



Ghosts of the Past: The Muslim Brotherhood and its Struggle for Legitimacy in post-Qaddafi Libya

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Key Terms and Acronyms

Al-tajammu'-u al-watani – Arabic for National Gathering or National Assembly

GNA – Government of National Accord

GNC – General National Council

Hizb al-Adala wa'l-Tamiyya – JCP in Arabic

HSC – High State Council

Ikhwan – Arabic for “brotherhood” and used to refer to the Muslim Brotherhood; longer version being Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin

JCP – Justice and Construction Party

LIFG – Libyan Islamic Fighting Group

LMB – Libyan Muslim Brotherhood

LNA – Libyan National Army

LPA – Libyan Political Agreement, also known as Skhirat Accord

MB – Muslim Brotherhood

NFA – National Forces Alliance

NTC – National Transitional Council

PC – Presidential Council

Executive Summary

Background: Libya in 2018

- Seven years have passed since the fall of Muammar al-Qaddafi, who ruled Libya alongside various alliances for 42 years. Following his overthrow, initiated by local forces and supported by Western military force in 2011, the country has experienced years of turmoil. The future is uncertain; Libya seems to be at a critical crossroads with various groups competing for power and claiming legitimacy.
- Political authority in Libya is divided between rival parliaments in Tripoli and Tobruk and dispersed between different militias exerting control in parts of the country.
- This climate of uncertainty and division forms the context for this paper, which explores one way in which the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood (LMB) tried to establish itself as a legitimate political actor after 2011.

The Muslim Brotherhood in Libya: A Global Movement Trying to Adapt to Local Circumstances

- After decades underground, the LMB arrived on the political stage through popular elections. Due to the intolerance of the Qaddafi regime, the LMB had marginal experience interacting with the masses compared to its counterparts elsewhere.
- From today's view, the movement seems to have failed to achieve its objective of taking power in the country. It is indisputable that many observers as well as MB members themselves were disappointed by the election results in 2012 and 2014, which revealed the LMB had relatively little support from the Libyan people.
- By tracing and explaining the history of the LMB's most salient organisational developments, this paper examines the ways in which the LMB tried to establish itself as a legitimate political actor with regard to its Islamic credentials in the Libyan political sphere after 2011. The fact that Libya is a majority Sunni country with a conservative society did not translate, somewhat paradoxically, into a conservative Sunni movement, such as the MB, faring as well as many had anticipated, derailing the impression that the whole region was "going Islamist" after 2011.
- The LMB today is still haunted by ghosts of the past, such as the decade-long demonisation of the Qaddafi regime, its exiled organisational structure and, connected to that, its impotence in developing a strong social base. The LMB was quick to blame these factors – exacerbated by their opponents' fearmongering of a purported Islamist takeover – as responsible for the Justice and Construction Party's (JCP) poor showing in the 2012 election, glossing over self-inflicted wounds, such as the Islamists' inability to unite or to convince major parts of the population of their political programme.

Epilogue

- Despite the aforementioned points, the LMB in 2018 established itself as a solid political force that has to be reckoned with in the future. This is mainly due to its shrewd manoeuvring and pragmatic choice of alliances.
- Despite its lacklustre electoral performance, which supposedly vindicates the proponents of post-Islamism, it is premature to equate the Brotherhood's electoral setbacks with the end of political Islam in Libya. However, political Islam needs to redefine itself conceptually to stay relevant and the LMB must adapt to a political environment that has been sliding, gradually but steadily, into a battleground for militias in which political institutions constitute simply another means for certain stakeholders to enrich themselves.
- Overall, the LMB exhibits a zero-sum approach to politics rather than bridging divides and pursuing compromises. Of course, like other political forces in Libya the LMB is hostage to military developments in the country, having to operate in a colossally demanding environment: a country painfully fragmented with political forces incapable of controlling the battleground. As a result, the LMB is one of many political forces that was reduced to negligible importance and to struggling with the other political forces for relevance and recognition.
- This paper cannot foresee the future of the LMB or the JCP, but it can draw conclusions based on existing opinions of the LMB in the country, the burdens from the past still influencing the LMB, and recent political schemes that have shaped its image.
- Overall, the LMB exhibited a more hawkish and less compromise-oriented policy approach than its Tunisian counterpart and, while aiming to grow in importance in the Libyan political sphere, cooperated with some of the more radical Islamist groups. Recently, however, it moderated some of its stances by verbally backing the Libyan Political Agreement (LPA). From a social perspective, it remains to be seen if the LMB will succeed in building up a social network resembling what it created in Egypt over the last decades; in the long-term this could strengthen its presence in the country and help it to mobilise and excel politically.
- Libya is no exception in a region of authoritarian systems that drastically weakened political culture and nurtured a zero-sum approach to politics. Therefore, the LMB must also be seen as an outgrowth of Libya's conditions before 2011; the political forces to its left and right would probably be judged similarly harshly in a comparison along the same lines. This does not necessarily suggest the failings of political Islam as much as the tragedy of a region unable to translate its own revolutions into a better, more confident future, leading to the spreading public conviction that Libya would be better off without political parties.

1 Introduction

After decades in which political leaders in North Africa fearmongered about the possibility of allowing democracy to operate unfettered, since it might allow Islamists to gain power,¹ the so-called Arab Spring has meant elections have taken place in several countries² – among them free and fair elections in Libya in 2012.³ Newly established political parties competed in the recently unclenched Libyan political sphere. After 2011, many expected Middle Eastern regimes to be transformed into ones with popular Islamic governance^{4,5} with the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) regarded as ideally suited for this metamorphosis. This paper examines the ways in which the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood (LMB) tried to establish itself as a legitimate political actor in the Libyan political sphere after 2011, a political arena void of independent political organisations due to the nature of the Qaddafi regime.⁶ Conceptually, the Justice and Construction Party (JCP) and the LMB will not be analysed separately, since this paper focusses on the political performance of the LMB after 2011 and it was during the following year that the JCP mutated into the political wing of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. The JCP is the natural point of reference. Although the JCP was theoretically set up as an independent entity from the MB,⁷ interviews conducted for this paper demonstrate that the JCP is unanimously perceived as identical with the LMB^{8,9}

Having spent decades underground, the LMB arrived on the political stage through popular elections. Due to the intolerance of the Qaddafi regime, the LMB had only had marginal experience interacting with the masses compared to its counterparts elsewhere.¹⁰ The LMB could not boast the same networks or support base, but it still looked set to

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- 1 JNC Hill, "Islamism And Democracy In The Modern Maghreb", *Third World Quarterly* 32, no. 6 (2011): 1090.
 - 2 Saïda Keller-Messahli, "Die Auswirkungen des Arabischen Frühlings", *Strategie und Sicherheit* 1 (2014): 695.
 - 3 Haley Cook and Jason Pack, "The July 2012 Libyan Election and the Origin of Post-Qadhafi Appeasement", *Middle East Journal* 69, no. 2 (2015): 171.
 - 4 Omar Ashour, "Libya's Muslim Brotherhood Faces the Future", *Brookings Institution*, 9 March 2012, <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/libyas-muslim-brotherhood-faces-the-future/>; Shadi Hamid, "The Rise of the Islamists: How Islamists Will Change Politics, and Vice Versa", *Foreign Affairs* 90, no. 3 (2011): 40; Alison Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows: The Muslim Brotherhood and the Arab Spring since the Arab Spring* (London: Saqi, 2016): 3.
 - 5 "Most analysts assumed that the majority of party list seats would go to Islamist parties, both because the only surviving opposition movements against the Qadhafi regime all had Islamist roots (the National Front for the Salvation of Libya, the Muslim Brotherhood, the Libyan Islamic Fighting Group, and various Salafi currents) and a North Africa-wide trend favoring Islamic politics that would reflect conservative Libyan sensibilities", Cook and Pack "The July 2012 Libyan Election", 191.
 - 6 Wolfram Lacher, "Families, Tribes and Cities in the Libyan Revolution", *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 4 (2011): 143.
 - 7 "The leaders of the new party say they are independent from the well known Libyan Muslim Brotherhood group both administratively and organizationally", Khadija Ali, "Muslim Brotherhood to contest Libyan elections as independent party", *Tripoli Post*, 24 December 2011, <https://web.archive.org/web/20150505212829/http://www.tripolipost.com/articledetail.asp?c=1&i=7553>
 - 8 "Well, they always argue that it's separate and then they say no it's identical. The Islamic Brotherhood themselves they cannot say if this party is Islamic Brotherhood or not so how could I? But reasonably if the same person is from the same people who found the party and they coincidentally have the same ideology you have to tell that they are the same", Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018; "It seems simply to be the political party founded by the MB members in Libya", Libyan based in London, Skype interview with the author, 5 July 2018; "It is identical, due to its beliefs, its statements, its aims and its program, plus the agenda of the people and countries that back it. The JCP is clearly an offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood Assembly, or Organization", Researcher on Libya, answers provided in written format, 11 July 2018.
 - 9 At the time of writing none of the internally discussed steps to detach itself from the LMB were taken, meaning the JCP can still be classified as the political wing of the LMB. This rings true especially since the concept of political parties in Libya is problematic because of the dominance of militias and the history under Qaddafi, see Mary Fitzgerald, "Libya's Muslim Brotherhood Struggles to Grow", *Foreign Policy*, 1 May 2014, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2014/05/01/libyas-muslim-brotherhood-struggles-to-grow/>; Amir M Kamel, "Post-Qaddafi Libya: rejecting a political party system", in *Political Parties in the Arab World: Continuity and Change*, eds. Francesco Cavatorta and Lise Storm (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
 - 10 Khalil al-Anani, *Inside the Muslim Brotherhood: Religion, Identity, and Politics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016): 10; Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 3.

do well in 2012 at the country's first democratic elections in decades. However, the election results were disappointing; although Libya is a majority Sunni country with a conservative society, which aligned seamlessly with a conservative Sunni movement such as the MB, the LMB was not able to garner popular support on a scale it originally hoped.¹¹ The outcome provided more question marks for analysts attempting to comprehend the Arab Spring: the country that displayed all the features that might suggest an Islamist victory ended up with election results that the so-called liberal parties in Egypt and Tunisia could only dream of.¹² From today's view, the movement seemed to have failed to achieve its objective of taking power in the country. It is indisputable that many observers alongside MB members themselves were disappointed by the election results in 2012 and then in 2014, which revealed the LMB had relatively little support from the Libyan people.¹³ Therefore, an analysis of the MB's attempt to establish itself as a legitimate political actor in Libya should help to explain why it has not achieved the political success for which it hoped.

