to Benghazi. B.M.'s money arrived after a couple of days and he too was smuggled to Benghazi for $200.

By forcing immigrants to use the "hawala" system to save their lives, Gaddafi's oil-rich Libya was able to extort money, not only from the intrepid traveler, but also from the whole of impoverished sub-Saharan Africa.

If immigrants made it to one of the seaside cities, Tripoli, Misrata, Sirte, or Benghazi, they had to live like refugees no matter their legal status. That meant finding a boat out of there while avoiding arrest and living under conditions of complete illegality. Since both transport and living cost money, and as one fictitious refugee in North Africa famously said, "it was much more than we thought to get here,"[11] they probably also needed to find work while they waited and hid from the police. HRW (2009, 14) summarized its interviewees: "They said they feared being robbed, beaten, and extorted not only by common criminals, but also by the police. Many told HRW that they even feared children on the street, who often threw stones at them."

The Hamood report (40) gave additional details:

Typical examples of the problems mentioned by respondents from Sudan and the Horn of Africa are: Libyan youth throwing stones at them or hitting, spitting, or insulting them, often shouting "abeed" (meaning "slave" in Arabic). Both men and women described facing such harassment when walking in the street or taking public transport.

In 2000 *The Economist* reported that, "Black-bashing has become a popular afternoon sport for Libya's unemployed youths" (*The Economist,* 2000). The Hamood report (41) noted that migrants also faced racist treatment from the police and other Libyan government agencies:

When relating the problems they faced from Libyan society, interviewees regularly described what they saw as a massive disparity between the treatment by police and other state officials of foreigners, particularly sub-Saharan Africans, and that of Libyan nationals. Those interviewed felt that they had no recourse to the police, who would never take action against a Libyan in the case of a dispute between a Libyan and a "black African."

Hamood added for clarification, "When probed, respondents using the term 'foreigners' explained that they specifically meant 'Blacks.'"

According to HRW (2009, 58),

Being mugged is a common experience for migrants, particularly for sub-Saharan Africans, in Tripoli and other cities, as is having children throw stones at them. Ermi, a 25-year-old Eritrean, expressed experiences and feelings shared by other migrants in interviews: "Even children took money from

me. Libyans could beat me and I couldn't defend myself. Even their parents didn't stop them. The police back them up. Most of them don't know that we are human beings."

F.H., a Somali refugee interviewed in Egypt, told Hamood (40), "Libyans have a separate plate for their black servant and they refuse to eat from it after it has been used by them, they might even throw it away."

Such racist attitudes among the Arab population led to pogroms in Gaddafi's Libya. Hamood (40) reported on one occurrence:

The potential for this racism to have dangerous and even fatal consequences was borne out in 2000, when racist attacks against sub-Saharan Africans led to dozens of deaths and scores of injuries. Disturbances in Tripoli and neighboring al-Zawiyah soon spread to other parts of the country. Many sub-Saharan Africans found themselves homeless after their homes were burned and looted, forcing them to move to camps, "where on occasion members of the security forces failed to protect them from further attack. On at least one occasion, there were allegations of police involvement in the attacks." The attacks were followed by a wave of large-scale repatriations. In 2001 two Libyans, a Ghanaian, and four Nigerians were sentenced to death in connection with the attacks.

The October 12, 2000, report in *The Economist* provided additional detail:

Planeloads of bodies, dead and alive, flew back to West Africa from Tripoli this week, after Libya's worst outbreak of anti-foreigner violence since the expulsion of Italians and Jews in Muammar Gaddafi's coup in 1969. Survivors told of pogroms.

Emeka Nwanko, a 26-year-old Nigerian welder, was one of hundreds of thousands of black victims of the Libyan mob. He fled as gangs trashed his workshop. His friend was blinded, as Libyan gangs wielding machetes roamed the African townships. Bodies were hacked and dumped on motorways. A Chadian diplomat was lynched and Niger's embassy put to the torch. Some Nigerians attacked their own embassy after it refused refuge to nationals without proper papers—the vast majority.

