

**Parochialism in Libyan Political Culture:  
understanding the authoritarian tendencies in Libyan  
Political Culture and their role in the failure of the  
2011 revolution**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Following four decades of authoritarian rule under the Gaddafi regime, and a decade marked by trends of fragmented rule, violence, chaos and instability, Libya's political culture undoubtedly suffered the negative implications of a plagued political atmosphere. This paper explores the role that the political culture of Libya plays in the peacebuilding processes and post-revolutionary reconstruction following the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, as well as examines the damage caused to it by the 2011 NATO-led military intervention. Apart from the frequently examined factors of security paradigms, oil and state rentierism, this paper focuses on exposing how the long acclimatization to authoritarian rule, the centralization of the state under Gaddafi, the engineering of a unique Jamahiriyya governance system, the interactive dynamics of localized systems of legitimacy, among other aspects have shaped the Libyan civic and political cultures into parochial ones. Such exploration enables a better understanding of the reasons behind Libya's inability to undergo sound processes of peacebuilding and post-revolutionary reconstruction.

**Keywords:** Political Culture, Libya, Muammar Gaddafi, Conflict, Western Intervention, Post-revolutionary Reconstruction.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

A little over a decade after the outbreak of the *February 17 Revolution* that overthrew Colonel Muammar Gaddafi's *Jamahiriyya*, Libya has yet to see the stability that its people have hoped for, and has in fact become the opposite: mired in chaos, politically fragmented, an illegal migration hub, and a complex, internationalized conflict zone to say the least. Having experienced a bloody revolution, two courses of civil wars, the rise and intervention of Islamic fundamentalism, the gruesome struggle for power between its two political centers, and most recently the postponement of its General elections in 2021, Libya's conflict is a challenging case to compare.

In understanding what fosters such continuous instability, analysts have been quick to resort to security-based explanations overlooking the deep-rooted implications the country's inherited political culture plays in propagating the instability. Having inherited an intensely disoriented national identity from the Gaddafi regime, characterized by regional, city-based and tribal affiliations and lacking any form of democratic institutions and foundations, Libya's decade long conflict has been exacerbated by this disregard for the importance of a sociocultural component in peacebuilding. Cultural disunity, individualized pride, and lack of democratic values, are but a few key components to the political culture of Libya that have largely manifested themselves in the failed processes of peacebuilding. Such a parochial civic and political culture was further exacerbated by the false hope provided by the 2011 NATO-led intervention in the country, that promised the citizenry fantasies of a democratic transition but abandoned the country as soon as regime change was accomplished, leaving Libya's political culture to be further damaged by trends of violence, instability and chaos. This reality briefly highlights the true identity crisis and incomparable political culture that Libya holds due to its historical experiences, and only proves that at the dawn of a new milestone such as the pending elections that Libya's political culture ought to be reflected upon.

### 1.1. Research motivation

The motivation behind this project comes from an immense interest on various levels, but above all, it comes from a very intrinsic and personal place. Being a Libyan who has lived through the transformative events of 2011 and who has had her life shaped by the hardship of the continuous unrest, I cannot help but be drawn to the exploration of my country's complex and unfortunate reality. My interest in Libyan affairs goes without saying, but the turning point that led me to fixate on the issue of Libyan political culture was my visit to Libya in the summer of 2021, after *exactly* a decade of being away. Besides my symbolic return date, my trip back also coincided with a symbolic and crucial time for Libya and Libyans: the months approaching the scheduled Libyan General Elections of 2021. Fundamentally, being there at such a time gave me a front row seat to

witness the general sentiment of the people, a sense of hysterical excitement and uncertainty: a delirium. Despite the fact that the elections were eventually rescheduled - which came of no major surprise - the sheer thought of the approach of such a groundbreaking event was enough to instigate what resembled a stage of teenage confusion, exposing many facets about Libya's unique political culture that ought to be addressed and reflected upon promptly. Moreover, the lack of recognition and the underestimation of Libya's unique social fabric and political culture in the literature and in the analytical accounts of the Libyan conflict are surprising, and cause me to want to investigate this issue further. Lastly, the amalgamation of seeing the every-day life of conflict materialized before my eyes once again, interacting with long-time friends and my fresh perspective on the actual, local dynamics led me to reflect on Libya's society and political culture and proved to me that Libyan political culture might be undergoing important developments and it is very timely for reflections.

In saying this, it must also be noted that beyond personal interest there is a true advantage that lies in the fact that this research is being conducted at such a sensitive time for Libya's political culture. Conducting this research and exploring this issue at such a "turning point" period holds a true added value, regardless of the conclusions of the research. While the Libyan elections that I mentioned above did not end up taking place on the date they were planned to take place in, there is a very telling narrative about that reality that this project must explore. The indefinite postponement of this groundbreaking event that led to the catalysis of this project to begin with says a lot about the weak political culture and the deteriorating social fabric that the country possesses, and there is a serious need to address the deep-set obstacles that allowed for this postponement.

## **1.2. Objectives, research question and thesis statement**

The project aims to expose a crucial, yet often overlooked, setback to the sustainability of Libya's post-revolutionary reconstruction and peace talks: the singularity of Libyan political culture and character. As mentioned above, approaches to the Libyan conflict often hyperfixate on security-focused and actor-based paradigms that center on dynamics of rivalries, relations and behaviors, offering some exploratory power to the aspects of the conflict, but constantly failing to explain the political lightning-rod moments that have sparked national conflicts time and again over the past decade. Such unsustainability and failure come from the inability to acknowledge the significance that political culture and social fabric play in determining the trajectory of peace.

Fundamentally, the general objective of this research is to use a political culture approach **when understanding Libyan state of affairs**. It does so through: (1) exploring the historical underpinnings of contemporary Libyan political culture, (2) examining the role that the Gaddafi regime plays in consolidating Libya's parochial political culture, and finally (3) evaluating the

current status of Libyan political culture after the fall of the Gaddafi regime. While the project assumes a political culture approach, it would not be sound to examine the series of events that took place within the country exclusively through such approach; for this reason, for the latter part of the project that fixates on the role of political culture post-Gaddafi's regime, the project assumes an analytical account that focuses on the role of the western intervention in the failure of peacebuilding and post-revolutionary reconstruction.

**In having laid out the main objectives of this paper, the main research question that guided the fulfillment of such objectives is the following:**

*What impact did the Gaddafi regime have on the political culture of Libya and what implications did that have on the post-Gaddafi scene in the country?*

**The brief answer to the above stated question, and the thesis of this research is the following:**

*When diagnosing the failures of democratic transition following the 17 February revolution and in understanding Libya's current state of affairs, it becomes apparent that the country's political culture acts as a true setback and plays a central role in defying peace. In analyzing the root cause behind such a reality, it is of utmost importance to refer to the identity that has come to define the Libyan state of affairs: dictatorship under Gaddafi's rule. Due to Gaddafi's unapologetic customization of the country, his personalized governance system, and his engineering of the society under the so-called Jamahiriyya model, Libya's political culture has turned into that of a democratically inexperienced one, and a political culture that merely thrives off of Gaddafi's persona: a parochial political culture. Given such an atmosphere, and combining it with the detrimental 2011 NATO-led military intervention, Libya's peacebuilding process that followed Gaddafi's downfall was doomed to fail given the shaky state foundations Libya was left with, coupled with the lack of support provided following the defective Western intervention in the country. The role that parochialism plays in Libya's current state of affairs has only expanded further following the fall of the Gadda regime, and is present in every aspect of civic and political culture today.*

### 1.3. Methodology

#### 1.3.1. Theoretical framework

As this research would assume a political culture approach to exploring conflict, it is imperative to examine the issue that political culture is confronted with when searching for a theoretical and methodological framework. Literature has been produced addressing the dilemma of methodologizing political culture and the inability to analyze it through a singular theoretical framework (Voinea and Neumann 2020). Several factors explain such a dilemma, among them is the observation that political culture theory has not succeeded at integrating culture and state studies under a singular operational and conceptual framework (Steinmetz 1999; Reus-Smit 2019). On the other hand, what further adds to such a dilemma is the fact that traditional international relations theories have difficulty in dealing with culture in their paradigms, securing no location for it. The hyperfixation on the concept of security and military power that comes from realism, the centralization of the role of economy in the international system in liberalism, and the constructivism outlook on the formation of the international system all have lacking explanatory powers when it comes to explaining modern politics (Roudgar 2021; Khodaverdi and Shahmohammadi 2016). On this bedrock, this research selects and incorporates certain aspects from several theories in order to be able to present a more holistic and comprehensive analysis in research. The main theories that are employed are the following: realism, constructivism and postcolonialism.

In what concerns realism, the theoretical framework around national security is borrowed in order to serve as an explanatory and analytical tool in understanding the conflict-ridden reality that Libya has been in. Realist understandings of security in civil war settings draw on aspects of the absence of authority, the vulnerabilities of particular groups and the implications of rapid power shifts (Posen 1993). Posen's insight around civil war appropriately complements the realist concept of *bandwagoning* (Mearsheimer 2001; Walt 1987), whereby weak states are believed to be more inclined to bandwagon greater states in the pursuit of national security. Building on from this theoretical basis, and applying it in the case of Libya's weak national security, it is apparent that instability have not only weakened Libyan foreign policy but also began to have implications on it in terms of political culture, as it went from a country with strong presence internationally to a hot zone for proxy conflict. The key realist aspects of fragmentation, sovereignty and foreign policy that are prominent in the case of Libya are important to reflect upon in the context of their implications on political culture.

To complement the security-focused aspects of realism, this paper accompanies it with the constructivist recognition of the importance of "inter-subjective structures that give the material world meaning," including norms, culture, identity, and ideas on state behavior or on international



relations more generally (Lantis 2005). The constructivist approach devotes particular attention to the process of identity formation, “with connections to organizational process, history, tradition, and culture” (Lantis 2005), which is suitable to explain the processes of political culture formation under the Gaddafi regime.

Finally, the post-colonial framework is suitable for analyzing the events of the 2011 NATO military intervention. This theoretical bedrock “provides insight into the ways in which the imperial juncture is implicated in the construction of contemporary relations of power, hierarchy and domination” (Chowdhry & Nair, 2005, pg. 11-12). Edward Said (2003) highlights the constructed image that the West has painted of the Middle East in particular, depicting it as a barren land, further feeding into the binary relationship created between North and South. Therefore, a postcolonial critique of the intervention is suitable to analyze this dynamic, challenge the alleged neutrality and objectivity of documents such as the “Responsibility to Protect”, and diagnose the intervention as a pretext for regime change.