To sustain this analysis, the paper begins by outlining the history of the MB under Qaddafi, focussing on the key points in this pre-2011 history that are still affecting the MB's political offshoot up to the present. Section two examines the LMB's role during the 2011 revolution and the birth of its political party, again concentrating on the aspects that still influence the LMB. These two sections portray the idiosyncrasies of the Libyan case of the MB; although the LMB is part of a global organisation, the Libyan context provided particular demands in terms of demographic, tribal and broader societal characteristics. In section three, the LMB is assessed on its central, defining claim that it is what is here called the "True Bearer of Islam" in Libyan politics. The analysis shows how the LMB was incapable of conveying a credible stance in this regard and hence was not able to attain the legitimacy it had hoped for as a political actor inside Libya. Methodologically the paper draws on primary sources from the LMB, such as its election manifesto from 2012, the Facebook account of Mohamed Sowane, leader of the JCP since its formation in 2012, and interviews in the local media with LMB representatives, as well as relevant academic literature and qualitative, semi-structured interviews with Libyan nationals and Libya experts.

This analysis is relevant because, despite the aforementioned points, the LMB in 2018 established itself as a solid political force that has to be reckoned with in the future. This is mainly due to its shrewd manoeuvring and pragmatic choice of alliances.¹⁴ It remains the only force that has genuine political national reach across Libya's various regions.¹⁵ Although suffering a blow from the underwhelming election results,¹⁶ the representatives of the Justice and Construction Party are entrenched in the political structures of a divided Libyan system.¹⁷ In 2018, the JCP is still active in seeking legitimacy among the Libyan

11 Mary Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place: Libya's Islamists During And After The Revolution", in *The Libyan Revolution And Its Aftermath*, eds. Peter Cole and Brian McQuinn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 202.

12 Omar Ashour, "Libya's Defeated Islamists," *Project Syndicate*, 17 July 2012, <https://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/libya-s-defeated-islamists>

13 Chris Stephen, "Muslim Brotherhood fell 'below expectations' in Libyan elections", *The Guardian*, 10 July 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2012/jul/10/muslim-brotherhood-expectations-libyan-election>

14 Libyan based in London, Skype interview with the author, 5 July 2018.

15 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 186.

16 Libya Herald "National Forces Alliance sweeps party lists as election results finally announced", 17 July 2012. <https://www.libyaherald.com/2012/07/17/national-forces-alliance-sweeps-party-lists-as-election-results-finally-announced/>

17 For example, Khalid al-Mishri leading the High Council of State (HCS); "The savvy alliances made by the JCP [in the GNC], resulted in the Islamists retaining significant influence on Libya's new politics. Outside the GNC, these pol factions were bolstered by nonaligned Islamists within the quasi-official security structures that grew out of battalions formed during the 2011 revolution", Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 203.

people and trying to establish itself in the power quagmire increasingly dominated by such strong men as Khalifa Haftar and the forces of his (mostly) loyal Libyan National Army (LNA). Despite its lacklustre electoral performance, which supposedly vindicates the proponents of post-Islamism¹⁸,¹⁹ it is premature to equate the Brotherhood's electoral setbacks with the end of political Islam in Libya. However, political Islam needs to redefine itself conceptually to stay relevant and the LMB must adapt to a political environment that has been sliding, gradually but steadily, into a militia battleground in which political institutions constitute another means for certain stakeholders to enrich themselves.²⁰ The current political catastrophe that is post-Qaddafi Libya exhibits a ruling establishment that struggles to assert any authority with the LMB engrained in these calamitous dynamics.²¹

While the Egyptian mothership and the successful Tunisian offshoot have been extensively discussed, the LMB has been insufficiently researched and neglected in the battleground between militias, army, tribes and terrorists that is the current Libyan state. While Libya is unique in many regards, its trajectory after Qaddafi's overthrow nonetheless offers a capacious repository for academic and policy lessons with relevance beyond the country itself on diverse phenomena, such as the challenges of governance and the influence of militarised non-state actors. First, this paper will address the research gap on the MB in Libya by combining a discussion of its more distant and its more recent history (the latter refers to after 2011, when the movement came "out of the shadows"²²). Secondly, this paper offers a distinctly Libyan contribution to the debate on how political actors aim to derive legitimacy by building on Islamic credentials. What becomes clear from this study is that there exists a palpable gap between the LMB's ambitions, the practical implementation of these ambitions, and their reception by the Libyan people. If these divides are not bridged, then the LMB might tumble into this gorge.

18 Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1996).

19 For more information on the discussion on the various strands of political Islam, including the currents of Post-Islamism and Neo-Islamism, see Ayoob 2008, Cavatorta 2012, Chamkhi 2014, Dalacoura 2007, Roy 2012.

20 Jason Pack, "Why the country of Libya appears so lawless", *TRT World Now*, 10 September 2018. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MC4eG-G5v2w&feature=youtu.be>

21 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 4.

22 *ibid.*

2 The Muslim Brotherhood in Libya pre-2011 – *Persecuted, Demonised and Dominated by Exile Structures*

The LMB certainly did not first appear during the 2011 revolution. It has a tumultuous history, including in recent decades, which provide the group's outlook today and allow it to claim to be the "country's oldest Islamist group".²³ Before 2011, years of forced exile, followed by conditional rapprochement with the Qaddafi regime in the early 2000s, scarred the LMB. Although initially welcomed by King Idris in the 1940s, things quickly changed for the LMB after the military coup of 1969 that brought Colonel Muammar al-Qaddafi to power.²⁴ Having to deal with severe repression and meagre reprieves meant the LMB could only boast a string of incoherent, choppily executed activities in the country. This eventually culminated in a deal offered as part of the "Reform and Repent" Programme launched by Qaddafi's son Saif al-Islam, which was officially aimed at de-radicalising Libya's Islamist prisoners²⁵ and included the release of Islamists on condition that they did not engage in political activity in Libya. By participating in the programme, the LMB left behind its status as a persecuted group but remained a shadow of what its founders intended it to be, namely a deeply entrenched and influential Islamist group in the country. Instead the LMB before 2011 consisted of a negligible congregation of people and the group in total can be described as traumatised by decades of brutal suppression. Residing mostly in exile and hence offering only futile *da'wa* (call) work²⁶ and barely existing Friday prayers in mosques meant that by 2011 the LMB was widely unknown and never gained much traction among Libyans.²⁷ Even more poignantly, for some Libyans, it was considered a murky force with negative connotations due to Qaddafi's decades-long propaganda against it.

The Muslim Brotherhood Arrives in Libya

In 1948, Libya's ruler, King Idris, welcomed some brothers to the eastern city of Benghazi, granting them asylum from Egypt. Furthermore, the Muslim Brotherhood also made its way into the Libyan university systems with Egyptian students and scholars preaching MB beliefs.²⁸ However, this vanguard faced problems embedding itself into Libya since it was predominantly a cultural

²³ Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 178.

²⁴ Ann M Lesch, "Troubled Political Transitions: Tunisia, Egypt and Libya", *Middle East Policy* 11, no. 1 (2014): 63.

²⁵ Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 123.

²⁶ "God's way of bringing believers to faith and the means by which prophets call individuals and communities back to God. Militant submovements interpret dawah as calling Muslims back to the purer form of religion practiced by Muhammad and the early Muslim community. Historically, missionary dawah accompanied commercial ventures or followed military conquests. Dawah was also the function of the caliph, extending authority over Muslims outside Islamic lands and promoting Islamic unity. In the twentieth century, dawah has become the foundation for social, economic, political, and cultural activities as well as domestic and foreign policy strategies" <http://www.oxfordislamicstudies.com/article/opr/t125/e511>

²⁷ Karim Mezran, "Conspiracism In And Around Libya", *The International Spectator* 51, no. 2 (2016): 113.

²⁸ Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 118; Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 178.

and religious organisation, unable to speak to the masses of a still barely developed state. Already by that time, Libyan society exhibited a revulsion towards foreign ideologies and proved difficult to win over.²⁹

The Muslim Brotherhood Under Qaddafi

After Qaddafi's rise to power and the establishment of his peculiar version of a state (*jamahiriyah*³⁰), there was barely room for any non-state-sanctioned activity in the country. In addition to outlawing any political opposition,³¹ Qaddafi also deeply penetrated the social sphere with his all-encompassing vision of the *jamahiriyah*. This left no room for other forces, particularly not for Islamist ones,³² since he wrapped his regime in the banner of Islam, rejecting any other interpretations or divergent religious strands next to his own, individualistic interpretation;³³ his intolerance was revealed in his notorious utterances when he called Islamists *zinadiqa* (heathens) or warned that they were more dangerous than AIDS.³⁴ He effectively banned the organisation, prohibiting it from ever providing the mixture of social and political work that defined it in Egypt and which its founder hoped would reform and hence "Islamicise" society from the bottom up.³⁵ Furthermore, repression sustained Qaddafi's regime; various security agencies, often headed by family members, oversaw securing his rule and quashing any possible political activity.³⁶ The repression found its first apogee in 1973 when the state targeted multiple political currents, including the LMB: the arrested members could choose if they wanted to stay in Libya and henceforth refrain from any political activity or exit the country to support Qaddafi's "Islamic Call Society", aimed at spreading Islam to its southern neighbours. To sum up, this manoeuvre effectively disbanded the MB inside Libya.³⁷

The LMB's Attempts to Utilise its Foreign Organisations as Catalysts

Still, overseas members of the LMB tried repeatedly to gain a foothold in the country. Operating mainly from the UK and USA, the LMB was able to attract devotees to its Islamist ideas that then established, for example, the *Jamā'at Islamīa Lībiā* (Islamic group Libya),³⁸ and later a London-based organisation called Libya Watch,³⁹ which operated from 2002 to 2006.⁴⁰ Building on its overseas organisations, the LMB embarked on discreet forays into Libya, which started in the early 1980s⁴¹ and continued through the 1990s, during which period the LMB created some student camps and worked secretly alongside several imams in mosques.⁴² However, this was once

29 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 119–120

30 Muammar Qaddafi, *The Green Book* (Massachusetts: Ithaca, 1999).

31 Lesch, "Troubled Political Transitions", 66.

32 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 115.

33 Yehudit Ronen, "Qadhafi and Militant Islamism: Unprecedented Conflict", *Middle Eastern Studies* 38, no. 4 (October 2002): 1.

34 Hanspeter Mattes, "The Rise and Fall of the Revolutionary Committees", in *Qadhafi's Libya*, ed. Dirk Vandevale (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 1995): 109.

35 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 178; Ayaan Hirsi Ali, "Prepare To Compete With The Muslim Brotherhood", *New Perspectives Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2011): 46; Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 4.

36 James Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015): 91.

37 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 121–122.