Libyans sheltering Africans were warned that their homes would be next. Some of Libya's indigenous one million black citizens were mistaken for migrants, and dragged from taxis. In parts of Benghazi, blacks were barred from public transport and hospitals. Pitched battles erupted in Zawiya, a town near Tripoli that is ringed with migrant shantytowns. Diplomats said that at least 150 people were killed, 16 of them Libyans. The all-powerful security forces intervened by shooting into the air. …

Over the past fortnight, hundreds of thousands of black migrants have been herded into trucks and buses, driven in convoy towards the border with Niger and Chad, 1,600 km (1,000 miles) south of Tripoli, and dumped in the desert.

Europe didn't have a problem with hundreds of thousands of Africans left by Gaddafi in the desert to die. There was no outcry, and U.S. members of the white left, from Cynthia McKinney[12] to Dennis Kucinich,[13] continued to sing Gaddafi's praises. The migrants certainly couldn't call on the police for protection. There were no sanctuary cities in Gaddafi's Libya. Now, in Trump's America, illegal immigrants who have spent the better part of their lives in the United States may find themselves detained at any time. This was always the case in Gaddafi's Libya, where they might be detained for years, beaten, tortured, and sold into slavery or left to die in the desert. A European Commission team commented, "The detainees did not understand the reasons for their detention since many had already spent years in Libya, mostly working and establishing themselves on a temporary basis in the fringes of any process allowing legal residence." (Hamood, 31)

Maybe the reason for their detention was to squeeze them dry of what little they had accumulated by working and trying to establish themselves. However, even when they were lucky enough to find work as illegal immigrants, that didn't necessarily mean they would get paid for it, as the Hamood report (41) related:

The two most common problems faced were related to thefts, especially by Libyan youth, and not being paid their salary after having completed their work. M.A.A., a Somali refugee in Egypt, said, "Somalis prefer not working in Libya because they know they will be beaten and humiliated." M., a Darfurian asylum-seeker in Italy, elaborated further with a somewhat typical response, "Many people work and do not receive their salary at the end. If you ask for your money, they beat you and the police do nothing to help."

The Return Route: Failed Boat Crossings Meant Death or Detention

When migrants did find transport, they were likely to pay a premium for travel on a safe ship, only to later be forced onto a flimsy raft at gunpoint, with beatings. Then the motor would likely die in the first hours of the voyage, leaving them adrift. That's what happened to Daniel, the 26-year-old Eritrean:

The smugglers beat us with a stick to get us to board the boat. They crammed 264 of us onto the boat. There were pregnant women, babies, children. The captain of the boat said there were too many, but the smugglers wouldn't listen. After ten hours, the motor broke. We had no food or water. We drifted for five days. … We were waiting to die. (HRW, 2009, 38)

The group got "lucky" and were found by a coast guard boat from Malta, which towed them back to Libya:

When we arrived, there were no doctors, nothing to help, just military police. They started punching us. They said, "You think you want to go to Italy." They were mocking us. We were thirsty, and they were hitting us with sticks and kicking us. For about one hour they beat everyone who was on the boat. Then they put us in a closed truck with only two little windows, not enough air to breathe. There was no food or water on the truck. It was 40 degrees centigrade outside but it felt like 80 degrees inside the truck. I thought we would all die inside the truck, but somehow we all survived. They first took us to Al Fellah Prison, but it was full, so they took us to Misrata Prison. (HRW, 2009, 39)

In a way, Daniel's boat really was lucky. If Gaddafi's Libyan Navy had found it, it might have been fired upon with live ammunition.

In 2010, for example, a Libyan patrol boat with Italian officers aboard opened fire on an Italian fishing trawler. Since Gaddafi had long been working with Berlusconi to suppress the refugee flow, they were both quick to patch things up, with the Italian interior minister explaining, "Perhaps [the Libyans] mistook the fishing boat for a boat with illegal migrants." Apparently, that was okay with the Italians, so they were willing to excuse it on that basis (HRW, 2010b). (It wasn't just refugees at sea who were met with lethal force: "West Africans describe similar problems when they enter Libya's southwestern frontier. Migrants said that border police would shoot at them" [HRW, 2009, 64])

If the Italian Navy found an immigrant boat, it might not be fired upon, but it would be returned to Libyan custody where the beatings would begin again. As HRW (2010b) reported, "Italy and Libya patrol waters near their borders to interdict boat migrants and return them summarily to Libya without screening … to identify refugees, the sick or injured, pregnant women, unaccompanied

children, victims of trafficking, or victims of violence against women."