### **1.3.2. Research methods:**

The methodological approach that is undertaken in this research project is a qualitative one. Specifically, this research combines methods of existing data and secondary sources with interviews in order to reach its desired outcome.

In order to achieve the objectives listed above, this project undergoes a comparative method of analysis, particularly in juxtaposing two political atmospheres: the political culture under Gaddafi’s rule vs the political culture post-Gaddafi’s downfall. While oftentimes comparative methods in research tend to narrow down the analysis to particular timeframes, the political culture approach of this project does not allow for that to be done. Given the slow-moving nature of developments in political culture, which reflect general changes in the socio-economic and politics of societies at a very gradual basis, it would be a limitation to confine this project to strict timeframes, as not enough data would be outsourced. Political culture developments happen over extended periods of time, and only rarely do some isolated events affect its acceleration; for this reason, the comparative method of research assumed by this project is comparing two different political atmospheres rather than fixating on the symmetries of timeframes.

To frame the theoretical approach behind this research project, this paper mainly sources secondary data. Beyond the relevant works mentioned in the literature review below to frame the discussion through a political culture approach, this research highly relied on analyzing authoritarian trends of rule under the Gaddafi rule, with some reference to the colonial and monarchical times, as well as complement such analysis with works produced by the Libyan pioneer on political culture, and political scientists Amal Obeidi. Through Obeidi’s comprehensive

study of Libya's political culture through her book *Political Culture in Libya* there is a sufficient foundation for this research to construct the idea of Libyan political culture, primarily through her observations and data collection. Given that her research time frame covers a bounded time period of Gaddafi's rule, and consequently does not cover the entire periodical trajectory of this project, this paper strategically complemented Obeidi's conclusions with more current analytical accounts of experts such as Emadeddin Badi and Anas El-Gomati, among others. Moreover, this project relies heavily on research reports, institutional publications, roundtable discussions, as well as primary sources such as the Green Book.

On the other hand, to materialize the theoretical basis and to obtain unique analytical accounts, this project majorly benefited from the raw input of key figures of Libyan society. In seeking diverse perspectives, two key figures from different fields of expertise (the diplomatic field and the scholarly field) were selected: Walid Abuabdallah, Ambassador of the State of Libya to the Kingdom of Spain, and Emadeddin Badi, scholar, independent consultant and Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council. While both perspectives differ slightly in approach, they were rather complementary to the conclusions of this paper in recognizing the grand role that political culture plays in Libyan politics.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

As the objective of this research is to use a political culture approach to study the case of the Libyan conflict and explore the failure of democratic transition, extensive research must be done on the theory of political culture in democratic transitions. This literature review will consequently be divided into two parts: on the one hand, it will lay out the research contributions from scholars on the aforementioned theoretical approaches, and on the other hand it will outline the existing literature on Libyan political culture.

As the field of political science gradually expands in its scope beyond the realist-based paradigms of conflict analysis, more and more attention has been pivoted towards the concept of political culture, deeming it “one of the most popular and seductive concepts in political science; it is also one of the most controversial and confused” (Elkins & Simeon, 1979). Interconnectedly, with the growing literature on the political economy of regime transitions in the fields of economics and political science (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2006), there has been a strong implication on the role that political culture plays in the shaping the transitions of conflict societies from nondemocratic scenarios to democratic ones. A central element to both of these lines of research is the exploration of political culture as a player in conflict settings and transitional societies, whether it be a catalyst for change or a counter-incentive of it. It must be noted however, that within this line of research, there is still an undersupplied set of literature on the matter of political culture in conflict analysis, requiring for this research to do an extensive amount of cross-referencing activities in order to produce a comprehensive political culture analysis of the Libyan conflict.

While the historical relevance of the notion of political culture is undeniable, the coinage and the sudden appearance of the term only came about in the end of the 1950s and early 1960s. The accreditation of the concept of political culture in political science today goes to political scientists Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba. In 1956, Almond first introduced the concept of “political culture” as part of his formula for the classification and comparison of political systems. In the early 1960s, together with Verba, an empirical study and survey of attitudes of five countries was carried out and published in their study *The Civil Culture* (1963). In this line, political culture is defined as “[...] the pattern of individual attitudes and orientations toward politics among the members of a political system. It is the subjective realm that underlies and gives meaning to political actions.” (Almond and Verba, 1963). The orientations which Almond and Verba touch upon in their definition become the basis for three types of political culture: *parochial* (where individuals have low expectations and awareness of government), *subject* (where individuals are aware of the output of the political system but do not participate in the process of policy decision) and *participant* (where individuals are active and involved in the input and output of the system).

This explanation and analysis demonstrate that Almond and Verba materialized political culture as part of the political process, an approach that this research will adopt.

Some other scholars have reiterated Almond and Verba's formulation of political culture. For Lucian W. Pye (1968), political culture provides "an ordered subjective realm of politics" which is present on two levels: (1) controlling guidelines for effective political behavior, and (2) gives a systematic structure of values and rational considerations which ensures coherence in the performance of institutions and organizations. On this bedrock, political culture is the product of both collective histories and individual life histories of political systems. On the other hand, Easton (1965) highlights political culture as a state of mind featuring a deep-seated set of attitudes which include the attachment to democracy as the "optimal" political institution, the belief in its legitimacy and attachment to its symbols.

Despite countable differences in their approaches, all the above definitions and most other relevant literature on political culture share the idea that all the values found in the political system are part of political culture (Almond & Verba, 1963; Pye 1968; Easton 1965). Building on this perspective, a large literature in political sociology and comparative politics has emphasized the importance of "immaterial factors", such as values, ideologies and legitimacy, as crucial determinants of the sustainability of specific political institutions. Such an explanation points to the role of "socialization agencies" like the state and the family in the transmission of these factors across generations (Ticchi, Verdier & Vindigni, 2013).

Central to political culture are democratic values or lack thereof; therefore, it is equally of importance to explore democratic transition theory. There is a large body of literature on democratic transition theory, from scholars identifying economic stability as a contributor to democracy (Lipsett 1959; Haggard & Kaufman) to others crediting the role of elites (Higley & Burton 1989). Others draw on the correlation between political culture and democracy by studying the overall values and attitudes of several societies (Almond & Sidney, 1963). The concoction of democratic values in political culture is what is referred to as the civic culture, a mixed set of values that contains attributes from both modern and traditional cultures and allows both cultures to interact polarizing and destroying each other (Almond & Sidney, 1963). As theories of democratization and democratic transition are abundant, and vary in their effectiveness and focus on several aspects such as economic, political and social factors behind democratic transitions, this research will focus on theories that account for processes of nation-state formation more than political economy ones.

Departing from the theoretical bedrock, and towards the practical approach of examining literature particularly on Libya's political culture, one will find gaps in research and date. Despite the undersupply of literature, a brilliant and prominent work on the matter is by professor Amal Obeidi in her book *Political Culture in Libya* (2001). Obeidi gives particular attention to the role

played by education and religion within the historical background of Libyan society. In doing so, she examines the state ideology of the revolutionary regime since 1969, through three main stages: first, from the founding of the revolution in September 1969 to 1973; second, from the popular revolution in April 1973 to 1976; third, from 1976 to date. She concludes in arguing the revolutionary regime's use of political socialization as an instrument to create 'revolutionary citizens', providing special attention to the education system as a political socialization agent. Another key element of Obeidi's analysis is her focus on the role of tribalism as an alternative to civil society, as well as the role of women in society. In another remarkable work of hers titled "Political Elites in Libya since 1969" (2008) Obeidi studies the structure of the elite within Libya to understand developments within society as well as the social fabric. While this work does not exclusively fixate on political culture developments, it implicitly contributes to the empirical knowledge on the political system and civic culture under Gaddafi.

Contrastingly, a more recent, post-revolutionary account titled *Libya's Political Culture Wars* (2020) by Anas El-Gomati fixates on a more security-centric, institution-focused analysis. From the outset of power dynamics, El-Gomati's security-focused analysis exposes the hasty, and almost non-existent foundation of Libyan political foundations, that has contributed to the failure of achieving sustainable peace. In other terms, El-Gomati argues that the peace building process identifies the power struggle, but does not explain how politicians and armed groups will exercise their power in a unified state, whether their visions of politics and power are compatible and whether institutional unification is sufficient to ensure peaceful cooperation.

On a less security-based account, Emadeddin Badi in his *Of Conflict and Collapse: Rethinking State Formation in Post-Gaddafi Libya* (2021) explores "the relationships between the Libyan state and society, and the ways in which these dynamics affected the subsequent civil wars in 2011 and onwards." Unlike El-Gomati's approach, Badi offers a less security-focused approach and a more sociopolitical approach to his analysis, focusing on Gaddafi's centralization of the state, dystopian governance systems, socio economic and political cultures pre-2011 among other factors that came to shape Libya's landscape. Though not comparable in nature and data, Badi's work is the closest recent publication in approach to Obeidi's political culture approach, yet it is alone in that.

In having said that, another relevant observation is that besides Badi's work, the more recent accounts that examine Libyan political culture, while they are security-focused in their scope, they commonly incorporate the facts of tribalism as the main element of analysis in Libyan political culture (Huesken 2012; Hweio 2012; Mühlberger 2012). Several works after the fall of Gaddafi have studied the tribal structure of Libyan society with the objective of understanding conflict related dynamics, most notably: *Tribal Political Culture and the Revolution in the Cyrenaica of*

*Libya* (Huesken, 2012), *Tribes in Libya: From Social Organization to Political Power* (Hweio, 2012),

While the above-mentioned analytical accounts provide comprehensive analysis for each of the perspectives they chose to analyze Libya's political culture from, it must be noted that there is a notable time disparity in literature between their publications. While Obeidi's work was published at a fairly recent stage in Gaddafi's reign, 2001, covering a considerable amount of Libya's political culture under his rule, it also came at a time of huge shifts in Gaddafi's reign, where he shifted towards a more liberal policy of conduct in the early 2000s. On the other hand, the more recent works mentioned are either right after the overthrow of the regime, or a decade after, therefore naturally holding a more security-based approach to the issue, tending to overlook other components of the social fabric. Due to the disparity in publication date, and the lack of general literature on the subject matter, this research undertakes a cross-referencing approach along with a complementary analytical approach of interviews.