38 *ibid.*

39 in Arabic *Muasāsat al-Raqīb li-Huquq al-Insān*: Al-Raqīb Institute for Human Rights

40 The website www.libya-watch.org is no longer active in English or Arabic versions.

41 Ashour, "Libya's Muslim Brotherhood".

42 Ronen, "Qadhafi and Militant Islamism", 3.

again significantly less than what the Egyptian MB was doing during the same period.⁴³ Most notably, the severe repression of the Qaddafi regime can be singled out as the main cause for this poor performance. All the same, it is also worth noting that more militant jihadist strands overshadowed the LMB and extended their influence substantially during the 1990s.⁴⁴ Ultimately, all these Islamist opposition groups were to be targeted by the same elimination techniques, either imprisonment in the notorious Abu Salim prison or public execution. This effectively finished off the MB inside Libya for a second time.⁴⁵

The Constant Demonisation of the LMB by Qaddafi

Qaddafi relied on using the LMB as a “catchphrase for regime opponents”⁴⁶ in the public discourse whilst also scapegoating the LMB. This combination led to the LMB becoming “Libya’s most vilified opposition group for most of Qaddafi’s 42 years in power”⁴⁷ or, in the words of a Libyan in Benghazi, *this terrorist group which the government condemned (...) and one should therefore rather stay away from and call if you knew anyone who could be related to them.*⁴⁸ This approach by the regime understandably drove the LMB outside Libya and reinforced its conviction that in order to survive it needed to stay on safe terrain. Hence many of the current leadership typically first encountered the LMB as students in Europe, the US and Canada, and much of the LMB’s network and organisational structure is still based overseas.⁴⁹

Saif al-Islam’s Politicised Rapprochement to the Islamist Opposition Backfires for the LMB

As a last historical development crucial to understand the LMB’s current standing in Libya, the “Reform and Repent” Programme launched by Qaddafi’s oldest son, Saif al-Islam, needs to be discussed. In hindsight the process certainly brought short-term to medium-term successes for the LMB as many imprisoned brothers were freed. In the long term, however, especially regarding the Libyan people’s perception of its positioning towards the Qaddafi regime during the 2011 revolution, the LMB’s engagement with the

43 “When Sadat came to power in 1971 he already noted that the Egyptian MB had permeated Egyptian society to an extent which no other organisation with voluntary membership has ever achieved; the following years, the MB resumed its activities as it was encouraged to do so by Sadat; finally, Mubarak replicated Sadat’s bargain with the MB after he took power in 1981”, Martyn Frampton, *The Muslim Brotherhood and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018): 322–377.

44 For example, the LIFG. For more on this see Noman Benotman, Jason Pack and James Brandon, “Islamists”, in *The 2011 Libyan Uprisings and the Struggle for the Post-Qadhafi Future*, ed. Jason Pack (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), in which they elaborate on the history of the LIFG. In short, the group originated from Libyans returning from their fight against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan who chose Qaddafi as their next target. After the regime discovered an LIFG cell in 1995, the group found itself prematurely caught up in a confrontation with the regime and most of them wound up in prison, to be released about ten years later as part of Saif al-Islam’s “Reform and Repent” Programme, in which the regime pledged a series of prisoner releases in exchange for the renouncement of violence and a promise of impartiality towards the Qaddafi regime. Ironically, the last prisoners were released in February 2011, just as the revolution started in eastern Libya, empowering some former LIFG members to feature in the revolution from the start. These men were turned into an organised cohort over the course of the revolution and consequently decided to run for office. They realised the importance of getting into key positions in the emerging political apparatus. This newly developed political class of the MB and former LIFG members, however, face a crucial struggle against those Jihadists who reject any form of political participation, including Ansar al-Sharia groups and Islamic State affiliates.

45 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 178, Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 121–123.

46 Ronen, “Qadhafi and Militant Islamism”, 1.

47 Mary Fitzgerald, “Introducing the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood”, *Foreign Policy*, 2 November 2012, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/11/02/introducing-the-libyan-muslim-brotherhood>

48 Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018.

49 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 178; Thorsten Hasche, *Quo vadis, politischer Islam? AKP, al-Qaida und Muslimbruderschaft in systemtheoretischer Perspektive* (Bielefeld: transcript-Verlag, 2015): 241.

programme certainly had negative repercussions. Some analysts even argue that its participation in this “reconciliation” attempt gave fuel to a so-called “Great Islamist Conspiracy Theory”, in which the LMB is subsumed into the plethora of Islamist groups in Libya.⁵⁰ By putting them all into the same category, each group could be charged with aspirations for power at any cost.⁵¹

At the time of Saif’s rapprochement, the LMB was emasculated to the point where almost any improvement to its current situation the regime had to offer was worth considering.⁵² Although the LMB was not the initial focus of the programme, the offer by the regime to release affiliated prisoners if they consented to keep away from any political activity also extended to the LMB.⁵³ Following these developments one particular move by the LMB stands out in the eyes of many Libyans and especially other opposition groups as betrayal of the national cause: the boycott of the first Libyan pan-opposition conference in London in 2005.⁵⁴ As a result, the LMB was considered compromised; the MB’s international website⁵⁵ provided the nail in the coffin when it explained that the movement had boycotted the conference because it rejected – inter alia – the demand for Qaddafi to be removed from power.⁵⁶ The LMB therefore seemed to have lost all its credibility as an opposition group and appeared neutralised by the regime.⁵⁷

In the end, the regime’s iron-fisted approach towards Islamist opposition forced the LMB to nurture a clandestine profile that subsequently hampered its efforts to appeal to the Libyan people and increase support for its cause;⁵⁸ the LMB underwent a different history than the Egyptian MB as they were “really cracked down on by Qaddafi”.⁵⁹ However, it did survive as an undercover movement and while the decades of repression were indubitably formative for the LMB, they were equally formative both for the Libyan population and for the resulting image the LMB still carries inside Libya, which led Bashir al-Kabti⁶⁰ to the conviction that the Libyan people “still see the Brotherhood through the eyes of Qaddafi”.⁶¹ Furthermore, the more recent developments in relation to Saif al-Islam’s process cost the LMB credibility as a truly revolutionary actor at the cusp of the 2011 revolution.⁶² With no real presence inside the country, the LMB consisted of, Suleiman Abdelkader⁶³ acknowledged to Al-Jazeera, “no one inside the country and no more than 200 outside of it”.⁶⁴

50 For more on the various groups operating in Libya, see Mattia Toaldo and Mary Fitzgerald, “A Quick Guide to Libya’s Main Players”, European Council on Foreign Relations, 19 May 2016 https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/Lybias_Main_Players_Dec2016_v2.pdf

51 Mezran, “Conspiracism In And Around Libya”, 117.

52 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 115.

53 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 123.

54 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 180, Fitzgerald, “Introducing the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood”.

55 Ikhwanweb <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/index.php>

56 B. Chernitsky, “Libyan Muslim Brotherhood on the Rise”, *MEMRI Inquiry and Analysis Series Report* no. 828, 24 April 2012 <https://www.memri.org/reports/libyan-muslim-brotherhood-rise>

57 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 124.

58 Ronen, “Qadhafi and Militant Islamism”, 12.

59 Libyan based in London, Skype interview with the author, 5 July 2018.

60 In November 2011 at the first MB conference to take place in Libya in 20 years, the conference elected Bashir Al-Kabti as general supervisor of the MB in Libya (he took over from Suleiman Abdelkader). Al-Kabti, born in Benghazi and an accountant by profession, was head of the Libyan MB when it operated clandestinely, and spent 33 years in the USA. He returned to Libya when the uprising against Qaddafi began: Chernitsky, “Libyan Muslim Brotherhood”.

61 Fitzgerald, “Introducing the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood”.

62 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 180.

63 Former leader of the LMB until he was replaced by Al-Kabti. He played an important role in the “Reform and Repent” Programme and wrote a letter of thanks to Saif al-Islam in 2006 after the regime released a number of MB prisoners.

64 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 125.

Demonised, Lacking Influence in the Social Sphere and Corrupted by the Regime

In short, three main factors from the LMB's history define its current perception inside Libya. First, its constant demonisation under Qaddafi, which naturally still lingers among the Libyan people. Second, its futile attempts to establish any social work or religious influence in mosques. Third, the lasting impression of corruption that emerged after its entry into Saif al-Islam's alleged rehabilitation programme, which led it to be viewed with scepticism by many Libyans and with deep suspicion or even bitterness by most opposition groups. These historic influences can be traced in the image of the LMB among Libyans up to the present.

3 The Muslim Brotherhood's Role During the 2011 Revolution and the Birth of its Political Party – *Gaining a Foothold in the Country, Shrewd Political Manoeuvring and Punching above its Weight*

At the Beginning of the Protests: the LMB Tries to Find its Place

Similar to the protests erupting in other countries in the region, the uprisings in Libya in 2011 were neither initiated nor controlled by Islamist forces, let alone the Muslim Brotherhood.⁶⁵ In Libya, decades of repression followed by tentative reconciliation with Qaddafi had taken its toll and the LMB was no potent force in 2011.⁶⁶ Hence two main factors defined the LMB on the eve of revolution: a) the exiled leadership needed to decide where to position the organisation with regard to the protests;⁶⁷ b) following a decision to support the protests, the question was how and by which means.

The decision about how to react to what appeared to be an indomitable revolutionary stimulus in eastern Libya was not taken lightly by the LMB. From an ideological perspective, supporting a regime overthrow was a problematic notion for the Brotherhood because of its conceptualisation as a non-violent, gradualist movement⁶⁸ that first transforms the individual and then society; in the words of Abdelrazzak al-Arabi, a senior MB member, “as an organisation we don't believe that changing the head of the regime will change the people”.⁶⁹ The MB's deep-seated devotion to gradual reform and its related uneasiness with revolutionary developments lingered to the extent that, while even after starting to actively support the revolution, the LMB still appeared almost hesitant to commit itself fully and even open to the possibility of making a deal with the

65 Amar Paul and Vijay Prashad, *Dispatches from the Arab Spring: Understanding the New Middle East* (Minneapolis; London: University of Minnesota Press, 2013): x; Alia Brahimi, “Libya's Revolution”, in *North Africa's Arab Spring*, ed. George Joffé (London: Routledge, 2013): 101–120; George Joffé, *North Africa's Arab Spring* (London: Routledge, 2013): 4; Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 125; Guido Steinberg, “Der Arabische Frühling. Eine Gesamtschau”, *Strategie und Sicherheit* 1 (2014): 690.

66 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 178; Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 115.

67 The decision was to be made between either keeping the promises made to the regime under the reconciliation process initiated by Saif al-Islam or turning away from the regime and breaking those promises, risking future reprisals if the rebellion proved unsuccessful and Qaddafi's regime remained in power.

68 Lorenzo Vidino, “The Muslim Brotherhood and the West: Evolution and Western Policies”, *Developments in Radicalisation and Political Violence*, February 2011: 8.

69 “Abdelrazzak al-Arabi fi Liqa Khass” [Exclusive Interview with Abdelrazzak Al-Arabi], 26 April 2013 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ojMUlrxY34M>

very regime it was fighting^{70,71} These moves did not go unnoticed by the Libyan people, baffling them with the LMB's supposed cordiality towards the Qaddafi regime.⁷² However, after its second of two infamous meetings abroad in early 2011, the LMB decided to take the side of the revolutionary forces and turn its back on the regime.⁷³ For a movement like the MB this was a big step.⁷⁴ Influential players in the Islamist scene such as Ali al-Sallabi⁷⁵ and Yusuf al-Qaradawi⁷⁶ ratified the righteousness of the protests, aiding the LMB from an ideological perspective.