Some of the migrant boats sank on the way to Europe, and, if they were lucky enough to be rescued, the passengers were brought back to Libya and imprisoned. This is what happened to Abdi Hassan, a 23-year-old Somali. He was imprisoned in Zleitan after the boat he was on sank and he was rescued. He described his release on July 7, 2008:

The head of the prison used me to translate an announcement to all the prisoners. He said, "It's time for business. Everyone has to pay us $1,000 for rescuing them at sea. Those who pay will be sent to the smugglers to help them go to Europe." Most of us paid the money. We were all released and taken by police car to the Abu Salim neighborhood and put at the door of the smuggler's house, back where we had started before our boat sank. (HRW, 2009, 88)

That was how the cycle was made to repeat itself until Gaddafi's Libya had squeezed the last dollar the poor immigrant had or could raise from the folks back home.

The Return Route—Deportation Back to Kufra

After varying periods of imprisonment and abuse in the coastal region, in which more money was extorted from them, they were likely to be transported back to Kufra for deportation from Libya. HRW (2010c) told of the aftermath of an immigrant prison protest:

Detainees told Human Rights Watch that Libyan guards severely beat them in the confrontation in Misrata, as well as on the way to al-Biraq; some were taken from Misrata to hospitals, while others arrived at al-Biraq with broken limbs. The detainees said they were given no food or water during the journey and no medical attention in al-Biraq. They also said that Libyan guards told them they would be deported to Eritrea.

Then as now, deportation to Eritrea meant "imminent torture or death at the hands of the brutal, dictatorial regime that rules Eritrea."14 The truck journeys themselves were "extremely dangerous and degrading. Migrants told HRW about being crammed into closed vehicles with almost no air. They would remain standing for a two-day journey, not allowed out even to urinate and defecate." (HRW, 2009, 71)

Being trucked to Kufra for deportation didn't necessarily mean that the migrants would get there. Very likely they would be released short of Kufra to traffickers who would take them back to Tripoli if they could pay, or leave them in the desert if they couldn't. "Libyan authorities in the coastal area put migrants (particularly from the Horn of Africa) in trucks and send them to Kufra purportedly to deport them across the land border with Sudan, but often they are not actually deported, rather simply left in the Libyan desert" (HRW, 2009, 70).

Tomas, the 24-year-old Eritrean we met above, was sent to Kufra after his failed boat attempt and a two-month stay in Jawazat Prison in Tripoli. He continues his story:

After two months, they put us with another group of Eritreans—150 people in all. They put us in a big truck packed with people. There wasn't room for anyone to sit down. … The only air was from some open holes in the roof of the truck; otherwise it was completely closed. The truck drove us from Tripoli to Kufra. We started at 6 am and traveled all day and all the next night. The truck was closed the entire trip. There were cracks in the floor and people urinated on the floor, but my eyes were in pain from the smell.

We begged for air. The truck would stop for the drivers to take a break and eat, but they would not open the door for us. They were afraid we would run away. The worst was when we arrived in Kufra.

At least the air circulated when we were moving. In Kufra, we stopped for two hours in 45 degree [Celsius] weather and we could hardly breathe. The truck was made of metal. They kept us in there for two hours as punishment because we were shouting during the journey. God is great; we all survived.

When they let us out of the truck, we were in Kufra prison. We spent one week there. They fed us food only once a day; rice only. Ramadan was over. I had already experienced two months of hunger in prison. We were now 800 prisoners crowded in different rooms. We slept on pieces of cardboard. There were no mattresses. It was dirty. The guards had no communication with us. They just opened and closed the doors.

Kufra is the border place for deportation. They just let you go from there because there is no place to go. There are always three nationalities there: Sudanese, Eritreans, and Ethiopians. They cast you back to your country at Kufra. They don't actually take you to the border; they just let you go.

But the smugglers have an agreement with the prison commander. When they let us go, we are ready for market. The drivers wait for us outside the Kufra prison and make deals to take us to Tripoli. The drivers say that they have paid money to get us out of prison. They then take us out of the city to a place in the open bush.

