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**National Belonging and Everyday Nationhood in the Age of Globalization:  
An Account of Global Flows in Libya**

Alice Alunni

Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
to the School of Government and International Affairs at Durham University in 2020.

## **Declaration**

This thesis is the result of my own work. Material from the published or unpublished work of others which is used in the thesis is credited to the author in question in the text.

Name: Alice Alunni

Signature:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Alice Alunni", written on a light-colored rectangular background.

Date: 12 October 2020

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## **Abstract**

This research explores the relation between national belonging, everyday nationhood and globalization in Libya. These aspects have been largely neglected in the scholarship on Libya and particularly in the analyses concerning the 2011 uprising against the Gaddafi's regime and the civil war that followed. A review of the literature on nationalism and particularly nationalism in Libya, together with the author's direct observation of Libyan civil society in 2013 and 2014, suggested the need to explore these aspects by moving beyond classical approaches to nationalism studies.

This thesis proposes a theoretical framework that combines Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper's relational and processual approach to the study of nationalism with Arjun Appadurai's framework of 'global cultural flows' to understand the role of globalization in shaping everyday practices of nationhood and the individual's sense of belonging to a nation – that is nationness - in relation to nationalism as a political ideology and everyday phenomenon fostered by the Gaddafi's regime. Drawing on the grounded theory method and qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, the framework was applied to explore how globalization had an impact on the emergence and evolution of everyday practices of nationhood, shaping nationness and a national imaginary among a selected group of Libyan actors within the territory of the state, such as the political elite and the civil society, as well as transnational agents, such as individuals and groups in the diaspora.

While narrating the evolution of the global cultural flows in the twentieth century in Libya, the main focus of this study is on the change unleashed by the ICT revolution from the 1990s onwards and on how this and the flows of Libyan people in and out the country affected the way these groups imagined the nation in the twenty-first century and, in particular, before and in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution. I argue in this thesis that these changes can only be understood in relation to the control exerted by the Gaddafi's regime on the Libyan people. That control limited the communication between 'the national' and 'the global', restricting the flows. This led to a hegemonic narrative inside the country centred on Arab ethnicity, Islam and the anti-colonial resistance. Counter narratives were developed privately and in the diaspora unable to freely emerge into the public space until the 2000s. Libya's reintegration into the international community changed the spaces within which nationhood and nationness were defined and contested, bringing 'the national' and 'the global' closer, challenging the vision of a homogenous Libyan nation. In the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, the imagined 'Libyan nation' emerged as highly contested under the pressure of multiple subjectivities and practices of nationhood.

## Introduction

In the Spring of 2011, a series of uprisings swept the Middle East and North Africa. In Libya, the protests led to a civil war, foreign military intervention and the end of Muammar Gaddafi's regime. Scholars, analysts and commentators have analysed this unrest through multiple lenses but have largely overlooked the significance in these events of nationalism as an everyday political phenomenon that through multiple practices shapes the individual's sense of belonging to the nation. A few authors, such as al-Rahim and Collins, highlighted the national character of the uprisings in terms of language, political goals and the presence of symbols like national flags. They identified the uprisings as 'time-bubbles' of nationalism and postcolonial national revolts. They emphasized the centrality of nationalism as 'an intensely felt bond of solidarity' (Collins 2012: 384) and, additionally, a *de facto* operative framework for the pan-Islamist movements confronted with different national political contexts (al-Rahim 2011: 13). However, they did not investigate the nationalist language, the meaning and origins of those national symbols, nor how nationalism as a political ideology centred 'on the core principle of prioritising the nation by achieving a degree of national self-determination or preserving nation-state sovereignty' (Sutherland 2012: 7) evolved in these countries before and as a result of the uprisings. They also did not address the extent to which this has had an impact on the bonds of solidarity among people, or how this has shaped and reflected their sense of belonging in an age of rapidly accelerating and increasingly growing global connectivity.

This research explores the relation between national belonging, everyday nationhood and globalization in Libya. These aspects have been largely neglected in the scholarship on Libya and particularly in the analyses concerning the 2011 uprising against Gaddafi and the civil war that followed. Some authors have attempted to explain the post-2011 breakdown as the result of local and tribal rivalries, the Islamist-secularist divide or external influences. However, they did not question whether these events reflected a struggle over the main characteristics of the nation. A review of the literature on nationalism and particularly nationalism in Libya, together with the author's direct observation of Libyan civil society in 2013 and 2014, suggested the need to explore these aspects by moving beyond classical approaches to nationalism studies, asking the following research question: *How should we understand national belonging and nationhood in Libya in the age of globalization?*



To answer this question, this study developed a theoretical framework that combines Rogers Brubaker and Frederick Cooper's approach to the study of nationalism with Arjun Appadurai's framework of 'global cultural flows' to understand the role of globalization in shaping everyday practices of nationhood and the sense of belonging to a nation in relation to nationalism as a political ideology and everyday phenomenon fostered by the Gaddafi regime.

Brubaker and Cooper's relational and processual approach, based on Pierre Bourdieu's sociological vision (1985), helps to illuminate the use of the nation as a category of practice in everyday life (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Through this approach, *groupness*, the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded solidary group, is the main category of social analysis understood in its dynamic and active dimension as an ongoing and performed act rather than as stable, fixed and passive identity. In particular, '*nationness*' (Borneman 1992) refers to the individual's distinctive sense of belonging to a nation. The focus on agents and practices pursued by this approach allows the analyst to explore the interplay between two analytical perspectives. On the one hand, we unveil *nationalism* as a top-down ideology articulated by political and intellectual elites around a certain vision of the nation projected for political purposes such as gathering support against external entities or other states. On the other hand, the bottom-up '*everyday nationhood*' perspective emphasizes the role of individuals and ordinary citizens in reproducing and negotiating national frameworks and shaping the individual and collective sense of belonging to a nation.

Arjun Appadurai's framework of 'global cultural flows' or 'scapes' (1996) links together nationalism, diaspora, cultural processes and globalization to help us understand how 'the nation' crystallises in people's imagination. The 'scapes' are constructs that result from flows, mobilities and relations that are given shape and meaning by multiple agents and their historically situated imagination. These actors can be located within as well as outside the territory of the state. The flows of people, ideas, information, images, technologies and capital around the globe contribute to build and break new and old barriers, strengthening or challenging the individual's sense of belonging and identification (Appadurai 1996). While these flows are not recent phenomena, the concept of globalization describes their growing magnitude and intensity that connect states and societies in worldwide systems and networks, overcoming time and space constraints that characterized modernity. The 1960s and the 1970s have been described as the golden age of expanding political and economic interdependence, particularly among Western states. By the end

of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the consolidation of capitalism and the information revolution strengthened the belief in a world increasingly socially and economically interconnected and interdependent (Held and McGrew 2003: 3-4). ‘Time-space compression’ produced by instantaneous electronic communication reduces, when not eliminates, the constraints of space and time on social organisation and interaction (Held and McGrew 2003: 3). By applying the core concepts of Appadurai’s framework to Libya, this research will contribute to unveil the experience and enactment of globalization and the individuals’ sense of belonging, their aspirations and those of their communities as a result of that process in that particular case study.

In particular, this theoretical framework was applied to explore the process through which the nation is imagined and realised by a selected group of agents. The literature review on nationalism in Libya, together with the author’s direct observation of Libyan civil society, suggested the need to explore the agency of actors within the territory of the state, such as the *political elite* and *civil society*, as well as transnational agents, such as individuals and groups in the *diaspora*. The ability of these groups to maintain a sense of Libyan nationness through practices of everyday nationhood while establishing, and in some cases maintaining, global links through interactions inside and outside the country, makes them an interesting group of agents worthy of study.

The term political elite in this study is used to refer to the ‘political class’, those individuals who ‘exercise political power or influence, and are directly engaged in struggles for political leadership’ (Bottomore 1993:7). In particular, the study examined through secondary and documentary sources the nationalist ideology propagated by Muammar Gaddafi, as well as practices and ideas around the nation through the voices of members of the opposition to the Gaddafi regime who joined transitional institutions and political processes during and after the 2011 revolution.

The concept of civil society is deployed to explore ‘the zone of voluntary associative life, beyond family and clan affiliations but separate from the state and the market’ (Hawthorne 2004:5). This study considers the associational ecosystem made of civil society organizations (CSOs), activists, professional associations and freelance journalists that started to appear in Libya in the 2000s but only fully emerged after the 2011 revolution.

Lastly, the term diaspora is understood as a category of practice defined by three key factors: dispersal from an original ‘centre’ to two or more foreign regions, orientation of activities

towards a 'homeland', and self-awareness of group identity (Brubaker 2005: 6). Through this approach, the focus is on practices, claims and language of individuals who left Libya but continued to engage with political activities oriented at Libya against the regime, or with civil society organizations inside Libya before, during and in the aftermath of the events in 2011.

The overlap and fluidity of these three groups of agents suggested using these categories as broadly indicative of individuals engaging at different levels in the public space rather than as rigid units of analysis. Furthermore, while the thirty-nine research participants interviewed for this study represent the groups of agents defined above, they do not represent Libyan society at large. Nevertheless, their voices, combined with the analysis of social media pages and websites, provide new perspectives on practices of everyday nationhood among broader sections of Libyan society, questioning the static and homogenous image traditionally depicted, the way national belonging is understood, and suggesting future avenues of research.

In so doing, this thesis provides an empirical account that reveals the effects of globalization on the emergence and evolution of everyday practices that contributed to shape the sense of belonging and a national imaginary among some groups of the political elite, the civil society and the diaspora. While narrating the evolution of the global cultural flows in the twentieth century in Libya, the main focus of this study is on the change unleashed by the ICT revolution from the 1990s onwards and on how this and the flows of Libyan people in and out the country affected the way these groups imagined the nation in the twenty-first century, before and in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution.

In particular, this study will show how the increase in the flows of ideas and images between the diaspora and Libyans 'at home' through new technologies such as satellite TV and the Internet, resulted in a mutually reinforcing process of construction of a national 'social imaginary' (Calhoun 2017) that only fully emerged during and after the 2011 revolution. This was a watershed moment in the process of reproducing and constructing the Libyan national imaginary. A sudden acceleration and increase in the flows of people moving in and out of Libya, as well as within the country, resulted in an unprecedented exchange of ideas and images that were supported by a free media environment and particularly by the Internet. For the first time in post-independence Libyan history, civil society emerged as a space where people could express their sense of belonging and identification outside of state control. The national imaginary that had emerged in the 2000s came to the forefront of the public space. Old and new ideas, images and

practices came to life in the battlefield, street demonstrations and celebrations, political transitional processes, and civil society initiatives organised inside Libya, in the diaspora and in the virtual online space, thereby redefining nationness and practices of nationhood. A multicultural, pluralistic and inclusive vision of the nation, promoted by some in the diaspora and by the emerging civil society in Libya, challenged the homogenizing vision imposed by the regime and other exclusivist counter-narratives centred on Arab ethnicity and Islamism. The imagined 'Libyan nation' emerged as highly contested under the pressure of multiple subjectivities and practices of nationhood.

I argue in this thesis that these changes can only be understood in relation to the control exerted by the Gaddafi's regime on the Libyan people inside the country and to a certain extent in the diaspora. That control, although not total, limited the communication between 'the national' and 'the global', meaning that the flows were restricted. This led to a hegemonic narrative inside the country centred on Arab ethnicity, Islam and the anti-colonial resistance. Counter narratives were developed privately and in the diaspora but were unable to openly and freely emerge into the public space until the 2000s. Suddenly exposed to the forces of globalization in the early 2000s to an extent unprecedented, Libya's reintegration into the international community changed the spaces within which nationhood and nationness were defined and contested, bringing 'the national' and 'the global' closer, challenging the relationship between individuals, groups and the state and the vision of a homogenous Libyan nation. In the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, these multiple alternative visions emerged to the detriment of the sense of unity that had prevailed in Libya until that time.

To develop this argument, I divided the study into six chapters and a conclusion. The first chapter defines the main categories of social analysis – groupness, self-understanding and identification – and the approach to the study of nationalism developed through the review of the theoretical literature on nationalism and the empirical literature on nationalism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) and in Libya. This, together with a review of Arjun Appadurai's framework, helps us to understand the articulation and transmission of nationhood and nationness today. The theoretical framework suggests that to answer the research question we need to examine how the flows of people, ideas, capital, images and technology contributed to the development of practices, ideas and symbols around the nation.

The second chapter presents the methodological framework grounded on an interpretivist, inductive, and qualitative approach to social research informed by the grounded theory method (GTM) and based predominantly on qualitative methods of data collection – semi-structured interviews and analysis of social media and websites – and data analysis – content analysis of text and images, and discourse analysis of text. In particular, it is in this chapter that I provide an account of my direct observation of civil society in Libya and how it informed the research design, as well as a conceptualization of agency (political elite, civil society and diaspora) and space (national, global and virtual) that informed the empirical analysis. Throughout the analysis the focus is on two relationships: the one between the national and the global and the one between private sphere, civil society and state that evolve within the national, global and virtual spaces.

The second chapter also unpacks the qualitative methods of data collection and analysis, the thesis' limitations and considerations concerning ethics and language while explaining in detail the reasons for presenting the empirical material in the chosen structure. Indeed, although it may seem counter-intuitive, I did not choose to devise a structure based on Appadurai's framework, but rather I presented the empirical material around ideas of the nation and everyday practices in their traditional ethno-cultural and civic-political dimensions, highlighting through the narrative the relevance and interplay of flows in shaping those. Furthermore, having obtained new empirical material on the period of the Gaddafi regime, I included this material in Chapter Three and Chapter Four to provide an historical and contextual analysis of the role of the global cultural flows in contributing to reshape nationness and nationhood across twentieth century Libya and up to 2010.

Chapter Three starts by introducing key political and social features such as ethnicity, religion, tribalism and regionalism that have deep historical roots and continue to characterise the debate around the nation in Libya today. The chapter then focuses on the interplay among the flows of people, ideas, technologies, images and capital in the twentieth century, in so doing providing a historical background to the manifestations of national symbols, ideas and practices in the twenty-first century that are discussed in the following chapter. Furthermore, this account shows that, although already in the 1960s and 1970s, following the discovery and commercialization of oil in Libya, the country started to partake in the global economy, it was only in the 1990s that the ICT revolution initiated a period of change that challenged the existing order.

Chapter Four narrates these transformations. It starts by filling a gap in the literature exploring through new empirical material how nationalist ideology and everyday political, social

and cultural practices developed throughout the years of the Gaddafi regime both inside the country and among groups and individuals in the diaspora. The main argument here is that in the absence of a safe public space outside the regime's control, counter-narratives to the regime's homogenizing vision of the nation emerged both inside Libya and in the diaspora within the familial private sphere. These practices and the symbols associated with those only fully emerged in the 2000s when the Libyan opposition at home and in the diaspora started to partake in new information and communication technologies, mainly the Internet but also satellite TV, and through those found a new space of resistance and new tools to redefine their nationness and practices of nationhood. The 2011 revolution was a turning point in so far as it led to enhanced access to these technologies and greater freedom to use them.

Chapter Five and Chapter Six explore the evolution of nationness and nationhood through the accounts of the members of the post-revolutionary political elite, civil society and diaspora, exploring how they imagine and practise the nation after the 2011 revolution as a result of the global cultural flows. Chapter Five unveils the ethno-cultural dimension, that is the ethnic and cultural ties and attributes that are perceived as tying Libyans together after 2011. It is in this chapter that I explore kinship vis-à-vis other forms of groupness such as family, tribe, diaspora, ethnicity and the nation but also examine cultural identifiers and social behaviours related to language, traditions, social norms and religion. The 2011 revolution resulted in unprecedented opportunities to explore differences and similarities in Libya and among individuals in the diaspora. This challenged an understanding of Libyanness in its more traditional forms and led to questioning the membership to the Libyan nation of ethnic minorities, individuals in the diaspora and Islamists of different currents.

Chapter Six pursues a similar line of enquiry, this time with a focus on the civic-political dimension of the nation and the political ties that bind Libyans together. The attention here is on the historical past, its narratives and symbols, and the way this informed nationhood through everyday practices after 2011. The chapter unveils how historical narratives and symbols emerged and found expression during and after the revolution in everyday practices and performances, reinterpreting these narratives and symbols through an active social co-production that results in a process of affirmation of belonging to and identification with the nation. In particular, the free flows of people, ideas and images after the revolution challenged the interpretation of national

history opening the door to a process of redefinition of collective memory that left the civic-political dimension of the nation also contested.

The concluding chapter pulls together the threads of the study by summarizing the trends of continuity and change concerning the development of a national imaginary in its ethno-cultural and civic-political dimensions among some sections of the Libyan political elite, civil society and diaspora. It is through narratives, practices and symbols that the nation is represented, acted out and negotiated in an active process of collective social reproduction that sustains people's sense of belonging and identification to the nation in everyday life. It is that process that this empirical account unveils contributing to enhance our understanding of how nationness and nationhood are imagined and practised in today's world as a result of globalization.

# Chapter 1 Theoretical Framework

## 1. Introduction

Understanding the evolution of nationhood and nationness in Libya requires a definition of nationalism. This chapter will do so by identifying the relevant categories of social analysis and a suitable approach to the study of this subject against a review of the literature from a theoretical perspective and with a focus on the Middle East and North Africa region and on Libya in particular. I will argue that to make sense of nationalism today we need to investigate how nationalism as an ideology and an everyday social, political and cultural practice develops through the multiple agency of actors within the territory of the state. These actors, however, participate in and are affected by the global flows of people, ideas, images, capital and technologies whose intensity is unprecedented in the age of globalization (Appadurai 1996). People can travel physically, navigate the web and consume news via satellite television. These flows create transborder spaces, both physical and virtual, where ideas emerge from the agency of a multiplicity of transnational and extra-territorial actors coming together with the territorial ones. This chapter provides the analytical lenses to examine Libya as an interesting case of the global traffic of ideas of peoplehood and selfhood in a way that contributes to the evolution of nationhood and nationness in the twenty-first century.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the importance of framing the analysis of nationalism through categories of analysis that avoid the reification of groups (Bourdieu 1991). Following Brubaker and Cooper's relational and processual approach, groupness, self-understanding and identification are proposed as alternative categories of analysis to the essentializing category of identity most often encountered in analyses of nationalism (Brubaker and Cooper 2000). Through this approach, the focus is on agency and practices. The second section evaluates different approaches to the study of nationalism that combine and apply to an empirical analysis which contributes to making sense of the articulation and transmission of nationhood and nationness today. The third section illuminates how the reframing of this approach to nationalism addresses the limitations that characterized the study of this subject in the Middle East, and in Libya in particular, until more recently. A literature review sheds light on the limitations of the dominant approaches to nationalism studies and draws attention to the need to factor in the analysis the role of flows and transborder spaces in the creation of ideas of nationalism



and nations. The fourth section illustrates how Arjun Appadurai's framework of the global cultural flows can help make sense of nationalism in Libya today.

## **2. Nationalism reframed**

Most studies of nationalism begin with the question: what is the nation? This study purposefully avoids that question as it rejects the realism of the group or 'groupism'. Groupism is the 'tendency to take discrete, bounded groups as basic constituents of social life, chief protagonists of social conflicts, and fundamental units of social analysis' (Brubaker 2004: 8). This trend dominated many areas of sociology in the twentieth century, among them political sociology, and continues to inform most discussions about nationalism today. Rogers Brubaker observed in this respect: 'Countless discussions of nationhood and nationalism begin with the question: what is a nation? This question is not as theoretically innocent as it seems: the very terms in which it is framed presuppose the existence of the entity that is to be defined. The question itself reflects the realist, substantialist belief that "a nation" is a real entity of some kind, though perhaps one that is elusive and difficult to define' (Brubaker 1996: 14). Building on the sociological vision of Pierre Bourdieu (Bourdieu 1985; Brubaker 1985), Brubaker criticized the realist ontology of constructivist and 'groupist' approaches that tend to understand nations as communities, stable and real entities, substantial and enduring collectivities to which one can attribute interests and agency (Brubaker 1996; 2004: 8; 2006: 7).

This tendency has been only partially overcome in the academic scholarship in the last decade, less so in politics. For instance, the research agenda suggested by Eleanor Knott that was triggered by the 24th Annual Conference of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN) on the theme of *Nationalism and Belonging*, in 2014, encouraged exploring the mutually constitutive relationship between belonging and concepts of nation and nationalism based on Brubaker and Cooper's understanding of belonging in its dynamic and active dimension, as an ongoing and performed act rather than fixed and passive as identity and groups are often conceived (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Knott 2017: 223). The articles by Bo Stråth, William A. Callahan and Alain Dieckhoff that emerged out of keynote talks at the conference, challenged the idea of belonging as static group identity and membership (Stråth 2017; Callahan 2017; Dieckhoff 2017). In another example, the edited volume by Skey and Antonsich presented a synthesis of more recent studies centred on different approaches to the everyday nationhood perspective (Skey

and Antonsich 2017). That approach emphasizes the role of individuals in reproducing national frameworks and in negotiating the nation through practices in everyday life (Brubaker 2006; Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Thompson 2001; Skey 2009, 2014; Antonsich 2016). These studies challenge the idea of singular and homogenous nations by exploring macro-structural forces and micro-level expressions of nationhood through ordinary people engaging in daily routine practices (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 537).

And yet, the world of politics seems highly enmeshed in nationalist politics that takes on itself the task of representing the interests of nations, as the 2018 ASEN conference on the theme of *The New Nationalism: Populism, Authoritarianism and Anti-globalisation* highlighted (Halikiopoulou 2019; Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2019; Kaufmann 2019; Lubbers 2019; Wright 2019). From my personal experience, as I introduced on countless occasions the subject of my study to policy-makers, most of them questioned the existence of a stable and real Libyan nation and Libyan national identity but none of them questioned the realism of nations and national identities *per se*. In fact, in most discussions they even blamed the absence of a bounded, homogenous and enduring nation for the events that unfolded in Libya after the 2011 revolution.

What is the core of the problem with this essentialist treatment of nations? It is the very assumption that nations are real and enduring communities, although they may be socially constructed and with fluid, multiple or fragmented identities. As Bourdieu observed, the process of reification of nations is central to the nationalist discourse of politicians who in some circumstances can succeed in establishing the existence of nations as real groups that can be mobilized (Bourdieu 1991: 220-28). The nation is undoubtedly a category of practice, a category of self and other identification inherent in the practice of nationalist politics and in the way the modern state and the international system of states work. It is also a category of everyday social experience developed and deployed by ordinary social and political actors (Brubaker 1996: 15; Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Brubaker 2013). However, Brubaker argues, the analyst of nationalism must avoid assuming the nation to be a real community and avoid taking the nation as the main frame of reference at the cost of disregarding other frames, in other words taking the nation as a category of social analysis. On the contrary, she should account for the process of reification ‘through which the political fiction of the nation becomes momentarily yet powerfully realized in practice’ (Brubaker 1996: 16).

And yet, as Brubaker observes, the dominant debate in nationalism studies between primordialists, modernists and ethno-symbolists is centred on the search for the origins of the nation and the universal cause of nationalism that seems to imply the realism of the nation (Brubaker 1996: 14-15). Primordialists believe in the antiquity and naturalness of the nation and view nations as ‘givens’ (Geertz 1963) or natural entities with a lasting essence (Fullbrook 1999: 8). When arguing that nations precede modernity and are primarily determined by an ancient nationalist culture and by objective criteria – such as language, heritage, religion, customs, etc – primordialists define the nation as being based on an enduring and unchanging ethnic core. In so doing, they fail to take into account the transformations which take place in the intellectual and social process of imagination and somewhat invention of past memories, an aspect underlined by modernists, such as Hobsbawm, Anderson and Gellner who see the nation as a construct and distance themselves from the realist approach (Anderson 1991a; Gellner 1983; Hobsbawm 1990; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983). Contrary to the primordialist view, modernist authors consider the nation to be a modern phenomenon prompted by developments of the last two hundred years. These scholars focus on the idea that nations are ‘historically emergent constructions’ determined by different changing conditions in modernity (Flynn 2000: 22; Fullbrook 1999: 12). Following this approach nations can be defined as ‘social, political and cultural constructions, which may be collectively experienced and reproduced, or challenged, to greater or lesser extents’ (Fullbrook 1999: 5). Lastly, ethno-symbolists like Armstrong, Connor, Smith and Hutchinson engaged in an attempt to create a midway between modernists and primordialists uncovering the symbolic legacy which pre-modern ethnic identities might have for the modern nations, and emphasising the shared belief in common origins, the perception or symbolism of this belief rather than actual descent (Sutherland 2012: 53; Armstrong 1982; Özkırmılı 2000: 168; Smith 1998; Hutchinson 2001; Connor 1994). According to this approach, modernists neglected the tenacity of memories, myths, values and symbols for large strata of the population in today’s world (Özkırmılı 2000: 167). These authors believe that ethnicity determined today’s nations. Pre-existing myths, symbols, customs and memories are important antecedents in the reinterpretation of the past by today’s nationalists (Sutherland 2012, 28). By looking at the historical depth of the nation, and its pre-existing ethnic formations, one can better understand recent developments (Hearn 2006: 37).

This debate, however, fails to make sense of nationalism and its manifestations in today’s world, although noting the continued mobilizing power of ‘the invention of tradition’ around the

historical origins of nations to nationalist ideology (Hearn 2006: 7; Ichijo and Uzelac 2005; Sutherland 2012: 29). In order to escape these limitations, this study follows the approach by Brubaker and Cooper (2000) to the study of groups in processual and relational terms.

This approach postulates that rather than reinforcing the reification of ‘the nation’, the political analyst should account for the processes and mechanisms through which the nation crystallizes as a reality in people’s imagination through social and political practices of ordinary social actors who contribute to construct and reproduce ‘the nation’ (Brubaker 1996; Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 5). Avoiding essentialist connotations when talking about the ‘Libyan nation’ means to avoid assuming it as a homogenous and solidary reality, and reject the idea of ‘Libyans’ as an internally homogenous and externally bounded group, a unitary collective actor with a common purpose (Brubaker 2004: 8). Rather, one should allow for heterogeneity to emerge whether in the form of ethnic, religious, kinship, local or other forms of solidarity and ‘groupness’, looking at manifestations of nationalism and ethnicity as the contingent product of political, economic and cultural fields (Brubaker 1996). One ought to understand the processes, relations and dynamics that lead social and political actors to categorize oneself and others as Libyan; the categories of social, religious and political practice related to ethnicity, race, kinship and religion, for instance, used for that purpose; the ideology, narratives and claims over the nation of different political and social actors and their impact on social and political conflict.

Following this approach, Brubaker proposes the analysis of the political, social, cultural and psychological processes that engender nationalism as a political project, as an ideology, and in its everyday manifestations by focusing on: a) nationness, a word provided by Borneman to refer to a form of groupness, a subjectivity derived from lived experience, a variable property of groups and relationships, a contingent event – e.g. Libyanness, Arabness, Amazighness etc; b) nationhood as institutionalized political, social and cultural form, a practical cognitive and socio-political category (Brubaker 1996: 18; Borneman 1992: 19). To do this, we need to unpack the practical use of the category ‘nation’, the way it informs perceptions of the self and the other, how it structures thought and experience, discourse and political action (Brubaker 1996: 7). Brubaker suggests thinking of nations, races and ethnicities in terms of ‘practical categories, cultural idioms, cognitive schemas, discursive frames, organisational routines, institutional forms, political projects and contingent events’ and looking at the political, social, psychological and cultural processes behind those (Brubaker 2002: 167). Rejecting ‘group ontology’ and the essentialist

treatment of groups, the revisionists in social sciences ‘allow us to think of “the nation” as a process under continual re-construction constituted among the pressures of historical events including immigration and racial and ethnic contests for power or equality’ (Yans 2006: 125).

Groupness, self-understanding and identification are the categories of analysis chosen to explore the phenomenon of nationalism in this study instead of identity. The concept of identity acquired an hegemonic position in academic and popular discourse in the 1980s and 1990s in so doing becoming an inflated and misleading category of analysis (Brubaker and Cooper 2000; Malešević 2006: 31). Brubaker and Cooper suggested adopting less ambiguous categories of social analysis to describe the multitude of conflicting concepts and processes roughly described as identity (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

*Groupness* is described as the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded solidary group generated by commonality - shared common attributes (categories) – and connectedness – relational ties that link people (networks) – that allow for the emotional sense of belonging to that group or the felt difference from or antipathy to specified outsiders or other groups to emerge (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 19-20). Shared common attributes can provide the potential basis for groupness. They can be analysed following a top-down approach, focusing on the ways in which categories are ‘proposed, propagated, imposed, institutionalised, discursively articulated, organisationally entrenched and generally embedded in multifarious forms of “governmentality”’; but also following a bottom-up approach, studying the ‘ “micropolitics” of categories, the ways in which the categorised appropriate, internalise, subvert, evade or transform the categories that are imposed on them’ (Brubaker 2002: 170). Groupness can be explored by looking at the political, social, cultural and psychological processes through which categories are invested with groupness from above, and at the way people and organisations ‘do things’ with the categories from below. In other words, we should look at ‘the processes through which those categories become institutionalised and embedded in culturally powerful and symbolically resonant myths, memories and narratives’ (Brubaker 2002: 169). This means studying the politics of categories from above and from below and the way categories are used to make sense of problems and circumstances, to articulate and identify affinities, affiliations, commonalities and connections, frame stories and self-understanding (Brubaker 2006: 11-12). In this process, we do not assume groupness as constant, enduring and definite but rather understand it as variable and contingent, characterised by phases of extraordinary cohesion and moments of intensively felt solidarity that will not

necessarily persist in time. In fact, groupness may not happen at all despite the efforts of social and political actors (Brubaker 2004: 12).

Brubaker and Cooper point at three particular advantages in adopting the term groupness (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 10-21). First of all, the feeling of belonging together, while depending on different degrees and forms of commonality and connectedness, will also depend on factors such as events, public narratives and prevailing discursive frames which are important to build groupness and can be observed and analysed. Secondly, large scale collectivities such as nations do not necessarily need relational connectedness but rather when a diffuse self-understanding as a member of a particular nation crystallises into a sense of groupness, this depends on a powerfully imagined and strongly felt commonality (shared common attributes) rather than on relational connectedness. These attributes or categories and their use can be examined. Lastly, this term accounts for differences between strongly binding and vehemently felt groupness and loosely structured, weakly constraining forms of affinity and affiliation, giving nuance to what has been otherwise grouped within the concept of identity *tout court*. Using groupness as a category of social analysis can help to comprehend the social processes through which people understand and locate themselves, therefore the core foundational aspect of selfhood or the development of the kind of collective self-understanding and solidarity that can make collective action possible (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 17-21).

*Self-understanding* refers to ‘one’s sense of who one is, of one’s social location, and of how (given the first two) one is prepared to act’ (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 17). In Bourdieu’s words, the practical sense that people have of themselves and their social world (Bourdieu 1990). This term allows for the analysis of the social processes through which people understand and locate themselves without assuming an understanding of the self as homogenous, bounded and unitary. Self-understanding may be variable across time and persons but may also be stable (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 18-19). Self-understanding may be tacit in contrast to (self-) identification that suggests instead some form of discursive articulation.

Indeed, the concept of *identification* can help to analyse the active and processual side of what has been ambiguously defined as identity: ‘as a processual active term derived from a verb, the term identification helps to escape the reifying connotations of identity and invites us to specify the agents without presupposing that the process of identification, even when conducted by the state, will result in internal sameness, distinctiveness, bounded groupness that political

entrepreneurs may seek to achieve' (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 14). Identification draws attention to *agents*: the state but also non-state actors such as families, firms, schools, social movements and civil society organisations that are crucial to perform what the state, with its material and symbolic resources, create as categories of identification that are crucial in the everyday life of non-state actors. Identification evokes *processes* since it can occur through discourses or public narratives, but it can also be pervasive and influential without being accomplished by discrete specified persons or institutions, therefore, it can be both a bottom up and a top down process (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 15-17). By choosing the term identification, the focus is placed on those actions performed by multiple agents, concrete and tangible processes that can be examined.

The choice of these categories of social analysis has two important conceptual and theoretical implications. The first one concerns the definition of nation for practical purposes in the field and is addressed in this section. The second one relates to the focus on processes, agents and practices of nationhood and nationness and is discussed in the next section. First of all, how do we define the concept of nation when discussing it in the field with our research participants? As Brubaker suggests, we can avoid enquiring directly about or signalling a special interest in nationhood and nationness and rather observe how these concepts and related processes are lived in ordinary life (Brubaker 2006: 15). However, as discussed in the second chapter, the limited access to the field forced the author of this study to adopt a research strategy centred on interviews that combined a biographical approach, through which stories of ordinary social life could emerge, with direct questioning that would help illuminating the processes, practices and agents associated with the use of the category of nation in a more direct way. Therefore, defining the concept of nation with my interlocutors was necessary and helpful while trying to maintain a critical stance towards this category of practice and discussing its validity openly with the research participants.

As Hearn suggested, every definition of nation reflects the decision of the scholar to focus on one specific aspect of such a complex phenomenon (Hearn 2006: 5). The definition proposed by Peter Alter has been chosen because it includes two clear categories of factors, 'objective' and 'subjective' (Flynn 2000: 10-12), that are easy to operationalise in an empirical study that makes use of the categories of social analysis discussed above. Alter defined a nation as: 'a social group (and by this we mean a people or a section of a people) which, because of a variety of historically evolved relations of linguistic, cultural, religious or political nature, has become conscious of its coherence, unity and particular interests. It demands the right to self-determination or has already

achieved such through a nation-state' (Alter 1989: 17-18). The 'objective' factors - the linguistic, cultural, religious and political ties - are the relational shared common attributes (categories) that contribute to groupness. By including these factors in the definition we included in the discussion with the research participants and in the analysis the ethno-cultural and the civic-political dimension of the nation. The former refers to aspects of ethnicity and the perception of common origin and cultural heritage. The latter concerns the civic-political dimension of the nation, the role of the state in establishing a political community in a defined territory, regardless of whether its institutions are democratically elected or not (Vassenden 2010: 737). The 'subjective' factors refer to the consciousness of being a nation - i.e. national consciousness defined as the feeling of belonging to a political and social community which forms or wants to form a nation-state (Alter 1989: 18). Belonging is understood in dynamic, relational and processual terms (Brubaker and Cooper 2000), as a concept 'actively lived', 'by being and doing' (May 2013), while considering the impact and role of politics, distance, contingency and contestation (Knott 2017). Ultimately, the nation is a strong form of belonging that provides a sense of groupness to its members. Understanding the concept of nation in these terms allows us to engage with this concept in clear terms in the field and in a way that is consistent with the categories of social analysis identified.

To sum up, in this study, the role of the political sociologist is to examine the 'objective' and 'subjective' factors that define the nation. We look at the categories incorporated or objectified in institutional forms, and at the practical schemes through which these and other categories are represented or acted out through social, political and cultural practices by the individual and groups of agents who put them to the service of their material or symbolic interests, try to conserve or transform them (Bourdieu 1991: 227). In so doing, the focus of the analysis is on the processes and relations that determine nationhood and nationness.

### **3. Nationalism as ideology, 'everyday' practice and cultural materiality**

The processual and relational approach reorients our attention towards processes, agents and practices of nationhood and nationness that develop in a given space. Brubaker, like Hobsbawm before him, suggests approaching the study of nationalism as a phenomenon that changes and shifts over time; a phenomenon constructed from above, mainly through the nationalist projects and ideology of the state and its institutions; but that cannot be understood unless analysed also from below by looking at how ordinary citizens act and react to nationalist projects and ideology



in their everyday lives (Brubaker 2006, 10-13; Hobsbawm 1990). In turn, one should explore the relation between nationalism as an ideology from above, and the experience and practices of nationhood in people's everyday life (Brubaker 2006, 16). These two approaches are combined in this study.

First of all, the ideological approach to nationalism can be used to examine the meaning, structure and strategy of nationalism today in its top-down manifestations (Sutherland 2012: 58). An ideology is a set of political ideas, convictions and orientations which represent the backbone of a series of practices meant to account, reinforce and give reason for political and social organisations while providing action-plans to public political institutions (Freeden 1998: 749). Looking at nationalism as an ideology, a set of beliefs and principles which combined with a plan of action direct collective behaviour (Freeden 1998; Smith 1991; Malešević 2011; Kedourie 1961; Brass 1991; Flynn 2000), helps to display the way in which the nation is built and perpetuated in political discourse and everyday interactions (Sutherland 2012: 8). Considering nationalism as an ideological and a political project, we can explore systems of ideas and mobilising strategies, principles and practices through the analysis of the manifestations and proclamations of nationalism as expressed by individuals like political leaders and collectivities such as political parties or state institutions (Sutherland 2012: 50-58). These may or may not have fostered groupness among the members of a community and a particular sense of identification and self-understanding in the individual.

We can explore the interplay between macro-level ideology and groupness, through the relational approach to ideology by Sinisa Malešević. Malešević suggests looking at the processes through which organised social collectivities manage to transform micro-interactional social mechanisms or bonds of micro-solidarity at work in the family, local and kinship-based groups into a macro-nationalist ideology with strong emotional reference and vice versa (Malešević 2011: 282; 2006; 2013: 16). By looking at individuals and organised collectivities that shape social action such as state institutions, social movements, political parties, armed forces and civil society groupings, by analysing their claims and course of action, we can understand the power of ideology, when and why it proves to be successful (Malešević 2011: 276). In other words, we look at the socio-historical processes through which social human actors articulate their actions and beliefs (Malešević 2011: 288). These processes are determined by the concrete work of social organisations such as the state with its educational system and armed forces, for instance, but also

non-state actors such as mass media, social movements or civil society organisations. These social organisations produced and maintained a certain image, practice, discourse and institutions that fostered nationalism in the modern era (Malešević 2011: 288). In this study, this practically means analysing the macro nationalist ideology of the state with a focus on the Gaddafi regime, on the counter-ideologies of the opposition groups in exile, and on the post-2011 transitional politics and institutions. Looking at these social organisations, at the content of their discourse, their plans for action, and the way they interplayed, is a way to unveil one part of the story that this study wants to narrate, what Billig would refer to as the existing ideological foundations of nationalism and Malešević would regard as the existing organisational and ideological scaffolding necessary for everyday nationalism to emerge (Billig 1995: 5-8; Malešević 2013: 136).

To unveil the other side of the story, we need to examine the micro interactional social mechanisms occurring at the level of the individual, the family, small and mostly kinship- or locality-based groups (Malešević 2011: 283). To do so we examine nationalism in its ‘everyday’ manifestations. As in other studies on nationalism (Brubaker 2006; Edensor 2002; Skey 2011), the concept of everyday is understood as a ‘site for investigation of discourse and practices through which people make sense of their social world’ (Antonsich 2016: 32). Indeed, individuals not always articulate ideological positions in the way governments or political parties do, but in their everyday life they come across categories, images, practices and ideas that they choose to reproduce or not while contributing to their articulation. Through this approach to nationalism as an everyday phenomenon, we move the focus from political nation-builders, whose agency is explored through the ideological top-down approach to nationalism, to the ‘social micro-processes of identification that suffuse social and political life and lead ordinary citizens to see themselves in a commonplace way, as members of the nation’ (Déloye 2013: 615). The process of affirmation of the sense of identification and belonging to the nation is conceived of as the result of an active social co-production in which the nationalist elite of the state is important but so too are the everyday activities of identifying, receiving and re-appropriating by the population (Déloye 2013: 617).

The research agenda set by Fox and Miller-Idriss suggests examining ‘the actual practices through which ordinary people engage and enact (and ignore and deflect) nationhood and nationalism in the varied contexts of their everyday lives’ (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 537). In other words, through this approach we aim to interpret practices, ideas and symbols of nationhood

and nationalism imagined and performed by agents other than the state and its institutions in the 'everyday' (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008). In this way we overcome the predominant focus on the agency of the state, its institutions and discursive repertoire over that of ordinary citizens that characterised the seminal study on the subject, *Banal Nationalism*, by Michael Billig (Antonsich 2016). The 'everyday nationhood' approach allows us to overcome another limitation of that study, that is the Western theoretical ethnocentrism reflected in his definition of banal nationalism as the collection of ideological habits daily reproduced in the form of beliefs, assumptions, practices and representations which enable nations to be reproduced in the everyday lives of citizens in the established nations of the West (Billig 1995: 6-7).

Billig emphasised the Western dimension of banal nationalism by assuming an opposition between banal nationalism with its unreflexivity and unobtrusive presence and hot, belligerent and aggressive forms of nationalism flagged during ceremonies or on the occasion of military mobilization. However, rather than getting fixated on this dichotomy, an analysis of 'everyday nationhood' allows us to include hot and banal nationalism and all points in between placing at the centre of the analysis the relationship and the tension between the two, an aspect that authors like Calhoun, Antonsich and Skey have encouraged us to explore (Antonsich 2016; Skey 2009, 2014; Calhoun 2017). In this way, we examine nationalism through different manifestations such as: the role of food in national identity construction (Appadurai 1988; Ichijo and Ranta 2016); the politics of commemoration in the everyday life of individuals through public ceremonies, rituals and individual acts (Turner 2006); the sudden appearance of flags and national symbols during ecstatic events (Skey 2006), revolutions (Collins 2012) and in sport events (King 2006); the importance of memory in marking social boundaries and defining the sense of belonging of individuals and collectivities (Brewer 2006); the recurrence of landscape tropes as a theme and motif in the life of individuals (Walter 2004; Morgan 2001); and the popular canonization of national martyrs and symbols (O'Leary 2000).

Lastly, Billig's reductive concern with the treatment of nationalism as ideology and with the production of discourse overshadows nationalism in its imaginary, material and cultural dimension (Antonsich 2016; Calhoun 2017, 2002, 2007; Spasić 2017). This is what Calhoun defines as the social imaginary, the process of reproduction of the nation in its material, spatial and performative dimensions that inform the very ideas of nations (Calhoun 2017). As the author of the 'imagined community' pointed out, one needs to find a way to bring together the 'self-

consciously held political ideologies' with the large cultural systems that preceded these ideologies, out of which and against which nationalism came into being (Anderson 1991a: 12). Anderson suggested treating nationalism not as an ideology but 'as if it belonged with kinship and religion' (Anderson 1991a: 5), in so doing stressing its cultural side. What I suggest here is to combine these two dimensions by bringing into conversation the analysis of nationalism as the ideology of the state and its institutions with that of nationalism in its everyday manifestations, material culture and larger cultural systems reproduced by individuals and organised collectivities in everyday life.

In particular, when referring to culture as 'a dimension of phenomena, a dimension that attends to situated and embodied difference' (Appadurai 1996: 13), on the one hand, the possession of material, linguistic and territorial attributes, the so-called 'archive of differences' is stressed and, on the other hand, the conscious and imaginative construction and mobilisation of these attributes and differences and their naturalisation as 'diacritics of group identity' is emphasised (Appadurai 1996: 13-14). In a case like that of Libya, this practically means looking at how people use categories of self and other identification including ethnic, religious, and linguistic categories such as 'Arab', 'Libyan' or 'Amazigh'. We explore how these categories are related to material culture and reflected in cuisine, traditional costumes and celebrations. We examine whether these cultural 'archives of differences' are identified, for instance as 'Arab' or 'Libyan' or 'Amazigh', and the way they interplay with the material culture of ethnic groups such as Amazigh, Tebu or Tuareg. We observe the presence of these categories in the ideological discourse of the state and its institutions such as the educational system, and the way their institutionalization had an impact on processes such as the attribution of citizenship and social benefits. The emphasis of the Gaddafi regime on the unity and homogeneity of the Libyan nation centred on its Arab character made other ethnic groups invisible and limited their access to citizenship and social benefits. We need to observe whether these categories, in turn, are brought up to identify people's membership to the nation in everyday life by different agents who apply but possibly also re-articulate the categories imposed by the regime. The cultural 'archive of differences' is consciously and imaginatively constructed and mobilised to define groups for political purposes in a process through which the national construct and culture reinforce each other in a symbiotic and mutual way. Cultural singularity can play a role in the formation and motivations of nationalism as that 'pervasive dimension of human discourse that exploits difference to generate diverse conceptions of group

identity' (Appadurai 1996: 13). Is the notion of an Arab Libyan identity still relevant after 2011 to define the 'Libyan nation'? Who mobilizes this category and for what purpose? Is the assumed cultural singularity of the Arab Libyan nation detrimental to establish a more pluralistic and inclusive form of groupness? How are the 'archives of differences' mobilised by political and social actors and naturalised into the diacritics of a putative Libyan group identity?

Through this approach, this research aims to reconcile the ideological and everyday approach to nationalism with its cultural materiality. Differently from conventional approaches that tend to focus on either aspect, this study looks at the mechanisms and processes through which nationalism emerges as a political phenomenon by approaching it from an ideological perspective while considering the instrumentality of culture in that process. In this way, one can explore the receptivity, production and reproduction of this ideology through an empirical analysis of everyday nationalist discourses, symbols and practices that contribute to the articulation and transmission of nationhood and nationness today.

#### **4. The study of nationalism in the MENA region and in Libya**

The reframing and conceptualization of nationalism presented above will help to provide the reader with a holistic picture of nationalism in its multiple manifestations in Libya, overcoming the limitations that have characterized the study of nationalism worldwide and particularly so in the MENA region and in Libya. This study proposes to go beyond essentialist, constructivist and modernist approaches to consider forms of territorial nationalisms, without imposing the equation between state and nation but exploring that and other dimensions of groupness, as well as the agency of individuals and groups beyond the state and the elites. The limitations of these approaches have characterized until more recently the scholarship of nationalism on the Middle East and North Africa and on Libya as this section also illuminates. The section concludes with a brief historical excursus of the emergence of nationalisms in the region to emphasise the importance of global flows and transborder spaces in the creation of ideas of nationalism and nations. It is only by refocusing the attention on these global flows that we can make sense of nationalism in Libya and worldwide today.

#### *4.1 A polycentric approach: beyond modernism, ethnic nationalism, state and elites*

Modernist and constructivist approaches, characterized by the realist ontology of the group discussed at the beginning of this chapter, have dominated the study of nationalism in the region. This has been hampered by two assumptions: on the one hand, the preponderance assigned to Arab nationalism – i.e. ethnic nationalism – over territorial nationalisms; and, on the other hand, the relevance of the agency of the state and of the elites over that of ordinary citizens (Gelvin 1999: 73). This highlighted a tendency to prioritise the analysis of Arab identity over the sense of groupness, identification and belonging of individuals across the heterogeneous communities and states in the region while ignoring the agency of individuals in reproducing national frameworks.

Territorial nationalism or state-centric nationalism<sup>1</sup> - defined as that form of collective identity where connections to the territory of the state, either by birth or by adoption, rather than religious affiliations or ethnicity define membership of the political community (Moaddel 2014: 13; Duignan and Gann 1983: 22) – and its interplay with other forms of group identity in the Arab Middle East started to be examined from the mid-1970s onwards (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997: xiii-xiv). This reflected the renaissance in nationalism studies prompted by two factors at the time. On the one hand, political events made nationalism once again visible as an ideology and a political project worldwide – the war between China and Vietnam, the Iranian revolution, the fall of the Berlin Wall followed by the reunification of Germany, the break-up of the Soviet Union, the rise of ethnic nationalism in the Balkans and in the Southern borders of the former Soviet empire, the rise of separatists movements worldwide. On the other hand, the rise of the new political sociology associated with the critical efforts by Michel Foucault, Edward Said, the Subaltern Studies Group, and with neo-Marxism, postmodern, feminist and postcolonial studies, had an important methodological impact on the study of nationalism (Gelvin 1999: 71-72). As a result, two main discussions came to dominate the theoretical writings on nationalism in the 1980s and 1990s: the debate on the origins of the nation discussed at the beginning of this chapter, and the methodological distinction between realist and semiotic approaches to nationalism (Armstrong 1982; Smith 1987; Anderson 1991a; Gellner 1983; Bhabha 1990; Lash and Friedman 1992; White 1973, 1978). The former considered nations as tangible realities embedded in concrete historical

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<sup>1</sup> In this thesis the term state-centric nationalism will be used as a synonym of territorial nationalism while state-nationalism exclusively refers to the ways in which nationalism manifests itself in state institutions' ideology and practices.

circumstances and the latter as discursive entities produced by narratives (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997: x-xii). These developments initiated a process of reframing the conversation on nationalism and nations, rejecting essentialist reifications and considering instead aspects of contingency, multiplicity and fluidity, the social and psychological bases of nationalism, the spreading of new forms of group identity in the society, and the non-elite dimension of nationalism (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997: xiii-xiv).

Until then, as Gelvin and Khalidi observed, area specialists and historiographers of nationalism in the Middle East and North Africa like Dawn, Zeine and Muslih had considered Arab nationalism – defined as the ideology aspiring at the political unity of the ethnically homogenous Arab nation on the basis of shared language and culture – to be the paradigmatic nationalist ideology that commands the loyalty of its ethnically Arab inhabitants in the region (Gelvin 1999; Khalidi 1991; Muslih 1991; Zeine 1958; Dawn 1973). The origins of Arab nationalism and its ideological strength were the focus of the edited volume by Khalidi, Anderson, Muslih and Simon, and of monographs like those by Dawisha and Tibi (Dawisha 2003; Khalidi 1991; Tibi 1997). Territorial nationalisms were presented as ‘false consciousness’ and a truncation of Arab identity (Gelvin 1999: 73-74).

This academic posture was rooted in the observation that Arab nationalism was the hegemonic ideology in most Arab states between the 1950s and the mid-1970s, to the extent that it can be considered a mass movement at a time when Islamism and territorial nationalism were side-lined (Hinnebush 2013: 151). However, the heyday of Arab nationalism terminated with the de-legitimisation process engendered by the defeat of the Arab coalition in the 1967 war against Israel. Following this event, Arab states reverted to self-assertion, strengthened their defences and regained state initiative. The drive for union among Arab states was diminished and the single states were left to reassert state particularism and develop particular identities (Gelvin 1999: 72). With little pre-existing sense of nationhood upon which to build national unity, postcolonial Arab states were confronted with the existence of conflicting ethnic, sectarian, religious, tribal and regional identities. In the 1970s and 1980s, each regime prioritized state-nationalism in order to create a sense of unity within these fragmented communities and to assert their power on them (Owen 2000: 72). State and Islam started to compete for people’s loyalty, no longer an exclusive prerogative of the Arab nation.

According to Bassam Tibi, with very few exceptions such as Egypt and Morocco, the newly established nation-states lacked historical legitimacy and the substance of statehood - that is nationhood. And yet, Tibi observes that Arab nationalism was a rhetoric which emphasized the common traditional culture of Arab people without accounting for the diversities across Arab societies which remained prevailing realities (Tibi 1997: 23). It is interesting to observe how Tibi, while highlighting the multifaceted character of the Arab world, does not seem to consider this diversity as a potential springboard for the evolution of Arab nationalism into forms of territorial nationalisms. Instead, Tibi focuses on the rise of political Islam as the main ideological development following the demise of Arab nationalism. In so doing, however, he disregarded how leaders of these postcolonial states engaged in heavy-handed forms of nation-building in order to foster a sense of national unity among their citizens (Kymlicka and Pfössl 2014: 13-14). Indeed, although Arab states initially adopted Arabization policies that privileged the Arab language and Arab unity to the detriment of other components of local societies - such as local dialects and cultures - they changed course in the aftermath of the 1967 war. Generalizing about the region, Harik observed that power considerations, common experiences, habits, vested interests, local peculiarities and sensitivities crystallized state borders while generating forms of particularistic territorial nationalisms (Harik 1987: 44-45).

This reflects a tension between two conflicting tendencies. On the one hand, the longing for conservation and strengthening of the particular identity of communities; on the other hand the yearning to suppress these particularistic differences in a great and uniform whole, be it the Muslim Umma or the Arab nation (Harik 1987: 42). In the interpretation of this tension as elaborated by Kymlicka and Pfössl (2014), this resulted in national identities in the Middle East that are far from static. They stressed how the source of national identity has been changing more recently, since the end of the nineteenth century, going from forms of ethnic nationalism (such as Arab nationalism or Kurdish nationalism) to forms of multiple territorial nationalisms (e.g. Egyptian, Iranian and Turkish nationalism). To this extent, the region is typical of the evolution of nationalism more generally in so far as it reflects the tension between territorial collective identity and ethnic identity, and 'a gradual departure (with back-and-forth movements) from collective identity based on blood relations to one based on the territory of the state' that, as Smith also argued, in fact exist on a continuum (Tabachnik 2019: 196). And yet, as highlighted by Tabachnik, territorial nationalism received little scholarly attention (Tabachnik 2019: 194). This left a gap in



the literature particularly so with respect to countries in Asia and Africa where postcolonial nationalisms were a result of decolonization and the newly independent and sovereign states, with their geographic borders created by the colonizers, had to be 'filled' by nations (Habermas 1998: 105-06).

In the 1970s and more so in the 1980s and 1990s, some empirical studies of nationalism in the region adopted a polycentric approach to the topic in the attempt to account for and understand the multiple factors - regional, confessional, generational, socioeconomic - at play in shaping variants of nationalisms in the region. These studies looked at the genesis of territorial and Arab nationalism, and at the role of nationalism as a political movement and an ideology in the formation of nation-states with a focus on Egypt (Beinin and Lockman 1987; Coury 1982; Gershoni 1981; Gershoni and Jankowski 1986, 1995), Iraq (Baram 1991; Simon 1986) and Syria (Khoury 1987); as well as at the role of nationalism in demanding a nation-state like in the case of Palestinian nationalism (Johnson 1982; Muslih 1988; Porath 1974, 1977). The edited volume by Jankowski and Gershoni provided a synthesis of these developments and new theoretical models to advance the study of nationalism in the region through a polycentric approach that shifted the attention from Arab nationalism towards other movements and forms of communal identities, among them territorial nationalism (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997).

This scholarship on nationalism in the Middle East decentred the notion of an homogenous and hegemonic Arab nationalism to focus on nationalism understood as a multifaceted process whose roots lie in the socioeconomic processes of the modern era reaching broader sections of society and going beyond elite groups (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997). As observed by authors like Jankowski, Gershoni, and Gelvin, until then area specialists and historiographers of the region had mainly looked at the agency of the state and of the Westernising elites without examining activities and aspirations of other social groups (Gelvin 1999; Jankowski and Gershoni 1997). Among these scholars, Dawn, Khoury, Khalidi and Haim provided accounts of the role of urban-based landowning bureaucrats and intellectuals in stirring nationalist doctrine and movements in the region (Dawn 1973; Khoury 1983; Khalidi 1992; Haim 1962). Studies of nationalism mostly focused on the evolution of nationalist movements within the context of the struggles for independence against colonial powers and on the emergence and diffusion of nationalism through the ideology articulated by intellectuals and the elites of political parties and regimes (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997: xiv). The non-elite dimensions of nationalism as well as the social basis of

nationalism and the dissemination of new forms of group identity within Middle Eastern societies attracted much less attention (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997: xiv). On these grounds, the variety of nationalisms that emerged in the region - local and regional, elite and popular, communal and linguistic - were disregarded (Gelvin 1999: 73-74).

The efforts by authors like Jankowski and Gershoni and the group of scholars that contributed to their edited volume were to transpose the theoretical developments in nationalism studies at the time to the region. Most of the authors were coming from a modernist and constructivist perspective. Among them, Fred Halliday elaborated a framework of 'comparative contingency' to provide students of modern nationalism in the region with a research agenda. He suggested writing the history of nations as the emergence of a set of contingencies, events or circumstances, international and local, which cannot be predicted with certainty and are not necessary, that are so without having to be so. Nations are communities that happen to come about through accidents of history, war and geography, and they are one among many other possible such outcomes. They are contingent products of modernity (Halliday 1997: 27). However, as stressed by Brubaker and Cooper, the contribution of constructivist social analysis differs from their relational and processual approach in so far as the constructivist perspective takes the accounts of affinities, categories and subjectivities changing over time to explain what seem 'existing' groups - in so doing somehow implying a 'realism' of the group. On the contrary, Brubaker and Cooper's relational approach takes groupness itself as contingent, emergent, not an unquestionable given (Brubaker and Cooper 2000: 31). Taking nationness as a variable property of groups and relationships, as explained at the beginning of this chapter, transforms the nation into a continual process of reconstruction resulted from the pressures of contingent events and contests for power and equality (Yans 2006).

The approach to the empirical study of nations suggested by Halliday carries some limitations. It is based on four main paths of investigation. The first path leads to define the general historicity of the nation, how recently it was formed and how its formation depended on the broader international context. The second path explores the specific causation of the nation, the key historical, geographical and cultural factors that contributed (or not) to its formation. The third path examines the specific ideological content of nationalism through an analysis of nationalist ideology, its claims and ideas. Finally, the history of the ideas has to be related to material, real-world sources, social and political groups and movements in order to investigate the

instrumentality of nationalism (Halliday 1997). The author focuses on the origins and causality of the nation and, in so doing, he may be accused to assume the realism of the nation as a given group or to fall back on methodological nationalism. The last two paths are useful to operationalise the study of nationalism within the borders of the nation-state through an historical and ideological approach. However, there is one main risk associated with this approach and that is that it may continue to limit our understanding of nations as homogenous, real, stable, substantial and enduring communities and forms of identity with a particular origin and causality. While moving the focus from ethnic Arab nationalism to the territorial nationalism of the nation-state, it falls short of examining issues of groupness, self-understanding and identification in dynamic, active, ongoing and performed terms that allow for the heterogeneity of communities to emerge (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

More recently, the book by Christopher Phillips, *Everyday Arab Identity*, while bringing the focus towards the valuable perspective of everyday practices and expanding the geographical scope of everyday nationalism to the region, is rooted on the analytical category of ‘identity’ – widely adopted by other scholars in the study of the Middle East (Kassir 2006; Maalouf 2001; Pintak 2009; Rinnawi 2006; Telhami and Barnett 2002; Yamani 2000). Phillips recognises the use of ‘identity’ as a category of practice and this seems to explain why he is adopting it as a category of analysis (Phillips 2013: 30-31). In so doing, the author falls into the trap of the reifying connotations of identity, as do the authors of a 2018 journal issue on *Nationalism and the crisis of community in the Middle East* who trace transformations in the national identities of Syria, Turkey and Palestine, blaming failed attempts at building coherent national identities for the disintegrated national identities we observe today in the region (Baban 2018). On the contrary, this study suggests that Arabs, Libyans, Amazigh and other groups that one can observe in the region, far from being internally homogenous and externally bounded, cannot be taken as categories of analysis and unitary collective actors with a common purpose. Rather than looking at these groups as homogenous nations and solidary realities or identities, one can unveil the processes and mechanisms through which these nations crystallize in people’s imagination through everyday social and political practices accounting for the process of reification of communities and nations rather than contributing to it.

Halliday concluded in 2000 that the MENA region is characterized by multiple, conflicting and uncertain identities which combined, at different times and in different fashions, Arab

nationalism, territorial nationalism and Islam (Halliday 2000: 46). He wrote: ‘There remains to this date a coexistence of Arab and state-centred nationalisms which will most likely not be resolved once and for all but will continue to shift from one plane to the other and will continue to compete with Pan-Islamism’ (Halliday 2000: 50). This aspect, hardly peculiar to the Middle East and North Africa, has yet to be fully grasped by analyses other than those of modernist and constructivist authors whose approach and limitations have been discussed and are further exemplified by the study of nationalism in Libya in the next section.

#### *4.2 The study of nationalism in Libya*

Against this background, the case of Libya stands out as one that attracted little attention from the scholarship of nationalism and area studies. With few exceptions (Baldinetti 2010; Mezran 2007; Anderson 1991c, 1991b), the issue of nationalism in Libya was addressed only tangentially in the Western literature on Libyan history that is quite limited when compared to the literature on other North African countries (Baldinetti 2010: 10-11). Reflecting the tendency observed with regards to the study of nationalism generally and in the MENA region, the authors of modern historiography on Libya reflected on two aspects: the origins of the nation and the issue of agency. Most of these authors adopted, more or less explicitly, a modernist approach that considers nations as a modern, if not invented, act of creation prompted by developments of the last two hundred years (Flynn 2000: 22), ‘historically emergent constructions’ determined by different changing conditions in modernity (Fullbrook 1999: 12). Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, Lisa Anderson, Anna Baldinetti, Majid Khadduri, and Karim Mezran contributed most significantly to the academic debate from this perspective (Ahmida 2009; Anderson 1986; Baldinetti 2010; Khadduri 1963; Mezran 2007). Other studies by Frank Golino and Faraj Najem that attempted to establish the historical depth of the Libyan nation, while maintaining some relevance in their historical accounts, fell short of providing convincing evidence of the antiquity of the nation on the basis of conceptual frameworks that are flimsy at best (Golino 1970; Najem 2004).

The modernist authors, influenced by the ‘new narrative’ of Arab nationalism (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997; Pappé 2006), located the origins of the Libyan nation within the twentieth century and considered the process of Italian colonial occupation and the role of external forces as the main triggers of the emergence of the Libyan nation and of territorial nationalism. Throughout their accounts, the relevance of the flows of people and ideas emerges clearly, together with the

significance of state institutions and the elites but also of transnational and ‘ordinary’ actors in the process of construction or negotiation of a national identity. Their approach, like the modernists of the ‘new narrative’, uses national identity as main analytical category and recognises its modular and dynamic nature (Mezran 2007, Anderson 1991, Baldinetti 2010: 5).

According to Ali Abdullatif Ahmida, the Libyan nation-state is a modern and recent construction, a product of the colonial period and a reaction to its impact (Ahmida 2009: 7). The years of occupation and resistance between 1911 and 1932 produced an ‘all-Libyan nationalism’ by offering to the Libyan people examples of martyrs and heroes. Ahmida suggests that it is no coincidence that state-nationalism after independence exploited the social history of the colonial period in the process of constructing a national identity, a choice that in his analysis points to the significance of these years for the collective memory of the Libyan people (Ahmida 2009: 7). In *The Making of Modern Libya*, Ahmida challenges the colonialism and elitism of nationalist approaches to North African social history and the view propounded by Lisa Anderson of social change in Libya as the product of external factors (Anderson 1986). He focuses instead on Libyan social and cultural history and on ‘the voices of history from below’ to be found in oral history and traditions, songs, folk poetry and proverbs (Ahmida 2009: xvii). In so doing, he offers a new perspective on the anticolonial resistance and on the role of local merchants, notables, tribesmen and peasants in the social transformations of that period (Ahmida 2009: 141). One major problem with Ahmida’s analysis, however, is the lack of clear definitions of concepts like nation and nationalism. When talking of ‘all-Libyan nationalism’, for instance, the author does not define whether he is referring to nationalism as a movement, an ideology or a cultural identifier. The author’s attempt to escape definitions and models of the Eurocentric colonialist and nationalist approaches to the study of the region might partially account for the choice not to subscribe to a theoretical model or clear-cut definitions but this choice results in a vague analysis in conceptual terms.

As Anna Baldinetti points out, Ahmida’s study and the historiographical accounts of the colonial era do not address Libyan nationalism and nation-building per se but only consider these issues as subordinate to the historical narration of events. This explains why they do not engage in definitional exercises (Baldinetti 2010: 10-11). The same can be said of recent historical surveys by Alison Pargeter, Dirk Vandewalle, Ronald Bruce St John and John Wright, as well as of the edited volumes by Pack (2013), Cole and McQuinn (2015) that even if providing valuable

historical analyses and analyses of the revolution do not explore nationalism per se (Vandewalle 2006; St John 2012; Wright 2012; Pargeter 2012a).<sup>2</sup>

A modernist empirical analysis on Libyan nationalism is the one presented by Majid Khadduri in *Modern Libya - A study in Political Development* (1963). Khadduri provides a brief analysis of the specificities of North African nationalism and is the first author to stress the role of political exiles and their communities abroad in the process of transmission of nationalist ideology. The return of the exiles to Libya, after the Second World War, with their nationalist ideas acquired in Cairo, Beirut and Damascus was key in that process (Khadduri 1963: 52). Throughout his work, Khadduri examines briefly the rise of nationalism and national stirrings in the country understanding nationalism as a political movement as he refers to the ‘rise of national movements’ (Khadduri 1963: 9). While this reflects the initial focus of the literature on nationalism in the MENA region on the evolution of nationalist movements post-independence (Gershoni and Jankowski 1997: xiv), Khadduri opened the way to other authors to explore further the issue of agency.

The work of Anna Baldinetti, *The origins of the Libyan nation*, explores this theme in depth by analysing the emergence of the modern Libyan nation from the second Ottoman occupation (1835) to independence (1951). The historian stresses the artificial character of the Libyan nation as a product of Italian colonialism and a creation of Libyan exiles who escaped the Italian occupation. She qualifies Libyan nationalism as ‘diasporic’: the Libyan exiles, influenced by Arab nationalists and North African independence movements, formed the associations that led to the creation of the political parties which fought for independence (Baldinetti 2010: 6-7). Baldinetti contributed to enhancing our understanding of the pre-independence era in light of the role played by the political exiles in the diaspora at a time when nationalism was not mainstream inside Libya. She raises important questions concerning the significance of the transnational flows of people and ideas in the process of transmission and construction of a national identity. In this work, the influence of the modernist approach of Benedict Anderson is evident. However, the importance of this work lies in the ability of the author to bring the focus outside the borders of the nation-state to unveil the agency of actors other than the state, although the focus is still on the elites,

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<sup>2</sup> Nation-building is here defined as the process which aims at integrating and harmonising socially, regionally or even politically and institutionally divided sections of a people (Alter 1989, 21). I really do think that, in a thesis on nationalism, core definitions of nationalism merit more than a footnote.

intellectual and political, in the diaspora. The same can be said of Karim Mezran's, *Negotiating National Identity in North Africa*, that includes one chapter on Libya. Mezran explains the development of Libya as a polity by studying the emergence of national identity as the product of elite actions and the outcome of negotiations between opposing visions within elite groups at independence and, briefly, at subsequent key historical moments. The books by Baldinetti and Mezran are valuable historical accounts that complement the analysis of everyday nationhood that this study aims to provide.

The focus on the elites is recurrent in the literature that pointed to the use of nationalist rhetoric and historical discourse by the Libyan monarchy and by the Gaddafi regime. Both the King and Gaddafi recognized the relevance of the historical narrative to legitimise internally and internationally the construction of a national sentiment and a collective memory in order to legitimise their rule (Baldinetti 2010, Anderson 1991). This is core to nationalism everywhere, as observed by Davis and Gavrielides with respect to oil countries in the Middle East (Davis and Gavrielides 1991) and more recently by Tabachnik with reference to the ability of historical memory to transmit a sense of collective identity and territorial nationalism worldwide (Tabachnik 2019). Lisa Anderson observed that in Libya, where the historical tradition of a nation-state was absent at independence, the manipulation of historical and cultural symbols found fertile ground in the population's need for a sense of social and political identity. The case of Libya is indeed emblematic of a reinterpretation of the past in order to create a new image for the new nation (Anderson 1991c: 71). While the monarchy claimed the necessity to translate the 'Arab Libyan spirit' into curricula, syllabi and textbooks (Golino 1970: 350), Gaddafi's use of public festivities and the production of political historiography became important tools in the transmission of national loyalty and a key element in the official historical discourse in Libya (Baldinetti 2010: 24; Bernini 2001: 99). From the literature review of modern historiography on Libya, the historical agency behind the construction and propagation of nationalism emerges as mainly diasporic and state-elites. State-elites and exiles adopted a nationalist rhetoric and policies that can help explain and contextualize the appearance and resonance of nationalism in Libya today, as discussed in greater detail in the historical chapter.