In saying this, a question begs itself: why is there such a disparity of publications between works? Did 2011 not have an impact in scholarly research? While there might be no singular academic answer for these questions, as there is a deficit of research on the matter in general, several speculations can be made through cross referencing of sources. Several authors have vaguely attributed the lack of political culture mobilization post-2011 to Gaddafi's divide-and-conquer strategy that has left the country paralyzed after his downfall (Evers, 2016; ICG, 2012). This strategy, that has left the state apparatus relatively weak, is what explains the failure of post-revolutionary reconstruction, and what in turn explains the fixation on conflict dynamics and the deviation away from exploring concepts such as political culture. In saying this however, it must be noted that there has undeniably been other works that have made reference to Libyan political culture, however, what is intended to be highlighted is that the concept of political culture exclusively is rarely ever examined entirely.

To conclude, despite some minor differences on the theoretical bedrock, the literature on political culture widely shares the conception that political culture is the combination of all the values found in the political system, while also acknowledging that it is a slow-moving subculture, that gradually reflects general changes in the socio-economics and politics of societies. When exploring this definition in the case of Libya, it becomes undeniable that Libyan society holds a rather unique and singular political culture, in that it is very much a reflection of the weak state apparatus. In exploring the literature on Libyan political culture, it becomes clear that there is a clear deficit on the matter, and a considerable disparity in publications on this concept, further prompting the need to research it and fill the gaps. Again, as aforementioned, this gap is explicit to research on political culture per se, meaning that there has undniebaly been a production of work on

the matter and implicit reference to political culture, and makes general reference to sociocultural components, yet placing such variables at the center of research is what is truly lacking. This research project humbly explores these gaps in research and exposes the true implications political culture can have on peacebuilding and state reconstruction.

### 3. POLITICAL CULTURE IN LIBYA

Linkages have often been drawn between the status of states' political cultures and the stability of democratic institutions (Selingson 2002; Inglehart & Welzel 2003), leaving room for one to speculate about the juxtaposed relationship between the status of political culture and its role in conflict settings. Based on the predominant axiom that there are in fact strong aggregate level correlations between political culture and stable democracy (Inglehart 1997), a presumption arises hypothesizing the correlation between certain types of political culture and states' proneness to conflict. In examining Libya's current state of affairs, a look back at its history and the crystallization of its contemporary political culture provide some understanding of the factors and elements which have affected the subsequent conflict dynamics post-Gaddafi's downfall. While routine analysis surrounding the impact of oil and state rentierism served some explanatory power to conflict dynamics, they have often failed to take into account the role of a dystopian governance system, citizenry identity and behavioral trends, socio-economic and political cultures among other pillars of political culture as a barometer in the perpetration of conflict.

This research sets out to validate the above stated presumption through three key developments. Firstly, it contextualizes the status of contemporary Libyan Political culture, dissect the pillars that compose it and subsequently diagnose it according to Almond and Verba's Civic Political Culture Classifications theory. Secondly, it analyzes the pillars of Libyan political culture that were materialized as a result of the Gaddafi regime, as well as outlines key events that helped shape it. Lastly, it exposes the grand political vacuum that took place after the fall of the Gaddafi regime, examines the shifts and analyzes the implications that had on the social fabric and the political culture of the nation.

#### 3.1. Historical background

Prior to its independence in 1951, Libya had gone through several periods of governance, including being a semi-independent province of the Ottoman Empire (1711-1835), an Italian colony (1912-1947), and an occupied state under British and French occupation (1943-1951). In 1951, Libya gained its independence and became known as the Kingdom of Libya under the rule of King Idris I. On September 1, 1969, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi led a bloodless *coup d'état* against the monarchy of King Idris I, which resulted in his proclamation as the *de facto* leader of the Libyan state that transformed Libya from a kingdom and into a republic; this revolution would be referred to by many different namings including the 1969 Revolution, the Fatah Revolution or the September Revolution. Following the dismantling of the monarchy, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC) headed by Gaddafi would denounce the idea of the kingdom, the monarchy and the constitution and would alternatively establish the Libyan Arab Republic, which was united under



the motto of “freedom, socialism and unity”, and would later be renamed to the Great Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyya. Gaddafi would go on to rule the country for 42 years, leading the country through several phases of socioeconomic and political remodeling, and experimenting with unique systems of governance. As a highly polarizing character, Gaddafi was notorious for his pervasive cult of personality that came to characterize his reign. Ruling under an idiosyncratic governance system, Gaddafi led the country under an ideology that combined socialism, islamic, pan-Arab, pan-African, anti-imperialist, anti-Western tendencies that all fall under the umbrella of authoritarian rule.

On February 17, 2011 a revolution broke out against Gaddafi’s regime, which led to his eventual murder and overthrow of the Libyan Jamahiriyya. The immediate demands of the general public and the opposition movement were for the improvement of the socioeconomic conditions of the people, for political reforms and for the creation of a true democratic system. The regime’s response coupled with the opposition’s pushback escalated the situation into a civil war, and led to the eventual 2011 NATO-led military intervention that supported the anti-Gaddafi National Transitional Council (TNC). In 2014, the two rival authorities that claimed to govern the country clashed, destabilizing the country and resulting in a second civil war, dividing the country between the Tobruk and Tripoli -based governments, additional to the various tribal and Islamist-based militias. On October 23, 2020, the two warring sides signed a permanent ceasefire and a unity government finally took authority.

### **3.2. Underpinnings of contemporary Libyan Political Culture**

In attempting to understand the role that political culture plays in conflict dynamics, it is of utmost importance to understand the essence behind it as a phenomenon, as well as diagnose its orientation to be able to explicate it appropriately in the chosen case study.

As a slow and gradual process that reflects the socio-economic and politics of societies, political culture is regarded as a formula for the classification and comparison of political systems (Obeidi, 2001). On the one hand, political culture has often been viewed as a blanket of the political attitudes and orientations of individuals relative to the political system by some scholars (Almond & Verba, 1989), and a broader ordered subjective realm of politics by other scholars (Pye 1972). When applying Almond and Verba’s classifications of political culture onto contemporary Libyan political culture, it becomes apparent that due to the co-occurrence of the state-building process with the authoritarian tendencies, combined with other historical developments (outlined below), it can be safely argued that Libyan political culture is *parochial* one (Obeidi 2001), with some subject political culture tendencies post-Arab Spring at best (Kashiem 2019).

The historical context of Libya offers some explanations to the factors and elements which have shaped the modern social fabric and political culture of the country. The periods following Libya's independence from Italian colonial rule proved to be crucial to the development of the political processes and cultural developments of the nation, as they came to mark the next six decades of Libyan state of affairs through authoritarian experiences (Kashiem 2019). Taking into account the diverse governance eras of the Ottomans, Italians, the Senussi Monarchy and the Gaddafi *Jamahiriyya* rule, it becomes evident that the citizenry traditionally derives its identity from the values, attitudes and patterns of behaviors inherited from parochial environments and figures of authority (Obeidi, 2001); trends of loyalties all common in parochial political cultures. With the process of state-building co-occurring with two, consecutive authoritative forms of governance, there became an "inherent weakness of civic and democratic culture," (Sawani, 2020; EI-Mogherbi 1992). In this manner, one can draw linkages between the Libyan case and that of other modern Arab nations, whereby clear structural contradictions speak to the citizenry, social fabric and political culture of states. The instability of Libya, much like other Arab nations, reflects the inharmonious relationship between the traditional Arab-Islamic model and the modern Western model of the nation state (Sawani 2020); to exemplify, both the Monarchical rule (1951-1969), and the Gaddafi regime (1969-2011) proved a failure at transcending such a contradiction. Consequently, the deep-set, traditional roots of the state, especially those of tribalism and conflict between the core and periphery have a tendency to overpower and rise at every potential opportunity, fostering a parochial political culture.

In having identified the contemporary Libyan political culture as an arguably parochial one, it becomes necessary to outline what sort of pillars uphold such a cultural and political environment. Principally, and while the characteristics of parochial political cultures are similar in their essence across societies, they often materialize themselves in different manners. In the case of Libya, the main pillars that make up Libya's parochial political culture are a product of the interactive dynamics of religion, tribalism, education, political socialization and ideology, among other factors (Kasheim 2019).

Through cross-referencing valuable sources on the matter, primarily by conducting two interviews (AbuAbdullah 2022; Badi 2022), this paper has identified several key factors that make up this parochial political culture; this argumentative thread was further assisted by cross-referencing information with other literary sources (Obeidi 2001; Badi 2022; Mühlberger 2012).

### 3.2.1 Submission and authority

In a political culture study titled *The Arab Political Culture and the Issue of Democracy*, Dr. Mohamed El-Mogherbi (1992) extensively explores the social fabric of Arab states, specifically through drawing on the relationship between democracy and Arab political culture. In his work, El-Mogherbi places emphasis on the agents of socialization processes from which Arab individuals acquire their values, orientations and patterns of behavior from childhood, concluding that such processes in turn create a strong relationship between submission and authority. When reflecting on Arab social life and Arab political life, there are clear linkages between the two, whereby the frameworks in the chains of authority and submission of the former, manifest themselves in the political experience of the latter. In other words, social relations between parents and children, spouses, elders and youth, among others create a dynamic of the governing vs the governed that then naturally manifest authoritarian systems (El-Mogherbi, 1992).

In the case of Libya, where society is distinctively based and organized along tribal, kinship and clan lines that are decidedly hierarchical in their dynamic, El-Mogherbi's attitudinal explanations are very much present. While this type of societal structure is in part challenged by the presence of an urban citizenry and by the nation's youth, it is undeniable that kind kinship ties and affiliations manifest themselves in urban centers as well, playing out the so-called "extended family politics", which often has a direct influence on the composition of city quarters as well (Mühlberger 2012). This attitudinal system of Libya's social fabric directly affects its political culture; in fact, "the relationship between tribal patterns and state institutions is not antagonistic, but rather complementary and overlapping" (Mühlberger 2012). This, along with the historical subordination that Libyans have been exposed to through colonial rule and authoritarian rule has imposed an authoritarian mode of socialization and made for a parochial political system based on submission to authority and subordination to government.

Another line of analysis highlights the give-and-take dynamic between Libyan society and politics, especially when it comes to the culture of submission to authority. To exemplify this statement within the context of Gaddafi's rule, it is argued that "repressive and manipulative practices [under Gaddafi] further undermined civil society and trade unions, while enhancing the role of traditional structures such as the tribal system, thus strengthening their influence in favour of Gaddafi's eccentric model" (Sawani 2012). Additionally, Libya's social fabric has been affected by the "the political culture that has prevailed under Gaddafi, which is pretty much a zero-sum political culture, very top-down, not extremely transactional and prone to suppression" (Badi 2022). Therefore, processes of social and political socialization through societal chains, family and educational institutions result in tendencies of submission and fear and patterns of non-democratic

behavior marked by lack of free discussion and disinclination towards different opinions (Obeidi 2001).