Capitalising on the watershed moment for Libyan politics and society that the 2011 uprisings represented, the LMB was able to move from repression and marginalisation to a role as actor in Libya. The LMB tried to roll out revolutionary support programmes under several guises. Once again, however, the previous decades under Qaddafi's rule had taken their toll on the movement to the extent that even if it wanted to throw its full weight behind the revolutionary forces this full weight did not actually add up to much. Fortunately, due to its attachment to the MB as a global movement, the LMB could offer logistical support, such as channelling humanitarian aid from Egypt into Libya. In some areas, the LMB finally also succeeded in aligning itself with mosques; MB-affiliated preachers delivered prayers urging people to join the demonstrations.⁷⁷ Even though the support the LMB delivered was not massive, it still stood out in a country where civil society organisations had been banned for decades; the LMB's weak but nevertheless established clandestine networks managed to jump in and deliver.⁷⁸

One aspect, however, grew more and more important as the revolution progressed: armed rebellion.⁷⁹ The LMB did not deliver in this regard in the way that many Libyans who were longing for a secure environment might have hoped. It is incorrect to say that the LMB was not involved in the armed conflict at all, as some members participated in the armed clashes, but these brothers fought in an individual capacity.⁸⁰ The jihadist groups overwhelmingly overshadowed any LMB military presence;⁸¹ especially, the increasingly assertive Salafists outflanked the MB and wielded considerable street power. They were prevalent in many of the militias that emerged following the revolution.⁸² In addition, the armed groups that formed initially did not adhere to any particular ideology but came together under the common cause of fighting Qaddafi with mobilisation for the militias predominantly defined by

70 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 116.

71 Former Head of the United Nations ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Taliban Monitoring Team, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

72 Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018; Libyan based in London, Skype interview with the author, 5 July 2018.

73 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 180.

74 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 132.

75 Sheikh Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi is a prominent, if unofficial, intellectual and spiritual leader, largely through his international connections, including a close relationship to Yusuf al-Qaradawi. He emerged as an informal leader of the various Islamist currents that came to the fore as Qaddafi's regime began to crumble. Before 2011, al-Sallabi had worked closely with Saif al-Islam in negotiating the repentance and renunciation of violence by LIFG persons. <https://islamonline.net/>

76 Qaradawi, head of the International Union for Muslim Scholars (making him the Brotherhood's Qatar-based overall spiritual leader), issued a fatwa live on television urging the Libyan army to kill Qaddafi, "Al-Qaradawi yantaqid-u al-ṣamt-a tijāh-a ahdāth-i lībiā" [Al-Qaradawi criticizes the silence towards the events in Libya], 21 February 2011. <http://www.aljazeera.net/news/arabic/2011/2/21/%d8%a7%d9%84%d9%82%d8%b1%d8%b6%d8%a7%d9%88%d9%8a-%d9%8a%d9%86%d8%aa%d9%82%d8%af-%d8%a7%d9%84%d8%b5%d9%85%d8%aa-%d8%aa%d8%ac%d8%a7%d9%87-%d8%a3%d8%ad%d8%af%d8%a7%d8%ab-%d9%84%d9%8a%d8%a8%d9%8a%d8%a7>

77 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 181.

78 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 181.

79 Wolfram Lacher, "Families, Tribes and Cities in the Libyan Revolution", *Middle East Policy* 18, no. 4 (2011).

80 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 116.

81 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 116.

82 Fitzgerald, "Introducing the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood".

local or regional origin.⁸³ In the tapestry of Libyan militias, prominent MB figures had to find their own places with, for example, Abu Kitef, a leading figure in the LMB (who was jailed for almost 20 years under Qaddafi), heading the Revolutionary Brigades Coalition in eastern Libya and becoming deputy defence minister in the NTC.⁸⁴ At the same time, the LMB also became embroiled in the intra-revolutionary battle for dominance in post-Qaddafi Libya. The assassination of Abdel Fattah Younes, the commander of the rebel forces, by an Islamist group in July 2011, for example, fuelled the image that the Islamist groups were not only fighting to bring down the regime but also already fighting for their own agendas.⁸⁵ A second advantage of being attached to a global movement with pockets of support internationally was that the LMB naturally could turn to its foreign allies for aid. Most prominently, it turned to Qatar and was henceforth capable of sending weapons to rebels on the front lines to counter what the LMB considered unjustifiable brutality by Qaddafi.⁸⁶ Even though this external support might have been valued at the time, the overt reliance of the LMB on outside forces proved a burden in the following process of positioning itself domestically as a credible political actor.

The Formation of the NTC: the Revolutionary Forces Start Organising Themselves

Early on, the rebellion forces were faced with the challenge of founding some kind of political institution that could exert political control in already liberated areas and, equally importantly, could manage relations with the international community. As a result, the rebels declared the emergence of the National Transitional Council (NTC) in early March 2011. This endeavour provided a plethora of challenges: many newly resurgent political actors attempted to establish political structures in a country that contained virtually no state institutions they could build upon due to the idiosyncratic make-up of Qaddafi's *jamahiriyah*.⁸⁷

The NTC, however, did succeed in bringing already influential people under its roof, among them defectors from the Qaddafi regime, who brought with them aristocratic family backgrounds, and other prominent family members, such as three sons of Mohamed al-Sallabi, who had been among the founding members of the LMB's branch in Benghazi.⁸⁸ The composition of the NTC was heavily criticised by the LMB itself, and even more harshly by Ali al-Sallabi, who condemned the NTC⁸⁹ as illegitimate since it had not been formed according to "allegiance" – or, in other words, it had not been chosen by the Libyan people,⁹⁰ or Usama.⁹¹ Former members of the regime sitting on the NTC were attacked during sermons attended by thousands in Benghazi. Despite the disproportionate nature of this criticism, the underlying argument holds true: the NTC was composed largely of Libyans with a more liberal orientation and the LMB's exclusion shocked the movement, as it had come to envision itself as a part of Libya's political future.⁹²

83 Lacher, "Families, Tribes and Cities", 145.

84 Ashour, "Libya's Muslim Brotherhood".

85 Mezran, "Conspiracism In And Around Libya", 114.

86 Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 102; Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 132.

87 Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 95–96; Lacher, "Families, Tribes and Cities", 148.

88 Lacher, "Families, Tribes and Cities", 143; Lesch, "Troubled Political Transitions", 67.

89 Sallabi denounces the NTC on Al-Jazeera, "al-Sallabi: Iā yumkin-u tajāwuz-u islamiyyi Libiā" [Al-Sallabi: The Islamists of Libya cannot be bypassed], 15 September 2011 <http://www.aljazeera.net/NR/exeres/49775047-16BF-42F1-B2C1-B32922FA4F35>

90 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 137; Lacher, "Families, Tribes and Cities", 148–149.

91 Brother of Ali al-Sallabi.

92 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 136.

As a result of a mixture of external circumstances (such as the NTC's difficulty being accepted internationally as the voice of all Libyans) and domestic reservations with the body (it was seen as too eastern-dominated and not representing the conservative nature of Libya), the LMB succeeded in relatively little time in elbowing its way into the NTC.⁹³ After its inclusion, however, the LMB, came to be viewed suspiciously by other NTC members. In their scepticism, traces of the factors described in section one can be perceived: presumably harmless actions like appearing particularly well organised unsettled some NTC members, as Fathi al-Ba'ja⁹⁴ explained: "when they arrived with their laptops and suits, they seemed more organised than us, as if they arrived with a plan".⁹⁵ His statement resonates with the image of the LMB as an "unknown force" or even the more drastic fear of an "Islamist conspiracy", of which the LMB was a presumed member, that has always lurked underground waiting for its chance to take over the country.

Unsurprisingly, the diverse groups of NTC members clashed on political issues. The two most contentious issues fought out between the self-described "Islamist current" and their "secularist" adversaries were, first, over the electoral law that should lay the groundwork for an inclusive Libyan state and more precisely the question of allocation of seats based on political party or individual allocation.⁹⁶ The LMB favoured the party-based option, probably hoping to benefit from its existing networks. In the end a compromise was reached with a hybrid system allowing for both individual candidates and party lists.⁹⁷ The second and even more important issue was about the constitution and Sharia's role in its formation: the LMB took the most stringent stance, insisting that Sharia should be "the" principal source of legislation.⁹⁸ Using a tactic of appealing to Libya's other Islamist groups (while disagreeing in their interpretations of Sharia), the LMB united with others to oppose the first draft, meaning it could claim a success. Abd al-Jalil⁹⁹ used his first speech after the overthrow of Qaddafi to proclaim that Sharia would be "the" main source of legislation.¹⁰⁰

Overall, the LMB managed to establish itself in the emerging political structures of Libya (alongside the NTC it was also present in many local councils), despite its limited engagement in the armed conflict and its unfortunate lack of penetration in the country. This result was partly a reflection of the hollowness Qaddafi had nurtured for decades and partly a result of benefitting from belonging to an international movement – although these features proved to be a double-edged sword later. In the autumn of 2011, the LMB secured far more influence politically than its influence on the ground reflected and hence appeared more powerful than it really was.¹⁰¹

93 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 183; Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 138.

94 Fathi al-Ba'ja, a political science professor from Benghazi who headed the NTC's political committee.

95 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 186.

96 Mohamed Eljarh, "The Libyan Elections Law 2012 and the Muslim Brotherhood", *Middle East Online*, 1 February 2012.

97 Some 120 of the GNC's 200 seats were allocated to individual candidates.

98 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 186.

99 Abd al-Jalil was born in the eastern city of Bayda and studied law and Sharia (Islamic law) at the University of Libya. He was named justice minister in 2007. During his career as a judge, he was known for ruling consistently against the government, according to the *Wall Street Journal*. As justice minister, he won praise from human rights groups and Western powers for his efforts to reform Libya's criminal code. Despite having a \$400,000 (£250,000) bounty for his capture placed on him, Jalil has nonetheless been busy over the last few months, seeking foreign support for the Benghazi-based NTC. He said, back in February when the NTC was formed – with "representatives of the entire population of the Libya" – that it would manage the affairs of a post-Qaddafi Libya but would not become the government. Once Tripoli fell, he said: "The Libyans will head for free legislative, parliamentary and presidential elections." <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14613679>

100 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 187.

101 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 117, 138.