More recently, a journal issue on *The Multiple Narratives of the Libyan Revolution* refocused the attention from the 'macro-historical metanarrative of Qadhdhafi-ness' to Libya-ness in its multiplicity of political voices and micro-narratives (Capasso and Cherstich 2014: 379-380).

The editors stressed that one of the aims of the issue was to recognize the agency of ‘Libyans’ beyond that of foreign intervention and foreign actors (Capasso and Cherstich 2014: 383). In particular, the article by Cherstich presents nationalism as narrative and ideology that can coexist with tribalism rather than being in opposition with it as stressed by other authors (Cherstich 2014). Ines Kohl provides another in-depth analysis related to the treatment of minorities and how they square into the Gaddafi regime’s equation between Libyanness and Arabness (Kohl 2014). Diana’s article on Libyan literature is a study of Libya’s political imaginary from below and of a space of contestation and resistance to the macro narratives of the elites and the state (Diana 2014). These authors contributed to shift the focus from the elites to the everyday. Their analyses, although not centred on nationalism, are complementary to this study in so far as they unveil the multiple and ordinary voices behind Libyan politics that this study also aims to examine.

To sum up, the literature on nationalism in Libya reflected until recently the limitations of predominant approaches to the study of nationalism with their focus on the origins of the nation, identity as analytical category, and top-down/elite nationalism. Nevertheless, it also solicited the attention of the researcher to transnational actors and global flows in order to make sense of a phenomenon that traditionally emerged in transborder spaces (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003). The next section addresses this aspect.

#### *4.3 The role of flows in shaping nationalism*

Anna Baldinetti’s analysis of the role of the exiles in the Libyan diaspora and their contacts with ideas and movements in the region shifts our attention from actors within the borders of the nation-state towards flows and transnational forces that bring people and ideas together cutting across borders. Indeed, through an analysis of the rise and evolution of ‘nationalisms’, as ideologies and political movements, in the Middle East and North Africa, one can observe how these are closely related to the process of internationalization of the European system of nation-states which was gradually exported and imposed on the rest of the world through colonialism (Tibi 1997: 12). In the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century, the movements of people, technological transfers and innovations created complex colonial orders centred on European capitals and spread through the rest of the world. This process resulted in ‘a permanent traffic in ideas of peoplehood and selfhood’ that led to ‘dialectically generated’ nationalisms and ‘imagined communities’ in the colonial world (Appadurai 1996: 28; Chatterjee 1986; Anderson 1991a). Looking at the process of



evolution of nationalism through the lenses of flows that preceded the age of globalization helps to contextualise the process through which nationhood and nationness emerged in the Arab states and in Libya as the result of their interplay.

We first learn about the relevance of the flows of people and ideas in the evolution and transmission of nationalism in the Middle East through the historiography of Arab nationalism. Bassam Tibi pointed out how the emergence of the first generation of Arab nationalists was closely related to the exposure to and evolution of external and local forces in the region (Tibi 1997: 95-99). To give one example, within the framework of Western colonization, the opening up of Greater Syria to European influence was essential in the process of developing Arabism in the region – Arabism is defined as the sense of common cultural heritage and cultural uniformity based on Arabic as the shared language (Dawisha 2003: 11). As Tibi observes, the presence of European and American Christian missions in the area, as well as of the Orthodox Russian mission, injected a national consciousness in the Arab population through the focus on and modernization of Arabic language, in turn contributing to the Arab cultural and literary renaissance and to the rise of Arabism in the region (Tibi 1997: 100). The revitalization of Arabic language and culture meant the revitalization of a new national identity (Tibi 1997: 100).

The subsequent evolution of Arabism into Arab nationalism was the result of conflicting nationalist tendencies within the Ottoman empire and of the interventionism of European colonial powers. The Turanian ideology, which fully emerged after the 1908 Young Turks revolt, aimed at the Turkification of other nationalities and the suppression of other cultures and languages within the Empire. This produced a politicization of Arabism among Arab army officers and civil servants determined to protect their Arab identity (Tibi 1997: 109). French and British interventionism in the region, meanwhile, were responsible for the emergence of local national independence movements like the Egyptian movement of Mohammad Ali or the Arab revolt led by Sharif Hussein (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997: 12). The German Romantic idea of a nation conceived as a cultural community and based on common history and language, a nation without a state, an organic entity and not a political community based on free will, suddenly became relevant to the case of the Arab nation as Arab nationalists found themselves in a position to justify and provide evidence of its existence to demand an Arab nation-state in the post-war colonial order (Tibi 1997: 21).

Furthermore, in the first half of the twentieth century, a sense of Arabism transcending political boundaries was facilitated by the development and diffusion of modern media (newspapers, broadcasting stations, films) and modern modes of transport, as well as by the Palestinian cause that had the capacity to unite Arabs (Owen 2000: 67-68). Intra-Arab conferences, the development of Arab banks, the employment of Palestinian-Arab doctors, teachers and legal experts across the region, as well as the assistance provided to anti-colonialist movements and to the Palestinians, overall contributed to the growth of Arab nationalist ideology (Owen 2000: 67-68).

However, as Arabism and Arab nationalism advanced in the region, the colonial powers contributed to the emergence of territorial nationalism by introducing a centralized system of administration. In the years before and during the Second World War, the political activities of the emerging social groups and classes within these borders were directed against the colonial systems, eventually leading to a sense of identification with the state (Harik 1987: 39). The nationalist movements and struggles for independence favoured forms of territorial-nationalism through local parties and movements which embraced the cause of national independence. Nationalism with its pillars of language, history, local territory and experience proved a very effective discourse around which to foster anti-colonial resistance movements (Mandaville 2013: 171). The states created by the colonial powers soon developed their own local symbols and nationalist practices providing an alternative loyalty and form of identity to the people. This was facilitated by the economic revolution Europe brought to the region (Harik 1987: 40-41). The intensified economic exchanges and communication with the West, the creation of new social strata and new systems of administration, led to an overhaul of political and economic structures. The traditional state structure and economy were weakened. A new class of landlords and merchants, who later became the champions of nationalism and independence, emerged. Domestic markets characterized by strengthened linkages between the cities and the periphery were established. This process resulted in the creation of national societies. Such developments stimulated the rise of territorial nationalisms while creating an ideological competition with Arab nationalism (Harik 1987: 40-41).

This brief historical excursus of the evolution of nationalisms in the modern Middle East sheds light on the importance of forces and flows external to the state in the emergence and evolution of nationalisms in the region. Making sense of nationhood in Libya today requires us to

consider the relevance and evolution of these flows whose nature, intensity and rapidity have changed significantly in the last century. Therefore, we need theories that address them and go beyond the nation-state as the sole arbiter of social change unpacking processes of globalization in the transmission and reproduction of nationalism as ideology and in the everyday.

## **5. Studying globalization as process**

The focus on processes and agency maintained in this study redirects our attention towards an understanding of globalization as process. Globalisation consists of ‘multidirectional flows, with no single point of geographic origin’ (Ritzer 2010: 82). It is a decentred and de-territorialized process not necessarily dependent on the territorial state (Appadurai 1996; Sassen 2006, 2007; Scholte 2005). It is a ‘complex, accelerating, integrating process of global connectivity ... [a] rapidly developing and ever densening network of interconnections and interdependencies’ (Tomlinson 2007: 352). These models of globalization rely on notions of connectivity - globalisation as a form of intensified and increasingly extensive exchange - and institutionalization – globalization as a process involving the diffusion of worldwide institutional rules and standards or cultural scripts. In particular, connectivists look at the links between actors previously separated and insulated by space and time as a starting point for empirical investigations that explore the impact of connectivity on social relations and social forms (Axford 2013: 24-25).

Globalization is a set of processes that extend, intensify and speed up flows and connections, and are grounded in agents, organizations and institutional arrangements which monitor, regulate and manage connections, movements and flows (Held, McGrew, and Perraton 1999; Held and McGrew 2007). These flows and connections are not recent phenomena, but the term globalization describes the growing magnitude and intensity that characterize them and help to overcome the time and space constraints of modernity. In particular, by the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s, the consolidation of capitalism and the IT revolution strengthened social and economic interconnectedness and interdependence in a way rather new compared to the 1960s and 1970s (Held and McGrew 2003: 3-4). The time-space compression produced by instantaneous electronic communication reduced, when not eliminated, the constraints of space and time on social organisation and interaction (Held and McGrew 2003: 3).

Flows, mobility and movement are categories of social analysis developed by anthropologists interested in the escalating pace and intensity of social change (Heyman and

Campbell 2009: 131). Among them, Arjun Appadurai's framework of global cultural flows or 'scapes' links together nationalism, diaspora, cultural processes and globalization to help us understand how nations are formed and transformed into powerful realities that captivate people's imagination. The global flows are 'cultural' so far as they pertain to 'differences that either express, or set the groundwork for, the mobilization of group identities' (Appadurai 1996: 13). Appadurai examines the way in which electronic media and migration create new resources for the work of the imagination as a social practice that shapes subjectivities and collectivities. Culture, media and transnational diasporas are mutually structuring forces in a world of disjunctures in which the production of localities is rendered more complex in the context of globalization (Appadurai 2006: ix).

The work of Appadurai builds on Benedict Anderson's analysis of the role of imagination in creating national communities, but his emphasis is placed on the realisation that the world we live in today is an interactive system in a sense profoundly new compared to the world and dynamics of interaction described by Anderson in the 1980s. This is even truer today than it was in the 1990s when Appadurai elaborated his framework. The high speed of transportation and the rapid flows of information revolutionised the way people, capital, images, goods, and ideas travel across the world. In this new world, imagination acquires a new extended role in social life. Appadurai describes the imagination as a form of labour and negotiation between sites of agency and the globally defined fields of possibility: 'The imagination is now central to all forms of agency, is itself a social fact, and is the key component of the new global order' (Appadurai 1996: 31). As part of this evolution, electronic media and migration are critical in shaping our imagination and the way modern subjectivity is constituted. The rapidity associated with electronic media means that self-imagining is an individual and everyday social project that combined with migration produces a new order of instability in the realisation of modern subjectivity (Appadurai 1996: 3-4).

In order to make sense of communities today and the way they are being forged, Appadurai suggests we explore the relationship between five 'scapes' that result from flows, mobilities and relations given shape and meaning globally by agents such as the nation-state, diasporic communities, social movements, civil society groupings, families, villages, individuals. etc. These are: ethnoscaping, the movement of exiles, refugees and immigrants who affect the politics of and between nations to an unprecedented degree; technoscaping, the technological flows both

mechanical and informational; financescapes, the global financial transfers; mediascapes, the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information providing large and complex repertoires of images and narratives to viewers throughout the world; and ideoscapes, the state-ideologies and counter-ideologies of movements oriented towards capturing state-power or a piece of it (Appadurai 1996: 33). These are interrelated but not causally ordered, fluid, irregular and deeply perspectival constructs influenced by historical, linguistic and political involvement of different agents within a given context. The individual navigates these scapes, experiencing and constituting them at the same time. The scapes are the building blocks of 'imagined worlds', the multiple worlds that are constituted by the historically situated imaginations of persons and groups around the globe (Appadurai 1996: 5). Global flows can build and break new and old barriers among national political communities strengthening or challenging competing forms of identity politics, nationalism among them.

In a de-territorialized, transnational and diasporic world, nationalism is an elemental political force and national identity a symbolic boundary to defend even though the unity of the nation might be constructed or imagined (Axford 2013: 97). De-territorialization means that diaspora based ethnic politics can communicate and act across the globe. Mediascapes and ideoscapes are diffused in global networks. The regular functioning of the nation-state is problematic and contingent, challenged by transnational ethnic movements among others (Appadurai 1996: 39-40). Moving images and ideas of the nation meet de-territorialized viewers in diasporic public spaces. How do diasporas imagine their nation? How do they re-elaborate their ideas of nation when abroad and how does this idea of nation square with that of nationals who have never left the country?

The work of the imagination becomes a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of modernity: 'This mobile and unforeseeable relationship between mass mediated events and migratory audiences defines the core of the link between globalisation and the modern' (Appadurai 1996: 4). In the globalised world, the diaspora member as much as the citizen within state borders can deploy her imagination in the practice of everyday life in a way that no longer needs charismatic individuals, elites or ruling classes, to inject imagination where it does not exist or belong. Imagination is a collective social fact that plays a newly significant role (Appadurai 1996: 5-10). By locating nationalist ideology within the category of ideoscapes it will be possible to analyse that ideology in

conjuncture and opposition with other ideologies and counter-ideologies that emerged and competed with it in post-independence Libyan history, thereby accounting for both national and transnational forces which contributed to ‘imagine’ the Libyan political community.

Heyman and Campbell critique Appadurai’s framework (Heyman and Campbell 2009). First of all, they suggest a focus on the relationships among processes or flows in grounded places and times in order to analyse the impact of these flows on social change rather than limit one’s analysis to the unpredictability of the flows and the way they intersect (Heyman and Campbell 2009: 135). This may also help to overcome one of the limitations concerning theories of globalization that discuss the idea of globalization as ‘space-time compression’ in terms that are rarely grounded or vaguely constructed in empirical research (Axford 2013: 1). By analysing the case of Libya, this study presents the opportunity to empirically apply the core concepts of Appadurai’s framework while trying to overcome the paucity of empirical analytical research at the micro-individual and meso-organisational levels of experience and enactment of globalization in its ‘softer’ aspects, such as identity and the aspirations of communities and individuals (Axford 2013: 2). Second, motion and flows are not new phenomena, as the analysis of the rise of nationalisms in the previous section demonstrated. Therefore, one can explore how older flows are reworked into new sets of flows. As the content, intensity and consequences of flows are constantly evolving, we can investigate how flows build on flows and how people experience the change (Heyman and Campbell 2009: 136). This is most evident when examining the flows of people from and to the nation-state that can constitute modern diasporas. These flows change communities through fluxes of departures, arrivals and returns with an impact on the way people imagine the nation, on its contingent and variable character but also on the way people’s subjectivity evolves as a result. Tracking the flows of people, their nature and evolution allows us to understand how communities develop and in turn how ideas of peoplehood and selfhood evolve. Third, while flows do not obliterate the borders they cross, they can however contribute to transform, constitute, undermine and reproduce these borders, in so doing contributing to a processual construction of geographic spaces. Through this process, globalization becomes a definable network of relations among spatially located entities. The flows are processes that can lead to disjunctures and breakdown of social and cultural units, as Appadurai stressed, but also to reinforcing social and spatial entities and boundaries. Indeed, migration and travel do not necessarily occur as freely as Appadurai’s framework seems to assume, leading people to engage in the construction of new

complex politics of location and travel rather than of infinitely disjunct fluxes (Heyman and Campbell 2009: 138). This is most evident in the case of exiles in the diaspora who are not able to travel back to the homeland and find ways to maintain a connection with it in the host-country, strengthening their sense of belonging to the original nation but also reinforcing the geographical boundaries of the diaspora community itself. This process can reinforce an understanding of the nation as a social construct within geographical, social and political boundaries that can be different from those elaborated in the homeland.

Globalization obliges us to reassert the importance of space in social theory and to reconceptualise our understanding of space in a way to ‘un-think’ state-centred models of social inquiry (Axford 2013: 61). Space includes the nation-state, transnational forms of solidarity and belonging in the diaspora, but also the virtual space online whose potential to link the two together remains under explored. Far from being static, these spaces are constantly shaped and reshaped by the flows of ideas, people, images, technology and capital and by the agents that navigate and contribute to shape them. The flows impact the way people think of themselves, identify with different spaces, and act through everyday practices contributing to determine groupness and belonging throughout one’s life. This is the process that this study is set to explore.

## **6. Conclusion**

Through this theoretical framework, this study aims to enhance our understanding of nationalism in Libya by reconstructing the historical process of development and dissemination of nationalist discourse by state-elites and by the diaspora with a focus on the period after independence. It will aim to integrate that account with ‘everyday’ practices and the views of ordinary people that have only recently attracted the attention of the scholarship on nationalism in the region and in Libya but have yet to be explored in depth. Through an ideological and everyday analysis of nationalism, informed by the processual approach, categories of practice other than the nation itself will emerge in relation to ethnicity, religion, social and political life, providing the reader with a holistic assessment of how these categories interplay with ‘the nation’ and inform groupness, self-understanding and identification in Libya. This analysis within the framework of the global cultural flows will account for transnational actors and forces that contribute to shape nationalism as an ideology, a political and everyday phenomenon in the twenty-first century.

## **Chapter 2 Methodology and Methods**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter explains how the theoretical framework was applied to explore the process through which ‘the nation’ is ‘imagined’ and realized through social and political practices of actors who contribute to construct and reproduce nationhood and nationness. To do this we look at ideas and discourse, practices and performances, examining them in a way that illuminates not just state-nationalism, but also everyday nationalism as it emerges from collective performances and in the life of individuals who internalise, resist and reproduce nationalism from below. The theoretical framework suggests that to answer the research question we need to examine how the flows of people, ideas, capital, images and technology contributed to the development of practices, ideas and symbols around the nation. This chapter presents the methodology and methods most appropriate to conduct this research.

The chapter is divided into six sections. The first section presents the study’s interpretivist, inductive and qualitative approach, informed by the grounded theory method (GTM), and its relevance to this research. The second section provides an account of the author’s direct observation of civil society in Libya and the way it informed the research design. The third section provides a conceptualization of agency and space that informs the empirical analysis of the case of Libya. The fourth section presents the qualitative methods of data collection - open-ended and semi-structured interviewing and a complementary analysis of Internet media with a focus on social media sites and websites - and describes them in detail. The fourth section investigates the analytical strategy that combined content, discourse and visual analysis of text and images. The fifth section briefly explains the rationale for presenting the empirical material in the current thesis structure. The last section addresses issues concerning the overall research limitations associated with access to the field, and ethical and language considerations.

### **2. Research approach**

This study is grounded on an interpretivist, inductive, and qualitative approach to social research informed by the grounded theory method (GTM) and based predominantly on qualitative methods of data collection and analysis. The process of social analysis is understood as an exercise of



human interpretation. Thorne emphasises that human interpretation is at the same time the starting point in the analysis of the social world but also the point towards which research findings are directed (Thorne 2014: 102). As Lindsey Prior observes, ‘communicative action (to use the phraseology of Habermas, 1987) rests at the very base of the life world, and one very important way of coming to grips with that world is to study the content of what people say and write in the course of their everyday lives’ (Prior 2014: 360). Overall, the aim throughout this research was to uncover subjective and contextual knowledge based on an analysis of meaning and motivation of the practices, ideas and symbols of nationhood and nationness in Libya. Therefore, the approach of this research was not a positivist effort at establishing the neutrality of the researcher and his/her separation from the object of the research while looking at universal rules to provide structural explanations through hard methods for data collection (Della Porta and Michael 2008: 23-24). Instead, the role of the researcher and how the research scene influenced the definition of the research question, the theoretical framework and the choice of methods of data collection and analysis, are acknowledged to provide the reader with the necessary tools to read what ultimately is a subjective and contextual analysis (Della Porta and Michael 2008: 24-25). What is presented is an interpretation of the data collected, grounded on the direct observation of civil society in Libya, using a data collection process designed to involve different sectors of Libyan society, based on an analytical strategy which combines content, discourse and visual analysis, and on a solid knowledge of the literature that allowed the author to establish a dialogue between that and the empirical material.

In particular, GTM is an approach to qualitative research that, differently from hypothesis-oriented research, emphasises the relevance of directly gathered data as the basis for developing new theoretical insights, conceptual models and frameworks (Bryant 2014: 119). Theoretical sampling, constant comparison and coding are the tools used to achieve conceptual and theoretical development (Strauss 1987: 5). Several variants of this method have been developed since originally created by Glaser and Strauss (Glaser and Strauss 1965, 1967). While at the root of the method is the simultaneous and iterative process of gathering, sorting and analysing data, the constructivist approach to GTM is particularly relevant to this study in so far as it recognises the role of the interpretation of the researcher in the coding process, as well as that of theoretical and conceptual frameworks that can inform the research project and the coding process (Bryant 2009; Charmaz 2000, 2006; Vassenden 2010; Bryant 2014). This approach unfolded throughout the

direct observation of civil society in Libya, the data collection and analysis, and the writing-up of the empirical material.

This research approach is crucial to provide in-depth and nuanced analysis that can advance our understanding of the manifestations of nationalism and other forms of group identity in the case of Libya with the intention to illuminate complex and unexplored social processes as interpretivist studies traditionally do (Della Porta and Michael 2008: 29). In particular, GTM allows the researcher to avoid imposing rigid schema of interpretation at the beginning of the research process giving a greater agency to the researcher and the research participants in the process of knowledge creation, research design and implementation. In this study, this meant that while the literature review conducted in the first year helped the author to gain a general overview of themes concerning nationalism theories and the study of this subject in the Middle East and North Africa and in Libya in particular, the direct observation and fieldwork shaped the analytical lenses and methods through which the study was ultimately conducted. This process ensured the relevance of the framework and of the research design by adapting it in dialogue with the research participants and in response to the evolving situation on the ground in Libya with its numerous political and security constraints.

### **3. Direct observation of civil society in Libya**

The author engaged in direct observation of Libyan civil society whilst working as a consultant for the British Council in Tripoli between September 2013 and June 2014. This contributed to defining the scope of the investigation. This exercise included observation of civil society organisations (CSOs) that proliferated in the country after 2011: NGOs, particularly women and youth organisations, but also student unions, and a variety of charities, associations and clubs. It allowed for the observation of this group of agents in their habitual context and through multiple and various interactions. Adopting the GTM methodology that values the experiential data of an analyst as well as theoretical knowledge acquired through the literature or previous research, the direct observation provided initial suggestions to develop the theoretical framework (Strauss 1987: 10-11).

Following the initial literature review, the direct observation and participation in Libyan civil society provided an insight on the phenomenon of interest, and a better view of what was relevant in that empirical area of study. This experience was similar to that of a participant observer

and relevant for the research in two main respects. First, it provided access to the study population and research participants. Such access was still hampered by the precarious and deteriorating security situation in the country, which restricted the author's movements to the capital. However that was mitigated by the large number of CSOs members travelling to Tripoli from areas such as Benghazi, Jadu, Misrata, Sabha, Zawya and Zwara for training, workshops and conferences within and outside the scope of the British Council's initiatives. Their ethnic background was predominantly Arab, although few individuals identified as Amazigh. Particular access was gained with women of different ages, and youth approximately between 18 and 35 years of age who were members of CSOs. This provided the author with the perspective of groups and individuals that tend to be marginalised within societies as well as in research projects. This exercise created a network that was essential to the data collection that took place in 2016.

Second, the direct observation helped to refine the phenomenon under investigation, agents, and research design by providing an insight into everyday life, civil society landscape and the diaspora element that had also emerged from the literature review. For instance, the interaction between members of the diaspora and 'born and bred' Libyans within the civil society context, suggested exploring the interplay between these agents and their contribution to nationhood. Indeed, the observation of practices and symbols in civil society gatherings, such as singing the national anthem or flying the national flag, redirected the attention towards everyday nationalism. The Libyan flag also appeared in other contexts: in the streets on the occasion of ecstatic events (Skey 2006) like the African Nations Championship in February 2014, the day of national liberation on October 23 and the anniversary of the 2011 revolution on February 17; in photographs, documentaries and videos shared by CSOs and diaspora groups on social media sites and websites; in street and graffiti art. In particular, the presence of the 1951 Libyan independence flag and of the image of the martyr of the anti-colonial resistance, Umar al-Mukhtar, were described as an impulse to reclaim symbols of pre-Gaddafi Libyan history and an indication of a desire for strong national symbols that could serve to unify Libyan society (Elias et al. 2012).

The observation of everyday nationalism within civil society directly affected the research design and methods. First, it suggested including in the analysis civil society activists, the content and scope of their activities, next to the political elite and the diaspora whose significance in shaping nationhood had emerged from the literature review. Second, having developed the perspective of an insider during direct observation but maintaining that of an outsider, the author

aimed to strike a balance between her position and interpretation, and the research participants' actions, meanings, intentions and interpretations.

The GTM approach to research critically considers the subjectivity, presence, role, and cultural background of the researcher, as well as the interplay between the researcher and the object of the research that contribute to the process of knowledge production. The researcher's role and way of seeing the world has an impact on the interaction with and interpretation of the research scene (Bryant 2014; Charmaz 2006). For instance, against the author's initial expectations, her Italian nationality was perceived as a factor that brought her closer to the study population who often mentioned family values, the passion for food, football and design as the features that Italians and Libyans shared. Furthermore, as someone who lived, studied and worked for the past ten years abroad, the researcher felt sympathetic towards those individuals from the diaspora who, like her, questioned their sense of identification and belonging to their country of origin and their engagement in civil and political life. Being aware of the specific cultural lenses of the research participants and the author's own self-reflectivity was key to considering these aspects carefully during the research process. This also redirected the author's attention towards the qualitative approach and methods, discussed later in this chapter, that allow a deep form of interpretivism and introduce subjective perspectives valuable in themselves (Della Porta and Michael 2008: 28-32).

Overall, the direct observation in Libya was helpful to contextualise and understand better the dynamics and nature of human experiences narrated during the data collection in 2016, to unveil multiple and diverse perspectives of the study population, and the relationships between people, ideas, norms and context. These experiential data informed the development of the research design, of the methods for data collection and analysis.

#### **4. A conceptualization of agency and space in the study of nationalism**

The literature review and direct observation of the emerging civil society in Libya provided some evidence concerning the need to conceptualise agency and space in an empirical study of nationalism. This thesis provides an empirical account that reveals the effects of globalization on the emergence and evolution of everyday practices that contributed to shape the sense of belonging and a national imaginary among some selected groups of actors: the political elite, the civil society and the diaspora. These concepts are defined below to illuminate how they are theoretically understood and operationalised in the research. The objective is to deploy concepts that are

informed by theories and by the Libyan context and capture the agencies of relevant actors. The triadic conceptual framework presented below is functional to understand the way relations between the different spheres of social life and the actors moving within and between them evolve, shaping nationhood and nationness in Libya and among people in the Libyan diaspora.

#### *4.1 Political elite*

The historical relevance of elite nationalism in Libya through the agency of the state and of the political exiles in the diaspora emerged from previous historical accounts (Anderson 1991c; Baldinetti 2010). This redirected my attention towards the concepts of elite and diaspora – the latter is discussed at the end of this section as definitions of elites traditionally refer to community elites and national elites within the borders of the nation-state (Hoffmann-Lange 2007: 912-13). A definition of elites as ‘groups or individuals with regular and substantial influence on important decisions within an organization or a society’ includes all political and societal elites involved in influencing policy decisions whether they are constitutionally authorized to make these decisions or command the resources that enabled them to influence policy decisions (Hoffmann-Lange 2018: 79; Higley and Burton 2006; Putnam 1976). To operationalise this definition in an empirical study, it is necessary to start by identifying the boundaries both vertical (hierarchical levels) and horizontal (sectors and organizations) of the elites that the research intends to explore (Hoffmann-Lange 2007: 910). This process is normally associated with the objectives of the research and the theoretical differences concerning loci of power and political influence in the society (Hoffmann-Lange 2018: 86).

The first methodological step is to identify the information that the researcher wants to collect. One aim of this research was to explore the role of political actors associated with state-power in shaping nationhood in Libya before, during and after the 2011 revolution. Examining the ideas of nation of this group of agents was a step towards exploring one aspect of nationalism, state/top-down nationalism, as an ideological project. Second, with respect to the loci of power and influence, the case of Libya after the 1969 revolution is considered a clear-cut case of a non-democratic system in which the political elite is indistinguishable from the rest of the social and economic elite (Blondel and Müller-Rommel 2007: 824). The rise to power of Muammar Gaddafi resulted in the centralization of political, economic and military power in the hands of the newly established state institutions whose decisions came to reflect Gaddafi’s directives (Martinez 2007:

89). This suggests that power in Libya before the 2011 revolution was highly integrated and centralized, a power structure typical of single-party systems and military regimes in which the political elite are united under the command of the leadership (Blondel and Müller-Rommel 2007: 824-25). Scholars of political elites have addressed these types of power structures in other contexts through positional methods of elite identification, that is methods that recognise members of elites based on the formal and legal position they hold across a broad range of political, military, media, civil society and business organizations and institutions (Hoffmann-Lange 2018: 80). However, since by the end of the 1970s Gaddafi did not held an official role in the system of government in Libya but was *de facto* its ruler and Guide of the Revolution (Martinez 2007: 90), this method is only partially relevant to the analysis of the political elite in Libya.

Moreover, with the collapse of the regime in 2011, the emergence of a pluralistic party system led to a horizontal development of a number of segments of the political elite autonomous from each other, as well as to a vertical differentiation of the elite among political parties, legislatures and government (Blondel and Müller-Rommel 2007: 825). A new transitional political elite came to the fore within the National Transitional Council (NTC), at first in opposition to the political elite of the regime. However, the NTC managed to capture state agency and to establish the road map that led to the establishment of transitional governments and legislative institutions – General National Congress (GNC) and House of Representatives (HoR) – as well as of the Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA). Meanwhile, newly formed political parties sprang up with the support of transnational movements, like the Muslim Brotherhood-associate Justice and Construction Party, or with the support of diasporic organizations of political exiles, like the National Front Party. These parties engaged in transitional political processes such as the 2012 and 2014 legislative elections or the UN-mediated Libyan Political Agreement (LPA) in 2015. Henry described the post-2011 Libyan state as a disintegrating one where political elites may be subject to a redefinition of their official power to make legal decisions and judgements (Henry 2017: 199). Nevertheless, these actors, their ideas and plans for action implemented by their organizations and institutions are relevant for the purpose of this study.

This context and theoretical considerations led the author to utilize a positional purposive method of identification of the political elite that focused on the political sector, understood as the sector of state power and its institutions, while emphasizing the active personal involvement of elite members in political decision-making and positional resources of political influence

(Hoffmann-Lange 2018: 87). This practically meant including in the analysis the pre-revolutionary state-elite and Muammar Gaddafi in particular through the use of secondary sources, as well as politicians with formal decision-making authority in transitional institutions and political processes after the 2011 revolution through primary sources, i.e. interviews. In other words, the focus is on the ‘political class’, those who ‘exercise political power or influence, and are directly engaged in struggles for political leadership’ (Bottomore 1993: 7). Other definitions of political elites that comprised professional associations, media, trade unions, religious and other hierarchically structured institutions powerful enough to affect political decisions (Best and Higley 2017: 3), include entities whose agency is better captured in the Libyan context within a broad definition of civil society separate from, or antagonistic to, the state and political decision-making power associated with it (Rosenblum and Lesch 2011: 288), as discussed below.

#### *4.2 Civil society*

Borrowing from Walzer’s definition, Edwards describes civil society as ‘the sphere of uncoerced human association between the individual and the state, in which people undertake collective action for normative and substantive purposes, relatively independent of government and the market’ (Edwards 2011: 4). Civil society is a composite of *forms*, the associational ecosystem made of a multiplicity of civil society organizations (CSOs) including advocacy and development NGOs, social movements, labour unions, professional associations, registered non-profits, social enterprises, community or grassroots associations etc.; *norms*, the normative values and aspirations that drive collective action; and *spaces* for citizen actions and engagement where citizens interact with each other and with the institutions of the state and the market (Edwards 2011: 12).

In this research, civil society is understood within the conceptual framework traced by Edwards as the sphere between the state and its institutions, on the one hand, and the private sphere of the individual and the family, on the other. This means understanding social life as composed of three spheres within the territory of the state: private sphere, civil society and state institutions (Calhoun 1992: 7). The political elite conceptualised above belongs to the sphere of the state in its pre and post-2011 configuration and includes the market that in Libya is under the control of state institutions. By looking at civil society we explore ‘the zone of voluntary associative life, beyond family and clan affiliations but separate from the state and the market’ (Hawthorne 2004: 5). That can provide us with an access to frames and spaces in which the agency and imagination of

individuals emerge to address social and political issues (Edwards 2011: 3). Voluntary associations and groups are intermediaries between individuals and government and provide platforms for political participation, political advocacy and resistance. When associations ‘speak’ their ideas do not float freely within an ethereal public sphere but voices are linked to individuals and groups (Rosenblum and Lesch 2011: 288-89).

The literature review and direct observation of civil society organisations in Libya helped to establish an integrated framework that considered the forms of civil society - i.e. the emergent civil society organizations but also activists, academics, professional associations and freelance journalists<sup>3</sup> - within the space of engagement and interaction among these actors that emerged in the 2000s and more so after 2011. Within this space, a set of values and beliefs concerning the nation were developed and became contested beneath the surface of activities conducted by these actors. This process took place within the contest of new relations with the ‘global civil society’ (Kaldor 2003) that members of civil society in Libya came in touch with and became part of after the 2011 revolution, affecting their ideas around the nation. Analysing the agency of civil society in Libya vis-à-vis nationhood requires considering its global dimension and the circulation of ideas and people in the twenty-first century.

#### *4.3 Diaspora*

Following the revisionist approach introduced in the previous chapter, rather than establishing the diaspora as a category of analysis, this study understands diaspora as a category of practice avoiding the essentialist connotations already discussed with reference to the nation (Brubaker 2013). Reassessing the meaning of diaspora, Brubaker added ‘boundary-maintenance’, or self-awareness of group identity, as a key factor in addition to the dispersal from an original ‘centre’ to two or more ‘peripheral’ or foreign regions, and to the orientation towards the homeland. The emergence of relationships and contacts among different segments of the diaspora is essential to build diasporic consciousness, institutions and networks (Brubaker 2005: 6). The focus ought to be not on the groupness of the putative diaspora that emerges from these relationships and contacts,

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<sup>3</sup> Freelance journalists are included in the category of civil society in so far as differently from established media outlets that function as professional organisations and belong to the economic sphere and not to the voluntary one, freelance journalists in Libya have an important perspective that is usually independent of economic interests of bigger media outlets. They support the role of civil society in opening access to the public sphere and to information. It is in this capacity that they are included.



but on the diasporic stances, practices, claims and language of its members. Indeed, diasporas develop projects, mobilize energies and define expectations, and in so doing formulating identities and loyalties of a population as much as other agents of nationalism within the nation-state (Brubaker 2005: 12).

Therefore, following the model traced by Sökefeld, the focus will be on diasporic mobilization through an analysis of opportunity structures - means of communication and the legal political environment; mobilizing practices - demonstrations, fundraising events, neighbourhood associations etc; and frames - the ideas around roots and home and the importance of collective memory. We should look at the ideas which unite and contribute in forming a diasporic consciousness, at the agents engaged in disseminating this discourse and imaginary, as well as at the threats, opportunities and events which unite people in transnational organizations (Sökefeld 2006).

In this analytical process five dimensions of diasporic research are addressed (Butler 2001: 195). First of all, we examine the reasons for and conditions of the dispersal. What segments of society move? Why and how? Are there any international conditions which determine the dispersal and the regions of destination? Secondly, we explore the relationship with the homeland. Does the diaspora participate in the activities of the homeland or vice-versa? Do they influence each other? How do changes in power and resources affect homeland/host-land relationships? Thirdly, we investigate the relationship with the host-land. Is the host-land an agent in the formation and development of diaspora? Does it affect the way in which the diaspora community interact with the homeland? Fourthly, we unveil the interrelationship within communities of the diaspora. And, finally, we examine the role of international forces as formative agents contributing to the creation and maintenance of the diaspora.

By bringing together Brubakers' idea of diaspora as a claim, Sökefeld's opportunity structures, mobilizing practices and frames, while keeping in mind Butler's five dimensions, one can undertake a thorough analysis of the circumstances and reasons behind claims, their receptivity by different agents of the putative diaspora, as well as the reactions to these claims in the homeland and the host-land and within the diaspora communities. In other words, we can explore the contribution to nationhood of transnational agents by including questioning around these aspects in an interview schedule – see Appendix 1. As pointed out by Barabantseva and Sutherland, the process of constituting diasporas is clearly connected to the process of nation-building. National

and diasporic politics and ideologies can complement each other. Diasporas are not homogeneous groups, they might be formed by cosmopolitan anti-nationalists as much as by reactionary ethno-nationalists (Barabantseva and Sutherland 2011: 5). Members of a diaspora can support a national government but they can also oppose it. Indeed, exiles can struggle to overthrow a national government without challenging the existence of the nation-state (Shain 1989: 1). In so doing they can try to modify political loyalties inside the country. They do it from abroad when living in exile as opponents of a regime but what happens when the regime falls? Does the diaspora go back to the homeland? How does it integrate in the national social and political fabric? This study aims to explore these issues in the Libyan context.

Reframing nationalism through the conceptual and theoretical lenses discussed in the previous chapter and in this section draws attention to processes, agents and practices that manifest themselves at the private, civil society and state levels in a way that helps us to understand nationalism within and beyond the borders of the state. Indeed, with globalization, agents, processes and practices within state borders change in relation and reaction to the global flows. The three spheres of social life – private, civil society and the state – become part of a global space, Appadurai's *scapes*, that individuals and organizations experience through the global flows that they constitute (people), produce and consume (images, technologies, capital, ideas). Electronic mediation, in particular, creates a virtual space that affects and is experienced at all levels of social life. Through this analysis, therefore, we need to pay attention to the dynamics and evolution of two processes in particular: the relation between spheres of social life, how these and the actors moving within them evolve; and the relation between the territorial and the global that is affected by the global flows. In Libya, during and after 2011, the boundaries between these spaces became porous with people, ideas, images, technologies and capital moving within and across them with unprecedented ease. Categories of actors can also overlap and evolve, with individuals from the diaspora flowing into civil society or transitional state institutions and vice-versa individuals from civil society and state institutions in Libya joining the diaspora ranks.

At the end of this section, it is necessary to stress that addressing issues related to global flows while maintaining the Libyan nation-state as the pivot around which the analysis revolves, is likely to attract accusations of methodological nationalism, the process of 'naturalization of the global regime of nation-states by the social sciences' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003: 576). As

Hay observed, one needs to find a way to address one of the key methodological questions of globalization theory namely: how to transcend methodological nationalism without completely dropping the state as a crucial part of the ontology of the globalized world (Hay 2006).

In this study, we need to consider in particular two variants of methodological nationalism identified by Wimmer and Glick Schiller. The first one is naturalization, the norm in empirical social sciences which takes for granted the boundaries of the nation-state in delimiting and defining the unit of analysis. Empirical social research whether in international relations, economic, history or anthropology has traditionally taken bounded societies as the natural unit of analysis leaving no room for transnational and global processes that connect national territories (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003: 578-79). The second one is territorial limitation that is dominant in the study of nationalism and confines the study of social processes to the political and geographic boundaries of a particular nation-state. This tendency is even more interesting because, as Wimmer and Glick Schiller observe, the concepts of the modern state, the nation and of a national population have developed within transborder spaces (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003: 581). Transborder networks of literate circles limited by practices and ideologies of the colonial and imperial domination emerged in these spaces. One needs to consider the history of these transborder and transnational processes of nation-state building and the associated circulation of people and ideas to appreciate the rise and evolution of nationalism and of the modern nation-state (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003: 581).

The theoretical and conceptual framework presented in this chapter aims to overcome the problems and limitations associated with methodological nationalism in two ways. First of all, this study problematizes the study of nationalism and of the nation-state model by making it the object of the analysis and is, therefore, far from oblivious to its relevance in national and international politics. Secondly, while the processes and agents analysed exist or are oriented towards the Libyan nation-state, the study of nationalism anchored on the analysis of the global flows brings into the picture transnational processes and agents outside the borders of the nation-state that move and act in transborder spaces. The brief historical excursus of global flows shaping nationalisms in the Middle East aimed to emphasize the importance of these spaces in the production of ideas of nationhood and nationness that Appadurai and theorists of globalization have attempted to make sense of. This study will consider the evolution of nationalism in Libya against this historical

perspective and in relation to transnational agents and transborder spaces that result from the global flows.

## **5. Data collection**

The two main methods of data collection used in 2016 and 2017 were open-ended semi-structured interviews and a complementary analysis of Internet media with a focus on social media sites and websites. In the field of nationalism studies, the tendency has been to focus on the so called ‘classic literature’ which includes government reports, textbooks, censuses, surveys, newspapers, speeches and diaries of nationalist leaders, chronological narratives, description of political regimes, economic and demographic statistics and the manifestos of nationalist organizations (Tsang and Woods 2014: 13; Smith 2014: 23). While these sources can be relevant to uncover key elements in the process of creation and dissemination of nationalist ideology, other methods can apply to the investigation of everyday nationalism. Fox and Miller-Idriss suggest combining qualitative methods of data collection, such as interviewing and focus groups, survey research and participant observation to approach the empirical study of everyday nationalism. Survey research provides ‘a general overview of the national sensibilities of relatively large segments of the population’ while qualitative modes of investigation can ‘capture variation in the nuance and texture of everyday nationhood’ (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 555). While these methods obtain insights into *what* the nation means for ordinary people, participant observation is a method that takes the national talk outside the research setting into which it is solicited to see *how* and *when* nationhood comes up into people’s everyday life (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 556).

In an attempt to operationalise this agenda empirically, the author was confronted with limitations dictated by access to the field. The security situation meant that participant observation was no longer an option in Libya by 2015. However, the direct observation in Libya in 2013 and 2014 provided an initial insight on how and when nationhood came up in the discursive and interactional contexts within the civil society space and in everyday life. That suggested the use of qualitative methods, and interviewing in particular, to provide accounts of the phenomenon in a way that actively involved the research participants. Focus groups would have also been an excellent research instrument, but given the fact that the study population was now scattered across Libya, the Middle East, Europe and North America, this method was impractical. Moreover, having chosen to focus on a small segment of the Libyan population rather than on a broad

examination of national sensibilities of large segments of the population, I chose not to conduct survey research. While I was engaging in showing ‘differences in kind’, other researchers showed ‘differences in numbers’ via survey instruments that explored the sense of identification of the Libyan population at large and that can be used to complement this analysis (Cole and Mangan 2016).

Fox and Miller-Idriss have discussed how qualitative interviewing techniques can unveil the way ordinary people articulate discourses on the nation, their everyday concerns and predicaments (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 538-39). Interviewing allows the recording of verbal and non-verbal manifestations, people’s talk and body talk that are ‘key to study people’s capacity to articulate their understanding of the nation and align with these understandings in discursive and non-discursive ways meaningful to them’ (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 555). Moreover, if the interviewer adopts a ‘wait-and-listen’ approach, interviewing can be an opportunity to let the interviewee choose the terms in which to elaborate on his/her representations of nationhood. Indirect questioning, Fox and Miller-Idriss suggest, can be a way to assess the everyday salience of nationalism by considering topics/questions that let the interviewee frame the response in national terms and observing when, how and in what contexts the nation is invoked to explain difference, predicaments and interpreting phenomena.

The research methods were developed to provide a snapshot of how territorial and transnational segments of Libyan society understood nationhood and nationness after the 2011 revolution. The first method of data collection was purposive semi-structured interviewing. The initial coding of these interviews suggested the need to complement them with an analysis of Internet media and, particularly, of social media sites and websites. As Bryant points out, in GTM initial coding is a way to highlight key aspects of the data and further orient the research and the data collection that proceeds simultaneously with the analysis (Bryant 2014: 127). As a result of this process, Internet media were included in the analysis further developing Fox and Miller-Idriss’s research agenda.

### *5.1 Purposive semi-structured interviews*

Thirty-nine interviews were conducted in total, as listed in Appendix 2. The interviewing strategy was developed in a way to allow space for the interviewee to narrate what she considered important through thick biographical accounts and semi-structured open-ended questioning. This form of

interviewing enables a deep understanding of the role of the individual and the community under study (Bray 2008: 309-12).

In order to identify the interviewees, the study population was clustered in the three groups that emerged from the literature review and direct observation of civil society in Libya, as defined in the previous section: political elite, civil society and diaspora. The overlap and fluidity of these groups of agents was evident from the start, suggesting the use of these categories as indicative of individuals engaging at different levels in the public space rather than as rigid units of analysis. The main operational criteria for the selection of interviewees were participation in political activities or civil society activism before, during and after the 2011 revolution, inside Libya or from the diaspora, through grassroots activism or Internet media.

Due to security considerations, travelling to Libya was no longer an option in 2016. However, following the outbreak of violence in Tripoli in the summer of 2014, Tunis and Cairo became 'meeting hubs' where members of the Libyan political elite and civil society converged for meetings, workshops, conferences and trainings hosted by the international community. Some of these individuals, still a minority, relocated to Tunis or Cairo. Twenty-five face-to-face interviews, five with women, were collected over two weeks in Cairo, in February 2016, and two months in Tunis, in March and May 2016.

Furthermore, the researcher chose to explore transnational diasporic nationalism with a focus on the UK and on the cities of London and Manchester as a result of both the fieldwork conducted in Egypt and in Tunisia in the spring of 2016, and the literature review. Indeed, on the one hand, the interviewees shared their perceptions of the relevance and diversity of the Libyan diaspora in the UK before, during and after the 2011 revolution. On the other hand, the statistics and the literature suggested that the UK hosted the largest Libyan diaspora community and one of the most active centres of political opposition to the Gaddafi regime.

Size, composition and distribution of diaspora communities are hard to identify due to the fluid nature of this social phenomenon (Shain 1989: 54). Diasporas are hardly captured in their entirety by statistics on international migration that do not include second and third generation individuals born in the 'host-country' who may not even have the citizenship of the 'home-country' but may nevertheless identify as nationals of their 'home-country' and as members of the diaspora.

Therefore, quantifying a diaspora requires going beyond the available migration statistics.<sup>4</sup> For the purpose of this study, various secondary sources (Vandewalle 1998; Gamaty 2012; Baldwin-Edwards 2005; Dumont 2006) and databases have been consulted to provide an estimate of the overall number of individuals who are identified or self-identify as members of the Libyan diaspora, and to pinpoint Libyan communities around the world. Two main databases are referenced in this study: the OECD International Migration Database (OECD 2019) and the 2017 UN International Migration Stock (United Nations 2017). In 2010, the UN estimated that out of a national population of around 6 million, a total of 127,168 people born in Libya were living outside the country (United Nations 2017).

The statistics showed that, in 2011, the UK was the country that since the 1990s had been consistently hosting the largest Libyan diaspora. According to the UK 2011 census, 16,452 residents were born in Libya.<sup>5</sup> UK census statistics, however, do not include second and third generation individuals born outside Libya. Faced with the inability to access information through the Libyan state and mindful of the flaws that international organisations have observed in the data provided by Libyan state authorities before (Gamaty 2012: 3-4), in order to overcome the limitations of the statistics, these data have been combined with the narratives of the interviewees, their memories and perceptions of the size and geography of Libyan diaspora communities. Libyan

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<sup>4</sup> The main indicators on international migration as presented in the OECD information note on statistical population related to the stock of foreign-born population by country of birth are (OECD 2019): inflows and outflows of foreign population by nationality; inflows of asylum seekers by nationality; stock of foreign-born population by country of birth; stock of foreign population by nationality; acquisition of nationality by country of former nationality; stock of foreign-born labour by country of birth; and stock of foreign labour by nationality. Data for these indicators are obtained mainly through four sources: census, labour force surveys, population registers and residence permit systems (OECD 2019). Population registers, residence permit data and specific surveys such as labour surveys or the International Passengers Survey are used in the UK, for instance, to collect data on inflows, outflows and stocks. However, these sources are far from comprehensive. Surveys usually are based on small samples and, as in the case of the Irish and UK International Passengers Survey, provided partial and misleading information that required significant correction after the latest census. Residence permit data does not reflect the actual physical flows or length of stay of people who have been accorded permanent or temporary residency. Moreover, as much as in the case of population registers that are based on residence or work permit, residence permit data do not account for illegal migrants or for definitive departures. The census, although infrequent, provides the most comprehensive data on the stock of foreign-born population by country of birth. This indicator includes both foreign and national citizens born abroad but does not capture the second and third generation individuals born in the 'host-country' (OECD 2019).

<sup>5</sup> For the analysis of the Libyan diaspora communities in the UK, the data above have been elaborated in combination with census data for 1981, 1991, 2001 and 2011 on the stock of usually resident foreign-born population by country of birth obtained by the Office for National Statistics, National Records Scotland and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA). While these data include all residents at the time of survey - all migrants, included students, and political refugees - this indicator does not include second and third generation individuals born outside Libya who may still identify as Libyans.

individuals resident in the UK interviewed in 2016 suggested that between 35,000 and 40,000 Libyans were living in the UK at that time.<sup>6</sup> Seven interviews, one with a woman, were collected in London, in June 2016, and in Manchester, in November and December 2016. Next to these face-to-face interviews, seven phone interviews were conducted with members of the diaspora, three of them women, based in Europe, Middle East and North America.

Purposive sampling and snowballing techniques were used to identify research participants. With regard to the political elite, the research targeted individuals who had participated in different transitional institutions, political processes and groups: members of the National Transitional Council and the House of Representatives; representatives of mainstream political groups like the National Forces Alliance and the Muslim Brotherhood-Justice and Construction party involved in the Libyan Political Agreement; representatives of mainstream political opposition groups in the diaspora like the National Front for the Salvation of Libya and the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood. The views and stances of other political groups were included where relevant through the analysis of secondary sources.

When it comes to civil society, the study included members of Libyan NGOs, independent activists, some of them belonging to professional associations, and freelance journalists. The NGOs included in this study mainly focused on civil society functions, as identified by Paffenholz such as: service delivery with a focus on humanitarian aid; monitoring of human rights, advocacy and public communication at the grassroots level and via the Internet through social media sites and web sites; and socialisation initiatives that contribute to the formation and practice of democratic attitudes and social cohesion by building a sense of community and strengthening bonds among citizens (Paffenholz 2010). The organizations whose members were directly involved in the study are: H2O, Bokra, 1Libya, Momkin and Ettawasol, these are youth organisations working on civic engagement; the Libyan Dialogue and Reconciliation Organisation (LDRO), an NGO working on intermediation and facilitation with a focus on dialogue and reconciliation at the local and national level; the Libyan Women Platform for Peace and the Committee to Support Women in Decision-Making, focusing on women's empowerment; the

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<sup>6</sup> As studies by Dumont and Gamaty pointed out, the numbers reported by Israel and Italy of residents born in Libya - 16,748 and 36,216 respectively - refer to people of Jewish and Italian origin born in Libya between 1911 and 1970 who left the country or were expelled totalling over 40,000 people who were repatriated (Dumont 2006: 11; Gamaty 2012: 14). Their membership to the Libyan political community remains contested but this issue is not addressed in this paper.



Libyan Institute of Advanced Studies (LIAS) dedicated to stabilisation and capacity building; and the Jusoor Centre focusing on research and women's empowerment. The content of the interviews and the author's experience of working with civil society organisations inside Libya suggest that the sample of research participants interviewed is representative of the leadership of Libyan NGOs, although not of the entire Libyan population. They tend to be more 'international', speak languages other than Arabic, are curious of the outside world which they have experienced through the Internet and through interaction with foreigners inside Libya after the 2011 revolution.

With respect to the diaspora, the research included individuals who had spent extensive periods of their lives in countries other than Libya who continued to identify as Libyans and engaged in politics or civil society before, during and after the 2011 revolution. The interviewees had, more often than not, experience of living in more than one country other than Libya. The countries are: Canada, United Arab Emirates, United States of America, United Kingdom, China, Egypt, Morocco, Sweden, South Korea, Singapore, France, Jordan, Syria, Qatar, Sri Lanka, Spain, Malta, Switzerland and Bahrain. Ten of them had long experience of living in the UK or were based in the UK, either London or Manchester, at the time of the interview.

Two semi-structured interview guides, reproduced in Appendix 1, guided the interview process: one for diaspora interviewees of different backgrounds and one for members of the political elite and civil society who did not migrate from Libya. The first set of questions were similar in the two schedules and aimed at unveiling the demographics of the interviewee while starting to engage him/her with questions of nationality/primary language and his/her experience of political, cultural or social engagement oriented at/inside Libya. This part of the interview with diaspora individuals focused on the reasons for and conditions of the dispersal and return – when that was relevant – and their engagement with political, social or cultural activities oriented at Libya before, during and after the revolution. This often turned into long narratives – between thirty minutes and one hour. The idea was to help informants to feel at ease and talk freely by starting with familiar references. This form of open-ended questioning allowed the interviewee to narrate the story of her civic and political engagement, while bringing up her sense of identification and belonging, as well as the practices of everyday nationalism. Moreover, this line of questioning presented an opportunity to fill a gap in the literature around the Libyan diaspora by providing a new descriptive narrative through the accounts of first and second-generation individuals – see Chapter Four.

The second part of the interview concerned the ideas around the Libyan nation, roots, home and collective memory, as well as the question of agency and role of media and technology in the process of shaping nationhood and nationness. The interviewees were asked questions about homeland, their social, political and religious values and ideas (another form of indirect questioning) but were also provided with specific questions in which a definition of nation was given to discuss to what extent Libya would fit in that definition based on their own knowledge and experience. In those cases in which the interviewee referred to Internet media the interviews were complemented with an analysis of websites and social media pages, as explained later in this chapter.

With the exception of one interview, the other thirty-eight were audio recorded. The research participants were given the possibility to remain anonymous at the beginning and at the end of the interview. The author obtained written or oral consent (audio recorded) to use and cite the data collected in each interview. To safeguard the safety of the interviewees in the current volatile security and political environment in Libya, the interviewees were made anonymous and the data collected were treated accordingly to maintain the anonymity of the interviewees.

### *5.2 Internet media: identifying social media sites and websites*

The choice of including an analysis of Internet media in this study resulted from the interviews conducted in 2016. The interviewees pointed to the relevance of advances in telecommunication technology in the twenty-first century in Libya related to satellite television and Internet media in particular. These technological developments led to significant changes in the ways people in Libya and members of the diaspora communicated. The latter, in particular, referred to this aspect suggesting a closer look to diasporic cultural consumption through communication technologies that can illuminate how diasporas imagine and project the nation (Lainer-Vos 2010: 895). The role of the Internet in imagining the homeland and in relation to diasporic discourses of nationalism has been brought to the attention of researchers in this field in the last ten years (Chan 2005). Websites and social media pages mentioned by the interviewees, widely accessible and up-to-date, were included in the analysis in order to deepen the understanding of the role of mediascapes and technoscapes in the process of constructing and experiencing nationhood and nationness.

A list was compiled of websites and social media pages emerged from the interviews in order to run a prior consultation of those – see Appendix 3. From this initial consultation, the enormous amount of material available suggested developing some selection criteria to identify the websites and social media pages most helpful for the analysis. To give an idea, more than 40,000 entries were retrieved from Shabab Libya’s Facebook page, including posts by the admin, posts and comments by followers, which included text, photos, videos and links to other articles or websites. As pointed out by Lai and To with respect to social media usage for research purposes, 'the lack of a versatile methodology for selecting, collecting, processing, and analysing contextual information obtained from social media sites' remains a main barrier in the use of these primary sources (Lai and To 2015: 138). In this case, the Nvivo software was used to capture and import data from websites and social media sites, and to analyse the imported data through the content analysis strategy devised for the interviews described in the next section. However, the inconvenience presented by the use of Facebook to construct the research data via Nvivo was that for those pages with a significant amount of content (40,000+ entries) the page would crash through the capturing process. In these cases the data were retrieved manually through a smart phone.

Two main criteria were identified to select websites and social media pages. First of all, only one site or page was selected when the entity under examination had developed more than one Internet media - i.e. Facebook Page, Twitter Page and website – and the content shared across platforms overlapped. For instance, in the case of the Shabab Libya movement, it established a Facebook page and a Twitter page, as well as a website during and after the revolution. The content on Facebook and Twitter overlapped and the website was no longer accessible in 2017. Moreover, capturing Twitter data proved incomplete and random due to Twitter's own policies. On the contrary, Facebook allowed to capture the data in their entirety. Therefore, the Facebook page was included in the analysis. This resulted in 46,855 entries including posts, comments and images. Second, websites and social media pages were purposively selected to represent the different groups of agents explored in the study. In relation to the diaspora, the focus was on diasporic websites and social media pages produced by individuals and groups in the diaspora which emerged as most relevant in the narratives of the interviewees. In relation to Libyan civil society, considered the volatile and fragile post-revolutionary Libyan civil society landscape, the focus was

on organizations whose online presence was sustained in terms of followers, online activity, as well as activities on the ground.

Based on these criteria, two Facebook pages and one website were included in the analysis: Libya our Home: News and Views, a diaspora website; the Facebook page of Shabab Libya-Libyan Youth Movement; and the Facebook page of H2O Organisation, a Libya based NGO. This sample does not aim to be representative of the websites and social media pages created or surfed by the Libyan diaspora or members of Libyan CSOs. It is used to deepen the understanding of the content and role of Internet media among these communities of agency as well as their ideas and practices around the nation. Including these social media sites and websites proved to be useful to explore their communication functions and the nature of the content offered to the users while looking at the representation of national, ethnic and/or cultural specificity, and the everyday activities by members of the diaspora and civil society of identifying, receiving, and re-appropriating a sense of belonging, consciousness and groupness. Moreover, through sharing of text, pictures and videos, the social media sites and websites opened a window on everyday practices and interactions related to sports, heritage, landscape, music, and objects with a national imprint such as traditional clothing, armed conflict, commemorations and national holidays. The methods employed for the analysis of this material are described in the next section.

## **6. Data analysis**

The data analysis strategy applied to this study combines content analysis of text and images and discourse analysis of text. First, a thematic matrix of categories was elaborated through the coding process in an iterative and inductive way to analyse the content of discursive strategies and semiotic materialities, mainly photos but also images such as flags and drawings. Second, discourse analysis was used as a research method to study written and spoken language in relation to its social context. A particular model for discourse analysis, as developed by Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart (Wodak 2009), was applied to the analysis of text resulting from interviews and Internet media. The analysis is predominantly qualitative although a simple quantitative analysis was employed where relevant to provide basic information about the frequency of images with regards to thematic categories and assess the basic functions of Internet media.

### *6.1 Content analysis of text and images*

In this study, a qualitative approach to content analysis informed by GTM and Krippendorff's method for content analysis was applied to extract central themes from the data collected through interviews and Internet media, both text and images (Krippendorff 2013). Content analysis can be deployed in parallel with other methods and, although mainly associated with the analysis of texts and documentation, it has value when applied to the analysis of text resulting from interview data, Internet media and images (Prior 2014: 361; Margolis and Zunjarwad 2018; Margolis and Rowe 2011). Qualitative content analysis raises questions around the representativeness of the material as a whole and the risk of the researcher to be selective and partial in the interpretation of the material (Prior 2014). This limitation can be addressed by combining thematic analysis with other techniques of discourse and quantitative visual analysis, as explained in section 6.2 and 6.3 below.

Krippendorff's approach to content analysis consists of: sampling the text - i.e. selecting what is relevant to the research question and analytical framework; unitizing it by distinguishing words or propositions and using quotes or examples; contextualizing it with the knowledge of the surrounding circumstances and known literature (Krippendorff 2013). In the first stage of sampling, Appadurai's five 'scapes' were identified as overarching categories which were useful to systematise the data collected. This analysis was conducted through the Nvivo software.

As a starting point in the construction of a coding matrix, some key themes and concepts were identified within each 'scape' a priori while allowing for categories to emerge from text and images following an open and axial coding method (Strauss 1987; Margolis and Rowe 2011). This type of coding demands treating categories as provisionally constructed through a sequential and comparative process focused on the examination of relations, similarities and differences within and among categories which can be expanded or collapsed when appropriate, therefore allowing for the identification and recoding of categories as absent or null (Margolis and Rowe 2011: 353).

### *6.2 Discourse analysis of text*

Once the coding matrix was developed, narrative analysis and the model by Wodak et al to investigate the discursive construction of national identity were applied to the text to deepen the understanding of words and propositions descriptive of the thematic categories.

Narrative analysis was particularly useful to analyse the first part of interviews whose content was biographical (Prior 2014: 366). These narratives did not answer specific questions on nationhood or nationness but were in themselves explanatory of the underlying sense of identification and belonging of the research participants. Chronology, plot and characters are central to narrative analysis (Prior 2014: 366-67). By focusing on chronology we break the narrative in three main parts: beginning, middle and ending. A broad understanding of the term 'characters' beyond individuals, what Greimas refers to as 'actants' beyond human subjects, informed the analysis to include characters such as 'the nation', 'the East', 'the West' or 'the Internet' among others (Prior 2014: 367). This approach, as Ricoeur argues, allows the researcher to unveil the explanatory force of the chronological structure of a narrative and not the merely descriptive one (Ricoeur 1984). For instance, most narratives of diaspora interviewees referred to a pre-Internet and satellite TV era (beginning of the narrative) and a period of change initiated in the 2000s by 'characters' such as the Internet and satellite TV (middle of the narrative) that culminated in the 2011 revolution and its aftermath (ending of the narrative). While describing the evolution of the media landscape in Libya and its implications, these narratives unveiled how the interviewees understood change and the main agents behind it. This analysis was useful to reconstruct the political history of the Libyan civil society and the diaspora, and explain the changes experienced by people in Libya and in the diaspora in the age of the ICT revolution.

Narrative analysis was combined with the discourse analytical model by Wodak, de Cillia, Reisigl and Liebhart to unpack the discursive formation of national identity (Wodak 2009). This model focuses on the discursive strategies and linguistic means through which national constructs are created. Wodak et al. identify five main discursive strategies that tend to occur more or less simultaneously and are interwoven in discourse (Wodak 2009: 31-35). First, constructive strategies aim to build and establish a national identity by emphasising unification, identification, solidarity but also differentiation from 'the other'. Second, perpetuation strategies aim to maintain and reproduce a threatened national identity, preserve, support and protect it. As a subgroup within this category, justification strategies try to justify or relativize by restoring, maintaining and defending the legitimacy of past acts or events important in the creation of a national history which have been put into question. Third, transformation strategies, attempt to transform a well-established national identity and its components into another identity. Fourth, demontage or dismantling strategies aim at dismantling all or parts of national identity constructs without providing a new model. Fifth,

strategies of assimilation and dissimilation aim to create similarity and homogeneity or difference and heterogeneity and in so doing may be constructive, destructive, perpetuating or justifying.

These strategies were used to interpret the content of the text emerged from the thematic analysis by focusing on the linguistic means through which the strategies are realised. The means include: lexical units and syntactic devices which serve the purpose of constructing unification, unity, sameness, difference, uniqueness, origin, continuity, autonomy, gradual or abrupt change with reference to persons, space and time; the phenomenon of vagueness in expressions, euphemisms, linguistic hesitations, disruptions and slips, allusions, rhetorical questions and the direct or indirect modes of reporting speech; the use of tropes and in particular personification, synecdoche and metonymy which are used to create sameness between people and are used in connection with constructive and perpetuation strategies; the deictic use of “we” as a means to include and exclude, annex and usurp, in its paternalistic and historical multiple meanings (Wodak 2009: 35). This use of strategies and linguistic means is most evident in the narratives concerning the inclusion of non-Arab and non-Muslim minorities within the Libyan nation deployed by some civil society actors. The use of constructive strategies to establish a new nation by emphasising unification and differentiation from neighbouring countries, is reflected in the use of syntactic devices that serve the purpose of constructing unification or uniqueness.

This thematic and discourse analysis led to the identification of extracts to substantiate the themes. The extracts are typical examples that represent recurring themes, settings, individuals or activities and are used to support the analysis to illustrate and substantiate key findings.

### *6.3 Analysis of websites, social media pages and images*

In order to analyse the images collected from websites and social media pages between August and October 2017, two methods of analysis were used: the model by Koukoutsaki-Monnier for the analysis of websites and the one by Margolis and Rowe for the analysis of images used as documentary data to provide evidence and document specific moments, illustrate concepts and categories constructed through the content analysis (Koukoutsaki-Monnier 2012; Margolis and Rowe 2011; Wodak 2009). The analytical approach to visual analysis was developed in connection with the analysis of textual data and based on the coding matrix created through the Nvivo

software. The visual data were collected through Ncaptor for Nvivo, analysed and stored with the Nvivo software as well as manually when necessary.

The analysis of Internet media started with the identification of the contextual unit of analysis, the home page in the case of web sites and the 'wall' for social media pages. As McMillan points out, with a website the home page is an ideal unit since many website visitors make their choice to continue their visit or not based on that page (McMillan 2000: 82). The 'wall' is also the first page the Internet user is faced with in the navigation of social media sites. When sub-pages and links relevant to the research subject were identified in the home page, the analysis extended to those sub-pages. The analysis was not limited to verbal units but extended to structural features (images, videos, animations, links) and the 'demographics' of the site (country where the site was set up and institution/individual that created or sponsored it) where possible.

Before proceeding with the qualitative coding, I employed quantitative content analysis to provide a quantitative assessment of the occurrence of communication functions of the website/social media page identified (Koukoutsaki-Monnier 2012: 670). In the case of social media pages, the quantitative analysis of communication functions was undertaken for the posts shared by the page administrator (Koukoutsaki-Monnier 2012: 670). Secondly, following a qualitative, structural semiotics and interpretive approach (Margolis and Rowe 2011; Margolis and Zunjarwad 2018), I looked at the representations of the national, ethnic and/or cultural specificity and sense of belonging with a focus on the way these means were used to 'forge symbolic constructions, memory and identity reconfigurations, as well as figures of the "other"' (Koukoutsaki-Monnier 2012: 670). This is not only relevant to understand the double spatial and temporal sense of belonging observed among migrant populations, as Koukoutsaki-Monnier observed, but also to uncover the sense of identification and belonging among other segments of the population. Images were categorised on the basis of the coding matrix constructed through the analysis of the interviews while allowing for the construction of new categories and a review of the existing ones that were collapsed and expanded throughout the process (Margolis and Rowe 2011). I then employed quantitative content analysis where relevant in order to provide basic information on the categories and their frequency.

Like in all social research, there are some limitations to the use of images, and photographs in particular, that have been carefully considered. First, websites and Facebook pages provide



unprecedented easy and wide access to photographs whose communication function and purpose, however, is not always easy to identify. Ideally a picture should be examined in relation to text when creating meaning out of it (Holm 2014: 384). Second, anonymity of the photograph is often a common problem when nothing or very little is known about the photographer's intent or the context of the picture. 'Vernacular' photographs (Margolis and Rowe 2011: 337), coming from unknown sources and offering little or none documentary information (date, location, name of the photographer, subject or reason for being made) are more difficult to interpret. This issue has been raised by other authors before in relation to archival photos (Holm 2014: 384) and limited the use of these photos as documentary data for social research. In this case, this study uses images in a complementary way to provide an illustration of phenomena emerged as relevant through the direct observation and the narratives of the research participants and does not claim representativeness of a sample or groups of agents. Ambiguity as well as subjectivity have been carefully considered.