### **3.2.2. Elite political culture**

Elite political culture is, and has historically been, very predominant in Libyan political culture, where there is a clear identity distinction between the elite and the masses. In another study by Obeidi titled *Political Elites in Libya since 1969*, she concludes that the political participation in decision-making was constricted to a particular segment of society, being policy makers at the elite status. The nature of the political system and political ideology under Gaddafi further fostered such an environment as the main characteristics of the political system in Libya was based on the so-called phenomena of a “temporary elite”, a group of individuals whose elite status is determined by the regime “in order to help implement the regime’s programs. The composition of this temporary elite is continually shifting with the needs of the regime.” (Obeidi, 2008). In this context, the study of elites and elite political culture is considered foundational when attempting to understand the political culture.

### **3.2.3. Demographic**

Demographic challenges have shaped Libyan political culture interactively with the other pillars that underpin social fabric of interconnectedness and a political culture based on familial and tribal ties. Libya’s demographic is striking in size, age and familial nodes, making it a very unique case study to analyze, and an incomparable one in terms of research and argumentative threads.

In contrasting the Libyan demographic with that of other Arab countries, it becomes clear the contribution it makes to political culture. What differentiates Libya’s political culture from other Arab states is the deep-rooted structural distinction of demographic: a very small country in terms of citizenry, a very large country in terms of size. With that concoction, there is a high level of homogeneity in the demographic structure of the country, with religion not only acting as the main indicator behind homogeneity, but also as a political symbol crucial factor in mobilizing people. This size and population factor, combined with the high level of homogeneity in the demographic structure of the country makes Libyan society “a very complex and interconnected one” (AbuAbdullah 2022). The aspect of interconnectedness is further accentuated by Badi’s analysis where he asserts that: “demographically speaking, it is a bit insane the extent to which political culture and this form of operating on local interests has been unleashed to wage this much conflict in all these urban elsewheres to where everyone is kind of interrelated basically two or three familial nodes away from each other.”

Another striking demographic aspect is the youthful nature of Libya’s populace. Libya is and has been considered a youthful country, “it has witnessed unprecedented youth momentum in

terms of size and proportion” (UNFPA 2015). While the young generation dominates the demographic, and has historically been exposed to campaigns of political socialization under the Gaddafi regime, they have never been represented at the governance level, leaving for a culture of stagnation and disappointment at the youth level.

### 3.2.4. Tribalism

Interconnected to the previous point of submission to authority, Libya’s political culture and social fabric is a by-product of a unique system of tribalism, tribal structure and the Islamic religion that is deep-root to its social fabric (Obeidi 2001), and that was further manifested and made use of under the Gaddafi regime (Sawani 2020). The tribe, clan and familial ties are the most basic and fundamental units to society, which in turn shapes their behavior socially and politically (Obeidi 2011).

With the establishment of Libya in the 20th century, the country was made up by the union of three disparate regions - Tripolitania, Cyrenaica, and Fezzan - which were brought together by Italian occupation. Traditionally in Arab societies, the role of the tribe was a social one historically; however, the “coexistence of the tribes and states over time raises the question of the role of tribes in state formation and the degree of tribal contribution to the state political structure” (Hweio). In the case of Libya, the long-established tendency towards tribalism manifested itself beyond societal aspects, with the different regions developing a sense of rooted mistrust and political ideologies of tribalism and federalism that would act as the downfall of whatever political scenario they were put in (AbuAbdullah 2022). For example, it was these regional and tribal rivalries that in part stymied King Idris's attempt to create unified state institutions before Gaddafi’s coup in 1969. Also, it is the same tribal animosities that motivated Cyrenaica’s Benghazi to break out against Gaddafi’s Tripoli in the revolution of 2011, and it was this tribalism coupled with a legacy of localized grievances that brought Libya's disparate regions into sporadic revolt against his dictatorial regime and against each other. Consequently, it is safe to say that the role of the tribe has historically been foundational in the organization of links of solidarity, particularly as a haven ensuring the protection of individuals when the structures of governance collapse (Ben Lamma 2017).

Tribal nepotism would witness an unprecedented expansion under Gaddafi’s rule, where the so-called tribal politics would be paramount to anything else. In fact, the former center of power under Gaddafi was called Rijal al-Khayma (the “*men of the tent*”), composed of Gaddafi associates, many of whom were from the Union of Free Officers that planned and executed the 1969 revolution (Mühlberger 2012; Joffé and Paoletti 2010). Another manifestation of tribalism was seen during elections to the *People’s Committees* (administrative units within Libyan ministries at the time of Gaddafi) where they would become highly influenced by tribal affiliations, with candidates relying

on tribal channels. This demonstrates that with Gaddafi in power, tribal association became foundational in the political structure. In fact, it can be argued that Gaddafi's regime made use of some of the historical tribal animosities to divide a society with no nation-state experience, and identified central authority with foreign rule (Sawani 2020).

### **3.3. POLITICAL CULTURE CRYSTELLIZATION UNDER GADDAFI**

While the previous section exposed how the contemporary Libyan political culture is in part shaped by long-term historical developments, this chapter aims to expose the political culture that prevailed under Gaddafi's regime. This chapter aims to expose the extent to which Gaddafi's regime shaped Libyan political culture as a parochial one through two ways: (1) analyzing long-term trends of the *Jamahiriyya* model and the co-occurrence of the first state-building experience with Gaddafi's regime, and (2) examining a selection of key events and transformative immediate developments that arguably led to materializing Libya's parochial political culture.

#### **3.3.1. The *Jamahiriyya* Model**

*Jamahiriyya* is a neologism, and a heavily loaded one at that, denoting a political concept, a governance system and the official name of the state of Libya under Colonel Gaddafi. While it is difficult for a translation to capture the true essence behind the meaning of the word, the literal translation of the Arabic word *Jamahiriyya* in English is "The State of the Masses" (Obeidi 2001). Essentially, under Gaddafi, Libya's political system was constantly undergoing an ongoing, evolutionary process (Obeidi 2001). For example, initially his rule was vested in a single-party system (Arab Socialist Union), it later got dissolved to make place for a political system of various lineages, even incorporating Maoist approaches at some point (Mühlberger, 2012). In March 1977, eight years after the Al-Fatah revolution that brought Gaddafi to power, the name of the country was changed to the *Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyya*, with the word *Jamahiriyya* being an invented one that would later be introduced into the political dictionary (Obeidi 2001, 141). While the introduction of the word was regarded as a novelty at the time, its essence was not, as Gaddafi came to power on the basis of his *Jamahiriyya* idea that placed the concept of popular sovereignty and the people's authority at the core of his philosophy. According to Gaddafi's *Green Book*, upon its introduction, the Authority of the People's System, alternatively seen as a direct democracy model, would act as the basis of the political system in the Socialist People's Libyan Arab Jamahiriyya, where the authority is in the hands of the people alone; he then goes into detail on the 4 elements that would comprise the ideology of the state under *Jamahiriyya*.

However, the popular sovereignty system would prove to be but "a fictive 'basic democracy' expressed through basic popular councils" (Mühlberger, 2012), and a new meaning

would be given to the *Jamahiriyya* model. For example, the basic popular councils - held the responsibility of rubber-stamping decisions made by the *Murshid*, the leader, to create a bottom-up appearance - were alienated through actions that were “strongly restricted by the Revolutionary Committees, thus fiercely ensuring the permanence of the Green Revolution” (Mühlberger, 2012). Another example is Gaddafi’s tendency to refrain from direct political involvement, doing so by strategically containing himself to two official roles: the head of armed forces and the leader of the revolution. By doing so, he managed to “skillfully maneuver his policies from the rear, and to continue his propaganda against the ‘wickedness’ of political parties” (Mühlberger, 2012) all under the pretext of *Jamahiriyya*. In other words, the signature of his *Jamahiriyya* model was vested in the rejection of all forms of political action, deeming politics unreachable and obsolete only “in favor of a system of aggregation in which the "Brother Leader" occupies the center” (Sawani 2020). This goes to show the extent to which Gaddafi managed to create a unique system that exploited the inexperience of Libyan society politically in order to rule a constituency that lacked a nation-state and in turn selected central authority with foreign rule.

In an attempt to diffuse this unique *Jamahiriyya* system among the masses, the regime underwent a strong political socialization process that made use of: (1) the education system, (2) The ideological preparation camps (Mu’askarat al-I’dad al-'Aqaidi), and (3) the mass media. Firstly, in what concerns the educational system, the turning moment for the political socialization process in this regard was the announcement of the ‘Cultural Revolution’ during his famous speech in Zuwara April 1973, whereby an emphasis was placed on the need to renew and review the curricula to one that would reflect the political ideology of the *Jamahiriyya*. Moreover, in 1976 after the publication of the Green Book, a process of “revolutionizing” the curriculum (tathwir al-manahij) took place, with Political Culture and Political Consciousness being taught as subjects in pre-university education, “the tenets of the Libyan leader's Green Book” (53) taught as part of the curricula and the *Third Universal Theory* becoming the main subject of study at some university courses (Obeidi 2001). Secondly, in what concerns the ideological preparation camps, students from all different ages were encouraged to participate in these 10-days to two weeks camps of ideological preparation, attending lectures and classes about an array of political subjects concerning the ideology of the regime as well as concerning Arab causes, like the Arab-Israeli cause. Lastly, regarding the utilization of mass media, in the end of the 1970s the state launched the idea of *Al-ielam Al-jamahiri* (Jamahiriyyan media) as a tool to communicate and reflect Gaddafi’s views, opinions and thoughts. The introduction of such a campaign consequently was accompanied by a rigorous supervision by the so-called Secretary of Information, Culture and Jamahiriyyan Mobilization and mediums of information were limited to state production (Obeidi 2001).

While the regime carried out a holistic campaign at revolutionizing the masses, the efforts were largely counterproductive given the underlying social fabric of Libya. The main setback to the attempts of revolutionizing the citizenry was the informal political socialization agents and the basic units of society: the family, the clan and the tribe. As previously reflected upon, Libya is heavily founded on a culture of religious and tribal affiliations that are regarded as paramount to any other aspect when it comes to acquisition of values, orientations and patterns of behavior; consequently, the informal agents of political socialization processes were not entrusted. “In many instances these agents served as counter-revolutionary sources of socialisation, because they inculcated Libya's younger generation with traditional, rather than revolutionary values.” (Obeidi 2001). Such a clash proved to be a true set back to the evolutionary process of a Libyan political community and a modern civic national culture, and consequently birthed a parochial political culture.

