

Film Review

Libya, The Last Exodus

Documentary film directed by Ruggero Gabbai,
written by Ruggero Gabbai and David Meghnagi,
65 minutes, Italy 2017

Review by *Giordana Terracina**

The documentary entitled *Libya, the Last Exodus*, directed by Ruggero Gabbai and written together with Professor David Meghnagi who played a central role in its conception and production, as an author, interpreter, narrator and as backup for the stories told, was screened at the Kolno' Festival organized by the *Istituto Pitigliani* in Rome and dedicated to Israeli cinema. The screening will be held on the morning of the 23rd at the Pitigliani Institute and attended by students from two schools in Rome, the *Convitto Nazionale "Vittorio Emanuele II"* and the *Leonardo Da Vinci* in Maccarese.

The ongoing exchange between testimonies and historical footage sets the narration on two levels, which allows one to grasp the contradictions of remembrance. Memories become mixed with feelings of nostalgia that, on the one hand distort their meaning, and on the other makes them human. The story begins with a mention of the Jews arrival in Libya, a necessary passage for allowing viewers to better understand how the community's existence was deeply-rooted in the country, to then travel through the centuries to the moment of the 1967 expelled. The part of the film most developed, also thanks to witnesses, is the post-World War II period. It is here that the creation of concentration camps in Libya is addressed, as is deportation to Italy by the Axis forces present in the country until 1943. Distancing itself from the truth provided by documentation, the story returns us to an idealised reality. With an ever-increasing crescendo one follows the birth and development of Arab nationalism throughout the Middle East, the cause of the 1945 pogroms that resulted in the definitive driving out of Jews from Libya. This confirms that it was not the creation of the State of Israel that was at the origin of this hatred, but only a contributory cause of something

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that had matured over a very long historical period. Improved living standards, thanks to the discovery of oil fields in the region at the end of the war as shown in the film, allows one to understand how daily events could be concealed and appear in all their harshness only at a subconscious level in the form of dormant feelings of fear, providing Jews with an altered perception of an imminent danger.

The interviews, filmed in Israel and in Italy, allowed the authors to work with multiple forms of expression so as to allow the emergence of various cultural levels as further confirmation of the levelling that characterises anti-Semitism and different ways of assimilation in host societies. In Italy there has been a yet-to-be completed cultural transformation due to the introduction of new traditions and customs. Although living together, the Communities do not seem totally joined together, almost in a relationship of reciprocal diffidence after knowing each other for fifty years. It is only now that the painful destiny of this group of Jews is beginning to be discovered after decades during which it was largely hidden and repressed.

As emphasized by Meghnagi in the debate, it is certainly a story of great resilience, showing how it was possible to react to a tragic situation and create expectations of a better life for the new generations.