The Political Wing of the LMB: Precursors and the Establishment of the JCP

Just as the NTC needed to be created from scratch, the same rings true for the creation of political parties in Libya.¹⁰² As Wolfram Lacher poignantly calls it, the political field in Libya was almost “virgin territory”.¹⁰³ In the early calculations on how to set up a political Islamist wing for the LMB, the influential Islamists Belhaj and Sallabi acknowledged that an Islamist Party might not fare well as “while the majority of the Libyan people are Muslims, they are not Islamists”.¹⁰⁴ Libyan society exhibits distinctive characteristics that sets it apart from its neighbours Egypt and Tunisia, in which there exists a gulf between conservatism and liberalism. In Libya, Islam plays a guiding role in public life, even if that does not necessarily directly translate into support for political Islam or even mean that there exists a clear vision about how Islam is supposed to inform politics.¹⁰⁵ Following the considerations by some leading Islamists, a national umbrella movement including Islamists from many strands was created called the National Gathering (*Al-tajammu'-u al-watani*), which was supposed to evolve into a political party in due course. However, mainly due to the LMB members, the movement crumbled within months of the fall of Tripoli in autumn 2011: the LMB officially detached itself from the movement because the National Gathering could not agree on basic structural issues.¹⁰⁶ Alongside internal fissures and scepticism about the appeal of the National Gathering to non-Islamist parts of the population, the LMB's preoccupation with its international image, which it did not want to be soured by alliances with (ex-) jihadists, was likely among the factors determining the LMB's exit.¹⁰⁷

Instead, the LMB launched the Justice and Construction Party in March 2012, which it based on the Egyptian model of not being an exclusively “MB Party” but instead open to others with “a similar mindset”.¹⁰⁸ Its structure and decision-making process would be separate from the LMB. This decision to distance the party formally from the LMB demonstrates the MB's awareness of their poor reception in Libya after the history described in section one.¹⁰⁹ With this set-up, the LMB aimed to display a more diverse, inclusive image¹¹⁰ reinforced by the fact that Brotherhood cadres made up only a fraction of its 10,000 or so registered members.¹¹¹ Simultaneously, however, the LMB could not effectively counter the widespread assumption that the JCP was the de facto political wing of the LMB; this image was reinforced by the fact that most founders were brothers and its newly elected leader, Mohamed Sowane, had previously led the MB's Shura Council.¹¹² The speed of the founding of the party demonstrates the MB's determination to participate in Libya's political future and its willingness to contest the country's first post-revolutionary democratic elections,¹¹³ but also conceals the LMB's lack of comprehension that Libya was not ready for political parties, let alone parties based on

102 Lesch, “Troubled Political Transitions”, 67.

103 Lacher, “Families, Tribes and Cities”, 49.

104 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 184.

105 Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018; Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018; Libyan based in London, Skype interview with the author, 5 July 2018.

106 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 184.

107 Ashour, “Libya's Muslim Brotherhood”.

108 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 195.

109 *ibid.*, 196.

110 Ashour, “Libya's Muslim Brotherhood”; Andrew McGregor, “Libya's Muslim Brotherhood and the Struggle for Post-Revolutionary Libya: A Profile of Sheikh Ali Muhammad al-Sallabi”, *Aberfoyle International Security*, 30 March 2016.

111 Libya Business News, “Libya's Muslim Brotherhood sets up political party”, 3 March 2012.

112 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 199; Fitzgerald, “Libya's Muslim Brotherhood Struggles to Grow”. *Foreign Policy*, 1 May 2014; Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 151.

113 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 145, 150.

ideology. Anything loosely connected to politics was still associated with trouble, as Qaddafi's system had preached the population for decades. Furthermore, the political "virgin territory" in general also reflected a complete lack of political culture and experience with parties was entirely novel in Libya.¹¹⁴ Nonetheless, in this difficult political context, the country was moving towards elections.

2012 Elections: Charged with Hope Both for a Better Future in Libya and for the Institutionalisation of Power by the LMB

The first elections in the country since 1965¹¹⁵ were held in July 2012 to great enthusiasm and a large turnout.¹¹⁶ Libyans elected a General National Council (GNC): a 200-person body that would name an executive head of state and pave the way for parliamentary elections in 2013.¹¹⁷ The elections were preceded by structural debates, such as the composition of the electoral law, but also less legislative but more practical issues, such as how the election would be conducted and who could participate.¹¹⁸

The LMB was realistic enough to anticipate that it could not collect a landslide victory or come close to the results its counterparts in Egypt and Tunisia had achieved.¹¹⁹ Two main issues were justifiably running high in the LMB's election campaign: first, effectively overturning the widespread negative impression of the LMB due to Qaddafi's relentless condemnation of the movement, since the LMB had never been able to counterbalance this impression with the provision of services socially, as the Egyptian MB had over decades;¹²⁰ second, the need to create a party platform and programme that would differentiate itself from competing entities and hence simultaneously attract voters to a party rather than individual candidates chosen because of local prominence. The first issue proved to be difficult, as already discussed, while the second turned out to be even more tricky in Libya with its deeply engrained localism. For an Islamist party the centrality of Sharia naturally becomes the centrepiece of its party programme; in Libya, however, this did not set the LMB apart, not even from the liberal National Forces Alliance (NFA), which also promoted a vision of Libyan democracy with an "Islamic frame of reference", just as the JCP communicated at its launch¹²¹ and Al-Kabti emphasised.¹²² Looking at the JCP's election programme, which was published in both Arabic and English,¹²³ there are expected phrases, such as the goal to work towards a state that "guarantees the rule of democracy and peaceful transfer of power".¹²⁴ There are barely any aspects that

114 *The Economist*, "Libya's Muslim Brothers: The knack of organisation", 12 January 2013; Kamel, "Post-Qaddafi Libya: rejecting a political party system"; Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 153; Former Head of the United Nations ISIL (Da'esh), Al-Qaida and Taliban Monitoring Team, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

115 Lesch, "Troubled Political Transitions", 67.

116 Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 108.

117 Marie-Louise Gumuchian and Hadeel al-Shalchi, "Libyans brave violence to grasp first free vote", *Reuters*, 7 July 2012.

118 Cook and Pack, "The July 2012 Libyan Election", 176.

119 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 145.

120 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 201.

121 *ibid.*, 200.

122 In an interview on Libya TV, Al-Kabti mentioned that his movement supports "political pluralism, inclusion, the separation of the powers, and media freedom" but legislation should not "contravene the principles of Islam"; Almanara Media, "hiwār-un ma'a al-mas'ūl-i al-'ām-i al-jadīd-i li-al-ikhwān-i al-muslimīn-a fi Libiā", [Interview with the new official of the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya], 24 November 2011 <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DH57e5gqLTK>

123 English version <https://kurzman.unc.edu/files/2011/06/LBY-2012-al-Adala-wa-al-Bina-Justice-and-Construction.pdf>; Arabic version <https://kurzman.unc.edu/files/2018/07/LBY-2012-al-Adala-wa-al-Bina.pdf>

124 Election programme of the JCP in 2012, <https://kurzman.unc.edu/files/2011/06/LBY-2012-al-Adala-wa-al-Bina-Justice-and-Construction.pdf>, 3.

would raise eyebrows in the West, apart from that the state should be based on a constitution drafted in accordance with the “beliefs of the Libyan people and community values [...] which consider Islamic law the main source of legislation”.¹²⁵ The LMB’s Facebook page says that “the values of freedom, justice and human rights [are] the backbone of religion, as long as [these principles] do not contravene the steadfast [precepts] of our faith”.¹²⁶ However, even if this assertion might have caused discomfort among some Western readers, it was hardly controversial in the Libyan context, in which even the NFA committed to similar principles. Again, the rift between conservatism and liberalism in Egypt or Tunisia could be detected in the widespread debate about the role of Sharia and provided a chance for the MB to position itself prominently; however, this discussion “barely caused a ripple” in conservative Libya.¹²⁷

One advantage the LMB held and which it could theoretically expand upon was its history and tradition, an aspect all the other hastily formed parties were lacking. Building on this, the LMB could offer a truly national agenda to the Libyan people founded on its ideology and transcending local, regional perspectives.¹²⁸ However, these appeals did not prove fruitful, again mainly due to the emphasis on local personalities that disadvantaged the ideologically focused Islamist party.¹²⁹

Election Results: Depicting Libya’s Historic Influences that Left a Mark on Politics until Today

With a voter turnout of just under 60 per cent,¹³⁰ the 2012 elections can be described as a true expression of the Libyan people’s political preferences at the time. The election results catapulted the NFA to the top of the list with regard to party results¹³¹ and the LMB did not live up to its own confident predictions that “the Islamist current would take at least 60 per cent of the seats”, instead coming second in the party list results.¹³² While it had still performed significantly better than other Islamist parties, it clearly did not come close to the number of seats it had hoped for.¹³³ Keeping in mind that its true representation in the GNC was bigger than that captured in the party list seats due to some brothers running (and winning) as individual candidates,¹³⁴ these election results still forced the LMB to confront the fact that ultimately it lacked widespread popular support in Libya.¹³⁵ From an international perspective, many observers had applied a framework of religious political groups competing against secular parties they had become accustomed to from Libya’s neighbours to the Libyan context, assuming that the better-organised Islamists groups, including the LMB, would have a tactical advantage. Observers were subsequently baffled by the NFA’s landslide.¹³⁶

125 Election programme of the JCP in 2012, <https://kurzman.unc.edu/files/2011/06/LBY-2012-al-Adala-wa-al-Bina-Justice-and-Construction.pdf>, 4.

126 <https://www.facebook.com/pg/EkwaanLibya/about/>

127 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 151.

128 Jean-François Létourneau, “Explaining the Muslim Brotherhood’s Rise and Fall in Egypt”, *Mediterranean Politics* 21, no. 2 (2016): 303; Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 145.

129 Cook and Pack, “The July 2012 Libyan Election”, 191.

130 Gumuchian and al-Shalchi, “Libyans brave violence”.

131 *Libya Herald*, “National Congress Party Results”, 18 July 2018 <https://www.libyaherald.com/2012/07/18/party-results/>

132 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 154.

133 Chris Stephen, “Muslim Brotherhood fell ‘below expectations’”.

134 Giving it more like 40 seats in total.

135 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 145.

136 Ashour, “Libya’s defeated Islamists”; Cook and Pack, “The July 2012 Libyan Election”, 191; Gumuchian and al-Shalchi, “Libyans brave violence”; Francois Murphy, “Muslim Brotherhood”.

Moving Forward: the LMB Seeks to Entrench Itself in Libya

In August 2012, the LMB also registered as a nongovernmental organisation in Libya to cement itself in Libyan society, playing catch-up to what its Egyptian counterpart had been doing for decades already.¹³⁷ In post-revolution Libya it could now theoretically engage with communities openly and on a scale that was never possible in the past, implementing its approach to improve society as a whole by working with individuals and communities. The disappointing elections results meant that the JCP was not necessarily a body the LMB as a whole wanted to be automatically linked with; establishing a separate NGO was supposed to differentiate the LMB from the JCP.¹³⁸ Yet the LMB had already catapulted itself onto the political stage, essentially out of nowhere, because of its involvement with the NTC, and could not rely on extensive social networks during its first emancipated steps in Libya. Trying to implement its model of societal transformation the “wrong way around” proved quite difficult, as many Libyans were still suspicious of the LMB and already viewed it as a predominantly political actor.¹³⁹

In conclusion, the political wing of the LMB had managed to entrench itself in the newly established Libyan political structures while still lacking a sophisticated social base. Despite managing to win a respectable number of seats in the GNC, the LMB was, bluntly, nowhere near where it imagined itself and had hoped for during the election campaign. The next section examines the LMB's failed efforts to convince the Libyan people that it be trusted with the political development of the country since it is the only true bearer of Islam.