### **3.3.2. Co-occurrence of state-building with the Gaddafi regime**

Having had no previous nation-state experience or any remote encounter with the Westphalian state system, the Gaddafi regime and the *Jamahiriyya* model would prove to be conclusive to the state-building process of Libya. During his rule, Gaddafi set out to design Libya in such a way that would serve as his custom-made, personalized governance system, under the stipulations of his Green Book and Third Universal Theory, and declared the *Jamahiriyya* (Wehrey 2016). Under the alleged *Jamahiriyya* rule, the country would witness many examples of this personalization of ruling, that was taken to such an extent that there would be no similar ruling structure to that of Libya anywhere else in the world. This very reality is what made it very challenging for those that came after Gaddafi to “break free from the pull of an exploitative, hyper-personalized reign that pitted communities against one another and atrophied institutions, the sinews of governance” (Randall 2015).

Having laid out the context, one can now identify that the first state component that is absent is: the *very idea of the state*. With the lack of a state, and a clashing political socialization process, the Libyan citizenry “were not given a foundational identity, a sense of being ‘Libyan’, nor a unity government” (Evers 2016). What is more, is that Libya’s existence under Gaddafi came to only be familiarized as a nation founded on corrupt bureaucratic developments that “used offices as political rewards to buy-off any potential adversaries” (Evers 2016). A central aspect to Gaddafi’s state-building strategy was prioritizing his preservation of authority and preventing any potential challenge to it; for this reason, he sought out to control Libyan society in whatever way possible. Given that the high level of homogeneity in Libyan demography would pose a risk to his regime, he sought out a divide-and-conquer approach to introduce deep-rooted political divisions in the country (Hweio 2012). Following this strategy, the regime would solidify its rule at the expense of the social



fabric, ultimately fostering the creation of “a relatively weak state apparatus controlling a patchwork of different ethnic communities” (Evers 2016). As a result of this engineering of orientations and attitudes among the population, Gaddafi prioritized dynamics that are most conducive to his ideology at the expense of the evolutionary process of Libyan social fabric and political culture, once again, adding to the parochial civic culture.

### 3.3.3. Key events:

While it is irrefutable that political culture is a slow-moving subculture in which developments materialize over extended periods of time, it is also true that some key events in certain political landscapes prompt for an acceleration in the process of civic and political culture. In the case of Libya, it is very clear that the parochial political culture came to be materialized over extended courses of history as a result of premeditated authoritarian processes interacting with other underpinnings of social fabric; nonetheless, some key events took place during Gaddafi’s regime that further consolidated the trends of its parochialism. In selecting these milestone events for the development of political culture, this paper made use of the expertise of the two experts interviewed for the purpose of this research (AbuAbdullah 2022; Badi 2022), and the following key events were explored:

- 1. The dismantling of the private sector in the late 1970s, early 1980s:** Gaddafi’s approach to socialism that initially helped him rise to power began to evidently come into practice in the second decade of his rule as a form of ‘remaking the economy’, which coincided with his remodeling of the political and social institutions of the country as well. Up until the late 1970s, Libya possessed a mixed economy, with a considerable private sector capacity, with the exception of oil production, banking and insurance (John 2008). However, with the publication of the second volume of *The Green Book*, specifically *The Solution of the Economic Problem: "Socialism," the second part of The Green Book* (1978), the socialist theories outlined within began to be materialized into legislation, with an evident tightening of control over private enterprises that eventually led to their complete dismantling and replacement with a centrally controlled economy. In light of this new manifesto, private retail trade, rent and wages began to be viewed as forms of exploitation that ought to be abolished. A property law was enacted that prohibited the possession and ownership of more than one private dwelling. Libyan workers subsequently assumed charge of a huge number of businesses transforming them into state-led firms. “People’s supermarkets” were introduced as a form of state-owned retail and wholesale trading operations, and by 1981, the regime went on to restrict access to individual bank accounts as an attempt to utilize privately held funds for government programs. This major demonetization movement was

an undeniable socialist initiative with redistributive goals and implementations (John 2008). This blatant dismantling of the Libyan private sector had detrimental effects on the social fabric of the country, and to a large extent on the civic and political culture. Such a process “set the precedent that if you have oil-wealth you can dismantle other powerbases by using oil rents as a source for funding that effort, and then also subsequently getting popular support for doing that” (Badi 2022). This indigenous nature of Libyan socialism imperatively held an implication on political culture, especially as the regime aimed for it to act as “an integral part of Libyan political culture and a necessary corrective action” (John 2008), which would later go on to nourish the pillars of authority, submission and parochialism in the political culture of the nation. In fact, this movement of Libyan socialism would directly feed into “the advancement in the command economy” which “often depended on family, clan, and tribal ties or other forms of nepotism and cronyism” (John 2008).

- 2. The introduction of economic reforms in the 2000s:** following the suspension of sanctions that were placed on Libya following the Lockerbie Bombing of 1988, the Gaddafi regime underwent an introduction of socioeconomic reforms with the aim of liberalizing the economy. Such liberalization of the economy also came after three decades of socialist experimentation; for this reason it generated much enthusiasm for many sectors within the Libyan economy, but was appropriately also greeted with some skepticism. With the regime reducing capital requirements for foreign investments, the restructuring of public commercial banks, among other measures, the regime underwent unprecedented liberalization measures that would later be referred to as “popular capitalism” by Gaddafi, a hybrid economic system (John 2008). Sectors such as the hydrocarbon sector gained substantial new investment, especially as a result of the new exploration and production sharing agreements that provided bidders with a much more transparent and competitive environment, among other things. While the liberalization of the economy constituted a huge leap forward for the Libyan citizenry and in turn could be reflected in their political culture attitudes, it must be noted that the introduction of these economic reforms was still done under an authoritarian system. This combination has led to the emergence of “some kind of people that label themselves as technocrats that emerged from that effort and still operate today in the Libyan arena, that also influenced Libyan political culture post-2011” (Badi 2022).

### **3.4. POLITICAL CULTURE DYNAMICS POST-GADDAFI**

When reflecting on the past decade of affairs in Libyan politics, several factors can be attributed to the ongoing conflict, failure of democratic transition and inability to undergo a sound process of peacebuilding. This paper argues that the enormous power vacuum left behind by Gaddafi, the ineffective NATO military intervention, combined with the parochial political culture, along with other structural values are attributable to the sustainability of conflict.

#### **3.4.1. Political vacuum:**

After Gaddafi's downfall, a massive security, power and political vacuum erupted, and in turn became filled by locally-rooted militias, islamist groups and other armed groups. Despite the naivety of joy in the early days of the regime's downfall, it has become evident that "revolutionary change also eroded Libya's old socio-political order, creating an ideological power vacuum and laying the foundations for a new local and regional fault line" (El-Gomati 2020). The institutional vacuum left behind thanks to Gaddafi's "me or nothing" strategy, combined with political opportunism and lucrative economic opportunities incentivized rebel groups to fill this gap. The dilemmas posed by this multilevel vacuum left behind by Gaddafi came to define the state of affairs in the decade to come, as is discussed below.

Firstly, one of the main factors that exacerbated and propagated the security, power and political vacuum in the country was the NATO military intervention of 2011. The success of the NATO military intervention is constricted isofar to its achievement to undergo a regime change. Considering the coincidental termination of the NATO intervention mandate with Gaddafi's death, combined with what several analysts have deemed as "unfinished business" on the West's end (Isaac 2012; Dock et al 2021), it can be safely assumed that the NATO intervention was an undeniable failure. While citing the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) as the main pretext for the intervention, the NATO-backed coalition failed to fulfill its protection duties as it treated the intervention as a rigid, inflexible concept bound to a specific time period. When reflecting on such a reality, it becomes questionable how the UNSC and NATO invoked R2P to justify the intervention but did not acknowledge the desperate need for peacebuilding to follow, especially when such an aspect is enshrined in the second pillar of R2P as 'capacity-building'. The intervention did not take into account the political culture, weak institutions, and long history of misrule and repression (Isaac 2012), which only propagated the political vacuum for the decade to come.

Moreover, in dealing with the conflict and issues of power struggle in Libya, the international community has failed to treat this multilevel vacuum due to their disregard to political culture matters. In particular, the United Nations' logic in resolving issues of power struggle, for example, have bluntly failed to consider political culture peculiarities as it "ignores Libya's

experience of power, its institutional form under the former regime and how this unique experience has shaped the ideas and outlook of the factions who today engage in conflict” (El-Gomati 2020). Above all, UN processes and Western imposed processes constantly neglect how political culture came to shape Libya’s society over decades and how it institutionally distributed power across society under Gaddafi, in turn leading to a paralysis in talks over the past decade. Disregarding this sociocultural component to power dynamics only results in a failure to understand the rise of armed groups across the country today, and how this redistribution of power and society came to be. Ultimately, the UN process and logic to the conflict fails to address political culture matters and visions that later came to drive local parties and militias to conflict, and consequently came to divide their international backers too. As a result of these internationalized dynamics, the past decade became characterized by the proliferation of rival governments and armed groups, as well as the fostering ground of Islamist groups all profiting off of an unstable economy at the expense of human rights, state infrastructure and administration (Lottes 2017).

On this ground, any serious analysis of the power vacuum related to today’s conflict needs to take into account the International community’s inconsistencies; the sheer disinterest in ending the Libyan conflict, the disregard to human rights violations, and the disinterest in the Libyan case when it no longer caters to Western interests. The framework governing the management of the conflict has largely been based on the displacement of agency and policy-making to foreign capitals. Therefore, “since agency has been displaced elsewhere, even if you have a critical mass of good willing Libyans, there is a minority that could still spoil the transition given the fact that foreign intervention is so entrenched and also how much agency they have over conflict and conflict decision making” (Badi 2022). Due to this displacement of agency, among other factors propagated by international actors, the initial political, power and security vacuum that was left behind as a result of Gaddafi, is only exacerbated; “Libya is just enough of a priority when it comes to certain files and just not enough of a priority when it comes to others” fostering a deadlock in moving past these vacuums (Badi 2022).