To conclude this section, an example is included to show how the thematic coding matrix was developed in relation to Appadurai's scapes, and how methods of data collection and analysis were relevant to explore the scapes and ultimately contribute to the thesis. The coding matrix was formulated out of recurring themes in the data and was not a set of preconceived themes imposed on the data. Technoscapes are the technological flows both mechanical and informational systems such as computers and telecommunications, for storing, retrieving, and sending information. Technoscapes are closely linked to mediascapes, the electronic capabilities to produce and disseminate information that provide large and complex repertoires of images and narratives to viewers throughout the world (Appadurai 1996: 34-35). A direct question on the role of technology and media vis-à-vis nationhood and nationness was included in the interview schedule to provide information and different perspectives around these subjects. A section of the coding matrix is reproduced below in relation to technoscapes and mediascapes with a focus on Internet websites:

- Technoscapes & Mediascapes
  - o Use of Internet
    - Websites before 2011
      - Libya Watanona (diaspora website)
        - o Enhanced communication within the diaspora

- Enhanced communication between diaspora and homeland
- Reproduction of ideas and images of the Libyan nation
  - Ethno-cultural dimension
    - Traditional clothing
    - National heritage
  - Civic-political dimension
    - Anti-colonial resistance heroes
    - 1951 independence flag
    - Martyrs of the Gaddafi regime

From the interviews it emerged that Internet technology provided a new virtual space for diaspora communities and the Libyan population to practice nationhood and, in so doing, present and discuss alternative ideas of nation to that of the Gaddafi regime. By combining the interview material with textual, photographic and video material retrieved from the website Libyan Watanona, it was possible to deepen the understanding of the content and relevance of the site with respect to ideas, practices and images of the nation. The images were analysed through visual content analysis as discussed above.

## **7. Thesis structure**

Initially, the thesis structure was based on Appadurai's scapes that were to inform each chapter – although from the start the fact that financescapes had emerged as not particularly relevant in the process of shaping nationness and nationhood, made a structure based on scapes unconvincing. As the writing up proceeded in that direction, the author realised that attempting to isolate each scape rather than analyse their interplay was difficult to achieve in practice. For instance, the attempt to separate agents (ethnoscapes) from their ideas of nation (ideoscapes) resulted in a convoluted narrative characterised by missing parts of the story. This process was also counter-productive in showing how nationhood and nationness emerged as a result of the interplay of the global cultural flows. The focus ought to be on the way the nation is imagined and practised as a result of the flows and their disjunctures.

Therefore, the empirical material was structured around ideas of the nation and everyday practices in their traditional ethno-cultural and civic-political dimensions, highlighting through the

narrative the relevance and interplay of flows in shaping them. Furthermore, the empirical material related to the period of the Gaddafi regime, particularly the 2000s as an important decade of change both in state-society relations but also in the communication and relations between the Libyan diaspora and the Libyan political elite and people 'at home', was included in Chapter Three and Chapter Four to provide a rich historical and contextual analysis of the role of the flows in contributing to the emergence of nationness and nationhood among the study population.

## **8. Ethical considerations and research limitations**

As the limits of the specific methods have been discussed in the relevant sections above, this last section discusses the overall limitations concerning access to the field, ethical considerations, as well as language issues.

As Libya emerged from armed conflict while showing signs of relapse into violence in 2013, the researcher prioritized the research participants' and her own wellbeing and safety throughout the research process. This meant assessing carefully the best strategy to get access to the field when possible and, when this was no longer an option, maintaining a careful eye on the risks associated with conducting interviews by considering aspects of vulnerability and anonymity. In order to do so, the purpose of the research was made clear to the research participants before and during the interviews through means of communication and by meeting in locations that were perceived safe and conducive to an open conversation. Interviewees that were based in Libya, for instance, preferred to meet in Tunis or Cairo to discuss the issues at stake rather than talk on the phone.

An information sheet and consent form were sent in advance to the research participants to provide them with all the information needed to take an informed decision about their participation in the research. The same information was also provided on the day of the interview. Even when the interviewee decided to take part in the research, during the interview she was allowed to withdraw at any moment if that was causing any trauma or distress and this was stressed at the beginning of the interviews when written and verbal consent was obtained. Written consent was obtained when the interviewees did not agree to be recorded and, in that case, it was not possible to audio-record the verbal consent. Having given the opportunity to research participants to choose whether to maintain anonymity or not, towards the end of the writing process the researcher chose to render all research participants anonymous. This was in light of the violent developments in

Libya and the sensitivity of the subjects addressed, such as the place of Islam in the Libyan nation. That subject became increasingly sensitive in the last few years. This decision was meant to ensure the safety of the research participants and their families who are based in Libya and are particularly active on social media. The killings of civil society activists, politicians and journalists in 2014 also suggested this course of action. Lastly, all the data collected were safely stored by protecting the sheet with the names of the research participants with a password. Interview transcripts were stored in a password locked hard drive. The interview audio-records were deleted from the recorders after the interviews to ensure that if the recorders were lost, these did not contain interview records. At the end of the research the information will be destroyed.

With respect to language, the author received Arabic language training throughout the duration of the PhD process – Academic Reading Skills course and Language course at Durham University. This allowed the researcher to gain the skills necessary to read text and translate it with the support of a dictionary and translation apps. This was helpful to analyse text from the Internet in Arabic although some text was also available in English. The content in Arabic was translated by the author and where too complex with the support of a translator. Concerning the interviews, most interviewees mastered English to a level that allowed for fluent conversations. Most of the diaspora interviewees were bilingual (Arabic-English), for instance. Therefore, the interviews were conducted in English with the exception of one interview when an activist acted as interpreter. In that case the transcript was later reviewed with a translator and with the support of the audio-recorded interview to ensure that the meaning was accurate. Furthermore, in order to ensure that cultural associations, sometimes difficult to render in another language, could come across fully from the conversations, when the interviewees were uncertain about how to express a concept or a word in English, they were invited to express that concept or word in Arabic that was reviewed by the author with a translator. To give an example, the use of the expression ‘double shafra’ (shafra meaning sim card) to refer to individuals with double nationality described the ability of the individuals from the diaspora to switch sim card – i.e. cultural codes – upon their arrival in Libya from the host-country. The expression was used to stress the difference between the ‘real’ Libyans ‘at home’ and Libyans from the diaspora. In some circumstances, the use of the word reflected resentment and judgement on the part of Libyans who did not have dual citizenship or the experience and opportunity to live abroad. This exercise was necessary to mitigate the risks of miscommunication when the language used is neither the primary language of the researcher nor

of the research participant. When transcribing interviews I edited words and/or sentences to conform to a more correct linguistic English style. In so doing, I was careful not to alter the meaning I believe my respondent wanted to deliver.

## **9. Conclusion**

The research methodology and methods described in this chapter provided the reader with the details concerning how the research was conducted in practice. This study contributes to advancing interpretivist, inductive and qualitative approaches grounded on GTM in the study of nationalism and globalization. It does so while reflecting the tendency in the study of everyday nationhood to explore the subject through empirical qualitative investigations of individual country case studies (Antonsich and Skey 2017: 7). This interpretive and qualitative research aims to understand and unpack the motivations and meanings that lie behind human behaviour and our interpretation of the external world (Della Porta and Michael 2008: 26-27). At the centre of this study are discourse, practices and semiotic resources developed in the private and public spaces by individuals and groups that are part of the political elite, the civil society and the diaspora. This research focuses on how the global cultural flows impact them and contribute to shape nationhood and nationness among these sections of the Libyan society.

## **Chapter 3 A long history of flows**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter provides a contextual and historical background to the empirical analysis of the global cultural flows with a focus on ideas, symbols and practices that contributed to the articulation and transmission of nationhood and nationness in Libya in the twentieth century. Through a chronological account, it illustrates the interplay among the flows of people, ideas, technologies, images and capital across Libyan history. As political and economic interdependence expanded in the 1960s and Libya started to partake in the global economy after the discovery of oil and the advent and evolution of electronic media, the flows started to acquire a global connotation that created a new order of instability in the production of modern subjectivities (Appadurai 1996). The focus is on the twentieth century until the 1990s when the digital, information and communication revolutions contributed to initiate a period of change in Libya that culminated in the 2011 revolution – that period is discussed in the next chapter. By tracing the evolution of the flows across time and space, and through the agency of the political elite, the civil society and the diaspora as they became relevant across Libyan history, the chapter contextualises the multiple manifestations of nationhood and nationness discussed in the following chapters. While other authors have provided a partial political history of the origins of the Libyan nation and the construction of a national identity (Baldinetti 2010; Mezran 2007), this chapter will construct a narrative around flows using secondary sources.

The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section introduces key historical periods and themes going back to the indigenous communities preceding the Arab invasion in the seventh-century AD. Far from aiming to establish the antiquity or the existence of a Libyan nation or of an Amazigh nation, the section focuses on migrations and transfer of ideas that emerged from the empirical analysis as particularly relevant in the process of imagining the nation today. The second section on colonial history and independence (1911-1951) addresses the relevance of this period for producing the symbols of the resistance to the colonial occupation that informed ideas, symbols and practices around the nation among the political elite in exile. The section also discusses the role of the political elite in crafting an idea of nation and a national imaginary through the debate around and the promulgation of the constitution. The third section on the Libyan Kingdom (1951-1969) presents the means and themes that the political elite used to further develop a national

imaginary at a time when Libya started to take part in the emerging global economy. The fourth section is centred on the Gaddafi regime (1969-1990s) and its homogenizing vision of the Libyan nation. It addresses how the repression of the opposition and the control exercised by the regime on information and communication technologies (ICT) resulted in new flows of people from Libya and in a limited communication between ‘the national’ and ‘the global’. Through this historical analysis we observe the evolving processes and agents within the territory of the state in conjunction with external agents and processes. The focus on the political elite and state narratives in these sections reflects the limited scope of historical research on the subject that the author tried to overcome for the period concerning the Gaddafi’s regime by integrating in the following chapter an account of everyday practices of nationhood and their impact on nationness among the diaspora and the civil society. In so doing, we begin unveiling how the relation between spheres of social life (private, civil society and state) evolved historically, but also how the relation between ‘the national’ and ‘the global’ developed as the nature of the flows changed throughout the twentieth century to impact on ideas of peoplehood and selfhood.

## **2. Ethnicity, religion, tribalism and regionalism through the lens of flows**

The political and social evolution of North Africa and of Libya is the result of interactions occurring across centuries between the people of the region, their continental neighbours, those coming from the northern shore of the Mediterranean and from the Near East (Maddy-Weitzman 2006: 71). Through this process, the flows of people became a conduit for ethnicities, tribes and religions to travel across the region. This can help us contextualize some political and social features that characterize the debate around nationness in Libya today.

Indigenous people inhabited North Africa and the Greater Sahara before the arrival of the Phoenicians in the eight century BC. The term Imazighen – plural word for Berber (Amazigh singular) – is used to refer to communities heterogeneous in dialects, religion, culture and ethnicity. Indeed, the existence of an ethnically homogenous Amazigh people is hard to demonstrate in the past as much as it is today. For instance, Tuareg are Amazigh but their ethnic origin differs from that of Amazigh people of the coast. However, what differentiated them from other people who came to the region were the Berber language and dialects that they share and comprehend (Brett and Fentress 1996: 3-4; Najem 2017: 13).

The arrival of the Phoenicians, followed by the Greeks, the Romans, the Vandals, the Byzantines and by the Arab Islamic conquest, reconfigured the socio-ethnic fabric of the region. In particular, the seventh century migration from the Arabian Peninsula was the largest and fastest compared to previous mass migrations of Arab tribes, as they were united by the message of Islam (Wright 2012: 55). The arrival of Arab tribes in Cyrenaica and the conquest of that region in 633 was followed by the occupation of Tripolitania in 635 – although other authors refer to 642 and 645 respectively – and by that of Fezzan in 663 (Najem 2017: 21-23; St John 2014: 277-78; Wright 2012: 56-57). These three regions were geographically separated by desert – the Sirtica in the north between Tripolitania and Cyrenaica and the Libyan desert's bare rocky plateaus in the south. By the beginning of the eighth century, the early Arab tribes had spread throughout most of what constitutes Libya today, creating the first Islamic society in the Maghreb (Najem 2017: 21-23).

Arabic language and Islam were introduced at that time. Arabic was imposed on Amazigh people as the official language of communication, religion, economics, culture and administration (Najem 2017: 24-25). The process of Arabization was facilitated through the conversion of the Amazigh population to Islam. The converts took the name of the Arabs who had converted them, entering in this way the genealogy of their adoptive Arab tribes (Lugan 2016: 136). Many Imazighen, however, escaped the Arab occupiers to the desert where they maintained control of trans-Saharan trade, confining Islam to the coast in the initial stages of the Arab invasion (Brett and Fentress 1996: 120-26). Furthermore, the political and religious disputes within the Muslim empire in the eighth century had an impact on the Imazighen tribes of the western mountains, the Jebel Nafusa, who joined the Ibadite sect, part of the Kharijite politico-religious protest movement which rejected the authority of the Caliph at the time for discriminating against Amazigh people. Since then, the Muslim Ibadi faith has been largely embraced by the Imazighen of that area (Wright 2012: 59-60). The presence of large communities of Jews, who constituted an influential and intellectual middle class, was also recorded at the time (Wright 2012: 59).

Amazigh rebellions continued to occur until the eleventh century. The process of Arabization was only completed by the fourteenth century and following another major flow of Bedouin Bani Hilali and Bani Suleiman Arab tribes in the eleventh century. Estimates suggest between 100,000 and 300,000 individuals travelled from Arabia to North Africa at that time (Ahmida 2009, 15-17). These tribes took control of land and water resources, turning Berbers and the seventh century Arab tribes into clients and vassals, marking the Arabness of the region. The



oral narrative of the Hilali migration became the most popular epic in the pre-colonial modern history of the region to the extent that the leaders of the twentieth century anti-colonial resistance, like Umar al-Mukhtar, were compared to the knights of the Hilali tribes (Ahmida 2009: 17-18).

More recently, critical historiographical approaches have emphasised that the Arabization and Islamization of North Africa were based on the tribal and nomadic social organization that Imazighen and Arabs shared. It facilitated intermixing and eventually led to the Arabization of the Amazigh indigenous population (Ahmida 2009: 17). As ecological factors related to the nature of the soil, rain and underground water determined the limited choice of modes of production, the pastoralist nomad migration of the eleventh century reinforced pastoralism and nomadism, and with it tribalism that became the dominant mode of social organization until the early twentieth century (St John 2014: 278; Ahmida 2009: 18-19).

Furthermore, as Ahmida also demonstrated, desert ecology, migrations and conquests reinforced regionalism, understood as the political and economic autonomy of Cyrenaica and Fezzan from Tripolitania. The ability of tribes and regional states in these areas to establish strong socio-economic relations with regional markets and tribes in neighbouring areas allowed them to escape or to contest the authority of Tripoli (Ahmida 2009: 11-12). In Tripolitania, throughout the Norman and Almohad rule in the twelfth and thirteenth century, periodic struggles between Arab and Imazighen continued to characterise the hinterland (Wright 2012: 63-64). Meanwhile, Cyrenaica, mainly inhabited by Arab nomads, was ruled from Egypt by the Fatimids and by the Seljuk Turks. Fezzan was an indigenous independent or semi-independent state based on Saharan trade and the preservation of safe caravan routes (Wright 2012: 64-66).

Other migratory flows reached North Africa and Libya from Europe and from the territories of the Ottoman empire from the thirteenth century onwards. Within the framework of the Spanish *reconquista* that reached Tripoli in 1510, the Muslims of Spain – or Andalusians – were a mixture of Berbers, Arabs, Africans and locals who had converted to Islam and left Spain following the religious and ethnic cleansing of Muslims and Jews. A few thousand settled in Tripoli, Benghazi, Derna and Misrata (Najem 2017: 75; Wright 2012: 69).

The Ottoman conquest of Tripoli from the Spanish in 1551 and the establishment of the province of Tripolitania as part of the Ottoman empire - Cyrenaica remained under the Mamluks of Egypt until 1638 - introduced a new political structure and ethnicities that soon became

tribalised. Karaghla emerged as a group first, and a tribe later, between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century, from the mingling of Ottoman soldiers of diverse descent with local Libyans, both Imazighen, by then Arabised, and Arabs. Their number soon reached tens of thousands, spreading into cities and towns outside of Tripoli to the east, west and south (Najem 2017: 98-103). Kologhli people (plural for Karaghla) constituted the class of soldiers and senior administrators. Among them, Ahmad Karamanli led the revolution against the Ottoman ruler of Tripoli in 1711 to govern independently. He was recognised as Pasha of Tripoli by the Sultan. The Karamanli brought Cyrenaica, and towards the end of the reign also Fezzan, within their orbit, governing Libya until 1835 when the Ottomans regained control of the province until the Italian military occupation in 1911 (Ahmida 2009: 23-24; Wright 2012: 78-79). Until then the only real challenge to Ottoman rule came from the Sanusi order.

The Sanusiyah was a Sufi reformist order that emerged in the mid-nineteenth century in Cyrenaica as a reaction to the weakening of the Muslim Ottoman state and to counter colonialism (Ahmida 2009: 86-87; Baldinetti 2010: 30-31). Sufism can be broadly described as ‘a form of Islamic spirituality that by the early medieval period had developed specific rituals that were meant to focus the believer’s attention upon God – in some cases leading to claims of direct experience with God’ (Ridgeon 2014: xvi). In the Maghreb, Sufism dates to the twelfth century and to the Almohad period. As a religious and a political movement built around the institution called *zawya* - lodges that operated as schools, commercial, military and legal centres - Sufism flourished in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries with the intent to democratize and deepen the Islamic faith and assume the leadership of the resistance against the European invasions from the Iberian peninsula to North Africa (Ahmida 2009: 91; Laroui 1977: 245). Little has been written about the origins of the first Sufi orders in Libya that scholars have recently dated to between the eleventh and the twelfth century (Kakar and Langhi 2017: 5).

The Sanusi order achieved wide fame. Its founder, Muhammad Ali al-Sanusi (1787-1859), was a scholar from Algeria who had studied in North Africa and al-Hijaz. It was in Arabia that he was harshly criticised by Hijazi scholars for his critique of the four schools of Sunni Islam and for his call for free interpretation of *Sharia* law. He took refuge in Yemen and then returned to North Africa where he chose Cyrenaica, distant from the control of the Ottomans in Tripoli, to settle and build his first *zawiya* in 1842. The theology of al-Sanusi combined reformist ideas related to the individual’s positive moral engagement in social life with Sufi institutions and methods of

organizations. In line with Sufism, he focused on the *Quran*, the *Sunnah* (daily practices of the Prophet) but only on some *Hadith* (sayings of the Prophet), stressing that some of those might be contradictory and fabricated hence requiring free thinking and interpretation. While rejecting luxury and more vivid Sufi practices such as the artificial production of ecstasy, music, dancing and singing, he preached toleration of other Sufi brotherhoods and allowed the veneration of leading Sufis and their tombs (Ahmida 2009: 90-91; Baldick 2012: 395.3-97.3). According to Ahmida, the ability of the Sanusiyah to transcend ethnic and tribal identification accounted for their success as a religious and a social movement. For instance, in the region of Kufra, the Grand Sanusi reconciled Arabs and Tebu, an ethnic group spread across southern Libya, northern Chad, north-eastern Niger and north-western Sudan. In turn, they embraced the movement (Ahmida 2009: 92-95).

As Sufism found expression in the socioeconomic and legal organizational system of the Sanusiyah in the hinterland and in the east of Libya, in Tripolitania, under the Ottoman occupation and later under the Italians, religious institutions were systematized into an autonomous hierarchy of Maliki *ulema* (religious scholars) that dominated modern judicial institutions and had an important role in the politics of the province and in blocking the spreading of the Sanusiyah and Sufi Islam in the region (Ahmida 2009: 85-86; Mezran 2007: 76). The Sunni Maliki school of jurisprudence had spread from Hijaz to North Africa through contacts established during the pilgrimage to Mecca and had become the dominant school of jurisprudence in North Africa (Hussin 2014: 381). The relations between the Sanusi order and the Ottomans were not negative nor confrontational and ultimately they allied in the face of the Italian military invasion. However, while the unity among tribes in the east, cemented by the Sanusiyah, made it possible to resist the colonial occupation in Cyrenaica until 1932, factionalism in Tripolitania led to the defeat of the resistance ten years earlier (Ahmida 2009: 92-95).

The importance of tribal life as the predominant mode of social organization among Berbers and Arabs goes back to before the Arab invasions (St John 2014: 278; Obeidi 2001: 43-45). Tribal relations and alliances developed not only through the migratory flows and the power and influence of external actors, but also through internal flows within what constitutes Libya today, particularly so over the last five centuries. These internal flows are mostly ignored by the mainstream literature on Libyan history. Faraj Najem provides several examples and how they affected the social fabric of the Libyan state (Najem 2017: 158-64). For instance, in the sixteenth

century, Tripolitanian traders from Tajura, Zlitan, and Mislata settled in the city of Benghazi only to be expelled to another eastern city, Derna, by traders from Misrata who came to dominate the city's economic life. The success of these traders was followed by their social integration that, Najem suggests, was reflected in naming streets and neighbourhoods in Benghazi after Tripolitanian tribes and places. Furthermore, Tripolitanian ulama served the religious and administrative needs of Cyrenaica by working as teachers, in the judiciary and in the provincial administration (Najem 2017: 163-64). Later, in the nineteenth century, a Ottoman and Tripolitanian military campaign against Cyrenaican tribes, inter-tribal fighting and natural calamities such as famines, droughts and lethal diseases, resulted in migratory flows across the country, as well as towards Egypt and Tunisia, resettlements and mixing of the population through intermarriage (Najem 2017: 158-61). Najem considers these events as having significantly contributed to building a social fabric based on familial and tribal relations long before the country's independence.

To sum up, by retracing the movements of people that characterised the history of the North African region and of Libya before the twentieth century, some key themes have emerged: first, the presence of diverse ethnicities in the territory that constitutes Libya today – Arab, Amazigh, Jewish and Tebu – and the mixing of these ethnicities among them and with Europeans and individuals coming from the Ottoman empire; second, the importance of Islam in its multiple dimensions - Maliki, Sufi and Ibadi; third, the significance of tribalism as the predominant mode of social organization at the dawn of the twentieth century; fourth, regionalism as the result of ecological and socio-political factors. These features and how they evolved across the modern history of Libya will be further addressed through the following historical analysis.

### **3. Colonial occupation and independence (1911-1951)**

The relevance of this historical period for the evolution of ideas and practices of nationhood in Libya is twofold. On the one hand, the resistance to the colonial occupation provided the material upon which ideas, symbols and practices around the Libyan nation were initially developed by the political exiles in the diaspora as part of an embryonic national imaginary that was also influenced by the dominant ideologies in the region at the time. On the other hand, the debate preceding independence and the 1951 constitution defined the concept of a Libyan nation.

Libya in its current state borders emerged as a construct of the European colonial order throughout the first half of the 20th century. Colonialism had a detrimental effect on the establishment of a Libyan state and of a Libyan nation in three main respects. First, the *de facto* tripartite administration of Cyrenaica, Fezzan and Tripolitania during the Italian occupation (1911-1943) and the British and French military administrations (1943-1951) reinforced regionalism (Baldinetti 2010: 27; Mezran 2007: 73). Second, the Italian colonial occupation hindered socio-economic progress and the development of local forms of political expression. In a context dominated by oral communication and widespread illiteracy, the nascent press was shut down by colonial authorities that imprisoned or sent the few Libyan journalists into exile, and restricted any form of freedom of association while imposing Arab-Italian propaganda (Baldinetti 2010: 44; Richter 2004: 23). This resulted in the lack of a strong political culture and united political forces sharing a common vision for the future of Libya at independence (Baldinetti 2010: 52). Third, the colonial occupation and repression of the resistance led to migratory flows (Baldinetti 2010: 62). Libyan people escaped conflict, starvation and disease, while most of the educated elite was killed or exiled. Historians suggest that the number of migrants was to be measured in the hundreds of thousands (Baldinetti 2010: 53). Ahmida argues that 250,000 people were forced into exile at a time when the population was estimated at no more than between 1 and 1.5 million inhabitants (Ahmida 2009: 1, 15).

As a result, it was in exile that a Libyan nationalist political culture began to take shape among Libyan intellectuals and the political elite. Indeed, the flows of the intelligentsia from Libya, triggered by the repressive fascist colonial policy between 1922 and 1932, resulted in elite diasporic nationalism that is regarded as the origin of Libyan nationalism (Baldinetti 2010: 27). The majority of the Tripolitanian and Fezzani leaders fled to Chad, Niger, Syria, Egypt and Tunisia. The Sanusi leadership went into exile in Egypt in 1923. In exile, the Libyan intellectual and political elite was able to benefit from a level of freedom of interaction with people and ideas, access to which remained restricted inside Libya due to the Italian occupation and to the limited socio-economic progress. In the 1920s and 1930s, Arab nationalism and pan-Islamism were the predominant ideologies in the public political debate throughout the Arab-Muslim world. Libyan political exiles became involved in the political debate and started to explore new political avenues and ideologies, and to develop a vision of the Libyan nation. With the support of nationalist parties in Egypt and Tunisia, the political exiles started to imagine a Libyan nation (Baldinetti 2010: 69).

The first step in this direction was the establishment of political associations in the host countries. These organisations lacked coordination and their mostly secret activities in the 1920s remained in isolation from the larger community of exiles as well as from the population inside Libya (Baldinetti 2010: 71-76). The most important political association was formed in Syria, in Damascus, in 1925. The Tripolitanian Colony in Syria, renamed in 1928 the Executive Committee of Tripolitanian and Cyrenaican Communities (ECTCC) to stress its ambition to represent both regions, was a secret organisation. Led by Bashir al-Sadawi, the ECTCC was the first platform to call for the independence of Libya and a seminal moment in the formulation of Libyan nationalism. The National Covenant of the organisation described the nation as composed of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, and it referred to the nation as a unified, integral territory, a Cyrenaican-Tripolitanian nation. A branch of the organisation was established in Tunis in 1931 with the support of the Tunisian nationalist Destour Party. The leaders of the ECTCC participated in the Islamic Congress in Jerusalem and pan-Arab conferences and circles, coming in contact with these ideologies which influenced their imagination of an independent Libyan Arab nation (Baldinetti 2010: 81-85).

The political activities of the exiles in the 1920s and 1930s received an impetus from the resistance inside Libya that provided examples of national heroes to Libyans at home and abroad (Ahmida 2009: xvii). Umar al-Mukhtar had emerged as a leader of the resistance in the 1910s. After the departure of the Sanusi leadership to Egypt, he took over the head of the resistance in Cyrenaica until 1932, when he was executed by the Italian colonial government, and the three regions unified under a sole colony officially named Libya<sup>7</sup> (Ahmida 2009: 107; Van Genugten 2016: 38). Although the use and circulation of images at the time remained limited, the picture of Umar al-Mukhtar started to appear on books published outside of Libya. *The Black and Red Atrocities: Civilisation through Iron and Fire* (1933), by Bashir al-Sadawi, detailed the atrocities committed by the Italians during the occupation, and featured the picture of al-Mukhtar after the title page. The ECTCC, renamed in 1932 Association for the Defence of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica (ADTC), established an annual commemoration for Umar al-Mukhtar (Baldinetti 2010: 86-87). This was the beginning of a cult around this historical figure. It was a clear example of how events unfolding inside the country influenced the exiles and the creation of ideas, symbols and practices around the Libyan nation. While the first elaboration of the Libyan nation was a

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<sup>7</sup> The administrative division of the colony included the Southern Military Territories - i.e. Fezzan - under the control of the Italian military.

diasporic phenomenon politically and ideologically led by the exiles belonging to the political elite, they relied on material coming from inside Libya in a process of co-production of an embryonic national imaginary.

Moreover, from their side, the memoirs and oral histories of the fighters reveal that they had two main motives for fighting against the Italians: religion and nationalism. The fighters viewed the war as a struggle to protect Islam, the homeland and their honour. Some of them, however, continued to refer to the tribal land as the homeland (Ahmida 2009: 127-28). Asked by the Italian General Graziani why he fought the Italians, Umar al-Mukhtar answered: 'For my homeland and religion', and by homeland he was referring to Libya and Cyrenaica (Ahmida 2009: 136). One might challenge Ahmida's claim that the resistance led to an 'all-Libyan nationalism' at that time, mainly because of the persisting regionalism and tribalism as prevailing structures of identification, loyalty and solidarity. Nevertheless, the significance of these years for the collective memory is self-evident when looking at the instrumental use of colonial history by the ruling elites in the second half of the 20th century that is discussed later in this chapter (Ahmida 2009: xvii).

Through their activities and links across the Middle East and North Africa, the Libyan political exiles were successful in breaking the disinformation and censorship on colonial actions perpetrated by the Italian government, although only abroad (Baldinetti 2010: 36). In Libya the Italians had replaced all Libyan newspapers with their own propaganda outlets (Richter 2013: 151). In exile, books, periodicals, pamphlets, newspapers, leaflets and journals became the main means to report the atrocities and the news of the resistance outside of Libya to fuel propaganda campaigns against the Italians, to communicate the activities of the exiles' associations, and to discuss new ideas among the exiles (Baldinetti 2010: 73-93). At a time when the press had acquired a wider circulation, and newspapers and books reached a wider audience (Baldinetti 2010: 71) one should not, however, overestimate the ability of these means to reach ordinary people in exile or the Libyan population inside the country. Print capitalism and mass literacy had not reached Libya yet. For example, from 1800 to 1929, only 13 newspapers were published in Libya compared to 1398 in Egypt, 426 in Lebanon and 98 in Tunisia, while Italian shortwave radio stations from Rome were only used from 1937 onwards to transmit Italian propaganda (Richter 2004: 23). Censorship, lack of basic freedoms and illiteracy were major obstacles in the flow of ideas between the political elite in the diaspora and the Libyan population at large. This hampered the development of a political culture inside the country and the penetration of ideas from abroad.

By the end of the 1930s the Libyan political exiles had started to identify the anti-colonial struggle, the unity of Tripolitania and Cyrenaica, Arab identity and language, a common territory (that of the colony), common history and culture as the main pillars of the Libyan national identity. The centrality of the Islamic character of the nation was more controversial. In the manifesto of the ECTCC, in 1929, the safeguarding of Islam was only mentioned fifth among their aims together with the protection of local traditions. Nevertheless, the 1931 Islamic congress, with its emphasis on the importance of pan-Islamism, the need to defend Islam from western imperialism, and the claimed incompatibility of colonialism and Islam, succeeded in raising this issue among Libyan exiles (Baldinetti 2010: 82-88). The Sanusiyah, on the contrary, openly embraced a form of anti-colonial Islam rooted in popular culture that resonated well with the traditional tribal and religious social fabric in Cyrenaica and resulted in a conservative reaction and revival of Islam and the tribe. This form of anti-colonial Islam became a defining element in the nationalist narrative of the Libyan monarchy (Ahmida 2009: 2).

To sum up, a disconnection existed at the time between the exiles belonging to the political elite and ordinary Libyans living abroad and inside Libya. The political exiles who belonged to the class of notables and chiefs paid little attention to the poorest social groups of Libyan migrants in Tunisia, Egypt and Syria who tended to remain separate (Baldinetti 2010: 74-84). Moreover, the ability of the political exiles abroad to explore, consume and produce ideas and images in the diaspora was mirrored by their inability to transfer these ideas and images into the country or among the ordinary Libyans in exile.

With the easing of fascist colonial policies throughout the 1930s and with the outbreak of the Second World War, Libyan migrants started to return to Libya (Baldinetti 2010: 63-66). However, it was only in 1943, with the end of the war in Libya and the establishment of the British and French military administrations, that political activity among the exiles in Cairo and inside Libya picked up again. Some political exiles started to return to Libya and played an active role in the formation of cultural organisations and political parties in the 1940s. The Literary Club, the Sporting Club, the Workers Club and the Reform Club were cultural and recreational organisations that emerged in 1943 out of the British authorization to establish social clubs (Baldinetti 2010: 116-17). Although, as Ahmida pointed out, Libyan civil society had included merchant corporations, guilds, Sufi orders and tribal organisations outside of state bureaucracy until that



time (Ahmida 2009: 146), these clubs were the precursors to a modern civil society, a platform for political expression and a springboard for political activities.

By 1947, political parties had emerged which, however, remained divided along regional lines. In Tripolitania, seven political parties had been established, five of them with a clear nationalist programme. They all demanded a unified and independent Libya although they disagreed on the role of the Sanusi leadership. Key figures from the exiles' communities joined these parties. Among them Ahmad Faqih Hasan who led the Nationalist Party and the Free Nationalist Bloc, and Mustafa Mizran who took the lead of the Nationalist Party after Hasan (Mezran 2007: 82). In Cyrenaica, the Sanusi leadership, supported by the traditional and the religious establishment, prioritised the independence of Cyrenaica over the unity of the country, and emphasised the traditional and legitimising role of Islam. To promote these ideas, the Sanusi established a party, the Cyrenaican National Front (1946). However, a group of young people who had grown up in exile and had been exposed to the ideas of Arab nationalism prioritised the unity and independence of Libya and considered the Sanusi political agenda 'reactionary and outdated'. They established the Umar al-Mukhtar Club in Benghazi in 1943 (Baldinetti 2010: 124).

The idea of an association gathering young Libyans and named after the hero of the anti-colonial struggle had first emerged among students and exiles in Egypt. With a pan-Arab inclination and great relevance given to education as a tool to build the nation, the Umar al-Mukhtar club aimed to strengthen relations between young Libyans in order to unify the country. Religious identity was not central to the club's idea of a Libyan nation (Baldinetti 2010: 122-25). In 1946, with the publication of the weekly *al-Watan* (the Nation), the Club signalled to the other political forces its clear political objectives and started to actively contribute to the development of a national consciousness among its young members. Unlike other political formations in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania that remained elitist in nature, this Club had wide support among the population. The criticism expressed against al-Sanusi and the Cyrenaican Front, however, resulted in the dissolution of all political parties and their merger into a National Congress (1948) ordered by al-Sanusi upon his official return to Cyrenaica in 1947. The Umar al-Mukhtar Club continued to operate until 1952 since its official purposes were cultural and recreational (Baldinetti 2010: 127).

In Fezzan, the separateness of which from the other two regions had been reinforced through the French administration and based on the legacy of semi-independence that historically characterized it, some notables created a secret society in 1946 and established communication with the political actors in the other regions to oppose the French military administration. In 1948, they decided to support Libya's independence and unity under the Sanusi leadership, although this was less connected to ideological commitment, and more to the lack of interest of the Tripolitarians in the region (Baldinetti 2010: 121).

The attempt, in 1947, by Bashir al-Sadawi to bring political formations from Tripolitania and Cyrenaica together under the umbrella of the Libyan Liberation Committee was unsuccessful for failing to acknowledge the leadership of al-Sanusi. However, in a memorandum to the council of foreign ministers of the Arab League, al-Sadawi presented the foundational pillars of the Libyan nation: the economic interdependence between the three regions; a political unity that was said to date back to the 16th century; Arab identity and Arabic language; and the mixed Arab and Berber heritage. Islam was not mentioned (Baldinetti 2010: 127-29).

Indeed, in this period the political discourse did not have a markedly religious connotation. For instance, the programme of the Nationalist Party (1945) stated 'the elimination of religious and confessional differences as basis [for discrimination between citizens] because religion belongs to God and the homeland belongs to all of us' (Baldinetti 2010: 117). Mezran points out that some of those individuals grouped around the Tripolitanian National Congress (1949) were very religious but they believed that religion and state administration were not to be conflated (Mezran 2007: 81).

As the political and public debate unfolded, so did the events precipitated after the publication of the Bevin-Sforza plan, in May 1949, that proposed a 10-year trusteeship over the Libyan regions with Fezzan going to France, Cyrenaica to Great Britain and Tripolitania to Italy. Manifestations and strikes erupted across Libya. In June that year Great Britain proclaimed the independence of the Emirate of Cyrenaica. This was followed by the adoption of UN resolution 289 that established the state of Libya as constituted by the three regions, and announced a process through which the country would have achieved full independence by 1952 (Baldinetti 2010: 134-38).

Mezran observes that as a result of these events, the Tripolitanian leaders were forced to negotiate a national identity with the Sanusi leadership. The unity of the country and the role of Islam were at the centre of these negotiations. The nationalists in Tripolitania and Cyrenaica were divided on the system of government. Some members of the nationalist front in Tripolitania and some within the Umar al-Mukhtar club believed that the circumstances required all forces to unite around a federalist system as a first step towards a closer union. Al-Sadawi and Mizran remained in opposition to the federalist system. They believed it was only functional to strengthen regional identities (Mezran 2007: 89-90). With respect to Islam, a compromise between two visions of Islam, the Sufi one of the Sanusiyah and the Maliki orthodox one of the Tripolitanian *ulema*, was reached in March 1950. The agreement foresaw the establishment of Islamic institutions, embedding Islam and Islamic law in the constitution, and reforms of the legal system to include more principles of Islamic Maliki Law. Al-Sadawi and Mizran rejected the agreement and incited people to protest against it. Demonstrations were held in December 1950 and in January 1951 in Tripolitania (Mezran 2007: 89-90).

However, under international pressure, a deal emerged in which the Tripolitanian leadership accepted a lower degree of unity in the form of a federalist system in exchange for diminishing the centrality of Islam. Islam was only mentioned in article 5 of the constitution as the religion of the state but Libya was not going to be an Islamic state (Mezran 2007: 92). This was the beginning of what Roumani refers to as the reluctant partnership between two very different political legacies (Roumani 1983: 163). The traditionalist Sanusi leadership soon came to clash with the Tripolitanian *ulema* and with the more modern, urban and nationalist forces that remained fragmented in the years before independence (Mezran 2007: 87).

With independence came the constitution that defined a national identity and national symbols for the first time. Article 3 declared Libya part of the Arab *watan* (homeland) and of the African continent, integrating the Arab and African identity in the Libyan identity. As Zartman points out, minority rights were subject to constitutional guarantees for the mixed Arab-Berber population and the Jewish, Tebu, Maltese, Greek and Italian minorities that had come to populate the country (Zartman 1964: 99). Indeed, Article 11 declared all Libyans equal before the law and entitled to equal civil and political rights and opportunities regardless of religion, belief, race, language, wealth, kinship, political or social opinions. Furthermore, Article 24 enshrined the right

to use any language in private, religious and cultural matters as well as in the press, publications or public meetings (LibyanConstitutionalUnion 2019).

Article 7 of the constitution also determined that the national flag should consist of three unequal horizontal stripes of red, black, and green, with a white crescent and star centred on the larger black stripe. The colours of the flag were rich with meaning: red symbolised the blood sacrificed during the anti-colonial struggle; black was a reminder of the dark days lived under occupation but also the Sanusi banner composed of a black background with a white crescent and star; green symbolised the country's agricultural wealth and the future prospect of peace and prosperity. Others have interpreted the flag as a celebration of the unification of the territories of Tripolitania (green), Cyrenaica (the Sanusi banner) Fezzan (red) (24December1951 2015b). The 1951 national anthem equally included a celebration of the sacrifices of the anti-colonial struggle, of Islam and of the Sanusi King as founding elements of the Libyan nation (24December1951 2015a).

This was the beginning of a top-down construction of a national imaginary elaborated by the political elite at the time, an attempt to institutionalize nationhood. A by-product of great power politics, at independence, Libya emerged as an Arab and Muslim nation with strong regional and local identities, but also as a nation of different history and traditions which its rulers soon learned to play with to foster a sense of identification with the Libyan nation and to exercise control over state boundaries and the population (Baldinetti 2010: 144; Van Genugten 2016: 45).

#### **4. The Kingdom of Libya (1951-1969)**

The absence of a national movement and of a unifying ideology at independence was considered by the historian Dirk Vandewalle as detrimental to the development of a sense of identification with the Libyan nation among the people of this newly formed state (Vandewalle 2006: 43). In the following decade, two events had a crucial impact on the process of evolution of the Libyan state: the Kingdom's authoritarian regression after the 1952 elections and the discovery of oil in 1959. This might have provided the political elite with the authority and the financial means to control the media and the emerging civil society. However, as Libya entered the global system of economic interdependence through the development of the oil industry, the oil revenues provided opportunities for socio-economic development that translated into new flows of people in and out of Libya and the appearance of new ideologies that traversed the country through people and new

electronic media – radio, and only towards the end of the monarchy, TV – with a new rapidity, intensity and immediacy. The global cultural flows challenged the idea of nation crafted at independence.

The Libyan Kingdom and the Sanusi monarchy emerged from the process of negotiation among leaders from Tripolitania, Fezzan and Cyrenaica forced by great-power politics. The power of the Sanusi originated in Cyrenaica and rested on traditional tribal and religious structure that had reinforced each other since the nineteenth century. This rendered the Sanusi leadership and legitimacy outside of Cyrenaica weak. In 1952, after the first fair and free election, the monarchy outlawed all political parties and rejected press freedom (Mezran 2007: 93). While creating a distance between the Libyan people and official state and party politics, the repressive political climate in the country did not succeed in subduing the population. First of all, in contrast to colonial times, the repression did not result in major migratory waves, although it succeeded in expelling or imprisoning some political opposition leaders who had returned from exile after 1943 - among them Bashir al-Sadawi and the leaders of the Tripolitanian National Congress (Baldinetti 2010: 143; Sury 1982: 125). Secondly, opposition organisations like the Umar al-Mukhtar club and the Free National Bloc continued to operate in secret although, in so doing, they were only able to reach small groups of the elite inside the country (Baldinetti 2010: 144; Vandewalle 2006: 73). Meanwhile, many well-educated Libyans who had returned from exile founded newspapers and magazines, leading to a revival of the press, although under the vigilant eye of the state (Richter 2013: 151). The elites that opposed the monarchy were still able to operate and, together with the emerging young and educated urban class, found their ways to exercise a political culture in Libya.

This process was facilitated by the discovery of oil in 1959 that suddenly exposed the monarchy to the emerging global economy (Monastiri 1995: 67) or, in Appadurai's terms, to financescapes. On the one hand, oil revenues required unified economic policies, and a national legislation to facilitate the management of this industry. The federal formula of government was replaced in 1963 with a unitary system, centralising power at the political, economic and administrative level in the hands of the state apparatus and diminishing the power of provinces and municipalities. Nationalist groups and technocrats welcomed the change as the first step in the process of 'Libyanization' although, practically, this meant increasing the power of the King and of the *diwan* (royal household), their patronage and corruption networks (Vandewalle 2006: 64-66). On the other hand, as Ahmida points out, the economic and cultural displacement resulting

from the discovery of oil, and the industry, technologies, and ideologies associated with that, had the power to transform the nation (Ahmida 2005: 57). Indeed, the development of the oil industry created a class of businessmen, contractors and landowners who entered the political arena next to the political elite opposing the Sanusi monarchy and claimed their right to take part in the patronage system. Oil revenues and the ensuing distributive economy led to rent-seeking behaviour, patronage, and corruption. However, the revenues also resulted in rapid socio-economic development in the 1960s in the form of urbanization, enhanced educational and health facilities, transportation, housing and higher wages in the main cities (Anderson 1986: 257-58; Sury 1982: 127).

In particular, the education sector offered new avenues to experiment with political activism at home and political ideologies abroad. In 1967 the General Union of Libyan Students was established in Cairo following years of student protests in the universities in Benghazi and Tripoli, starting in 1964 (Le Tourneau 1968: 297). Moreover, due to the close political ties with Western countries, students were sent to study to the UK, US and Egypt (Ahmida 2005: 64; Maghur 2010: 4). Attending educational institutions in Libya and abroad presented an opportunity for young people to come in contact with new ideologies and forms of political engagement. As a result, student movements influenced by the political agitations and political currents of the 1950s and 1960s – the Muslim Brotherhood, the Ba'ath Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Arab nationalist movement - started to emerge in Libya. The interconnectedness between ethnoscaples and ideoscaples, and the ability of global cultural flows to challenge the status quo and the way people imagined themselves, became self-evident.

Indeed, among the main political currents, it was the Arab nationalist one that gained ground inside the country in the early 1960s through secret political parties among oil sector workers and students (Anderson 1986: 260; Sury 1982: 129-30). As an ideoscape, ethnic nationalism found expression in the Middle East and North Africa at the time under the political guidance of Gamal Abdel Nasser of Egypt (Owen 2000: 68). Arab nationalist ideology penetrated the Libyan social fabric through an agreement of cooperation with the Egyptian government that brought Egyptian teachers and books into Libya. This had an impact on the development of political ideas and beliefs among young students as the textbooks narrated stories about Arab history, celebrated Arab unity and the Arab fight against imperialism (Obeidi 1996: 37). This, combined with the development of transistor radios, which made Arab nationalism and socialism

almost universally accessible through the broadcasting of radio Sawt al-Arab, based in Cairo, allowed the rise of Arab nationalism inside Libya (Mezran 2007: 95). Mediascapes thus had a crucial role in the process of transmission of this ideology.

Egyptian teachers and students, however, also spread in Libya the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Sunni movement established in Egypt in 1928 by Hassan al-Banna. The Brotherhood first appeared in Libya in the 1950s when King Idris allowed the inflow of Egyptian members of the movement fleeing the persecution of Nasser. The Brotherhood spread its ideas in Libya also through Libyan students who had pursued their education in Egypt (Pargeter 2008: 85-87). However, as Pargeter observed, the movement was not able to rally wide support among the population at large and among the traditional *ulema* who remained sceptical of its political objectives disguised under a cultural and religious agenda. Moreover, the religious legitimacy of the monarchy and the tribal and traditional nature of the Libyan society constituted a barrier to the expansion of Islamist ideology at the time (Pargeter 2008: 85-87). As an ideoscape, Islamism, a global ideological alternative to nationalism in the Arab and Muslim world at the time, did not find fertile ground in Libya due to the opposition of the political and religious elite that fostered a form of traditional Islam and the tribe as the main form of social organization.

Against this background, the monarchy tried to legitimise its rule through a propagandistic use of historical discourse and the strengthening of its vision of Islam as a factor of political mobilization (Baldinetti 2010: 144). In the historical discourse of the monarchy, the references to the anti-colonial struggle emphasised the King's commitment to that struggle, and the positive and crucial role of the Sanusiyah as the main political force in the resistance against the occupation while fostering the cult of the hero of the resistance Umar al-Mukhtar (Anderson 1991c: 81). The book *Umar al-Mukhtar*, for instance, was published at the expense of the Sanusi family and carried pictures of al-Mukhtar and of the King. Popular poetry in memory of al-Mukhtar was also included in an appendix (Baldinetti 2010: 15-17). These books were published in Cairo and their circulation inside Libya remained limited in view of an illiteracy rate above 90% at the time and the unavailability of book printing technology in the country until the late 1950s (Richter 2004: 25; Vandewalle 2006: 42). This limited the ability of ordinary citizens in Libya to partake in the global mediascapes.

Few exiles provided alternative historical narratives of the colonial era based on their experience of exile and on the respective political leanings. Their accounts remained characterised by regionalism over a unitary narrative and were scarce and subject to censorship from the monarchy. Indeed, in an attempt to control the flows of information inside the country, the monarchy banned the books of Tahir al-Zawi that narrated the resistance in Tripolitania, the stories of Libyan notables and of the ordinary men who fought against the Italians in defence of their homeland. Al-Zawi's books attempted to promote a national cultural heritage (Baldinetti 2010: 20). Al-Zawi was later rehabilitated by the Gaddafi regime and appointed *mufti* of Tripoli to support Gaddafi's interpretation and use of history and to legitimise his rule (Anderson 1991c: 84).

The attempts by the monarchy to legitimise its rule through historical discourse were mirrored by the Islamization of the country pioneered by the King and his entourage that passed through the revision of the constitution in 1963. As Mezran points out, article 40 was revised in accordance with classical Islamic precepts that accord the origin of every authority to God. The 1951 constitution stated that 'sovereignty is vested in the nation'. The 1963 revised version said that 'sovereignty shall belong to God, and by the most high God's will it shall be entrusted to the nation from which all powers stem' (Mezran 2007: 93). Article 44 was also modified to place only God above the King. It read that 'subject to what has been provided in art. 40, sovereignty shall be vested in the nation, in trust with the King Muhammad Idris'. In the 1951 constitution the same article stated that 'the sovereignty of the Kingdom of Libya is vested in the nation. By the will of God the People entrust it to King Muhammad Idris al-Mahdi al Sanusi' (Mezran 2007: 93-94). As Mezran points out, through these constitutional amendments the King was revising the Libyan identity negotiated at independence. Baldinetti points out that the King used Islam to overcome regionalism and build a national identity. She observes that this was exemplified once again by the Kingdom's educational policies which offered compulsory and free education in Islam and Arabic at the primary level. Furthermore, the state opened Quranic schools, educational centres for illiterate adults, and a religious institute later transformed into the first Islamic university in Baida to teach religion and Arabic to young people and adults (Baldinetti 2010: 144-45). This was a form of Islamism different from that of the Muslim Brotherhood in ideological tenets and religious practices but similar in the intent to make of religion a political tool. We observe a global ideoscape in its localized form.



After the breach of the pact sealed at independence, the nationalist opposition, particularly the Tripolitanian nationalist parties, together with the urban class and the student movement emerged as vocal critics of the monarchy and its Western-leaning policies at home and abroad (Mezran 2007: 95). Meanwhile, Arab nationalist political parties had been flourishing underground (Anderson 1986: 260). Demonstrations occurred in 1964 in Tripoli and Benghazi, leaving some students dead. The protesters demanded the end of the pro-Western policy of the monarchy and the departure of foreign forces from Libya. After the defeat of Arab forces in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, new riots followed in which demonstrators demanded the King's abdication, the proclamation of a republic and a union with Egypt (Mezran 2007: 95-96).

Under such pressures, the monarchy's broadcasting via Radio Libya and the first national TV station - established in 1957 and 1968 respectively - became firmly anti-Arab unity, and anti-Nasser, placing great emphasis on 'Libyan identity' (Richter 2004: 27). Endowed with new technologies, the monarchy tried to mediate the flows of information and ideologies inside the country by boosting its own vision of the nation. As Sury points out, the emphasis on a Libyan national identity came to the surface sponsored by prime minister Abdul Hamid al-Bakkush between October 1967 and May 1968. During his short tenure, he stressed the roots in pre-history of a Libyan national identity, the importance of land, and of a feeling of identity in the 'new society' (Sury 1982: 131). He tried to reconcile the traditional and Islamic regional component with Arab identity (Mezran 2007: 97). The fall of Bakkush's government in 1968 was perceived as a set-back in the process of advancement of a modern Libyan identity vis-à-vis the traditional elite. However, as Khadduri observed: 'When nationalism became the new mode of loyalty, especially among new generations, the Sanusi movement began to decline' (Khadduri 1963: 9).

Mezran concludes that this was a crucial moment in the development of a sense of identification among Libyans. On the one hand, there was Arab nationalism and a sense of Arab identity that was predominant outside and inside Libya, particularly among the youth, and had been disregarded by the Libyan monarchical elite in favour of stronger ties with Western powers. In this respect, the failure to emphasize the Arab element helps to explain the failure to project the Libyan national image crafted by the monarchy. On the other hand, Islam was perceived to be under attack by the traditional elites. Towards the end of the 1960s, the deal reached in 1951 between unity of the state and Islam was challenged by a new tension between ideoscapes, Arab nationalism and Islamism, that characterised the region at large (Mezran 2007: 96-99).

To sum up, by the end of the 1960s, the tepid attempts by the monarchy to build a national identity through the use of historical discourse, Islam and through reform of the state and its administration in a unitary sense had not solved the identity question raised at independence. As pointed out by Ahmida, those societies that experienced colonialism, rapid economic development, and social and cultural dislocation suffer from inner contradictions (2005, 65-66). The discovery of oil altered the course of the country through the realization of a distributive economy and oil revenues that created new opportunities for young people to be exposed to the political ideologies in vogue at the time. Libyan students, Egyptian teachers and students became carriers of ideas while advances in technology allowed these same ideas to circulate more freely via transistor radios. By the end of the 1960s, Islam, Arabism and state nationalism were competing as main sources of political identity and loyalty (Anderson 1986: 65). This suggests the need to investigate nationness in Libya as a variable property of groups and relationships contingent on the interplay among ideoscapes, ethnoscapas, mediascapas, technoscapes and financescapas that Libyan people and organizations started to partake in by the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s with new rapidity and intensity.

### **5. The Gaddafi regime (1969-2011)**

In this context, it was not coincidental that the young military officers who led the military coup on 1 September 1969, were inspired by Arab nationalism and by anti-Western resentment. They came from poor or petty bourgeois families, and from less prestigious Libyan tribes that had not partaken in the patronage networks dominated by the pro-Western monarchy. Among them, Muammar Gaddafi emerged as the *primus inter pares* (Vandewalle 2006: 78-79).

Within the first four years of the revolution, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) established a firm control over the country and the Libyan population, putting an end to the embryonic modern civil society. The main ideological slogan of the revolution, 'Freedom, Socialism, Unity', was soon superseded by authoritarian policies. Indeed, while national unity was one of the main pillars of the RCC's political agenda, and socialism, highly nationalistic, was presented as an integral part of Libyan political culture, the RCC banned political parties and any form of political activities outside its control, including freedom of the press and association (Obeidi 1996: 45; St John 2008; Vandewalle 2006: 82). The establishment of Popular Congresses as a form of popular direct rule, and of the Arab Socialist Union (ASU) as the country's only

political party were meant to reduce the power of traditional elites and institutions, and rally people around the revolution. In May 1972, the RCC criminalised any political activity outside the ASU (Vandewalle 2006: 82). Those media that did not subscribe to the principles of the revolution and Arab unity were silenced. The RCC established the short-lived newspaper *The Revolution* (1969-1972), while the official newspapers that existed under the monarchy, and foreign language media were closed. The few existing independent newspapers were pushed out of the market through state cuts to advertisements (Richter 2004: 27-28). The regime established two new radio channels, The Holy Quran and Voice of the Arab Homeland (Richter 2013: 152). The mass media became one of the main means to spread the regime's ideology through the leader's speeches and political statements (Obeidi 1996: 50-51). Indeed, the Gaddafi regime soon learned to use the new technologies to advance its ideology showing the importance of the interconnectedness between ideoscapes, technoscapes and mediascapes.

However, the failure to mobilise Libyans through these means motivated the regime to embark on a whole new experiment. In April 1973, with a speech from the city of Zwara, Gaddafi proclaimed the 'popular revolution' and 'cultural revolution' and presented the Third Universal Theory as an alternative to capitalism and Marxism. The Zwara speech inaugurated the dichotomy between formal and informal ruling in Libya. Popular Committees were set up to manage enterprises, public and community organisations but, in fact, the RCC remained firmly in control of all sectors of political and economic life (Vandewalle 2006: 83-84). Moreover, the cultural revolution included measures such as the rejection of and opposition to other cultures besides the Arab-Islamic one, the ban on foreign books, music, newspapers and magazines, the burning of certain western musical instruments in public spaces, and the closure of foreign schools and foreign cultural centres (Maghur 2010: 5). By the end of 1973, the press and broadcasting sectors were subject to the regime's institutions (Richter 2004: 30). As technological advances created new opportunities for Libyan people to partake in the global cultural flows, the control of the regime over these means of communication *de facto* created new barriers.

### *5.1 State-ideology and Gaddafi's homogenizing vision of the Libyan nation*

Gaddafi's Libya in the early years of the regime reflected the ambiguous relationship to the nation proper of many Middle East and North African states which needed to reconcile Arab identity and

unity with local identities and loyalties, within the borders of the state determined by European colonialism (Anderson 1991c: 72). Like the Arab revolutionary movements that preceded him, the ideology and discourse of Gaddafi consisted of a combination of ideas, beliefs and myths with an emphasis on nationalism and symbolism of national independence (St John 1983: 485). The regime's speeches and policies were imbued with a strong ideological agenda rich in traditional, historical, cultural, and symbolic references that resonated within Libyan history and served the purpose of legitimating Gaddafi's rule (Vandewalle 1998: 124; 2006: 86). This was a clear attempt by the regime to define locally a global ideoscape.

Nationalism was central to the ideology, development and survival of the Gaddafi regime. St John observes that Gaddafi considered national unity to be 'the critical form of allegiance with no other loyalties taking precedence over that to the state itself' (St John 1983: 472-75). Nationalism, as a thin-centred ideology (Freedon 1998), was combined with thicker ideologies, socialism first and foremost, providing a new project for the Libyan political community. The preservation of national borders and national sovereignty against the interference of foreign entities or states was the main priority of the regime together with its survival, in turn determining the country's foreign policy (Deeb 1991).

The leader's idea of nation was presented in the third volume of the Green Book, *The Social Basis*, published in 1979. From the beginning of the revolution, Gaddafi had identified education as one of the most important mechanisms to propagate the revolution (Monastiri 1995: 68-69). The study of the Green Book was made compulsory at university level. In pre-university education a new subject, *al-Mujtama al-Jamahiri*, was dedicated to the study of the leader's book at all levels. Excerpts from the book appeared on TV and on Libyan banners in the streets (Obeidi 1996: 51; Duncan 2011). In explaining his concept of nation Gaddafi wrote:

[...] the common origin and shared destiny through affiliation are two historic bases for any nation, though origin ranks first and affiliation second. A nation is not defined only by origin, even though origin is its basis and beginning. In addition to that a nation is formed by human accumulations through the course of history which induce a group of people to live in one area of land, make a common history, form one heritage and face the same destiny. Finally, the nation, regardless of blood bond, is the sense of belonging and a common destiny (Al-Qathafi 1980).

Gaddafi seems intent on reconciling the primordialist view of the nation as a 'given' (Geertz 1963), natural entity with a lasting essence based on a sense of unique descent and kinship (Connor 1994: 202; Fullbrook 1999: 8), with the modernist view of nations as historically emergent constructions resulting from the combination of social solidarity, historical contingencies and voluntary collective will (Fullbrook 1999: 12; Hutchinson and Smith 1994: 17-18). In the last sentence, however, he concludes that ultimately the latter prevails over the former. This was reflected in his reorientation at the end of the 1970s away from Arab nationalism, a form of ethnic nationalism, towards historically contingent and constructed territorial nationalism, in line with regional and global trends at the time.

Gaddafi built his vision of a Libyan nation around three main pillars: Arab identity; Islam; and the anti-colonial struggle. These were combined with narratives around modernisation, progress, development and anti-imperialism that influenced his vision of a politically and economically independent Libyan nation opposed to the political and economic domination of Western countries and their pawns (St John 1983). Performances by the leader and practices of nationhood were meant to cement this vision.

- *Arab identity*

With regard to the first pillar, previous analyses of Gaddafi's ideology focused on Arab nationalism (Mezran 2007: 99; St John 1983), defined as the ideology aspiring towards the political unity of the ethnically homogenous Arab nation on the basis of shared language and culture (Jankowski and Gershoni 1997: 12). Arab nationalism was described as Gaddafi's 'primordial value' (St John 1983: 473) and a cornerstone of its foreign policy in the 1970s. Arab nationalism was also integrated in the country's national symbols. The pan-Arab flag with white, red and black horizontal bars, to which the golden hawk of Quraish symbolising Arab independence was added in 1970, was the national flag until 1977. The national anthem, 'Allahu Akbar' (Allah is the Greatest), remained the same throughout Gaddafi's rule. It was an Egyptian military marching song that became popular in Egypt and Syria during the Suez Canal War in 1956 and had, therefore, strong pan-Arab connotations (NationalAnthems 2019). The military, political, economic and cultural unity of the Arab world advocated by Gaddafi was seen as an essential tool against imperialism, colonialism and Zionism that in his view explained the weakness of the Arab world (St John 2008: 136). However, the alliances with Egypt and Sudan in 1969 and with Egypt and

Syria in 1971, rather than advancing pan-Arabism, were instrumental to consolidate the regime, its survival and position in the region (Deeb 1991: 59-61). When by the end of the 1970s Israel and Egypt signed the peace, the special relationship with Egypt came to an end and with it the pan-Arab dream and Gaddafi's focus on Arab nationalism (Ronen 2008: 110-116). The pan-Arab flag was substituted with a green flag that some connected to the traditional colour of Islam or to Gaddafi's Green Book (Smith 2019).

As Mezran pointed out, although Arab nationalism as a political movement had gathered a following among Libyans at the time, as the ideology aspiring to the unity of the Arab world it was never really embraced by Libyans (Mezran 2007: 99). Indeed, St John observed that Gaddafi advanced the myth of the 'greatness of the Libyan nation as part of the Arab nation' (St John 1983: 485). When Gaddafi claimed that 'Libya is the heart, the vanguard, and the hope of the Arab nation and thus the custodian of Arab nationalism' he was exalting the Libyan nation, the 'homeland' that needed to be liberated from imperialist and reactionary elements (St John 1983: 474).

Nevertheless, the inflaming of a nationalist sentiment, with the Arab sense of identification integral to that sentiment, was critical to regime survival. Although Gaddafi's disenchantment with Arab nationalism became evident by the end of the 1970s, Arabism remained a main pillar of Libyan national identity throughout the four decades of the regime (St John 1983: 481). Understood as the sense of common cultural heritage and cultural uniformity based on Arabic as the shared language (Dawisha 2003: 11), Arabism was imposed on Libya's population and on its minority ethnic groups. Faced with multiple national, ethnic and tribal affiliations, Gaddafi promoted an idea of Libya as a homogenous Arab Muslim nation-state, and worked towards erasing tribal and ethnic differences, although strategically playing with these at times, to achieve national unity and loyalty as well as control over the population (Kohl 2014: 424).

Indigenous or minority rights related to language, religion and citizenship, were mostly denied to ethnic groups in Libya who were persecuted in their political and cultural activities. With respect to the Amazigh population, speaking Tamazight (Amazigh language) in public was forbidden. Gaddafi deprived the Amazigh of the right to manifest their ethnicity, banning Amazigh names, persecuting and imprisoning Amazigh activists, denying them employment and preferment opportunities in the armed forces, while also banning the Ibadi religious practices of some Imazighen. In its most extreme move, the regime settled Arab tribes on Amazigh lands (Joffé 2013:

37). The discrimination to which the Tebu minority was subject has been referred by Kohl as ethnic cleansing. It included withdrawal and denial of citizenship rights, expulsion from and destruction of their houses, and barring them from access to health and education services (Kohl 2014: 431). The Tuareg, on the contrary, were allowed to practise their language but were *de facto* exploited for political gains by the regime. The regime incorporated many Malian and Nigerian Tuareg in the Libyan army, supported their rebellions in neighbouring countries, and invested in these impoverished regions to secure the Tuaregs' loyalty and military support (Kohl 2014: 427-30). Tuareg and Tebu, being semi-nomadic, were often unable to prove their Libyan origin for citizenship purposes. Indeed, Libya's citizenship laws of 1954 and 1979 stipulated a form of citizenship by descent determined by having parents - for someone born before 1951 - and both parents and grandparents - for someone born after 1951 - born in Libya (Kohl 2014: 431). From this analysis, we can identify Gaddafi's nationalism as both ethnic and territorial, an ideology that contributed to shaping and spreading a homogenizing project of the Libyan nation-state with little regard for ethnic diversity.

However, with the end of the Arab nationalist dream, the Gaddafi's regime had to find new ways to guarantee its survival and national sovereignty. The confrontation with the outside world based on military interventionism and support for insurrectional movements around the world was key to engender and mobilise popular support, particularly after the imposition of economic sanctions on Libya by the United States in 1982 and by the United Nations in 1992 (Ronen 2008:110-116). The regime's turn to pan-Africanism was instrumental to its survival, particularly after the imposition of international sanctions that were supported by the Arab League (Ronen 2008: 181). The Organisation of African Unity, on the contrary, started to demand in 1994 that UN sanctions on Libya be removed and, in 1998, several African countries broke the air embargo on Libya. These countries and their leaders were mostly motivated by the need to find new political allies and financial backers (Huliaras 2001: 14-16; Solomon and Swart 2005: 477).

The support by African leaders and need to re-align its policies towards the African continent also resulted in the transformation of its nationalist discourse with a greater emphasis on Africa and a rejection of Arab nationalism. In 1998, Gaddafi declared that pan-Arabism was over and abolished the ministry dedicated to Arab unity. The national radio was renamed 'The Voice of Africa' after being known for thirty years as 'The Voice of the Greater Arab Homeland'. A map of the African continent replaced that of the Arab world in the background of the national TV news

channel. Gaddafi announced that the Arab world was over, and that African people were the real supporters and brothers of Libya (The Economist 1999). In March of 1999, Gaddafi declared: “I have no time to lose talking with Arabs. ... I now talk about Pan-Africanism and African unity” (Takeyh 2001: 67). He launched the idea of the African Union and financially supported the preliminary discussions in the early 2000s that led to its creation in 2001 (Morais and Naidu 2002: 112). One of Gaddafi’s main slogans became ‘Libya is Africa and Africa is Libya’ (Haimzadeh 2011: 130).

However, the dilution of the Libyan-Arab identity and promotion of a Libyan-African identity were not welcomed by Libyan people together with Gaddafi’s pan-African policies. The regime actively promoted immigration from Sub-Saharan countries such as Chad and Niger, from West Africa and the Horn of Africa - estimates set the figure of migrants from these areas between 1 and 1.5 million (de Haas 2009). In the 2000s, violent clashes between Libyans and African workers led to the killings of dozens or perhaps hundreds of sub-Saharan migrants who were blamed for rising crime, spreading diseases and social tensions. As a result, Libyan people’s attitudes towards immigrants and Gaddafi’s African policies and discourse hardened (Haimzadeh 2011: 129; de Haas 2009). Libyan authorities, responded by introducing more restrictive immigration regulations, detaining Sub-Saharan immigrants in prisons and camps, physically abusing and forcefully repatriating tens of thousands of them (de Haas 2009). As Haimzadeh pointed out, Libyan people remained for the most part reluctant to the regime’s pan-African turn (2011: 129).