¹³⁷ Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 204.

¹³⁸ Fitzgerald, “Introducing the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood”.

¹³⁹ Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018; Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 2 August 2018.

4 The Muslim Brotherhood's Quest for Legitimacy in the Libyan Political Sphere as the "True Bearer of Islam"

The Theoretical Concept of Legitimacy and its Operationalisation in the LMB's Case

When referring to legitimacy, one quickly needs to discuss what the term actually describes and how and to what aim it is conceptualised in this paper. In the literature, the differentiation between either normative or empirical legitimacy has become standard procedure¹⁴⁰ with the main fault line running between political philosophers outlining the theoretical principles under which power is legitimately held¹⁴¹ and political scientists and sociologists collecting empirical data to reinforce their conceptualisations of legitimacy.¹⁴²

While acknowledging that legitimacy is a contested subject primarily in the fields of political philosophy, sociology and political science (with authors often failing to be categorised in any one of these disciplines – because authors either deliberately avoid categorisation or are simply hard to categorise), this paper follows an empirical notion of legitimacy, i.e. relying on the people's judgement of a political actor. This method extracts the concept of legitimacy from its macro-dimension of the political system as a whole¹⁴³ and transfers it to the relationship between the people and a political actor. Legitimacy in this paper solely focuses on the ascribed credibility to the referent object (the LMB) by its domestic audience (the Libyan people). The analysis is normatively framed by Islam as the main variable to operationalise legitimacy in the current Libyan context.

Naturally, legitimacy therefore correlates with identity since it is applied to an actor and an ideology, political Islam being the backbone of the Muslim Brotherhood. Because the justification and continued relevance of any ideological agenda rests on the transmission of ideological values for the sake of legitimacy both from top to bottom

140 Morten Skumrud Andersen, "Legitimacy in State-Building: A Review of the IR Literature", *International Political Sociology* no. 2 (2012); Cord Schmelzle, "Evaluating Governance. Effectiveness and Legitimacy in Areas of Limited Statehood", *SFB Governance Working Paper Series*, no. 26 (2011); Wilfried Hinsch, "Legitimacy and Justice", in *Political Legitimization without Morality?*, ed. Jörg Kühnelt (Berlin: Springer, 2008): 39–52.

141 Michael Becker, "Demokratie und politische Legitimität", in *Politische Philosophie*, eds. Michael Becker, Johannes Schmidt and Reinhard Zintl (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2006): 257–307.

142 Mattei Dogan, "Conceptions of Legitimacy", in *Encyclopaedia of Government and Politics*, eds. Mary Hawkesworth and Maurice Kogan (London: Routledge, 1992); Mike Hough, Jonathan Jackson and Ben Bradford, "Legitimacy, Trust and Compliance: An Empirical Test of Procedural Justice Theory Using the European Social Survey", in *Legitimacy and Criminal Justice: An International Exploration*, eds. Justice Tankebe and Alison Liebling (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

143 Max Weber defines states as "compulsory political organizations" whose "administrative staff successfully upholds the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical forces in the enforcement of its order within a given territory" (1978: 54); he therefore ties the monopoly of coercion to the legitimacy of the state, which is expressed in the notion that the state is recognised by those whom it seeks to govern. In this paper, I call this conceptualisation of legitimacy "the macro-dimension of the political system as a whole".

and through a bottom-up process,¹⁴⁴ the legitimacy of the LMB as a credible actor in the Libyan political sphere shall be assessed in the Libyan context, featuring the cultural structure and Libyan history, when analysing political and religious legitimacy that attempts to be Muslim in identity.

The free and fair 2012 elections in Libya made it possible to examine the LMB's stance in Libya, as they needed to position themselves to the public before the 2012 election and subsequently were held accountable for political developments by Libyans after the election.¹⁴⁵ The analysis in section four will take into consideration the Libyan reactions to the LMB's behaviour during the 2011 revolution, the 2012 election and the political developments from 2013 onwards, while also factoring in the points made in sections one and two about the Muslim Brotherhood's history in Libya and tracing in a moderate constructive approach to how actions by the LMB were seen as legitimate or illegitimate¹⁴⁶ due to the identity the LMB portrayed to the Libyan people.

This paper acknowledges that the chosen operationalising factor is based on the more recent political history of Libya and the author's design of the research. However, conceptions of legitimacy and identity can change as they are not static but rather (de-)constructed on a regular basis and according to changing social fields. Hence this paper cannot ensure that a similar study in a couple of years' time would not reach a different conclusion as significant factors might shift, and values might change due to political and societal developments.¹⁴⁷

Centrality of Islam for the LMB's Identity

The LMB, being an Islamist group belonging to the broader current of political Islam, views Islam as a "body of faith [that] has something important to say about how politics and society should be ordered in the contemporary Muslim world and implemented in some fashion".¹⁴⁸ Therefore, conveying an image of being the true bearer of Islam rests right at the heart of the LMB's identity¹⁴⁹ and could have been expected to be the easiest dimension for the Libyan people to believe since its homogenising element is its Arab Sunni Muslim character.¹⁵⁰ The LMB as part of the global organisation of the Muslim Brotherhood adheres to a particular vision of Islam symbolised in the MB's "conception of Islam as praxis".¹⁵¹ However, the following analysis will show that the LMB was not able to establish itself in this fashion due not only to historical legacies but also to political choices it made in the course of the 2011 revolution and its aftermath.

144 Jasmin Gani, *The Role of Ideology in Syria–US Relations: Conflict and Cooperation* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014): 17.

145 Keller-Messahli, "Die Auswirkungen des Arabischen Frühlings", 699.

146 Raymond Hinnebusch, *The International Politics of the Middle East* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2003): 29.

147 Muthiah Aligappa, *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995): 20.

148 Mohammed Ayoub, *The Many Faces of Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Muslim World* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008): 20.

149 Hasche, *Quo vadis, politischer Islam?*, 253; Hirsi Ali, "Prepare to Compete", 46.

150 Ronen, "Qadhafi and Militant Islamism", 12.

151 "What continued to unite Brotherhood – across the globe – was a particular vision of Islam. There was shared commitment to what Marechal called a broad 'corpus' of ideas, each of which could be encapsulated in a key term: 'shumuliyya' (the comprehensiveness of Islam), 'wasatiyya' (their adherence to the middle path), and jihad. The latter in particular, symbolized the Ikhwan's conception of Islam in praxis." (Frampton, *The Muslim Brotherhood*, 450).

The Tendency of Libyans to Blend Together Islamist Groups Harms the LMB

From the early days of its political engagement in Libya, the Brotherhood was viewed suspiciously mainly due to Qaddafi's adamant warnings about the MB's hunger for power and plots to subvert the country,¹⁵² and the fact that it had never been able to anchor itself deeply in Libyan society, making it an unknown or even mistrusted quantity.¹⁵³ Therefore, the narrative that the LMB was conspiring to take over the country and the strategy of blaming the LMB for everything that went wrong in the country proved particularly fruitful; "Ikhwani" became a popular negative catchphrase in the course of 2011.¹⁵⁴ The LMB was merged into one greater Islamist movement that was portrayed as wanting to conquer Libya, entirely rejecting the heterogeneous reality of Islamist groups on the ground.¹⁵⁵ This view became so dominant that Sowane saw the need to dismiss as "misinformation"¹⁵⁶ claims that the LMB were secretly trying to rule. These developments severely impeded the LMB from relying on its predefined strain of legitimacy, that of its Islamist credentials, since "too many people just don't believe them".¹⁵⁷ Hence the LMB could not claim legitimacy by advocating its sincere commitment to Islam. In addition, the complexities of distinguishing between Libyan Islamists elaborately discussed in academia and policy briefings¹⁵⁸ have understandably not taken root in the mainstream Libyan discourse; in Libya itself, many amalgamate Islamists who partake in the democratic process with violent extremists who deplore the political system altogether.¹⁵⁹ One interviewee summarised the situation thus:

I mean if you ask a random Libyan he doesn't necessarily distinguish between let's say Muslim Brotherhood, Ansar al-Sharia, LIFG, they don't distinguish between all these actors. Probably because they have certain networks, and all know each other somehow. People don't know about the MB as a political movement or what for example it did in Tunisia or Egypt, they just know that it is a party to be distrusted.¹⁶⁰

Captured in the above quotation is the fact that alongside to the historical scars the LMB is carrying, the Libyan public has also reacted with sensitivity to the developments on the ground that led them to believe that all Islamist groups at least "know each other somehow".¹⁶¹ For example, with regard to Ansar al-Sharia,¹⁶² the LMB's apparent lenience towards the extremist group made Libyans suspicious of ties

152 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 154.

153 Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

154 Researcher on Libya, answers provided in written format, 11 July 2018; Libyan based in London, Skype interview with the author, 5 July 2018; Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018; Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

155 Mezran, "Conspiracism In and Around Libya", 113.

156 Rana Jawad, "Libya elections: Do any of the parties have a plan?", *BBC News*, 6 July 2012 <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-18721576>

157 Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 2 August 2018.

158 Ben Fishman, "Could Libya's Decline Have Been Predicted?", *Survival* no. 5 (2015) Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place"; Youssef Mohammad Sawani, "Islamist and Non-Islamist Currents and the Struggle for Post-Qaddafi Libya", *Contemporary Arab Affairs* no. 1 (2018).