### **3.4.2. Shifts in political culture and missed opportunities**

The political, institutional, ideological and power vacuum that Gaddafi left behind created a huge growth opportunity for political culture, in the sense that civic and political culture had room for improvement and re-education. However, in examining whether there have been any positive shifts or developments in political cultures following Gaddafi’s fall, it becomes very evident that all of the new cultures and emerging trends in this context have been stagnant at best, and detrimental to aspects of everyday life to say the least.

One line of analysis argues that the political culture of Libya is in fact still the same parochial culture, and there has been a stagnation in development. In this argumentative thread, analysts argue that “the political culture of the *Jamahiriyya* is still alive through lessons learned from the Qadhafi system: during the upheaval, a pattern of locally rooted councils emerged in basic-democratic style and handled the fragile transition” (Mühlberger 2012). Such reflection accentuates the irony behind the so-called “popular committee” advocated by Gaddafi, as they have finally been put into practice in 2011. Similarly, Badi subscribes to this line of argument commenting: “I’d still argue that the political culture is roughly still the same, they [authority figures after Gaddafi] are still prone to be exclusionist in their policy approaches, there is still the same parochial interest that guide a lot of people, it’s just that whereas before they could operate within the confines of what was ideologically accepted by Gaddafi, now they are’ far more flexible and far more prone to toxifying the Libyan political scene than they were before - that is both at the elite level and the communal level” (2022). Beyond the deep-rooted Gaddafist trends present in political culture, Gaddafi’s legacy lives on in new potential authority figures as well, for example, “on the one extreme, you have Haftar, who is trying to replicate something similar to the *Jamahiriyya* system. You see that at different levels, whether that be at the level of military legitimacy, narratives around nationalism, the narrative of *thawra* (revolution) as well (ie. dignity operation), and also at the level of legacy planning” (Badi 2022). Haftar’s attempt at reviving the *Jamahiriyya* system is seen in his tribal re-engineering of the Libyan Arab Armed Forces (LAAF), as well as through establishing his own upper tier elite guards (El-Gomati 2020).

On the other hand, the other line of analysis argues that there has in fact been detrimental shifts to the political culture of the country that stained the civic and political culture to unprecedented extents primarily through unmatched elements of violence, chaos and division that served as a harmful novelty further feeding into the parochialism of political culture. These developments can be divided into the following points: (1) unprecedented cultures of violence, (2) and the polarization and militarization of politics.

Firstly, the proliferation of armed groups, militia governance and the absence of an effective official security sector that monopolizes the use of force have had determinative impacts regarding insecurity in the country, to levels never experienced before. One of the most prominent emerging cultures on the sociopolitical level, especially among youth, is the unprecedented exposure to day-to-day violence, precarity and poverty. Given the extension of the Libyan conflict, over time there became a dilution of the social barriers of using violence: “before, the act of torture, the act of abusing people openly and all these kind of nefarious aspects of society, they were socially frowned upon - as they should be - but I think in Libya the problem is that they’ve become almost semi-normalized” (Badi 2022). In saying this it is worth exemplifying the statement with offenses

committed under the NATO-military intervention. In the context of the 2011 uprisings, ethnic and racial violence became a characteristic of the revolution, as “the victorious rebels perpetrated scores of reprisal killings and expelled 30,000 mostly black residents of Tawergha [Libyan town] on grounds that some had been ‘mercenaries’ for Qaddafi” (Kuperman 2013). The concept of mercenaries or *mortazaqa* (in Libyan dialect) went as far as being used as an insult, and a threat of turning someone in as a Gaddafi affiliate. Consequently, the black population, Libyan and non-Libyan alike, became a relentless target to the NATO-backed rebels, with widespread use of torture, rape, extrajudicial executions, revenge attacks among other forms of violence (HRW 2012); a Human Rights Watch report states that abuses “appear to be so widespread and systematic that they may amount to crimes against humanity” (2012). With the Western coalition turning a complete blind eye to these human rights atrocities, and continuing to support the rebels, the intervention has introduced a gruesome, unprecedented, rageful ethnic divide that precluded a decade of violence to follow. Consequently, “violence has become so ingrained in the day-to-day that it has become part of the political culture” (Badi 2022).

Secondly, the atomization in Libya following Gaddafi’s downfall preceded an intense polarization and militarization with the constant power struggle conflicts. What characterized the post-Gaddafi era, among other things, is the desperate urge of all political factions to become part of the ruling establishment, with exclusionary politics being at its height in 2013; “when faced with the threat of exclusion, all political factions did not recoil from relying on armed politics to further their political agendas.” (Kamouni-Janssen & Abdo 2015, p. 2). Moreover, subsequent to the intense polarization in Libyan politics, the power struggle dynamics have resulted in the remarkable deadlock of the last decade: two rival governments fighting for power in Tobruk and Tripoli. This interaction of this dynamic, with the political vacuum mentioned above, have created for a political space led by patronage and has allowed for exclusion and militarization of politics to resurface with no existing state structure in place (Kamouni-Janssen & Abdo 2015). Such internal dynamics of a dichotomous political scene, with opposing blocs, exposes an important reflection on Libya’s political-military relations in the past decade: the instability has led to a militarization of Libyan politics that has reached new heights and the fragmentation of rule has further exacerbated the existing administrative parochialism.

Ultimately, when evaluating the status of the Libyan political culture post Gaddafi, it becomes evident that the new cultures and emerging trends that developed in the post-Gaddafi scenario have only acted as an exasperation of the already existing parochial elements. Libyan political culture has experienced detrimental implications over the last decade, with unprecedented levels of violence and instability, a disintegrating power grid and heightened levels of parochialism and continued corruption, among other structural changes. While this paper highlighted parochial

elements that manifest themselves at the political level, it is very important to note that parochialism is so widespread in Libyan affairs that it manifests itself strongly in the day-to-day routines of Libyans, with local forces continuing to prize parochialism over the wellbeing of the nation and its people, and weaponizing on water and power cuts for parochial interests. This goes to show the extent to which civic and political culture dynamics are central in conflict dynamics, and any serious analysis of the state of affairs of Libya should factor in these dynamics.

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

In closing, this research paper set out to demonstrate the grand role played by the Libyan political culture in the political developments that followed the overthrow of the Gaddafi regime, particularly in the failures of the post-revolutionary reconstruction and peacebuilding process. In doing so, this project has fulfilled several of its principal objectives, including the primary aim of understanding the role that political culture plays as a setback to stability and sustainability of conflict, primarily by examining the role that the Gaddafi regime played in shaping a parochial political culture, as well as by exposing inability to fill the grand vacuum left behind by the Gaddafi regime in the last decade. Equally, this project also fulfilled its aim of narrowing down the gap in literature regarding the status of political culture in Libya, particularly effectively utilizing a political culture approach at the center of analysis when examining conflict, as well as by bridging and compiling all the relevant works on the matter in one research paper. In carrying out this research, several conclusions have been reached regarding the status of Libyan political culture, and they can be summarized as follows.

Firstly, historical tendencies of subordination under foreign rule and authoritarianism under domestic rule have come to shape the Libyan political cultures in light of parochialism, which have in turn facilitated the consolidation of a parochial political culture under Gaddafi's rule. The general underpinnings that define contemporary Libyan political culture are based on the interaction between elements of submission, division between the elite and the masses, demographic obstacles and tribal affiliations among others, which in turn conditions the idea of the nation state to be built upon deep-set, traditional roots that will facilitate the rise of authoritarianism. This paper has demonstrated that the interactive elements mentioned above inevitably lead to a social fabric that is doomed to conflict between the core and the periphery given the fact that the citizenry's loyalties often lie at the tribal, clan or familial levels, and in turn easily facilitate for the fostering of authoritarian regimes.

Secondly, the Gaddafi regime further confirmed the lingering parochialism in the Libyan social fabric and further consolidated it in the form of a parochial political culture through engineering values and attitudes that are conducive to his ideas and interests. Having had no previous nation-state experience or any remote encounter with the Westphalian idea of the state, it can be argued that Libya experienced the process of state-building at the hands of Gaddafi's authoritarian regime. Therefore, the very idea of the state would be mirrored by Gaddafi's persona and consequently weaponized by him to preserve himself in power. Central aspects to Gaddafi's state-building strategy included promoting a culture of dependency, prioritizing his preservation of authority and preventing any potential challenge to it; for this reason, he sought out to control



Libyan society in whatever way possible and further instilled parochialism at all levels of governance.

Thirdly, given the prominent promotion of a culture of dependency under the Gaddafi regime, Libyan political culture experienced an unprecedented power vacuum that manifested itself on the political, social and economic level. With Gaddafi's downfall came a huge security, power and political vacuum that has failed to be filled over the past decade, instead, such a vacuum, combined with political opportunism and lucrative economic opportunities incentivized rebel groups, islamist groups and western intervention to fill this gap, further feeding into the parochialism in the political environment, civic and political culture.

Fourthly, the NATO-led military, western intervention in the country has only further exacerbated the status of Libyan political culture that Gaddafi left behind, and has in fact facilitated for more harm to be done to it. It is of utmost important to note that the Western intervention and the NATO operations under the Responsibility to Protect also include the responsibility to protect populations and the responsibility to aid in capacity-building, yet throughout the intervention NATO fundamentally failed to fulfill both duties as it was exclusively fixated on regime change. NATO's swift exit following Gaddafi's death serves as a clear example of the NATO-coalition's disregard for the wellbeing of Libya's state of affairs outside of their own interests. For this reason, in failing to protect civilians and to fulfill duties of capacity building, the western intervention has left behind a considerable power vacuum that reflects their disinterest in ending the Libyan conflict, in turn leveraging detrimental implications on the social fabric and the political culture of the country.

Lastly, taking into account the interaction of the above stated findings, it is safe to conclude that over the past decade, Libyan political culture has been stained by unprecedented elements of violence, chaos and division that served as a harmful novelty further feeding into the parochialism of political culture. When diagnosing and re-evaluating the status of the Libyan political culture over the past 10 years, it is undeniable that it still strongly meddles with parochialism, to a worse extent, given the new emerging trends of normalization of anarchy, violence, precarity and poverty, all elements that did not exist during the Gaddafi regime. In fact, the only changes to the political culture over the past decade have been the emergence of new subcultures at the political and societal level, of the normalization of day-to-day violence, kidnapping and tragedy, particularly among young people. This reality has left a stain on the political culture and has consequently left detrimental implications on the trajectory of peacebuilding and post-revolutionary reconstruction over the past decade.