The drivers told us we had to pay them money since they had paid to get us released from prison. We had either to pay the 40-dinar bribe to get us out of prison or $400 to get to Tripoli. The only way to do that is to call your family to have them send money. My family sent money and I went back to Tripoli. (HRW, 2009, 72-73)

The 2009 HRW report (14-15) described how a truck ride to Kufra, ostensibly for deportation, was turned into a way of recycling the poor immigrant through Libya again to squeeze more money out of him or her:

Libya trucks migrants from the coastal areas to its land borders to deport them. Migrants from the Horn of Africa, including Somalia and Eritrea, are sent by truck to Kufra in Libya's remote southeastern corner to be deported into Sudan. In some cases, however, they are not actually deported. Instead, according to testimony from migrants, they are left in the desert within Libyan territory. In practice, this means that such migrants have no choice but to put their lives in the hands, once again, of the smugglers who brought them from Kufra to Benghazi or Tripoli in the first place, usually abusing them along the way.

Sub-Saharan migrants sent to Kufra for "deportation" were turned over to the human traffickers or simply left to die in the desert, depending on whether they can still pay or not. Many saw the bodies of migrants who had been left in the desert to perish. Madihah, a 24-year-old Eritrean woman, was left in the desert by smugglers and saw what happened to others who had been similarly abandoned: "I walked to Libya after being dropped in the desert. I saw the bodies of Eritreans and their ID cards there in the desert—two ladies and a boy who looked Eritrean. It took 24 days to get through the desert" (HRW, 2009, 64).

The Bounce—from Kurfa Back to the Coast

If they could pay, the cycle repeated until they reached Europe or died trying. Ghedi, a 29-year-old Somali, described how he had to bargain for his release from Kufra detention center in April 2008: "The first time I paid $300 and was not released. Then I paid another $500 and was released. It was at night. The smugglers and the police—or the army—were the same. They were all the same" (HRW, 2009, 76). As HRW summarized the pattern in its 2009 report (72),

Although the authorities transport migrants to Kufra for the supposed purpose of expelling them overland to Egypt or Sudan, in fact the Kufra authorities sometimes do not actually take them to the border but rather leave them in the desert outside Kufra or make deals with smugglers who pick them up to start the process again.

For those few lucky enough to finally reach the "promised land" of Italy, this 2009 Reuters article, titled "'Modern slave' migrants toil in Italy's tomato fields," gives us an idea of what they could expect:

Every year thousands of immigrants, many from Africa, flock to the fields and orchards of southern Italy to scrape a living as seasonal workers picking grapes, olives, tomatoes and oranges. Broadly tolerated by authorities because of their role in the economy, they endure long hours of backbreaking work for as little as 15-20 euros ($22-$29) a day, and live in squalid makeshift camps without running water or electricity. …

"It's a feudal system like in the Middle Ages. These modern slaves are handy for the economy: you can exploit them and then get rid of them when you don't need them anymore," said Father Arcangelo Maira, a local priest trying to help the immigrants. … "They left their country and came here hoping to find an El Dorado, but they end up living in conditions that are often worse than what they had at home," said Benelli.[15]

Arab Supremacy Is the Child of White Supremacy

White supremacy developed out of the European practice of enslaving Africans in the Western Hemisphere.[16] Arab supremacy is a derivative of white supremacy. It emerged relatively recently, in the wake of World War I and the fall of the Ottoman Empire. While historically the Arabs also enslaved Africans, the practice never played the critical economic role for them that it did for the Europeans who built empires with slaves. Far from providing the material basis for racist ideology, Arabs trafficked mainly in African women, who were prized for their beauty. They were sold into harems, where they were integrated into the culture and bore their master's children. This was not American-style racial slavery. Those children became full heirs to their fathers' names, legacies, and fortunes, no matter how dark they were. That is why African blood can be seen in almost every Arab face. The vile hatred for that African blood practiced by Muammar Gaddafi and the other Arab supremacists who supported him had a different genesis. It aped the customs and practices of the white racism that seemed to be doing so well as the 300-year-old Ottoman Empire was collapsing. As Jihan A. Mohammed put it, "The emergence of the Arab supremacy was a reaction to the Western powers, Western colonialism, and imperialism in the early twentieth century."[17]

Libyan Racism Under Gaddafi

Tomas, the 24-year-old Eritrean, remembers the racism as well as the abuse he experienced in Libya: "They called me 'nigger' as they beat me" (HRW, 2009, 89).