- *Islam*

With regard to the second pillar, in a sign of continuity with the monarchy, Islam was a central component of Gaddafi's vision. Islam was described as the religion of the state in the 1969 constitutional proclamation and was referenced across the RCC's political programme to establish the religious credentials of the revolution and legitimise it. As Joffé has observed, 'Islam became the vehicle through which Gaddafi attempted in his usual popular fashion to reject the old religious order and to justify his own ideological alternative' (Joffé 2008: 146). Initially, this was done in alliance with the country's orthodox *ulema*, and in opposition to the Sufi-Sanusi elite of the monarchy (Mezran 2007: 98). Between 1973 and 1977, it brought religion under its control, redefining religious and legal practices also in order to destroy the Sufi institutional base upon



which the Sanusi monarchy had been established (Joffé 2013: 39). However, as St John observes, Gaddafi's emphasis on the role of the *Quran* and of the *Sunnah* as the basis for Muslim life, while downplaying the role of the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, was perfectly in line with the precepts of the Sanusiyah and were most likely embraced for their recognised legitimising power within Libyan society (St John 1983: 477). Moreover, Gaddafi initiated substantive reforms to ensure the compliance of the Libyan legal system with Islam and *Sharia* law. He banned alcohol and prostitution to demonstrate his commitment to Islamic values and consulted with clerics, placing them in positions of power within the legal and educational systems (Pargeter 2008: 83; Takeyh 2000: 112). In so doing, he reinforced the relationship between religion and politics, authenticating the latter by appealing to the former (Mezran 2007: 97). However, when the religious leadership increasingly criticised his policies, in 1978, Gaddafi reduced the role of the religious establishment and brought religion under the control of the state. He emphasised the centrality of the *Quran* to Islam and criticized the *Hadith* on the grounds that the *Quran* is the only real source of God's word. Gaddafi also criticized the schools of Islamic jurisprudence, whose formal interpretations were rejected, claiming that they were the product of a struggle for political power while mosques were meant to be places of worship and not arenas to discuss economic, social, or political questions (St John 1983).

From the late 1970s, Gaddafi engaged in an open confrontation with any form of political Islam, annulling the role of religious leaders in the political sphere like any other form of opposition to his rule inside the country. And yet, it was in the 1970s and throughout the 1980s and 1990s that Salafism – understood as ‘a philosophical outlook which seeks to revive the practices of the first three generations of Islam [...] held to constitute a golden age of authenticated and orthodox Islam’ (Maher 2016: 7) – reached Libya. It did so through the cassettes of Wahabi preachers as well as through Libyans who had travelled to Saudi Arabia for *haj* and had been able to observe new trends in Islamic practice from which they had been isolated by the regime (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 199). The appearance of this current of Islamism in Libya was connected to the new electronic media and the flows of people that allowed this Islamist current to find its way inside the country. The regime reacted brutally repressing the militant groups while allowing for alternative strains of Salafi thought to take a foothold inside the country, as discussed in greater detail in the next chapter. By the 1990s, Gaddafi had established his own interpretation of Islam imposing it as the one and only legitimate way of practicing the Muslim

faith in Libya, silencing the diversity within the Islamist spectrum in the same way that he did with respect to ethnicity.

- *Anti-colonial struggle*

Lastly, with regard to the third pillar, the anti-colonial struggle occupied a central place in the nationalist discourse of the leader. The use of 'official history' to serve the ideological and political ends of the regime was evident from the beginning (Anderson 1991c: 87; Del Monte 2015: 69). Gaddafi reformulated the nature of the anti-colonial struggle as a national struggle and reconciled it with Islamic and Arab identity by linking it to the concept of *jihad*. He presented it as a uniquely Libyan struggle but also a common cause in the Muslim and Arab world which he assigned Libya to uphold (Anderson 1991c: 88). He used the official historical discourse to establish the roots of the nation in the past and claim that the country's territorial and regional divisions were a pure colonial invention. Umar al-Mukhtar, the leader of the anti-colonial resistance, was celebrated as a national hero (Baldinetti 2010: 17). The years of the monarchy were obliterated from Libyan history, to the extent that this period remained undocumented in the national museum that, instead, covered extensively the colonial period and celebrated al-Mukhtar and Gaddafi (Vandewalle 1998: 126). This was also reflected in the publication and distribution of historical works that presented the role of actors other than the Sanusiyah such as the Ottomans and the Tripolitanian leaders in the anti-colonial struggle.

In 1978 the Libyan Studies Centre was established with the objective of rewriting the history of Libya to include actors, populations and regions obliterated until that point (Anderson 1991c: 74-85). The centre aimed at decolonising Libyan history, and nationalising it through the study of the resistance and its narration from the perspective of the colonised and of ordinary people. The resistance was presented as a unitary struggle led by the people. Regionalism was downplayed in order to project the idea of national unity before independence. The devastation of the Libyan population during the Italian occupation, the deportations and other sufferings Libyans had been exposed to were also a focus of this new research (Baldinetti 2010: 18). Some of the centre's documentation appeared occasionally on television to celebrate the martyrs of the anti-colonial struggle (Vandewalle 1998: 126). The centre pioneered methods of oral history and published a multivolume popular account called *Our History*, scholarly histories of the Fezzan, and a biography of Umar al-Mukhtar (Anderson 1991c: 86-87).

Indeed, in the 1970s, Gaddafi elevated Umar al-Mukhtar to the main symbol of the fight of the Libyan people for independence. He printed his image on banknotes, creating monuments in his honour, and funding a movie on his life. In the second half of the 1990s, however, following the discontent emerging in Cyrenaica against the regime's policies, he tried to remove the image of this Cyrenaican hero from the collective memory. He re-appropriated it again in 2009 on the occasion of his first official visit to Italy when he walked out of the plane in Rome with the son of al-Mukhtar and his picture pinned on his chest (Baldinetti 2010: 17). By portraying himself and his revolutionary audience as the 'followers of Umar al-Mukhtar', Gaddafi created a bond of solidarity that Libyans identified with (Vandewalle 1998: 130). As Vandewalle suggests, this provided Libyans with a sense of integrity, collective identity and self-esteem (Vandewalle 1998: 129-30). In contrast to Vandewalle, Del Monte stressed the sense of alienation and displacement produced by Gaddafi's manipulation of historical memory (Del Monte 2015: 91). It is probably fair to say that the two are not mutually exclusive.

- *Practices of nationhood and Gaddafi's performances*

To emphasise the unique nature of the Libyan nation, in the early years of the regime, Gaddafi combined the idea of a homogenous Arab-Muslim nation with practices aimed at fostering a sense of pride in the nation, such as the nationalisation of the economy and the establishment of national holidays. The nationalization of the oil industry and international banks elevated Gaddafi to a place of honour in the region and gave him unprecedented internal legitimacy (Vandewalle 2006: 91). Furthermore, Gaddafi's anti-imperialism translated into the evacuation of American and British military bases, and in the confiscation of assets of the Italian and Jewish population and their expulsion. The dates of these achievements, together with the date of the coup d'état that initiated the 1969 revolution, became official national holidays that were celebrated yearly and were accompanied by nationalistic addresses of the leader (Anderson 1191c: 72).

Indeed, Gaddafi's performances and speeches promoted his understanding of the nation and aimed to achieve congruence between elite discourse and everyday practices of nationhood. As Haimzadeh observed, the leader had an incredible talent for taking the nation and international stage and was conscious of his charismatic power on the audience. The choice of decoration, furniture and clothes enhanced his performances and contributed to foster his image and strengthen the impression of his omniscience (Haimzadeh 2011: 59). As Anderson pointed out, these

performances were a way to assert state sovereignty, regime legitimacy, state loyalty and national identity (Anderson 1991c: 72), an attempt at constituting the Libyan nation.

As a result of this positive valorisation of the nation, as Vandewalle observed, the Libyan elite, as well as ordinary Libyans, equated the 1969 revolution in Libya to the 1949 Chinese revolution in terms of its importance and impact on a global scale. Each night on Libyan TV, a cartoon depicted the Green Book and how it was intended to spread throughout the world. Vandewalle suggested how revealing this was at the time of the idea that some Libyans held of themselves and of the revolution, as well as of the role played by mass media in reinforcing these ideas (Vandewalle 1998: 129-30).

To sum up, through a firm control of the means of information and of the education system, the regime crafted a project for the Libyan political community which, at least at the beginning, responded to the demands for Arab unity and solidarity coming from the Libyan people. The efforts by the regime contributed to rewriting Libyan history and redefining the Libyan nation that was portrayed as unified, anti-imperialist, loyal to its Arab and Muslim culture and opposed to Western colonialism, imperialism and cultural domination. Throughout his rule, the leader worked towards the establishment of a nationalist project for Libya by spreading ideas, practices and symbols to reinforce a sense of pride, solidarity, identification and belonging to Libya as a nation. However, as Obeidi pointed out, the regime remained unable to control informal mechanisms of socialisation among Libyans, the ideas, practices and symbols reproduced in the private sphere both in Libya and, even more so, among Libyans in the diaspora (Obeidi 1996).

### *5.2 Political Opposition to Gaddafi: between the national and the global*

Political opposition to Gaddafi's political project emerged in the years following the 1973 Zwara speech. Student unrest erupted in early 1975 following the announcement of compulsory military service, the imposition of restrictive measures concerning the consumption of alcohol and Western music but, most importantly, due to the limitations posed by the regime to freedom of expression and free elections in the student associations (Bleuchot 1976: 447). Protests continued throughout 1975, leading to arrests and culminating in large demonstrations in January 1976 in Benghazi and in protests of Libyan students abroad (Bleuchot 1977: 344). On April 7, 1976, students at Benghazi

and Tripoli University organised new demonstrations against the regime. Hundreds were wounded and arrested. The following year on April 7 the regime marked the anniversary of the April 1976 uprisings by publicly hanging five people who had participated in the uprisings in Benghazi the year before, broadcasting the events on Libyan State TV (Bleuchot 1978: 487). By then, the space for publicly protesting the regime had been annihilated, while a coup d'état led by a faction within the RCC opposed to the regime's economic policies had failed in August 1975 (Vandewalle 2006).

The crackdown on the students and on the political opposition, together with the pursuit of higher education abroad, led to new migratory flows in the 1970s. According to UNESCO's statistical year book, in 1975, one in five Libyan university students was studying abroad - 2,126 students against a national higher education population of 11,997 students (Gamaty 2012: 12). North America, Europe, the Middle East and North Africa were the regions of destination. By 1978 there were about 3,000 students in the United States alone (Clark 2004). Most of them were on government-sponsored scholarships, part of a regime policy to support graduate and postgraduate education and training but also a way to control people and a deterrent for students to engage with the student unions and the political opposition at home and abroad. Many of these students opted not to return to Libya as the political events unfolded inside the country (Gamaty 2012: 12). In the following years, national and international politics determined the flows of students towards western countries. In fact, their numbers plummeted after 1985 and until the restoration of diplomatic relations between Libya and the West after 2003 (Joffé 2013: 32).

In the 1970s, the student unions were the main vehicle for catalysing the opposition to the regime. After the student demonstrations, Gaddafi banned the student unions and replaced them, in 1977, with the Revolutionary Committees composed of young people responsible for mobilising and indoctrinating the youth (Vandewalle 2006: 120). Through the Revolutionary Committees and the Libyan embassies around the world, the regime strengthened its grip on the students abroad. In response, they set up the Free Student Unions that were fertile ground to recruit members to the opposition groups. Indeed, as numbers of Libyan citizens abroad increased throughout the 1970s, so did the organizations of the political opposition to the regime outside of Libya. Vandewalle suggests that, by the end of the 1970s, around 100,000 Libyans had left the country out of a population of about three million (Vandewalle 2006: 112).

In the late 1970s, dozens of political groups were active outside of Libya (Van Genugten 2016: 111). Some were small, composed of a few individuals, but others such as the National Front for the Salvation of Libya-NFSL (1981), the Libyan Islamic Group-LIC (1979) and the Libyan National Democratic Front-LNDF (1979) gathered a larger membership. The multiplicity of these groups reflected their diverse ideological leanings and the fragmentation within the opposition. The response of the regime to the growing political opposition abroad was to call for the 'physical liquidation' of Libyan dissidents. In 1980, ten Libyan exiles were assassinated in Europe (Pluchinsky 2015: 61). These events resulted in suspiciousness among Libyans abroad and in limited interactions and shared intents between the political exiles, other Libyans in the diaspora and inside the country. This had a negative effect on the ability of the opposition groups to exchange ideas, and to present a credible alternative to the regime. Yet, the activism of the political opposition in exile had a significant impact on the everyday lives of its members and their families, determining their sense of identification and belonging to the Libyan nation. As the ranks of the diaspora were further expanded between the end of the 1980s and the end of the 1990s, this time involving mainly the Islamist political and militant opposition, a new element of suspiciousness was added among Libyans in the diaspora and at home. These aspects are discussed in greater detail in the next chapter.

The ability of the regime to ring fence Libya from external threats to its rule was enhanced by the redistribution of oil revenues after 1973. As the rentier state literature points out, oil revenues have a stabilising effect on a regime and lower significantly the level of social and political protests and the risk of civil wars (Vandewalle 1998; Smith 2004). In the 1970s, oil revenues were directly invested on health, education and infrastructures as well as on military spending, with a positive effect on the country's economy, on the living standards of the population and on the support enjoyed by the regime at home (Villa 2012: 70). Oil revenues provided the funds to implement a revolutionary economic plan that resulted in the elimination of the private sector by the end of the 1970s, making business in Libya impossible (Vandewalle 2006: 106-08). As a result, several businessmen and doctors relocated to Arab countries such as Egypt, Tunisia, Morocco, and Jordan, or in Europe and the US (Maghur 2010: 4).

However, when in the 1980s oil prices fell dramatically and oil revenues dropped, an economic crisis hit the country and the regime found itself increasingly economically, politically and diplomatically isolated. US economic sanctions, imposed from 1982 in response to Gaddafi's

involvement with international terrorism, aggravated the crisis leading to social protests. The regime continued to spend on weapons and infrastructural projects like the Great Man-Made River, a network of underground pipelines that carries water from aquifers in the Sahara towards the coastal towns of Libya (Villa 2012: 74). It also deepened its involvement with international terrorism while opening up to reforms internally (Vandewalle 2006: 139). However, once the social protests stopped in the 1980s, the reforms were quickly set aside regardless of the economic sanctions that led to a further flow of professionals working in the aviation and petro-chemical sectors towards the Gulf States in the 1990s (Maghur 2010: 4). Indeed, while the trade embargo imposed by the US in 1986 had a relatively limited impact on the country's economy due to the ability to sell to European markets as well as to engage in new ventures with Turkey and Brazil, the inability to access US technology for the oil and aviation industries had a much greater effect that was only fully felt under the regime of multilateral sanctions imposed by the UN (1992-1999). During these years the economy contracted and stagnated. The greatest damage to the aviation industry resulted in a halt in passenger traffic and aerial transport of commodities, combined with the cessation of international flights (Vandewalle 2006: 152-55). Meanwhile, the Revolutionary Committees had taken over the national news agency, national and foreign broadcasting, the press, newspaper distribution as well as activities such as cinema, theatre and culture, therefore controlling the entire telecommunication and entertainment sectors (Richter 2013: 154).

This state of affairs resulted in limited interactions between Libyans and the outside world, particularly with the diaspora, both in the political and in the economic fields. While FDI and remittances from the diaspora are significant factors in the development of a country's economy and on the processes of socialisation and transmission of new ideas, technologies, and know-how (Newland and Patrick 2004), this was not the case in Libya. The regime's control on the economy and its self-sustainability through oil revenues, limited FDI while making remittances from the diaspora unnecessary. Between 1990 and the early 2000s, FDI in Libya was negative and its impact on the Libyan economy remained irrelevant even after the lifting of sanctions in 1999 (Efhialelbum and Flatau 2013: 47-48). At the same time, data on remittances, only available from the 2000s, show figures of personal remittances as a percentage of GDP never above 0.034 between 2000 and 2006, therefore unimportant to the overall volume of the economy (WorldBank 2019). Libyan people and the Libyan diaspora remained mostly politically and economically isolated one from the other.

As the oil economy and the advances in ICT created new opportunities for Libyan society to become increasingly enmeshed in the global economy, its systems and networks of interaction, the regime actively worked towards isolating the population at home from the diaspora and from the rest of the world. By suffocating any form of opposition and civil society, the regime tried to ensure that its vision of the Libyan nation remained hegemonic at home. However, other ideologies found their way inside the country via the electronic media and the flows of people that facilitated their transfer. The attempts by the regime to institutionalize its form of nationhood were confronted by growing opposition in Libya and among Libyans abroad.

## **6. Conclusion**

Through this long history of flows, the chapter demonstrated that the movement of ideas, people and commodities from, to and across Libya is not a recent phenomenon. In the twentieth century, colonization led to migratory waves and posed limitations to the development of a political culture in Libya. Nonetheless, the 'paradox of constructed primordialism' (Chatterjee 1986) materialised with its dialectically generated nationalism before and after independence. The political and intellectual elite in exile, influenced by the events unfolding in the country and by the pan-Arab and pan-Islamist circles emerging in the region at the time, started to build a vision of the Libyan nation, a nationalist discourse and symbols around it. Ordinary Libyans in the diaspora and inside the country remained excluded. At independence, formulating a national identity remained an elite business. However, the anti-colonial struggle became a main repository for the creation of a collective memory. A constant across post-independence Libyan history, the images of martyrs and the debate around the role of different agents in that struggle were instrumental to strengthen the legitimacy of the ruling elite and to build a national imaginary.

With independence, the deepening integration into the global economy brought socio-economic development and technological advances. Electronic media and migration became two significant factors in the elaboration of an image of the nation. The power of the state and of the political elite to control the flows to and from Libya started to fail and ordinary citizens became more involved in the political process. The relation between the national and the global became more dynamic with new external influences and ideologies flowing into the country. The Libyan monarchy was unable to limit the spread of Arab nationalism despite attempts to do so. Binding people to local and national ideas of self and peoplehood proved difficult in a world that was



becoming more connected. The 1969 revolution answered people's demands for greater regional solidarity and connectedness. Mindful of this, the Gaddafi regime in the first two decades obtained firm control over ICTs as well as any form of political opposition or civil society. The political elite overthrown by the 1969 revolution was replaced by a new one while the emerging civil society that the monarchy had tolerated was effaced. As communication with the outside world was facilitated by socio-economic development and by new technologies in the 1960s, ordinary Libyan citizens who had begun taking part in the global world found themselves once again isolated under the Gaddafi regime and its homogenizing narrative of the Libyan nation. In the absence of a public space outside of state control, it was in the diaspora and in the private sphere that a resistance to the regime and its idea of nation emerged and evolved. The relation between the national and the global were to acquire a new fluidity only in the face of new technological developments. The next chapter narrates that story.

## **Chapter 4 The 2000s, the 2011 revolution and its aftermath: A period of change**

### **1. Introduction**

In tracing the history of global cultural flows in the twentieth century we have scarce information on the way nationhood in Libya is practised in everyday life. This chapter starts by filling that gap in the literature with new empirical material for the period concerning the years of the Gaddafi regime. From the analysis of that period it emerges that in the absence of a public space outside of the regime's control, both in Libya and in the diaspora, counter-narratives to the regime's homogenizing vision of the nation emerged in the private sphere through everyday social and cultural practices. This state of things started to change at the end of the 1990s with the advent in Libya of new information and communication technologies (ICT) and the rapprochement with the international community. This chapter will argue that by taking part in technoscapes and mediascapes, people in Libya begun to be exposed to new ideoscapes at the time to an extent unprecedented with an impact on the way individuals and groups practiced nationhood and understood nationness. However, it was only during and after the 2011 revolution that these ideoscapes and mediascapes manifested themselves fully and freely, following the liberalization of the media and civil society landscapes.

The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first section explores how nationalist ideology and everyday political, social and cultural practices developed throughout the years of the Gaddafi regime in the diaspora and in Libya. The second section starts with a brief analysis of the developments concerning ICT in Libya from the late 1990s onwards through the voices of the members of the diaspora and of the post-revolutionary civil society. It then presents several examples of how that change provided new spaces for public interaction, particularly on the Internet. Through these processes of interaction, the diaspora and the emerging civil society in Libya started to challenge the regime's notion of nation, laying the ground for the manifestations of nationalism observed during and after the revolution in 2011. The third section provides a description of how the 2011 revolution and its aftermath changed the relationships private sphere/civil society/state and national/global. We observe the main agents and processes at play during and after 2011 through the lens of the global cultural flows, in so doing providing a contextual analysis to the next two chapters where we explore the impact of the 2011 revolution and its aftermath on nationhood and nationness.

## 2. Nationalist ideology and everyday practices until the 1990s<sup>8</sup>

As discussed in the previous chapter, the political, economic and cultural revolution imposed on the Libyan people by the regime of Muammar Gaddafi resulted in its firm control over the country's economic, political and social life. This led to new migratory flows from Libya and to the establishment of diverse Libyan diaspora communities in North America, Europe and the Middle East. Political dissidents and citizens from different socio-economic backgrounds such as students in higher education, businessmen, and professionals came to constitute the Libyan diaspora. Ideas and everyday social, political and cultural practices emerged, both at home and in the diaspora, fostering groupness and identification with the Libyan nation while challenging the regime's historical narrative and homogenizing vision.

### *2.1 Students' unions and opposition groups in the diaspora*

In the 1970s and 1980s, students' unions and opposition groups had an important role in developing nationhood and nationness among individuals in the diaspora. Through political activism oriented at Libya, the Libyan nation crystallised as a reality in the imagination of the members of these organizations, strengthening their sense of belonging to Libya based on a perceived commonality and connectedness. A brief account of their political actions and discursive articulations of the nation provide examples of how de-territorialization created an attachment to the politics of the homeland (Appadurai 1996: 37-38). This helps to contextualise the engagement of these groups and that of their members in the 2011 revolution and its aftermath.

As the regime strengthened its grip on the students' unions in the early 1970s, Libyan students abroad set up the Free Students' Unions in several countries like the US, Canada, Italy and Germany.<sup>9</sup> Their objective was to continue the struggle of the students that had been suppressed in Libya. The Free Students' Unions were well organised and used to gather and project the views of young people opposing the regime. They managed to communicate across cities from Tripoli to Benghazi, London and Cairo by smuggling letters and organizing meetings abroad. The students' unions organised demonstrations outside Libyan embassies around the world, often in

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<sup>8</sup> This section summarizes and elaborates the content of an article published by the author of this research (Alunni 2019). For an examination of primary sources the reader can refer to that article.

<sup>9</sup> Interviewee #18 and interviewee #28.

response to students' demonstrations and killings in Libya.<sup>10</sup> For instance, in 1976, following some students' protests, Libyan students in Cairo, London, Rome and Bonn occupied the Libyan embassies or protested in front of them, raising the issue of human rights violations with the international press (Bleuchot 1977: 344-45). Paper newsletters were the main means of communication among the students' unions in the diaspora:

The newsletter was a paper one written with typewriters and we would just make copies, hundreds of copies and send them around by post and give them by hand to a network of members. We collected the addresses of the members, as many as we can. And we used the occasions of the annual gatherings to distribute the newsletters.<sup>11</sup>

This description of the process of realisation and distribution of the paper newsletter exemplifies the impact of limited technologies at the time on the ability of the opposition to communicate quickly and freely beyond the established networks. Nevertheless, the political activism of the Free Students' Unions was a unifying element in the process of socialisation among young Libyan students abroad. A member observed:

In the student unions we had chapters and the chapters would meet once a month not necessarily for political meetings but for cultural events, discuss a topic or watch a movie or sports activities. Even though we were a small number there was a sense of community.<sup>12</sup>

Young people came together, overcoming regionalism, ethnic and tribal divisions, denouncing the regime and its human rights abuses but also recreating around themselves a 'Libyan community', in so doing reinforcing relational ties and a sense of commonality based on a shared culture.

The Free Students' Unions became fertile ground to recruit members to the opposition groups abroad that started to emerge by the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s.<sup>13</sup> As narrated by some members of these groups, a fervent patriotism permeated their discourse. Nationalism was the shared 'thin-centred ideology', limited in ideational ambitions and scope and unable to provide solutions pertaining to questions of social justice, redistribution of resources or conflict management (Freedon 1998: 750-51). However, the groups embraced radically different 'thick ideologies' such as baathism, socialism, liberalism and Islamism, reflecting the predominant ideoscapes at the time and the ability of nationalist ideology to attach itself to other fully fledged

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<sup>10</sup> Interviewee #16, interviewee #18, interviewee #28, interviewee #32.

<sup>11</sup> Interviewee #18.

<sup>12</sup> Interviewee #28.

<sup>13</sup> Interviewee #18 and interviewee #28.

ideologies (Freedden 1998: 751). Here we examine briefly the discourse and practices of the National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL), the Libyan National Democratic Front (LNDF), the Libyan Islamic Group (LIG) and the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG). These groups gathered a larger membership and their members sustained political activism, although intermittently, until the 2011 revolution and after.

The National Front for the Salvation of Libya (NFSL), established in 1981, was the main opposition group in exile until the 1990s (Van Genugten 2016: 112). The leader, Mohamed Yusuf al-Magariaf, a defector and former Libyan ambassador to India, recruited more than a thousand members across the world. Among them were Mustafa Abushagur, Ali Zeidan and Khalifa Haftar who assumed political and military roles in the 2011 transitional institutions and armed forces.<sup>14</sup> The group had a comprehensive political, military and media strategy for regime change imbued with a nationalist discourse that appealed to a wide audience. Indeed, the interviews with some members, and the founding declaration of the NFSL, revealed the relevance of nationalism as the thin-centred ideology of the group (Alunni 2019: 246-47). The Libyan nation was the defining framework of the NFSL's action. This was combined with the pride in the anticolonial struggle, Libyan national history, civilisation and heritage that were recurrent themes in the group's discourse (Alunni 2019: 247; NFSL 1992: 291-92), mirroring the nationalist ideologies of other post-colonial nation-states. We observe continuity with the monarchy and the Gaddafi regime that placed the anti-colonial struggle at the centre of the construction of a national imaginary. This suggests once again the relevance attached to these historical events by individuals beyond the state institutions and the political elite.

The founding declaration stressed the unity of the Libyan nation and the aspiration of the group to represent all Libyans. The NFSL is described as 'a body to encourage and unite all Libyan national forces to further expose the destructive reality of Gaddafi's rule, to restore the national will', a body belonging 'to all Libyans regardless of their age, social status or outlook' (NFSL 1992: 291-92). 'Outlook', in particular, is interpreted as implicitly referring to ethnic, tribal, political or ideological leanings. Belonging to the nation is understood as inclusive and pluralistic (Alunni 2019: 247). In this respect, not only Amazigh activists were prominently represented in the NFSL (Lacher and Labnouji 2015: 261), but through the accounts of some members of the NFSL's communities in the diaspora, it emerged that in their everyday socialization, ethnicity or

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<sup>14</sup> Interviewee #18.

regionalism were not used as categories of practice to discriminate against individuals' membership to the group or to the nation (Alunni 2019: 247). Presenting their political project in nationalist and cohesive terms, the group emphasized unification and solidarity – constructive strategy (Wodak 2009) – while seemingly remaining oblivious to the divergent ‘thick ideologies’ inside the country and among the opposition groups in the diaspora. However, the case of Ashur Shamis and Mohammed al-Magarief who were also members of the Muslim Brotherhood and chose to break away from the Islamist organisation in 1981 to focus on the nationalist cause of the NFSL (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 195-96; Pargeter 2008: 87), shows the complex relations between groups and ideologies at the time. The split reflected the rising tension between territorial nationalism and Islamism as conflicting ideoscapes in Libya and in the region.

The NFSL grew through the political, military and financial support of foreign governments, particularly the US and France, in the 1980s (Seeberg 2018: 6). A radio station operating from Chad until the late 1980s and a bimonthly paper newsletter, *al-Inqadh* (Salvation), were the means of communication of the group that were clearly limited in their ability to reach Libyans across the world and inside the country (Alunni 2019: 247-48).<sup>15</sup> Coups d'état were the group's main political actions in the 1980s. These failed, like the Bab al-Azizia Coup in 1984, or never materialized, like the Chad Plan with the Libyan National Army led by Khalifa Haftar at the end of the 1980s. The political and logistical support by the United States' government to the group led to the establishment of NFSL's communities composed of the members and their families around the world but particularly in the US (Tawil 2010).<sup>16</sup> As the NFSL lost political and military traction in Libya, external backing vanished and the group stalled and shrank in the 1990s.<sup>17</sup>

Throughout the 1980s, the NFSL found itself competing with other groups that offered ‘thicker’ sets of principles. Established in 1980 in the US, the Libyan National Democratic Front (LNDF) stood at the left of the political spectrum, embracing social democracy and supporting freedom of the press as one of the main causes.<sup>18</sup> Among the most well-known members who were at the forefront of the 2011 political transition were Ali Tarhouni, Fathi el-Baja and Mahmoud Shammam. The group had 150 members abroad who occasionally were able to travel to Libya, and some members inside the country. The LNDF published a magazine, *al-Watan* (The Nation),

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<sup>15</sup> Interviewee #28.

<sup>16</sup> Interviewee #28.

<sup>17</sup> Interviewee #18 and interviewee #28.

<sup>18</sup> Interviewee #21.

that on some occasions the members smuggled in a reduced size into Libya. The activities of the group ended in 1988 when the members concluded that to make an impact in Libya it was necessary to go back.<sup>19</sup>

At the opposite side of the spectrum stood the Islamist groups that thrived in the Islamic revivalism of the 1980s by taking part in the global networks through which Islamism as an ideoscape traverses the world. Security operations against high-level members of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood in Libya begun in the 1970s.<sup>20</sup> That led to a first wave of members leaving Libya and to the official dismantling of the movement in the country. The elimination of the leadership reduced the ability of the Muslim Brotherhood to operate inside the country but it did not succeed in eradicating its followers in Libya and abroad. Since the 1960s, the movement had been using university Islamic societies and prayer rooms in the UK and the US as spaces to recruit visiting Muslim students. These efforts, and the increased numbers of Libyan Brotherhood figures living abroad, led to the establishment of the Libyan Islamic Group in the US and in the UK in 1979 (InternationalCrisisGroup 2011: 19; Pargeter 2008: 86-87). As students and exiles mainly in the UK, the US and Canada, the members of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood developed the networks that are the basis of today's organisational structure (Fitzgerald 2015: 178; Pargeter 2008: 86). Throughout their activities, they regarded the Libyan state as the defining framework of the group's political initiatives and patterns of socialization.<sup>21</sup>

As an Islamist movement, the group understood Islam as an 'all-encompassing religion', 'a comprehensive order for human existence' that overrides foreign ideologies such as socialism, nationalism, communism and capitalism and provides an inclusive system that extends to politics, economics, society and culture, 'a program for everyday life' ('Anānī 2016: 56-65). Islamism, in contrast with nationalism, socialism or communism, provided a project for a Libyan political community based on Islamic principles. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Brotherhood figures who had remained inside the country opted for a gradual social approach (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 196). Nevertheless, this did not translate into the establishment of a political party

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<sup>19</sup> Interviewee #21.

<sup>20</sup> While most books refer to the 1980s as a period where members of the movement started to leave the country, in fact, from an interview with a member of the movement it emerged that the first wave was already in the 1970s. Benotman et al. refers to such security operations without providing a date. From further discussion with the interviewees, the date of 1973 was established as the initial moment in which members of the MB started to leave the country.

<sup>21</sup> Interviewee #10 and interviewee #27.

or charities in Libya. Indeed, due to the regime's oppression of any form of civil society, the Libyan Brotherhood did not manage to create the social networks established in other countries that are essential in drawing support to the movement. This prevented the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood from gaining a strong foothold in Libya (Pargeter 2008: 88-90). When in 1998 the regime discovered some Brotherhood cells in the country, it launched a mass arrest campaign that led to over one hundred members of the organisation being detained and the rest forced to flee.

The diaspora ranks were expanded between the end of the 1980s and the end of the 1990s to include militant Islamists. Small groups of *jihadists* emerged in Libya in the early 1980s around religious leaders who opposed the regime. Between 800 and 1,000 Libyan jihadists joined the global *jihadi* networks and the fight against the Soviets in Afghanistan where the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group (LIFG), known as *al-Muqatila*, was formed in 1990. When they started to return to Libya in the early 1990s, much of the leadership was forced to remain in exile in Afghanistan, Sudan and in the UK. After all, the regime still maintained control over the flows of people in and out of the country. Those who managed to return set up cells in Cyrenaica. By 1995 the LIFG had 300 members inside Libya (Pargeter 2008: 92-97). When they were discovered that year, the group had infiltrated the country and issued its first statement announcing its existence and declaring in the London-based and Libya focused *al-Fajr* magazine that the overthrow of the regime was 'the foremost duty after faith in God' (Pargeter 2008: 96-97). The regime responded with a brutal repression. By the end of the 1990s the LIFG had lost its base in Cyrenaica. Hundreds were jailed, several fled the country and took up residence in the West, especially in the UK, but also in Yemen, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Sudan and Afghanistan (InternationalCrisisGroup 2011: 21; Maghur 2010: 4). Although the group officially adopted the discourse and the principles of the global revolutionary *jihad* and of the *Umma*, 'One Muslim Nation' (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013; Pargeter 2008: 95; Tawil 2010), a former member of the LIFG's *Shura* council stated in a 2005 interview that the LIFG had always been wholly focused on Libya and that the ultimate objective of the group was the creation of an Islamic state in Libya (Zellin and Lebovich 2012). The LIFG can be defined as a 'country-first' *jihadi* group, that is a group that combines militant Islamism with a nationalist rhetoric and commitment to nationalist politics, whose membership is ultimately determined by Libyan nationality, although maintaining fluid relations with the global Salafi-Jihadist movement (USIP 2017: 5-6). We observe that the political activities of the group are



oriented towards Libya as a state and that the patterns of socialization, linked to the global *jihadi* movement, tend to strengthen connectedness among individuals who identify as 'Libyans'.

Against this opposition, as anticipated in the previous chapter, the Gaddafi regime called for campaigns of assassinations against Libyan dissidents abroad starting in 1980 and renewed its call in 1984 after the Bab al-Aziziya failed coup (Vandewalle 2006). Seeberg referred to this process, that led to more than 25 exiles being killed between 1980 and 1987, as transnational repression. It prevented the diaspora from engaging in political transnationalism being unable to escape the authoritarian control of the home country (Seeberg 2018: 3).

These events resulted in suspicion among Libyans in the diaspora reinforcing connectedness among political dissidents within each opposition group and within their communities (Alunni 2019: 253-54). The communities of political exiles tended to be small in size, geographically concentrated around a few main cities and mostly isolated from the a-political communities. The a-political communities, composed of individuals who left Libya in search of better education and work opportunities and did not engage in political activism, tended to develop their networks around family and friendships previously established in Libya, with minimal interactions with the political opposition. Their members were keen not to jeopardize their relationship with the homeland as they used to travel to visit families or because they depended on government sponsored scholarships for their income and life abroad (Alunni 2019: 253-54).

On top of this, the ICT that together with the flows of people had allowed for the flows of ideas into the country in the 1960s, were now subject to the exclusive control of the regime that used them to broadcast its propaganda. Abroad, radio and TV were subject to the mediation of host-state institutions and media corporations, leaving the groups in the opposition with magazines and paper newsletters that hardly reached Libya and whose audience remained mostly limited to the respective political networks in the diaspora.

This prevented the establishment of a diasporic public space where all Libyans could come together in the host countries to openly and freely 'imagine' their nation and discuss its character collectively, something that should have been facilitated by the experience of migration and the ability, at least in theory, to communicate more easily and freely (Alunni 2019: 254; Appadurai 1996). On the contrary, expanding the opposition networks and widely sharing ideas between the political dissidents and other Libyans in the diaspora as well as inside the country proved difficult.

This can explain, at least in part, the failure of the opposition to catalyse support among the population or within the Libyan diaspora at large.

## *2.2 Practising the nation in everyday life*

The absence of a civil society outside of state control in Libya and the limited ability to interact in a safe public space in the diaspora, resulted in everyday practices of reproduction of ideas and symbols of the Libyan nation mainly taking place within the familial private space, private social gatherings and Libyan schools. It was in these spaces that a sense of commonality based on shared culture and kinship emerged, contributing to generating nationness among the examined groups in the diaspora (Alunni 2019: 254). By looking at the micro interactional social mechanisms at work in the diaspora and ‘at home’ with a focus on everyday life, we shed light on how these contributed to determining a sense of belonging and identification with the Libyan nation among this particular group of individuals (Malešević 2011).

The private sphere of the family was a space where people maintained or came in touch for the first time with Libyan cultural heritage and social culture in the form of practices related to marriage, language, historical narratives, food and traditional clothes. For the interviewees ‘at home’, the family was a space where ideas and opinions were freely expressed, a space of resistance to the regime and its vision of the nation.<sup>22</sup> In the diaspora, the family was the primary space of reproduction of social culture. It was within the family that a sense of identification and belonging to Libya as a community of blood and kinship prevailed, particularly so among the young generations, as discussed in greater detail in the next chapter (Alunni 2019: 254-56).

In the diaspora, social gatherings such as picnics, camping, youth camps, monthly or weekly lunches and dinners, as well as religious festivities such as Ramadan or Eid al-Adha, were based on political, familial and friendship networks. These gatherings aimed to maintain a sense of community along national lines, transmitting cultural heritage and knowledge of Libyan history to the young generations. This was in itself a political act that strengthened the sense of community and crystallised the sense of identification with the Libyan nation as a frame of reference in the everyday life of individuals (Alunni 2019: 256). By contrast, among the interviewees ‘at home’, there was no mention of gatherings that served a similar function outside the familial space nor of

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<sup>22</sup> Interviewee #5, interviewee #38, interviewee #19, interviewee #25.

the public gatherings organized by the regime, for instance on the occasion of the anniversary of the 1969 revolution. The latter can be interpreted as a rejection of these practices forced on them by the regime that they were only able to voice in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution.

Finally, Libyan schools had an important role in the transmission of the regime's ideas of nation. The curricula that the schools adopted were directly influenced by the regime, both in Libya and in Libyan schools abroad. Furthermore, schools played an important role on the everyday socialisation processes to which students from primary to high school, and later in higher education, were exposed. This was particularly the case in the diaspora where Libyan schools were one of the tools at parents' disposal to establish and maintain a connection between their children and Libya, foster Libyan networks and a sense of belonging to the 'homeland'. As Fox and Miller-Idriss observed, sending children to a minority-language school can be defined and experienced as a national choice (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 542). Hundreds of 1.5 and second-generation pupils were sent to these schools where 'being Libyan' was an identifier that overcame other regional or ethnic differences (Alunni 2019: 256).

Within these spaces, the most common everyday practices of reproduction of the nation were: intra-marriage; practising languages and dialects; narrating history; wearing traditional Libyan clothes and consuming Libyan food. While some of these practices were not unique to the diaspora, they appeared more relevant among diaspora interviewees, as well as among women and youth who remained largely excluded from politics. These practices of everyday nationalism overall fostered a form of identification and belonging to Libya based on imagined commonality.

*Intra-marriage.* As Fox and Miller-Idriss have pointed out, nationhood is implicated in the choices that people make, marriage being among those. Choosing a partner of one's own nationality can structure future choices and reinforce nationhood (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008: 542). This is one of many instances of how people choose the nation in everyday life. Inter-marriage across ethnic borders strengthens territorial nationhood while threatening ethnic nationhood. It can break down social and political barriers but can also threaten the existence of a community or its purity (Hastings 1997: 206). Here, the term intra-marriage was chosen rather than inter-marriage to stress the importance of marrying within what is perceived as the Libyan community. Marrying among people whose origin can be identified as within the borders of the Libyan state was and still is a dominant social practice both 'at home' and in the diaspora that helps to maintain the Libyan

national community as a close and closed community across space and time (Alunni 2019: 254-55).

A woman in the diaspora explained how this practice within diaspora communities went back to the times preceding Libyan independence:

My grandparents moved from Libya to Egypt as a result of the Italian colonisation. [...] They [people from Libya] were quite clustered as a community and only married among themselves. [...] So, before the idea of an actual independent Libya, most individuals were marrying only within the Libyan community, Fezzan, Cyrenaica, or Tripolitania because they were very close. And I think, you know, I think about the idea of a nation. This is an indicator to that. [...] Even before the formal creation of what is now modern-day Libya the people saw themselves, we saw ourselves, as one nation.<sup>23</sup>

Here the interviewee seems to imply that Libyans were already using the Libyan nation as a category of practice before the creation of an independent Libyan state. Factors such as the social and geographical proximity among tribes or the limited transportation and communication infrastructures could also explain this practice among communities in Libya and in the diaspora in the first half of the twentieth century. However, in the narrative of this interviewee this practice is presented as proof of the existence of strong bonds among Libyan people and an indicator of nationhood before the creation of the Libyan state.

Intra-marriage attaches great meaning to kinship, fostering the reproduction of the Libyan national community on the basis of blood relations. The way young generations in the diaspora reproduce this historically persistent practice is indicative of that. A second-generation man observed:

The girl that I am married to was born and raised in the US from Libyan parents and had been to Libya very few times but still I chose to go for somebody from Libyan heritage because I felt that, at some stage, I would like to return to Libya and because I have a lot in common with that person, even if she was born and raised in the US.<sup>24</sup>

Coming from a dual citizen raised in the UK since age six, the assumption that Libyan heritage, transmitted by the parents, is *per se* indicative of commonality with his wife is striking and yet indicative of his own self-understanding. His opinion echoes that of another peer in the diaspora:

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<sup>23</sup> Interviewee #12.

<sup>24</sup> Interviewee #23.

I'm 25 years old and I would like to get married to a Libyan because I am a Libyan man. Actually, I don't have a preference, but we have this thing where it would be more comfortable, I would say, if she were a Libyan.<sup>25</sup>

These men understand Libya as a community in which kinship is the key determinant of people's roots and the marker of a unique culture. The way in which they consider being of Libyan origin an important factor in the choice of a spouse is in itself a reflection of the importance of this feature for their own sense of identification. They spent most of their lives abroad and have dual citizenship and yet they make a 'national choice' when it comes to marriage.

However, some among 1.5 and second generations challenge or resist this practice. A woman observed:

I mean, the requirement [to marry a Libyan] remains more or less spoken unspoken, whatever you might call that. My parents had a flip at me when I married an English man: 'Couldn't you have found a Libyan? Any Libyan!'.<sup>26</sup>

Another young woman tweeted on this subject:

It's wedding season and Libyan aunties (and lowkey uncles too) are having collective meltdowns whenever a Libyan, especially a Libyan woman, marries a non-Libyan. You can sense the tension, the drama. Seriously, when is this community going to stop being so insular? smh [shaking my head] (Ahdash 2019)

These women are aware of the predominance of intra-marriage and the effect of this practice on the Libyan community in terms of insularity. In the diaspora, intra-marriage strengthened connectedness among individuals, their self-understanding and sense of identification based on a perceived commonality transmitted through other everyday practices discussed later in this section.

Intra-marriage had a particular significance among the interviewees 'at home' as well. It was described as a fundamental practice to establish a cohesive social fabric. Several factors can possibly explain this. One interviewee described how marrying across the three main Libyan regions was the norm even before independence but particularly so after independence with the establishment of universities across the country.<sup>27</sup> Young people moved for education purposes,

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<sup>25</sup> Interviewee #10.

<sup>26</sup> Interviewee #12.

<sup>27</sup> Interviewee #32.

mingling with their peers, marrying and in some cases settling in a city other than that of origin. The University of Libya and the Military Academy, for instance, were established in the city of Benghazi in 1955 (Baldinetti 2018: 422). This led to young people from across the country moving to Benghazi, although at the time these flows only involved young people belonging to the country's elite. This practice was extended to wider sections of the population when Gaddafi came to power. The control imposed on Libyan people by the regime and the limited ability to travel from and to Libya possibly contributed to reinforcing this practice. Among other factors, the inability for Libyan women who marry non-Libyan men to transfer nationality rights to their children (Netherlands 2014: 8-9) could have also acted as a disincentive for women to marry outside the Libyan nation. Minority ethnic groups shared this practice as well. Despite their mistreatment by the regime and their cultural and political marginalization, personal relationships between Libyan Imazighen and the Arab population have largely remained unaffected and there was a significant degree of intermarriage (Smith 2013: 176). The same is true with respect to the Tebu who customarily marry outside immediate family circles and have built family relations between Tebu and local tribes in Libya (Murray 2015: 305).

This suggests that both 'at home' and in the diaspora, the practice of intra-marriage contributed to crystallize the idea of a Libyan nation as the main frame of reference of one's sense of identification and belonging.

*Practising languages and dialects.* Languages are important 'markers' at the individual and group level (Edwards 2009: 21). Through their communicative function they act as ordinary tools of communication. Through their symbolic function, that is given life by a vernacular (a language or dialect spoken by ordinary people in a particular country or region), they become emblems of groupness (Edwards 2009: 55). Language has been described as an 'act of identity' that aims to strengthen in-group connections through processes that can be conscious but also unconscious or automatic and reveal an individual's sense of belonging or difference (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985).

Gaddafi's regime made Arabic the default language for Libyans 'at home'. When using the term Arabic we refer to *al-'arabīyah al-fuṣḥā* (the pure Arabic) used as the language of official transactions, religion and media. Libyan Arabic is the vernacular language and *de facto* national working language, also spoken in the diaspora. Four Arabic dialects are spoken in Libya: Eastern

Libyan Arabic, Southern Libyan Arabic, Tripolitanian Arabic and Western Egyptian Bedawi Arabic (Eberhard, Simons, and Fennig 2019; Pereira 2011; Benkato 2014). As tends to be the case with dialects, since they are forms of the same language, they are mutually intelligible (Edwards 2009: 63). Gaddafi's policy of Arabisation – initiated on paper but not in practice during the Kingdom – made Arabic the only official language permitted on public road signs and advertising, as well as the only language of instruction and state bureaucracy with the objective of preserving the 'authenticity of the Libyan nation' (Baldinetti 2018: 423-24). This policy resulted in the predominance of Arabic and Libyan Arabic in the public space.

In turn, ethnic minorities and their languages were effaced, although in a rather inconsistent fashion. For instance, discriminatory policies towards the Imazighen discussed in the previous chapter also included Arabising Amazigh place names, burning books in Tamazight and about the Imazighen, but also excluding Imazighen from the media and avoiding references to them in school textbooks (Baldinetti 2009). As a result, Tamazight was only spoken in the secrecy and safety of the familial private space (Kohl 2014: 425; al-Rumi 2009). Differently from the Imazighen of the mountains and the coast, the Tuareg in the south were allowed to speak Tamahaq/Tamasheq. The regime considered it an Arabic dialect as part of its efforts to accommodate this ethnic group in the nation and incorporate them in the Libyan army. Acknowledging their cultural and linguistic rights was a way to ensure their loyalty in times of need (Kohl 2014: 429). Finally, the Tebu speak a language called Tudaga that belongs to the Nilo-Saharan family and uses Latin script. It was an oral language until the early 1990s when an American linguist developed an alphabet for it that Tebu activists kept secret (Van Waas 2013; Zurutuza 2018).

In the Libyan diaspora, language was a key factor in the process of developing a sense of identification and belonging to the Libyan nation (Alunni 2019: 255). While Arabic and Libyan Arabic were the default primary language of first generation individuals, it was in the family that 1.5 and second generations got to speak their 'mother tongue' and identified with the parents' Libyan Arabic dialects and Amazigh language.<sup>28</sup> Libyan Arabic dialect and Tamazight were used in everyday communication within the family but also had a symbolic value in so far as they were associated with memories and stories of life in Libya recounted by parents and grandparents. The everyday use of the language and the memories associated with it contributed to establishing a sense of identification and belonging to the Libyan nation but also to the Amazigh community.

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<sup>28</sup> Interviewee #1, interviewee #2, interviewee #3, interviewee #11, interviewee #36, interviewee #10.

The ‘mother tongue’ was identified as what instilled a sense of identity and attachment to Libya (Alunni 2019: 255). An interviewee elaborated on the link between language and identity in these terms:

Your identity is an accumulation of who your parents are, their influence on you, your journey, where you live and the language you speak.<sup>29</sup>

However, in a few cases, English was identified as the primary language or as the language spoken at home, particularly within a Libyan couple composed of two 1.5 or second-generation individuals or among siblings.<sup>30</sup> As Edwards pointed out, the loss or abandonment of a language in its ordinary communicative function eventually can lead to the dilution or disappearance of its symbolic value (Edwards 2009: 57). The implications of this process for 1.5 and second-generation individuals will require further examination in the future. However, we can recall in this respect De Fina’s discussion of transnationalism as a dimension of identity and how migrants create social networks that link their ancestral homeland to the place of settlement, re-elaborating transnational identities that are the product of multiple nation-states, ethnicities, cultures and languages (De Fina 2016). Looking at this through the lenses of nationness, one would expect that the subjectivity of migrants will result from their experiences and relationships that happen by using languages in their communicative and symbolic functions, in turn determining groupness and its variability across time (Borneman 1992; Brubaker 1996).

This analysis suggests that while Arabic was imposed in the public space in Libya, in the familial private ethnic minorities continued to practise their languages. In the diaspora, de-territorialization did not translate into losing the mother tongue but rather in strengthening the individual’s attachment to the mother tongue and, in turn, the sense of belonging to Libya. The nurturing of languages and dialects in the private sphere can help contextualise the re-emergence of these languages and associated ethnicities after the 2011 revolution but also the attachment of the diaspora and their activities oriented towards Libya in 2011.

*Consuming traditions: ceremonies, clothing and food.* Coins, anthems, ceremonies, traditional clothing and food are symbols of national belonging, ‘markers’ at the individual and group level (Palmer 1998: 190; Ichijo and Ranta 2016). They reveal the history of nations and ethnic groups while reinforcing and flagging individuals’ sense of belonging (Palmer 1998: 186).

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<sup>29</sup> Interviewee #36

<sup>30</sup> Interviewee #23, interviewee #12, interviewee#15, interviewee #2.



Wearing traditional ‘Libyan’ clothes on the occasion of religious ceremonies like weddings and festivities like *Eid al-Adha* or *mawlid* (the Prophet’s Muhammad birthday), in the family but also at school and during social gatherings, was a shared practice both in the diaspora and ‘at home’ most often accompanied by the consumption of ‘Libyan’ food.<sup>31</sup>

Asked what are the common characteristics that Libyans share, a woman in the diaspora observed:

Well, culturally, I think it’s in the traditions that they [Libyans] hold. So, those are celebrated or kind of... come up in daily life but also in celebrations. So, there is, kind of... a unified pride. Even if there are differences across the country, there is a pride in the traditional dress, for instance. There’s a pride in eating Libyan food. That’s a huge part of Libyan life. That’s what defines their celebrations, so weddings and religious holidays throughout the year. There are things that are distinctly Libyan, like the Prophet’s birthday. Libyans will, you know... there’s the procession but then everybody enjoys Libyan *asida*, which is this dessert that people have. So, there’s unity in the culture and in the celebrations.<sup>32</sup>

As examples of everyday nationalism, the consumption of these traditions and the fact that they were described as ‘Libyan’ was yet another act of categorization and identification among people ‘at home’ and in the diaspora. These are important cultural identifiers that united people in performing the nation. A woman who attended the Libyan school in London in the 1980s observed:

In the Libyan school in London there were Libyans from different parts of Libya. So, they were from the South, from the East, from the West, and we all actually had to make the different cuisines, the cooking traditions and all that stuff. So, it was kind of a united presentation of the whole Libya, in terms of food and traditional clothes.<sup>33</sup>

The attempts at bringing together diverse cultural traditions from inside Libya reflected the intention to establish a ‘Libyan identity’. In another example of how Libyan traditions related to food, clothes, and dialects are perceived as ‘Libyan’ regardless of ethnicity, religion or migration, one interviewee observed with respect to the Libyan Jewish community currently residing mostly in Israel:

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<sup>31</sup> Interviewee #11, interviewee #9, interviewee #16, interviewee #25, interviewee #30.

<sup>32</sup> Interviewee #11.

<sup>33</sup> Interviewee #9.

If you go to Israel today and you walk into the house of a Libyan Jew, he still speaks old Tripolitanian-city Libyan [dialect] even better than Tripolitanians because they [Libyan Jews in Israel] were frozen in time. Their family speaks the same accent that was spoken in 1956 and 1972 while the Tripolitanian slang has been altered by people from Misrata and Surman. They speak pure Tripolitanian-old city [dialect]. They eat couscous the Libyan way and make it very good. They love *harisa*. They have the same habits, they are circumcised, they dress in Libyan traditional clothes during the festivities.<sup>34</sup>

This interviewee draws an example from a segment of the Libyan community rather controversial due to the politics surrounding the creation of the Israeli state and the expulsion of the last few hundred members of the Jewish community by the Gaddafi regime in 1970, together with what remained of the Italian community (Wright 2012: 200). With this examples he suggests that there are a set of traditions related to ceremonies, clothes and food that are ‘Libyan’, go beyond religion or ethnicity, and have been maintained across time and space, both ‘at home’ and in the diaspora.

As pointed out by Kittler and Sucher, ‘eating, like dressing in traditional clothing or speaking in a native language, is a daily reaffirmation of cultural identity’ (Kittler and Sucher 1989: 5). Whether a national cuisine exists or not, whether certain religious ceremonies like *mawlid* and the traditional clothing wore on these occasions are distinctly Libyan or not, what matters is how, through the everyday performances and reproduction of these material objects, these become naturalized by ordinary citizens as ‘diacritics’ of Libyanness (Appadurai 1996: 13-14).

*History and commemoration.* As Turner observed, all collectivities develop a relationship to past, present and future. For instance, the family and the school tend to focus on the past and on the transmission of existing traditions of practices and beliefs (Turner 2006: 205). The devices through which individuals and groups evoke, mark, represent or debate their past are referred to by Turner as ‘commemoration’. Commemoration is intended to create or sustain a sense of belonging in the individuals. It can include public as well as individual performances and rituals of recollection of historical events and periods; the building of monuments, places of memory and museums; as well as the naming and visiting of places (Turner 2006: 205-06). Throughout the years of the Gaddafi regime, outdoor events, the family, social gatherings and schools were the spaces where commemoration took place in everyday life.

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<sup>34</sup> Interviewee #16.

The family was the space where individuals crafted and transmitted a historical collective memory and symbols around the nation. It was in the family that parents and grandparents narrated their stories and memories of Libya, filling the gaps in their children and grandchildren's knowledge of the country's historical past. Some families fostered alternative narratives to those of the regime 'at home' and in the diaspora, particularly around the years of Independence and the Libyan Kingdom. One interviewee pointed out:

This [the history of independence and of the Libyan Kingdom] is what was told us from our parents, but no-one taught us that [at school]. If this person [the King] unified this country, why aren't we reading about this person to build up our sense of unity, you know? This person fought, he had negotiations to bring this land together. So, [by teaching this part of history] you would see where this [country] came from, where the fact that we are together came from, you know. You [as a young Libyan in school] didn't see that. You just didn't.<sup>35</sup>

The interviewee reiterates the key role of the family in transmitting counter-narratives and counter-memories to those of the regime that erased the Libyan Kingdom from textbooks and from the national museum. She seems to imply that including this part of history in the school curriculum would have produced a sense of unity among the Libyan population. And yet, as observed in the historical chapter, the years leading up to and following independence were far from uncontroversial. As Gaddafi worked towards obliterating that part of Libyan history from the collective memory, some in the diaspora and at home continued to commemorate this event. This was most common among families and communities in the political opposition in the diaspora, as well as among families in Libya that were close to or part of the political elite at the times of the Kingdom. An interviewee observed:

There is a date, 24th of December which is the Libyan freedom day [independence day]. After Gaddafi's revolution in 1969, he deleted it, so all these people who were born in the 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, 2000s, they don't know this date. They just realised this after 2011. I know this date because I have been taught this by my grandfather and my family always celebrated this date.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Interviewee #13.

<sup>36</sup> Interviewee #25.

The regular and repetitious character of this private act of recollection is central to the effectiveness of commemorative practices. While making the day of independence a national holiday is common of nations that achieve political autonomy (Turner 2006: 205-13), Gaddafi and his regime disregarded the day of Libyan independence that would have celebrated the King they ousted and focused instead on the anti-colonial struggle.

As a result of this process, particularly the members of the diaspora but also some representatives of the civil society and of the political elite developed a sense of heritage in the private sphere through counter-narratives and counter-memories not necessarily coincidental with that dictated by the regime. Asked whether across Libyan history there were any institutions that contributed to establishing a sense of unity among the people, an interviewee representative of civil society responded:

Libyans have a great sense of heritage. We love it. As Libyans, there is always a link to the past. The part that I really liked, when we were kids my father would tell me the same stories. The one thing that you [we] would love, would be to have a moment to chat with your grandma or your grandpa when they would be telling you about ancient stories. How they were suffering. They wore rug bags as clothes. And you just wanted to know more about history and then depends about what kind of story-tellers grandmas are but they are really good at it generally!<sup>37</sup>

This interviewee among others was keen to stress the importance of the family in transmitting a sense of heritage through family stories and folk stories recounted by parents and grandparents which helped to shape one's perception of the country but also to create stereotypes. Oral traditions, songs, proverbs, folk poetry with a focus on the anti-colonial resistance were narrated by the grandparents to their grandchildren. As Ahmida observed, the victims of the Italian concentration camps preserved the memories of these dramatic experiences through oral traditions – e.g. the collection *The Oral History of the Jihad* – folk poetry, *al'am*, and memoirs that are highly valued in Libyan culture and offer powerful testimonies of that historical period (Ahmida 2005: 33-53).

In the diaspora communities, people were able to discuss and transmit these narratives not only in the family but also through social gatherings, thereby influencing the way the younger generations interpreted Libyan history but also consolidating a certain interpretation of the past

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<sup>37</sup> Interviewee #5.

within their communities. Members of political opposition groups as well as Libyans in the diaspora not directly involved in political activities, came together on the occasion of religious and national holidays, weekends and summer holidays. A young woman who spent most of her childhood outside Libya recalled gatherings with family and friends in Egypt:

So we had those summer nights in which they [her parents and family friends in the political opposition] would sing the Libyan national anthem and fly the Libyan flag and narrate stories about Libya.<sup>38</sup>

This is an example of how these events became an occasion to reproduce national symbols that preceded Gaddafi's time, such as the 1951 flag and the national anthem of independence that were maintained in the national imaginary against those imposed by Gaddafi. The stories mainly focused on the prosperity of the years of the Libyan Kingdom and on the abuses of the regime that relatives or family friends had endured at the time of the student protests in the 1970s and throughout the years. While the older generations recalled the time of the anti-colonial resistance and the poverty that characterised their lives, the following generation narrated the abuses and the fight against the regime and the memories of life before Gaddafi.

Finally, the role of Libyan schools in teaching history was stressed by individuals in the diaspora that used to complement the education received in the host country with a Libyan education. Whether every weekend or in the afternoons, hundreds of children learned about Libya and Libyan history through the teaching of Libyan schools based on the curricula dictated by the regime 'at home'. In the words of a young woman from the diaspora:

So, there is like this institutionalized introduction to the Libyan nation and then there are the informal narratives that people would get from their own families and their communities that, kind of... functioned underground. That was always in the back of your mind, but you were institutionally given a different story. Growing up in a world where you only knew about the Libyan regime, I'm sure that shaped people's identity or people's understanding or sentiment towards the Libyan nation.<sup>39</sup>

The interviewee is keen to stress how the historical narratives of the regime and those within the family competed in establishing a historical memory both collectively and individually. The results of this process are discussed in the final chapter of this thesis.

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<sup>38</sup> Interviewee #19.

<sup>39</sup> Interviewee #11.

In the same way that languages other than Arabic and Libyan dialect were practised in the safety of the familial private space, in the diaspora and ‘at home’, the family and the communities that people created around themselves remained a space of resistance to the regime’s official historical narratives. This, together with the everyday nationalism that found expression in religious ceremonies, food and traditional clothing, left a legacy in the people’s imagination and a symbology of the nation that only emerged in the public sphere in the 2000s via the Internet and through some initiatives by the political opposition in the diaspora communities and the civil rights movement inside the country.

### **3. A period of change: ideoscapes, mediascapes and technoscapes in the 2000s**

By the end of the 1990s the opposition appeared defeated, both in Libya and in the diaspora. As the multilateral sanctions were lifted, the rapprochement with the international community initially seemed to strengthen Gaddafi’s grip on power. However, advances in ICT and the demands coming from the international community concerning the respect of human rights and ethnic minorities, *de facto* challenged the status quo, initiating a period of change that culminated in the 2011 revolution. On the one hand, the new technologies and the Internet in particular, created new opportunities for interaction and political activism among Libyans across the world. On the other hand, the rapprochement with the international community forced the regime to change Gaddafi’s previous tactics and to open up a dialogue with the political and civil opposition abroad and ‘at home’.

Through this process a virtual and physical public space emerged where the multifaceted opposition tried to redefine nationhood as it was institutionalized by the regime with a focus on two aspects: cultural pluralism and the symbols of the nation. This section discusses how this process unfolded by looking at: the development of websites in the diaspora with a focus on Libya Watanona; the challenge posed by Amazigh activism to the regime via the Internet and inside Libya; the 2005 London Conference of the Libyan Opposition and its fallout for the regime inside the country; the experience of civil activism in Libya between resistance and collaboration with the regime in the 2000s. These processes and events emerged as particularly relevant from the narratives of the interviewees and the analysis of the Internet landscape in Libya and in the diaspora before 2011. To understand these developments we start with an analysis of technoscapes and how

by taking part in new technologies the Libyan opposition at home and in the diaspora found a new public space of resistance and new tools to redefine nationhood and nationness.

Satellite and Internet technology reached Libya at the beginning of the 1990s. The regime participated in 1985 in the creation of Arabsat, the first Arab regional satellite. In 1990 satellite TV became available in Libya, although to a small number of citizens. (Richter 2013: 154). The imposition of multilateral sanctions in the 1990s left Libya behind in technological and professional development in the media sector, with a positive effect on the interest of Libyans for Arab satellite channels. People in Libya started to obtain their news from channels such as al-Jazeera and al-Arabiyya rather than from national TV channels (Elareshi and Gunter 2010). Moreover, differently from the traditional analogic media – TV and radio – owned and controlled by the state, until the early 2000s satellite TV was not routinely blocked (Richter 2013: 156; FreedomHouse 2005).

The Internet became available to Libyan institutions in the 1990s and was expanded to public access in 1998 although de facto it was available only to multinational companies, regime cronies and authorised cyber cafes. Household Internet connections were beyond reach of the average Libyan, particularly so outside of major urban centres. However, following Gaddafi's endorsement of ICT in 2000 to promote economic opportunities and skills advancements for the youth, cyber cafes were opened everywhere, even in small desert towns. Moreover, thanks to state subsidies, internet costs were brought down enhancing its reach (FreedomHouse 2012). By 2004, the number of Libyan people with access to the Internet had grown significantly reaching 350,000 users by 2009, equivalent to a penetration rate above 5%. As Scott Railton observed, that number did not track the use of mobile Internet devices (Scott-Railton 2013: 20). Other estimates by the International Telecommunication Union set the internet penetration at 10% in 2009. By 2011, Freedom House reported the Internet penetration at 17% (FreedomHouse 2012).<sup>40</sup> Facebook was the first social media site in the country with a penetration estimated between 2.8 and 4.6% - approximately between 170,000 and 270,000 users against a population of six million (Scott-Railton 2013: 20). The mobile phones penetration, over one-hundred per cent, at first had a limited impact on Internet penetration since the costs of smartphones and 3g connectivity, available since

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<sup>40</sup> Assessing the penetration of Internet and Satellite technology in the absence of reliable government data can be challenging. I'm grateful to Digital Media Analyst, Khadeja Ramali, for her support in navigating the wealth of information, at times inaccurate and contradictory, on the subject.

2006, were too high to allow for wide dissemination. Government imposed restrictions to connectivity and content came only after 2003. With the complete lifting of sanctions the regime was able to purchase surveillance and filtering technology that allowed for systematic censorship which targeted opposition websites overseas (FreedomHouse 2012). Indeed the regime preferred a strategy of surveillance over one of complete censorship that allowed it to control cyber activism and communication via Skype and VSAT and intermittently cut it (FreedomHouse 2012).

Although still subject to regime control, internet technology and satellite TV created new opportunities for interaction among members of the diaspora and between them and people inside Libya. Asked whether he thought that the political opposition in exile had any role in fostering national consciousness in the diaspora and among the Libyan people, a member of the NFSL observed:

We tried hard although the barriers and the difficulties to communicate with the Libyan society at large made our impact very limited [...] It was only lately with globalisation and the telecommunications revolution, with satellite television and the Internet that the Libyan opposition abroad and the Libyan diaspora started to enjoy mass access to the Libyan population inside Libya and tried to infuse a sense of nationalism and, if you like, an alternative discourse to Gaddafi's discourse. [...] we all had emails, started going in the Internet, setting up websites and interacting through them. The paper print had faded away. It's a new chapter now. And then we started writing articles, holding activities, conferences, seminars and covering them through the Internet. I used to write on a very famous website called *Libya Our Home* [Libya Watanona] run by a Libyan guy in America called Ibrahim Gnewa. That was the most popular website.<sup>41</sup>

Several research participants shared his view. One of them referred to the use of video chat rooms to communicate with Libyans inside the country:

In 1998 we introduced to the Libyan community across the globe a media, you know, chat rooms called Paltalk. You can go to the website, create a room, make it private or public. You can announce what kind of topics you want to address, you can announce a lecture for people interested. It was used for private communication first. We can open up a room and I have your address and you have mine and we can go to a room and talk privately or

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<sup>41</sup> Interviewee #18.



publicly. The first one was called al-Manara and it was led by Suleiman Dogha, he was managing it.<sup>42</sup>

Suleiman Dogha was an Amazigh television presenter who became famous for his media engagement with Saif al-Islam Gaddafi in the 2000s (Altai 2013: 44). These excerpts give a sense of how Internet technology allowed Libyans in the diaspora to communicate among themselves much more easily while creating opportunities for communications with activists ‘at home’.

Another interviewee, a young woman in the diaspora, shared her perspective of the impact of satellite and Internet media, on her family and particularly on young people inside the country. Her account is vivid and focuses on the way the satellite, as illustrated in this quote, but also the Internet, as elaborated in other parts of the interview, challenged assumptions about selfhood and peoplehood. As Libya became part of the global world, new subjectivities were being crafted:

Satellite really shattered a lot of what Libyans believed and understood about themselves and the world around them [...] it showed the diversity of the neighbours and the rest of the region [...] You know, these are the people who shared similar religious beliefs and had similar values, and shared a language and history. They [Libyans] saw diversity and openness [...] So I think it [satellite] broke down what they believed. [...] They were very proud of themselves and had a strong Libyan national identity. That came into question from watching what other people were doing. It challenged the mantra that they were fed over decades that they were better than their neighbours and that they were doing what they had to do to preserve themselves. You know, that’s just this regime talk, and so when they realised: ‘Hey, people are actually better than us and they don’t even have oil. People are doing better than us and they are smaller. People are doing better than us and they are not as powerful.’ So it [satellite] really shattered those assumptions, it made them question them.<sup>43</sup>

This interviewee further observed the impact of all this on her family in Libya, especially on young people: they emulated singers and TV stars but also followed religious preachers. In one of the many informal conversations I had with Libyan friends, for instance, one of them observed how she saw her mother strengthen her religious beliefs and value system by watching the Egyptian preacher Amr Mohamed Helmi Khaled. He was described in 2006 by The New York Times

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<sup>42</sup> Interviewee #27.