In having said all of that, this project undoubtedly holds some limitations that ought to be reflected upon for the sake of future research. Above all, the main limitation to this research is the lack of data and primary sources on the matter, as well as the disparity in research. Firstly, lack of

data and primary sources are not a surprise in authoritarian environments. In the case of the political characteristics of Libya under Gaddafi, it has been very difficult to obtain any data that record the perspectives of civilians on their outlook regarding civic and political life, given the restrictions on freedom of expression and speech. Secondly, even when trying to look for data during the past 10 years, it has been difficult to find relevant sources given the absence of systemization of such data, or the deficiency in recording it. For this reason, this research primarily relied on qualitative accounts and secondary sources to draw conclusions, and tried to compensate for the lack of primary sources through conducting interviews with experts.

In developing the idea of this research beyond the constraints of this project, it would be valuable to undertake a political culture approach to analyze the behaviors of certain segments of Libyan society. On the one hand, I believe that it would be interesting to conduct further research on the relationship between militia dynamics and political culture, in order to understand the behavior of militiafication in Libya and explore the networks of war through a sociocultural component. On the other hand, it would be very valuable to further explore political culture through the feminist perspective, particularly focusing on the role of women in Libyan political culture, and the key developments that women have played in the political scenario over the past decade.

To end on a more personal, and perhaps a more positive note, I do think that regardless of the decades characterized by parochialism and dogmatism, Libyans have a hope to look forward to, especially in the optimism of the youth. While Libyan citizenry has long been governed through top-down, non-transactional and parochial approaches, younger generations have broken this cycle through demonstrating their ability to be far more transnational, far less ideological and more hopeful in dealing with conflict. It is undeniable that Libyans at large possess a willingness to do better and improve the situation of the country, however, willingness and eagerness can only go so far in repairing a political culture founded on authoritarianism and parochialism, and much less when agency is displaced out of the hands of Libyans. In saying this, I believe that the key to resolving the main dilemmas raised in this paper begin by reinstating the agency of Libyan affairs in the hands of Libyans. I believe that solutions to the Libyan conflict should not have prioritized military solutions, but rather solutions based on political dialogue, and solutions that place political culture at the center of problem solving.

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## 6. ANNEXES

### Annex 1: Interview with Emadeddin Badi



Emadeddin Badi is a scholar and independent consultant who has worked with multiple development and international organizations in the fields of research, political risk, development, policy and capacity building. He specializes in governance, post-conflict stabilization, hybrid security structures, security sector reform and peacebuilding.

**Interview conducted on:** April 15, 2022

**Maisara:** To begin with the questions, In your opinion, what are some of the defining factors or pillars that make up Libyan Political Culture or what circumstances shaped the contemporary Political Culture of Libya?

**Emadeddin:** Do I answer within the confines of the timeline that you have, because you mentioned 2000-2010 and 2011-2021.

**Maisara:** So this question is timeless, just in general what are the pillars.

**Emadeddin:** I mean obviously a lot of it has been affected by the political culture that has prevailed under Gaddafi, which is pretty much a zero-sum political culture, very top-down, not extremely transactional and prone to suppression of opponents evenly. So you have all these factors that are displayed on a more localized degree in the post-2011 era. In terms of specific events that have resulted in this, obviously one thing I would think is the dismantlement of Libya's private sector in the late 1970s early 1980s, because then it set the precedent that if you have oil-wealth you can dismantle other powerbases by using oil rents as a source for first of all funding that effort and then also subsequently getting popular support for doing that. So that is one event, and then I think also the mid-2000s where you have this idea of introducing economic reforms, but also still keeping the authoritarian system - which I think we have some kind of people that label themselves as technocrat that emerged from that effort and still operate today in the Libyan arena, that also influenced Libyan political culture post-2011. So you have a lot that has been influenced by Gaddafi's era in today's arena. Now, one problem - and maybe this is something to take into account for your analysis - is that we have a demographic issue at this stage in Libya. Most of the elite is very old, and they're still the same people. Even if you look at the articles from 8 years ago, 9 years ago, 10 years ago, it is de facto the same people that are still in key positions. There is some re-shuffling of the key individuals, etc, particularly at the level of the executive, but there are no young people that are penetrating this arena. I think there is this new culture emerging on a more political and societal level at the level of young people, one that is more affected by day-to-day violence, precarity, poverty, etc. So different dynamics to what existed back then. And I think that these people are far more transactional in their approach, far less ideological. Doesn't mean it's any better, because they can be a bit ruthless, but I think it is a discontinuity with what existed prior to 2011.

**Maisara:** You just hit two birds with one stone, so we have two questions out of the way. So basically, what you're saying in a way, would you attribute his personalization of politics to the political culture? Is there a mirroring of his persona in the political culture or would you say it's more so of the events that took place than him per se?

**Emadeddin:** Well you have different people that try to embody and take on different aspects of his political culture. On the one extreme, you have Haftar, who is trying to replicate something similar as a system. You see that at different levels, whether that be at the level of military legitimacy, narratives around nationalism, the narrative of *thawra* (translation: revolution) as well (ie. dignity operation), and also at the level of legacy planning. So that is one extreme, but then you also have other people that are still thinking about facets of the Gaddafi system and often are still operating in the same way. I don't think it is as personified as Gaddafi, partly because I think they're trying to be a bit more transactional, and try to do a bit more alliance-building rather than patronage building. For example, Dabaiba right now, what he is doing is also a Gaddafi type strategy, it is not explicitly ideological, but this whole idea of centralizing patronage, building an alliance system, bringing back the old Jamahiriya system with oil rents, that's explicitly a Gaddafist political culture so to speak, and it has attracted in quite number friends I'd say from the old regime and from the post-2011. So those are two figures that operate in two different systems, but then you have the lower-level dynamics within parliament or within the General National Congress post-2012, where you say a proclivity to operate like Gaddafi but in a system that was not built for one to operate like Gaddafi. In parliament you're supposed to work on alliance building, not to boycott, to marginalize opponents or use violence in a way, and we saw all of that happen post-2011 at the level of the General National Congress and I think that toxified Libyan politics because the system was built parliamentary but institutional they were operating like little Gaddafis.

**Maisara:** That's very interesting, because initially the hypothesis I had was that with his downfall he left behind a political vacuum sort of. One of the main problems I tried to diagnose is sort of what happened after him with this vacuum, and my hypothesis was that due to the vacuum our capacity building and peacebuilding and all of that failed because of it, because the political culture is tightly tied to him. So I guess the question that could follow is: would you say the political culture experienced a shift since his downfall, if so, when was the turning point and what are the changes? Or is it primarily trying to follow within his footsteps?

**Emadeddin:** I think one trend that you see is that the public sector got supercharged with him not being there anymore. If you look at the statistics of the people employed from 2000-2010, and compare it to 2011-2020 as a trend of a case study, you clearly see that you have someone of a cap, Gaddafi was somewhat of a cap on that system and that he could manage it, but then we lost the manager of that system and as a result that system went completely paywall, to put it bluntly. A lot of people going on public sector pay roll, with even less regard for productivity, so in that way you lost the manager of the system. That doesn't mean that the system in and of itself collapsed, because all the institutions and legal frameworks are still those of the Gaddafi era and in fact I'd even argue that some of the institutions became even more entrenched in the political arena after 2011 because of Gaddafi being gone. So instead of Gaddafi, it's now the central bank of Libya, the National Oil Corporation, the Libyan Investment Authority, all these institutions that were pillars that were being managed by Gaddafi, became their own sort of beasts, operating as *Jamahiriya* but within the institution themselves, with the heads of institutions being the managers of the system (and not doing a great job at managing them either).

**Maisara:** So I guess to detach from the personalization of politics, I want to talk about political culture in and of itself as a phenomenon. So my question is, how much would you say the political culture approach to explaining conflict dynamics in Libya weighs against other structural issues? In other words, to what extent is political culture attributable to the failure of democratic transition that we've witnessed so far?

**Emadeddin:** I'd argue that it was our fault, Libyan's fault, the elite's fault. You have a gradual decrease in agency over decision making, over conflict decisions, even over the war itself, like the dynamics of conflict itself, you see that agency has been displaced to foreign capitals. The most blatant example is the latest conflict, and the current period, where peace is predicated on something that is Libya, but is based on something because of the Turks and the Russians and so on. So in that sense the trend is different between

the 2010s decade to the 2010s decade. I'd still argue that the political culture is roughly still the same, they are still prone to be exclusionist in their policy approaches, there is still the same parochial interest that guide a lot of people, it's just that whereas before they could operate within the confines of what was ideologically accepted by Gaddafi, now they are' far more flexible and far more prone to toxifying the Libyan political scene than they were before - that is both at the elite level and the communal level. The latter is seen in the case of communities shutting down the oil, or water on other constituencies, those dynamics did not necessarily exist before. There might have been a willingness to do that that was suppressed because one did not have the capacity to [under Gaddafi], people didn't take those actions before, whereas now they're far more prone to do that.

**Maisara:** Right, very well. That's what I'm arguing, that the political culture does have a huge in the perpetration of conflict, not more so because of the fact that it carried on post Gaddafi in the same manner or path but more so because of the inbred pillars that are so innate to it that did not allow it to move away from this path. So for example, we've got the elite political culture, tribalism, demographic and so on - they have been so ingrained deep in the political culture that even if it were to change, it would take decades to be a sound transition.

**Emadeddin:** That makes sense.

**Maisara:** Good to have the reassurance there!

**Maisara:** There is a point that you mentioned earlier on that I want to get back to, and it was basically regarding the fact that even though he fell [Gaddafi], the system in a way has not collapsed. So this smoothly needs into our next question and that is if you believe that there is a possibility for Libya to undergo a stable democratic transition process without having had any democratic experience in the political culture in the past?

**Emadeddin:** I mean I do not think that democratic experience in and of itself is a main predictor for democratic transition, otherwise, you wouldn't have democracy in most places anyways. I think there are processes and social changes, reconciliations and reforms that need to be introduced for a democratic transition to be successful. The new dynamic also now is that we need to be insulated from foreign intervention, because as I said earlier, since agency has been displaced elsewhere, even if you have a critical mass of good willing Libyan, there is a minority that could still spoil the transition given the fact that foreign intervention is so entrenched and also how much agency they have over conflict and conflict decision making. Those dynamics, and the cycles of conflict create their own, first of all vested interests in the perpetration but also on the other hand their own grievances, so even that critical mass (of good willing Libyans) would get diluted over time. So these are all problems that we have to deal with. I think they have partly informed some of the initiatives over the past 10 years to kind of rectify the democratic transition, but I do not think that any initiative was all encompassing, they all defaulted back to some form of power-sharing, etc, which is neither the system is built to sustain, nor is what is needed for democratic transition. You're basically shooting yourself in the foot.