It is a fitting tribute to the fatherhood of white supremacy that these Arab speakers used an English word to insult these Africans. "Nigger" is a racial slur for Africans that developed in the United States in the 1700s along with slavery.[18] The Hamood report (29) noted the effects of this racism on African migrants:

For sub-Saharan Africans, there are additional difficulties faced from society at large, notably racism. Testimonies of some of the Egyptian respondents, as well as those of sub-Saharan Africans, describe a situation in which sub-Saharan Africans face greater difficulties both from state officials, such as police officers and prison guards, and from ordinary members of society by virtue of the

color of their skin.

For Hama Tuma (2010), the responsibility for these racist policies came straight from the top:

For all his claims to the contrary, Gaddafi has no respect for Africa or Africans. This is not just manifested by how very inhumanely he treats African workers and asylum-seekers, nor by his self-declaration as the King of All African tribes, but mainly by his deeply ingrained chauvinism and pretension to be an African Messiah. No wonder he refers to Africans as starved and ignorant and violates the rights of Black Africans in Libya.

In 2010 the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights compiled reports on Libya's human rights record, including on ethnic and racial discrimination in government policy. Some of these addressed the plight of the Berber, or Amazigh, people, who would later be among the strongest supporters of the revolution:

Some 10 percent of the Libyan population was estimated to be of Amazigh origin. Tens of thousands of Tuareg people migrated from Niger and Mali to the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya in search for jobs after the disastrous drought in the Sahel countries in the 1970s. But the Libyan government insisted on the Arab identity of the country and described claims of Amazigh identity as a colonial invention. Despite the fact that the Amazigh were the indigenous population of North Africa, on March 1, 2007, the Libyan leadership has publicly stated that no Berbers were living in North Africa. These remarks have caused an outcry among the Amazigh community in North Africa. STP [The Society for Threatened Peoples] reported that the president of the World Amazigh Congress wrote an open letter and protested against the denial of the existence of 30 million Amazigh in North Africa. Libyan Amazigh were facing ostracism, exclusion, and broad discrimination, stated the letter. (UNHRC, 2010a, 6)

The Toubou, too, faced awful conditions:

STP recalled that massive discrimination of the Toubou minority had been reported from the southeastern part of the country. Some 4,000 Toubou people are living in the town of Kufra, an oasis city of 44,000 inhabitants some 2,000 kilometres from Tripoli. In the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya, they were treated as foreigners by the authorities. In December 2007, the Libyan government withdrew citizenship from members of the Toubou group, stating that they were not Libyans but Chadians. Furthermore, the local authorities issued decrees barring Toubou from access to education and health care services. The armed movement Front for the Salvation of the Toubou Libyans has opposed these measures, and up to 33 people died in Kufra during five days of fighting between the official security forces and the Toubou in November 2008. (UNHRC, 2010a, 7)

A report for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace summarized events this way:

Throughout the late 1990s and into the 2000s, the Toubou in Kufra saw their livelihood decline precipitously, with the majority of Toubou confined to ghetto-like conditions in the districts of Swaydiya and Qaderfi. In 2007, Gaddafi withdrew Libyan nationality from many Toubou in Kufra, effectively depriving them of health care, housing, jobs, and education. In response, local Toubou formed the Front for the Salvation of Libyan Toubou; widespread rioting and protests ensued. In 2008, the regime suppressed a major Toubou uprising in Kufra, deploying helicopter gunships and tanks. (Wehrey, 2012)

In 2009-2010, the repression continued, including these examples of Israeli-style discrimination: "Since November 2009 dozens of families lost their homes due to forced destruction by bulldozers supervised by state security forces. Several dozens of Toubou were arrested because of their

opposition against the forced evictions." Moreover, "Libyan authorities refused to renew or extend passports to members of this minority. Several times parents were prevented from registering births of their children and denied birth certificates. According to STP, the Libyan government is responsible for a deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing in Kufra, which violates both Libyan and international law" (UNHRC, 2010a, 7).