159 Fitzgerald, "Libya's Muslim Brotherhood Struggles".

160 Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

161 Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

162 "Ansar al-Sharia, a group few in Benghazi (...) led by a husky appliance-store owner named named Muhammad al-Zahawi. The details of his life are sketchy. Some alleged that he had fought in Afghanistan or Iraq or had travelled to Sudan and met Bin Laden. What is certain is that he sojourned in Saudi Arabia for many years before Saudi intelligence handed him over to Qadhafi, who imprisoned him in Abu Salim. During the revolution, he fought in Benghazi and then commanded fighters on the Misratan front line. Sometime in early April, after coming back from Misrata to Benghazi, he broke with his erstwhile comrades to start the nucleus of what would become Ansar al-Sharia; "Breaking with the leaders of the Abu Salim Martyrs Brigade in Derna over their support of the NTC, Sufyan bin Qumu founded a militia called Ansar al-Sharia, separate at first from the identically named group in Benghazi", Frederic Wehrey, *The Burning Shores: Inside the Battle for the New Libya*, (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2018): 106, 117.

between the two.¹⁶³ Violent developments on the ground in Benghazi in 2012 and 2013 heavily harmed the LMB in the eyes of the people in Benghazi as the organisation was seen as tolerating Ansar al-Sharia's killings, even though it was part of the governing body at the time and should have protected the civilians under its authority against violence from non-state groups. Rather it was seen as "cleaning the traces to Ansar al-Sharia"¹⁶⁴ and hence that translated into the "first bridge that collapsed between the Islamic Brotherhood and the people".¹⁶⁵ Lingering in the minds of the Libyan people as well was the violent fighting that broke out in the 1990s between violent Islamist groups and Qaddafi forces. The involvement of the LMB with these Islamist groups and the mentioned conflation of Islamist groups by many Libyans led to rejection of the LMB due to the "blood" factor: not voting for a party when family members died in fighting linked (accurately or otherwise) to the LMB.¹⁶⁶

The LMB Cannot Claim a Monopoly over Islam in the Political Sphere

Turning towards the political programme of the LMB and its appeal to the Libyan people, the religious conservatism of the Libyan society paradoxically did not prove as fruitful a breeding ground for the LMB's central unique selling point – the introduction of Sharia as the main source of legislation – since Libyans regarded it as axiomatic that Islam would take on a leading role in the political sphere. The LMB had not been able to engrain its version of political Islam within Libyan society due to the aforementioned historical developments¹⁶⁷ and ended up being just one of many parties that ran on an Islamic platform advocating for Sharia to be the main source of legislation with little disagreement in Libya as a whole on the issue.¹⁶⁸ Additionally, the LMB tried to employ similar campaigning and rallying tactics as its counterpart in Egypt by relying on ideological debates over identity politics, emphasising its Muslim character and juxtaposing it with the LMB's allegedly secular opponents.¹⁶⁹ However, in contrast to Egypt and Tunisia, in Libya there was no room for this sort of ideological debate pitting two parts of a polarised society against each other.¹⁷⁰ Given the conservative nature of Libya, such debates rarely picked up. Furthermore, the pertinacious attempt by the LMB to discredit its opponents' Islamic credentials backfired as Libyans reacted allergically to a single group perceived as dictating to them what was right and wrong with regard to Islam.¹⁷¹ For example, during the 2012 election campaign Grand Mufti Sadiq al-Ghariani¹⁷² attacked the

163 For example, JCP member Ramadan Eldarsi from Benghazi responds after being asked about Ansar al-Sharia defensively, "we should have a conversation with them." *The Economist*, 12 January 2013 <https://www.economist.com/middle-east-and-africa/2013/01/12/the-knack-of-organisation>

164 Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018.

165 Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018.

166 "I am not giving my family's votes to the MB. Two of my cousins died because of them," Mohamed Abdul Hakim, a voter from Benghazi, told me. He agrees that Islam should be the source for legislation, and his wife wears a niqab. Nonetheless, he voted liberal: his cousins were killed in a confrontation in the 1990s, most likely between the Martyrs Movement (a small jihadist group operating in his neighborhood at the time) and Qaddafi's forces" (Ashour, "Libya's Defeated Islamists").

167 Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 186.

168 Libya Business News, "Libya's Muslim Brotherhood sets up political party", 3 March 2012

<https://www.libya-businessnews.com/2012/03/03/libyas-muslim-brotherhood-sets-up-political-party/>

169 "The NFA, a broad coalition led by Mahmud Jibril, often described as 'secular' or 'liberal'. But religion was an unhelpful lens through which to view Libyan politics. There were no liberal secularists; all of Libya's agreed that Islam should play a prominent in political and social life." Wehrey, *The Burning Shores*, 78.

170 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 145.

171 Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018; Libyan based in Beirut, Skype interview with the author, 7 August 2018.

172 "Though ostensibly independent Ghariani was still seen as attached to the LMB; Ghariani was considered part of Libya's mainstream Salafist-oriented current, and his early declaration of the revolution as religiously legitimate in February 2011 ensured his promotion to head of the re-established Dar al-Ifta', the body responsible for interpreting Islamic law, a year later". Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 203.

secular strand and pronounced voting for parties that would “limit Sharia” to be “unislamic”; these remarks were interpreted by many as a targeted attack on the NFA under the leadership of the popular Mahmoud Jibril.¹⁷³ Even though part of the LMB’s leadership realised the counter-productivity of the Sheikh’s interference in hindsight,¹⁷⁴ that was no help as yet another bridge with the Libyan people had collapsed, due to what many saw as the unfair discrediting of the Sheikh by other Libyan parties. The LMB was seen as “*playing dirty; they tried to establish what they called fatwas [Islamic Ruling] so the Sheikh al-Ghariani would establish an Islamic opinion on any political topic [... which] was ridiculous, it was like the competitors always had a haram [forbidden] position, so you cannot elect them because [it is] haram*”.¹⁷⁵ In general, the campaign rhetoric of the LMB heavily relied on the assertion that to vote Islamic meant to vote for the LMB; that assertion did not fare well in Libya as it seemed offensive that one group would try to monopolise the Islamic credentials of Libya and impose the image that the LMB was the logical choice for anyone with a Muslim identity. They were convinced that “*in the end we are all conservative and from a conservative country, we all refer to ourselves as Muslims, so what is the Islamic Brotherhood talking about*”^{176,177} Hence some people voted for the allegedly liberal NFA, despite believing that Islam should be the ultimate reference for Libya’s legislature.¹⁷⁸

Qaddafi’s Ideological Penetration Leaves Libyans Apprehensive about Ideological Parties

Furthermore, the negative reaction (or natural suspicion) to ideology-based parties can be traced back to over forty years of being subjected to an unyielding indoctrination of Qaddafi’s all-encompassing ideology. The Libyan people thus rejected groups like the LMB that they saw as a party that aimed to spell out and define its identity on ideological (Islamic) grounds.¹⁷⁹ In other words, they did not need the LMB to tell them that they needed to vote for an Islamic party as the great majority of the population considered itself Muslim¹⁸⁰ and remained unaffected by the claims of the LMB to monopolise it.¹⁸¹ It was obvious to the Libyan people that Islam would always have a “*certain degree of influence from a social perspective. And automatically this means also some influence on the political*

173 Jibril, who was born in 1952, attended university in Cairo and then Pittsburgh. He earned a master’s degree in political science in 1980 and a PhD in 1984 at the University of Pittsburgh. Jibril returned to the Middle East, teaching at Garyounis University in Benghazi, Libya, and running his own company, Gebriil for Training and Consultancy, which operated across the region. Jibril was an early member of the NTC, one of seven professors and one of several members educated in the West. He was head of the council’s crisis committee, in addition to foreign affairs, Jibril is also responsible for military affairs, and that has been at least as big a challenge. About six years ago, Qaddafi’s son, Saif al-Islam, persuaded Jibril to join his effort to restructure the Libyan economy. Daniel Schwartz, “Mahmoud Jibril: the international face of Libya’s rebels”, *CBC News*, 29 March 2011, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/mahmoud-jibril-the-international-face-of-libya-s-rebels-1.1009552>

174 Fitzgerald, “Finding Their Place”, 203.

175 Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018.

176 Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018.

177 “Libyans, with the exception of the Amazigh Muslim minority, are Sunni Muslims who follow the Maliki school of fiqh. This has traditionally played an instrumental, unifying role in society. Gaddafi, who came to power in a bloodless coup in 1969, utilized a religious discourse to legitimize his political choices and to fight political Islamism, particularly the MB and the jihadist LIFG. Apart from quietist Salafi and Sufi groups who were either naturally pacifist or were co-opted by the regime, the regime oppressed Islamists who at the time were unable to galvanize any popular support to confront the regime and went or were forced into exile”, Youssef Mohammad Sawani, “Post-Qadhafi Libya: Interactive Dynamics and the Political Future”, *Contemporary Arab Affairs*, no. 1 (2012): 12.

178 Ashour, “Libya’s Defeated Islamists”.

179 Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018; Libyan based in London, Skype

interview with the author, 5 July 2018; Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 2 August 2018;

Libyan based in Beirut, Skype interview with the author, 7 August 2018.

180 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 156.

181 Michael Wilson, Stratfor (global intelligence firm), “Muslim Brotherhood, Salafist said moving towards political Islamization of Libya”, 21 October 2011, Wikileaks https://wikileaks.org/gifiles/docs/15/154065_-_os-libya-muslim-brotherhood-salafist-said-moving-towards.html

*sphere whether directly or not [...] since it's a Muslim country".*¹⁸² However, all Libyans in the course of the next few years would need to determine the role Islam should play; no one group should be allowed to decide, particularly not the LMB.¹⁸³

Lack of an Ideologically Opposed Political Party Impedes the LMB's Political Advances

To make things worse for the LMB, the NFA was not what in the West would be considered a secular party, but rather a conglomerate of individuals located across the political spectrum, from liberal to Islamist. This made it even trickier for the LMB to differentiate itself and build authentic Islamic credentials by contrasting itself with a secular opponent. In other words, there was no "other" the LMB could have defined itself against; this problem significantly hindered the formation of its religious identity, a juxtaposition of "us" (the Muslim identity) versus "them" (the secularists).¹⁸⁴ Instead, the NFA was a newly founded party, led by former interim prime minister Mahmoud Jibril, that included a wide array of civil society organisations, smaller parties and individuals who identified as non-Islamist but also some who identified as Islamists.¹⁸⁵ In addition, it advocated for Sharia to be considered a "main source of legislation",¹⁸⁶ acknowledging the uncontentioned necessity to appeal to the conservative Libyan people. Hence, while the NFA portrayed itself to the international audience as the secular alternative to the LMB and other Islamist parties, it never did so domestically,¹⁸⁷ since secularism enjoys little support outside an elite group of former exiles.¹⁸⁸

As a final point, the LMB not only found itself attacked on its Islamist agenda by the NFA but outflanked by other Islamist parties such as the Watan Party¹⁸⁹ and non-party opposition groups as well. This meant that the LMB did not really offer anything concrete or practical regarding its political vision apart from establishing Sharia as the main source of legislation;¹⁹⁰ this, however, did not distinguish it from other political parties and they were never seen as particularly trustworthy on the issue. Thus, in Libya they could not capitalise on their core claim of being a true bearer of Islam.

Negligible Presence in Mosques – no Islamic Credentials Originating from this Institution

One factor that could have changed the game for the LMB was if they had been able to establish a social network and presence in the mosques before competing in elections. Since the LMB had been heavily oppressed by Qaddafi and, after the deal brokered with Saif al-Islam, failed to roll out its organisation in the country, even after the revolution it did not have a network either of charities or in mosques that it could build on. Instead, it was the Salafis who gained the

¹⁸² Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

¹⁸³ Researcher on Libya, answers provided in written format, 11 July 2018.

¹⁸⁴ Samuel Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* no. 3 (1993): 29.