<sup>43</sup> Interviewee #11.

Magazine as the world's most famous and influential Muslim television preacher. His devotional programs at the time were broadcasted on Iqraa, a Saudi-owned religious satellite channel (Shapiro 2006). The ICT provided new opportunities for people to evade the reality in Libya and to access and express new dimensions of selfhood and peoplehood.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century technoscapes connected the individual in Libya to the global world, showing diversity and opportunities that were denied inside the country. As people started to partake in the global cultural flows, their subjectivities evolved in new directions, particularly among the youth. The new technologies provided new means of communication but also an access to a pop-culture and a religious landscape that were still denied in Libya. The sense of groupness, identification and belonging of individuals evolved as this process unfolded. The new ICT allowed the opposition in the diaspora to become more vocal, cover conferences and seminars on human rights, advocate for reforms, spread news and ideas in the worldwide Web and on satellite TV among the Libyan diaspora but also inside Libya. The following sections illustrate these processes and analyse their contribution in challenging the regime's vision of the Libyan nation and nationness.

### *3.1 Diaspora websites*

Collaborations first emerged between journalists and intellectuals inside Libya and diaspora websites such as Libya Alyoum and Libya Jeel (FreedomHouse 2006). Websites supporting the rights of minority ethnic groups, such as the Amazigh website Tawalt.com, but also websites close to the Muslim Brotherhood or of a less clear political leaning like Libyan Watanona also emerged towards the end of the 1990s. Libyan political activists abroad started to publish their criticism of human rights abuses in Libya, as well as to cover events in which these issues were discussed. Those who dared to do so in Libya were harassed or imprisoned (FreedomHouse 2008). The authorities' clampdown on cyber dissent prompted Libyan users to self-censor their political discourse online (FreedomHouse 2012). Not surprisingly, when blogging became a reality in the country, Libyan bloggers focused on culture, poetry and story-telling rather than politics (FreedomHouse 2008).

Claudia Gazzini pointed out that in the 2000s Libyan opposition websites were used by Libyans in Libya to communicate with their compatriots in exile and for those in the diaspora to push for change in Libya (Gazzini 2007). An observation of websites like Libya Watanona, for

instance, reveals how these websites provided a discussion platform – although limited in its interactive functions – that gave significant room to letters and emails from the audience. For the exiled community, these means of communication became essential to strengthen the opposition groups, lobby with foreign governments and wage campaigns against the regime, but also to communicate with their countrymen in Libya to announce the death of tribesmen (Gazzini 2007).

Among the UK-based websites that emerged in the diaspora in the 2000s, the online news outlet Akhbar Libya was established by the Libyan Human and Political Development Forum, an NGO registered in London. Born as a four page paper newsletter, it went online in 2002 and by 2007 had reached 26 million page visits (Gazzini 2007). This gives an idea of the impact of the Internet phenomenon on the ability of the opposition to overcome the obstacles encountered until its advent. Among other causes, Akhbar Libya supported the establishment of cultural pluralism in the country (Baldinetti 2009: 238).

Other websites recalled the cult of martyrs and their mythologization in the national imaginary. The website Justice4libya.com, for instance, was dedicated to the martyrs of the Gaddafi regime, political prisoners or individuals that disappeared or were killed in Libya or in exile. In particular, this website provided an eye-witness account of the 1996 Abu Salim massacre around which the Libyan civil rights movement had been growing in the 2000s ‘at home,’ as discussed later in this chapter. A forum for survivors to share their experiences through posts and poems that recounted their stories, the website is no longer accessible but is described in these terms: ‘Small black-and-white photos of hundreds of political prisoners allegedly killed in prison frame Justice 4 Libya's homepage’ (Gazzini 2007).

*Libya Watanona* (Libya our home) was one of the first diaspora websites that emerged by the end of the 1990s. It was referred to by the diaspora interviewees from across the political spectrum as the main website of the Libyan diaspora. It gathered messages coming from all Libyan political factions, whether the regime, the Libyan Brotherhood, the US, the monarchists and the socialists in one online diasporic public space (Gazzini 2007). Today, it is one of the few websites of its genre still accessible. Gazzini observed how letters, commentaries and the obituaries sections had an important function in reinforcing a ‘Libyan identity’. In particular, a ‘tone of nostalgia’ emerged from the obituaries of the Libyans living abroad as well as the ‘emotional bond’ among Libyans in the diaspora and their compatriots in Libya. They were: ‘[...] using the websites of the

Libyan opposition abroad not just to foster greater freedom or to engage in heated discussions on the country's current problems, but to maintain their complex and layered identity' (Gazzini 2007).

A further examination of the website provided examples of everyday nationalism. The material had the potential to challenge the hegemonic historical narratives of the regime by providing the users with counter-narratives and counter-memories. Although it is difficult to examine the reactions to this material due to the rudimentary nature of the website that does not include a comments section or sharing functions, one would expect these elements to contribute to shape new subjectivities (Appadurai 1996). The web pages do not include the year of publication so it is not possible to contextualize their content in the historical period in which they were originally published. However, it is interesting to observe the narratives and images chosen to describe 'Libya, its people, its past, present and future' and the way the websites presents the ethno-cultural and civic-political dimensions of the Libyan nation (LibyaWatanona 2019c). The images representing 'Libyan culture' grouped under that label are mainly related to traditional folklore music and dance, traditional clothes, the modern and old architecture of the cities of Tripoli and Benghazi, Libyan cultural and natural heritage, and scenes of everyday life belonging to a distant past (LibyaWatanona 2019f, 2019g, 2019b) – see Appendix 4, set of images #1. One can interpret the choice of these elements as a way to romanticize the past, the symbols and the traditions associated with it. In so doing, the website can contribute to establish and strengthen national symbols in the individual and collective imaginary.

Among these elements, the most recurring ones across the website are photographs of urban architecture and landscapes that project the vision of a multicultural Libya, the result of layers of several civilizations. As Palmer suggests, if we understand architecture and landscape tropes as symbols of the history and of the roots of a nation, we must acknowledge their power in engaging people into a conversation with their past that can help them make sense of their present and their future (Palmer 1998: 191). The photographs of Tripoli celebrate the 'city rich history and magnificent sites'. These include Souk Attruk, Jamia Ahmad Pasha and the Red Castle – see Appendix 4, set of images #1. These are referred to as sixteenth and seventeenth century constructions from the Karamanli era. However, we know that the Karamanli administered Tripolitania, Cyrenaica and Fezzan for the Ottoman Sultan between 1711 and 1835, therefore in the eighteenth and nineteenth century – see Chapter Three of this study. This can be interpreted as a way to celebrate a period of Libyan history, the Karamanli regency, associated with the first

attempt by ‘Libyans’ at ruling ‘Libya’ independently but it could also be a mistake by the website manager. Regardless, these photographs portray and celebrate traditional architecture. For instance, the Red Castle is a fortress whose defensive structure is attributed to the Knights of St John in the sixteenth century. It hosts since 1919 a national museum covering 5,000 years of ‘Libyan history’ – although it did not include the years of the Libyan Kingdom due to the Gaddafi’s regime intent to obliterate that part of Libyan history. This reminds us of the significance of museums as symbols and celebrations of national pride. In another instance, the photographs of the city of Benghazi depict the Ozo hotel, a symbol of modernity, and buildings of the old city whose description, however, is not provided. With respect to Libyan cultural and natural heritage the pictures portray different subjects: images of the desert, oases and desert life; the Amazigh towns of Ghadames and Ghat; and the pre-Islamic archaeological sites of Cyrene, Leptis Magna and Sabratha (LibyaWatanona 2019f, 2019g, 2019c, 2019e, 2019a, 2019h) – see Appendix 4, set of images #1. Some information is provided next to the pictures that can also be accessed via external links in the history, travel and transportation sections of the website from the home page (LibyaWatanona 2019c).

The use of these photographs recalls the importance of architectural styles and landscape tropes in the process of developing the ‘imaginative faculty’ that underpins banal nationalism (Walter 2004; Déloye 2013; Billig 1995). As some authors have observed, the success of these images in occupying the visual fields and becoming ‘genuine identity landmarks, veritable “social frameworks” of national memory’ (Déloye 2013) depends on the process of dissemination in the everyday life of individuals (Morgan 2001; Daniels 1993). Libya Watanona provided the viewer in the diaspora as well as in Libya – although to a lesser extent in Libya due to the control exercised by the regime that periodically blocked or hacked the website (FreedomHouse 2010) – with the opportunity to consume images of the architecture of Libyan cities and landscape presenting them with a multicultural vision of the nation, inclusive of different regional, ethnic and historical elements.

The same can be observed in the section on arts, music and literature, that includes long lists of Libyan artists, writers and intellectuals with their stories, books, articles, poems, proverbs, photography, paintings, cartoons, as well as references to Libyan magazines and newspapers of the diaspora. While the analysis of this material is beyond the purpose of this study, it is significant to stress that these lists include references to Amazigh culture and in particular a link to the

Amazigh website mentioned above, *Tawalt*, providing the user with direct access to what the editor considers one of the elements of Libyan culture, denoting the pluralistic vision of the nation differently from the regime's Arab-centred vision (LibyaWatanona 2019d).

The section on Libyan history is also of particular relevance in so far as it tackles issues concerning the civic-political dimension of the nation by reconstructing its past. The pre-Islamic history with its figures and cultural heritage, the anti-colonial resistance and its heroes, the years leading to independence and those of the Libyan Kingdom, and the post-1969 history, occupy the web pages of this section accompanied by photos. The space given to pre-Islamic history reflects an attempt at presenting the ancient pre-Islamic past as part of Libyan history. However, the anti-colonial resistance and the events leading to independence and concerning the Libyan Kingdom occupy more than two-thirds of the section (LibyaWatanona 2019c).

The historical narrative of the anti-colonial resistance glorifies the Libyan heroes with photos portraying them but also capturing the brutality of the colonial occupation (LibyaWatanona 2019c) – see Appendix 4, set of images #1. Beyond the story and the iconic pictures of Umar al-Mukhtar who is described as ‘a Libyan hero’ and a great symbol of the resistance, the editor provides several stories of other *mujahideen* and political leaders of the anti-colonial resistance. Among them: leaders of the Sanusiyah in Cyrenaica like al-Sayed Ahmed al-Sherif al-Sanusi, and leaders from Tripolitania, some of them of Amazigh descent like Sulaiman al-Baruni. The effort of the editor to equally celebrate *mujahideen* and political figures from different regions, families, tribes and ethnic groups reflects the intention to portray the resistance as a united struggle led by leaders who collectively contributed to the resistance. This section, while recalling the cult of the martyrs of the anti-colonial resistance and the dominant historical narratives discussed in the previous chapter, commemorates this period of Libyan history as one of national unity in line with the narratives of the regime and its attempt at using this period of Libyan history as a catalyst of expression of national belonging (Turner 2006).

In contrast to Gaddafi's historical narratives, the editor of Libya Watanona included the Sanusi order and its leaders. The events leading to independence and to the Libyan Kingdom, such as the establishment of a Libyan army and of state institutions, are discussed together with the national symbols of the period, the Kingdom's flag and the national anthem (LibyaWatanona 2019c) – see Appendix 4, set of images #1. A short biography of the King and a list of Prime Ministers between 1951 and 1969 is included, as well as an audio of the King declaring national

independence. The main source for this historical era is the scholarly book by Majeed Khadduri, *Modern Libya*, and reports by the UN-envoy Adrian Pelt. This section of the website provided an alternative and additional source to the regime's narrative and to the family narratives in the diaspora and 'at home'.

Lastly, on the historical period from 1969 onwards, the website provided a critical description of the rise to power of the Gaddafi regime, its abuses and human rights violations reported by Libyans in the diaspora and by Amnesty International. The events related to the Libyan students' movements and to the killing of Libyan students in April 1976 are included in the documents section accompanied by the pictures of the students (LibyaWatanona 2019c) – see Appendix 4, set of images #1. This suggests yet again the relevance of this period in the collective memory of the regime's opponents and the emergence of a cult of the martyrs of the Gaddafi's regime in the diaspora.

To sum up, the analysis of the websites of the diaspora points to the use of content and images that aim to represent a Libyan national culture as pluralistic and inclusive of ethnic minorities, to disseminate historical narratives that emphasise national unity and create a myth around the martyrs of the anti-colonial resistance and the martyrs of the Gaddafi regime while providing counter-narratives concerning the years of Independence and of the Libyan Kingdom. Such a use of online diasporic public spaces provided an alternative vision of the nation to that of the regime among individuals in the diaspora and possibly 'at home'. The Internet contributed to creating a new interactive space partially outside the regime's control, at least for the diaspora. At home, the development of Internet cafes and the introduction of satellite Internet connections resulted in web access spreading, enabling the users to connect to the web through the satellite, bypassing state servers and the regime's censorship, ultimately forcing the regime to open up and, in particular, to tackle the Amazigh question (Gazzini 2007).

### *3.2 Amazigh Activism*

The Imazighen were actively persecuted throughout the forty-two years of the Gaddafi regime. Oppression mainly took the form of denial of cultural and language rights that resulted into the obliteration of Amazigh culture and history from official historical narratives. At the turn of the twenty-first century, the use of the Internet, international platforms and organizations advanced the agenda of a growing transnational Amazigh cultural movement across North Africa,

intertwined with the Amazigh diaspora in Western Europe and North America. It demanded the recognition of Amazigh people as an ethnic group and of the historically and culturally Amazigh character of North Africa while supporting cultural pluralism and political democracy (Maddy-Weitzman 2011: 8-9; 2006). Maddy-Weitzman observed how globalisation and the expansion of the international discourse on human rights that included the recognition of the rights of ethnolinguistic groups, provided new opportunities to challenge North African states and their national constructs. Technoscapes and ethnoscapings rendered possible the rapid circulation of ideas and images to an unprecedented extent. The Internet, in particular, played an important part in creating a 'landscape of group identity' among Amazigh activists worldwide through websites and e-mail list-serves that stimulated discussions and dialogue. As a result, in the 2000s the Amazigh question entered the public agenda in Libya where Imazighen constituted 8-9 percent of the population (Maddy-Weitzman 2006; 2011: 129-30).

The Internet made Amazigh culture, language, instances and organisations visible among the Libyan diaspora and 'at home' challenging Gaddafi's vision of an Arab Libyan nation. Indeed, several Amazigh foundations, associations and websites were established in the diaspora in the 2000s (Baldinetti 2009: 232). They aimed to foster the idea of a pluralistic Libyan nation inclusive of ethnic minorities. In so doing, their intent was similar to that of other diaspora websites discussed in the previous section although their focus was specific on Amazigh culture and demands of cultural and political recognition. In 2000, the Amazigh organisation Sifaw was established in France at the same time as the website *Tamazgha.fr*. Tawalt was created in California in 2001 as a website (*Tawalt.com*) and a cultural foundation to preserve and spread Amazigh culture in Libya. In 2002, the Libyan T'mazight Congress was established in London with activities focusing on making the Amazigh element part of the Libyan national identity and Tamazight a national and official language next to Arabic. Amazigh websites Libyaimal and Adrar that also emerged in the early 2000s aimed to spread Amazigh culture, music, language, literature and art. As Baldinetti observed, these websites, while focusing on the Amazigh question, aimed to involve all Libyans (Baldinetti 2009: 243).

Amazigh websites adopted a technique similar to that of Justice4Libya that contributed to enrich the 'pantheon of Berber martyrs in Libya' (al-Rumi 2009). Several websites displayed a black and white photo of a bearded man with the question 'Where is al-Nami?'. An Ibadi religious scholar and Cambridge PhD graduate, Umru al-Nami was imprisoned in 1981 and is believed to



have died in prison. The picture of martyr Yusuf Khraysh, a political activist who fled the country in 1979 and was allegedly assassinated while in exile in 1987, appeared on another Amazigh website (al-Rumi 2009). A Libyan exile observed that unless these martyrs were considered victims of the regime to the same extent of many others and without stressing the ethnic divide, the cult of martyrs along ethnic divides risked separating the exiles and the opposition (al-Rumi 2009). What the commentator seems to imply here is that there remained at the late of the 2000s a tendency to create a myth and a cult around the martyrs of one's own political or ethnic group that was detrimental to the unity of the opposition in the diaspora.

In the 2000s, these Amazigh organisations by raising awareness worldwide and having succeeded in rallying the attention of international organizations like the UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, pushed the regime to open a dialogue with the Amazigh community in Libya (Tamazgha&Tawalt 2014: 247; Baldinetti 2009). Gaddafi received a delegation of the World Amazigh Congress, a Paris-based NGO, in 2005 and in 2006, and established a dialogue committee to rehabilitate the Amazigh question in Libya. The first Amazigh World Congress was held in Tripoli in 2007, while Saif al-Islam Gaddafi engaged in a broader outreach to the community (Kohl 2014: 428; Smith 2013: 176). In January 2007, a legal amendment permitted Amazigh names in places, commercial and sport activities (Baldinetti 2018: 429). In 2008, the regime authorised for the first time the promotion of Amazigh folklore through the public celebrations of the Amazigh New Year and by allowing a music group to sing in Tamazight. The regime also sponsored the renovation of historical buildings of touristic interest in Amazigh villages (Baldinetti 2009: 246; al-Rumi 2009).

However, that same year, during a visit of Gaddafi to several Imazighen tribes in the town of Jadu, the recognition of Amazigh identity was withdrawn and Gaddafi was heard warning the tribal leaders (Kohl 2014: 428-29):

You can call yourself whatever you want inside your homes – Berbers, Children of Satan, whatever- but you are only Libyans when you leave your homes.

The regime started to take back its concessions. By the end of 2009, the website Tawalt was shut down, possibly due to the attacks on the founder's family in Libya by individuals close to the regime. They accused the blogger's family and other Libyan Imazighen who participated in the activities of the World Amazigh Congress of jeopardizing Libya's social unity. Footage of the

incident was shared by major Arabic satellite channels, raising concerns around the status of Libyan Imazighen (al-Rumi 2009).

The use of satellite and internet technologies, together with the experience of exile that allowed individuals to connect with global networks and transnational organisations, acted as a means of raising Amazigh cultural awareness. As al-Rumi pointed out, however, by the end of the decade, it was fair to question whether the websites of the Amazigh diaspora reflected the way Imazighen felt in Libya and the way they perceived themselves (al-Rumi 2009). At the end of the 2000s, al-Rumi reported that the young generation of Imazighen living in Tripoli did not speak Tamazight and showed little interest in Amazigh customs and traditions. One of them observed (al-Rumi 2009):

I do not consider myself and other Tamazight speakers as an ethnic minority - as many do. We are Libyan Tamazight speakers and Libyan Arab speakers, because I have never experienced that I am different from other Libyans nor the other Libyans treated me differently or as a stranger.

Was the ‘imagined’ Libyan Amazigh identity in the diaspora at odds with that of young Imazighen influenced by the regime’s homogenizing narrative of the Libyan nation? Al-Rumi seems to suggest so or that Libyanness and Amazighness were not considered mutually exclusive. Nevertheless, the 2000s opened yet another crack in the regime’s Pandora’s box. Other challenges kept coming from the opposition abroad.

### *3.3 The National Conference for the Libyan Opposition*

Next to the demands and criticism advanced by the Amazigh community and the challenges posed by the diaspora websites, the National Conference for the Libyan Opposition emerged from a conference held in London in June 2005. It was an umbrella organisation which brought together a number of non-Islamist opposition groups from the diaspora – among them the NFSL, the Libyan Constitutional Union and the Libyan League for Human Rights – as well as individuals who belonged to opposition groups that no longer existed, like the LNDF (InternationalCrisisGroup 2011: 19). The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood did not join the gathering as it was directly engaging with the regime in an attempt at mediating with it at the time. Asked about the political agenda of the conference, a participant responded:

It was purely nationalist, transcending all ideological forces. Which was again, a sign of the times. Because in the 80s we were divided by ideologies. Now we are post-ideology, if you like. In 2005 we are post-ideology but nationalist, definitely, one hundred percent.<sup>44</sup>

The interviewee does not consider nationalism an ideology. However, it is the nature of nationalism as a ‘thin-centred ideology’ that allows it to be embraced by all sorts of political actors that subscribe to different ‘thick ideologies’ (Freedon 1998). Furthermore, the international discourse centred on human rights, that functioned as a vessel for the promotion of the Amazigh agenda, reappeared in this platform marked by a nationalist tone. The importance of linguistic and cultural pluralism in Libya was included in the official programme of the conference (Baldinetti 2009: 242-44). Indeed, the same interviewee as above also pointed out:

With the internet and satellite television came different narratives and a different discourse. We started talking about freedom of speech, respect of human rights, no torture for prisoners, reforms [...] The 2005 London conference, played a crucial part because for the first time the conference was televised internationally by satellite. The Libyan people inside, when they saw that, they said: ‘Wow, this is fantastic, you know, this is great’. Gaddafi got so annoyed with that because he did not want the local population to be encouraged about ideas like that but that is the beauty of communication and satellite television. From 2003 until 2011, we [some participants to the conference] were appearing regularly on satellite television talking about the Abu Salim massacre, violations of human rights, lack of democracy. This was fantastic because they [Libyans] all identified with these things that they wanted to say but cannot say.

By taking part in the global technoscapes and mediascapes, the Libyan opposition in the diaspora found a voice that Libyan people inside the country were finally able to hear, rendering them part - although intermittently - of the global ideoscapes.

The London conference was a good combination of old diasporic political networks, new technologies and the regime’s inability to entirely control those and the media but, nevertheless, trying to react to external threats. The London conference demanded a constitution, raised the Libyan Kingdom's flag and brought back the 1951 national anthem through social media. It was televised inside Libya via satellite TV, reaching some segments of the Libyan population. A participant described the conference in these terms:

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<sup>44</sup> Interviewee #18.

Our media played on two concepts: we asked to go back to the 1951 constitution and we started by singing the national anthem of 1951, and [raising] the old regime flag. With our relationship and contacts with BBC and al-Jazeera, the conference appeared as a conference that demanded the return to the old kingdom of Libya. That inflamed the dreams of tribes and young people in Libya. Gaddafi felt the pressure and reacted in a very stupid way. He started to run demonstrations on the streets in Libya condemning the London Conference and so all the people that had never heard of the London Conference in Libya, heard of it. The people who never heard about the constitution started to talk about the constitution. The image of the flag was everywhere in social media. [...] That is why we had Saif [al-Islam Gaddafi] and *Libya al-Ghad*. That was the first time Gaddafi people started to talk about the constitution because they felt that the constitution was in the background and people would go back to it.<sup>45</sup>

The London Conference is a clear example of the ability of the opposition abroad to penetrate Libya from outside via satellite television and the Internet, bringing in a new vision and ideologies but also the old symbols of the nation. This was a moment that catalysed multiple national symbols through different media. Indeed, the symbols established at independence, like the national flag and the national anthem, that had also appeared in the websites of the diaspora, were once again picked up by the opposition and inside Libya, contributing to challenge Gaddafi's vision and symbolism of the nation. That provoked a reaction from the regime that created a new space for civil society activism under its control.

### *3.4 Civil society activism in Libya: between collaboration and resistance*

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Gaddafi's sons were trying to position themselves vis-à-vis the international community and the opposition in the diaspora and in Libya to enhance their chances to succeed to the leader. The rapprochement with the international community and the advent of new technologies forced the regime to open up, in so doing creating some space for civil activism in Libya and new opportunities for people from the diaspora to return and bring new ideas with them (Joffé 2013). This opening allowed to establish contacts between the diaspora and some Libyans at home in the 2000s contributing to initiate a change in the

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<sup>45</sup> Interviewee #21.

relationship between national and global, as well as between the private sphere, civil society and the state, while constituting new narratives and a national imaginary.

In 2000, the regime initiated activities aimed at engaging the diaspora and bringing Libyan people back (Seeberg 2018: 8). Saif al-Islam Gaddafi's *Libya al-Ghad* initiative, in 2005, came as an attempt to engage the country's intellectual elite, the businessmen and the professional community inside the country and in the diaspora in a process of political and economic reforms. With the Gaddafi International Charity and Development Foundation (GICDF), established in 2003, Saif al-Islam opened conversations around human rights, constitutional change, political and economic liberalisation (Baldinetti 2009: 233). The international liberal discourse on human rights and respect for ethnic minorities reached Libya as an ideoscape not only via satellite, the Internet and the demands of ethnic minorities but also through the regime. The *Libya al-Ghad* project promoted less invasive internet filtering and included an ambitious media component with two newspapers, Oea in Tripoli and Quryna in Benghazi, the TV channel al-Libiyya TV, the website Homeland Libya, and the news agency Libya Press. Moreover, it contributed to the emergence of a CSOs eco-system composed of thirty registered NGOs, service-driven and government funded that, however, remained controlled by the regime and dominated by the GICDF (Geha and Volpi 2016). The project increased the interaction within the diaspora and between the diaspora and the Libyan people inside the country, allowing for people, ideas and images to circulate more freely and easily in and out of Libya.

The enhanced interplay between ethnoscaples, ideoscaples, technoscaples and mediascaples is also evident in the transmission of Islamist ideology and trends inside the country in the 2000s. Although openly not questioning the regime's idea of nation, *de facto* the Islamist groups emerged in that decade provided alternatives to the way the regime had portrayed Islam in the national imaginary, allowing for other global trends and ideologies to take root inside Libya. As a result, Islam, one of the main pillars of the regime's vision of the Libyan nation, started to appear in all its diversity for the first time.

To start with, Saif al-Islam Gaddafi took the lead in the programme of reconciliation with the Islamist groups. Saif al-Islam opened a dialogue with the Muslim Brotherhood in the early 2000s through the GICDF which led to the release in 2006 of members of the group as individuals, based on a pledge not to engage in political activities (InternationalCrisisGroup 2011: 20). This also resulted in the return of some members of the Brotherhood to Libya from abroad. The

movement remained banned in the country and its members closely monitored, making of it little more than a movement in exile and limiting the ability of Islamist ideology to take root beyond the intelligentsia (Pargeter 2013: 320-21).

Meanwhile, the official hardliner policy against militant Islamist groups that had led to assassinations, arrests and rendition programmes in collaboration with the West based on an alliance to counter terrorism, was matched by an attempt to reconcile with LIFG members abroad and allow them to return to Libya in exchange for public recantation (Joffé 2013: 40-41; Pargeter 2008: 99-100). In 2007, as part of his ‘reform and repent’ program, Saif Al-Islam initiated a dialogue with the LIFG leadership (InternationalCrisisGroup 2011: 21). As a result, the majority of them were released between 2008 and 2009, and in January 2011. In August 2009, the LIFG released a document, “Revisionist Studies of the Concepts of Jihad, Verification, and Judgment of People”, containing a set of doctrinal revisions that rejected past violent practices and the use of weapons against the state (InternationalCrisisGroup 2011: 21; CISAC 2018). The publication of this document in March 2010 brought to light to an unprecedented extent the group and its doctrine while they re-established communication with members abroad and regained some form of cohesion, facilitated by advances in ICT (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 204-05). By the end of the 2000s, parts of the LIFG in the UK and Switzerland had become semi-independent, rejecting Saif’s initiative and the regime. They established the Libyan Islamic Movement for Change which operated in exile and was opposed by the leadership inside Libya. It later emerged as a political force in the 2011 revolution (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 205).

In the 2000s, another Islamist current gained ground in Libya, that of Madkhali-Salafism. Named after the Saudi scholar Sheikh Rabee Ibn Hadi Umayr al-Madkhali, Madkhali-Salafism is a trend within the category of ‘scientific Salafism’ a religious current that ‘calls for the emulation of the *salaf al-salih* (pious ancestors), the first adherents of Islam who accompanied Prophet Muhammad, as related by the *Hadith* [...] a politically quietist current that opposes political participation and contestation’ (InternationalCrisisGroup 2019: 3). This religious current spread across the Arab world through the support of Saudi religious charities and satellite television. It first appeared in Libya in the 1990s, through Libyan people who had studied in Saudi Arabia and Yemen in Madkhali-linked institutions or had been exposed to this current during pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina. Traveling allowed them to observe new trends in Islamic practice from which they were otherwise isolated due to the regime’s censorship of books, newspapers and foreign

media (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 199). Although initially suspicious, the regime allowed for the movement to grow and invited Madkhali scholars in Libya as they preached against political dissent. Books and taped sermons from Saudi Arabia were allowed to flow into the country but it was only with satellite television and the Internet in the 2000s that the doctrine picked up in Libya and with the support of Gaddafi's son Saadi they took control of mosques and provided Quranic classes (InternationalCrisisGroup 2019: 5-6).

At the time, these Islamist groups constituted a minority within Libyan society. However, it is only by understanding their gradual emergence in the 2000s as a result of the flows of returning people and of global ideas facilitated by the ICT that we can contextualise the phenomenon of shifting relationships between the national and the global as well as between the private sphere, civil society and the state. As the individual was able to access and consume Islamist ideologies online and on satellite TV, this brought global Islamist ideologies within the national space questioning the type of Islam that the regime fostered. This process only became evident during and after 2011 as discussed in the next chapter.

Two more episodes illustrate that phenomenon: the cartoon row in 2006 and the activism by the families and lawyers of the Abu Salim victims. In the words of an interviewee:

From 2003 until 2011 there was a strong interaction between activists outside and inside [Libya] and this was brought about mainly by globalisation, by the IT revolution. Let me give you an example, the incident of the Italian consulate in Benghazi, we [the politically active diaspora] got that all over the world. We gave it a lot of publicity and, you know, publicity is the oxygen, publicity is the main thing. [In another instance] The families of the Abu Salim victims holding public stands in Benghazi, we used to get the videos out [from Libya] within one hour. We had people inside there that we were communicating with through Facebook and the Internet. We got the videos out. The interaction now [in the 2000s] between the outside and the inside is much more intense and much more widespread.<sup>46</sup>

As Pargeter observed, the protests sparked by the cartoon row in Benghazi in February 2006, reflected the discontent and frustration simmering in the country (Pargeter 2006: 219). On 1 February 2006, papers in France, Germany, Italy and Spain reprinted the satirical cartoons depicting the Prophet Muhammad, first published by a Danish newspaper in September 2005. In

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<sup>46</sup> Interviewee #18.

the following days, the Italian Minister Roberto Calderoli, worn a T-shirt displaying the drawings. The news reached Libya, leading to protests against the Italian consulate in Benghazi on 17 February 2006 that resulted in the killing of ten demonstrators by the regime's police. The demonstrators shouted anti-regime slogans. The diaspora helped to amplify that event online and outside Libya. Fast-forward to 2011, in the wake of the protests in Tunisia and Egypt, the diaspora and activists at home chose 17 February as the day of rage to commemorate the 2006 martyrs and hold new demonstrations. This was a sign of how the cult of martyrdom had a key role in the opposition to the regime and construction of a national imaginary that was mobilized in 2011.

The same applied to the Abu Salim victims. In 1996, a riot in the Abu Salim prison in Tripoli that housed mostly political prisoners, many of them from Cyrenaica and from Islamist groups like the LIFG, was suppressed with brutal violence, leading to the death of 1,286 people who were buried in mass graves. The demonstrations of the family and a court case led to the regime admitting the event and promising compensations that were never paid (Joffé 2013: 42; Pargeter 2012b: 310). As narrated by someone directly involved in the case, the demonstrations that followed from 2009 onwards, after the final court judgement, brought the families of the victims to the streets of Benghazi and to the square of the Court House every Saturday.<sup>47</sup> They were holding the photos of their relatives, the martyrs of the Gaddafi regime. This was a commemorative performance, regular and repetitious, outside of the regime's control that aimed to remember this brutal event in the modern history of Libya, *de facto* crafting counter-memories and counter-narratives to those of the regime (Turner 2006). As observed by Pargeter, these demonstrations were rendered possible by the reformist and human rights discourse and initiatives led by Saif al-Islam (Pargeter 2012b: 384-85).

These events and demonstrations brought to the fore the group of lawyers that had established a committee in 2008 raising issues around human rights, the rule of law, political participation and freedom of speech – yet another example of the ability of the liberal discourse centred on human rights to traverse Libya at the time. Among them were Abdul Hafiz Ghoga, Salwa Bugaghis, Abdulsalam Mesmari, Intissar Aghili and Khaled Saleh who became prominent leaders of the revolution in 2011, together with Fathi Terbil who also represented the victims of Abu Salim. They were among the organizers of the demonstration in front of the Court in Benghazi scheduled for February 15, 2011. That demonstration led to the arrest of Fathi Terbil and was

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<sup>47</sup> Interviewee #39.



followed by another demonstration on February 17 where the lawyers were joined by a big crowd inside and outside the court in Benghazi. Thirteen people were killed that day. That was the beginning of the 2011 revolution.

The attempts at opening Libya towards the world and the opposition were reversed by the regime in 2009 with the nationalization of the *al-Ghad* media outlets and a dramatic decline of Internet freedom, followed by arrests and imprisonment of cyber dissidents (FreedomHouse 2008, 2010; Richter 2013: 155-60; el-Issawi 2013: 6). The regime reasserted ‘its belief in a homogenous Muslim Arabic society in culture, language and belief’ even in the face of reprimands coming from the UN Committee for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Joffé 2013: 38). The understanding of nation expressed by Gaddafi in the third volume of the Green Book as sense of belonging and common destiny regardless of blood bonds that was discussed in the historical chapter, did not find practical application through the inclusion of ethnic or religious minorities throughout the forty-two years of the regime. On the contrary, the Arab-Muslim vision of the nation remained predominant.

By the end of the 2000s, the regime appeared yet again in full control of the flows of people, images and ideas as well as of the new technologies. However, the national and transnational political and civil society networks remained the main legacy of that decade together with the appearance of new ideoscapes and civil activism in the country. This strengthened connectedness among some sections of the Libyan population inside the country and in the diaspora. They shared a different vision of the nation from the one of the regime, a nation diverse in ethnic and religious terms anchored on a more inclusive understanding of Libyan history and on a symbology that recalled the independence era rather than the symbols imposed by the regime. This image of the nation only fully emerged in 2011.

#### **4. Global cultural flows in the 2011 revolution and its aftermath**

During and after the 2011 revolution, the micro-interactional social mechanisms at work in Libya, in the diaspora and between the diaspora and the ‘homeland’ changed dramatically as a result of the opportunities created by the global cultural flows. The flows of people and the enhanced access to ICTs reconfigured the concept of public space, both physical and online. It allowed for new social interactions in which media and migration determined a new capacity for individuals and

organisations to imagine the nation, practice and experience nationness and nationhood outside the control of the state. The significance after 2011 of a civil society, understood as a realm of sociability and intermediate associations such as civil society organisations and political parties, is linked to the ‘institutionally organized and substantial capacity for people to enter as citizens into public discourse about the nature and course of their life together’ (Calhoun 1993: 392). Moreover, for the first time since independence, people, ideas and images were flowing in and out of the country with an unprecedented intensity thanks to the technological advances in telecommunications and free access to the Internet. The opening of these new public spaces and the free flows of people, images and ideas occurred not only inside Libya but also between Libya and the diaspora whose ability and freedom to interact, although partially enhanced in the 2000s, was only fully achieved after the 2011 revolution.

New, markedly political spaces of interaction were created by the revolution. The battlefield, transitional politics and the emerging civil society, created new platforms of interaction where people in Libya and in the diaspora converged with their ideas, images and practices of the nation. It was within these spaces that the sense of identification developed in the diaspora before 2011 was put to the test, together with the willingness of Libyans ‘at home’ to welcome Libyans from the diaspora as full members of the national political community while reconsidering their ideas of nation in light of those brought back by the diaspora. Imagining the nation after 2011 became a staging ground for action (Appadurai 1996) in which different visions of the nation competed and overlapped in a new public space. Nationness and nationhood resulted much more contested than its members initially thought.

At the onset of the revolution in 2011, Libya was characterized by a restrictive media and civil society landscape. By the end of it, that would have changed dramatically. People in the diaspora and in Libya were able to communicate with each other freely. Global ideologies accessed the country via the Internet and the flows of people without the restrictions previously imposed by the regime. The national was drawn into the global and the individual gained an agency in the process of accessing information and joining civil society organisations that challenged top-down nation-building and the authoritarianism that characterized the previous forty-two years. This section illustrates the main actors involved in these processes providing a contextual analysis to the following two chapters.

The revolution created the opportunity to establish new links among people in Libya and between people in Libya and in the diaspora, enhancing the connectedness that the regime had hampered and the ICTs enhanced in the previous decade. In the wake of the uprising in Egypt on January 25, the National Conference for the Libyan Opposition called for a ‘Day of Rage’ on February 17 to take place inside and outside of Libya to commemorate the death of protesters involved in the cartoon row in Benghazi on February 17, 2006 (McQuinn 2015: 233-34). This prompted the opposition in Libya and in the diaspora into action. At the beginning of February, Gaddafi met media figures, journalists and political activists in Libya, warning them against joining any form of protest (Asharqal-Awsat 2011). Meanwhile, the regime started to impose rolling outages on the internet and telephone communication. On February 13, Gaddafi warned all Libyans not to use Facebook (Scott-Railton 2013: 24). The Facebook group calling for the day of rage saw the number of members double from 4,400 to 9,600 between February 14 and 16. Messages were also being posted on the diaspora site Libya Watanona urging people to take to the streets (al-Jazeera 2011). As calls for the day of rage spread online, the regime started to arrest activists known to use the internet (Scott-Railton 2013: 24). On February 15, people demonstrated in Baida and in Benghazi. In Benghazi, they protested the arrest of Fathi Terbil, the lawyer of the Abu Salim victims. On February 17, people took to the streets in Benghazi, Baida, Zintan and Derna. The army responded by shooting and killing demonstrators (Mezran and Alunni 2015: 253). That triggered further protests in Misrata and Tripoli in the following days. In the words of an imam from Misrata: ‘We all have family in Benghazi. By killing people there, Qadhafi made a mistake: he forced us to choose sides’ (McQuinn 2015: 234). That was the beginning of the ‘February 17 Revolution’ and of a bloody civil war that lasted eight months and was characterized by defections, crimes against humanity, and foreign military intervention authorized by the UN Security Council (Mezran and Alunni 2015: 254). By the end of the conflict, the number of deaths was initially set at 25,000 by the Ministry for the Affairs of the Families of Martyrs and Missing People (MAFMMP) but it was revised and set at 4,700 in January 2013. The correction was related to the MAFMMP’s definition of martyrs, *shuhada*, that was limited to those who died at the hands of the regime and received public acknowledgement of their death. A survey by the University of Tripoli estimated that a total 21,490 persons were killed between February 2011 and February 2012 (Salama 2018: 7-11).

As the armed confrontation between the rebels and the regime escalated and extended to the rest of the country, a partial and intermittent internet and telephone blackout was imposed between March 2011 and the liberation of Tripoli in August 2011, with some exceptions in the liberated areas in the east (Scott-Railton 2013: 27). In Benghazi, for instance, the rebels took control of the mobile phone network and re-established internet connectivity with the technical support of Egypt and the UAE (FreedomHouse 2012: 4-5). People in eastern Libya were able to communicate with the diaspora and the external world during the revolution. Indeed, online media, blogs and social networks played an important role in amplifying the news and voices coming from Libya, often via websites and social media pages of the diaspora. On the contrary, the regime was determined to block the flow of information in and out of the country. The satellite TV channel al-Jazeera was removed by Libyan-owned cable networks, while transmissions from two TV satellites that served a wide range of news programming and satellite telephones were disrupted by jamming (Scott-Railton 2013: 30). Libyan authorities continued to exercise the monopoly over the country's telecommunication infrastructures that facilitated the satellite and internet shutdowns. As restrictions on ICTs were imposed on Libyan people, the regime continued to arrest activists. On March 19, a citizen journalist, Mohammed al-Nabbous, who launched an online live broadcast of events called Libya al-Hurra TV was killed by regime snipers (Scott-Railton 2013: 52-54). He would have become one of the most acclaimed martyrs of the 2011 revolution.

The establishment of the National Transitional Council within the first few weeks of the revolution was a clear example of how, after many years of limited communication, the politically engaged diaspora was able to get involved in the politics of the homeland establishing itself as a key political actor. Within the first few days of the protests, a group of lawyers and academics gathered in Benghazi and established the 17 February Coalition. They formed the first local council and invited representatives of similar entities across the country to join them to discuss the formation of a national body to govern the areas liberated in the east (Bartu 2015: 33-35). The National Transitional Council (NTC), officially established on March 5, developed around this main nucleus through the additions of senior regime defectors, activists, ambassadors and diaspora leaders (Mezran and Alunni 2015). As the political organ of the revolution, the NTC emerged as a fluid entity. In September 2011 it published a list of 40 members and relative geographic affiliations although it was observed from the start that some of them were long time exiles and

did not have a base of support inside the country (Murphy 2011). This seems plausible in light of the restricted ability to communicate between the diaspora and people inside Libya until the 2000s.

And yet, this signalled the return of the diaspora with its diverse ideologies and visions of the nation. Leaders and members of the opposition groups abroad such as the National Conference for the London Opposition and the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood joined the ranks of the NTC while several Libyans from the diaspora supported the Council in an advisory capacity, coordinating the activities of the body in Libya and abroad. Mahmoud Jibril, head of the National Planning Council of Libya and of the National Economic Development Board, was appointed head of government in the NTC. He was instrumental in gathering a group of Libyans abroad with important connections within the international community who were part of the political opposition groups in the diaspora (Bartu 2015: 36; Mezran and Alunni 2015). The cadres of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood were also based abroad. Having formed the National Gathering (al-Tajammu‘ al-Watani) with members of the LIFG and other less aligned figures in April 2011, the Islamist faction joined the NTC and demanded it be diverse and representative of the Islamist strands of Libyan society (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 218; Fitzgerald 2015: 184). Overall, the political groups established in the diaspora were essential in mobilising individuals in the transitional institutions. However, these networks had grown in disconnection from Libyans inside the country and from the majority of their countrymen in the diaspora until the 2000s. They remained weak and unable to command strong political constituencies in Libya and in the diaspora as demonstrated in the first legislative elections, in 2012. Indeed, those political formations emerged from diasporic networks like the National Front Party led by NFSL leader Mohamed el-Magariaf, al-Watan (the Nation/the Homeland) established by LIFG's senior leader Abdel Hakim Bilhaj, and al-Umma al-Wasat (the Moderate Nation) led by former exile Sami al-Sa'adi, were not successful at the ballot box.<sup>48</sup>

The involvement of the Libyan diaspora in the 2011 revolution took also other forms. For some, the revolution was an opportunity to return to Libya to contribute to the humanitarian efforts of international organisations and NGOs. Others engaged from outside coordinating financial and

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<sup>48</sup> Mohamed el-Magariaf served as the President of the General National Congress from August 2012 until May 2013 but the National Front Party only gained three seats. Al-Watan did not win any seats. Al-Umma al-Wasat gathered former Libyan jihadists coming from the experience of exile and rendition like Khalid al-Sharif. This party only won one seat. The Justice and Construction, a party independent but affiliated to the Muslim Brotherhood, was the one who performed best winning seventeen seats. (Fitzgerald 2015: 200; LibyaHerald 2012).

operational support for humanitarian purposes, advocating for the revolution through peaceful protests, online websites, social media, and newly established media outlets. Others took the opportunity to fight the final battle against the regime. Regardless in which capacity, the revolution and the end of the regime created an opportunity for people from the diaspora but also for foreigners working for international organisations and NGOs, as well as for clerics and members of religious groups and movements to travel to Libya and bring with them ideologies that had started to filter inside the country in the 2000s. The revolution was an opportunity to establish the connectedness that the regime hampered throughout forty-two-years. Overall, as the next two chapters will illustrate, the mobilization of the diaspora was an opportunity to articulate the sense of identification and belonging of individuals in opposition and dialogue with that of some Libyans 'at home' challenging their nationness through new processes of socialization inside the country and online.

Indeed, a sudden opening of the Internet media landscape followed the announcement of the liberation of Libya from the Gaddafi regime on October 23, 2011. Free Internet access via ADSL and WiMAX was extended from the east to the rest of the country until March 2012, increasing the number of users and internet usage. By 2012 the media and Internet environment had loosened and freedom of expression, still less than complete, was flourishing although the uncertainty of the political situation continued to cause some self-censorship (FreedomHouse 2012). The slight decrease in prices led to an increase in household connectivity although the electricity blackouts in the west due to damaged infrastructures continued to limit Internet connectivity. Most important, the transitional government did not impose restrictions on connectivity or on Internet content with a very few exceptions after 2014 swiftly reverted (FreedomHouse 2015). Social media applications like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube became freely accessible. The number of Facebook users duplicated from 200,000 in April 2011 to 400,000 in April 2012 and continued to grow to 860,000 in April 2013 to reach 3.5 million users in 2017 (FreedomHouse 2012, 2013; Kemp 2017). Estimates on Internet penetration, set at a low 21.76% for 2017 by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), have been challenged in a 2017 report and set at 50% showing a visible increase compared to 2011 when internet penetration was set at 17% by Freedom House (Kemp 2017; InternationalTelecommunicationUnion 2018; FreedomHouse 2012). That was explained by the introduction of portable WiFi routers and enhanced access to 3G and 4G technology in the cities of Tripoli, Misrata, Zawiya and Sabah and

by a mobile phone penetration rate of 169% (FreedomHouse 2017). These statistics give a clear sense of how technologies evolved and Internet access became widespread in the years following the revolution enhancing its relevance as a conveyor of images and ideas.

Throughout these years, the breakdown of the rule of law and the militia violence that engulfed the country particularly from 2014 onwards, had an impact on Internet freedom not so much in terms of the ability of people to access Internet content but rather in terms of their freedom to make their voices heard without the risk of becoming subject to militia violence. Nevertheless, as pointed out by Freedom House, the online media landscape developed from 2011 onwards has never been so diverse (FreedomHouse 2017). This led not only to the opening of new opportunities for people in Libya to connect with the outside world, but it also enhanced the individual's agency in the process of connecting with global ideologies and movements online. This is exemplified by the new interactions occurring at the political and civil society level.

With respect to civil society, the 2011 revolution created the opportunity for groups, movements, individuals and organizations civically or politically engaged to freely emerge and interact in the public space (Cavatorta and Durac 2010). The months leading to and following the declaration of liberation on 23 October 2011 resulted in the rapid development of civil society as a new physical public space of socialisation outside of state control where Libyan activists from the diaspora and within the country converged with international organisations and international NGOs. In so doing, Libyan activists joined the global civil society. The emergence of civil society as a free public space of interaction produced new relationships between Libyan organisations and activists and the outside world bringing the national into the global and vice-versa but also redefining the relationship between the individual and the state mediated by new organisations active in the virtual, national and global space.

The initial response of Libyan citizens to regime's violence was informal mobilization but after the country's liberation formal civil society organizations (CSOs) were established. CSOs first emerged in a service delivery function to provide humanitarian assistance. By 2013, 2,700 CSOs had been registered in Libya working mostly on service delivery and advocacy while citizens continued to mobilise informally both in Libya and in the diaspora (Geha and Volpi 2016: 695). By 2014 the number had reached 4,000 although only 2,000 were reported as active. According to the World Values Survey 2014-2018, Libya had a greater number of members of volunteer organisations per capita compared to other Maghreb countries and Egypt (Romanet

Perroux 2015: 8). The importance of the emergence of civil society organizations after the revolution lays in the capacity of CSOs to act as ‘partial social units where people find capacity for collective voice and the possibility of differentiated, directly interpersonal relations that act as crucial defences of distinctive identities’ (Calhoun 1993). The period between 2012 and 2013, has been referred to as the ‘Golden Age’ of CSOs engagement in Libya. The focus at the time was on the constitution. CSOs activities included awareness raising, national and subnational dialogues on aspects of democracy that were meant to engage citizens in the political transition (DRI 2019: 53). Furthermore, a study on civil society in Libya conducted between 2012 and 2014 observed the importance of civil society in shaping a national identity by promoting a process of dialogue and activities based on values such as tolerance, pluralism and inclusion (Romanet Perroux 2015).

Indeed, new narratives and practices of the nation, discussed at length in the following two chapters, emerged as a result of CSOs’ initiatives inside the country, in the diaspora and from collaborations between the two. These found expression in the everyday of civil society projects, social media campaigns, and in the use of social media. The civil society public space opened opportunities for members of CSOs to travel across the country, as well as from and to Libya, to openly debate ideas related to the nation and freely use the internet for that and other purposes. More or less consciously, through their activities and the use of social media, CSOs contributed to foster and develop a national imaginary built on previous images and symbols of the nation while also creating new ones. Instances of the banal nationalization of everyday lives emerged related to the ethno-cultural dimension of the nation, mainly to traditional clothes and to national cultural and natural heritage. Meanwhile, the civic-political dimension of the nation was imagined in continuity and opposition to the narratives of the regime, finding expression in the cult of martyrs and in the re-appropriation of historical figures and national symbols like the independence flag.

The space of civil society started to tighten due to militia violence in 2013. The killings that begun in the summer of 2013 of prominent activists like Abdelsalam al-Mismari, human rights lawyer and activist Salwa Bugaghis, journalist Muftah Buzaid, congresswoman Fariha Berkawi, and youth activists Sami Elkwafi and Tawfik Bensaud, challenged the ability of activists and organizations to operate on the ground. However, it did not hamper the relations with the outside world that are still possible through traveling, ICTs and the networks established between 2012 and 2014. In fact, from 2014 onwards, with the breaking of state institutions into two competing poles, CSOs have become the preferred recipient of funding from the international community.



CSOs have continued to advocate for a democratic transition. Although several CSOs suspended their activities in 2014 and some activists left the country, the civil society in Libya and in the diaspora continues to operate creating new spaces for social and political interaction (DRI 2019: 53).

Indeed, after the 2011 revolution, Libyan people at home and in the diaspora were suddenly free to travel to, from and across Libya to an extent unprecedented. This increased mobility had an impact on Libyan people involved in civil society, both ‘at home’ and in the diaspora, on the establishment of new relations between them, and, ultimately, on the way activists imagine and practise the nation. The activists interviewed for this project considered traveling across the country and abroad within the framework of civil society initiatives, as particularly important to strengthen their sense of national unity and shape a diverse and pluralistic vision of the nation. The ability to travel across Libya, discover its people and traditions, to interact with like-minded people across the country and from abroad, challenged pre-existing social circles, norms and behaviours as well as preconceived ideas of the national community. Indeed, these initiatives had the power to shape people’s vision of the nation. An interviewee representative of civil society observed:

People who are working in civil society trust more their outer circle than their inner circle. But the normal and regular citizens trust more their inner circles than the outer circles. And why is that? Because when you are more self-critical, and you critique your society, and you think and reflect, you start to doubt many of the principles and many of the practices that we are doing. So, you do not trust anymore the close circle because you think they are trying to impose things on you. And because you started to interact with people from different places in your country and outside, you feel you have many more things in common with them rather than with your inner circle. But the people who do not interact with others, they do not have these feelings. They believe in anything within their small square meter, let’s say.

The interviewee identifies a critical mindset and the opportunity to interact with people ‘outside your inner circle’, both across the country and from abroad, as key factors that shape how individuals working in civil society think. This can help contextualize the inclusive and pluralistic vision of the nation shared by the majority of civil society representatives after 2011 and discussed in the following two chapters.

Freedom to travel also meant that some Libyans from the diaspora were able to return and get involved with civil society, fundraising for or directly assisting in building new organizations (Geha 2016). Many in the diaspora joined or established organisations to support the humanitarian efforts of international organisations and NGOs delivering humanitarian aid during the conflict. Some Libyans based in the UK, Dubai, Switzerland and Manchester set up organisations such as the Libyan Appeal Team, the Libyan Link and the Libyan doctors in Manchester.<sup>49</sup> The Libyan branch of the Muslim Brotherhood established offices in Egypt and Tunisia as well as an organisation, al-Nada, to channel humanitarian aid (Fitzgerald 2015: 181; Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 216-17). The presence of the diaspora was also observed in other endeavours such as advocacy through traditional and social media, a multiplicity of NGOs and associations with various purposes such as civic activism, research, and giving a voice to youth, women and minorities. Some Libyans in the diaspora advocated for the revolution through peaceful demonstrations, on satellite TV and on the Internet. In particular, faced with the limited presence of traditional international media inside the country, some second-generation individuals in the diaspora took to the Internet. Whether as bloggers, activists, columnists or commentators, some young people in the diaspora established their presence as key interlocutors in the media and social media scene. Some of them went back to Libya where they worked as analysts, fixers and photographers. Their intent was to fill the information gap, counter regime narratives, and document the revolution as it evolved on the ground in order to reach decision makers and public opinion around the world. By sharing news and images, they contributed to challenge pre-existing narratives and practices of nationhood.

Twitter and Facebook were the main platforms utilised by a multiplicity of civil society actors. On the websites front, for instance, Shabab Libya and LibyaFeb17 were diaspora creations (LibyaFeb17 2011; ShababLibya 2011a). LibyaFeb17 aimed to document the events on the ground and make them available to the international readership by translating news from Arabic into English. The website reached in one month one million visitors from almost every country in the world.<sup>50</sup> Media and social media work at times was linked to the humanitarian operations taking place on the ground as in the case of Shabab Libya that disclosed the information provided by the

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<sup>49</sup> Interviewee #1 and interviewee #24.

<sup>50</sup> Interviewee #14.

Libyan Link on social media and on their website.<sup>51</sup> In so doing, particularly online activists in the diaspora became agents of everyday nationalism.

The 2011 revolution provided the physical and online spaces for Libyans in the diaspora and inside Libya to work together with an intensity new to many of those involved. This was built on pre-existing networks that were further developed to include the youth in the diaspora. For instance, one of the founders of the LibyaFeb17 website joined the team of the Qatari based channel Libya al-Harar established by Mahmoud Shammam, one of the leaders of the 2005 National Conference of the Libyan Opposition. Libya al-Harar became the voice of the revolution and brought together Libyans from the United States, Europe and Libya, both first and second generations. Meanwhile, diaspora organisations and movements emerged during the revolution tried to formally register as NGOs, like Shabab Libya and the Libyan Youth Forum. Some CSOs were established as a result of the collaboration between individuals in the diaspora and in Libya such as H2O, 1Libya and the Sadeq Institute. Libyans who remained in the diaspora also established new organisations. The National Council of US-Libya Relations and the Noon Arts foundation, for instance, the former with clear political intents and the latter with a marked cultural character, aimed to engage with and present Libya to the world (NationalCouncilUS-LibyaRelations 2018; NoonArtsProject 2018). It was in these physical and online spaces of interaction produced by the flows of people and free access to the Internet that Libyans ‘at home’ and in the diaspora involved with civil society organizations re-produced instances of hot and banal nationalism. Their activism not only sheds light on their own understanding of the civic-political and ethno-cultural dimensions of the nation but it also opens a window through social media on the way Libyans ‘at home’ reproduce ideas, symbols and images of the nation after the 2011 revolution.

## **5. Conclusion**

The analysis of the political, social and cultural practices in the everyday lives of individuals during the years of the Gaddafi regime revealed the relevance of the interplay between the global cultural flows in the process of determining nationhood and nationness in the diaspora and in Libya. Through the analysis we observed an evolution of processes and agents of nationhood within the territory of the state in conjunction with external agents and processes. Interview data suggests the

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<sup>51</sup> Interviewee #3.

importance of technoscapes and mediascapes in starting to break the restrictions on communication imposed by the regime on the diaspora and on some Libyans at home. Satellite television and Internet technology created new connectedness among people in the diaspora and between them and people in Libya. As Appadurai points out, media and migration as the two major interconnected factors have an effect on the way people conceive their subjectivity and the world they live in (Appadurai 1996). Some Libyans in the diaspora and the active and intellectual strands of the population with access to the internet and satellite TV, started to dialogue online in a process of reconfiguration of the images and ideas around their nation. On the one hand, ICT enabled the relationship between private sphere, civil society and the state to change in a way that provided a new public space for interaction while bringing the national and the global closer. Indeed, by taking part in technoscapes and mediascapes, people in Libya were exposed to new ideoscapes with an impact on the way individuals and groups understood nationness. The exchange of images and ideas intensified and new practices emerged leading to a mutually constitutive process of construction of a national imaginary between the diaspora and the emergent civil society in Libya. Cultural transactions between these groups assumed a whole different intensity and spatial scope in the 2000s. When the regime imposed new limitations to these means of communication by the end of the 2000s, it was probably too late to undo the interactive system that had emerged. The 2011 revolution created new links between actors and spaces that had started to open up in the 2000s, both on the internet and within civil society in Libya. The exchanges and relational ties among some Libyans ‘at home’ and between them and the outside world was intensified and extended, particularly so with some groups and individuals in the diaspora, allowing them to partake in the global scapes to an unprecedented extent. The revolution had an impact on the way members of the political elite, the civil society and the diaspora imagined the nation and understood Libyanness. We unveil this aspect in the following two chapters.

## Chapter 5 Exploring Nationness and Nationhood: The Ethno-Cultural Dimension

### 1. Introduction

As migration and ICT reshape groupness globally, in Libya the 2011 revolution provided an opportunity for some people within the groups examined in this research to redefine the relationship between the national and the global, as well as between the private sphere, civil society and the state, affecting nationhood and nationness. Through the accounts of the post-revolutionary political elite, the civil society and the diaspora, this chapter and the next explore how this particular group of agents imagines and talks about the nation and the ethnic, cultural and political ties that bind them together. By discussing what are perceived as relational ties and shared common attributes, we observe how connectedness and commonality are imagined by these groups as the basis of nationness after 2011. To examine this aspect, we investigate two dimensions of the nation: the ethno-cultural dimension in this chapter and the political-civic dimension in the next. While anchoring the narrative on this traditional dichotomy, we observe the role played by the global cultural flows, how these are imagined and contribute to shape nationness and nationhood.

Libya sits at the crossroads between Arab, indigenous, African and Mediterranean politics and culture. Gaddafi's homogenizing project for the Libyan nation was centred on Arab identity, Islam and the anti-colonial struggle. The regime silenced any form of diversity and opposition. However, the 2011 revolution and the subsequent political transition enhanced Libyan people's exposure to the global cultural flows. The diversity within what had been described until then as a homogenous nation started to emerge with vigour. In the words of an interviewee:

Before the revolution we did not realise these elements [of diversity in the society], they were not visible. There was a pro-Gaddafi camp and a diaspora against Gaddafi but the rest was in a grey area. Afterwards we found a whole rainbow in the country: the more religious, the conservatives, the liberals, the democrats. Some have even adopted a few basic elements like... being an ethnic minority became a cause.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Interviewee #5.

New questions were raised around religion, ethnicity, kinship, Libyan culture and history and the way these elements contributed or were detrimental to the construction of a national political community.

Kinship and culture featured prominently in the interviewees' narratives around the Libyan nation. In their imagination, Libya is a unique nation in ethno-cultural terms based on several cultural identifiers and social behaviours that have been combined across space and time and are perceived as constituting a unique nation. From their narratives, five main elements constitute what I will refer to as the Libyan ethno-cultural matrix: kinship; language; traditions; social norms and behaviours; and religion. These elements, highly contested in the process of redefining what constitutes the Libyan national community after 2011, are addressed in two sections. The first section explores how the concept of kinship interplays with other forms of groupness such as family, tribe, ethnicity and diaspora in determining nationness. The second section examines how language, traditions, social norms and behaviours, and religion form an 'archive of differences' that can be re-imagined into the diacritics of a national community – i.e. features that mark the uniqueness of the group (Appadurai 1996: 13-14). Through this process, different forms of groupness emerge and adapt bringing them together in a broad conception of Libyan nationness. The significance of global cultural flows is addressed across both sections and summarised in the conclusion.

## **2. Understanding kinship vis-à-vis family, tribe, diaspora, ethnicity and the nation**

Kinship is a key factor in determining the individual's sense of belonging and her membership to the Libyan national community. A diaspora interviewee observed:

Libya is a percentage of who I am. Libya is my parents. Libya is culture. I mean, I connect back to some of the songs, some of the stories, some of the aspects of the culture. That is a part of me.<sup>53</sup>

His words capture the deeply intertwined relationship between kinship and culture in the individual's process of identification and belonging to the nation, as well as in the evolution and understanding of nationhood. Understanding how kinship interplays with other forms of groupness such as family, tribe, diaspora, ethnicity and nation is key to appreciate how these are perceived and evolve across space and time, how these forms of groupness are not mutually exclusive but

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<sup>53</sup> Interviewee #36.

can be reconciled in people's imagination in a broad conception of Libyan nationness. The flows of people have a significant role in that respect.

### *2.1 Family and tribe*

In the narratives of the interviewees, the historical migratory flows across the country resulted in a national community based on blood relations and tight familial and tribal ties that constitute the country's social glue and reinforce the image of a homogenous Libyan society. This reflects the relevance attributed by Gaddafi and his regime to familial ties on which, as expressed in the Green Book, tribes and nations are grounded (Al-Qathafi 1980: 14-15). The relevance of tribes in Libya varies across the national territory. As some interviewees and other authors observed (Mezran 2007; Lacher 2011), within the context of large urban centres like Tripoli, families are more relevant than tribes, being closer units of socialisation that more easily survive modernity and urbanization. Nonetheless, tribes remain an important factor of identification among Libyans across the country and across different generations.

Tribalism is based on a system of kinship relations evolved across centuries, largely perceived as one of the diacritics of the Libyan national community. The concept of tribe maintains a sense of bloodline and ancestry but also of influential socioeconomic and political entity (Cole and Mangan 2016; Alunni, Calder, and Kappler 2017: 15-16; Ahmida 2009: 15; Najem 2017: 1). One interviewee observed:

The tribal community is very important for Libyans. Everybody in Libya comes from a tribal background even in the big cities like Benghazi and Tripoli we have tribes. The tribes have always engaged in doing this job, bringing the country together. Libya has been built on the basis of the tribal community. This important element you cannot neglect, before and after 2011.<sup>54</sup>

The flows and mingling of tribes across the national territory was presented by the interviewees in several instances as proof of the positive role tribes played in establishing and maintaining the Libyan national community across Libyan history and territory, both before and after independence. An interviewee observed:

Libya is made of tribes and family clans that reinforce the links among the population. For instance, sixty or seventy percent of eastern Libyans are [originally] from the west. This is

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<sup>54</sup> Interviewee #30.

the result of a recent migration happened in the last one-hundred years. These families and tribes are interlinked. Many families in Benghazi have very solid roots in the west, in Misrata or Tajura, and even if the families have migrated, one hundred or two hundred years ago, they still keep in contact with their families in the west. Libya is very homogenous. Anyone with the same surname has a high chance of being closely related. We are very close in terms of family links.<sup>55</sup>

In this interviewee's narrative, the internal migratory flows in the 19th and 20th century discussed in the third chapter of this study resulted in the strengthening of familial and tribal relations and a homogenous and interconnected social fabric based on strong relational ties. This can help contextualise the sense of belonging to the Libyan nation as a distinctively bounded solidary group (Brubaker and Cooper 2000).

In another instance, several interviewees mentioned Benghazi, the second largest city in Libya, as the product of internal migratory flows and a microcosm of the Libyan nation. One of them pointed out:

Benghazi is a Libyan nation. You can find every family in Libya in Benghazi. You can find the Huni from Hun, Waddani from Waddan, Misrati from Misrata, Werfalli from Werfalla, Trabelsi from Tripoli, Zawy from Zawya. And they have these names [that identify their area of origin in Libya and tribal affiliation]. My wife is from a Misrati family. My grandmother was from a Misrati family while I am from the east [Benghazi] and from an eastern tribe.<sup>56</sup>

His personal experience as someone from Benghazi who inter-married and witnessed inter-marriage among family members from different areas across Libya, is cited as a proof of the mingling of Libyan people in the city of Benghazi and within the borders of the Libyan state before and after independence. The flows of people discussed in the historical chapter and the practice of inter-marriage among people from different regions across Libya examined in the previous chapter, are perceived by the interviewees as defining and maintaining the national community. Familial and tribal ties are seen as constituting the Libyan national community, reinforcing the idea of a nation based on kinship.

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<sup>55</sup> Interviewee #23.

<sup>56</sup> Interviewee #32.



This raises two issues. On the one hand, with respect to global cultural flows, internal migratory flows are as relevant as outgoing or incoming flows of people in determining groupness among individuals. When considering ethnoscares, we need to look not only at the mobility of individuals across state-borders but also within those borders and how that affects ideas of selfhood and peoplehood (Appadurai 1996). On the other hand, the way the interviewees imagined the historical and more recent flows of people across the country, produced an idea of connectedness among these individuals that supports an imagined sense of community rooted in kinship relations (Anderson 1991a). This reminds us of the relevance of the flows of people, not only in disrupting spaces but also in reinforcing spatial entities and boundaries through the work of the imagination (Heyman and Campbell 2009).

## *2.2 Diaspora*

The idea of blood relations and ancestry as the foundation of the Libyan national community has been maintained and reproduced across space and time. The outflows of some Libyan nationals had the potential to dilute the sense of belonging of these individuals to Libya. And yet, through the everyday practices discussed in the previous chapter, the interviewees maintained relational ties and a sense of commonality that are at the basis of their sense of nationness. In particular, intra-marriage helped to reproduce the Libyan community and to solidify the understanding of Libya as a nation based on blood, a nation that one 'naturally' belongs to (Alunni 2019: 255-56). A woman in the diaspora expressed this concept in these words:

By my blood I'm a North African Libyan. That's who I am, you know. [...] both my parents are from Libya albeit they were born in another country eh, but it's just, to me, it's natural, it's naturally who I sense I am.<sup>57</sup>

Being born and raised abroad does not hamper the identification with Libya among these individuals since the sense of belonging is rooted in blood relations. However, kinship and the micro-processes of socialisation discussed in the previous chapter produced a diverse, complex and multi-layered sense of identification and belonging among first, 1.5 and second generations in the diaspora interviewees.

The first generation manifested a strong sense of identification with and loyalty to Libya as their one and only 'home', 'nation' or 'homeland', regardless of other acquired citizenship and

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<sup>57</sup> Interviewee #12.

even more so if they were politically engaged. One of them, having first elaborated about the notion of nation and its ridiculousness in today's world, something that we are forced to accept and deal with because of borders and passports, concluded:

But nevertheless, the question is: Who do you belong to most? And who do you feel loyal to? Frankly speaking, it's a very good question. [...] We talk about this all the time with my kids. But I am a hard Libyan. I get upset about any attempt to belittle the country or its people despite all the mess they create, despite all the limitations and retardation that exist, despite of the recognition that there are fundamental cultural changes that need to happen. Regrettably, yes, I am a Libyan and Libya is my homeland. You can't take away that. There is no way.<sup>58</sup>

This individual who has lived most of his life abroad, who studied and worked in countries that endowed him with citizenship and provided him the opportunity to flourish professionally, nevertheless continues to identify Libya as his homeland and his loyalty ultimately goes to that country. The political engagement of many first-generation interviewees before and after the 2011 revolution, can be explained as a reflection of this very clear sense of identification and belonging to Libya as the homeland.