White Supremacy and the Green Book

The Green Book is a 19,054 word "book" that Muammar Gaddafi published six years after his 1969 military coup. It sets out the philosophy and political structures of his "revolution." When asked to explain the Green Book, Professor Dirk Vandewalle of Dartmouth College said,

I must admit it's very difficult to understand, in part because it really is not a coherent thought if you compare it, for example, to "The Little Red Book" of Mao and so on, where you get at least a consistent argument. The Green Book contains really a set of aphorisms more than a completely thought-out, integrated philosophical statement.[19]

And yet, it was supposed to serve as the supreme law of the land. It has very little to say directly about black people, but what it does say panders to the racist mythology behind the so-called threat of "white genocide"[20] that so worries white supremacists. It is also right in line with Gaddafi's fear-mongering, anti-migrant sales pitch to the EU. Under the heading "Black People Will Prevail in the World," the Green Book declares,

The latest age of slavery has been the enslavement of Blacks by white people. The memory of this age will persist in the thinking of Black people until they have vindicated themselves.

This tragic and historic event, the resulting bitter feeling, and the yearning or the vindication of a whole race, constitute a psychological motivation of Black people to vengeance and triumph that cannot be disregarded. In addition, the inevitable cycle of social history, which includes the Yellow people's domination of the world when it marched from Asia, and the white people's carrying out a wide-ranging colonialist movement covering all the continents of the world, is now giving way to the re-emergence of Black people.

Black people are now in a very backward social situation, but such backwardness works to bring about their numerical superiority because their low standard of living has shielded them from methods of birth control and family planning. Also, their old social traditions place no limit on marriages, leading to their accelerated growth. The population of other races has decreased because of birth control, restrictions on marriage, and constant occupation in work, unlike the Blacks, who tend to be less obsessive about work in a climate which is continuously hot.[21]

Those 215 words are the sum total of what the Green Book has to say about black Africans in this North African country, although it does peddle its national chauvinism throughout the text with little tidbits like, "People are only harmonious with their own arts and heritage. They are not harmonious with the arts of others because of heredity."[22]

It's no wonder that today Muammar Gaddafi's words are featured on extremist websites like InfoWars,[23] Daily Stormer,[24] and Stop White Genocide.[25]

Conclusion

On February 17, 2011, a united majority of the Libyan people, including Arabs, Amazigh, Tuareg, and black Africans, rose up and put an end to the madness and oppression that was the 42-year

reign of Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. They received substantial help from NATO "allies" that had their own economic-crisis-driven reasons for insuring that the flow of Libya's light-sweet crude was not long interrupted, reasons that caused NATO countries to support Gaddafi's crackdown before they opposed it.

While the UN-authorized, NATO-implemented, no-fly zone stopped Gaddafi from doing to Libya what Bashar al-Assad has been allowed to do to Syria, the heavy lifting of defeating Gaddafi's armed repression, the fighting on the ground, was done by people's militias organized by the Libyans themselves. They succeeded in doing what no other "Arab Spring" revolt was able to do: They succeeded in completely smashing the dictatorial state machinery, including its instruments of violent repression!

Of course, overthrowing the government is just the first half of the revolutionary process. The process Libya is going through now, typically a ten-year process, is the one in which the people, hopefully, replace the dictatorship with something better. The future is not predestined, however. Ten years after their revolution, the French got Napoleon, and ten years after our revolution we were still hashing out the U.S. Constitution.

Post-Gaddafi Libya also faces some special problems. Gaddafi's unique style of "governance" left Libya with almost nothing like normal civil and government institutions. If you've gotten to this point in this essay, you know that is something of an understatement. Civil society has to be created virtually from scratch.

Generations of Libyans have no experience living outside of a police state and no tradition of carrying out ordinary civil functions like voting, joining civil discourse, or running for office. Generations grew up in an environment in which racism wasn't just tolerated, it was encouraged from the highest levels of law and government. They were also largely abandoned by the white Western left, which discredited communism with their counterfeit versions, failed to criticize Gaddafi when he was in power, didn't notice the revolt until NATO changed sides, and then threw their support behind the fascists because NATO came around to needing to be rid of Gaddafi fast.

Libya deserves criticism for practices of racism, slavery, and immigrant abuse that continue there today, but the left should not join the imperialists in propagating the counter-revolutionary mythology that these features are new to Libya or have gotten worse since Gaddafi was overthrown. Rather it must be recognized that his overthrow was but the first necessary step to correcting these ills. Libya is still trying to overcome Gaddafi's legacy, and those efforts should be supported, not denigrated, by progressive people around the world.

Footnotes

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