¹⁸⁵ Cook and Pack, "The 2012 Libyan Elections", 192.

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Libyan based in London, Skype interview with the author, 5 July 2018.

¹⁸⁸ Lacher, "Families, Tribes and Cities", 150.

¹⁸⁹ The Islamist Hizb al-Watan (Homeland Party) was founded by al-Sallabi and Belhaj in November 2011 (initially under the short-live name National Gathering for Freedom, Justice and Development). Andrew McGregor, "Libya's Muslim Brotherhood", *Aberfoyle International Security*, 30 March 2016.

¹⁹⁰ Election programme of the JCP in 2012, <https://kurzman.unc.edu/files/2011/06/LBY-2012-al-Adala-wa-al-Bina-Justice-and-Construction.pdf>, 3.

most from mosques.¹⁹¹ It is clear that the “*most effective platform in Libya*”¹⁹² – the mosques – were not sufficiently accessed by the LMB. One can speculate that if they had “*gotten the mosques, the speech of the Friday prayers, they would not have needed Al-Jazeera, not Al-Arabiya or Sky News*”, but instead would have had the most credible and natural access to the Libyan people and could have changed their perception in the country significantly.¹⁹³ However, this paper will not try to prove something that never happened.

To sum up, the LMB’s central attempt to represent itself as the true bearer of Islam (Islam’s vanguard) mattered little in a country where basically all political organisations paid lip service to Islam and thus there was no political force the LMB could effectively position itself against. While in neighbouring countries the MB could style itself as the vanguard of Islam, the LMB had no comparable role to play.¹⁹⁴ In short, the LMB was not able to claim a monopoly over Islam in the political sphere and present itself as a party with legitimate claim to act as the true bearer of Islam in Libyan politics.

191 Libyan based in London, Skype interview with the author, 5 July 2018.

192 Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018.

193 Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018, Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

194 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 24.

5 Conclusion

By tracing and explaining the history of the LMB's organisational developments, this paper examined one way in which the LMB tried to establish itself as a legitimate political actor with regard to Islam in the Libyan political sphere after 2011. Almost paradoxically, even though Libya is a majority Sunni country with a conservative society, that did not translate into a conservative Sunni movement like the MB proving as popular as many had anticipated, derailing the impression that the whole region was "going Islamist" after 2011.¹⁹⁵ To this end, the paper has outlined relevant aspects that thwarted the LMB's potential success story in the country: its inability to leave behind the demons of the past and establish credibility in its key source for legitimacy in contemporary Libya, Islam (alongside outlining a distinctly Libyan contribution to the debate on how political actors might derive legitimacy).

The LMB today is still haunted by ghosts of the past, such as the decades-long demonisation by the Qaddafi regime, its exiled organisational structure and related impotence in developing a strong social base. The LMB was quick to blame these factors – exacerbated by their opponents' fearmongering of a purported Islamist takeover – as responsible for the JCP's poor showing in the 2012 election, neglecting self-inflicted wounds such as the Islamists' inability to unite or to win over major parts of the population with their political programme.¹⁹⁶ Following the 2012 election, however, the LMB successfully crept into the centre of political decision-making and proved the most muscular force in pushing for the draconian political isolation law, which targeted the exclusion of some of its most potent rivals (particularly in the NFA). Overall, the LMB exhibits a zero-sum approach to politics rather than bridging divides and pursuing compromises. Of course, the LMB, like other political forces in Libya, is hostage to military developments in the country, having to operate in a colossally demanding environment with the country sorely fragmented and political forces incapable of controlling the battleground.¹⁹⁷ Despite its logistical support and affiliation with some militias, as well as its members joining various armed groups in individual capacities, the MB never established its own military wing with overtly branded MB militias.¹⁹⁸ Thus, after installing itself in the political power apparatus, the LMB had no military forces under its leadership that it could indiscriminately rely upon when trying to enforce security. In hindsight it can be said that the perceived unwillingness to protect the Libyan population (it was seen as ruling after 2012) negatively influenced the perception of the LMB as a ruling entity in the country.¹⁹⁹ Generally speaking, the militarisation of the revolution meant that from the early days onwards, armed groups influenced political decisions. Again, LMB members were leading actors in this development, such as, for example, the deputy of the

¹⁹⁵ Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 144.

¹⁹⁶ Fitzgerald, "Finding Their Place", 203.

¹⁹⁷ Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 179.

¹⁹⁸ As argued in previous parts of this paper, this is unsurprising due to its ideology and marketed commitment to non-violence as well as its widely negative standing in the country, which would have provoked concerns of an Islamist conspiracy taking over the country had the LMB established its own military wing.

¹⁹⁹ Libyan based in Benghazi, Skype interview with the author, 21 June 2018.

Misratan interior Omar al-Khadrawi, who is a Brother from Zawiya.²⁰⁰ To sum up, it was obvious that the LMB was interlinked with militias in the country, but simultaneously this involvement was messy and opaque, which led to criticism and speculation among Libyans that ultimately hurt the LMB instead of credibly promoting its commitment to the revolution and its ideals in military terms. As a result, the LMB is one of many political forces that was reduced to negligible importance and simply struggling against other political forces for relevance and recognition.²⁰¹ On top of that, in this struggle, the LMB underperformed in the key aspect that would have helped it to earn legitimacy and establish it as a credible political actor in post-Qaddafi Libya. Despite it being part of an established transnational Islamist movement, the LMB failed to persuade Libyans that it is a “true bearer of Islam”, whereas the MB had success with its unique selling point in neighbouring countries where it could juxtapose itself with liberal forces and advocate most authentically for a Sharia-based political system.

This paper does not predict the future for the LMB or the JCP, but it can draw conclusions based on existing opinions of the LMB in the country, burdens from the past still influencing perceptions of the LMB and recent political schemes that have shaped its image. Overall, the LMB exhibited a more hawkish and less compromise-oriented policy approach than its Tunisian counterpart and, while aiming to grow in importance in the Libyan political sphere, cooperated with some of the more radical Islamist groups. However, recently it moderated some of its stances by verbally backing the LPA²⁰² and simultaneously seemingly trying to appeal to its fiercest opponents like Haftar – for example by referring to the LNA fighters that died in recent battles as “martyrs”.²⁰³ From a social perspective, it remains to be seen if the LMB will continue and succeed in building up a social network resembling what it achieved in Egypt over the last decades; this could in the long-term strengthen its presence in the country and help it to mobilise and profit politically.²⁰⁴ However, as outlined above, a plethora of other Islamist groups developed a presence in Libya outflanking the LMB, for example with regard to holding the prestigious Friday sermons in mosques. As a consequence of its limited social reach, holding on to power positions in Libya, as well as Libya’s vast oil resources to bankroll activities in the region, is crucial for the LMB’s survival.²⁰⁵ Yet the power structure of Libya is currently divided and its future configuration uncertain because of its dependence on military developments nationally and diplomatic developments internationally.²⁰⁶ Finally, the LMB’s unpopularity (already in evidence

200 Al-Idrissi and Lacher, “Capital of Militias”, 3.

201 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 148.

202 “Libiā- Ra’īs-u al-Majlis-i al-A’lā li-al-Dawla Khaled al-Machriy: anā min al-Ikhwān-i al-Muslimīn-a wa lan A’tarif-a bi-Haftar” [Libya – President of the Supreme Council of State Khaled al-Mashri: I am from the Muslim Brotherhood and I will not recognise Haftar], 24 فرانس / FRANCE 24 Arabic, 31 May 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=n7wMBgJo-KA>

203 Their international homepage declared that “in its latest session, the Libyan Muslim Brotherhood’s Shura Council reviewed the group’s regulatory and administrative conditions, and the homeland’s situation, crises and open wounds. At the end of its regular meeting, the Council affirmed the following: [...] 2. We appreciate the great role and the enormous sacrifices made by the brave revolutionaries in the fight against the criminal gangs of the so-called Daash (also known as ISIL or ISIS) in the cities of Derna and Sirte. We pray to the Lord to accept the martyrs who passed in these battles. We also pray for a speedy recovery for the wounded. May God reward all those who contributed with or supported the revolutionaries in that successful campaign”, “Statement from Libyan Muslim Brotherhood on Current Affairs Hails Defeat of Coup in Turkey”, 19 July 2016 <http://www.ikhwanweb.com/article.php?id=32600&ref=search.php>

204 Former Head of the United Nations ISIL (Da’esh), Al-Qaida and Taliban Monitoring Team, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

205 Toperich, “Libya”.

206 “If for example the simplistic Islamist versus non-Islamist narrative flames up again and predominantly shapes the diplomatic process, then the JCP was likely to have a leading role because they would be viewed as one of the major parties that needs to be included in the power broking process and future political system. On the other hand, in case of a military intervention on Haftar’s side the LMB might be crushed and designated a terrorist group that needs to be kept out of any political responsibility, similar to Egypt’s crackdown under Abdel Fatah al-Sisi”, Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 22 June 2018.

in 2012, but aggravated over the course of 2013 and 2014) led some Libyans to the conclusion that *they cannot have a bright future: the people don't like them and at some point, will revolt against them. The Muslim Brotherhood has done a lot in the last years and the people remember that. They are corrupted. They took advantage of power.*²⁰⁷ Even if the Libyan people do not revolt against the LMB, this sentiment does not bode well for a movement that currently operates in a semi-democratic system where elections might be the next challenge for it to ensure its survival in the political landscape. Still, the LMB is definitely a power to reckon with in the future as it has established itself in local councils, is affiliated with some armed forces and is currently securely entrenched in the power structures in the west of the country. But it will always be restricted by other forces, such as tribalism and the newly emergent local power centres, which will work as constraining influences.²⁰⁸

Libya is no exception in a region of authoritarian systems that killed off political culture and nurtured an approach of zero-sum politics. Therefore, the LMB must also be seen as an outgrowth of Libya's preconditions before 2011, and the political forces to its left and right would probably be judged similarly harshly in a comparison along the same lines, signalling not necessarily the failings of political Islam but also "the tragedy of a region unable to translate its own revolutions into a better, more confident future".²⁰⁹ The outcome is a growing public conviction that Libya might be better off without political parties.²¹⁰

207 Libyan based in Tripoli, Skype interview with the author, 2 August 2018.

208 Pargeter, *Return to the Shadows*, 250.

209 *ibid.*, 253.

210 Fitzgerald, "Libya's Muslim Brotherhood struggle".

Final Remarks

The complexity of the Libyan situation means that many aspects could not be discussed in detail here. Excellent analyses on the most salient ones can be found in the following bibliography, including on the tribal and geographical implications behind local identities and regional dynamics in Libya's political sphere, in the writings of Haley Cook and Jason Pack as well as Wolfram Lacher; on voting diversion according to local differences, for example in Omar Ashour, Project Syndicate; on the "rejectionist" sentiment in Libya regarding politics in general, in Amir Kamel's chapter.

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