More complex is the way in which 1.5 and second generations developed their sense of belonging and identification. The role of parents in transmitting Libyan heritage was paramount in the experience of 1.5 and second-generation interviewees. The parents' intent to maintain the 'lineage', the connections to the family and to the land was a relevant dimension of their upbringing, one that was essential to foster an attachment to Libya. A young man observed:

I consider myself a member of the Libyan nation because of first and foremost my lineage, my history, the place I was born, the country that my parents are from, and the family hails from Libya.<sup>59</sup>

From the accounts of the interviewees, it emerged that the parents transmitted a sense of pride, 'innate love' and 'crazy passion' for Libya. 1.5 and second-generation interviewees expressed pride in being Libyan, in raising the flag, in supporting other Libyans inside the country and around the world when succeeding in different endeavours such as sports, the arts or business. One of them

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<sup>58</sup> Interviewee #16.

<sup>59</sup> Interviewee #23.

said: 'I loved it [Libya]. I wanted to fly the flag. I always felt Libyan'.<sup>60</sup> And responding to a Tunisian colleague who asked why he was so proud of Libya given the circumstances, he recalled answering: 'If you love something it is not because it is successful. You work to improve it'.<sup>61</sup> This emotional attachment to Libya was recurrent among 1.5 and second-generation interviewees. Raised in Libyan diasporic spaces, they grew up in host countries where, regardless of citizenship rights, they did not feel considered as full members of the nation. It is possibly as a result of this that even the ones who were more critical about their right to define themselves as 'Libyans' ultimately observed that their allegiance goes to Libya, even more so if compared with the allegiance to the host-country.

And yet, research on the subject suggests that the sense of belonging of second generations is to be understood as situated, partial and contingent, as 'multi-sited embeddedness', that is belonging and engagement in multiple communities (Brocket 2018: 15; Horst 2018). Indeed, among 1.5 and second-generation interviewees involved in this study, a sense of 'in-betweenness', of being caught between two worlds while feeling unwanted both in the homeland and in the host land, emerged from their narratives (Potter and Phillips 2006; Brocket 2018). Many of my interlocutors, although acknowledging the importance that 'being Libyan' played in their lives, admitted that they do not feel they belong nor have full rights in either community, whether the supposed homeland or the host land.

As suggested by previous research, transnational ties can lead to multiple tensions that result from the difference between migrants and the homeland, as well as between migrants and the host land that identifies them as 'other' due to such ties and provenance (Brocket 2018: 4; Waldinger 2017). A young interviewee born and raised in the UK described his feeling of in-betweenness in these terms:

Growing up in the UK, being an Arab and being a Muslim, that always, kind of, left me a bit on the fence with certain things, obviously culturally. There are certain things that I don't do, there are certain aspects of the culture that I do not embrace. So... there was always that thing of: 'Well, you're not exactly British,' and I understand that. Visiting Libya as well, ever since I was a kid, I had always heard that phrase: 'You're not like us.

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<sup>60</sup> Interviewee #1.

<sup>61</sup> Interviewee #1.

You don't think like us. You aren't like us.' So then you think, 'What the heck am I? Who am I as a person?'<sup>62</sup>

This interviewee expresses uncertainty about his sense of belonging and identification based on a particular cultural and ethnic understanding of himself and the surrounding society that results in a sense of 'otherness' both in the host land and in the homeland.

As in-betweenness reveals a more contingent and partial sense of belonging, this is inevitably reflected in ideas of the nation. For instance, discussions around tribalism led to the emergence of differences in the value attached to this resilient social institution between 1.5 and second-generation interviewees in the diaspora and in Libya. On the one hand, interviewees in the diaspora observed how the diasporic experience strengthened the sense of belonging to Libya in opposition to tribalism and other forms of localisms 'at home':

[In our political opposition community in the diaspora] we had people from different cities, from Benghazi, Misrata, Tripoli, the South, Sabah, Kufra and we did not identify each other by our cities in the way we see it happening now. I never really thought where they were from, I just knew them as Libyans. So I think for us in the diaspora community, I think we had a stronger national identity than maybe Libyans in Libya which maybe have more of a local or tribal dominant identity.<sup>63</sup>

The interviewee frames the sense of belonging to Libya in the diaspora as stronger compared to that of Libyans 'at home' where she thinks that locality and tribalism are more relevant in everyday life. In her understanding, national belonging and belonging to a tribe or a city are exclusive, but this ought not to be the case. Another interviewee expressed the need to get rid of tribalism that was equated with a 'mafia system in which one person is in control of everything and everyone through bribes and systems of loyalty that are against meritocracy'.<sup>64</sup> In turn, interviewees in Libya pointed out that particularly young 'double shafra' (people with dual citizenship) do not understand the Libyan tribal system and the traditions and culture underpinning the Libyan society. One of them observed:

I have a problem with double shafra and I tell them, do not think that this is the United States. This is Libya. You have to think about that. We have religion, tradition, tribes,

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<sup>62</sup> Interviewee #14.

<sup>63</sup> Interviewee #15.

<sup>64</sup> Interviewee #1.

cultural differences. [...] You cannot bring your ideas from American and put them in Libya. This is the difference between me and double shafra.<sup>65</sup>

This interviewee draws a line between him and Libyans in the diaspora based on the different understanding of tribalism that interviewees 'at home' perceived as a defining character of the Libyan nation.

As a result of these tensions, 1.5 and second-generation interviewees in the diaspora deployed a strategy of engagement vis-à-vis the homeland to respond to the feeling of 'otherness'. Multi-site embeddedness can help contextualise their mobilization in 2011. The mobilization of second generation individuals has been interpreted in other case studies as a way to enact 'positioned belongings', that is an effort to position 'themselves vis-à vis a number of "others" to implicitly articulate their own identities' both in the host land and in the homeland (Brocket 2018: 14; Hall 1994). A second-generation male interviewee observed:

Libya had a very special place in my heart and obviously I have family there [...] when the Amazigh and the Arabs of the mountains in the Jebel Nafusa, Yefren, Zintan, Nalut and these places, started to flee and tried to flee to Tunisia on the border, you know, I decided to do something. I packed my bags and myself and my brother went to Tunisia.<sup>66</sup>

Kinship relations and an emotional affinity with Libya were presented in several circumstances as one of the main reasons that motivated many 1.5 and second-generation interviewees to contribute in different capacities to the 2011 revolution. In so doing, they claimed their Libyanness, chose to engage and in some cases to return to Libya. Their mobilization was an instance of enactment of positioned belongings and multi-site embeddedness through which they articulated their nationness.

In particular, it was within the emerging civil society space that 1.5 and second-generation interviewees in the diaspora interacted with Libyan people inside the country after the 2011 revolution. A young woman from the diaspora described her relations with Libyan people involved in civil society in terms of 'compatibility' and 'like-mindedness' but she also admitted that leaving the civil society 'bubble' she felt like 'speaking a different language' and having a different vision of life and of the future compared to most Libyan people.<sup>67</sup> From their side, activists in Libya

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<sup>65</sup> Interviewee #22.

<sup>66</sup> Interviewee #3.

<sup>67</sup> Interviewee #11.

acknowledged the ability of young people from the diaspora to develop organisations, communicate with the international community, collect funding, access information and spread new ideas. A male activist observed that the diaspora was primarily responsible for establishing civil society organisations, being able to speak other languages and move easily within the space created by the international community. However, he pointed at deep differences in values and understanding of Libyan society and at how most young Libyans did not consider their diaspora peers as their representatives.<sup>68</sup> Some of them expressed their frustration at the sense of superiority emanating by some Libyans from the diaspora and at the extreme criticism expressed towards Libyan people and their 'backwardness'. Another young male activist observed that Libyans inside the country and those from the diaspora come from different backgrounds and that cultural dialogue might be necessary to work together.<sup>69</sup> It is interesting to observe in this respect how interviewees inside Libya would point at cultural differences in stark contrast with the self-perception shared by many of the diaspora interviewees as culturally in tune with Libyans 'at home'.

It is only by understanding the sense of belonging of individuals in the diaspora as situated, partial and contingent on political, economic and cultural fields, particularly among 1.5 and second-generations, that we can contextualise and understand their nationness and mobilization vis-à-vis the homeland. The experience of transnationalism did not eradicate the sense of belonging to Libya among individuals in the diaspora, this being rooted in kinship relations and perceived commonality. However, as this is contingent and partial, it results in interactions and mobilization that are fluid and reflective of the individual's sense of in-betweenness. In the words of Khachig Tölölyan (Tölölyan 2012: 12-13):

[...] the oscillation between loyalty and sceptical detachment that characterizes the performance of diasporic lives, is in my view an example of the way everyone, including nationals, will have to live in an increasingly heterogenous and plural world.

The involvement of the diaspora in civil society challenged nationness among individuals in the diaspora and in Libya. Ethnicity, cultural frames and religion were the main aggregating but also contested factors in this process after 2011.

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<sup>68</sup> Interviewee #5.

<sup>69</sup> Interviewee #4.

### 2.3 Ethnicity

Ethnicity emerged in post-revolutionary Libya as one of the factors heightening conflict and political tensions. The silencing of ethnic diversity by the regime was subverted after 2011 and ethnic minorities started to advance demands for recognition and equality. A representative of civil society observed:

I remember in 2012, when people warned that Libya might turn into another Iraq and we said: ‘No, we are not, we speak the same language, we have the same religion, we have the same background’. Unfortunately, I did not even know the weight of Amazigh at the time. I thought Libya was one thing. I thought it’s just they have a different accent or language but I did not know how important for them this different nation is. Most Libyans will tell you: ‘We are all Arabs and Muslims’. But then you have the Amazigh who would differ and this is the first shock for me that started after the revolution and then it expanded. They actually have another language but then turns out it’s actually more than that.<sup>70</sup>

The interviewee refers to Imazighen as a different nation whose characteristics, aspirations and demands were unknown to him and to the majority of the Libyan-Arab population before 2011. Having overcome the impression of Libya being ‘one thing’, he drew a line between ‘they’, Imazighen, and ‘we’ Libyan-Arabs in a clear example of how ethnicity became divisive in post-revolutionary Libya.

Interviewees presented two main narratives in this respect. One stressed the equation between Arab ethnicity and Libyan identity at the expense of ethnic minorities and their rights. The other acknowledged the divide between Arab majority and minority ethnic groups while suggesting opportunities to reconcile this diversity in an inclusive Libyan identity. With respect to the first, defining who is an Arab and who is not is a way to identify the ethnic dimension of the Libyan national community in the 21st century that reminds us of Gaddafi’s ethnic nationalism centred on the Arab nation throughout most of his regime. The way these interviewees imagined the flows of people was selective and exclusive, removing from the Libyan national community individuals belonging to minority ethnic groups. An interviewee observed with reference to the city of Benghazi:

There are two groups in Benghazi: those who have lived in Benghazi for over 500 years and those who came later. So those who came later brand themselves as locals but they

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<sup>70</sup> Interviewee #6.

came with a different culture from the one that existed in the city that was dominated by Arab Beduin tribes and herders. [...] They come from different descents. Some come from Turkish [descent], some from other non-Arab [descent].<sup>71</sup>

This interviewee seems to imply that Arab ethnicity is the ‘real’ local identity against other ‘locals’ that arrived in the area in the last five centuries. Here he is possibly referring to the historical flows of people, discussed in the historical chapter, that reached North Africa from Europe and from the Ottoman empire from the thirteenth century onwards. In particular, the reference to individuals of Turkish descent recalls the Karaghla, the class of soldiers and senior administrators that emerged from the mingling of Ottoman soldiers of Turkish and other descent with local ‘Libyans’. As Najem pointed out, the prevalent understanding among Libyans is that the Karaghla were of Turkish descent or naturalized Turks from the paternal side and ‘Libyan’ from the maternal side. As a consequence, they are considered less Libyan since the fathers were not Arabs. Najem challenged this assumption by providing some indicators that suggest the majority of the members of the Karaghla tribe were in fact of ‘Arabised-Libyan’ background (Najem 2017: 100). Nevertheless, in post-revolutionary Libya this perception not only seemed to prevail among the interviewees, but it also served to reinforce lines of conflict. The political and armed rivalry between the city of Misrata, where Kologhli are said to make up the majority of tribes (Najem 2017: 102), and the Libyan Arab National Army, renamed as such in 2019 to stress its Arab character, constitutes one example. The establishment in 2015 of the Libya Koroglu Association to represent Turco-Libyans is yet another instance of the rise of ethnicity in Libyan politics. This has implications for the Turkish state as well since the demands of the community are also addressed to the Turkish government – first and foremost the recognition of citizenship rights. These examples show how framing Libyan identity exclusively in Arab terms can be a catalyser of conflict as well as a trigger of new political demands by ethnic communities that, when feeling excluded or in danger, can mobilize on the basis of a primordial ethnicity (Tastekin 2019).

Those interviewees who emphasized the Arab character of the Libyan nation juxtaposed the flows of non-Arab people into Libya against the idea of a pre-existing indigenous Arab community. The process of Arabisation of indigenous communities inhabiting the region before the seventh century was mostly absent from their narratives. In this process of identification of relevant flows in the formation of the Libyan political community, the few who referred to the

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<sup>71</sup> Interviewee #31.



Arabisation of North Africa mainly stressed its peaceful nature, whereas research on the subject suggests a combination of intimidation and inducement (Najem 2017: 36). This selective reference to the flows of people can be partially explained by the Gaddafi regime's narrative of a homogenous Arab Muslim nation that fostered a sense of attachment to Arab origins, history and traditions. This survived the 2011 revolution, reflecting the importance attributed to Arab ethnicity in the definition of the national community among the majority of interviewees of Arab descent. One of them observed:

Libya is 90% Arab and Arabs are very attached to their origins and history. If you ask Libyans, maybe not from my generation, but from my grandfather generation, they can tell you the history of the family going back hundreds of years. So yes, there is a national consciousness in Libya. A national body which is a lot more homogenous than a country like Egypt for example or a country like Iraq. Or any of the European countries.<sup>72</sup>

The interviewee sees the attachment to Arab origins and history, together with the ability of the older generations to trace the roots and history of their families, as the building blocks of a Libyan national consciousness and national body that is seen as 'homogenous', a word repeatedly used by interviewees to describe the Libyan social fabric. Arab ethnicity was largely perceived among the interviewees as an aggregating factor linked to familial and tribal history, and to national unity.

Therefore, it is not surprising that some interviewees considered the Tebu and Tuareg minorities as 'accidents of geography'. One of them observed:

Libya is about how much land you control, so there is the geography of things. So these guys just happen to be spread over a wide, huge area, and very strategically important, because mostly on the borderlands. So they have weight, they have spill-overs from other countries. [...] Tuareg and Tebu they have extensions outside Libya. So they usually don't identify themselves as Libyans, they just happen to be geographically within the borders, but they have the identity, or sort of spill-over from outside. So we can't really have them as within the national unity.<sup>73</sup>

The transnational flows of people in the borderland are used in this case to justify the exclusion of ethnic minorities from the national community.

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<sup>72</sup> Interviewee #23.

<sup>73</sup> Interviewee #31.

With respect to the second more conciliatory narrative, the way interviewees understood minority ethnic groups vis-à-vis the Arab majority ranged from identifying those as sub-cultures or sub-identities that did not preclude the existence of a Libyan national identity and national culture, to valuing these sub-cultures as part of the Libyan national identity. This narrative was mainstream among young civil society interviewees. One of them observed:

We have ethnic minorities like the Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu. They have tribal affiliations and they feel that they have a unique sub-identity or sub-culture but overall I think there is a basis for a national culture and national identity in Libya as well.<sup>74</sup>

The interviewee acknowledges the unique sub-culture and sub-identity of these ethnic groups based, among other things, on separate tribal affiliations, but he does not see this as precluding the existence of a broader Libyan national identity. In fact, ‘we’ includes minority ethnic groups. Along these lines, another representative of Libyan civil society suggested that these sub-cultures should have been integrated as part of the Libyan national culture, particularly in the south where semi-nomadic Tebu and Tuareg live:

Culturally, you can see it more in the south where you have [non-Arab] tribes on both borders. These tribes, I guess they don’t really belong to the countries that they’re in. They were living in this area which was split in few parts, you know. They were living in one part and then, someone came and drew a border and it became two parts and I don’t think Libya worked to include these people, even if they were living on the other side of the borders. I believe this is why we’re suffering from what we’re suffering from today because we tried to push people away. Speaking about cultural difference, they could have been accepted as a cultural component in Libya and you know, when you give someone a home in the sense of somewhere to belong to, they would depend on that home.<sup>75</sup>

This interviewee provides a critical reading of the circumstances in which the Libyan nation-state was born and how people living on the borders were separated. The presence of ethnic minorities and the cultural diversity within Libya is a result of this process. The transnational flows of Tebu and Tuareg were used in the past by the regime to exclude or manipulate these groups vis-à-vis the national community (Kohl 2014). This, combined with the regime’s policies aimed at silencing minorities that were discussed in the previous chapters, resulted in their marginalization. This civil

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<sup>74</sup> Interviewee #18.

<sup>75</sup> Interviewee #13.

society representative suggests that providing these groups a ‘home’ within the Libyan nation-state would have resulted in a sense of belonging and dependency that in turn, she seems to imply, would have helped to foster a sense of unity between these groups and the Arab majority. Another interviewee observed:

[According to the regime] Tebu or Amazigh are not the same nation, they are silent. Most of them [people from ethnic minorities] felt that we are one country [...] Most of these nations they feel they are Libyan.<sup>76</sup>

In this respect, in the late 2000s, it appeared that the homogenizing historical narrative of the regime had resulted in assimilation, particularly among the younger generations of Imazighen (al-Rumi 2009). After the revolution, the same tendency was observed among other ethnic communities as discussed with reference to the town of Kufra later in this chapter. The attempts by these ethnic minorities to establish themselves as members of the Libyan national community, demanding their heritage and access to resources be recognised in transitional political processes like the Constitutional Drafting Assembly or at the local level, point in the same direction. Marginalizing these groups and ignoring their demands resulted in renewed ethnic tensions after 2011.

Indeed, while during the revolution ethnic differences like ideological ones were set aside in the battle against the regime, soon after the liberation of the country, new armed clashes erupted between ethnic minorities and Arab tribes, particularly in southern Libya, while political tensions emerged within the framework of transitional institutions, namely the Constitutional Drafting Assembly, in the process of defining the characters of the new Libyan nation. These are instances of how ethnicity became a source of political tension after 2011.

Among the southern towns where ethnic conflicts emerged after the revolution, the oasis town of Kufra in south-eastern Libya is a clear example of how marginalization of ethnic minorities can lead to conflict.<sup>77</sup> Kufra is home to 4,000 Tebu while the large majority of inhabitants are Arabs from the Zway tribe reaching an estimated total population of 43,500 (Wehrey 2012: 14). The Zway dominated the cross-border economy in the region, its civil and military councils and economic life until the 2011 revolution (Murray 2015: 309). In 2011, the

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<sup>76</sup> Interviewee #22.

<sup>77</sup> The southern oasis towns of Sabha, Murzuq and Ubari witnessed similar confrontations since 2011 but since the case of Kufra is less known, and considering the author’s work on this case, Kufra has been chosen as an example.

Tebu played a central role in the fight against the regime, uniting with the Zway for the common purpose of defeating it (Smith 2013: 178). However, inter-communal violence re-emerged at the end of 2011, claiming by April 2017 more than 500 lives.

The revival of the conflict after 2011 can be explained against three main factors (Alunni, Calder, and Kappler 2017: 14). First, the smuggling economy in the borderland whose control after 2011 was once again contested between Tebu and Zway. Second, the demands by the Tebu to overcome the political and economic discrimination to which they had been relegated for decades. Third, denied citizenship rights. The 2011 revolution did not reverse this curse of marginalisation, with dire consequences for stability and peace in the town and for the Tebu who live in segregated neighbourhoods with limited access to services. Another study by the author concluded that the absence of violence negotiated by *hukama* and tribal leaders in the area on several occasions since 2011 will not translate into restored relations within and between communities unless initiatives are devised to address entrenched inequalities (Alunni, Calder, and Kappler 2017: 14). Giving the Tebu a 'home' and 'somewhere to belong to' within the borders of the Libyan nation-state, along the lines of what was suggested by one of the interviewees earlier on, means recognizing their citizenship rights and redistributing resources within the community, in so doing acknowledging them as equal members in the Libyan national political community. Adam Rami Kerki, head of the National Tebu Assembly, observed (Zurutuza 2018):

Many in Libya insist in rooting their identity in the Arab culture, but we had not heard about that until the arrival of Gaddafi to power in 1969. We may not be Arabs but we are doubtless Libyans.

Research conducted by the author of this study suggested that those settled Tebu have a strong sense of identification and belonging to Libya, particularly the youth. Getting involved in civil society activism is for them a way to express their nationness and demand recognition within the Libyan national community (Alunni, Calder, and Kappler 2017). Ethnic minorities are determined to change the pre-revolutionary understanding of the ethno-cultural dimension of the nation by posing multi-culturalism as an important feature of the national community.

In another example of the interplay between ethnicity, political tensions and nationhood after 2011, members of the Amazigh community demanded the country's transitional institutions recognize them and their language in a new constitution (Logan 2011). Signs, webpages and media using Tifinagh characters had appeared during the uprising (Baldinetti 2018: 430). However, the

recognition of linguistic and cultural rights for all components of Libyan society enshrined in the 2011 provisional constitution, fell short of expectations as it only recognized Arabic as the official language (Baldinetti 2018: 430).

Leading the drive for cultural and political recognition was the Amazigh Supreme Council (ASC) established in January 2013 (Temehu 2019). Following the decision that two seats of the Constitutional Drafting Assembly (CDA) were to be reserved for each of the Amazigh, Tebu and Tuareg minorities, the ASC ordered a boycott of the 2014 elections, both for the CDA and for the House of Representatives. The boycott remained in effect at the beginning of 2019, with the ASC refusing the draft constitution and no longer demanding only the legal status for the language but rather that Imazighen be accorded the same constitutional rights as all other Libyans, meaning that their language and culture would have the same status as Arabic (Cousins 2018).

Article 2 of the Libyan draft constitution of 29 July 2017, while only recognising Arabic as the official language of the State, opened the door to a diverse and inclusive understanding of Libyan identity by describing Libya as part of the ‘Arab and Muslim World, Africa and the Mediterranean Basin’.<sup>78</sup> Languages such as Tamazight, Tamasheq and Tudaga, while not given official language status, are described as a cultural and linguistic heritage and common asset for all Libyans that the state should protect and preserve while providing opportunities for these languages to be taught and used by those who speak them. The draft constitution also establishes at article 160 a National Council for the Protection of Cultural and Linguistic Heritage aimed at developing and protecting these languages, preserving, documenting and devoting attention to the diverse cultural and linguistic heritage of the Libyan people as part of the collective Libyan identity.

However, article 2 leaves it to the Libyan parliament to legislate on means of integrating these languages in public life at the local and national level. According to the 2017 constitutional draft, acquisition and withdrawal of Libyan nationality should be based on national interest, ‘maintaining of demographic composition’ and ‘ease of integration’ as provided in article 10. These principles can be subject to different interpretations and practicalities such as the lack of official papers and family booklets that are necessary to prove an individual’s origin for the purpose of citizenship. According to the 1954 law, citizenship is acquired through descent from a Libyan mother or father born in Libya. As Kohl pointed out, semi-nomadic peoples like Tebu and

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<sup>78</sup> Unofficial translation of the final draft of the Libyan constitution, 29 July 2017.

Tuareg have difficulties in proving their Libyan origins due to their transnational movements and lack of papers (Kohl 2014: 431). This, in addition to the ten-year moratorium on naturalisation included in article 186 of the draft constitution, risks fuelling feelings of marginalization among these ethnic minorities for the foreseeable future (Toaldo 2017).

Although as previous studies pointed out, national belonging, ethnic and tribal affiliation are not mutually exclusive categories in Libya (Kohl 2014: 424), the political circumstances after 2011 openly called into question the membership to the Libyan political community of minority ethnic groups and individuals in local communities whose Arab origins can be disputed on the basis of more or less recent migratory flows. The selective way in which the flows of people are imagined and used to justify policies that strengthen divisions suggests that without a clear political intention to oppose this tendency, perceived and self-identified ethnic differences have the potential to become more and more preponderant in the current political scene, in turn jeopardising the sense of national unity and belonging among Libyan people 'at home'.

To sum up, in post-revolutionary Libya, Arab ethnicity continued to be perceived by the interviewees as an important category of practice used to identify the members of the Libyan nation. However, the demands and actions of ethnic minorities, supported by the civil society, suggest that some activists challenge this vision, redefining their own nationness and practices of nationhood, and possibly those of the individuals engaging with their initiatives and media of communication. This shows how the global liberal discourse around pluralism and minorities' rights found expression among some groups in Libya after 2011. The revolution created the space for public debates and political struggles around the place of minorities within the Libyan nation, leaving the question of their inclusion open.

### **3. Transforming the 'archive of differences' into 'diacritics' of the nation**

The section above showed how ethnicity in Libya can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it can be used to divide people. On the other hand, one can consciously and imaginatively construct and mobilise the material, linguistic and territorial attributes, the so called 'archive of differences', and naturalise them as 'diacritics' of groupness (Appadurai 1996: 13-14). For instance, certain symbols or rituals related to traditional clothing or religion that are common across other countries in the Maghreb can be reinterpreted and perceived as 'Libyan' by integrating the cultural identifiers of ethnic minorities, in so doing transforming these features into diacritics of the Libyan national

community. A sense of uniqueness and unity in diversity can replace that of supposed Arab-Muslim homogeneity fostered by the regime, contributing to establishing an inclusive and pluralistic understanding of the national community.

In the aftermath of the 2011 revolution, some diaspora and civil society interviewees engaged in this process together with ethnic minorities. A large majority of civil society interviewees appreciated ethnic diversity across the Libyan nation-state, imagined the Libyan nation as inclusive and pluralistic, and actively contributed after 2011 to build a national imaginary around this vision. One of them observed:

Minorities are part of the diversity and variety of the Libyan nation. I always believed that we should get the best of these minorities in a way to reflect the diversity of this community, appreciate their culture and how they can add value to this nation.<sup>79</sup>

The interviewees linked the development of this vision to the unprecedented ability to travel across the country to undertake civil society activities after 2011, but also to the relationships established with the global civil society. These activities and the use of Internet media provided these individuals with the opportunity to get to know their country and its diverse ethnic and cultural components, widely sharing this knowledge via social media and contextualizing it within the global liberal discourse on pluralism and multiculturalism. This process resulted in the celebration of Libyan national heritage in the social media pages of CSOs. They shared photos of Libyan cultural and natural heritage, food and people dressed in traditional attire online, contributing to develop the imaginative faculty of the audience. This reminds the observer of the importance of these tropes to develop and consolidate the sense of identification and belonging in everyday life.

The inclusive and pluralistic view of the nation expressed by CSOs members and some diaspora interviewees emerged clearly in the post-revolutionary practices of these groups. From June 2011, a diaspora group, Shabab Libya, shared images of natural heritage and Libyan architecture and archaeological sites that speak to the multiculturalism and diversity of Libya – see Appendix 4, set of images #2. These included photos of Amazigh towns like Yefren or Nalut that portray villages, old synagogues and churches (ShababLibya 2011bs, 2011bt, 2011ax), and photos of Tuareg culture that is celebrated in the album ‘Libya’s pearl of the desert: Ghadames’ Tuareg Culture’ (ShababLibya 2012n). Other albums celebrated the architecture of Libyan cities such as Benghazi with the Cathedral and the Ozo hotel, Tripoli with its Red Castle, the old town

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<sup>79</sup> Interviewee #17.

and the Italian architecture, and Libya's archaeological sites like Sabratha, Silene, Leptis Magna and Cyrene (ShababLibya 2011g, 2012b). The album, 'Libya's true hidden beauty from East to West', appears with pictures that celebrate the diversity of Libya and its rich multicultural history. Pictures included in this and other albums portray pre-Islamic archaeological sites (Cyrene, Susa-Apollonia, Tulmaytha, Sabratha and Leptis Magna), the Court Square in Benghazi, the desert and modern architecture, like the Wadi al-Koof bridge (ShababLibya 2011ah, 2013i). Other albums show Libya at night and include photos of the Red Castle, Tripoli towers and the cornice in Benghazi (ShababLibya 2011ae). The looting of a large collection of coins, statues, jewellery from a bank vault in Benghazi during the war is denounced together with pictures of these antiquities (ShababLibya 2011c). This suggests the value given by the admins of the page to the pre-Islamic, Roman and Hellenistic heritage. A National Geographic series is shared later in January 2013 that includes Roman ruins and the Berber town of Ghat (ShababLibya 2013h). In May 2014 the vandalism against prehistoric rock art in Ghat is denounced (ShababLibya 2014c). Libyan natural heritage is celebrated with photos of the Sahara and its oases, the Libyan coastline and the Green mountains (ShababLibya 2011p, 2014b, 2011bg, 2012n).

In another example, H2O team shared between December 2012 and May 2014 the photos of its Dus-Tour across Libya. *Dustoor* in Arabic means constitution and the project introduced the idea of the constitution to people across the country. The team toured Libya in a bus visiting thirty-five towns across Western, Southern and Central Libya.<sup>80</sup> They came in touch with people from across the country and from different ethnic groups, shared photos of their experiences on their social media page, in so doing portraying the cultural and natural heritage encountered along the way. The follower is introduced to areas of Libya that remained difficult to access even after 2011. The photographs include Libyan towns off the beaten track, pre-Islamic and natural heritage (H2OTeam 2014). More recently, CSOs like H2O and Volunteer Libya celebrated the diversity of Libya by including Amazigh scripts in their social media messaging (H2OTeam 2019; VolunteerLibya 2016).

We observe a continuity in the choice of some images by Shabab Libya and the old diaspora website Libya Watanona that suggests the consolidation of some of these images in the collective

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<sup>80</sup> The towns included: Zawya, Sorman, Agilat, Sabratha, Zwara, Rigdelin, Zliten, Jawsh, Murzuq, Waddan, Suknah, Houn, Tamanhint, Ubari, Germa, Sabha, Msellata, Tarhouna, Zliten, Khoms, Misrata, Mizdah, Bani Walid, Gharian, Yefren, Ryainah, Zintan, Jadu, Ghadames, Nalut, Rigdelin, Zelten, Badr, Jawsh, Zwara.



imaginary in the diaspora across generations – e.g. the architecture of Libyan cities such as the cathedral in Benghazi and the Ozo hotel or the Red Castle in Tripoli but also the desert and Amazigh towns and the pre-Islamic archaeological sites. While some of the images are shot by the admins who travelled to Libya and had the opportunity to report from inside the country, in most cases the photos are shared by Libyan or international photographers present in Libya or, like in the case of H2O's Dus-Tour, by members of CSOs. These civil society actors contribute collectively to establish these images in the field of vision of the diaspora and of those Libyans 'at home' who can access Facebook. While establishing the importance of these images for the CSOs in Libya and in the diaspora, this study suggests extending the research in the future to understand how these images were reproduced by followers of these social media pages, a task that this research did not pursue.

An interviewee member of a CSO expressed his inclusive and pluralistic understanding of the Libyan national community in these terms:

Mainly, they [Libyans] speak Arabic and their traditions are unique. We can discover old traditions that still exist which are not similar to Egyptians or Tunisians or Chadians. It's a mixture of Arab, Amazigh and African culture. For example, the old tattoos for women, they use Amazigh symbols and you will find traditional clothes that are not Arabic but are not African either. It is something in between. You will find also the tribal rules and traditions during marriage and reconciliation. It's different. Not like Jordan or Saudi Arabia or Tunis or Morocco. Libya has roots in Africa as well. So, that's why Libyans if I'm describing Libyan identity, I would see it as the mixture of Arabic, African, Mediterranean, Amazigh, Tebu, Tuareg, all these cultures coming together.<sup>81</sup>

He pointed at some elements that can be explored to further dissect the Libyan ethno-cultural matrix: language; traditions related to clothing and food; social norms and behaviours; and religion.

### *3.1 Language*

The Gaddafi regime's denial of linguistic pluralism led to Arabic language being perceived by the interviewees as one of the key defining elements of their sense of Libyanness. This was reflected in their narratives that almost unanimously referred to Arabic as a unifying 'objective' factor

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<sup>81</sup> Interviewee #7.

within the Libyan national community. And yet, they acknowledged that the emergence of ethnic minorities and their languages challenged the primacy of the Arabic language after 2011. In fact, after the revolution, talking about language in Libya became a way to raise the social, cultural and political demands of ethnic minorities, challenging the regime's vision of the nation that had dominated until that point. Asked about the characteristics that Libyan nationals share, a woman civil society activist answered:

Number one it's religion. We're a Muslim country, that's for sure. Number two, the Arabic language united us but it doesn't define us because we're not all Arabs. We have a diversity when it comes to Amazigh, Tuareg and Tebu. So we can't define ourselves as Arabs, but the Arabic language does unite us.<sup>82</sup>

In what might come across as a contradictory statement, Arabic language is seen as a unifying element in so far as it is widely understood and spoken across the different ethnic groups, but the interviewee seems to question whether it can be considered a defining element of the Libyan national community if one takes into account the existence of ethnic minorities and their languages. This point of view is taken to an extreme by the interviewee who claims that, for this reason, Libyans ('we') can't define themselves as Arabs. This critical perspective, although unique in its formulation among the interviewees, reflects both the tendency among civil society representatives to challenge former regime policies on ethnic minorities, as well as the attempt at integrating these minorities and their linguistic expressions in the national social and cultural fabric after 2011. In other words, an attempt at reconciling different forms of groupness in a broader concept of Libyan nation. As Arabic and Libyan dialect maintain their communicative function in Libya, the emergence in the public space of vernaculars such as Tamazight, Tamasheq and Tudaga has the potential to strengthen in-group connections through their symbolic function as emblems of groupness, unless these linguistic differences are naturalized as diacritics of the national community (Edwards 2009; Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985; Appadurai 1996).

In Libya, where four main dialects are spoken across the country, one might expect the unifying character of the Arabic language to be challenged by these dialectic vernaculars. However, the majority of the interviewees identified these dialects as characteristically Libyan and familiar, recalling the principle of mutual intelligibility discussed in the previous chapter. An interviewee observed:

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<sup>82</sup> Interviewee #9.

We have our own particular language. Okay, there are dialects and differences between the west and the east and you can say that the eastern dialect is more similar to that of western Egypt and the Tripoli dialect is more similar to Tunisian dialect. From a linguistic perspective, we have certain words, constructs, that are only used in Libya. Maybe some are shared with Tunisia, such as *bahi ba*, but in the way we speak we can always identify a Libyan regardless of how he looks just from his language in the same way that you can do with an Egyptian, an Algerian or a Moroccan. So, that kind of dialectic cohesiveness is there.<sup>83</sup>

The interviewee is keen to stress that although he is aware of differences in dialects across the country, people in Libya identify these dialects as Libyan and, therefore, they are an important marker of the Libyan national community. Another interviewee observed:

If you focus on some words said in Tripoli but not common in Benghazi, they [Libyans] can understand them. That is the same for people in Rome. Maybe they are different from Milan or Napoli or Sicily and someone from elsewhere in Italy can understand he is from Sicily. They are Libyan [words].<sup>84</sup>

The interviewee here suggests that dialects are different across Libya, just as much as in Italy, but they are still recognizable to Libyan people as Libyan dialects. By labelling the dialects as Libyan, these turn into a unifying character of the nation rather than a divisive one that would feed the regionalist narratives. In post-revolution Libya, this is a conscious process by some actors of turning linguistic and dialectic diversity into one of the diacritics of the national community that in turn generated Libyanness among the interviewees.

### *3.2 Imagining Traditions: clothes and food*

As discussed in the previous chapter, traditional clothes and food were the material cultural expression of everyday nationalism before the 2011 revolution. In the narratives of the interviewees, the different styles associated with the different ethnic groups were not ignored but rather transformed into diacritics of Libyanness. The celebration of traditional clothes and food takes place by sharing images online and through civil society initiatives that show examples of how Libyan people in the diaspora and ‘at home’ perform the nation in everyday life collectively.

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<sup>83</sup> Interviewee #37.

<sup>84</sup> Interviewee #32.

After the revolution, traditional clothes worn on the occasion of religious ceremonies or celebrations specific to some ethnic group were referred to by the interviewees as uniquely Libyan. In particular, traditional clothes were celebrated in the social media pages of civil society organizations. The *farashiya* and the *rida* for women and the *jarid* and *shenna* for men are worn by people across Libya, as well as by the Imazighen, while Tebu and Tuareg wear their traditional clothes – see Appendix 4, set of images #3. As we can see from the old photos in Libyan Watanona, these are the clothes that people used to wear in everyday life – see Appendix 4, set of images #1. Today they are only worn by old people or on the occasion of celebrations. It is on the occasion of protests in the city of Benghazi, for instance, that we observe pictures of children, men and women wearing traditional clothes (ShababLibya 2011an, 2011ay, 2011q), as well as on the occasion of religious holidays such as Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha when people take to the squares to pray and celebrate bringing with them Libyan flags (ShababLibya 2011ap, 2011aw). In some photos, children wear traditional clothes and hold pictures of martyrs in the town of Yefren where the Amazigh flag also appears (ShababLibya 2011bu). Children wear traditional clothes in pictures of events such as the visits of representatives of foreign governments – e.g. Hillary Clinton in October 2011 and David Cameron and Nicolas Sarkozy (ShababLibya 2011bh, 2011bq). In other photos, men on horses wear the traditional clothes of the Libyan *mujahideen* from the anti-colonial resistance to welcome the heroes of the revolution back to Benghazi at the end of October 2011 or in front of the shrine of Umar al-Mukhtar and on the celebrations of the anniversary of the revolution and on Martyrs day (ShababLibya 2011ar, 2011ac, 2012g, 2013e, 2012o). National Dress Day, established in 2015 on March 13 by the Libyan transitional government, is another occasion to wear traditional clothes both in Libya and among people in the diaspora, an example of institutionalization of nationhood. More recently, in 2019, Al Miaad Culture and Arts society organised an event in Tripoli to introduce to new generations the Libyan traditional dress worn by their ancestors. Folklore bands accompanied the parade of people dressed in traditional attire who from Martyrs' Square reached the palace of King Idris (Arab24NewsAgency 2019).

In another instance of the politicization and attempts at nationalization of clothes after 2011, a study on gender and revolutions by Sahar Mediha Alnaas and Nicola Pratt observed that the Libyan revolution subverted and resignified nationalist norms in several ways. In particular, the authors observed how the choice of a group of Libyan women to start the *farashiya* national day in March 2013 was a way to reclaim the choice of their own national costume that reflected

their history and national identity over female Islamist attire that they did not consider Libyan. This was described as a: ‘strategic use of national culture that validates the “authenticity” of the *farashiya* as rooted in Libyan tradition, against efforts by political Islamists to impose a “foreign” dress code on women’ (Alnaas and Pratt 2015: 356-57). The traditional dress became a way to assert national identity but also to reinforce the opposition towards political Islam and the attire associated with that. In another example, the journalist and blogger Nahla al-Ajeli, a Libyan living in London, chose the *farashiya* to represent Libya at the London 2012 Olympics (ShababLibya 2012u). A woman wrapped in a *farashyia* stands in front of a painting of the city of Tripoli with the Red Castle at its centre. These images enter the field of vision of those who access the social media pages of diaspora and Libyan CSOs with the potential of consolidating them and their role in the national imaginary. What is significant here is both the choice of these images by CSOs and diaspora individuals, as well as the performance of this act of identity in everyday life by Libyans ‘at home’ and in the diaspora.

In the previous chapter we observed how food was a medium through which nationhood and nationness were practised and experienced in everyday life before the revolution. Here we focus on how food and a national food culture are imagined by the interviewees after 2011. In the words of Mendel and Ranta, by food culture we ‘do not simply mean a particular diet, but rather the manner and methods, in which food is prepared, commodified, and consumed by a particular society’ (Mendel and Ranta 2014: 414). While the national does not have the monopoly over food and one can observe tension and conflict between different forces that try to appropriate it, like ethnic or regional forces, the narratives of the interviewees revealed constructive strategies (Wodak 2009) that aimed to build and establish the existence of a Libyan food culture by emphasizing differentiation from the cuisines of other North African countries and transforming regional cuisines into the diacritics of a national food culture that in turn generates Libyanness.

For instance, *couscous* is a basic staple across North Africa. Some consider it a dish of Amazigh origins that appeared in the 3rd century BC (Bolens 1989: 61). Others suggest that couscous only originated between the 11th and the 13th century in North Africa, therefore questioning its Amazigh origin (Perry 1989: 177). As de Castro observed, the way in which couscous is interpreted in the national cuisines across the Maghreb is *per se* an expression of national identities (de Castro 2003: 465-66). Indeed, several interviewees claimed that the way in which couscous is made in Libya is different and unique. One of them observed:

You [as a Libyan] make your couscous different. It's Libyan! You put little different ingredients but if it's Tunisian it's a different couscous altogether. And you feel that!<sup>85</sup>

As part of a Twitter thread on Libyan food, the menu of a Libyan restaurant in Alberta, Canada, explained the uniqueness of Libyan couscous with the use of the special Libyan five-spice seasoning blend called *hararat* (T 2019). In another instance, the interviewees referred to *bazin*, an Amazigh dish made from barley and served with a tomato-based or a fava bean-based sauce. The interviewee observed:

*Bazin* is a western thing. We don't do it in the east and we [in the east of Libya] don't consider it as our dish but we do it from time to time. We consider that as Libyan in the east and any family or woman that cooks *bazin* would say that it is a western Libyan dish. I'm from the east but when I go abroad and they ask me: 'What do you have as Libyan food?', I say *bazin* which is western and not eastern but I feel it's Libyan. *Bazin*, *rishdat*, there is a lot of Libyan food which is unique to Libya. Nobody does it outside of Libya although it's hard to say that it's from all over Libya.<sup>86</sup>

If the way we perceive food has an impact upon how we view ourselves and imagine ourselves as part of the nation (Ichijo and Ranta 2016: 2), the sense of ownership towards this dish expressed by this interviewee is a testimony to the significance of food in defining regional traditions and turning them into the diacritics of a national food culture that is maintained in the everyday life of individuals 'at home' and in the diaspora, as discussed in the previous chapter. The word 'we' used to refer to a regional form of groupness is subsumed by the end into a shared Libyan food culture. As Edensor observed, the tendency is for regional and ethnic differences to become incorporated, 'subserving to, and part of, the greater national identity' (Edensor 2002: 66). Furthermore, as pointed out by Appadurai in the case of India or by Montanari in the case of Italy, national cuisines can emerge from the re-articulation of regional and ethnic cuisines (Appadurai 1996; Ichijo and Ranta 2016; Montanari 2004).

When viewed through Edensor and Ichijo's interpretive lenses, the everyday practices around food consumption discussed in the previous chapter contributed to establishing a food culture based on normalizing patterns of 'how things are', 'how we do things' and how we talk about things. Through this process, social and cultural rules about food are established, helping to

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<sup>85</sup> Interviewee #28.

<sup>86</sup> Interviewee #30.

define and characterize the nation. The practices around food and religious ceremonies discussed in the previous chapter, and the process of imagination and re-articulation of a national food culture observed in the narratives of the interviewees, suggest that these banal rules bring about a passive sense of nationness performed as a reflex when prompted by encounters with ‘others’. By locating what is ours and what is not, a Libyan food culture is established (Edensor 2002; Ichijo and Ranta 2016).

### *3.3 Social norms and behaviours*

Besides language and traditions, the Libyan national community was perceived as unique by the interviewees in so far as Libyan people displayed social norms and behaviours that they identified as uniquely Libyan. In fact, the reader might recognize these features among people across the globe. And yet, labelling these as distinctively Libyan is indicative of the narrative of uniqueness of the Libyan nation shared by most interviewees. However, while the importance of languages and traditions as diacritics of the national community was hardly questioned by interviewees in Libya and in the diaspora, on the matter of social norms and traditions some differences emerged.

Interviewees in Libya perceived the flows of returnees from the diaspora as disrupting Libyan social norms and behaviours, ‘othering’ the Libyans from the diaspora and in so doing redefining and strengthening their Libyanness. Diaspora interviewees were keen to stress that their experience of migration did not modify their social norms and behaviours. Libyans ‘at home’ argued the opposite and claimed that their social norms and behaviours are the real Libyan social norms and behaviours, not those of individuals from the diaspora. An interviewee from the diaspora observed:

It’s not so much whether you were raised abroad or in Libya. It depends on how Libyan your upbringing was. Because Libyans act in a particular cultural way. Culturally, in the way that I act and some of my... in my religious structure, for instance, in the sense of how I feel religion in my life... in the moral code, this is probably the best way of describing it, I am very similar to all the other Libyans who I met.<sup>87</sup>

Here the interviewee defines the way in which Libyans behave as unique from a cultural perspective and he describes this uniqueness in terms of social behaviours associated first with religion and then with a Libyan moral code. This moral code can be unpacked in several social

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<sup>87</sup> Interviewee #37.

behaviours pointed out by other interviewees: those associated with Arab Bedouin culture; those associated with the rentier state economy; and social conservatism and conformity associated by some with religion and by others with traditions.

First of all, some defining features of the Libyan national community are related to the tribal Arab Bedouin culture and to the nomadic and pastoralist lifestyle of the tribal communities until the modern age. According to some interviewees ‘at home’, these cultural and social norms have survived modernity and can be observed across the entire country, informing cultural and behavioural norms that are perceived as uniquely Libyan. A civil society activist observed:

We have this tribal culture, Bedouin culture. This Bedouin culture has some characteristics and these characteristics I can see among different Libyans... and they are not very positive honestly. Most of them are negative. So I will start with the positive one. The positive one is that we are very flexible and we can adapt very easily, we adapt to change in a way that you cannot even imagine. [...] But the other characteristic is that we don't really like to plan and we don't plan on the long term. We are most likely quick and reactive people. We take decisions on spot [...] If you look to the Bedouins and the way they reacted and used to live, this kind of decision-making and also their relation with time, very open, this explains why we do not really respect deadlines and we do not give time importance and we think time is more loose and open. This is how Bedouins used to live, you see, if you live in the desert for example and you start to move from a land to another land and you do not manufacture, you do not produce a specific product or agriculture, you don't really have deadlines, you don't have a systematic way to function.<sup>88</sup>

This interviewee points out three main elements associated with Bedouin traits that he sees as characterizing Libyans ‘at home’: flexibility and adaptability to change and harsh circumstances; reactive decision-making against long-term planning; and a loose concept of time. It was around these elements that during civil society activities, Libyans ‘at home’ and those from the diaspora clashed the most. According to Libyans ‘at home,’ this was evidence of the change that occurred in the mindset of Libyans in the diaspora.

Secondly, the advent of the modern economy and the discovery of oil determined the development of the Libyan rentier-state model. That encouraged rent-seeking behaviour, a feature that interviewees identified as Libyan. An interviewee expressed this concept in these terms:

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<sup>88</sup> Interviewee #26.



You are always looking for someone to give to you rather than to produce. Our economy is very dependent on oil and it's not a diversified economy and people are not paying taxes and are not feeling responsible to produce. It's not really our duty to do so.<sup>89</sup>

Some interviewees pointed out that as a result of the rent-based economy, most people developed a passive attitude towards economic activity and the state that was also associated with the efforts of the Gaddafi regime to eliminate private enterprise. Libyan people expected the state to redistribute oil revenues. This state of affairs, on the one hand, created a relation of dependency vis-à-vis state institutions and hampered the creation of economic networks among people inside the country. On the other hand, it contributed to develop a sense of pride in the richness and diversity of Libya from its North African neighbours that was also linked to the Beduin culture. One interviewee observed:

Most of the things that we have talked about, it's just, ehm, practically institutionalised into your psyche from the minute you are born. You are Libyan, Libyan, Libyan, Libyan, Libyan. [...] [there is] this sense of exclusivity. Now, I am not Tunisian, I am not Egyptian or Algerian. I have this... it's a small country, it's oil rich and this is who we are and in some ways we also look at the Gulf because it's also just as much of a Beduin set-up and we think that we are more like them than we are like the neighbours. We are a small and exclusive community, and, you know, possibly, there is a sense of misplaced superiority.<sup>90</sup>

This sense of superiority vis-à-vis the North African neighbours based on Bedouin culture and oil-richness was grasped by the author of this research in several conversations in Libya in 2013 and 2014. The aspiration to be like Dubai that many expressed is to be interpreted in this context. That first emerged in the late 1990s and more so in the 2000s, when satellite television and the Internet showed to people in Libya the level of development of oil-rich countries in the Gulf. The oil wealth and Beduin culture shared with the countries of the Gulf translated into the aspiration to be like them and in the belief of being different from the North African neighbours. One interviewee observed:

One goal that Libyans share is to be like Dubai. What do they mean by Dubai? They mean economically, just economics. Everyone is happy, the place is clean, the buildings are high, skyscrapers. That sort of things. That's all the Libyans want to see. They want to be rich,

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<sup>89</sup> Interviewee #26.

<sup>90</sup> Interviewee #12.

able to travel the world, everyone wants that, this is what they expect from an oil-rich country.<sup>91</sup>

The excerpts from these interviews show how the interviewees perceive the Libyan nation differently from its neighbours based on characteristics that, while not unique to Libya, are narrated as diacritics of the national community. One might question how Libyans in the diaspora, living in strikingly different contexts, maintained the social norms and behaviours of Libyans at home. And yet, reproducing these social norms and behaviours, the interviewees at home and in the diaspora strengthened their sense of Libyanness.

Thirdly, social conservatism and cultural conformity are just as important to identify the members of the Libyan national community. Indeed, in several instances, the interviewees pointed to the existence of a rigid social conformity among Libyans that distinguishes them from other nations. Some suggested that religion informs these social behaviours and the individual's 'moral compass' while others referred to customs. Social conservatism translates into cultural conformity that is measured against lifestyle and women's clothing. The main indicators are the non-consumption of alcohol, limited relationships between men and women before marriage and women's socialisation in the public space. An interviewee recounted:

I am Libyan, I am totally Libyan. I come from X [city in Libya]. My grandfather was born in X [city in Libya], I lived all my life in X [city in Libya] and my mom is from X [city in Libya]. I'm a Libyan. I have my grandfather, my grandmother, they were all Libyan. But the thing is, my parents were born and raised in X [country in the Middle East]. [...] growing up in school, I was always asked: 'Where are you from?'. They were trying to spot and point out where was I from. What does it matter? I have a genuine Libyan name. My classmates they always wanted to see me as a non-Libyan. They started a rumour that my mom was X [from the country where she was born and raised in the Middle East] just because she wears the hijab in a different way. They always try. If you're not exactly like them, you're not part of that society. They have to wear the same *hijab*, they have to speak the same dialect, they have to behave the same way, have the same lifestyle.<sup>92</sup>

The interviewee here highlights how kinship was not enough to identify someone as Libyan while social conformity was particularly relevant. One can meet all the requirements in terms of blood

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<sup>91</sup> Interviewee #31.

<sup>92</sup> Interviewee #13.

relations to be defined as ‘totally Libyan’, but social conformity must be respected for an individual to be considered part of the community.

However, several interviewees agreed that while Libyans display socially conservative behaviours in public, privately or outside the country these behaviours change. Social conformity in public is reinforced by social control ‘at home’ and in small diaspora communities, suggesting that conservatism is seemingly more related to Libyan customs, social norms and behaviours than to religious beliefs. An interviewee observed in this respect:

Some [Libyans who came back from the diaspora] do things against Islam like drinking or have girlfriends. These things are against Islam. There are Libyans in Libya who have girlfriends but they ... they don’t show these things. You do not have to do these things in front of all people. Libyans do these things but don’t do it in your face. You are doing things in front of everyone because this is your culture and this is the culture you learned from outside Libya. Libyans coming from outside they do these things in public.<sup>93</sup>

This interviewee, who displayed social conservatism in other instances, seems to suggest that what matters for Libyans is not so much not doing things that are against Islam but rather not doing them in public. That is considered disrespectful of Libyan customs and something that reflects the individual’s culture. The more liberal diaspora is a clear target of his criticism. Another interviewee, however, observed with regard to Libyans ‘at home’:

I personally say, and some people disagree, that Libya is not a conservative country. If you are conservative you have a moral obligation not to do certain things, you have moral limits. In Libya the all family goes out [of Libya] and does whatever they want, like hippies in the 1960s but then when they are back in Libya then they are like: ‘The neighbours will think that we are...’. So you want to be that thing, you want to live that kind of life but you are not living it because you are afraid that others in your community will judge you.<sup>94</sup>

According to the interviewee, the ability to shift one’s moral compass makes Libyan social conservatism void. And yet, the attachment to certain customs expressed by others seems to indicate that this conservative code of conduct inside the country is something that individuals see as necessary to maintain the community. The challenge posed by some in the diaspora was indeed perceived as dangerous in that respect.

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<sup>93</sup> Interviewee #4.

<sup>94</sup> Interviewee #5.

The interviewees in Libya expected Libyans from the diaspora coming back 'home' to conform to what they identified as Libyan social practices. The 1.5 and second-generation diaspora interviewees found this aspect of social control and conservatism hard to accept and live with. Several among them hoped for a change in the cultural code, values, lifestyle, ways of being and modes of understanding human interaction in a more open and pluralistic sense. A woman in the diaspora observed:

There needs to be, kind of... more acceptance of different archetypes that people choose to be. There's a lot of, like... conformity and a lot of social pressure [...] it can be too much pressure, especially when a society has so little control over their lives in many ways, living under dictatorship or now living under chaos. They tend to, you know, heighten things that they control, like how they interact socially. That can go awry. [...] So I think it's, kind of, like a pressure cooker. A pressure cooker set to explode. So, yes, it's just about finding ways to relieve that pressure and allowing people to be themselves.[...] Libyans are, from my point of view, quite harsh and I think we can all be afforded some breathing room.<sup>95</sup>

Another man in the diaspora pointed out:

I would like to see a society that respects other people's opinions, no matter how much they differ from their own because I think we have been used to kind of one mind set and a lot of problems that we have now, the political and social problems stem from the fact that we cannot accept somebody who is different to our own, no matter what their difference is.<sup>96</sup>

These excerpts testify to the in-betweenness of some individuals in the diaspora, particularly 1.5 and second generations who find it challenging to adapt to the social context of the homeland. These differences emerged clearly through the interactions within the civil society space in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution. For as imaginative as the emerging civil society can be in attempting to transform the archive of ethnic differences into diacritics of commonality, the perception of 'the other' re-emerged in relation to the diaspora, challenging the pluralism and inclusivity advocated by civil society representatives. Through this process, both groups craft their sense of Libyanness.

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<sup>95</sup> Interviewee #11.

<sup>96</sup> Interviewee #24.

### 3.4 Religion (and politics)

We now turn to religion. The vast majority of research participants referred to Islam as a main factor that binds Libyans together. However, when delving deeper in the conversations, a tendency emerged among the research participants to identify exogenous and endogenous factors, what is Libyan and what is not, when it comes to Islam. Orthodox Sunni Maliki Islam, while not unique to Libya, was largely perceived as constituting ‘the core of the Libyan value structure and the framework of its social system’ (Sawani 2013: 57). One interviewee identified the traditionally moderate Sunni Maliki Islam compatible with Sufi orders and traditions as endogenous to the Libyan society but observed:

Moderate Islam has always governed and has always been a part of the Libyan social fabric. Unfortunately, now [2016] we are seeing certain changes and trends and, kind of, new influences and new and different ideas that are alien to what Libya has always had.<sup>97</sup>

The events of 2011 brought to the fore of the battlefield and of the political and religious scene a variety of Islamist ideological currents and groups that in the narratives of several interviewees, like the one above, were ‘alien’ to the Libyan society and to the way Libyan people practise Islam. The analysis of the flows of people and ideas after 2011, and of the debate concerning the role of *Sharia* law demonstrates that these flows influenced the way people practice the faith and their everyday lives, *de facto* challenging the role of Islam as a unifying national identifier.

In 2016, a largely shared perception remained that ‘a huge number’ of Libyans from the Islamist diaspora came back during and after the 2011 revolution. In fact, there are several instances of the relation between the flow of returnees from the Islamist diaspora and more conservative and radical forms of Islamism emerging in Libya. Examples can be drawn from the ranks of the Muslim Brotherhood, the LIFG, and Salafi and Salafi-Jihadist groups of more recent formation.

At the onset of the revolution, the leadership of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, scattered across Europe and North America, gathered in Switzerland. The exiled leader, Sulaiman Abd al-Qadir, sent Alamin Bilhadj, an exile and the President of the Muslim Association of Britain (MAB), to Libya together with other Brotherhood figures. They reached Benghazi in February where they questioned the representativeness of the National Transitional Council (Fitzgerald 2015: 183). The LIFG was also scattered across Europe and the Middle East. LIFG’s senior figures in London such

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<sup>97</sup> Interviewee #14.

as Abd al-Basit Bu Hliqa, a businessman and member of the LIFG's *shura* council, and Anis al-Sharif, in charge of communication for the group, supported the establishment of the Libyan Islamic Movement for Change (LIMC) to act as a political actor during the revolution. They also demanded a more diverse NTC (Fitzgerald 2015: 182). Some exiled members of the LIFG joined the battlefield and fought next to non-Islamist revolutionaries in mixed brigades such as the Martyrs of Abu Salim, the Umar al-Mukhtar, the Rafallah al-Sahati and the 17 February Battalion (Lacher and Labnouji 2015: 34; Cole and Khan 2015: 77).

The Libyan Muslim Brotherhood and the LIMC agreed to counter the more secular elements in the NTC and established in April 2011 *al-Tajammu al-Watani* (the National Gathering) to include all 'Islamists from all sides and nationalist who accepted Islam as a [political and legal] frame of reference' (Fitzgerald 2015: 184). In the words of Alamin Bilhaj: 'We did not want to create an Islamic party or push an Islamic revolution because while the majority of Libyan people are Muslims, they are not Islamists. [...] The idea was to create something bigger, more nationalist in tone, but conservative' (Fitzgerald 2015: 184).

After some lobbying, Brotherhood member Alamin Bilhaj became one of the Tripoli representatives within the NTC. Salam Shaikhi, also a Brotherhood member and *imam* who returned to Libya from Manchester (UK), headed the religious affairs portfolio in the NTC (Fitzgerald 2015: 184-85). The membership of these individuals in the NTC signalled the access of the Muslim Brotherhood and its Islamist ideology to the main transitional institution. After the revolution, several Brotherhood exiles contributed to the formation of the Brotherhood-associated Justice and Construction Party and ran for office. Some, like Majda Fallah, a member of the *shura* council who lived in exile for decades and returned to Libya in 2007, gained seats in the first elected legislative assembly, the General National Congress (GNC) in 2012 (Khalil 2014: 104). After the revolution, former members of the LIFG went in different directions with some softening ideologically (Lacher and Labnouji 2015: 36). Some established political parties. A large group, for instance, established al-Umma al-Wasat (the Moderate Nation), led by former exile Sami al-Saadi that gathered former Libyan jihadists coming from the experience of exile and rendition like Khalid al-Sharif (Fitzgerald 2015: 200). Khalid al-Sharif and Abd al-Basit Bu Hliqa also served respectively as deputy minister of Defence and deputy minister of Interior in post-revolutionary transitional governments (Fitzgerald 2018: 129).

Nevertheless, the Islamist political formations were not hugely successful in the 2012 legislative elections, possibly confirming what Alamin Bilhaj suggested: Libyans are Muslim but they are not Islamists. The Justice and Construction party won 17 out of the 80 seats reserved to political parties and 17 out of 120 seats reserved to independents who declared their association with the Justice and Construction Party. Umma al-Wasat won one seat. Salafi party lists won four seats and Salafi independents or associated with party lists won 23 seats (Fitzgerald 2015: 200; Lacher 2013: 9). Nevertheless, these Islamist formations represent a section of the Libyan population that understands the role of Islam as integral to that of the state compared to other strands of the Libyan society that accused the Islamists of manipulating their religion to build political consensus, thereby *de facto* separating Libyan people on the basis of religion and how it should be practiced.

The claim that Islamism infiltrated Libyan transitional institutions and the battlefield through members of the diaspora, while probably exaggerated in proportions, reflects the trends exemplified above. However, as observed in the previous two chapters, these groups were not really alien nor entirely new to Libya, but rather reflected global ideoscapes and the ability of those to flow freely in and out of Libya. The 2000s, in particular, were a decade of openings from the regime towards the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafi Madkhali and the LIFG that prompted their emergence in the public space in Libya. One interviewee associated the flow of returnees at the end of the 2000s with the initiative of reconciliation led by Saif al-Islam Gaddafi that led to the return of some members of the Muslim Brotherhood, as well as to the release of the majority of Muslim Brotherhood and LIFG's members from prison by February 2011. Prominent leaders of the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood, like Imad al-Banani and Abd al-Razzaq al-Aradi, had returned to Libya before 2011, although officially distancing themselves from the organisation. In 2009, the Muslim Brotherhood network inside Libya was estimated to number a few thousand (Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 197; Fitzgerald 2015: 181). This interviewee, who was involved with the more liberal strand of civil society, observed in that respect:

Before the revolution, there was this wave of people coming back from abroad at the end of the 2000s. [...] not everybody but some of them came with Saif al-Gaddafi initiative. So, I got to meet the kids when I was in college because it was an international college to study in English. They came, and they were a bit annoying, sorry. They came from a different background, surprisingly religious, very religious and a different thinking of Islam than the

one we know, different from the Maliki Islam we know, the moderate, nice, conservative but not-too-tough-on-you kind of Islam. They were from the Muslim Brotherhood. You can tell from the way they think. There was one guy who told me he does not believe in borders or this girl who likes to hang out in the mosque. Which is not a problem, it's not a problem but it's new to us. People preaching us about a religion that we thought we knew about. It was imported Islam. [...] very unusual and abnormal Islamic values that we did not need and we don't apply till this day.<sup>98</sup>

The words of this interviewee reflect the experience of a Libyan teenager who met peers from the returning Islamist diaspora ('they') in the 2000s and identified their values and background as 'surprisingly religious', 'unusual and abnormal' compared to those of the majority of Libyan people ('we') that he is familiar and identifies with. Here he draws a line between the Libyan Maliki Islam and what he sees as the diasporic Islam of the Muslim Brotherhood. He also claims to speak for Libyans ('we') when saying that these values are not necessary nor applied in Libya today. Another civil society representative observed with respect to Salafism:

Salafism came from outside and does not have roots or *sheiks* in Libya. They [Salafists] still get *fatwas* from Saudi Arabia or Jordan and that means it [Salafism] does not exist in Libyan society. But we can find graveyards of Sufi *sheiks* and still [Libyan] people celebrate religious *eid* [festivities] in the Sufi way. You find, for example, Sufi from Jaghbub on the Egyptian border, and from places like Zwara on the coast. You find it [Sufism] in Kufra and Ghat as well.<sup>99</sup>

The interviewee here presents Sufism as an ancient and nation-wide current while the more recent Salafi movement cannot even rely on the presence of scholars inside Libya to issue rulings. For him this is proof of the exogenous nature of Salafism in the Libyan society. In fact, as observed in the previous chapter, the regime invited in Salafism in the 1990s to counter the Muslim Brotherhood and home grown *jihadism* (Ali 2017). Salafi Madkhalism grew in Libya in the second half of the 2000s with the support of the regime, which invited Saudi clerics into Libya as part of the initiative to deradicalize former LIFG members (Wehrey 2016). Ideologically, Madkhalism is opposed to the Maliki school of jurisprudence (Ali 2017). Salafism, therefore, is exogenous to

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<sup>98</sup> Interviewee #6.

<sup>99</sup> Interviewee #7.



Libya in so far as it was originally imported from Saudi Arabia, but it has been present inside the country for decades.

At the beginning of the revolution, Salafi-Madkhali preachers encouraged their followers to side with the regime, a choice that made them popular among Gaddafi supporters. However, during the take of Tripoli, in August 2011, they took up weapons and sided with the revolutionaries (Wehrey 2016; Meddeb et al. 2017). In the aftermath of the revolution, they took advantage of the absence of state authority to proselytise, take control of mosques, clamp down on the sale of alcohol, demolish Sufi shrines, tombs and mosques and attack the beliefs of Sufi Muslims as heretical (St John 2013: 100). The demolitions of shrines in Zliten were overseen by Muhammad al Madkhali, the brother of the Saudi leader of the movement Rabee al-Madkhali, who encouraged other Madkhalists to do the same. The relevance of external funding and backing from the Gulf in the development of the movement and recruitment of young men into Salafi armed groups is evident (Wehrey 2016; France24 2012). By establishing a presence within armed groups and paramilitary structures such as the al-Tawhid Battalion, the 604th Infantry Battalion, the Special Deterrence Force and the Libyan National Army, Salafists gained control of the streets and worked towards imposing new social norms on Libyan people. An interviewee, a politician involved with the National Front for the Salvation of Libya said:

They want to establish a new social code and turn the country into Saudi Arabia which is ridiculous.<sup>100</sup>

Some interviewees also observed how as a result of the rise of Salafism men go more often to the mosque, dress differently and wear a beard, while women experience unprecedented restrictions on their freedom of movement. One of them, a man in his early thirties who used to work in civil society organisations in Benghazi and left the city due to the threats received by Salafists armed groups, recalled how Salafists wanted people to stop celebrating a religious festivity, the Prophet's birthday, *mawlid*, considered *haram* (sin) by them:

We have a culture of doing something called *asida* [typical dish] and it's a normal thing, just like partying. Other religious people, *wahabis*, are against it and say that 'it's *haram*, don't do it' and they force people not to do it. And all the people in Benghazi and all the

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<sup>100</sup> Interviewee #18.

east, I don't know, maybe the same thing in the west, they did it just to prove that this is our culture.<sup>101</sup>

Here the interviewee presents this as a Libyan ('we') cultural practice shared across the country that Salafists are challenging, but people defied them and celebrated *mawlid* to reaffirm their religious practices and identity. Today, Madkhalists own schools and religious academies where they give lessons and hold seminars inviting sheiks from Saudi Arabia (Ali 2017).