**Maisara:** Totally agree, we have a lot of work to be done. So to branch out into a more general question, because in the end I'm also using the literature and research that has been done on other Arab countries' authoritarian experiences and so on. My question is, what do you think makes Libyan political culture unique to other Arab states that experienced authoritarian rule, if that is the case?

**Emadeddin:** In North Africa or at large, because some are still experiencing authoritarian rule.

**Maisara:** I'm thinking of more Arab Spring countries that underwent their own revolutions, like Egypt and Tunisia.

**Emadeddin:** Yeah, okay, makes sense! I think one of the key differences is more structural than at the level of the political culture itself: we're a very small country. Demographically speaking, it is a bit insane the extent to which political culture and this form of operating on local interests has been unleashed to wage this much conflict in all these urban elsewheres to where everyone is kind of interrelated basically two or three familial nodes away from each other. I don't know any Libyans that do not have some sort of distant family relation, so at least some very close family relationships. So I think that is one thing, it is almost built in a retrocidal way. That is one thing I could think of that is more structural. Then I think what also changes over time is the social barriers to using violence are diluting over time. Before, the act of torture, the act of abusing people openly and all these kind of nefarious aspects of society, they were socially frowned upon - as they should be - but I think in Libya the problem is that they've become almost semi-normalized. Violence has become so ingrained in the day-to-day that it has become part of the political culture. **For instance**, we deal with people now all based on their ability to wage violence, which wasn't exactly there before. Yes people dealt with Gaddafi because he had a monopoly on violence, but it was not as blatantly done as today. So that is another problem that is affecting all levels of society. Violence is becoming more diluted. (25:00)

**Maisara:** Usually when you draw these contrasts between Libya and other countries, so often between Tunisia and Egypt, they tend to linkages between events or democratic experiences, and I find that to be somewhat shallow in analysis. So the fact that you've dug deeper into the social fabric and barriers and the structural composition is very insightful. Anyways, I guess to wrap up on a more hopeful note, my question is: in your opinion what would you say are some recommendations, if any, on how best Libyan culture can be weaponized for the good of peacebuilding?

**Emadeddin:** So these would be recommendations for what needs to happen for Libyan political culture to improve?

**Maisara:** Yes, so with the presumption in mind that Libyan political culture is one of the main setbacks for the stability of the country.

**Emadeddin:** It is a difficult question because right now the problem is that there is a lot of popular willingness for things to become better and for the political culture that has currently prevailed at the level of those being dealt with effectively to not be the political culture of the level of people themselves. So it is either you need to target change at the level of people you're dealing with right now (those in power), which is not great, or you need to default back to the people ideally through vote basically. Trying to do both at the same time right now is not taking us anywhere. So that is more of a contemporary kind of recommendation, but I think overall, you need to prioritize legal reforms, rule of law, social reconciliations - as I said most of the conflict unleashed a lot of damage on the Libyan social fabric - so that is one thing. More broadly, I think what we could benefit from is actually having discussions about these things because there is no public fora for us to do this, and the platforms that are most used by Libyans are not exactly hosting any constructive discussions about the matter. However I think the good thing now is that there are a number of young people dealing with this in a creative manner, using dark comedy, comedy, shows, even cartoons to speak of day-to-day reality, and it is very creative, but it is not exactly constructive - it is an acquired taste.

**Maisara:** One thing I want to comment on is what you mentioned about the top-bottom approach, and the bottom-up approach, because in the case of Libya they need to happen at the same time. You do need the state level to do the capacity building and so on, but also at the same time from the bottom-up there needs to be an initiative from the people. It is kind of hopeful to see that our youth is doing something more so than

the older generations, but would you say that these processes that are required to happen at the same time create a sense of paralysis? Like is it beneficial or is it a challenge?

**Emadeddin:** It is definitely a challenge that Libya is not a priority, if you take it from the perspective of peacebuilding strategies where a lot of it is western led, Libya is just enough of a priority when it comes to certain files and just not enough of a priority when it comes to others. I think peacebuilding is really down the food chain when it comes to western files, whereas you have more, oil, migrations and all of these things are far more prominent files. The success in those is not exactly predicated on any form of political culture reform in Libya. I think that definitely is a problem because the strategy is definitely that of containment rather than resolution.

That's why I mentioned earlier the initiative, some of them had some sort of format, I think Al-Said was trying to lead something like that, have some bottom-up feedback into a top-down led process that was a bit more inclusive, but it was still defaulted back into power sharing unfortunately. That was sort of an embryonic try, and now we've gone back to some sort of power sharing.

**Maisara:** Completely! For having said that the recommendations are challenging I think that you've implicitly given some great ones that could be elaborated and built upon. So thank you so much for that. And so to not take up any more of your time, in general you've holistically brought up many aspects that I was hoping to touch on, so thanks so much. But before I wrap up, I wanted to ask you if you had any additional comments regarding any aspects that you think I didn't touch on or any points that I'm missing?

**Emadeddin:** I think your 2000-2010 timeline might restrict you a little bit in terms of political culture. Political culture is much more than those 10 years, political culture spans over the 40 years of rule, there were a lot of back and forth during the regime, and I think there were two or three poles that kind of crystallized in that period over what political culture should look like. All centered around authoritarianism still, but it is fluctuating. So that is one thing. The other thing is the demographic aspect of things in terms of political culture and shifts over the past 10 years. That's a lot harder to capture.

## Annex 2: Interview with Walid AbuAbdullah



Walid Bashir AbuAbdullah is the Ambassador of the Libyan state to the Kingdom of Spain since 2019.

**Interview conducted on:** April 15, 2022

*Note: the following is a translated version of the original dialogue that was conducted in Arabic. Given the long nature of the interview, only the excerpts relevant to the context and scope of the project were highlighted and included.*

**What do you think are the factors or pillars that make up the Libyan political culture? Or, in other words, what were the circumstances that shaped the Libyan political culture that we know today?**

Let me provide a brief theoretical context first. The political culture in any society, is the amalgamation of values and political knowledge of individuals. What distinguishes political culture as a subculture is that it is not stable, but rather inflexible and transformative. Among the many factors that influence political culture are the environment, the social and economic structures, elite structures, among other things. In saying this, we must also recognize that political culture is not only unique state wide, but it is also different from individual to another, from one region to another, and it is determined by social status, education status and the types of governance in a state.

In our society (Libya), the political culture is exclusively birthed as a product of the former regime. As you know, this regime was founded on an alternative political thought, with the coinage of the Third World Theory, and with a contrasting political philosophy from other polities. Libya is a live example of the political culture statement that states that regimes in any country entrenches its ideas among individuals and tries to imbue them with its ideas. For this reason, our political culture is based on determinants that were placed by the former regime. Among these determinants are the following points. You could argue that the first determinant is the direct criticism of capitalist and communist regimes and ideologies. And the second determinant, logically, is based on the advantages that the Jamahiriyya regime would bring, and what solutions it would have to offer. So the strategy used by the former regime to construct the desired form of political culture was the following: criticize the foreign, and advertise for the local.

Beyond the foundations that set the ground for the Jamahiriyya state-building process, the main underpinnings of political culture under Gaddafi included strengthening and localizing the idea of tribalism, clan-based thought and familial nodes.

**What, in your opinion, are the major events that occurred during the Gaddafi era and that contributed to the formation of the Libyan social fabric?**

Throughout its history, Libya has experienced significant political events and eras. One of the most remarkable eras to Libya's state of affairs is the era following the September 1 coup d'état in 1969, that resulted in the rise of the *Jamahiriyya*. In this context, the predominant political thought that was widespread during this time are notions of Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism and Nasserism. Given the coincidence of the rise of the Jamahiriya with this heightened Nasserism era, or maybe not so coincidental, the former regime sought to consolidate its power under the umbrella of Arab unity and nationalism. This period of idolizing

Jamal Abdel Nasser's ideologies, and ruling under nationalist agendas proved to be very determinative in the identity aspects of political culture.

Another key era to highlight is the Lockerbie bombing incident, that had huge implications on Libya both internationally and domestically, given the accusations on Libya for bombing the Lockerbie civilian flight. This incident resulted in severe sanctions imposed on Libya, which led to a crippling internal situation, scarcity in resources, inaccessibility of travel, etc. All these international dynamics had internal dynamics on our behavior as a Libyan citizenry and state, and also our behavior in the international arena changed. Later on, these circumstances would lead the Libyan state to undertake an aggressive anti-Western stance, and eventually pivot towards the African Union. The state began seeing the benefits of engaging with efforts within the African Union, specifically seeing an opportunity in the scattered and weak states that make it up, and considering it as a synergy for unity. Here again, the state would turn to the idea of union again, on an international and regional level but in the context of the African Union, treating it as an organ through which we could fight for our interests in the international arena. The state was successful in forming this regional assembly, and in strengthening the African Union, and in fact Libya succeeded in transforming the African Union into an executive branch. What do I mean by an executive branch? I mean in 2009, we reached a state of the plan where the creation of a united flag, the African dinar and the African passport was reached. This obviously never happened, but this development definitely had a positive impact on the political culture, as it allowed for an interaction between the citizenry and the state on the domestic level, and the state and the international system on the global level.

**Has the political culture witnessed a transformation since the fall of Gaddafi? In the event that you see a transformation, when was the turning point and what were the main changes? What distinguishes or shapes the Libyan political culture after the fall of Gaddafi?**

In my opinion, the political culture had a direct implication on the political behaviors of Libyans in the past 10 years. Such implications began with the willingness to participate politically, given the political awareness campaigns that took place in 2011, among other things. Therefore, people were more willing to participate in politics, and in fact in the elections the turnout rate was 55%, which is groundbreaking for Libyan history. On another note, some other implications of political culture were mere continuations of what we have always known, for example, I'm referring to tribalism here. In particular, in the context of elections, the different regions in the country would let tribal and clan based affiliations govern the dynamics of elections, which says a lot about the political culture of tribalism that is predominant in the country. Another implication of the political culture onto the political scenario over the past decade is the factor of elite political culture. Libyans that have lived abroad, in the West, and who have lived in democratically experienced polities, have tried to directly impact the social fabric through raising awareness, organizing talks, and educating on an informal basis. Here, we see a positive effort in the context of political culture.

These initial positive trends in the context of political culture have not maintained themselves after the 2014 period, given the outbreak of the second civil war. The unprecedented levels of violence that took place after this period would have direct implications on political culture and would lead the citizenry to pull out of political matters.