In another instance, the flows of people and ideas from Syria to Libya after 2011 was crucial for the rise of Salafi-Jihadism in Libya and is yet another instance of the relevance of these flows in reshaping Libyan society and Libyanness. Libyan returnees from Syria, where they fought after 2011 in some cases joining the Islamic State (IS), were responsible for the establishment of Islamic State branches in Derna and Sirte with the assistance of non-Libyan IS senior figures (Lacher and Labnouji 2015: 45). These were opposed and ultimately eradicated from their main outposts in the coast by a coalition of Libyan armed forces that included local jihadists, Salafists and former members of the LIFG. In 2018, they numbered no more than 600 people (Fitzgerald 2018: 131) and remained scattered across the country conducting sporadic attacks against other armed groups in the centre and in the south.

While Sunni Maliki Islam and Sufism have a centuries-old tradition in the North African region and in what constitutes Libya today, one cannot ignore the emergence of Islamist currents and groups in Libya in the late twentieth century that, as much as in the rest of the world, gained support among some sections of the population. Indeed, at the same time as the Islamism of the Muslim Brotherhood, Salafism and Salafi-Jihadism gained momentum as global ideologies and movements, they also emerged inside Libya. It was the regime's repression that provided an obstacle to the spreading of these ideologies but also created the conditions for these to develop underground, in exile, or in the case of Salafi Madkhalism in open sight in Libya in the 2000s. In fact, one interviewee observed that even before the revolution, there were people in Libya who practised Islam in a way that was more obsequious and different from the way the majority of Libyans practised the faith. Referring to the years preceding the revolution, he observed:

In Libya, if you grew a beard, if you went to the mosque daily you were called 'Sunni', that was your name, which meant you were following the *Sunnah* of Prophet Muhammad. We

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<sup>101</sup> Interviewee #25.

all do that, we are all Sunni but that term was used to distinguish them from us because they were practising more. And that was the case in the east or in the west [of Libya].<sup>102</sup>

By referring to ‘them’ and ‘us’ the interviewee draws a line between two different ways of practising Islam, one more moderate and majoritarian and another one more obsequious and minoritarian, but in so doing he acknowledged the existence of more extreme trends across Libya in the years preceding the revolution. Islamism in its different forms can hardly be described as new or exogenous to Libyan society today, but what really changed during and after 2011 was the reach and ability of these ideas and groups to circulate unchecked inside Libya. That was unprecedented and offered the opportunity for those coming from exile to join their peers in Libya. When global and local links were recomposed in 2011 these ideologies were able to emerge, challenging moderate Islam, its role in the society, the way people practice the faith and live their everyday lives, ultimately calling into question the role of Islam as a unifying national identifier. Islamism challenged the unity of the Libyan nation on the basis of different interpretations and understanding of Islamic beliefs and practices.

Indeed, after 2011, Islam became a polarizing and divisive factor exploited by political forces. An interviewee observed:

When it comes to the political side, people have started to use religion, tribe, family and I would not really call it religious difference but a negative way to utilise uniting factors in the country to separate [people].<sup>103</sup>

In the forty-two years of the Gaddafi regime, Gaddafi used Islam to legitimise his rule. He erased the role of religious authorities, bringing Islam under the control of the state and repressing political Islam while ensuring the compliance of the Libyan legal system with Islam and *Sharia*. The emergence of Islamism challenged the role of Islam vis-à-vis the state and Libyan society. This was particularly evident in the debate around the role of *Sharia* law - the Islamic law derived from the religious precepts of the *Quran* and the *Hadith* - in the new Libya.

Indeed, when it comes to the role of *Sharia* law, some Libyans displayed rather conservative attitudes possibly rooted in the integral role played by *Sharia* in the Libyan state during the years of the Gaddafi regime. During the revolution a team within the NTC working on the draft of the transitional roadmap referred to Islam as the religion of the state and to *Sharia* as

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<sup>102</sup> Interviewee #10.

<sup>103</sup> Interviewee #5.

a main source of legislation. Members of the Brotherhood within the NTC and other Islamist factions outside the council - mainly Salafists - demonstrated against this and opposed the draft that ultimately was modified to refer to *Sharia* as *the* main source of legislation (Fitzgerald 2015: 186-87). The dichotomy between Islamists and non-Islamists emerged once again. Commentators at the time observed that the NTC roadmap did not reflect the position of Libyans on the issue of *Sharia*. Public opinion surveys in 2013 reported that a majority of Libyans want *Sharia* to be a source of legislation but not *the* main source of legislation (Saab 2015; NDI 2013b: 27; 2013a: 12).

Among the interviewees, across the political spectrum, in Libya as well as in the diaspora, there was agreement around acknowledging some space for *Sharia* in the constitution while doing it in a way so as not to radically transform the country's social and religious fabric. An interviewee, a freelance journalist, observed:

People [in Libya] have an Islamic identity but it differs from one person to another. Some are Salafi, some Salafi-jihadist, some Sufis and each of them think that *Sharia* means what they view as *Sharia* and if you speak to each of them you see the difference and you realise that you cannot have something like *Sharia*, it does not exist. I hope that religion will have no role in the constitution for this reason. But that's a very unpopular thing to say in Libya.<sup>104</sup>

The interviewee recognizes that while Libyans share an Islamic identity, their interpretations of *Sharia* differ, based on the different Islamist currents that emerged after 2011. It is for this reason that he wishes for religion to remain outside of the Constitution, but he acknowledges that this view is not shared by the majority of Libyans. Another representative of civil society observed that there is very little awareness of what *Sharia* is among Libyan people:

They just impose this as a restriction and a religious duty without understanding it.<sup>105</sup>

Similar points of view were expressed by diaspora interviewees. One observed how it is necessary to acknowledge the fundamentals of *Sharia* in the Constitution to appease the conservative elements of the society and reassure them by saying 'look we are still a Muslim country we have not lost this key factor of identification'.<sup>106</sup> Another who associated himself with the Muslim

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<sup>104</sup> Interviewee #34.

<sup>105</sup> Interviewee #30.

<sup>106</sup> Interviewee #37.

Brotherhood suggested putting *Sharia* ‘on hold because no one can agree on what it is, everyone has his own way, so for now we leave it out’.<sup>107</sup> Some thought that separating state and religious authorities would be beneficial in the current political circumstances in which religious authorities have taken sides, fuelling the conflict but also as a principle to ensure a limitation to the interference of religious authorities in state and political affairs. This, however, was identified as a minority position.

The debate on *Sharia* law tackles the tense relationship between state and religion and the role of Islam as a national identifier. The regime subordinated Islam to the state, with state laws integrated with the Islamic *Sharia* law and made of its vision of Islam a core national identifier that also legitimised Gaddafi’s rule. Other visions of Islam and Islamist ideologies were repressed but developed within some groups in the diaspora or underground inside the country. After 2011 Islam acquired a whole new connotation in the everyday life of individuals as much as in the political game. The supposed unity among Libyans based on the Sunni Maliki school of law gave way to the emergence of Islamist ideologies and trends that compete for power, legitimacy and authority reconfiguring a key national identifier.

This section showed how the flows of people in and out of Libya are perceived, at least in part, as disrupting the traditional and predominant understanding of the diacritics of the Libyan nation by some civil society activists and members of the transitional political elite in Libya. Although language and traditions related to food and clothing are maintained across space, the diaspora is ‘othered’ based on social norms and behaviours, as well as religious practices and beliefs. Ultimately, we observe how the older flows of ideas and people that emerged in the 2000s were finally free to navigate the Libyan national space after 2011. The result is a contest of ethnic and religious groups around the ethno-cultural dimension of the nation that nonetheless contributes to strengthen or challenge their sense of belonging to the nation.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This chapter started to address the impact of the 2011 revolution on nationness and practices of nationhood. ICT developments and the flows of people affected the relationship between the national and the global and the private sphere, civil society and the state in several respects. This

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<sup>107</sup> Interviewee #10.

chapter focused on the ethno-cultural attributes that the agents under examination considered prominent in shaping their sense of Libyanness.

Kinship is a key element in determining membership of the Libyan political community both 'at home' and in the diaspora, and a foundation of other forms of groupness, such as tribe and ethnicity. This shows continuity with the ideology of the regime. The flows of people across history are imagined as having constituted a homogeneous national social fabric based on strong familial and tribal ties that are the foundation of Libyan society. In the imagination of some interviewees, that society remains exclusively Arab. They exclude the non-Arab components of Libyan society on a social and political level based on a selective interpretation of migratory flows.

Challenging this state of affairs were representatives of the emerging Libyan civil society that, as the next chapter will also show, displayed an inclusive and pluralistic understanding of the nation but fell short of including some sections of the diaspora that were 'othered'. Transforming the archive of ethnic and cultural differences into diacritics of the national community will take a much greater effort. The unprecedented opportunity to explore differences and similarities at 'home' and in the diaspora, for now, resulted in questioning the membership of ethnic minorities and of the diaspora to the Libyan nation.

Lastly, religion, that was widely perceived as unifying among the majority of interviewees, has de facto resulted in yet another heavily contested field. The agency of people carrying those ideas was enhanced to an unprecedented level, influencing the way Libyans at home practise the faith in their everyday lives, but also challenging the role of Islam as a unifying cultural identifier. The global flows of people and ideas facilitated this process and made one of the few established elements at the core of Libyanness highly contested. Enhanced freedom and access to the outside world challenges Libyanness in its more traditional understanding and the definition of religion as a key marker. Overall, the civil society, including ethnic minorities and the diaspora, challenged the concept of the homogenous Arab and Muslim national community dear to the Gaddafi regime. The revolution provided an opportunity for new ideas around the ethno-cultural dimension of the nation to emerge rendering it highly contested.

## **Chapter 6 Exploring Nationness and Nationhood: The Civic-Political Dimension**

### **1. Introduction**

This chapter continues to explore how the post-revolutionary political elite, the civil society and the diaspora imagine the nation, assert nationness and practise nationhood in everyday life. The focus is on the civic-political dimension, that is the nation understood as a political community under the control of a state that exercises its monopoly over a defined territory (Vassenden 2010). When asked about the political ties that bind ‘Libyans’ together, the interviewees referred to the shared historical past as the most important ‘objective’ factor underpinning this dimension of the nation and contributing to groupness. In a country where state institutions were detached from the citizens, political parties were banned, and civil society did not exist, the act of imagining and reproducing a shared history featured prominently in the narratives of the interviewees and in everyday practices and performances.

Narratives, practices and use of symbols are key to unveil the process of creation of a national social imaginary that sustains people’s attachment to the past and their sense of identification and belonging in everyday life (Antonsich 2016; Calhoun 2002, 2007, 2017; Spasić 2017). This chapter will unveil how historical narratives and symbols emerged and found expression during and after the 2011 revolution in everyday practices and performances. In particular, civil society’s engagement online illustrates how civil society activists, as well as ordinary citizens, performed nationhood after 2011, contributing to redefine the national imaginary as a constructed landscape of collective aspirations (Appadurai 1996). These are ways to represent and act out ‘the nation’, negotiate and reproduce national frameworks while reinterpreting historical symbols and memories that, through an active social co-production, result in a process of affirmation of the sense of belonging to and identification with the nation (Déloye 2013: 617).

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first one contextualizes the interplay between politics of memory and nationalist ideology in Libya before and after 2011. The second section evaluates how the interviewees imagine and reproduce the ancient accidents of history, war and geography pertaining to the territory that constitutes Libya today and how they ‘Libyanise’ the history of that land establishing the antiquity of the nation. The third section dissects the relevance

of the anti-colonial struggle in the historical collective memory through an analysis of narratives and practices among the agents under examination. The fourth section presents the contentious narratives concerning the independence and the Libyan Kingdom and how interviewees in the diaspora and 'at home' elaborated, interpreted and performed this period of Libyan history while making of its national symbols the symbols of post-Gaddafi Libya. The fifth section evaluates the narratives concerning the Gaddafi regime and the way that period in Libyan history became a repository of images of new martyrs that came to populate the national imaginary after 2011. The chapter examines how the global cultural flows contributed to craft the civic-political dimension of the nation and to redefine nationness and nationhood after 2011.

## **2. Contextualising history, politics of memory and nationalism in Libya**

As discussed in the historical chapter, the politics of memory has been the main tool of state-led nation-building in Libya since independence. In practice this meant creating new historical narratives and challenging pre-existing ones to generate legitimation and support for the regime. The anti-colonial struggle was the main focus of these efforts. As Anna Baldinetti and Lisa Anderson pointed out, the King and Gaddafi commissioned historians to rewrite the history of the anti-colonial struggle and crafted a certain idea of nation through the education system and the media available at the time (Anderson 1991c; Baldinetti 2010). Chapter Four of this thesis showed how during the years of the Gaddafi regime people in Libya were mostly subject to the regime's historical propaganda, although some fostered alternative historical accounts and commemorations within the family. Meanwhile, individuals in the diaspora, particularly those members of the political opposition, fostered alternative historical narratives around ancient history, the events that led to independence and the years of the Kingdom. In their narratives and imagination these periods of Libyan history held great relevance.

The 2011 revolution provided the opportunity to reinterpret historical symbols and memories within the public space and online. As discussed in Chapter Four, the flows of people and ideas during the revolution and in its aftermath allowed for this process to unfold, facilitated by ICT and particularly the Internet. Reinterpreting historical symbols and memories is a way to act out the nation, negotiate and reproduce national frameworks around the ancient history and the seminal moment of its creation, the memories of the fight against the colonial occupation and of



the struggle for independence, the period of the Libyan Kingdom, and the years of the Gaddafi regime. In so doing, the national history and the national imaginary were challenged and redefined.

In particular, the analysis of the activities and Facebook pages of CSOs revealed that activists in Libya and in the diaspora contributed to reformulating and filling the gaps in the regime's hegemonic historical narrative by sharing photos of historical events, figures and symbols, with an emphasis on the anti-colonial struggle, independence, the Kingdom, and the Gaddafi regime. This is a bottom-up form of politics of memory and a form of everyday nationalism. The instances discussed across the chapter are examples of hot and banal nationalism manifested in public performances. Hot nationalism in this context refers to civil conflict that, to the same extent as warfare, results in a period of nationalist mobilization that deposits layers of experience into collective memory. Combining the legacy of heroes, memories of collective endurance, commemorative ceremonies, and sacred sites thicken 'the texture of a national culture, providing reference points both inspiring and shameful that orient the members of the nation in everyday life' (Hutchinson 2006: 448). However, for national symbols to be available for dramatic moments of mobilization, nationalism must be produced and reproduced in its banal and everyday forms. Everyday nationalism, that is, the constant reproduction of a sense of national belonging in everyday life to create an 'us' of which we are proud and defensive, is a condition for the appearance of hot nationalism (Calhoun 2017: 19).

It is only by contextualizing the appearance of hot nationalism in 2011 within everyday practices in Libya and in the diaspora, and nationalist ideology as developed by state institutions and the political communities in the diaspora, that we can make sense of it and its evolution into forms of historical commemoration, the canonization of martyrs and the institutionalization of symbols intended to create or sustain a sense of belonging to the nation in individuals in the aftermath of the revolution (Turner 2006: 205-06). These are manifestations of everyday nationalism that emerge from the ideological foundations of nationalism observed in the narratives and practices of the regime and some groups in the diaspora as well as in Libya before 2011 (Billig 1995; Malešević 2013). This chapter traces the links and trends of continuity and change of the process of transformation of nationalist ideology into everyday nationalism.

Before moving on to the analysis, it is worth recalling that the representatives of the political elite interviewed for this research were either members of the political opposition in exile who returned to Libya during the revolution, or members of the political elite in Libya who stood

against the regime during the revolution and became part of the transitional political elite. They belong to the anti-Gaddafi camp. The representatives of civil society were also critical of the regime, even those who contributed to regime-led initiatives in the 2000s. The political positions of these interviewees are reflected in their narratives and views over the legacy of the regime that were mostly negative. Moreover, there was a widely shared perception among the interviewees that criticism and opposition to Gaddafi was largely shared among Libyans ‘at home’ and in the diaspora, and that opposition to the regime united the vast majority of Libyans during and after 2011.

These views and perceptions are compared to the cautionary views of a few interviewees and the existence of regime loyalists and counter-revolutionary forces who were side-lined in the immediate aftermath of the revolution. Some of them were among those who fled the country in 2011. Estimates suggest that 550,000 people were uprooted after the conflict although the majority returned after the fall of the regime (Bradley, Fraihat, and Mzioudet 2016: ix). The Gaddafi loyalists in Tunisia, for instance, established an organization and have been active over the last few years. The organisation declared itself to be composed of a group of exiled former soldiers, between 15,000 and 20,000 people (Galtier 2016). One interviewee in the diaspora observed:

[After the 2011 revolution] there is no unity on many fronts. [...] There is no unity on, sort of... scoring what we do with Gaddafi loyalists or what we do now with the extremists. There is no unity on many things. And it’s really hard to build that unity especially if you have forty-two years of one brand, call it brand X, that was so predominant and so strong and everywhere you go, every speech there was and in the education system. That thing [system] is gone and you have no strong replacement for it and you don’t have a national conversation that acknowledges that.<sup>108</sup>

This interviewee, like a few others, suggests that the end of the regime was not necessarily a unifying moment like the majority tended to report, but instead acknowledged the existence of loyalists whose views remained excluded from the political scene. This is important to consider in order to underline the ambivalence towards the period of the Gaddafi regime that is not captured in the narratives of the research participants and that will possibly characterize the interpretation of the more recent historical past for years to come.

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<sup>108</sup> Interviewee #36.

### 3. The ancient history of the nation

Against this background, we start by examining how the interviewees imagine the ancient accidents of history, war and geography related to the territory constituting Libya today as part and parcel of Libyan history. In so doing, they provided historical depth to the modern nation-state established in the twentieth century, ‘Libyanising’ the ancient history of that territory and establishing the antiquity of the Libyan nation. The ancient flows of people and the way these were selectively valorised were key in this process.

Most interviewees displayed a sense of pride in the ancient history of the Libyan nation and rejected the view that Libya is an artificial and young nation created by Western powers. An interviewee from the diaspora involved with the political opposition observed:

I once read an academic study of Libya, I forgot the author. His story in the paper was that Libya is a unique case where statehood preceded nationhood. I did not accept the proposition and I thought: Well, no, we are a nation!<sup>109</sup>

As Frank Golino pointed out, in the late 1960s, studies by Rejai and Enlow, and by Emerson suggested that in the newly independent countries of Africa, statehood preceded nationhood (Golino 1970: 338; Emerson 1969; Rejai and Enlow 1969). The interviewee might be referring to the work of these scholars. As a student and exile in the diaspora, he stressed instead his sense of nationhood and belief in the antiquity of the Libyan nation.

This perception and belief is in line with the narratives of several other interviewees that testify to the attempts at establishing the antiquity of the nation based on a land and a population that evolved across centuries and came to constitute what Libya is today – a form of constructed primordialism. An interviewee representative of the civil society ‘at home’ observed:

Libya is a nation. To have a land... this land has natural resources. These resources were created by generations and centuries and history. And on this spot of land there is a nation, a population. This population was created in history by loads of cultures and religions.<sup>110</sup>

The interviewee presents the concept of nation as the combination of common territory and shared history that people of different cultures and religions contributed to shape, ultimately producing a community of people that define themselves as a nation. Asked what are the common

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<sup>109</sup> Interviewee #28.

<sup>110</sup> Interviewee #29.

characteristics that bind Libyans together into a nation, another interviewee from the diaspora observed:

Common culture, common language, the geographical location, history, the common shared history, going back to, you know, to the ancient Libu tribes and their fights with the Pharaohs and then adding on, layer after layer, the diverse communities that came in and settled in what is now known as modern day Libya.<sup>111</sup>

Beyond the culture and the language whose relevance to the sense of unity, belonging and identification with the nation has already been discussed, these interviewees introduced the themes of a common territory and shared history. In the imagination of this woman from the diaspora, the history of Libya starts with the Libu Berber tribes whose presence is first attested in the area that constitutes Libya today in the second millennium BC (Lugan 2016: 50-57). That territory is imagined as the original land of the Libyan nation where the overlapping of peoples and communities eventually resulted in the Libyan nation-state.

This effort at Libyanising the history of what constitutes Libyan territory today was observed among several interviewees when tracing the origins of the nation. The majority of them, however, referred to the Arab invasion of North Africa as the seminal moment of the Libyan nation. An interviewee from the diaspora representative of the transitional political elite observed:

Libya will be easy to understand by going through its history. Libya was the connecting point between Western Arabs and Eastern Arabs. If you go to Egypt you never feel that you are an Arab. If you go to the west, Algeria and Morocco, it is the same thing. But when you are in Libya you think you are in Jordan or in Saudi Arabia. So it was a passage. Libya Arabised in the 7th century but it only fully Arabised in the 11th century. You do not have many Amazigh compared to Algeria and Morocco.<sup>112</sup>

Identifying the beginning of Libyan history with the Arab invasion while diminishing the relevance and presence of indigenous communities before the arrival of the Arabs is problematic vis-à-vis the communities that today see themselves as descendants of these indigenous people who are *de facto* excluded from the history of the nation. Here we notice how the flows of people are imagined as shaping the Libyan nation, this time through the prism of selective historical narratives and

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<sup>111</sup> Interviewee #12.

<sup>112</sup> Interviewee #21.

interpretations that achieve the same result observed in the previous chapter: defining the Libyan nation as an Arab-Muslim nation.

According to Golino, this reflects a tendency among Libyans to reject cultural identification with their pre-Islamic history and to obliterate from the national consciousness the historical heritage associated with these migratory flows (Golino 1970: 346-47). Nevertheless, some interviewees, particularly among the civil society representatives, expressed a more nuanced and inclusive vision of Libya's ancient history that not only values the presence of indigenous communities and their role in crafting Libyan history, but also regards the flows of people preceding the arrival of the Arabs as contributing to form the Libyan nation that Libyans value today. This reflects the celebration of the pre-Islamic cultural heritage observed in the social media pages of CSOs and discussed in the previous chapter. In a rare example of positive valorisation of pre-Islamic history coming from a representative of the political elite 'at home', a member of the House of Representatives observed:

The culture, Libyan culture has developed for thousands of years through engagement with other cultures who have been coming and going. Greeks, Muslims, all the, you know, the movements through history. Libyan people value their nation. [...] Libyans have an understanding of culture and good respect for the past. You can see how they treat Roman architecture, the engagement of years before.<sup>113</sup>

The interviewee refers to a Libyan culture that has developed for thousands of years. We recall the Greeks who arrived in Cyrenaica in the 7th century BC, the Phoenicians who reached the coast of Tripolitania in the 8th century BC, the Romans who occupied the whole of northern Libya by the first century AD, the Vandals and the Byzantines who followed in the 5th and 6th century encountering the resistance of the Berbers that the Romans had faced before (Wright 2012). The interviewee here suggests that Libyan people value and respect this historical past.

The #MyLibya campaign, for instance, provided several instances of the positive valorisation of the pre-Islamic past. Twitter users referred to Libya as a 'land of history and civilizations' and shared photos of the ancient Roman and Greek ruins of Leptis Magna, Sabratha and Cyrene while using hashtags like #TheLibyaYouDoNotKnow (Farkash 2015b; Shebani 2015; Farkash 2015a). These were the ruins that the regime neglected and Gaddafi equated with the Italian occupiers. As recounted by Hafeed Walda, a Libyan professor of archaeology, the Roman

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<sup>113</sup> Interviewee #33.

statue of Septimius Severus stood as a reminder of a culturally and economically rich Libya, part of the Mediterranean region, far from being the isolated country that the Gaddafi regime turned it into. The regime tried to get rid of the statue, but it was saved by the people of Leptis Magna that took care of it waiting for a better future where it could be brought back to its glory again (Draper 2013). The diaspora group Shabab Libya shared the National Geographic reportage that reported this story titled 'New Old Libya' (ShababLibya 2013h). This was an act of re-appropriation of the historical past.

In another attempt at making Libyan history ancient and inclusive, few representatives of the civil society referred to the Jewish component of the Libyan nation. Although this was a position shared by a minority of interviewees in the diaspora and few representatives of civil society 'at home', it is nonetheless worthy to address it briefly in so far as it relates to the attempt at establishing the antique and pluralistic nature of the nation. A woman from the diaspora observed:

A community of Libyan Jews, pre-existing Islam, had been there for thousands of years and they were thrown out of the country, you know, fully by 1969. There needs to be room made for inclusion of a community that belongs to... to ... to... Libya as well. They are no less Libyan than Libyan Sunni Muslims. And there should be an eventual effort made to ensure that they can return if this is what they want. They have lands that they need to reclaim, they have, you know... this is their choice.<sup>114</sup>

Jews migrated for generations to Cyrenaica in the first millennium BC although larger flows started in the first century AD. Some Jews were also said to have become an important element of the Berber Zenata tribal confederation (Wright 2012: 32-48). The right to return and reparations of the Jewish community expressed by this interviewee is based on their long-established presence in that territory which in turn justifies the claim that they belong to Libya as much as Muslim Libyans. This interviewee, however, stressed that her position on this matter is not shared by the majority of Libyans and described her perception of how the majority of Libyans feel about the nation in these terms:

When I speak about the need for inclusion of the Libyan Jews, some Libyans would say: 'Uh, uh, this is not something we can accept'. There are issues of... you know, there are other regional, political and security dimensions that are involved and there is a loss of trust between the two communities. So I think that Libyans do believe in the need for a

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<sup>114</sup> Interviewee #12.

diverse society [...] It should include everyone and should not exclude anyone and the average Libyan would probably sit a little bit further in the middle and say: ‘Yes, include everyone. Yes the Berbers. Yes the Tuareg. Yes this and that’. Ehm... yet, you know, maybe not that particularly sticking point of Libyan Jews. They [Libyans] hold issues with that.<sup>115</sup>

This is a clear example of how history is imagined and, in turn, informs the way this individual from the diaspora imagines the Libyan nation and perceives others doing so. In general, those interviewees who displayed a more inclusive and pluralistic understanding of history imagine an inclusive and pluralistic nation.

As observed in this section, in defining the terms of the antiquity of the Libyan nation, the political elite and civil society, at home and in the diaspora, tended to split between those who emphasized the Arab history of Libya and the Arab origins of the nation, and those who went back in history and displayed a more nuanced and inclusive view. All of them were intent in establishing the ancient roots of the nation. The way in which the flows of people are seen as determining the antiquity of the Libyan nation and its civic-political dimension confirms the findings related to the ethno-cultural dimension. After 2011, the Libyan nation is understood as first and foremost Arab and Muslim. Nevertheless, civil society and some in the diaspora express a more pluralistic understanding of that history, one that includes the non-Arab indigenous communities and values positively the flows of people preceding the arrival of the Arabs and Islam, reflecting the attempts at transforming the archive of differences into diacritics of the national community (Appadurai 1996).

#### **4. The anti-colonial struggle and the making of a national hero**

Across post-independence Libyan history, the anti-colonial struggle constituted the key for discussions concerning national identity (Baldinetti 2010: 20). It occupied a major part of the Arab historical narrative sponsored and encouraged by the Sanusi family and by Gaddafi. Libya’s rulers use and production of historiography was meant to support their vision of Libya and to strengthen their power and legitimation. Ultimately, in the words of Del Monte, they hoped to organise and direct the Libyan collective memory, ‘shaping national identity by reconstructing its past’ (Del Monte 2015: 23). In so doing, they made of the anti-colonial struggle the fulcrum of their politics of memory and the country’s crucial historical legacy that survived the end of the Gaddafi regime.

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<sup>115</sup> Interviewee #12.

Indeed, most interviewees referred to the anti-colonial struggle as a key aggregating factor that contributed to shape the civic-political dimension of the nation and a sense of unity among the Libyan people. But how did the political elite and the civil society, ‘at home’ and in the diaspora, re-imagine and re-interpret that historical period and the role and image of its most famous martyr, Umar al-Mukhtar. The representatives of civil society and of the political elite ‘at home’ conceived of the history of the anti-colonial struggle as the history of one united people against foreign occupiers, with Umar al-Mukhtar as the national hero of that struggle. The anti-colonial struggle was seen as one moment in Libyan history when the entire country was fighting against a common enemy. One interviewee representative of civil society ‘at home’ observed:

Libyans shared the same pain under the Italian regime. They were fighting together from Barqa, from Tripoli from the south of Libya. All of them were fighting one enemy at that time. At that time, they came up together with the idea that we are fighting a foreign people that want our country. When they started to build the Libyan nation, it was based on that shared history, that we are fighting together and we have our area, we have to build one nation and be more clear about being a nation, about independence.<sup>116</sup>

The history of the resistance is narrated as a moment in Libyan history that united Libyans from across the country not only in the battle but also through the suffering of people during the occupation. It is described as the basis of a shared history upon which the nation was built and purpose was created to achieve independence and start developing a national consciousness. These narratives reflect Gaddafi’s sponsored politics of memory and, in particular, the work of the Libyan Studies Centre that presented the *jihad* against the Italians as a united national struggle (Baldinetti 2010: 21). Asked whether they could think of any periods or events in Libyan history during which people felt united, the interviewees ‘at home’ referred to the anti-colonial struggle as the most important period. A representative of Libyan civil society ‘at home’ observed:

When the Libyans were trying to fight against the Italians, when they were occupied and [were trying] to get them out of the country, I mean, they all stood up as one united country. One of the most famous and known *jihadists* who fought the Italians was Umar Al-Mukhtar.<sup>117</sup>

Another interviewee, a representative in the HoR, claimed:

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<sup>116</sup> Interviewee #38.

<sup>117</sup> Interviewee #9.



During the bad years of the first and second world war they [Libyans] were working together: Umar al-Mukhtar and the people in the *jihad* against Mussolini. That [the *jihad*] was very very strong.<sup>118</sup>

As exemplified by these quotes, the unity of the Libyan people ‘working together’ in the face of the occupier under the leadership of Umar al-Mukhtar was the predominant narrative among the representatives of civil society and of the political elite ‘at home’. The way these interviewees, both the older and younger generations, narrate this part of Libyan history reflects the regime’s attempts to portray the anti-colonial resistance as a united national struggle, downplaying regional differences to promote the idea of a national unity that pre-dated independence and the Kingdom (Baldinetti 2010: 21).

This is typical of postcolonial states where nationalist leaders tended to engage in establishing a nation-state with a distinct and unified identity against the colonial ‘other’ and to confront internal divisive tendencies (Forrest 2006). As other authors observed in the case of Libya, that was necessary to build a sense of special identity and unique nation among Libyans (Anderson 1991c: 87-88; Del Monte 2015: 23). In postcolonial states, commemoration of historical events of national significance is a source as well as a symbol of national belonging (Turner 2006) and the narratives surrounding these events, incomplete and perspectival, are stories that people tell about their collective existence, in so doing continuously redefining their historical past (Bhabha 1990).

As discussed in the historical chapter, the historical analyses of the anti-colonial struggle tend to present a more nuanced picture of the political and armed unity of the resistance. Although the success of the resistance against the Italians in the famous al-Gardabiyya battle, in 1915, has been associated with the unity of the armed resistance in Fezzan, Cyrenaica and Tripolitania, Ahmida reminds the reader that this unity was exceptional since normally each area organised its local forces independently (Ahmida 2009: 121). The Libyan reactions to colonialism, as he suggests, are better described as a combination of politics of collaboration with the colonialists and resistance to them (Ahmida 2009: 103). Furthermore, the repression of the resistance led to migratory flows that resulted in the lack of united political forces sharing a common vision for the future of Libya at independence (Baldinetti 2010: 52). And yet, the interviewees ‘at home’ imagined the anti-colonial struggle as a moment of national unity.

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<sup>118</sup> Interviewee #33.

Moreover, the interviewees described how the anti-colonial struggle entered everyday life through the voices of its protagonists by turning into a shared national folklore. The regime recorded accounts of the anti-colonial struggle through a major oral history project based on interviews with surviving *mujahideen* in the early 1980s (Baldinetti 2010: 22). As reported by the interviewees and discussed in Chapter Four, these accounts were handed down from the eldest to the youngest generations within the family, through oral traditions, songs, proverbs and folk poetry such as the popular poetry in honour of Umar al-Mukhtar (Baldinetti 2010: 17) or the oral history and poetry of Libyans who survived the concentration camps between 1929 and 1934 (Ahmida 2005: xv). One interviewee from the diaspora observed:

In terms of how we identify ourselves as a political community, whether you are in the south, west or east, we have a shared national folklore which is the war against the Italians and the shared experience of being under Gaddafi and that is a badge of honour, that you survived his mad policies and his mad time in power. And so, that provides the political cohesiveness of sort.<sup>119</sup>

The interviewee suggests that the history of the colonial occupation and the resistance to the Italians is the main aggregating factor for the Libyan political community, equalled only by the resistance to the Gaddafi regime - although this is more ambivalent, as discussed later in the chapter. The memories of the resistance to the Italians and to Gaddafi provide the basis of the country's national folklore and in turn of political cohesiveness, making the anti-colonial struggle the main repository of the Libyan national imaginary 'at home'.

Among the interviewees 'at home', the anti-colonial struggle was associated first and foremost with Umar al-Mukhtar. This reflects a tendency of the historiography on Libya to focus and exploit the heroes of the resistance and al-Mukhtar in particular, while disregarding other social and economic forces (Anderson 1991c: 86). During the early years of the Gaddafi regime, as discussed in the historical chapter, al-Mukhtar was celebrated through ceremonies and monuments, a movie and a book. The movie filled Libyans with pride as it was a rare example of the Libyan struggle for liberation that reached a wide international audience (Del Monte 2015: 15). However, as Baldinetti and Nassar and Boggero pointed out, Umar al-Mukhtar was 'in and out' of the official discourse and in the late 1990s and early 2000s there were several attempts at removing his image from the collective memory by making his book and movie not available or leaving the

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<sup>119</sup> Interviewee #37.

monument in his honour to go to ruin (Baldinetti 2010: 21; Nassar and Boggero 2008: 203). His body was moved from his burial place in Benghazi, which was later blown up by the regime, and relocated to the village of Soluq where he had been hanged by the Italians (Del Monte 2015: 15). And yet Gaddafi used the image and legacy of al-Mukhtar when visiting Italy in 2009. As Del Monte observed, that episode was a clear example of the interconnection between memory, identity, myth and symbolism, and the use of colonial history to serve Gaddafi's interests at the domestic and international level (Del Monte 2015: 79-80).

Nassar and Boggero explained the regime's ambivalence towards Umar al-Mukhtar. On the one hand, his image projected a message of traditional religious values at a time of unsettling social and economic modernisation, a message that resonated well with the tribal and traditionalist Libyan society and particularly so with the elders who still had memories of the anti-colonial struggle and were intent in passing these memories on to their grandchildren. On the other hand, Umar al-Mukhtar and his image also resonated well with the youth, being an inspiring figure of the resistance, celebrated for not giving in to a life of slavery and oppression (Nassar and Boggero 2008: 204).

This can help to contextualise the reappearance of Umar al-Mukhtar's image and name to the forefront of the political and armed struggle in 2011 and in the aftermath of the revolution – see Appendix 4, set of images #4. The image of al-Mukhtar appeared from the very beginning in the streets, squares and demonstrations against the regime in the liberated city of Benghazi, in protests against the regime across the world – e.g. San Francisco and Winnipeg – and in the aftermath of the revolution (ShababLibya 2011bm, 2011bn, 2011bf, 2011j, 2011l, 2011bb, 2011ab, 2012p, 2011ak, 2011aj). The social media pages of diaspora organizations gave it resonance by sharing photos of the national hero among thousands of followers in Libya and across the world. Umar al-Mukhtar was invoked across the political spectrum for political mobilisation by those who wanted to stress his traditional religious values, but also by the youth who looked at him as an example of resistance. His face appeared on placards and on cars, on graffiti in Libyan streets and these photographs soon emerged on social media (ShababLibya 2011au, 2011ab, 2012p, 2011h). The demonstrators chanted slogans attributed to al-Mukhtar such as 'Victory or death!' and 'Live with dignity or die with dignity!' (OrientalReview 2011). In this process of re-appropriation of the national hero's image and symbolic value, the members of the National Transitional Council claimed that 'Al-Mukhtar fought foreign invaders, but these days he would

be fighting a dictator' (OrientalReview 2011). The Egyptian Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, spiritual leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, spoke in support of the rebels and urged them to persevere, saying 'You are the heirs of Umar al-Mukhtar!' (OrientalReview 2011). A member of the LIFG, Abd al-Basit Bu Hliqa, contributed to forming the Umar al-Mukhtar Battalion that brought together militant Islamist *jihadists* and Libyans of diverse backgrounds in the struggle against the regime (Fitzgerald 2015: 190; Benotman, Pack, and Brandon 2013: 213). As the leader of the *jihad* against the Italians, the name of al-Mukhtar was borrowed in the *jihad* against the regime by a group like the LIFG that had tried for two decades to reconcile militant Islamism and nationalist aspirations. The leader of the brigade called al-Mukhtar his hero and other *jihadists* in the group, identified as members of al-Qaeda, also spoke of their respect for the Libyan hero (OrientalReview 2011). One interviewee representative of civil society observed:

The politics of memory, the history of Libya, the colonisation, the fight against colonialism and the Gaddafi regime: these are the big elements right now that unite Libyans. I give you an example. After 2011, nobody related Umar al-Mukhtar to the former regime, even in Benghazi. Umar al-Mukhtar was buried in Benghazi and Gaddafi removed his body from Benghazi to Soluk, a suburb of Benghazi. That was before 2011. Immediately after the revolution, in April or May, the people of Benghazi and all over Libya agreed to bring back the body to the original place. It was a momentum! The politics of memory has been an important part of the Libyan mindset, the nationalist mindset. It does not relate to the revolution but it was the first step [to bring back the body to its original burial place] they [the revolutionaries] took after the revolution. It meant something to them, it meant something about the nation, the Libyan nation. This [the politics of memory] is the most important thing and element that brings Libyans together.<sup>120</sup>

The interviewee brings up the link between politics of memory and nationalism as an aggregating factor during and after the 2011 revolution. As the national hero of the anti-colonial struggle whose story and image dominated the politics of memory of the Libyan institutions until 2011, Umar al-Mukhtar maintained a value of his own in the national imaginary. Reinstating his body in Benghazi, the city where the revolution began in 2011, was a way for the revolutionaries to re-appropriate the image of the national hero and the past.

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<sup>120</sup> Interviewee #30.

The anniversary of the death of al-Mukhtar on the 16<sup>th</sup> of September became an annual occasion to celebrate the martyrs, including those dead fighting against the regime in the 2011 revolution, in what is now known as Libya Martyrs' day (ShababLibya 2012o). In 2011, hundreds of people gathered in Benghazi in front of a newly built burial place where the body of al-Mukhtar was brought back from Soluk (ShababLibya 2011ar). In a religious ceremony, some men wore the traditional folk costumes of the Libyan warriors of the anti-colonial resistance to honour the Libyan hero. This was an instance of historical commemoration, the building of a monument and a place of memory, that sustained the individual sense of belonging (Turner 2006). The following years, on Libya Martyrs' Day, al-Mukhtar was celebrated among the other martyrs of the Libyan pantheon. Photos of these events were shared by civil society in their social media pages, giving them wide resonance inside Libya and among followers in the diaspora (ShababLibya 2012o).

The re-appearance of Umar al-Mukhtar, who had been part of the regime's official historical discourse, during and after the 2011 revolution demonstrated that he had become part of the national imaginary beyond the historical narratives of the regime. In fact, as observed in Chapter Four, pride in the figure of Umar al-Mukhtar had been nurtured among Libyans for decades. This tendency was reflected in the ideas expressed by the research participants and discussed above, as well as in the imaginary fostered by diasporic websites like Libya Watanona. This continuity in the use of the image and of the story of Umar al-Mukhtar demonstrates how the revolutionary hot nationalism relied on banal and everyday nationalism and how that evolved after 2011 in new forms of historical commemoration that feed the sense of belonging to the nation in twenty-first century Libya.

A young interviewee representative of Libyan civil society explained the resilience of the hero in the collective memory and national imaginary in Libya in these terms:

In 1969 they [the regime] imposed ideas and stories about Libyan *jihadists* against the Italian and western invasion by the name of their leader Umar al-Mukhtar. This was basically the one and only story in Libyan history classes about the identity of Libya and Libyan fighters against the invasion. They [the regime] shaped that story and imposed this information and then from the Italian invasion to the era of Gaddafi there was a gap.<sup>121</sup>

The interviewee is critical of the regime's selective politics of memory and school history curricula that focused on the anti-colonial struggle and on the period after the rise to power of Gaddafi while

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<sup>121</sup> Interviewee #30.

ignoring the history of Libyan independence and that of the Sanusi Kingdom. And yet, he acknowledges that this is possibly what rendered Umar al-Mukhtar the national symbol he is today.

The importance attached to education by the regime and its control over it have been discussed in Chapter Three, while in Chapter Four we observed how the regime was responsible for transmitting the institutional version of history and of the Libyan nation through schools in Libya and abroad. As Mohammad-Arif observed, educational systems are key channels to manufacture national identity through the teaching and re-writing of history (Mohammad-Arif 2005: 143). Case studies on South Asia, for instance, have shown how not only schools have the major task of ‘socializing the young into an approved national past, the approving agency being the state’ (Kumar 2001: 20), but particularly in postcolonial societies like Libya the main purpose of education is ‘to disseminate a view of the nation’s past deemed conducive to the strengthening of “national unity” or the furthering of “integration”, whether in the present or in the future’ (Powell 1996: 190). This is an instance of how state institutions can use history for a top-down ideological consolidation. In this case, the Libyan state was successful not only in making Umar al-Mukhtar the main symbol of the anti-colonial struggle but also the main story about Libyan identity, firmly associating the national hero with the civic-political dimension of the nation. More recently, Jaskułowski, Majewski and Surmiak have summarized the wealth of research on this subject and further demonstrated how the state uses school history education to impose a sense of belonging through the construction of a national collective memory (Jaskułowski, Majewski, and Surmiak 2018). In this respect, one interviewee representative of civil society ‘at home’ observed:

[...] in the education system and curricula influenced by the regime [...] it’s all either the history of Umar al-Mukhtar or Muammar Gaddafi struggling against the west or other invasions or defending the country and the nation. Every Libyan has the same idea. They do not have any clues about how Libya achieved independence. After 2011, people have a bit more of a clue about this period but they never knew this during the regime. The former regime just excluded and erased everything about the Kingdom era and Libyan independence and unification and the concepts and ideas under which Libya was united. This all went into the mentality of Libyans. The regime excluded anybody else that opposed this idea. Everyone talking about different ideas either was exiled or has been tortured or jailed. This

is how the regime influenced the identity of Libyans. They imposed one idea of Libya. Umar al-Mukhtar and Gaddafi.<sup>122</sup>

This interviewee suggests that the regime had a monopoly over history and, in turn, over the ideas that Libyan people developed about the nation. Carretero referred to the process of constructing patriotism through history and memories as one of cultural violence that totalitarian regimes of all colours embrace (Carretero 2011: xxvi). The strategy of Gaddafi's regime in this respect is not new in the literature. Indeed, another interviewee representative of civil society associated patriotism with the anti-colonial struggle and Umar al-Mukhtar:

There was the Italian invasion, Umar al-Mukhtar fighting them [the Italians] which means a strong movement against the west. That was the patriotism among Libyans, Umar al-Mukhtar.<sup>123</sup>

The importance of education and of how history was taught inside Libya during the years of the regime was also picked up by a young woman in the diaspora. She observed:

So in the way that things were controlled with respect to education, history and the school system, he [Gaddafi] shaped what the Libyan nation was for them based on what they were educated with. So perhaps, I feel like... I see that a lot, that people of my generation know Libya and their national identity in a way that has a lot to do with the regime, the green flag, perhaps the nonsense of the [Green] Book, and also through a really... even history was something that was very tampered with by the regime, so they also learned certain things.<sup>124</sup>

She is keen to stress the link between education and the idea of nation that the regime wanted to shape and that she saw reflected in the mentality of many among her peers in Libya. The accounts of these young Libyans concerning the impact of the regime's selective politics of memory enacted through the education system are compelling.

And yet, as observed in Chapter Four and in other studies that explored the everyday practices of reproduction of nationhood and nationness with a focus on education, the efforts towards constructing a national identity and the effects of such efforts may be limited or problematic (Miller-Idriss 2009; Siebers 2019; Bénéï 2005; Fox 2004). Resistance can take place at the familial level, as discussed in the case of Libya in Chapter Four, or it can compete with other

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<sup>122</sup> Interviewee #30.

<sup>123</sup> Interviewee #5.

<sup>124</sup> Interviewee #11.

forms of groupness like ethnicity or other ideologies like cosmopolitanism (Siebers 2019: 34). As Fox puts it, ‘the effectiveness of nationalist politics in advancing this [national] view [of the world] ultimately rests upon the uses ordinary people make of it’ (Fox 2004: 363). This section, combined with the analysis of everyday practices around the narration and commemoration of history in Chapter Four, provides us with a better understanding of how the research participants, resisted and interiorized the regime’s narratives. This help us to make sense of the attachment to and display of images of Umar al-Mukhtar in the physical public space and online during and after the 2011 revolution.

This section showed how the ability of the regime to present a one-sided view of the anti-colonial struggle, while trying to obliterate the years of independence and the Kingdom from the country’s collective memory, heavily relied on the capacity to limit the communication between people inside the country and the outside world, while making use of a propaganda machine that reinforced its historical account. The ability to largely control the flows of people and ideas resulted in a highly mediated version of Libyan history that came to inform the national imaginary of those involved in civil society and in transitional politics even after the revolution. Here we observe continuity in a cyclical process of development of national symbols that relies on pre-revolutionary ‘ideological scaffolding’ to mobilise hot nationalism in 2011 and is transformed into new forms of everyday nationalism in its aftermath.

## **5. Independence and the Libyan Kingdom: controversies and symbology of an era**

During the years of the Gaddafi regime, Libyan people ‘at home’ and in the diaspora had different access to information and possibilities to study and debate the history concerning the period of independence and of the Libyan Kingdom. The events in 2011 created the opportunity to discuss these issues in a common public space in Libya and online. According to several interviewees from civil society, although this was an important step in the process of rewriting the country’s history, this period remains a contentious one.

The controversies surrounding independence and the Kingdom were described as a dichotomy between those who attach a positive role to the King and his state-building efforts, and those who viewed the Kingdom as a kleptocratic institution dominated by those who went into exile during the Italian occupation and returned before and after independence. This quote from a



representative of civil society captures the divergent views on the role of the King, of the diaspora and more generally of the political elite at the time of independence and during the Kingdom:

There are two different views [concerning independence and the Kingdom]: either those who are supportive and will tell you that when the independence came Libya was a poor country and the King worked on education and building institutions; and on the other hand there are those who oppose this view and will tell you that it was a Kingdom and people were slaves and only those with money who were abroad during the Italian occupation and came back and became statesmen, them and their families lived a good life until Gaddafi came to power.<sup>125</sup>

Among those interviewees who attached a positive value to the Libyan Kingdom, a tendency to praise the diaspora and overall romanticise about that period can be discerned. This is particularly the case among members of the political elite and civil society originating from the eastern region or whose families were involved in the post-independence state-building efforts. A woman, intellectual and representative of civil society ‘at home’, from Benghazi, observed in this respect:

[...] in the time period between 1948 and 1952 when the subject of Libya was in the UN Security Council agenda at the time of the Libyan independence, the people who stood for Libya were not Libyans inside, they were the people who were outside. Libya was not ready at all to become a state if it was not for the Libyans outside at the time. The people educated outside who lived and stayed outside from 1911 until 1948. The Italian occupation made Libyans poor and at the time the Libyans abroad who had all the financial and psychological requirements not to be affected by the war that happened between Libyans and Italians, they stood from everywhere for Libya to get our independence. They established this country. It was a fight from abroad without guns. With culture.<sup>126</sup>

The return of the diaspora to Libya was promoted by King Idris for state-building purposes (Baldinetti 2010: 25). The interviewee here acknowledges the important role of the diaspora in the process of construction of the Libyan nation-state and celebrates its role at a time when Libyan people ‘at home’ were suffering from years of violence, occupation and under-development. Through the education and culture obtained abroad, the diaspora managed to influence the political process, come back and establish the country. And yet, the political manoeuvring inside the

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<sup>125</sup> Interviewee #19.

<sup>126</sup> Interviewee #29.

country and the crucial role played by non-Libyan external forces in defining the independent state of Libya (Baldinetti 2010: 144), suggest a certain degree of romanticism in the interpretation of the events provided by the interviewee above.

The oldest interviewees who had direct experience of that time tended to describe it as peaceful and characterized by development and stability. One of them, for instance, highlighted the role that the Sanusiyah played in pacifying the country long before independence and during the years of the Kingdom:

What the Sanusi did to Libya when he came from Algeria, he made all these tribes live together in peace. The Sanusi brought peace to Libya. When King Idris formed Libya with the help of the UN, they designed Libya to be a small country with good education and good health. The eighteen years of the Sanusi were the best years in the history of Libya. If I show you pictures, did you see? [He refers to pictures in his office portraying the King]. Go see pictures in universities! I was the production of that period. Born in 1947, baby boom, I lived in the Sanusi time. I was educated under the Sanusi regime. I graduated from university under the Sanusi regime. Believe me, we were demonstrating, sometimes we occupied the streets in Libya in 1966, we wanted the police to arrest us. They refused to arrest us.<sup>127</sup>

The interviewee presents the Sanusiyah as a force for good of Libyan history, although his choice of the word ‘regime’ probably inadvertently suggests the reality of a regime, rather than a democratic system, that *de facto* banned political parties and expelled political opponents, depriving the country of a strong political opposition and of the possibility to develop a democratic political culture (Baldinetti 2010: 144). However, what this and other interviewees stressed in their positive reading of that historical period is the socio-economic development that Libya enjoyed in terms of education, health and some degree of political freedoms such as the ability for students to demonstrate their discontent, later curbed by the Gaddafi regime. And yet, the reference to the peaceful student protests that erupted in the country starting in 1964 is refuted by other sources that mention deaths, arrests and severe jail sentences (Le Tourneau 1968: 297-98; Mantran 1965: 325-26). Another interviewee, a member of the political elite ‘at home’, observed along similar lines:

In Libya, during the monarchy, King Idris was a very wise man and started to build a state and to appoint prime ministers from Tripoli or the south. He chose the ministers. He was

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<sup>127</sup> Interviewee #21.

very successful from 1951 to 1969 which is eighteen years. There was a Libyan nation, very very good. If it had continued, Libya would be a different country. He was a very wise man, not attacking every country. He had good relations with the UK with the US, with Arabs. He tried to take advantage of oil wealth to build a society and provide education. There were economic plans for five years. People with Gaddafi came and he used the five years plans that were set up during the economy by Ahmed Atteiga, a minister under King Idris.<sup>128</sup>

This reading of the events is disputed by several authors, among them John Wright who described the Libyan Kingdom as a kleptocratic system of patronage dominated by tribal and oligarchic family interests and led by a ‘benign despot’. And yet, not even Wright denies that through the oil revenues that started to flow in the country, by the end of the 1950s, the Libyan government was able to finance the beginnings of important economic and social development programmes and to initiate a process of urbanisation from the interior towards the coast that had positive effects on and was combined with the provision of education, welfare, social security and health services to Libyan citizens (Wright 2012: 177-78).

In particular, it was the Kingdom’s education policies that attracted the interviewees’ praise and whose impact was considered far reaching and contributed to establishing a cohesive national social fabric. A member of the civil society ‘at home’ observed:

While Libya used to be a kingdom there were some policies that tried to bring people from the west to the east to study and to stay there and be based there and that created a sort of bond in the social fabric.<sup>129</sup>

As Golino observed, during the years of the Libyan Monarchy, the public education system was seen as a way to solve the national identity question by pervading ‘the curricula, syllabi and textbooks with the Arab Libyan spirit’ (Golino 1970: 350). Since 1956 a process of Libyanisation of history and geography books for the last two years of primary education and the first year of preparatory education begun, integrating the Egyptian curriculum that had dominated Libyan education until that time. These Libyan adjustments were maintained in the primary schools manuals even after the 1969 revolution (Souriau 1973: 414). In 1967, an inter-ministerial committee was set up that also included the deans of the Libyan University and of the Islamic University to establish a programme for a campaign ‘to strengthen national consciousness’ and to

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<sup>128</sup> Interviewee #32.

<sup>129</sup> Interviewee #26.

maintain traditions while enhancing the relation between citizens and the government (Bleuchot 1968: 414). The development of the higher education sector favoured these initiatives as well as the movement and mingling of young people across the country - the Libyan University in Benghazi was established in 1955 and the University of Tripoli in 1965, the construction of the Islamic School of Arts and Crafts in Tobruk also started in 1965, while in the same year the project to build a Faculty of Medicine near Tripoli was announced (Mantran 1966: 391). In the narratives of the interviewees this overall contributed to the flows of young people across the country and, in turn, to developing a national social fabric in post-independence history.

Younger interviewees 'at home' were more cautious and tended to criticize the views on independence and the Kingdom discussed above. One of them, a representative of civil society, observed:

Today the east is saying: 'Look how Benghazi was back in history in the times of the monarchy'. What kind of Libya did you have? We did not really have enough time to build anything. You don't have your legacy and this, I mean, in all honesty, a monarchy that was established in the last less than one hundred years, for god sake, I mean what kind of monarchy is that? I'm not an historian but so, it was there for a purpose and that purpose served and that's it. [...] Back in the day we were not really involved in the monarchy. We had a king and there were negotiations but the community was not really part of that. It was a one-sided elite process going on and then in Gaddafi's time the idea of people controlling themselves was very appealing because at that point people were isolated, the elites were ruling. That was why Gaddafi managed to rule for forty-two years. That is something they need to realise. The monarchy failed terribly.<sup>130</sup>

This representative of civil society, originally from Tripoli, holds critical views on the impact and relevance of the policies of the Kingdom in the formation of the Libyan nation-state. His major criticism is addressed to the elitist nature of that system of government that he considers responsible for leading to the rise to power of Gaddafi. Ultimately, he thinks, that was the main indication of the failure of the monarchy and he suggests that commemorating that legacy falls short of critically re-assessing the country's history.

Although the interviewees expressed such contentious views regarding the years of the Libyan Kingdom, a narrative emerged that portrayed independence as a time of unity in which

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<sup>130</sup> Interviewee #5.

people from all over the country and from the diaspora came together to build the Libyan nation-state. This might appear counterintuitive, but it can be explained against the attempt to re-appropriate a part of Libyan history that was erased by the regime in the attempt to emphasise once again a common shared historical past. An interviewee representative of the HoR originally from the west of the country observed:

The King came after the second world war and there was one million and a half Libyans who died during the war. And the country was at a loss. People stood to build the nation again, became stronger, stabilised. People who had a sense of nationalism and a sense of loyalty towards Libya.<sup>131</sup>

Here the interviewee links nationalism and loyalty towards the country to the Libyan people who, faced with the post-war adversities, went on to successfully build the nation. Another interviewee member of the civil society ‘at home’, originally from the west of the country, stressed even more clearly the unity among Libyans at the time. Interestingly, his source is the book by the UN special envoy to Libya, Adrian Pelt:

I have the book by Adrian Pelt. When I read it, I see the existence of a movement in the south and the east and the west, and the realisation that Libya should be one country. You know, people do not know the outside world, how they [the outside world] see Libya and how they [the outside world] recognise Libya but people in the Sahara and in the mountains, in the east and the west they were moving and trying to bring the country together. When I see Adrian Pelt going to all these places and talking to people, they are shouting [cheering] ‘Libya’ and not Cyrenaica and Fezzan at that time. Then started federalism but after 1963 the country came together and there was no opposition to that and that means this is what the people need.<sup>132</sup>

Street demonstrations at the time of independence are mentioned as yet more proof of Libyan people’s needs, unity of intents and common destiny that was forged and strengthened after the switch from a federalist to a unitary system of government in 1963. This intention towards unity at independence, the interviewee seems to suggest, is even more genuine because the people inside the country were mostly unaware of external pressures and forces.

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<sup>131</sup> Interviewee #33.

<sup>132</sup> Interviewee #7.

Another interviewee representative of civil society ‘at home’, originally from the east, presented the process of achievement of independence as a gradual process reminiscent of Halliday’s accidents of history, war and geography:

The kingdom, when they started the Libyan nation, it started with one region, with Barqa. Then they said: ‘Now we have another two parts under two regimes, one under France and the other under the Italians’. We were with Britain, when Barqa took its independence in 1949. After one year they said: ‘Why don’t we come together to make one nation? We have some things together like we are Muslims, we are sharing the same thing, we can be a nation. We are living in the same area and we have the same problems and we have the same mentality somehow. We are not the same colour, we are not the same, but somehow we can find some things to do that [bring a nation] together.’ So the King Idris was selected to be the king and the Umar al-Mukhtar organisation at that time its main reason was to bring Libya together and have the Libyan project or the Libyan nation.<sup>133</sup>

Religion, geography and a common mentality were mentioned as some characteristics that Libyans shared at independence and upon which they chose to unite with the support of the King and the Umar al-Mukhtar Club that was established in Benghazi with the main objective to unify the country, as discussed in the historical chapter.

This can possibly explain the re-appearance of national symbols such as the independence flag and national anthem in the streets and squares of the revolution, together with the images of the King and of Libyan people and cities at the time of independence. The Libyan flag of the 1951 independence that the opposition in the diaspora had continued to honour and to portray in events like the London Conference for the Libyan Opposition and websites like Libya Watanona, dominated the squares, the streets and social media during the revolution and in its aftermath. The flag and the anthem celebrated Libyan heritage and reflected the national pride in the anti-colonial struggle, traditional Islam and the Sanusi King. As Reading observed, the flag recalled and rearticulated the national identity of Independence (Reading 2011: 377-78). The appearance of the flag recalls Collins’ idea of time-bubbles of nationalism and sudden upsurges in popular nationalism (Collins 2012). The dramatic events of the 2011 revolution assembled crowds into spontaneous ‘natural rituals’, leading to the emotional upsurge of national identity that was used to legitimate the revolutionaries and to discredit the Gaddafi regime (Collins 2012).

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<sup>133</sup> Interviewee #38.

In a powerful instance of everyday nationalism, the national flag of Independence and its colours appeared everywhere during and after the revolution – see Appendix 4, set of images #5. It is through the social media pages of civil society organisations that we observe the pervasive presence of the flag - CSOs like Volunteer Libya and Shabab Libya also chose the colours of the flag for their logo and cover photos (ShababLibya 2012w; VolunteerLibya 2017, 2015; ShababLibya 2016). As the conflict unfolded and the country was liberated by regime's forces, the flag appeared in the battlefield, in the streets and squares of freed areas (ShababLibya 2011f, 2011x, 2011w), in solidarity rallies held by Libyans across the world (ShababLibya 2011bm, 2011bn, 2011bj), as well as in refugee camps (ShababLibya 2011bl). The flags were out in the streets on the occasions of demonstrations against the regime and to demand attention from the international community (ShababLibya 2011bi, 2011bk, 2011az), in the funerals of the martyrs of the revolution (ShababLibya 2011z), in some Libyan embassies across the world (ShababLibya 2011bc, 2011t). The death of Gaddafi on October 20, 2011, and the country's liberation were celebrated on October 23<sup>rd</sup> with flags flying everywhere inside Libya and among Libyan communities around the world (ShababLibya 2011bd, 2011o, 2011av, 2011b). The colours of the flag or the flag itself were the background of the pictures of the martyrs in Court Square and in Martyrs' Square, as well as of the written elements of the posters that portrayed the martyrs (ShababLibya 2011bi, 2011br, 2011k, 2011ai, 2011ao, 2011am, 2011ba, 2011m, 2011l, 2011aq, 2011be). The flag and its colours filled the map of Libya that appeared on the posters in Court Square and the writings on street art graffiti in Benghazi and Tripoli (ShababLibya 2011y, 2011i, 2011aa). In one of them, the flag is a background of a portrait of Umar al-Mukhtar in a graffiti and at the bottom is the sentence 'Grandchildren of al-Mukhtar' (ShababLibya 2011ab).

As the country was finally liberated, photos of celebrations and historical commemorations were captured and shared online in 2011 and in the following years. In particular, Martyrs' Day (16 September) and the Anniversary of the Revolution (17 February) were occasions for public celebrations in Libya as well as in the diaspora. The images portray jubilant crowds in the streets and squares of the revolution or at gatherings in the diaspora waving flags (ShababLibya 2012i, 2012o, 2012h, 2012c, 2012a, 2011ab, 2013g, 2013f, 2013c). In the photos from Benghazi, the first anniversary of the revolution is an opportunity for the flag to appear everywhere in the streets, especially the 17km-long flag held across the town centre in Benghazi, but also as a t-shirt wore by young people celebrating (ShababLibya 2012g, 2012l). The anniversary is celebrated in 2013

with people marching with the giant national flag yet again (ShababLibya 2013d). The flag appeared also on July 1 on the occasion of the day of the flag, during religious holidays such as Ramadan, Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha, and on the occasion of sport events such as the African Nations Championship in 2014 and the Arab games opening in 2011 (ShababLibya 2011bu, 2011r, 2011s, 2011af, 2011d, 2014a). Back to school in September 2011, teachers and students performed the old Kingdom national anthem standing in front of the Libyan Independence flag. In some pictures, female teachers appear to be wearing the hijab in the colours of the flag. Kids wear t-shirts, rings and have make up in their faces portraying Libyan flags (ShababLibya 2011al, 2011e).

Through social media pages we also observe the appearance of the Amazigh flags in November 2011 on the occasion of the Eid al-Adha festival in the Amazigh town of Yefren, as well as the Libyan flag and the Amazigh flag flying together on the occasion of the Amazigh song festival held in Benghazi in December 2011 (ShababLibya 2011ag, 2011bu). This is yet another example of the efforts by CSOs to celebrate Amazigh culture as an integral part of Libyan society. Flying the Amazigh flag next to the Libyan flag is the preferred symbol for that purpose.

The choice of going back to the independence flag was an important political act of re-appropriation of national symbology that occurred both in the diaspora and ‘at home’ and reflected a tendency that had been developing in the diaspora websites and more openly since the 2005 London Conference through satellite and Internet coverage of the event. The flag of the 1951 independence symbolized the unity of the country and was used in a clear anti-Gaddafi function. Burning of the Green flag and flying the independence flag was an important historic shift in the national imaginary (ShababLibya 2011v). The national symbols that the diaspora had institutionalised before 2011 and some in Libya had nurtured over the years of the Gaddafi regime, re-emerged in the public space in Libya during and after 2011. It was not a sudden appearance but rather the result of a process of creation of a national imaginary in the private sphere and in the diaspora that finally found expression in the squares and streets of the 2011 revolution.

King Idris and images of Libyan cities and people at independence re-emerge in the post-revolutionary national imaginary with the purpose of celebrating these figures and historical periods, romanticising about it and, in so doing, reformulating the historical narrative of the nation. For example, the album by Shabab Libya, ‘Portrait of a Free Tripoli’, includes photos of Tripoli’s old town in the 1950s and King Idris (ShababLibya 2012v). Photos of the King and from the times of the independence are shared on Independence Day as well as on the anniversary of the death of



the King but also during demonstrations (ShababLibya 2011n, 2011u, 2013a). In one of the posts, Shabab Libya shares the photo of King Idris accompanied by this text:

30 years ago today, King Idris of Libya, passed away. الله يرحمة King Idrees Al-Sanussi. The founder of Libya, the one who united all three provinces (Tripoltania, Fezzan, Barqa) into one country. The one who gave us our first constitution. The man who Umar al-Mukhtar aka the Lion of the desert was proud to server under as the commander of the Senssussi Army in Barqa. The man who dedicated his life to fighting the Italian occupation and then founding a Nation that would be called Libya in 1951. May Allah swt bless your soul for everything you have done for us.

In other instances, bringing back Libyan history is a way to draw lessons from the past for the present and the future. For example, Moomken Organization for Awareness and Media shared a video that featured King Idris to remind Libyans of how he banned political parties, a decision that according to a member of the organisation resulted in divisions and people's lack of interest in politics.<sup>134</sup> We observe a change in the choice of images and the way they redefine the political ties that bind Libyans together and a clear intention to bring back the period of independence and the Kingdom in the collective memory.

As this section has shown, far from bridging gaps and differences about the reading of the country's post-independence history, the 2011 revolution provided an opportunity for these differences to be debated among the members of the Libyan nation, 'at home' and in the diaspora. This was facilitated by the free flows of people and ideas that allowed the diaspora to return and ideas to circulate freely in the aftermath of the revolution. As Del Monte suggested with respect to the anti-colonial struggle, reconstructing this part of Libyan history is yet another step towards the redefinition of the collective memory (Del Monte 2015: 23) and the individual's sense of belonging to the nation and practices of nationhood.

## **6. Overcoming the legacy of the Gaddafi regime: unity in diversity and the cult of martyrs**

This section explores how the political elite, the civil society and the diaspora imagine the Gaddafi regime as a dark chapter of Libyan history and a step back for the idea of an inclusive and pluralistic Libyan nation. In the aftermath of the revolution, CSOs worked towards creating new

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<sup>134</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/MoomkenOrg/videos/942767182486715/>

political ties to bind Libyans together through projects that emphasised unity in diversity. Furthermore, the regime's repression of the opposition 'at home' contributed to develop a narrative of resistance and martyrdom before the revolution that only fully emerged after 2011. The images of old and new martyrs of the Gaddafi regime appeared on the streets and squares of the revolution on graffiti, framed photos and posters held by participants in celebrations and demonstrations but also shared online by CSOs in their social media pages. Celebrating old and new martyrs of the regime was yet another example of the reformulation and negotiation of a national imaginary and redefinition of the country's historical past in post-revolutionary Libya.

The vast majority of the interviewees referred to the historical period of the Gaddafi regime as one particularly detrimental to the idea of a pluralistic Libyan nation from an ethnic, religious and political perspective. A representative of civil society from the diaspora observed:

What Gaddafi attempted to do was homogenise [the nation], Arabise it, prevent Berber [language] from being spoken so everybody had only to speak Arabic. They [Libyans] only had to perceive themselves as Arabs and Sunni Muslims which was the easiest because you had a tiny minority of Jews that were just very quickly thrown out. And in that process of homogenisation... I think this was his own take on how you make Libya more Libyan.<sup>135</sup>

The regime's dismantling of the ethnic and religious diversity was seen as a negative step taken by the regime that contributed to demolishing the 'real' Libyan national identity. An interviewee representative of civil society observed:

In 1969, when Gaddafi started to destroy the constitution and announced his own constitution, and later the Green Book, and then started attacking Sufis and mosques and *manaras* [minarets], he attacked that part of our identity and moved to attack our Amazigh social fabric too when he announced the Libyan Arab Jamahiriyya [...] We also had Jewish in the country and they are part of Libyan identity as well. So he destroyed many things about the religious identity and about all parts of Libyan identity. When we came back to Libya and got rid of the Jamahiriyya we found asking ourselves: what is Libya now?<sup>136</sup>

The interviewee refers to some actions taken by the regime that aimed to redefine the country's political, religious and ethnic components of the nation. While these have been discussed in the previous chapters, here we observe how the interviewee linked this process to a sense of loss of

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<sup>135</sup> Interviewee #12.

<sup>136</sup> Interviewee #7.

identity among Libyans who after the revolution embarked on a journey to rediscover their sense of belonging and identification.

And yet, others observed how the regime provided a clear and strong sense of identity for the majority of Libyan citizens who identify as Arab and Muslim and are reluctant to consider other ethnic and religious groups as members of the national community, regardless of their presence within the territory that constitutes Libya today. A young interviewee in the diaspora observed:

I just wanted to say that the regime was very nationalistic because that was the best way to concentrate power and difference or diversity were definitely not tolerated in terms of national identity. We know that the minorities were oppressed and they were not allowed to speak their language, so the regime had a language and had a religion, and had a song and a flag. So, yes, it simplified, you know, for better or for worse, it gave people a very clear answer of what the Libyan nation was, whether they accepted it or not. Whether they liked it or not. It was packaged.<sup>137</sup>

She suggests that fostering a strategy of strong identification with the regime's view of the Libyan nation to the exclusion and detriment of ethnic minorities was a way for the regime to control power and the Libyan people. An interviewee representative of civil society 'at home' observed:

Gaddafi was the one bringing Libyans together and he maintained the country united. He kept any thoughts other than his own out. He excluded any other ideas in a very harmful way that goes against democracy and freedom of speech and ideas but at the same it was good for the country in terms of nationalism. He brought the majority of Libyans together and [they] have been united for forty years without talking about tribal differences, cultural differences and don't know about these differences actually. They don't know because the regime did not provide information on this. [...] In the north of Libya we heard nothing about the south, Tuareg, Amazigh, Tebu, different cultures. We just keep our unity because we do not know these differences in Libya. We are all one and are all Libyans.<sup>138</sup>

This interviewee stresses the strong link between Gaddafi's policies and majority nationalism in Libya. The repressive policies of the regime were key to impose a national project on the people.

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<sup>137</sup> Interviewee #11.

<sup>138</sup> Interviewee #30.

And yet, in the aftermath of the revolution, CSOs worked actively to foster unity and bring Libyans from across the country together while celebrating the diversity that suddenly was allowed to emerge. Many of their projects seemed to assume that Libya needed unity and that the regime's forced homogenization of Libyan society had precluded the possibility for Libyans to get to know each other and value their diversity. For instance, 'My city is Libya' was an initiative undertaken by Volunteer Libya to spread 'the idea of a ONE unified strong Libya' through recreational activities, volunteerism, and a media campaign.<sup>139</sup> The 'My Libya' campaign by freelance journalist Khadija Ali highlighted the beauty of Libya's land and people through a stream of photos, memories and words that had in common the affection for the country and celebrated its unity in diversity and adversities.<sup>140</sup> The project 'Let our voice be heard' by H2O Team trained young Libyans on dialogue, debate and human rights so that they developed knowledge and skills on these themes but also in order to create a network across the country and bring Libyan youth closer, building trust among them.<sup>141</sup> A representative of civil society observed:

The politics that has been practiced for decades it was only one direction, one colour, one Libya, one leader, one everything actually. That gave the sense that we are only one, all Libyans are similar. That made us feel that we are not diverse and we are only one thing. This was a perception shared by many civil society interviewees that was only challenged in the aftermath of the revolution when traveling across Libya became an essential aspect of the work of CSOs. The increased mobility within the country was considered an important factor to shape a sense of national unity among this group of agents. A representative of civil society observed that before the revolution Libyans did not use to travel:

Libya is very large and especially people who live in the capital or big cities can very easily just live there and not even move from it to any other places. Why? Because there is no inner tourism, there are no economic activities that make you go and exchange and so, because of these two reasons, there is a sort of isolation between cities that makes it [the nation] more fragile in terms of unity.

This interviewee like others perceived the fragility of the nation. As a result, CSOs devised projects that valorise unity and diversity. Other than the Dus-tour project by H2O team discussed in the

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<sup>139</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/events/1498573513753520/>

<sup>140</sup> <https://yourmiddleeast.com/2014/06/12/from-libya-with-love-mylibya-photos/>

<sup>141</sup> Interview with co-founder Mohamed Hamuda

previous chapter, the Paving the Future Youth Forum, organised by the British Council in 2012 and 2013, was another example of a project that brought together young activists from across the country. They met for the first time and connected to the global civil society via the British Council. The 100 participants were brought together through an online application process launched on the British Council's website and Facebook page. They came from Murzuq, Msellata, Zwara, Derna, and Tobruq although the majority was from Sabha, Tripoli, Misrata and Benghazi. These young people shared their revolutionary and post-revolutionary activism although their backgrounds and ideologies differed significantly. The freedom to travel facilitated these initiatives that, ultimately, the participants observed, aimed at uniting Libyans and getting to know each other while creating links between them, the global civil society and liberalism, in a clear example of how ethnoscaping and ideoscaping intertwined reinforcing their narratives and vision of a pluralistic nation.

The repressive policies of the Gaddafi-regime not only had a negative effect on the perception of diversity, but they also resulted in the creation of narratives and images around the martyrs of the Gaddafi-regime that had started to emerge through the websites of the diaspora and activism in Libya in the 2000s, but only fully emerged in the streets and squares during and after the 2011 revolution and online. The martyrs can be broadly divided into three groups: the students and political dissidents of the 1970s and 1980s; the prisoners of the 1996 Abu Salim massacre; and the martyrs of the 2011 revolution.

As Nasser and Boggero, and Weiner and Weiner have observed, the mythologization of the martyr requires a process of narrative construction within a context and time, wide publicity and a climate of dissent (Nassar and Boggero 2008: 205; Weiner and Weiner 1990). One interviewee member of the political opposition in exile observed:

During Gaddafi's era, the people who actually stood up to Gaddafi very bravely and sacrificed themselves were either publicly killed or hanged or persecuted for years. I think they gave the rest of the population a sense of pride and a sense that this is how you love your country and sacrifice even the dearest thing, which is your life, for your country. I think these people inspired the rest of the population, inspired the youth.<sup>142</sup>

Although the demonstrations of the families of the Abu Salim victims had brought the images of their family members into the squares of the city of Benghazi before 2011, during the 2011

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<sup>142</sup> Interviewee #18.

revolution these images were put together with those of the martyrs of the 1970s and 1980s, as well as with the martyrs of the 2011 revolution, giving them unprecedented publicity in the revolutionary climate of dissent.

First it was in the Benghazi's Court Square, renamed Freedom Square, where the families of the Abu Salim victims had been gathering for years and where the revolution started in February 2011 – see Appendix 4, set of images #6. The faces of the martyrs of the Abu Salim massacre appeared with their names in a long poster that reappeared on the first anniversary of the revolution on the walls of the courthouse. Other photographs of the students and political opponents who disappeared and were killed by the regime, as well as of the martyrs of the 2011 revolution, were hanging against the walls of the courthouse or held by demonstrators and family members (ShababLibya 2011at, 2011bo, 2012o, 2012r, 2012e, 2011br, 2011bp). When Tripoli was liberated on 23 October 2011, the poster of the martyrs of Abu Salim also appeared in Martyrs' Square - known as Green Square under the Gaddafi government. The change of name suggests the importance of the martyrs in the national imaginary at that crucial point of the country's history and political transformation. The naming of the square after the martyrs commemorated that historical event and as Turner points out, this is an instance of the attempt to create or sustain the individual's sense of belonging to the nation. The two squares in the two main Libyan cities became the space where the pantheon of Libyan martyrs from the anti-colonial resistance till 2011 came together. From the pictures retrieved online, in some posters the photos of the martyrs of the 2011 revolution stood next to that of Umar al-Mukhtar against the background of the Libyan flag (ShababLibya 2011k). This suggests a continuity in the reproduction of national martyrs by linking a firmly established element of the national imaginary, Umar al-Mukhtar, to the independence flag and the 'new' martyrs.

The martyrs of the 2011 revolution, those who died fighting against the regime, were celebrated on several occasions: during events hosted by Libyan embassies around the world and by transitional institutions in Libya, on the occasion of Libya Martyrs' Day, and on the anniversary of the revolution (ShababLibya 2011t, 2012d, 2012o). The martyrs and their families were honoured and their photos widely displayed in street demonstrations and celebrations, and shared online on the Facebook pages of CSOs and diaspora organisations during and outside the events – e.g. the albums 'Memories with Epic Libyan Photos' and other photos of freedom fighters, martyrs

and funerals from across the country in the album ‘Memorable moments’ by Shabab Libya (ShababLibya 2012s, 2012t, 2012q).

In 2012 the photos and placards of the martyrs were removed from the Court Square in Benghazi and were relocated inside the Mahkama (the Court) and in the Gaddafi Crimes Museum (ShababLibya 2012f, 2011ad, 2011as, 2012j, 2012k). This signalled their relocation from the public square into spaces that are not as visible but institutionalise the martyrs as national heroes. The building of a museum and the creation of spaces to recall the crimes of the regime is yet another instance of attempts at linking martyrs, memory and nationhood in post-Gaddafi Libya. In another instance, the photos of the ‘Gaddafi archives’, an exhibition held in London in June 2012, were shared by Shabab Libya, bringing together images of the King and of Gaddafi but also notes and drawings from the Abu Salim prisoners (ShababLibya 2012m). This choice was intended to recall and commemorate that bleak event in modern Libyan history, in so doing re-articulating in a critical way the more recent past. These photos included those of the students killed by the regime in April 1976 that were widely shared on social media (ShababLibya 2013b).

As Nassar and Boggero have observed, the retention and propagation of the images of martyrs is akin to an invented tradition in the crafting of an imagined community (Nassar and Boggero 2008). By focusing on the commemoration of martyrs and historical figures through photos and videos shared in the activities and on the social media pages of CSOs, Libyan activists allowed for the images of the martyrs to emerge in the public space next to the Libyan flag, thereby transforming the cult of martyrs into one of the most common forms of everyday nationalism in post-revolutionary Libya.

Far from being a clear-cut legacy in Libyan history, the years of the Gaddafi regime were interpreted by the transitional political elite and the civil society in 2016 as a crucial moment in the formation of Arab-Muslim majority nationalism that informed the idea of a homogenous Libyan nation to the detriment of the rights and inclusion of ethnic and religious minorities as well as political dissidents. The ambivalence in defining this part of Libyan history after 2011 is determined by the departure of Gaddafi loyalists and the return of the opposition from the diaspora. These flows of people were crucial in establishing a predominant narrative around the historical legacy of the regime after 2011, as well as in redefining the Libyan national imaginary composed of symbols and individuals closer to them, in so doing initiating a process of redefinition of national symbology and mythologization of new martyrs.

## 7. Conclusion

This chapter explored the way the political elite, civil society, and the diaspora imagine the shared historical past as the main element of the civic-political dimension of the nation. The selective valorisation of the ancient flows of people determined different ideas of nation. Those emphasising the relevance of Islam and the flows of people from the Arabian Peninsula imagined an Arab-Muslim-Libyan nation. The representatives from civil society and those from the more liberal strand of the diaspora advocated for a diverse and pluralistic nation inclusive of ethnic and religious minorities, thereby ascribing relevance to the pre-Islamic heritage and to the indigenous communities. Moving forward to the twentieth century, the politics of memory and the fight against colonialism and Gaddafi that the interviewee suggested in the opening to this chapter as uniting Libyans, in fact unite *some* Libyans. The link between the politics of memory, the anti-colonial struggle and the way those inform the national imaginary is clear cut for the political elite and civil society 'at home'. The diaspora, while subscribing to this narrative, demonstrated a great interest in the independence and post-independence history, particularly around the martyrs of the Gaddafi regime. The return of the diaspora in 2011 and the ability to communicate more easily and online after the revolution opened the door for greater debates concerning national history and initiated a process of redefinition of the national imaginary. The free flows of people, ideas and images challenged the interpretation of national history and in turn the sense of belonging and identification, particularly among those 'at home', opening the door to a process of redefinition of collective memory that left the civic-political dimension of the nation contested.



## **Conclusion**

This research set out to explore national belonging, everyday nationhood and globalization in Libya through a theoretical and methodological framework designed to analyse how nationness and nationhood evolved and interplayed as a result of global cultural flows, and in relation to nationalism as a political ideology fostered by the Gaddafi regime. National, transnational and extra-territorial agents and processes were included in the analysis with a focus on selected groups within the political elite, the civil society and the diaspora. This conclusion highlights the main findings in relation to the theoretical literature, the empirical contribution, and the research question that it set to answer: How should we understand national belonging and nationhood in Libya in the age of globalization?

Among the examined groups of Libyan actors, national belonging emerged as contingent on connectedness and a sense of commonality largely based on kinship, social and cultural practices that challenge and redefine, but also to some extent reproduce, the vision of the Libyan nation imposed by the Gaddafi regime and its nationalist ideology. The analysis of everyday social and cultural practices inside Libya and among individuals and groups in the diaspora suggests that these practices shaped a strong sense of belonging to Libya as a nation among the interviewees.

Before 2011, everyday social and cultural practices related to marriage, language and dialects, the consumption of traditions (religious ceremonies, food and clothing), as well as the narration and commemoration of history, strengthened relational ties but also fostered the perception of the existence of some commonality among individuals whose origins could be traced back within the borders of the Libyan state. As individuals and opposition groups in the diaspora crafted their ideas and images of the nation in the private sphere and online, people in Libya resisted Gaddafi's vision of the nation in the private sphere and, in the 2000s, in the civil society and online space that the regime allowed to emerge under its surveillance. The decade before 2011 was particularly relevant in so far as new, markedly political practices and initiatives, on the part of individuals and groups in the diaspora, and civil society initiatives inside Libya, found expression through the Internet and satellite television, challenging Gaddafi's vision of the nation. Everyday social and cultural practices became means to affirm and naturalize the perceived common attributes as diacritics of Libyanness. Libya was a main frame of reference in the individual's sense of belonging and the main operative framework of opposition groups in the diaspora. Those who also identified as members of ethnic minorities did so not in opposition but

in conjunction with their sense of Libyanness. In the narratives of the interviewees, nationness in Libya is compatible with other forms of groupness such as ethnicity, tribe and family.

These social and cultural practices shaped the way individuals imagined the nation and its symbology that started to emerge in the 2000s. A national social imaginary emerged. Indeed, satellite TV and the Internet in particular allowed for new opportunities of political interaction online and for the penetration of people, ideas and images from the diaspora to Libya and vice-versa. The examples provided of diaspora websites, Amazigh activism, the London Conference for the Libyan Opposition and civil activism in Libya illustrated how diaspora individuals and groups, and activists 'at home' reinforced each other, redefining practices of nationhood and reproducing a national social imaginary that revolved around personalities and ideologies nurtured in the private sphere, both in the diaspora and in Libya. These can be grouped around four main themes: the mythologization of the martyrs of the anti-colonial struggle and of the Gaddafi regime; the valorisation of cultural pluralism based on an understanding of Libyan historical, natural and cultural heritage inclusive of ethnic minorities and diverse regional elements that also reflected the international liberal discourse on human rights; counter-narratives of pre-Gaddafi history centred on the positive role of the King and on the symbols of Independence (mainly the flag and the anthem); and Islamism in its multiple currents. While some agreement emerged around these elements, overall, they remained contested and came to inform competing visions of the nation after the 2011 revolution.

Nevertheless, these processes generated a strong sense of belonging to the Libyan nation among members of the Libyan political elite and the civil society. The same is true for individuals in the diaspora: the experience of transnationalism did not eradicate their sense of belonging to Libya. However, their nationness is situated, partial and contingent upon political, economic and cultural fields, particularly among 1.5 and second-generation individuals. This is reflected in interactions and mobilization that are fluid at best and reflective of their sense of in-betweenness.

The global cultural flows, by creating a new transformative connectedness, strengthened or challenged competing forms of identity politics. The theoretical framework enabled the researcher to link nationalism to globalization and explore these two phenomena together. In so doing, the study provided an empirical account that not only supports theories of globalization as space-time compression, but also fills a gap in the literature on globalization by offering an analysis of the experience and enactment of globalization at the micro-individual and meso-organisational

levels with a focus on national belonging and identification. Indeed, the analysis of the global cultural flows in Libya shows that a change in the magnitude and intensity of the flows can create new links between actors previously insulated from one another or whose communication was limited. The analysis of modern Libyan history and the empirical analysis in this study demonstrated that when taking part more freely in global cultural flows became possible, whether due to technological advances, or to the cracking or collapse of the regime, existing constructions of nationness and nationhood were challenged. In this sense, the revolutions in 1969 and in 2011 share similar dynamics. The relevance and interconnectedness of the global cultural flows in disrupting the status quo was evident.

In the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Internet and satellite television significantly enhanced the intensity and rapidity of communication between people in Libya and the rest of the world. Interview data, combined with the analysis of Libyan advances in technology in the 2000s, show that technoscapes had a major role in providing a platform for new ideoscapes and mediascapes to emerge inside the country at that time. This was also made possible by the regime's rapprochement with the international community. In particular, the Internet created an opportunity for individuals in the diaspora, who had escaped the Gaddafi regime in the previous decades, to intensify the exchanges among themselves and with activists 'at home'. The improved interconnectedness confirmed the relevance of instantaneous electronic communication that reduced constraints of space and time on organizations and individuals in Libya and in the diaspora.

The 2011 revolution was a product of that decade. The ideologies and groups that had started to filter into the country in the 2000s and to a lesser extent in the previous decades, only fully emerged then. Indeed, the 2011 revolution and its aftermath created the circumstances for global cultural flows to circulate rapidly and freely to an extent unprecedented in post-independence Libyan history. In particular, we observed the liberal discourse on human rights, minorities and pluralism competing with ethnic nationalism, as well as with multiple forms of Islamism. These ideoscapes have an unprecedented visibility in the post-2011 media and civil society environment. The revolution and its aftermath were the culmination of the process of people, ideas and images flowing in and out of the country facilitated by technological advances and a significantly more open media and civil society environment.

However, the analysis also shows that in an authoritarian context like that of Libya, when the state regained control of the flows, as in the 1970s, it reduced the ability of people, ideas, images, technologies and capital to flow inside and outside the country freely, limiting the impact of globalization. In its first three decades, the Gaddafi's regime was able to establish its control over the flows. The advent of new ICT towards the end of the 1990s reduced that control and was only partially re-established towards the mid/end of the 2000s. In the post-2011 highly fragmented political scenario, establishing control over the flows proved difficult and depended on the ability and willingness of divided authorities to exercise it.

This shows that the global cultural flows can bring the national and the global closer, challenging the relationship between private sphere, civil society and the state. Like the monarchy in the 1960s or the Gaddafi regime in the 2000s, state institutions can lose control over the global cultural flows as a result of technological advances that allow ideas and images to circulate outside their control. In so doing, the agency of the state is diminished and that of groups and individuals is enhanced until state institutions or other entities try to impose their control on these flows again.

During and after the 2011 revolution, as the regime lost control over the flows, the Internet and civil society landscape changed dramatically, providing new opportunities and physical and virtual spaces to practise nationhood and shape nationness. Imagining the nation became a process of contestation through which different visions emerged in the battlefield, in transitional politics and in the emerging civil society through initiatives online, across the country and in connection with global civil society. Observing these spaces and the agents moving within them shed light on their practices of nationhood and understanding of nationness. We analysed how individuals imagine commonality and connectedness vis-à-vis the ethno-cultural and civic-political dimensions of the nation.

The Libyan nation is perceived as unique in ethno-cultural terms based on kinship, language, traditions, religion, social norms and behaviours which have been combined across space and time and today are perceived as constituting a unique nation. These elements, however, have become contested after 2011. Kinship, based on familial and tribal relations, is seen as the country's social glue and what reinforces the perception of a homogenous Libyan society. This is imagined as the result of internal migratory flows that historically and more recently came to shape the country's social fabric. The perception of the importance of relational ties explains the sense of belonging to the Libyan nation as a distinct group, reinforces the idea of a nation based on

kinship, strengthening its boundaries. This applies to individuals and groups in the diaspora, although it is less straightforward for 1.5 and second generations. The latter refer to Libya as the homeland but in fact their sense of belonging is partial and contingent, characterised by ‘multi-site embeddedness’, ‘in-betweenness’ and ‘otherness’. The mobilization of these individuals vis-à-vis the homeland, therefore, is fluid. This results in people ‘at home’ struggling to accommodate their presence and beliefs when not openly contesting the diaspora’s membership of the nation. This interaction leads to individuals ‘at home’ and in the diaspora questioning key characteristics of the national community as imposed by the Gaddafi regime.

Ethnicity, socio-cultural frames and religion are other heavily contested fields in the aftermath of the 2011 revolution. Ethnicity partially explains armed conflicts and political tensions between non-Arab minorities and the majority of the population that identifies as Arab. While Arab ethnicity continues to be perceived as a defining and aggregating factor by the majority, ethnic minorities, the emerging civil society and the more liberal strands of the diaspora advocate for a pluralist and multicultural vision of the Libyan nation. The latter demand the recognition of cultural and political rights in the new constitution. That would mean first and foremost recognizing citizenship rights and redistributing economic resources. As the state is fragmented and the country in turmoil, the question of the position and rights of ethnic minorities remains unanswered.

Meanwhile, civil society organisations, some diaspora groups and ethnic minorities embraced the global liberal discourse on human rights and cultural pluralism. These agents consciously and imaginatively constructed and mobilized the diverse material, linguistic and territorial attributes within the borders of the Libyan state to transform those into the ‘diacritics’ of Libyanness. Not only did they attribute a positive value to diversity, but they also actively engaged in redefining the national imaginary around this vision. This was most evident in the initiatives on the ground and social media pages of civil society organisations. By traveling across the country and engaging with the global civil society, these groups attempted to redefine nationhood, revealing yet again the importance of the flows of people. Through their activities and social media pages, ‘Libyan’ cultural and natural heritage was celebrated, as well as ‘Libyan’ food and traditional clothing that become the material cultural expression of everyday nationalism. This reminds us of the process of positive valorisation of diversity and cultural pluralism that emerged in the 2000s through the political, social and cultural activities in the diaspora and inside Libya.

The same is true with respect to linguistic and dialectic diversity, although the appearance of ethnic minority languages in the public space has the potential to strengthen in-group connection and ethnic divides in the currently polarised political scene. The efforts to re-imagine the archive of differences into diacritics of commonality and Libyanness stops in the face of the disjunctures created by global cultural flows between diasporic individuals and those ‘at home’ on the issue of social norms and behaviours. This reveals the difficulty, particularly among 1.5 and second generations in the diaspora, but also among those ‘at home,’ to accommodate themselves in an evolving society.

After 2011, Islam and the place of religion in society and vis-à-vis politics became another highly contested issue. Several Islamist currents that had started to emerge in the public space in the 2000s gained an unprecedented visibility. This had an impact on the everyday practices of religion as well as on the perception of Islam as a unifying cultural identifier. Narratives around Islam identified endogenous and exogenous factors in the practice of religion in Libya. However, in the twenty-first century interconnected world, it is difficult to draw such distinctions and even more so in light of the trends observed in the historical chapter that point to a global rise of Islamism in its multiple forms since the 1980s that also involved Libyan individuals and groups. What we observe is an enhanced ability of Islamism as an ideoscape to circulate in the aftermath of the revolution, reflecting global trends.

As ethnic and cultural attributes are disputed in post-2011 Libya, the shared historical past, as the most important ‘objective’ factor underpinning the civic-political dimension of the nation, also appeared contested. And yet, we observe some continuity with respect to the post-2011 national social imaginary and manifestations of everyday nationalism. The mythologization of the martyrs of the anti-colonial struggle and Gaddafi’s regime, as well as the appearance of symbols of independence like the national flag, contextualised against the everyday social and cultural practices discussed in Chapter Four, and particularly those in the decade preceding the revolution, explains how hot nationalism is only the manifestation and the apex of banal nationalism. This process of creation and evolution of a national social imaginary ultimately helps to sustain people’s sense of identification and belonging in everyday life. As the agents under scrutiny negotiate, reproduce and reinterpret historical symbols and memories, they reclaim their belonging to the Libyan nation as a political community and not only a community based on kinship and cultural

attributes. The flows of people and ideas after 2011 challenged the regime's interpretation of national history, initiating a process of redefinition of the collective memory that is still in progress.

This empirical account fills a gap in the literature in so far as it enhances our knowledge and understanding of nationalism in Libya, overcoming stereotypical accounts of countries in the MENA region that have tended to focus on Islam, Arab nationalism and the elites. This study, instead, focused on territorial nationalism through an approach that explored nationness in relation to other forms of groupness, and the agency of individuals and groups beyond the elites and the state. The empirical analysis shows how Arab nationalism evolved into a form of ethnic nationalism based on blood relations among people whose origins are traced back to the borders of the Libyan state. This is a way to re-imagine ethnic nationalism along territorial borders. Through this process a new ethnicity can imaginatively be created around Libyanness. This is a clear example of the tension among different forms of groupness. Indeed, while the analysis unveiled the importance of nationness in the Libyan context, it also highlighted ethnic diversity and heterogeneity of the so-called Libyan community that has been traditionally identified as Arab and homogenous. The analysis stressed how contingent these forms of groupness are on the social and political developments that contribute to redefine nationness and nationhood in what ultimately is an ongoing and dynamic contest for power and equality.

Through this approach we made sense of the multiple manifestations of nationalism during and after 2011 in the public space, physical and virtual, that are a result of previous practices in the private sphere and in the diaspora. These symbols of the nation would have been hard to understand by simply focusing on the agency of the state and of the elites in Libya and without an examination of everyday practices in the private sphere both in Libya and in the diaspora. This study confirms that the agency of individuals in everyday life is essential to challenge and reproduce national frameworks articulated by the state and its institutions while also creating alternative social imaginaries.

Furthermore, through the analysis of everyday nationalism in its multiple forms, this study contributes to the debunking of Western theoretical ethnocentrism reflected in Billig's banal nationalism theory (1995), while unveiling the relationship between banal and hot nationalism, as well as between the macro-nationalist ideology of the state and its institutions and the micro-interactive social mechanisms through which nationalism is articulated by ordinary citizens in the everyday. Indeed, we explored forms of banal nationalism in the everyday lives of individuals

in Libya and in the diaspora that illuminated the presence of symbols of nationalism and their cultural materiality outside the ‘West’ illuminating the relationship between banal and hot nationalism on which the production of social imaginaries relies. By combining these approaches, it was possible to draw connections among different agents, ideologies and practices exploring the interplay among those and their impact on groupness. This is hard to achieve in studies which tend to focus on either approach. By unveiling the ideological foundations of nationalism across different state and non-state agents, it was possible to make sense of nationalism in its everyday manifestations during and after 2011.

Through this analysis we used Arjun Appadurai’s framework to explore how nations are formed and transformed through the work of individual and collective imagination, linking nationalism to globalization in a grounded place and time. The empirical analysis not only accounted for time-space compression and the power of global flows to create disjunctures among spaces, but we also observed the power of the imagination in creating boundaries to imagined entities such as the nation. The mention of the power of internal flows in establishing a homogenous social and cultural fabric among the interviewees suggests that while the global cultural flows can disrupt and challenge the nation and the nation-state, the individual’s imagination can erect new boundaries based on imagined flows that impact the way subjectivities and collectivities are shaped. Indeed, the power of this framework lies on the ability to provide an understanding of societal evolution in the global context while stressing the role of the imagination as an individual and collective everyday practice that creates instability in the realisation of modern subjectivities.

This analysis of global cultural flows, combined with a multifaceted approach to nationalism, allowed the researcher to illuminate the dynamics of articulation and transmission of nationalism, overcoming stereotypical accounts that continue to characterize post-colonial countries across the world. This suggests the benefit of applying the approach to other single case studies but also in a comparative fashion on a larger scale. Indeed, Libya is only one case of the global phenomenon of the traffic of ideas of peoplehood and selfhood in the twenty-first century. Through this study, we observed a dichotomy between an exclusionary vision of the nation based on an ethnic form of nationalism, and an inclusive and pluralistic vision that aims to accommodate diversity and multiculturalism. And yet, the latter struggles to come to terms with the effects of globalization on individual subjectivities and communities. In an age of resurgent nationalism, this



seems to reflect the polarization of societies worldwide. Further exploring this aspect would help to make sense of the world we live in today.

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## Appendix 1 – Semi-structured interview guides

### A- SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR DIASPORA INDIVIDUALS

Dimensions of the diasporic phenomenon addressed:

#### 1) Reasons for and conditions of the dispersal

- What segments of society move? [Identified through the demographic questionnaire]
- Why do people move?
- How do people move?
- Where to?
- Are there any national/international conditions that determine the dispersal and the regions of destination?

#### Questions:

*Demographic questions* asked during the first meeting before the interview or at the beginning of the interview/phone interview in order to identify what segment of the study population the respondent belongs to and help contextualizing the interview.

- *What is your age?*
- *What is your gender?*
- *What is your primary language?*
- *What is the highest level of education you have completed?*
- *What is your primary nationality?*
- *Do you hold any other nationality?*
- *Where were you born?*
- *Where do you permanently reside?*
- *How long have you been living there?*
- *Have you lived in any other country before?*
- *What is your current marital status?*
- *Do you have any children? If yes, how many?*
- *What is your primary area of employment?*
- *What is your role in the industry?*
- *What sector does the organisation you work for belong to?*
- *What is the name of the organisation?*

Main Questions (numbered and bold) and possible questions for further clarification or exploration in light of the response to the initial open questions about the issue area (italic)

#### **Q1 – When did you move from Libya on a permanent basis for the first time, where to, how and why?**

This first question might be phrased differently or skipped entirely depending on the answer to the previous demographic questions. For instance, a young respondent who was not born in

Libya will rather be asked “When did your parents move from Libya on a permanent basis for the first time? Do You know how and why?”. It will then be interesting to interview the parents. A respondent who has never lived in Libya but lived in other countries and still identifies as Libyan will rather be asked questions such as “When and why did you choose to live in X country?” and/or “Have you ever lived in Libya? If yes, when and why did you move to Libya?”. Other questions might include the reasons behind choosing that country X to move to or the reasons for going back to Libya from country X at that particular time. In general, this first question is meant to identify the reasons for and conditions of the dispersal and will have to be adapted to the interviewee.

## **2) Ideoscapes**

- Ideas around roots, home and collective memory
- State-ideologies and counter-ideologies

### **Q2 – What do you consider to be your homeland?**

- *What is Libya for you?*

### **Q3 – What are the social, political and religious values and ideas that you would want to see in the new Libyan state?**

- *Do you think the majority of Libyan nationals share these values and ideas? If not, in your opinion, what are the social, political and religious values and ideas shared by the majority of Libyan people?*
- *Do you think there is a difference in values and ideas between Libyan nationals permanently residing outside Libya and those who do not? If yes, please explain.*

### **Q4 – If we take the following definition of nation “a political community which, because of linguistic, cultural, religious or political ties evolved throughout history, already forms, or aims to form, a nation-state and is conscious of its coherence, unity and particular interests”: do you think there exist a Libyan nation?**

- *Do you think Libyan nationals across Libya share some common linguistic, cultural, religious or political characteristics that make them unique?*
- *Do you think Libyan nationals outside Libya share some common linguistic, cultural, religious or political characteristics among themselves and with Libyan nationals permanently residing in Libya?*
- *Were there any events/moments in post-independence Libyan history until today when you think Libyan nationals felt united?*
- *Do you consider yourself a member of the Libyan nation?*
- *Do you think the majority of Libyan nationals residing outside Libya consider themselves part of the Libyan nation? What do you think contributed to this state of things?*

**Q5 – Do you think the Libyan state contributed in any way to the formation of a national consciousness among Libyan nationals inside and outside Libya through state-ideology or concrete political/social/cultural/economic activities? If yes, how? If no, were there any other actors that you think tried to fill this vacuum and contributed, if they did, to the formation of a national-consciousness among Libyan nationals?**

*- Do you think the new media or satellite technology had a role in this process?*

### **3) The relationship with the homeland**

- Does the diaspora participate in the activities of the homeland or viceversa?
- Do they influence each other?
- How do changes in power and resources affect homeland/host-land relations?

**Q6 – Did you ever take part in any cultural/political/social/economic activities that were oriented at Libya in your host-country or any other country before, during or after the revolution? If yes, what activities/organisations (e.g. demonstrations, direct investments, cultural/fundraising events, neighbourhood/cultural/political organisations)? If yes, what activities/organisations (e.g. demonstrations, direct investments, cultural/fundraising events, neighbourhood/cultural/political organisations)?**

*- Do you think the new media or satellite technology had a role in this process?*

### **4) The relationship with the host-land**

- Is the host-land an agent in the formation and development of diasporas?
- Does the host-land affect the way in which the diasporan community interacts with the homeland?

**Q7 – Did your host-country have any role in supporting the activities you took part in, for instance, through the involvement of governmental institutions, business organisations, civil society organisations, cultural organisations, political parties or religious organisations?**

*- Do you think these activities contributed to the development of a Libyan community in the host-country?*

*- Did the host-country influence in this way the relations between the Libyan community in the host-country and the homeland? If yes, in what way?*

*- Do you think the new media or satellite technology had a role in this process?*

### **5) The interrelationship within and among communities of the diaspora**

- How do relations among communities of the same diaspora determine political action vis-à-vis the homeland and the host-land?

## Questions

**Q8 – Do you have any contacts, regular or occasional, with Libyan people or organisations based outside Libya whether in your host-country or other countries?**

**Q9 - Did the activities/organisations you took part in were ever coordinated with the activities/organisations of other Libyan communities based in other countries?**

*- Did these coordinated activities ever resulted in any social/cultural/political/economic action oriented at Libya or at the host country?*

*- Do you think the new media or satellite technology had a role in this process?*

**Q10 - Would you want to return to Libya one day? If yes, why?**

**Q11 – Is there anything else you would like to add?**

## ***B- SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE 'NON-DIASPORA'***

*Demographic questions* asked during the first meeting before the interview or at the beginning of the interview in order to identify what segment of the study population the respondent belongs to and help contextualizing the interview.

- *What is your age?*
- *What is your gender?*
- *What is your primary language?*
- *What is the highest level of education you have completed?*
- *What is your primary nationality?*
- *Do you hold any other nationality?*
- *Where were you born?*
- *Where do you permanently reside?*
- *How long have you been living there?*
- *Have you lived in any other country before?*
- *What is your current marital status?*
- *Do you have any children? If yes, how many?*
- *What is your primary area of employment?*
- *What is your role in the industry?*
- *What sector does the organisation you work for belong to?*
- *What is the name of the organisation?*
- *Have you ever been involved in any political/cultural/social activities in Libya as an individual or a member of an organisation? If yes, what is the name of the organisation, what are the main objectives it aims to achieve and what kind of activities does it run?*

Main Questions (numbered and bold) and possible questions for further clarification or exploration in light of the response to the initial open questions about the issue area (*italic*).

**a) Ideoscapes**

- Ideas around roots, home and collective memory
- Ideas around state-ideologies and counter-ideologies

**Q1 – What do you consider to be your homeland?**

- *What is Libya for you?*

**Q2 – What are the social, political and religious values and ideas that you would want to see reflected in the new Libyan state?**

- *Do you get the sense that the majority of Libyan nationals share these values and ideas? If not, in your opinion, what are the social, political and religious values and ideas shared by the majority of Libyan people?*
- *Do you get the sense that there is a difference in values and ideas between Libyan nationals permanently residing outside Libya and those who do not? If yes, please explain.*

**Q3 - If we take the following definition of nation: a political community which, because of linguistic, cultural, religious or political ties evolved throughout history, already forms, or aims to form, a nation-state and is conscious of its coherence, unity and particular interests. Do you think there exist a Libyan nation today?**

- *Do you think Libyan nationals across Libya share some common linguistic, cultural, religious or political characteristics that make them unique?*
- *Do you think Libyan nationals outside Libya share some common linguistic, cultural, religious or political characteristics among themselves and with Libyan nationals permanently residing in Libya?*
- *Were there any events/moments in post-independence Libyan history until today when you think Libyan nationals felt united?*
- *Do you consider yourself a member of the Libyan nation?*
- *Do you think the majority of Libyan nationals residing outside Libya consider themselves part of the Libyan nation? What do you think contributed to this state of things?*

**Q4 – Do you think the Libyan state contributed in any way to the formation of a national consciousness among Libyan nationals inside and outside Libya through state-ideology or concrete political/social/cultural/economic activities? If yes, how? If no, were there any other actors that you think tried to fill this vacuum and contributed to the formation of a national-consciousness among Libyan nationals?**

- *Do you think the new media or satellite technology had a role in this process?*

**b) Ethnoscapes - The relationship with the diaspora**

- Interaction and engagement with individuals and activities of the diaspora

**Q5 - Did you have any contacts, regular or occasional, with Libyan people or organisations based outside Libya before, during or after the 2011 revolution? If so, what kind of contacts?**

**Q6 - Did you ever take part in any cultural, political, social or economic activities oriented at Libya but organised outside Libya? If yes, what kind of activities/organisations (e.g. demonstrations, cultural/fundraising events, neighbourhood/cultural/political associations, direct investments) and organised by who?**

- *Do you think the new media or satellite technology had a role in this process?*

**Q7 – Is there anything else you would like to add?**

## Appendix 2 – List of Interviewees

#	Gender	Age	Categories	Scope of activities
1	Male	35	Diaspora-2nd generation	Humanitarian Aid
2	Female	31	Diaspora-1.5 generation	N/A
3	Male	35	Diaspora-2nd generation	Humanitarian Aid
4	Male	28	Civil Society	Youth Advocacy
5	Male	29	Civil Society	Youth Advocacy
6	Male	30	Civil Society	Youth Advocacy
7	Male	42	Civil Society	Advocacy & Capacity Building
8	Female	50	Civil Society	Women Advocacy
9	Female	42	Diaspora-1.5 generation/Civil Society	Women Advocacy
10	Male	26	Civil Society	Media & Communication
11	Female	28	Diaspora-1.5 generation	Advocacy/Media & Communication
12	Female	41	Diaspora-2nd generation	Humanitarian Aid/Women Advocacy
13	Female	31	Civil Society	Media & Communication
14	Male	29	Diaspora-1.5 generation	Media & Communication
15	Female	41	Diaspora-2nd generation	Media & Communication
16	Male	63	Diaspora 1st generation	Political Activism/Advocacy
17	Male	29	Civil Society	Advocacy
18	Male	58	Diaspora 1st generation/Political Elite	Political Activism
19	Female	24	Diaspora 1.5 generation/Civil Society	Advocacy
20	Male	64	Political Elite	Transitional Politics
21	Male	68	Diaspora-1st generation/Political Elite	Transitional Politics/Media
22	Male	38	Civil Society	Mediation and Facilitation
23	Male	29	Civil Society	Advocacy
24	Male	30	Diaspora-2nd generation	Humanitarian Aid
25	Male	28	Civil Society	Youth Advocacy
26	Male	26	Civil Society	Youth Advocacy
27	Male	55	Diaspora-1st generation/Political Elite	Political Activism/Transitional Politics
28	Male	53	Diaspora- 1st generation/Civil Society	Political Activism/Media & Communication
29	Female	59	Civil Society	Political Activism/Advocacy
30	Male	29	Civil Society	Youth Advocacy
31	Male	28	Civil Society	Advocacy
32	Male	57	Political Elite	Political Activism
33	Male	44	Political Elite	Transitional Politics
34	Male	31	Civil Society	Media & Communication
35	Male	33	Civil Society	Media & Communication
36	Male	33	Diaspora-2nd generation	Media & Communication
37	Male	28	Diaspora-2nd generation	Advocacy



38 Male  
39 Male

25 Civil Society  
57 Civil Society/Political Elite

Women and Youth Advocacy  
Political Activism/Transitional Politics

### **Appendix 3 – List of websites and social media pages preliminarily consulted**

#### Web sites

Al-Wasat – Newspaper, Radio and web TV, Online news <http://alwasat.ly/ar/news/libya/>

Libya National Forces Alliance – Political Party <http://nfalibya.org/>

Libya 17<sup>th</sup> February 2011 – News provider <http://libyafeb17.com/> (diaspora)

Libya our Home: News and Views – Diaspora Website <http://www.libya-watanona.com/libya/>  
(diaspora)

National Council on US-Libya relations – Lobby Group <https://www.ncuslr.org/> (diaspora)

Tariq Elmeri – MERi TV, You Tube Channel, cultural video production  
<https://www.youtube.com/user/togatigo> (diaspora)

H2O Team – NGO <https://www.h2o.org.ly/>

Libyan Institute for Advanced Studies – NGO <http://lias.ly/index.html>

1Libya Organisation – NGO <http://1libya.org/>

#### Social media

Shabab Libya-Libyan Youth Movement (diaspora) – Facebook page (Open group)

<https://www.facebook.com/LibyanYouthMovement/> and

Twitter page <https://twitter.com/shabablibya?lang=en>

Volunteer Libya – NGO Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/VolunteerLibya/> (Open group) and Twitter Page <https://twitter.com/volunteerlibya?lang=en>

1Libya Organization – NGO Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/1Libya.org/> (Open group) and Twitter Page <https://twitter.com/1libyaorg>

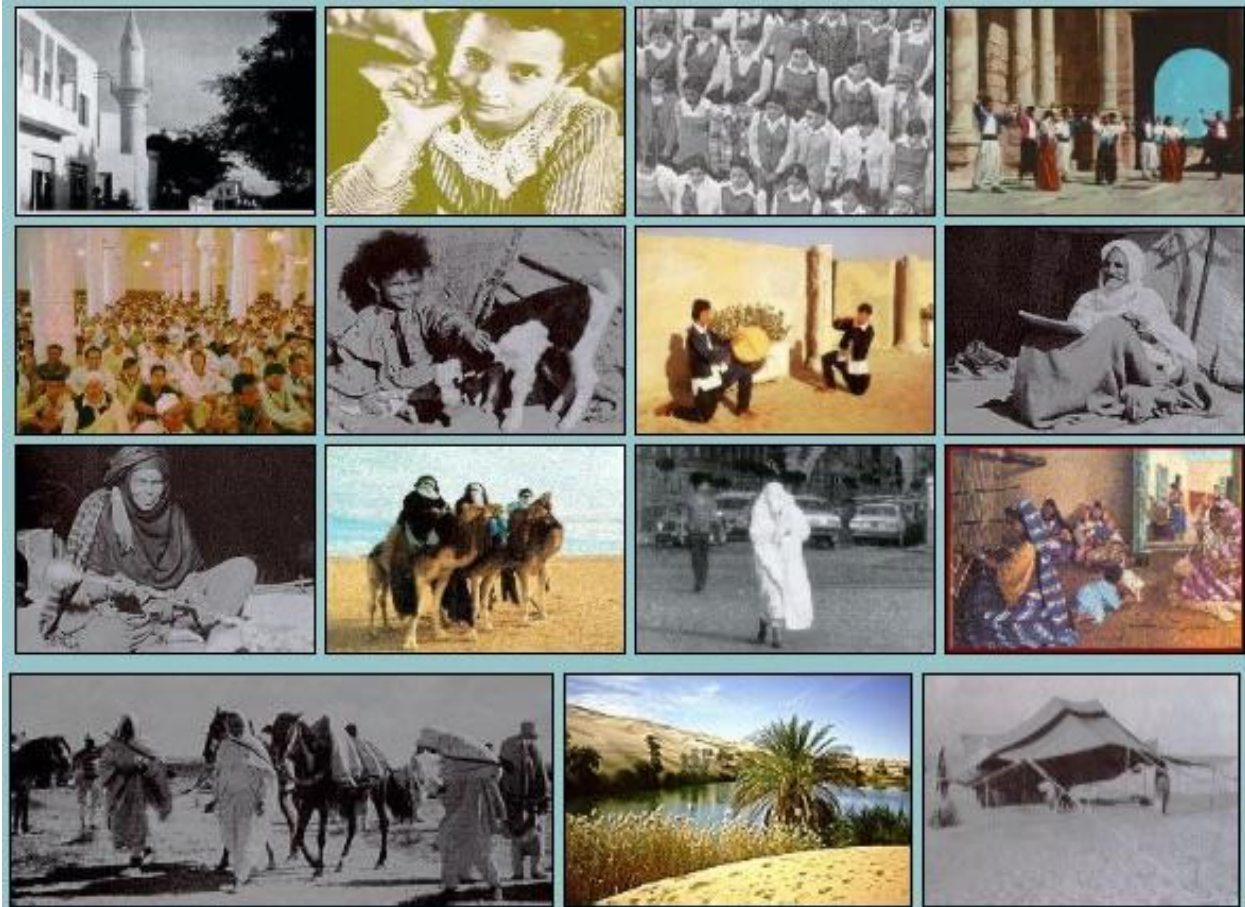
Bokra Organization – NGO Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/Bokra.Org/> (Open group) and Twitter Page <https://twitter.com/BokraOrg>

H2O Team – NGO Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/H2OLY/> (Open group) and Twitter page <https://twitter.com/H2OTEAMORG>

## Appendix 4 – Images

This annex presents a selection of images from websites and social media pages whose relevance is addressed in the text.

### Set of images #1: Selection of images from Libya Watanona.



First row left to right: a mosque in Benghazi; a student in primary school; a group of students in high school; Libyan folklore dancers. Second row, left to right: Inside a mosque; a little child and a little goat; Libyan folklore drummers; a man reading the Qur'an. Third row, left to right: a woman sewing; The Libyan Tuareg; a woman wearing *farashiya*; a Libyan home. Fourth row left to right: Libyan horsemen; Omm el-Ma' an oasis in the south west; a Bedouin tent (Libya Watanona 2019f).



Old Benghazi (Libya Watanona 2019a).



The Ozo Hotel in Benghazi (Libya Watanona 2019g).





The Red Castle in Tripoli (Libya Watanona 2019g).



Souk Attruk, Jamia Ahmad Pasha and the Red Castle (Libya Watanona 2019h).



# LIB-kyr1



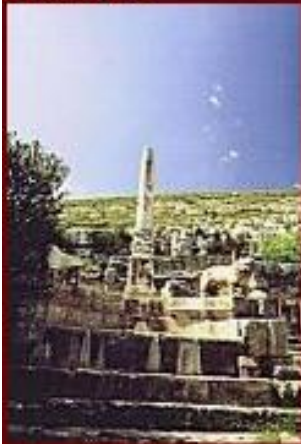
# LIB-kyr2



# LIB-kyr3



# LIB-kyr4



# LIB-kyr5



# LIB-kyr6

Cyrene (Libya Watanona 2019c).



# LIB-lep1



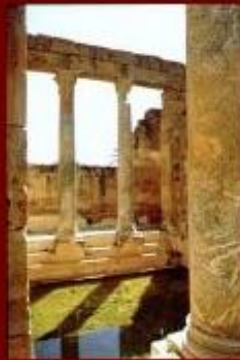
# LIB-lep2



# LIB-lep3



# LIB-lep4



# LIB-lep5



# LIB-lep6



# LIB-lep7



# LIB-lep8



# LIB-lep9

Leptis Magna (Libya Watanona 2019c).





Sabratha (Libya Watanona 2019c).

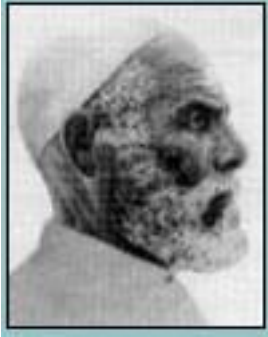




Pictures of the Italian Occupation (Libya Watanona 2019c).



Omar al-Mukhtar arrested by the Italians (Libya Watanona 2019c).



Omar al-Mukhtar (Libya Watanona 2019c).



The 1951 Libyan national flag (Libya Watanona 2019c).



King Idris meets Gamal Abdel Nasser (Libya Watanona 2019c).



Martyrs of April 7<sup>th</sup> (Libya Watanona 2019c).

**Set of images #2: Transforming the ‘archive of differences’ into ‘diacritics’ of the nation**



The Amazigh town of Ghadames. The medina is a UNESCO heritage site. © Gaia Anderson. Original link: <http://www.theworld.org/2012/11/libyas-pearl-of-the-desert/> (ShababLibya 2012n).



Moussa Fari Gmama was one of the Tuaregs from Ghadames to join the Revolution in early 2011. © Gaia Anderson. Original link: <http://www.theworld.org/2012/11/libyas-pearl-of-the-desert/> (ShababLibya2012n).



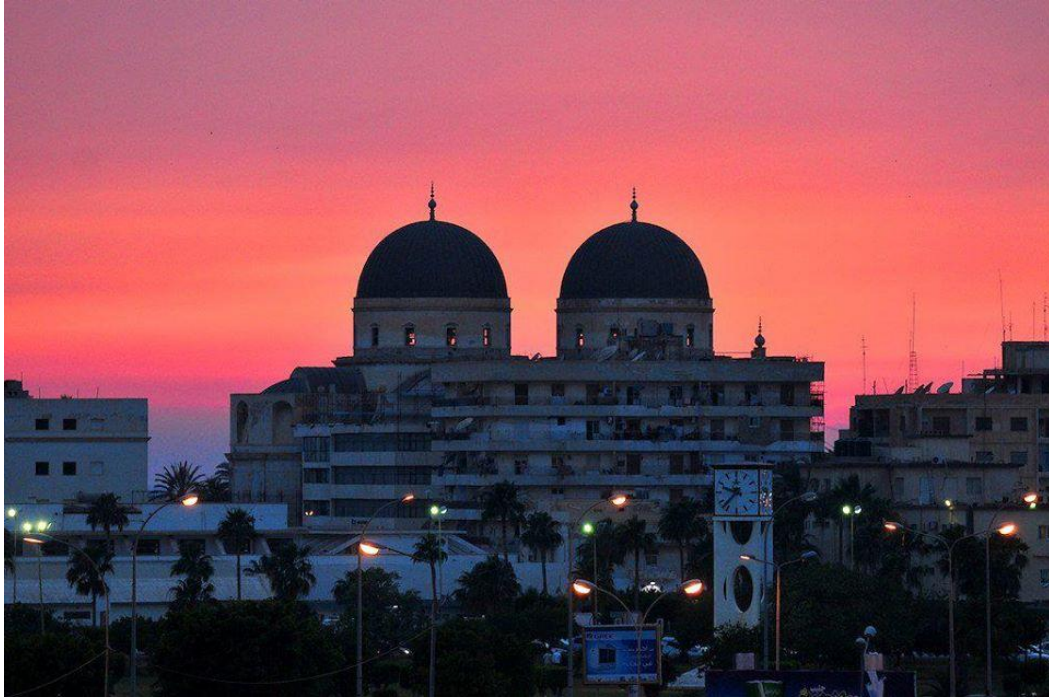


The town of Ghadames. The Facebook post reads: 'AGE-OLD ARCHITECTURE. Tight clusters of traditional mud-brick-and-palm houses have stood for centuries in Ghadames, a pre-Roman oasis town in the Sahara. Rooftop walkways allowed women to move freely, concealed from men's view.' © George Steinmetz (ShababLibya 2013h)



An old town in Ghadames. The Facebook post reads: 'INVITING THE WORLD IN. Kasim Abdu Salaam Habib, 39, opens his lovingly decorated 600-year-old home to foreign tourists in Ghadames. The house needs repairs, and visitors are scarce these days. But Habib is optimistic. "I want to see Libya as a democracy," he says.' © George Steinmetz (ShababLibya 2013h).





The Cathedral in Benghazi. © Sohail Nakhooda (ShababLibya 2011g).



The Ozo Hotel in Benghazi (ShababLibya 2011g).



The Red Castle in Tripoli (ShababLibya 2011g).



Italian architecture in Tripoli (ShababLibya 2011g).





The Omm el-Ma' an oasis (ShababLibya 2011g).



The Wadi al-Koof bridge. © Walid Tumi (ShababLibya 2011ah).



The ancient Roman theatre of Sabratha. © George Steinmetz (ShababLibya 2013h).



The Roman site of Leptis Magna. The Facebook post reads: 'VESTIGES OF GLORY. Among the world's largest, best preserved ancient Roman cities, Leptis Magna flourished under Emperor Septimius Severus, who was born here [Libya]. A vast theater, forum (at top right), and market became part of an urban center to rival Rome. Muammar Qaddafi saw sites like this as symbols of Western imperialism'. © George Steinmetz (ShababLibya 2013h).





The Greek site of Cyrene. The Facebook post reads: ‘PILLARS OF POSSIBILITY. Horses wander freely around the 2,500-year-old Temple of Zeus at Cyrene, the only ancient Greek site among Libya’s five World Heritage sites. Archaeologists are now documenting and preserving these once neglected ruins’. © George Steinmetz (ShababLibya 2013h).



An old town in Ghadames. The Facebook post reads: ‘INVITING THE WORLD IN. Kasim Abdu Salaam Habib, 39, opens his lovingly decorated 600-year-old home to foreign tourists in Ghadames. The house needs repairs, and visitors are scarce these days. But Habib is optimistic. “I want to see Libya as a democracy,” he says.’ © George Steinmetz (ShababLibya 2013h).



The Amazigh town of Nalut in the Nafusa Mountains. © Jim Almhamodi (ShababLibya 2011ax).



H2O Team wishes Eid Congratulations in Arabic and Tmazight to its followers (H2OTeam 2019).



Volunteer Libya launches an advocacy campaign in Arabic and Tmazight (VolunteerLibya 2016).



Set of images #3: *Imagining Traditions – clothes.*



A Libyan woman wearing the *farashiya* holds the pre-Gaddafi flag as she joins protesters in the eastern city of Benghazi (Shabab Libya 2011an).



Nahla al-Ageli wears a *farashiya* in a photo-portrait to represent Libya at the London 2012 Olympics. In the background is a painting portraying the Red Castle in Tripoli. © James O Jenkins (ShababLibya 2012u).



A Libyan man wears traditional clothes and the Independence flag in Benghazi in July 2011. © Mohammed Muttardi (Shabab Libya 2011ay).



Children wear traditional clothes and hold photographs of martyrs at the Eid Festival in Yefren in November 2011 (ShababLibya 2011bu).





A man riding a horse wearing a folk costume of Libyan warriors, carries a Kingdom of Libya flag as he celebrates the eightieth anniversary of the martyrdom of Libyan resistance hero Omar Al-Mukhtar, near the shrine of his burial place in Benghazi September 16, 2011. © REUTERS/Esam al-Fetori (ShababLibya 2011ar).



Libyan men wear a folk costume of the Libyan warriors of the anti-colonial resistance during the celebrations of Martyrs' Day in Benghazi on September 2012. © Maher Al-Awami (ShababLibya 2012o).

**Set of images #4: the anti-colonial struggle and the making of a national hero.**



Graffiti art in Tripoli portrays Omar al-Mukhtar. The Facebook post reads: 'Grandchildren of [anti-Italian resistance fighter Omar] Mukhtar" on Al Fatah Street on the Corniche, uptown Tripoli' (Shabab Libya 2011ab).

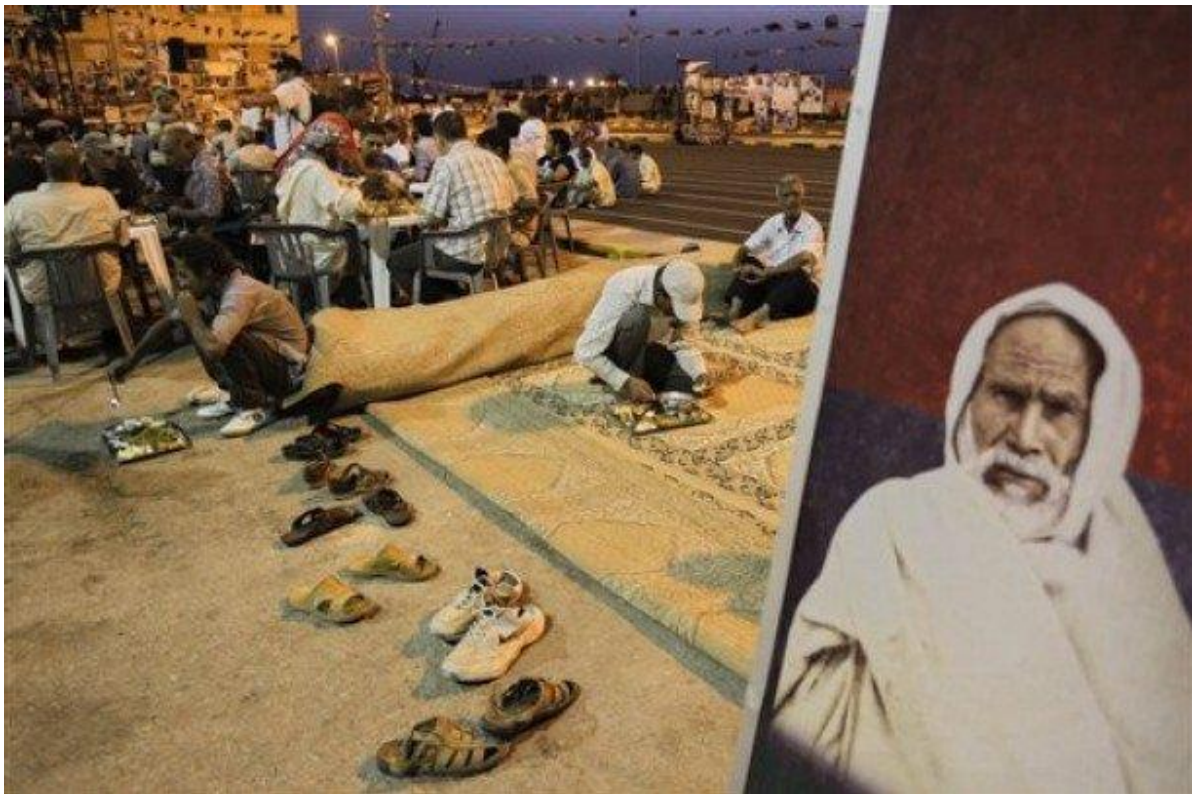


Graffiti art portrays Omar al-Mukhtar next to the blasting of the car of Mahdi Ziu, a martyr of the 2011 revolution that gave up his life to break into the regime's barracks at the beginning of the revolution in Benghazi (ShababLibya 2012p).





Men pushed a car decorated with rebel flags and images of rebel leaders and Omar al-Mukhtar in Benghazi. © AP / Sergey Ponomarev (ShababLibya 2011au).



Libyan men eat food after breaking the fast on the first day of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, with a portrait of Omar Mukhtar, the symbol of the anti-Gadhafi campaign at right, at the square in the revolutionaries-held Benghazi, Libya, Monday, Aug. 1, 2011. © AP / Sergey Ponomarev (ShababLibya 2011ak)





'A Libyan man sticks to a car window a sketch of late Libyan revolutionary leader Omar al-Mukhtar (R) and another unidentified leader at the front line on the eastern ridge of the Nafusah Mountains in Western Libya, on the outskirts of Gualish, on July 10, 2011 as forces loyal to Libyan leader Moamer Kadhafi launched a counterattack against rebel advance positions nearby. © AFP PHOTO/MARCO LONGARI' (ShababLibya 2011aj).



Protesters at San Francisco Solidarity with Libya Rally on February 26, 2011 California (ShababLibya 2011bm).





A placard portrays Omar al-Mukhtar with the Libyan flag of Independence in Benghazi in April 2011 (ShababLibya 2011h).

### Set of images #5: Independence and the Libyan Kingdom: controversies and symbology of an era



Facebook profile photo of Shabab Libya (ShababLibya 2012w).



Facebook Cover Photo of Shabab Libya (ShababLibya 2016).



'Freedom fighters carrying their weapons are seen at their positions outside the Bir-Ayyad gate near the city of Zintan in the western mountains, 120 km (75 miles) southwest of the capital Tripoli, July 23, 2011. ©REUTERS/Zoubeir Souissi' (ShababLibya 2011x).



Protests in front of 10 Downing Street, London, 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2011 (ShababLibya 2011bj).





One million march 6/7/2011. People from many cities travelled to Benghazi to participate in the march. The Facebook post reads: 'Longest Independence Flag especially made for this historical day. Benghazi, July 6, 2011. ©Ziad Ben Halim (Shabab Libya 2011az).



Libyan Embassy to the US Pays Tribute to Fallen Martyrs of Libyan Revolution. The Facebook post reads: 'The Libyan Embassy to the US held a dinner in Northern Virginia to pay tribute to those killed in the successful Libyan Revolution. Also honoured were many US based groups and individuals who played important roles during the revolution'. ©George Newcomb (ShababLibya 2011t).



Benghazi Liberation Day, 23 October 2011. © Omama Elbarassi (ShababLibya 2011o).



Military Parade in Tripoli to Celebrate Liberation. © AFP/ Joseph Eid (ShababLibya 2011av).





People celebrate in the newly named Martyr's Square, formerly known as Green Square, August 23, 2011. © AFP PHOTO/MAHMUD TURKIA (ShababLibya 2011be).



'Graffiti and fly posters vilifying Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi are popping up in Benghazi and other cities that have fallen to the rebels'. © Rory Mulholland (ShababLibya 2011aa).



Benghazi Celebrations February 17th, 2012. Rima Bugaighis of Benghazi Chronicles captures February 17th anniversary celebrations in Benghazi (Shabab Libya 2012c).

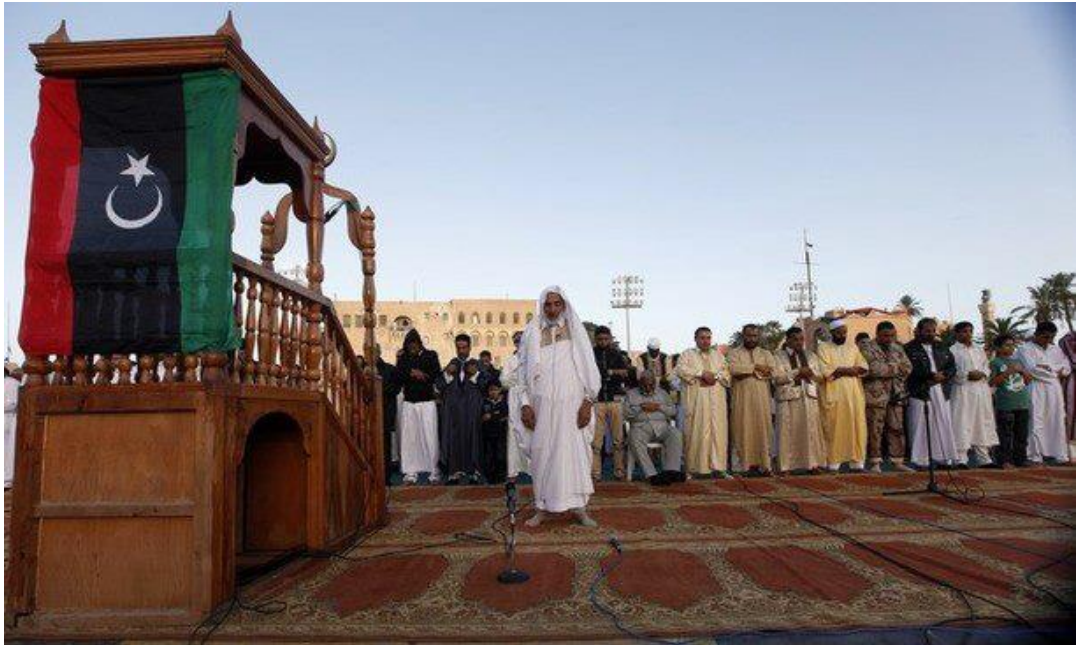


Feb17, 2012- Benghazi Celebrates First Anniversary of Feb17 (ShababLibya 2012h).





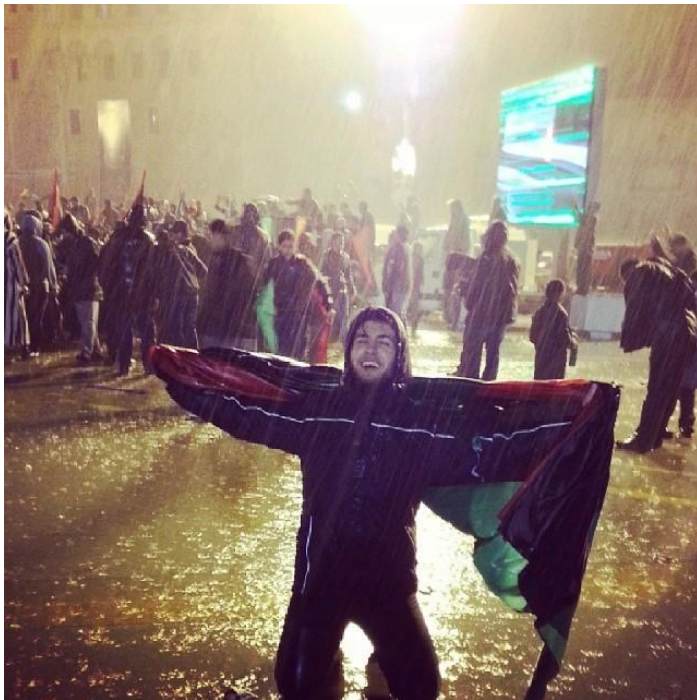
People wave Libyan flags during celebrations commemorating the second anniversary of the country's February 17 revolution, at Martyrs' Square in Tripoli February 17, 2013. ©REUTERS/Ismail Zitouny (ShababLibya 2013f).



Muslims attend the Eid al-Adha prayers, the first after Muammar Gaddafi was killed, in Martyrs' Square in Tripoli November 6, 2011. ©REUTERS/Ismail Zitouny (Shabab Libya 2011r).



A Tuareg photographed at the Libya's first festival of the Amazigh songs in Benghazi (ShababLibya 2011ag).



'Amazing photo from Tripoli Martyrs' Square after Libya won the African Nations Championship 2014' (ShababLibya 2014a).





First Independence of Libya. December 24, 1951 – Benghazi. Proclamation of the creation of the United Kingdom of Libya at al-Manar Palace in Benghazi. King Idris al-Sanusi stands at the right side of the Prime Minister Mahmoud Muntasir who reads the proclamation of Independence on 24 December 1951 (ShababLibya 2011u).



The Libyan people celebrate the first Independence of Libya. December 24, 1951, Benghazi (ShababLibya 2011u).



A man holds a poster of the Royal family in a demonstrations in Benghazi in July 2011. ©Mohammed Muttardi (ShababLibya 2011n).



Set of images #6: Martyrs.



A Libyan woman walks past portraits of people killed or who have disappeared during the rule of Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi's regime at the court square in the rebel-held capital Benghazi, Libya, Saturday, June 25, 2011. © AP Photo/Hassan Ammar (ShababLibya 2011a).



Flags and photos of martyrs inside the Mahkama in Benghazi (ShababLibya 2012c).

## Martyrs of April 7th.

## شهداء 7 ابريل



We will not forget. RIP

الله يرحم شهداءنا

حركة شبابنا الليبي

Libyan Youth Movement | @ShababLibya

April 7<sup>th</sup> martyrs (ShababLibya 2013b).